

PLAY PRODUCTION  
IN AMERICA

ARTHUR EDWIN KROWS



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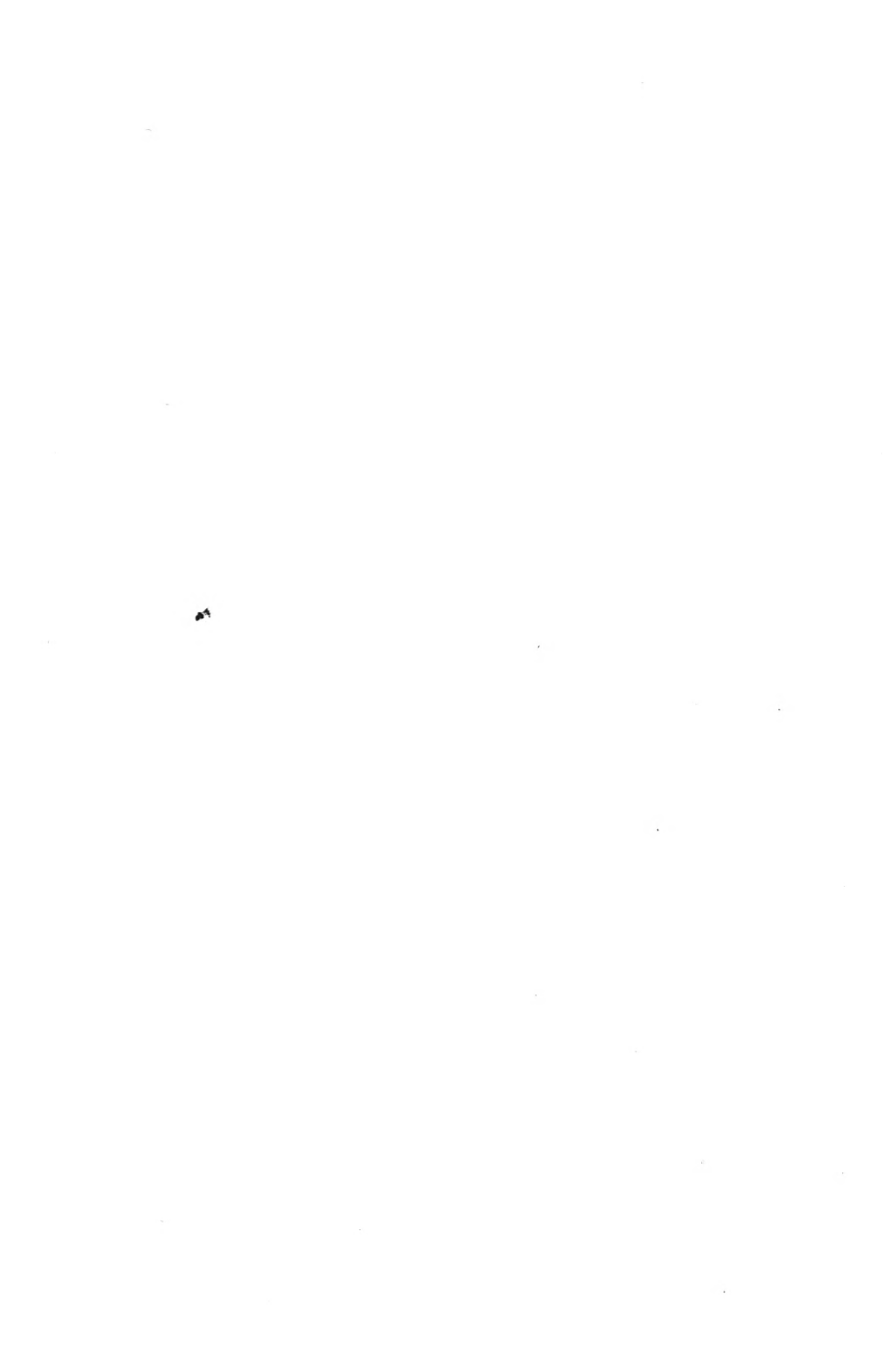
Howard G. Stokes

with affection

Arthur Edwin Howe

New York, July 21, 1930







*Photo Byron*

EUGENE WALTER READING A NEW PLAY TO DAVID BELASCO.

This new play was not accepted here, although one of the most successful Belasco ventures was Walter's "The Easiest Way." Walter did not give up, but, like every other successful worker in the American theater, tried again. This steadfastness of purpose is the true spirit of the American theater. It brings about its achievements, and its failures too, for when the purpose is mistaken, it frequently amounts to no more than stubborn persistence. But, when the worker is happily free from the conceit that his art holds no more ramifications for him to explore, it tides him over obstacles to a mental and physical freedom that redounds to honor of the nation.

# PLAY PRODUCTION IN AMERICA

BY

ARTHUR EDWIN KROWS

Late of the staff of Winthrop Ames at the Little Theater, New York,  
and one-time assistant editor of the *New York Dramatic Mirror*

WITH NUMEROUS ILLUSTRATIONS

"It is not inapropos to remark that Europe gave us the tallow candle, but, like grateful children, we sent in return the electric light; Europe gave us the primitive hand-power printing-press of Gutenberg, and, in our simple-hearted way, we gave her the Goss perfecting press; Europe placed the goose-quill in our hands, and we have added the typewriter to her resources; Europe put the bare needle in the fingers of our housewives, and we reciprocate with the modern sewing-machine—but why enumerate?"—JOHN PHILIP SOUSA



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To

ADOLPH KLAUBER

for seventeen years dramatic editor of the  
New York Times and now member of the  
producing firm of Selwyn and Company

One of My Best Friends In the  
Theater or Out of It



## PREFACE

ABOUT ten years ago I was groping about in the theater for detailed information concerning it. I discovered many books, a few answers, and more guide-posts; but, on many important subject divisions, I found nothing. Then began a quizzical career that led me, partly through inclination and partly through force of circumstances, into most of the departments of the theater. Throughout the experience I took notes; and, when these seemed sufficiently voluminous, I projected the present work to fill what seemed a serious gap in stage literature.

Upon the title-page I have placed a quotation from John Philip Sousa's speech on subsidy, published some years ago in the *Paris Herald*. This is to remind a reading public, that has lately been presented with a number of excellent works dealing almost exclusively with the theaters of Europe, that American playhouses also have made decided advance, although, perhaps, along different lines. But while this book is essentially American, it is presented, in this connection, mainly to remark America's contribution to international development. I cannot reiterate too often that there cannot be a protective tariff placed around art. Anything worth while that this country is doing in the theater belongs to the world.

It is only lately that there has been widespread attempt to define what the theater is trying to do—to achieve a synthesis of the various interdependent arts for more forceful expression of truth, keeping refinement of each art as an important but subordinate thing. In a measure, this book

LIGHTING AND "EFFECTS" ARE "WORKED" BY  
THE STAGE CREW

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# THE PLAY IS ACCEPTED

## CHAPTER I

### PLAY BROKERS

A NEW season is coming. At the end of it will be the usual loud wail about lack of authors' protection. Also, in accordance with custom, most dramatists will fail to learn from the bitter experience out of which the cry is engendered, that they had better entrust their business affairs to specialists in the line.

It is manifest that few playwrights are fitted to market their own products in the most efficient manner. Their knowledge of managers' contracts, inclinations, and other details of theatrical business, is necessarily casual, because, if they observe their obligations as dramatists, the writing of plays occupies most of their attention, and they come into contact with the selling or leasing end only at those intervals when their plays are completed or have outlived their usefulness in a particular field. Hence, they cannot well compete generally, with those who specialize in the business.

Still, it must be said, and with emphasis, that it depends altogether upon the temperament of the author whether he employs an agent or sells his play himself. George Middleton attributes much of his financial success as a dramatist to the fact that his contact with managers has almost invariably been direct. He is a conspicuous example of a playwright who is entirely competent to handle his own business affairs.

A competent play broker becomes an integral factor in a dramatist's scheme of things as soon as he evidences his ability to place a play in the right quarters. There is an appalling amount of energy wasted by authors in trying to establish their pieces with managers who are interested in just totally different types of play; so here the broker or author's agent, as he is more frequently called, first demonstrates his value.

He has constant touch on the pulse of the market; he knows just what kind of play a manager is likely to take; he is aware that a producer must find pieces at certain times to fit the special capabilities of his stars; that a company under contract for a season, left idle by a failure, must have another piece in which to earn their salaries; in short, he knows how to present the plays entrusted to him with economy of time and greatest possible effect.

His other service, every bit as important, is in protecting the author's interests once the drama is accepted. It was realization of this, they say, that made Clyde Fitch employ an agent to the day of his death. His agent was Elisabeth Marbury. She placed his first production; so sentiment played some part in his faithfulness to her service. Miss Marbury was probably the first professional play broker in America. She became a broker by accident. Quite by chance, she came into possession of Frances Hodgson Burnett's dramatization of her own story, "Little Lord Fauntleroy," and was able to arrange its production. The lucrativeness of that venture determined her. Alice Kauser, another exceedingly well-known broker, began as stenographer to Miss Marbury.

Some brokers have their work so systematized that it is no great effort for them to maintain familiarity with the market. Mrs. Helen McCaffry is one of the best-posted agents with whom I am acquainted. She knows a good



play, too, her knowledge of stage requirements gained largely when she was the splendid actress, Helen Lingard. Her knowledge of the immediate theatrical situation combines an unerring news sense with rare diplomatic salesmanship.

The daily press, letters to the managers, personal interviews, and other channels of information that are convenient to a discriminating intelligence, provide a remarkably accurate survey of the sphere of activity. Experienced brokers take few chances and cover only the field they are on. If they have to do with the market abroad, they make frequent trips there, and make careful note of its fluctuations. Elisabeth Marbury keeps an agent in London. His name is Golding Bright; and he does some brilliant work on his own account. When the Dramatists' Play Agency, founded by Bartley Cushing, the stage director who has been producing feature motion pictures for Thomas Dixon, Jr., was first running in New York, Mr. Cushing used to watch the New York situation, while his partner, Guy Crosswell Smith, as business manager ahead of various large touring attractions, observed the state of affairs in outside cities.

Elisabeth Marbury has devoted most of her time of late seasons to producing her plays herself. Sanger and Jordan, one of the oldest play broking firms, has come to act particularly as New York agents for foreign authors and managers, and to specialize in leasing plays for stock; the American Play Company also handles a large stock business.

#### PICKING PLAYS THAT SELL

Of course, one of the most difficult problems of the agent is to find plays. He cannot take anything and everything that is offered him. The play handled must be available for a manager's purposes, or there is nothing in it for him.

Therefore he must exercise some discrimination, must be able to estimate the effectiveness of a play from the script, and recognize dramatic diamonds in the rough.

He makes his confidence in a play as nearly as possible the confidence of the managers with whom he hopes to do business. To submit plays without reference to their practical merit, would soon destroy the manager's belief in the broker, and he would not be so disposed to consider other plays sent in by the broker for his approval. This explains why we hear from one broker of standing that only about three per cent. of the plays sent in are found worth sending out.

There are cases where agents, who are trained play-readers with expert opinion, are so anxious to eliminate worthless plays—worthless for their purposes—that they have other experts pass upon them even after they themselves have accepted the scripts. However, plays that are rejected at the first reading are rarely taken up again. Few agents alter or revise scripts submitted to them. They may recommend changes here and there, but the author usually carries them out himself. Play doctoring, while a perfectly legitimate practice in itself, when professed in conjunction with a play broker's office, invites suspicion that it is the real business, with the play broking held forth as bait.

Frequently a broker accepts for handling a play that he does not expect to submit to managers for perhaps two or more years. In that time he hopes to see a return to that particular type of play which is not in favor at the moment. Accordingly, one often finds in an agent's office a cabinet within which repose many different play manuscripts, each awaiting time and tide. A certain agent of long standing in American theatricals is said to have within reach of her office chair a file of more than two thousand plays.

There is one great drawback to this arrangement. The

agent's opinion is not infallible; so a play manuscript may be gathering dust on a shelf when it might be circulated in the market to advantage. In recognition of this possible error of judgment, most brokers do not ask for exclusive agency.

This may be unfair to the agent. Selling plays is a peculiar proposition. If one is accepted by a manager after a long period of submitting, it does not necessarily mean that early rejections are due to poor salesmanship. A manager may not need a play at this time; or he may need one, and yet consider that the time is not ripe for this particular script, in both of which events the agent is powerless. Many other circumstances combine to make the play broker's profession that of an opportunist.

I have in mind one play broking firm that has endeavored to strike a compromise. If they cannot do anything immediately with a work, or have nothing directly in view for it, they return the script at once. If, however, a piece is accepted for handling, they immediately communicate with the author and secure from him the exclusive agency for that play for one year. That is quite within reason, because the broker gets absolutely no fee unless the play is placed; and to interfere with his plans by placing copies of the work in the hands of other brokers would be decidedly wrong, not only to the broker, but also to his competitors and to the author himself, who might thus defeat his very hope of quick sale by inspired bungling.

Still, I have long tried to reconcile myself to this idea of play broking competition. Older agents seem to regard competition of other brokers part of the game, and sometimes even recommend giving plays to other salesmen as a way of proving to impatient authors that no one can do more than themselves.

Every month this firm instanced sends out notes to pro-

ducing managers, telling them of the new plays they have on hand, giving descriptions of the characters, settings, approximate cost of production, fitness for starring purposes, and other things calculated to arouse managerial interest. Some manager picks out one he would like to read, and at his request, a copy is forwarded. In special cases, where they have reason to believe that a given play is well adapted to the producer's requirements, they do not wait for his request, but call his attention to it at once.

At the end of the year the author's agreement with them expires; and, if the play remains unsold at that time, it is returned to him unless he chooses to leave it longer and they feel there is still hope for it. Then, if a manager keeps a play beyond what they think is a reasonable time in which to consider it and makes no report, they communicate with him at once and secure his answer or demand the play.

#### BROKERS' CHARGES

Play broking fees are often called in question. Very few agents now charge any reading fee or any other recompense until a play is placed, at which time they give the added service of drawing up contracts, enforcing the clauses, collecting royalties, and otherwise protecting the author's interests. Ten per cent. of the author's royalties, in return for the service rendered, is generally acknowledged to be fair.

When that service is competent, there is no denying that the average author is saved more money than he would have received had he handled his play himself; so it really pays for itself. That ten per cent. scale, lived up to by author and agent, is a mighty good thing.

There remain many abuses in play broking at the present time, but there has been marked decrease in their number since the beginning of the decade, largely through persistent legal action.

## CHAPTER II

### PLAYREADERS

GETTING a play to a manager for reading is not merely a matter of detail, but a matter of temperament. It involves, however, something of getting the manuscript in proper physical shape for submitting—which may mean no more than having it legible and neat. This is likely to insure prompt and patient consideration.

The accepted form in which to write the manuscript, for arrangement of the page, is illustrated herewith in a page from the acting edition of Daly's "Frou-Frou." If the author cannot afford to hire a professional typist, he ought to be able to typewrite the play reasonably well himself, following this form. Only, stage directions should be underlined by him in red ink. He should use a plain, durable paper of only moderate weight, but with enough body for the typewriting not to show through. The size of the page should be that of the ordinary commercial quarter-sheet, about eight and one-half by eleven inches. He should put nothing on the typoscript that would not belong there if the play were published, save his name and address, clearly written on the lower right-hand corner of the title page. Each act may be clamped separately, if desired, down the left-hand margin, but not so closely as to hide any of the text when pages are turned. Personally, I prefer to have the entire play bound together.

While pages commonly average a minute each, the approximate number of minutes to the act is found by reading

ACT THREESCENE:-

Fine house of SARTORYS, in Paris. Sofa R. front to audience. Piano behind sofa, up and down stage. Round table L.C. Chimney up L. Large mirror over mantelpiece. Flowers and pedestals about room. Marble bust on stand C. Picture of FROU FROU on easel above L. table. Chairs R. and L. Walls covered with pictures. Armchair L. table.

AT RISE:-

Enter BARON followed by VINCENT.

BARON

[As he enters.]

You are sure the Baroness has not called here this morning?  
[He stops and looks suspiciously at VINCENT.]

VINCENT

Positive, Monsieur, no-one has called to-day; not even M. de Valreas.

BARON

Why do you say "not even" M. de Valreas?

VINCENT

Because he comes here every day.

BARON

The young jackanapes!

[Changing his tone as he remembers he is not alone.]

And what does he come for?

VINCENT

I suppose to see Master, although he always sees Madame.

BARON

[Looking at him sharply.]

Oh?

[VINCENT smiles, shrugs his shoulders, and goes to mantle, while the BARON eyes him grimly.]

BARON

What an imprudent little creature Gilberte is! The servants begin to talk, and what's worse, to shrug their shoulders. Hang the rascals!

[Enter PAULINE, R.]

[VINCENT starts off L.]

*Courtesy of W. T. Price*

## MECHANICS OF THE MANUSCRIPT

This page, from Daly's "Frou-Frou," illustrates many points in the preparation of play manuscripts. Actual size of the page is 8½ x 11 inches. Underscoring of "business" is supposed to be done in red.

the script and timing it, of course making allowances for business—directions for physical movement about the stage. Each act of a four-act play should run about thirty-three minutes in performance. It is wise to make the last act shortest, and, in the case of a four-act play, the third act longest—in the case of a three-act play, the second act longest and the last act shortest. There is nothing arbitrary about this division; many worthy and successful plays depart from it. The three acts of "A Pair of Silk Stockings" were of the same length, almost to the minute. An audience certainly does become restless when certain acts are prolonged, even when the material is interesting; and the structure of almost any play does seem to accommodate itself to those periods of rest that come to moderns as heritages from the decline of the Roman Empire.

Still taking the four-act play as an example: Roughly speaking, the first two acts contain the conditions and beginning of the main struggle; the third act naturally is long because it shows this struggle at its height with centralization of the forces; and the last act is short because its common function is to settle up matters.

If a play is thoroughly interesting, it will hold its audience for any reasonable time; but public sympathy is not wasted at all on those attempts to present dramas of full length without intermissions. A modern play ordinarily runs about one hundred and twenty-five minutes, not counting periods of rest. That permits beginning the play at about 8:15 P. M. and closing at about 10:45. This has many arguments in its favor in the matters of dinner, toilette, conveyances, supper, accommodation-trains and other things that are too self-evident to require mention. Less than one hundred and fifteen minutes is too short; more than one hundred and thirty-five minutes is too long. The beginner must accommodate himself to these demands;

and, if he chafes under them, he may console himself with the knowledge that established dramatists conform to them, too.

#### WHO READS THE PLAYS?

There is one right that the producer almost always regards as inalienably his; and that is selection of that play in production of which his money is to be hazarded. But generally he has to ask some proxy to separate the dramatic wheat from the chaff.

Who, then, reads the literary children of the Great Unproduced?

Many a manuscript does fall into the hands of a person incompetent to judge; but playreaders, on the whole, are persons trained in the ways of the stage. Stuart Walker, who contrived the Portmanteau Theater, long read plays for Belasco; so did Mr. Stillman, who was manager of the Republic Theater, New York, under the Belasco régime; so, it was said, did the late Acton Davies, once critic for the New York *Evening Sun*. Theodore Burt Sayre, author of "Tom Moore," read plays through long seasons for the late Charles Frohman; before that, Charles Klein, the dramatist, occupied the post, reading a thousand, at least, and passing on to Frohman some twelve or fifteen, of which three were produced without a single success. Helen Arthur, an expert on matters theatrical, read many for the Shuberts. Samuel Hoffenstein, press representative to A. H. Woods, reads them for that office.

#### RELATIVE IMPORTANCE OF READERS

Even these experienced persons are not expected to be infallible. They may not recognize big ideas in reams of rubbish, but frequently they see commercial possibilities in plays having a majority of good points—even sometimes in



plays they are rejecting. This successful drama, described as having been turned down by manager after manager, may not be a monument to playreaders' ignorance, but rather to their sagacity, for the very things that spell large receipts at the box office now, may be due to suggestions accompanying their rejections.

Of course, there are many incompetents passing upon submitted plays. Too many managers entrust such work to persons who have been closely associated with some other important phase of play-production in the past, and are supposed, consequently, to be qualified as readers. There is a tendency, too, to underrate playreading responsibility—probably because it makes little noise.

Too many readers work by "hunches," thinking a situation in a given successful play—like the famous door-slamming in "A Doll's House," which was effective largely through its position in the action and by virtue of happenings that went before—may still be effective in different circumstances.

Now and then in past has appeared the super-reader, dignified by the title "dramaturg." In theaters of Europe the dramaturg also issues statements of the management to the press, although he is not a press agent in the American sense. A. R. Cazauran, author of "A Parisian Romance," was dramaturg for A. M. Palmer. So was Augustus Thomas in his salad days. These men were given the task of revamping and salving plays deemed of value but not in acting shape. The dramaturg exists to-day as the "play tinker," or "doctor"—Willard Mack and Max Marcin for A. H. Woods; George Broadhurst for William A. Brady; Bayard Veiller and Roi Cooper Megrue for the Selwyns. Details of the peculiar profession will be dealt with in subsequent pages.

Reputable managers are commonly sincere in considering

submitted scripts. Here or there may be found one who affects dislike of unsolicited plays; but he is not representative of producers as a class.

Playreading is rarely regarded as a distinct profession. If a manager employs a man for reading and for nothing else, he regards him as a mere sieve for the stream of scripts that pours in, and rarely calls him into consultation on the siftings.

Managers frequently find it expedient to appear to have done the reading themselves, and at times are so careless about it that their frankness to a playwright who expected and perhaps was assured he would receive direct managerial attention, often gets his enmity only.

The careful producer makes his reader turn in a report on everything, accepted or rejected. In the first place, the report is evidence that the reader has done his work, for that functionary is human after all, and in the material—which is a synopsis of all important facts in or about the play—the producer may find basis of disagreement with the reader's recorded opinion. Secondly, it enables the producer to meet the playwright face to face, if necessary, ready to talk familiarly of his composition. Finally, it preserves a record for reference in questions of plagiarism, or non-receipt, or other difficulty involving the manager.

It is frequently possible to comprehend much about a play in brief examination, provided judgment is trained. Generally speaking, too protracted consideration blurs perspective, while a few moments' glancing at glaring faults such as that once remarked by Sir Herbert Tree in a play the action of which began one Christmas Eve 500 years before Christ, suffices to throw a piece into the discard.

Daniel Frohman maintains that in judging a play, a manager should remember his first impression of the manuscript and stick to it, because his second reading and repe-

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## THE WHOLE DUTY OF MAN

In 5 Acts

By Thomas Atkins Doe

(1913 Main Street, Hicksville Corners, Patagonia.)

Hugo Allworth, a wealthy young man, falls in love with Geraldine Merrivale, a poor working girl. But they are separated by Hugo's parents, who contemplate a better match for their son, so Geraldine becomes the mother of Timothy, an illegitimate child. By a stroke of poetic justice, Copper Conmalgamated Stock drops three and one-sixteenth points, and the proud Allworths lose all they possess. Hugo is stricken with remorse, leaves home and takes to drink. Forty-seven years later, Timothy, his mother now dead, is a famous physician.

Although his mother forgave his wandering father on her deathbed, he is very bitten and studies eugenics. At last a tramp is brought in to him on the operating table. He is about to remove his lalapalooza through an incision in his chest, when he recognizes the patient as his father by a scar back of the left ear, where Hugo's false teeth once slipped and bit him. Awakening him by a liberal application of spirits of ammonia, he is about to take a summary revenge for his mother's degradation, when the call of the blood overcomes him. He acquaints his erring parent with the mother's forgiveness, and stabs himself with a scalpel. Act Five relates how the father recovers, marries a good woman, raises fourteen children and lives happily ever after.

A melodrama of the average type submitted, full of revolting situations and with poor construction. What plot there is is completed at the end of the fourth act. Act Five is quite superfluous. It is virtually a postscript, an entirely new and distinct story. The dialog and handling of some of the minor details are spirited, indicating an author worthy of encouragement. Unfortunately the nature of the material used removes it from consideration; it is decidedly unpleasant. It is more than an hour too long. There is no particular demand at this time for plays of this type. It will hardly do.

About 45-50-28-30-33-186 Minutes, Acting time.  
Characters, 9m.-8f.

*Van Kinsella Strat*

December 10, 1913.

## FORM OF PLAYREADER'S REPORT

A card index, maintained elsewhere, shows an individual record of names of play and author, date received, date delivered, and position of the report in the files. Of course, this specimen report is fictitious.

tition of the scenes at rehearsal have removed from his sense the elements of surprise, suspense, and anticipation.

## PLAYREADERS' REPORTS

Carefully drawn reports, brief, concise, yet covering the salient features of the work submitted, are perhaps the greatest time-savers in the routine of the manager's office. A form of report that has been pronounced unexcelled, gives these points:

Beginning at top, it provides title of play submitted, number of acts, the author, his address, the plot of the play, and a criticism that gives first, the chief objections—if any—points of merit, a line—precluding correspondence or argument—to be quoted in the rejection slip, and the statement that the play will or will not do, the whole calculated to acquaint the manager at a glance with the availability, and at the same time make him familiar enough with the play to discuss it to the point.

The report is completed with the approximate acting time, by minutes, of each act, with a total for the play, the number of characters, male and female, the date of reading and the reader's signature. A card-index, maintained elsewhere, shows an individual record of names of play and author, date received, date delivered, and position of the report in the file. Advantage of the arrangement to the manager may be appreciated in knowing that more than fifty of these reports may be read comfortably in the time usually devoted to perusal of a single play.

Reasons for rejection are grouped under three general heads: material, construction, and treatment.

In practically every case where poor treatment—which is to say, manner of handling details—is the main fault, the reader's recommendation is strong enough to arrest the manager's attention, for such plays frequently are remediable without superhuman effort.

## CHAPTER III

### ACCEPTING PLAYS

PLAYREADING methods constitute an intricate subject; but here and there managers and readers have recorded their processes. Of particular interest is the method outlined in the *New York Times* of May 9, 1915, by Arthur Hopkins, producer of "The Poor Little Rich Girl," "Evangeline," and "We Are Seven," and "discoverer" of Elmer Reizenstein's melodrama, "On Trial."

Mr. Hopkins is at loss to understand how managers can leave their plays to hired readers; they should themselves go through all the material that comes, he thinks, for there lie the needles in the dramatic haystack. The search should be for ideas only, for "no plays are right when first written; but if they have the idea, they soon can be made right. . . . Ordinary plays spell failure," he goes on; "the successes must have talking angles—new treatment, new theme, or especially fine acting, as that of Elsie Ferguson in 'Out-cast.'"

For his own guidance, Mr. Hopkins has worked out a formula which he says he has found rather helpful. As his quest is of ideas, he has marshaled into four likely divisions the qualities he thinks these ideas should possess. These are Novelty, Human Interest, Acting Opportunity, and Production Opportunity. They are given relative importance on a percentage basis:

Novelty .....	25%
Human Interest .....	25
Acting Opportunity .....	25
Production Opportunity .....	25
	100%

“Assuming that 100 is a good play,” explains Mr. Hopkins, “it is then desirable to have your elements add up to a point much higher than 100. Of course, the appraisal of the various qualities is largely guesswork, but at least one can arrive at some adjustment. Take a play like ‘Within the Law,’ for instance, the chart would read something as follows:

Novelty (above average) .....	40
Human Interest (above average) .....	35
Acting Opportunity (unusual) .....	50
Production Opportunity (average) .....	25
	150

Under most circumstances, the producer is not looking for merely a good play, but a play to fit the special capabilities of a star he is holding under contract. Thus, Harrison Grey Fiske looks first to the possibilities for Mrs. Fiske; Margaret Anglin would probably not consider any piece without some reference to personal appropriateness. The manager buys only what he thinks he needs. If he does not think he needs a certain play, no matter how well constructed it may be, or how excellent its theme, that usually ends it in his office.

#### FORMULAS OF CHARLES FROHMAN

Nevertheless, it would be a stern manager, indeed, who would turn down a play that appealed to him in every particular save that it did not measure up to his star. John D. Williams, long general manager for the late Charles Froh-

man, and himself to-day one of the most capable producers in America, confided to the *Century Magazine* of December, 1915, some crotchets by which "C. F.," manager of a whole galaxy of stars, estimated the worth of plays that had been sorted out for his perusal.

"When he talked plays," said Mr. Williams, "Frohman always relied upon certain pet formulas. He knew nothing and cared less about the technique of the drama; he hated the term; but he ordered or accepted plays for himself, or accounted for the success of plays produced by other men, by squaring them with two or three formulas as quaint as himself.

"'You can't find any better scheme for play-building than the old nursery tales,' he would say. 'Monsieur Beaucaire,' 'Cyrano de Bergerac,' and all such plays in which youth is triumphant, are variations, and, of course, amplifications, of the tale of 'Prince Charming.' 'Peg o' My Heart,' 'Daddy Long-Legs,' and similar enormous successes, the popularity of which cannot be accounted for in themselves, always win great publics, because the public, like so many children at the end of a long day, loves nothing so much as to hear the story of 'Cinderella.' 'Within the Law,' 'The Lion and the Mouse,' and that kind of play, almost never fail because they contain the formula of the woman triumphant. Americans love to see woman triumph over men."

#### ENCOURAGING DRAMATISTS TO SUBMIT PLAYS

Without further discussing peculiar methods of selecting plays, one turns to another angle of selection, the difficulty of even getting good plays to read. Grace George, gifted with youth, vivacity, experience, and ability, lately was idle for more than half a season because the struggling playwright, on whom public sympathy is lavished, failed to provide a play for her use. She hunted everywhere, offered

a \$1,000 bonus for one, and eventually began a repertoire season in New York, reviving a series of her former successes and doing "standard" plays from over the water.

In order to encourage dramatists to submit their plays, managers frequently resort to expensive methods; they inaugurate playreading bureaus like that Belasco once had, or like that still maintained by Morosco; or they hold prize contests. Morosco's bureau, presided over by Elmer Harris—who collaborated with his employer on "The Pretty Mrs. Smith" for Kitty Gordon—issued its first quarterly report late in May, 1915. It showed the reading of 1,000 manuscripts, with twenty-nine acceptances.

But the "theatrical Czar of the Pacific Coast" can afford to gamble just a little more lavishly than most of his brother managers, for at Los Angeles he maintains what he calls his "manufacturing plant," a stock theater, with a resident company, which he uses as a sort of laboratory wherein he may present new plays cheaply in advance of regular productions at larger theatrical centers. In this way he insures paying patronage before bringing his attraction to town. As he explained to me in an interview not long ago, he has centralized his experiments because he has found that by keeping his equipment in one spot he can work cheaper and more efficiently. He has educated his stock patrons to expect new plays along with the old ones, and always is certain of a run of from five to ten weeks. All that time he keeps his play in solution, developing the visualized manuscript to the greatest possible extent.

But prize contests for plays are not generally satisfactory. Most of those submitted are either written in haste with consequent lack of both inspiration and care, or are plays taken from the author's own discard on the shelf. Chances are much against presence of the sort of play desired. In



this connection it is significant that in the conditions of the contest for the Ames \$10,000 prize, it was frankly stipulated that while the award would be paid the winner in any case, the play would not be produced unless considered in the eyes of the judges, of sufficient merit.

With the flood of plays submitted—there were 1,646 in the Ames contest, which evolved “Children of Earth”—it is inevitable that some sifting must be done by readers before the judges begin their labors; and here there is little time for leisurely examination.

Prize plays are heir to more than ordinary ills. Being selected in competition, the public expects unusual quality. They must be virtual masterpieces—not merely good plays—and must overcome the baleful influence of disappointed contestants, their relatives, and friends. They do not occupy a natural position; they generally are denied the fighting chance.

Prizes are constantly being offered for plays. John Craig, at the Castle Square Theater in Boston, gave one annually to competing Harvard and Radcliffe students. But, at the announcement of each new contest, the conservative dramatist smiles patiently, completes his play as the spirit moves, and submits it in the everyday, routine manner.

## CHAPTER IV

### CONTRACTS WITH AUTHORS

AUTHORS in America have had little assistance from any organization in establishing equitable contracts, although their agents have done much; yet there has come about a sort of acknowledged standard to which reputable firms are not loath to subscribe. And it is likely that this will be substantially the basis of the model contract now being prepared by the counsel of the Society of American Dramatists and Composers. On the other hand, there ever are unscrupulous persons anxious to defraud others of their rights; and of this number probably an equal proportion are dramatists.

The first thing after acceptance of a play is money down, unless, of course, production is immediate, when possibly no advance is made. For a new author, this advance on royalties ranges from perhaps \$250 to \$500, or even \$1,000—assuming, for instance, that the author has public standing in another line. This amount binds the manager's option of producing the play.

But a manager has been known to accept a play not to produce it himself, but merely to keep another manager from doing it, and so destroying the freshness of, or "taking the edge off," some prearranged piece. This is the more likely to happen because authors commonly submit plays similar in character to one then running or announced under the producer's direction. To guard against this, a date limit of perhaps six months is set to the option. And when that

time has expired, the producer may extend his option usually for two periods of three months each, at the rate of perhaps \$250 apiece, or forfeit the first sum, and yield up the play to its author, representative, or other owner.

It is generally considered that a manager is taking extraordinary chances in producing an author's first play—usually from two to three times as many as with one by an established dramatist. This estimate is accurately made here by the circumstance that the new man often gets but five per cent. of the gross receipts, while the playwright who has "arrived" with one other production at least, ordinarily gets ten per cent., and the long-established, "representative" dramatist may get as much as fifteen.

The average matter of author's payment is adjusted to what is known as the "sliding scale," whereby he gambles on chances of success along with the manager. This system is always based on gross receipts of a production, before any other expenses are deducted.

It starts with five per cent. on the first \$3,000; seven and one-half per cent. on the next \$2,000; a flat ten per cent. beginning with the next \$2,000, or, perhaps, fifteen per cent. on all over \$10,000 gross. The gross is almost invariably figured on the week, although the production may play three or more different theaters in six days. In a large city, and depending, of course, on capacity of the house, weekly receipts of a successful play usually vary anywhere from \$4,000 to \$10,000. Occasionally the contract stipulates that by the time a certain sum is paid in royalties, the play becomes property of the manager; but this is comparatively rare.

#### MINOR CLAUSES IN AUTHORS' CONTRACTS

In the body of the contract there are various minor considerations, such as stock and motion picture rights, which

are generally shared equally with the manager; options on production abroad, which commonly allow the author an increased percentage, and the condition that if the manager fails to present the play for, say, fifty performances over a period of perhaps forty weeks, or the theatrical year, the play reverts to the author.

Something is said, too, about appearance of the author's name on programs, and in certain classes of advertising which are specified carefully. So the author, while not having his name in the ordinary newspaper directory as a rule, may be represented when the space is increased—this being a form of what is technically known as “display” advertising. Novelization rights are generally retained by the author, although these often are ceded some newspaper or “news” syndicate for publicity accruing from serial publication.

A brief clause in the contract, which may achieve monumental importance later, is the author's guarantee that his play is original or an authorized translation, adaptation, or dramatization, and contains no libelous matter, and that, in event of libel or plagiarism being found, he will undertake responsibility, and recompense the manager for any losses sustained in consequence.

## CHAPTER V

### PLAGIARISM

MUCH of the incidental business of the playhouse has arisen through dragging into legal light skeletons from outside departments. Troubles of dramatists, for instance, would seem no affair of a producer; yet his connection with their work frequently involves him in their broils, and compels him to resort to certain measures for personal protection. Prominent among these difficulties is dramatic plagiarism.

The best definition of the word seems to make theft a comparative thing that may be proven right and proper by clever wording. Of course, appropriation of another's work is not right in any case; but the definition must also tell what a man's property is, and when his proprietary rights are being violated, two problems somewhat difficult of solution. In fact, solve the first, and the second remains a riddle no longer.

Mere similarity does not mean theft, any more than so-called doubles imply common parentage. No author "invents" anything; the copying of a few external truths means faithfulness to life, not necessarily imitation of another's work. This generally accounts for the flood of "parallels" pouring in at the slightest hint of resemblance between two produced plays.

It is rather the arrangement of material that belongs to the author. In that he may be original. But when one work is found to parallel another not only in plan but in errors,

plagiarism may well be suspected. More important than parallelism of facts is the sequence of facts, for it is there that the author shows most clearly the individuality of his technique. Importance is attached to the fact that the alleged thief had access at some previous time to the matter believed to have been stolen, merely because it is an additional precaution that the offender may not escape through a loophole of the law. This has been the deciding factor in a large number of cases.

There was tried out in New York not long ago, the most effective disposition of a charge of plagiarism that has been made in the history of the American stage. David Belasco produced "Tainted Philanthropy," by Abraham Goldknopf, and "The Woman," by Cecil De Mille, the two plays in dispute, as a visual demonstration to the court before which the case was being tried, that they were entirely unlike. The outcome was a prompt dismissal of the charge, and a stinging rebuke to the plaintiff. The test was efficient in the particular case, as it would have been in establishing plagiarism had there been any there. It was also a needed qualification of charges brought and defended. There was, on the one hand—for the time at least—care in substantiating first impressions of injury done, and, on the other hand, more discrimination in gathering material for playmaking.

#### WHY IT IS UNWISE FOR MANAGERS TO "LIFT" PLAYS

By far the greater portion of play claimants are obscure persons. That is popularly supposed to be the reason they have been robbed. The real reason in most authentic cases, is just what their obscurity implies—they are incompetent. If they were able writers their plays would show it; and this much is certain: if a play is good enough for production in any reputable manager's eyes he will not try to steal it. He will make terms directly with the author or the author's

agent, for to arrange with some well-known—which implies capable—dramatist (whose reputation would be jeopardized) to steal it would cost him many times the cost of legitimate contracts, together with the added danger of severe punishment if caught.

It is only when the play needs radical alteration, and another, more expert, dramatist has to be employed to make it, that plagiarism is likely. Nearly every professional playreader has felt the pity of seeing a good dramatic idea go to waste simply because the author seemed incapable of ever doing anything with it himself, although his regret has not necessarily been followed by the idea of theft.

Every once in a while critics really do discover plagiarism in a new production—despite the frequent false alarms—and soundly berate the author for it. But it happens that many producers and stage directors have a fashion of strengthening plays with “borrowed” lines and situations. They would rather put in something proven to be good than to invent new matter about which there is doubt. But they take care that their thefts will go unpunished at law.

A few years ago Preston Gibson produced a play wherein some one or other found a few of Oscar Wilde’s scintillating lines, and denounced Gibson in no uncertain terms. Gibson appeared before the curtain on the second night, and replied, dealing humorously with his detractors, and “justifying” himself by the usual references to Shakespeare and Molière. Now, those lines may have glittered there by Gibson’s authority, or they may have been placed there by someone else, as witness this: The late Charles Klein and J. I. C. Clarke wrote a play (was it “Heartsease”?) that was produced by Henry Miller in Philadelphia. A local paper discovered that the last act corresponded to an act of “Camilla’s Husbands.” Miller promptly appeared, admitting the charge, assuming entire responsibility, and arguing producer’s

license. Miller may have been a martyr, practising a graceful ruse to get out of it; but, likely enough he spoke truth.

Producers may be innocent sufferers, because they cannot well be expected to know the author's sources of the plays they handle. "Paid in Full" caused difficulty for its producers in being almost identical in plot with a one-act play by Florence Jerrold. The author, Eugene Walter, declared that he had taken his plot from Maeterlinck's "Monna Vanna." The case was settled out of court; and it is said that Miss Jerrold received \$10,000 in satisfaction of her claim.

How was Henry W. Savage to know the dubious past of "The Merry Widow" when he secured the American rights? He restrained every selection, imitation, and burlesque until Gertrude Hoffman gave an imitation in vaudeville. To meet his application for an injunction she was fully prepared. From her statement, it appeared that "The Merry Widow" had for its original "L'Attaché d'Ambassade," written by Henri Meilhac in 1861. And, of course, Colonel Savage lost out.

#### ACCIDENTAL PLAGIARISM

There may be such a thing as accidental plagiarism, but it does not seem likely as a general thing. A few years ago one prominent English author was accused of taking a play from another. It developed that the latter had sent a copy of his play to some actor friends, and they had outlined the plot to the first dramatist, who then wrote a play from it. It would appear that one using a plot so clearly organized for dramatic purposes, would investigate its source, or that one knowingly telling the plot of one dramatist to another, would, unless malicious, be careful to specify authorship.

Of course, acknowledgments may go a bit too far when



an author is over-scrupulous in giving credit. Goethe is quoted in reference to "Faust," "I owe the intrigue to Calderon; the vision to Marlowe; the bed scene to 'Cymbeline;' the serenade to 'Hamlet; the prologue to the 'Book of Job.'" This is satirized by a pair of much humbler authors, Floyd Jenkins and Richard Putnam Darrow, who remark in the preface to their printed play, "The Wilderness," that it is adapted chiefly from Noah Webster.

#### UNCONSCIOUS APPROPRIATION

There is said to be such a thing as unconscious plagiarism. Daniel Frohman has quoted Bronson Howard, who said he made it a point of not reading play manuscripts for fear he would unwittingly absorb them. This "absorption of ideas" caused the predicament of James Halleck Reid, who was accused of pirating his own play. He sold one of his pieces, and wrote another in which the new owner of the first said he found serious parallels.

The only very grave reflection upon the two last-named possibilities, accidental and unconscious appropriation, is that more effort is usually devoted to plagiarism without punishment than to avoid plagiarizing at all. These exceptions do not in any way justify this rule; and appropriation of another's property still remains theft.

#### UNACKNOWLEDGED ADAPTATIONS

One of the worst and most persistent forms of plagiarism is the unacknowledged adaptation. The mere statement that the source is French or German, or that the indebtedness to the unnamed original is small, is, to my mind, criminal. "The Master of the House," itself supposedly by C. T. Dazey, author of "In Old Kentucky," masquerading under a pseudonym—although lately advertised, I notice, as by Julius Steger, who staged it—is a case in point.

During Ludwig Fulda's recent visit to the United States that distinguished German dramatist told me how England's "gentle Barrie" evolved a play called "The Admirable Crichton" that is suspiciously like a piece of his called "Robinson's Island," and how in this country he could identify "Our Wives," by Helen Kraft and Frank Mandel—which, by the way, was made into an operetta called "The Only Girl," by Victor Herbert—as his play, "Jugendfreunde."

Plots, taken bodily from the thousands of available old French and German plays and presented in modern clothes, appear every season upon stages here and abroad. A famous writer, approached several years ago for a recipe of success, said (but not for publication over his name), "I am successful because I have the best library in New York."

## CHAPTER VI

### PLAY DOCTORS

WANTED: by almost any producing manager, a person who can invariably pick successful plays in advance. Concerning this common theatrical demand, it is said by those in the know that if the admirable Crichton could be found, his salary would be beyond the dreams of avarice.

On the rebound from this apparently bold statement of recompense, one notes that it is quite safe, because no person could possibly guarantee a hit from simple reading of the manuscript. He could in no way anticipate the particular manner of its staging, the quality of its acting, or the moods of its potential audiences. Even if he were Gordon Craig's ideal artist of the theater, who does everything save attend his own play, I doubt that his opinion in such sweeping regard could be more than hit-and-miss.

Failing the presence of the needed oracle, managers maintain the dramaturg—more democratically known as the play tinker, or doctor. He is the incarnation of the theatrical bag of tricks; and it is his duty to invest accepted plays with professional earmarks, to make them structurally perfect, to create or strengthen situations, to make characters individual and consistent, to “leave 'em laughin'”—which is professional patter meaning the happy ending—to insure suspense at ends of acts, to inject comedy at intervals, and otherwise to conform to the custom of centuries.

In most theaters, this work is left to the stage director at rehearsal—some maintaining that no radical corrective

work may be done on a play until it is at least roughly visualized. The notion has led to a pernicious habit of throwing half-baked compositions into rehearsal, and attempting to "whip them into shape" with little or no time for extended consideration.

George Broadhurst, who works mainly for William A. Brady, is one of the best-known play doctors in America. W. H. Post has done play tinkering for many managers. The late Byron Ongley, stage director and author, did much work of the kind for A. H. Woods. Willard Mack, author of "So Much for So Much," and Max Marcin, author of "The House of Glass," are steadily employed by A. H. Woods, not merely to write plays of their own, but to galvanize the manuscripts of others. Some women tinkers are Edith Ellis Furniss, who wrote the play, "Mary Jane's Pa," and Rida Johnson Young, author of "Brown of Harvard." Eugene Presbrey, distinguished stage director, and George V. Hobart, author of "Experience," and Edward Peple, author of "The Prince Chap" and "A Pair of Sixes," have done reams of revamping of other persons' plays. And there is a long list of others who have made a specialty of just such service. In a complete roster would appear the names of almost all stage directors, for stage direction, as it is commonly practised, is largely fulfilling neglected obligations of authors.

However, the tendency is growing to leave less to rehearsals, and to call in the doctor, if necessary, before money is spent on scenery, casting, rehearsals, and so on.

David Belasco is probably the master play doctor in America, although I know of two or three others who run him close seconds. He is working as a tinker on productions scheduled two and three seasons ahead. He weighs every ounce of material, every situation, and, very important indeed, public states of mind. And all the while, the author

of the play under consideration, is with him, consulting and acquiescing—acquiescing mainly, for, as one of his authors once told me, ‘ You simply can’t deny the Governor’s reasons; they’re too d—ned well-founded.’

Leaving public states of mind out of the question for the time, in theme and material lie the main indeterminable factors in a play’s possible success. In them is the real life of the play; but that life may be readily strangled off by faulty arrangement. For theme and material the manager accepts a play; to provide arrangement he engages his tinker.

#### MATERIAL DICTATES PROPRIETY OF HANDLING

Dramatic theme and material dictate the propriety with which they should be handled; but morality and good taste in general are no direct concern of art—which is simply another name for the doctor’s technical service. It is the doctor’s business to make the play dramatic—or, in other words, to make the manuscript a play. An undramatic play is a contradiction in terms.

What, then, is dramatic? Brander Matthews, in his usual, common-sense way, says a play is a composition written to be played by actors on a stage in a theater before an audience. One may say, then—broadly—that that is dramatic which, when presented by actors on a stage before an audience, commands at once the attention and interest of a majority of persons in that audience. The minority in an audience does not generally count very much, because in time, the majority will swing them into more or less accord.

#### ART MERELY A DEVICE TO GAIN INTEREST

The assumption may be, therefore, that dramatic art is merely one of the many ways of arranging material for its effective expression; and here one has the premise from which the play doctor begins his work. Its purpose being

effectiveness, it is not good art if it fails to accomplish that end. Conversely, if it is effective, the art must be good. And, as the effectiveness of dramatic art may be estimated only by the impression produced on the audience, it is the interest of the audience that is the test of art.

It will be noted, incidentally, that the interest of an audience is what makes it pay its dollars into a box office. I honestly believe that an artistic success—remember that “artistic” here means well designed to appeal to the audience to which it is presented—is financially successful, too. There are many fine plays that have gone to failure because of conditions under which they have been presented; but they were not artistic, or they would have been contrived to appeal to their patrons. Unchanged, but presented under proper conditions, they probably would have succeeded because their peculiar artistry then would have been consistent.

#### ART FOUND BY ANALYSIS OF SUCCESSFUL DEVICES

To determine the nature of dramatic art that it may be applied to new material, is to group together those combinations and arrangements that have proven effective, and find their common characteristics that these may be applied to other material for its effective expression.

This inductive method has been the scheme of great theorists of playwriting from Aristotle to our own William Thompson Price, including Horace, Jonson, Sidney, Dryden, Diderot, Schlegel, Lessing, Freytag, Brander Matthews, and William Archer.

#### ACTION

The initial discovery is that to provide action is the first obligation of the art. Interest is gained only when there is something doing. It may be an outcry, physical combat,

a ringing doorbell, a word spoken, or just the souging of the wind; but an action takes place, although it may be only disclosure of the scene by the rise of the curtain. It must be observed, however, that dramatic action is not necessarily physical movement, but rather significant matter freshly brought up.

#### MUST BE OBJECTIVE

Action is manifestly most effective in the doing, for it is thus brought more closely and vividly to the comprehension; so there is more action in drama when it is shown directly on the stage before the eyes of the audience than when the action is merely described. So dramatic art requires that action be as objective as possible.

There will be recalled, in apparent contradiction to this, that the murders in "Antigone," "Macbeth," "Tess of the d'Urbervilles," and many more plays, take place offstage, while no one may deny their greater effectiveness in being done just that way. Here once more we have the question—in more amplified form—of just what action is. These murders are, of course, vital points in the plots of the three plays mentioned; but their importance is secondary to their immediate consequences, which are objectively shown.

That the murders themselves are not shown is because they would be revolting and sordid spectacles, making their ghastly details so emotionally exciting that they would subordinate more important motives and possibilities. They are merely instances of material dictating its own treatment, bearing out the dramatic law of objectivity, while indicating, when playwriting method reaches a point of choice between things to be or not to be shown on the stage, that the objective quality is always to be applied to the more dramatic material—in other words, that which is to have the greater significance.

Necessity of objective quality is the great foe to preachments in the theater. One of the strongest points of Galsworthy's "Justice," a play frankly designed to make people think, is that both sides of the matter at issue are presented objectively, without comment.

#### MUST BE CONTINUED

It is observed, however, that interest flags unless a second thing is done soon after the first. Therefore, the first action must be followed by a second, and that by another, and so on as long as the performance lasts.

R. H. Burnside once told me that this has constituted one of his most perplexing problems—first the positive aim to entertain, and then the negative purpose to avoid wearing.

#### MUST BE VARIED

As repetition breeds monotony, variety is necessary; and the second action is preferably a new one. The need of variety extends even to costumes, and to the set scene—although one frequently finds an absurd parade of gowns, and constant shift of irrelevant settings.

#### MUST BE UNINTERRUPTED

If the second thing done is quite distinct from the first—a common enough error in opening scenes of the play, where distinct facts are being established for later weaving together—it is seen that there is a break in the interest as the old thread is dropped for the new; so the conclusion is reached that action must be uninterrupted. This is accomplished when the second action develops directly from the first, leads to a third, and so on until the end of the play. In other words, the first action is presented as a cause, of which the second action is an effect.



## INTEREST MUST BE PROVOKED

Yet, it is not enough that something takes place, and a second new action follows directly out of it as from cause to effect, for the interest must be provoked in addition to being carried along smoothly.

There are many plays, however, like Edward Locke's play, "The Bubble," in which Louis Mann appeared, the plots of which may be anticipated soon after the first rise of the curtain, but which remain interesting because of their incidental action—little details of no great importance to the given plot, but amusing for the moment in themselves. James A. Herne, author of "Shore Acres," was a strong believer in this sort of incidental action, and attached greater importance to it than he did to the unity of the play itself. In his drama, "Griffith Davenport," he carried the idea of a chain of episodes, almost to the point of proving his theory; but the play failed—some other causes, however, speeding its untimely end.

The audience must desire to know more about the objects of their attention. Therefore, their attention must be gained by making it manifest that something more is to happen, and their curiosity piqued by suspense, or uncertainty as to just what that happening will be. The problem, then, is to have something done to or by an object of attention—the fact conveyed that something further is to result from that action, and yet withhold just what that result will be. The future must be pregnant with possibilities that may not be anticipated.

Here we have the familiar expedient of keeping a secret from an audience—a splendid device at times, as witness George M. Cohan's dramatization of Earl Derr Biggers' surprise novel, "Seven Keys to Baldpate." In this play a novelist comes to lonely Baldpate Inn, a summer resort,

in the dead of winter, to win a bet by writing a novel in twenty-four hours, only to be interrupted while in throes of composition, by a series of thrilling adventures which the audience is at first led to believe is a "frame-up" arranged by the other party to the wager, and then learns that it is just a visualization of the story itself which the novelist has written.

In order to make it clear that something is to happen to an object of attention, it must be shown that it is subject to some influence which will create the change. For instance, it early appears that Helen, in "The Hunchback," is likely to propose to her bashful lover, Modus. However, there will be no uncertainty as to the result if the object of attention is from the beginning in complete accord with the influence, and entirely submits to it. On the other hand, if the object of attention opposes the influence—there is question whether Helen will propose to Modus or not—there is immediately created a sort of conflict, the outcome of which is in doubt. And the more evenly matched the contestants are, by advantage or disposition, the greater will be the suspense as to issue.

#### CONFLICT THE ESSENCE OF ACTION

Conflict, then, of arms, as in the hand-to-hand battle of Macbeth and Macduff; habits, as in the coming of the cosmopolitan French girl to the narrow country village in "The Strange Woman;" desires, as in "The Unchastened Woman;" points of view, as in "Magda;" or what not, is of the very essence of dramatic action, and, being objectively presented, fulfils all of its requirements. Something is done; it is continued, varied, uninterrupted, and provokes interest.

There must be at least two sides to a conflict; and it is advisable to have no more, as, by keeping the conflict re-

duced to its lowest terms, attention of the audience is concentrated, and interest proportionately strengthened.

#### UNITY GIVEN BY PROPOSITION

Obviously, there cannot be any conflict until the second side of it is established; so, for convenience, the second side of it is termed the "Cause of the Action." To correspond, the first side is called the "Conditions of the Action." Together, they constitute a conflict, or a proposition to be solved, from which there is bound to be an issue, known as the "Result of the Action." Thus a dramatic action is made to be about one thing, with a beginning, middle, and an end. In other words, it is given Unity. And all that remains, on this score, is to make the proposition of sufficient magnitude that it fills the acting time, be that time twelve minutes or three hours.

Statement of a dramatic action in terms of a proposition is the peculiar invention of William Thompson Price, my own excellent teacher, who founded the first school of play-writing in the world in New York in 1901. It is the touchstone of dramatic unity; and Mr. Price, himself a celebrated play doctor, employs it constantly in his work of revision.

I know of no more striking example of a dramatic proposition than his own oft-quoted statement of the action of "Romeo and Juliet." The conditions out of which the main action grows, he says, are that Romeo and Juliet, son and daughter respectively, of two families at deadly enmity, fall in love. Cause of the main action is that they marry. Once that is accomplished it cannot be undone. The proposition which it automatically presents, and which remains to be solved, is, "Will their marriage result happily and reunite the two families?" The answer is, of course, provided in the play.

## PLOT: ESTABLISHMENT AND ORDER OF NECESSARY FACTS

There are certain facts, implied in the Proposition, which must be established in order to tell the story of a play, and without which that story is incomplete. This establishment of necessary facts may be called supplying causes for effects already established in the Proposition. The number of facts so obtained, at once raises the question of the order, or sequence, in which they are to be arranged.

It is plain that first of all, they must be so ordered that the story of the play is self-progressive—always moving forward toward the result of the action—and self-explanatory—so that it is not necessary to go back and explain things that have happened. Now, each fact that is essential to the telling of the story, must have taken place after one other fact or before another or both; and the arrangement, so determined, is bound to be self-progressive. In short, each fact is ordered, with regard to the others, according to the time it actually happened, the present tense; and being presented on the stage objectively—which necessarily is in the present tense—it must also be self-explanatory.

## DIVISION INTO ACTS

In the case of a full-sized play it is readily understood that the action is more thoroughly appreciated if there are periods of rest for the audience, and also that there are changes of scene or lapses of time that make interruptions. It is a matter of economy to identify these changes, or lapses, with the periods of rest, and make them serve the same purpose as far as possible. The longest intermission is usually after the tensest moment in the play.

At the same time, it is necessary to have sufficient suspense at the end of each act, that interest may be carried across to the next, and thus be continuous to the end of the play.

It is well, therefore, to end the acts with matters that are absolutely essential to the plot, that interest may be carried forward, over the intermission, most powerfully, and directly along the line of the main action, incidentally summing up the preceding action for complete understanding.

#### SCENARIO: ACTION OF THE MOMENT

At this point it is found that the play is now merely a succession of facts that tell a story, with many of them interesting only because of their relation to what has gone before, and to what is to come. They must be made interesting in themselves at the present moment. Therefore each fact must be brought out in action. If practicable, it may be made the issue of a minor proposition; but, in any case, it should be invested with the characteristics that have already been described as providing action, to give it interest to as full a degree as possible.

This following out of possibilities frequently means getting at facts by going around Robin Hood's barn, so to speak; but it often is the very best kind of action, interesting by virtue of its very retardation. Sheridan's plays are full of examples. To some minds, it is this following out of possibilities that has done more than anything else structural to make great, living plays. Most of the plots used by Shakespeare had become trite before he touched them; but his manner of following out their ramifications has made them endure throughout centuries.

#### EXPOSITION

Particular difficulty will be found with those facts that have occurred before the play opens, and hence may not be shown objectively. But their influence may be shown objectively, bringing them out, in that way, in an interesting manner. We have, for convenient example, establishment

of the enmity of the rival houses of Montague and Capulet in "Romeo and Juliet," by the street brawl in the opening scene. Note how Shakespeare, in "The Tempest," brings out the early history of Ariel, by having Prospero chide the spirit for ingratitude. See, also, how the history of Caliban is brought out in a quarrel.

#### DIVISION INTO SCENES

Thus, it soon appears that the action of a play naturally divides itself into definite steps forward, each fact that is necessary to the plot being developed by its own little action, that, while distinct, is still relevant to the play as a whole. These steps are called scenes.

A scene is constituted, as has been observed, by a little action that brings out a fact which advances the plot, and which is its object. By analogy, other little actions—in the nature of episode—which bring out important facts that contribute materially to the play (although these facts may not be *absolutely* necessary to the telling of the plot) are called scenes. Then the others are distinguished by being called plot scenes, or necessary scenes, or *scènes à faire*—scenes that must be made. There may be scenes to bring out points of character, connective scenes, and many other kinds that will suggest themselves, although each scene has its own definite object.

Scenes are naturally defined by the entrance and exit of important character, for the entrance and exit of important character almost invariably changes the complexion of affairs, and sets the action going toward a new object, although there may be two or more scenes without any change of character whatever.

## PREPARATION

In order to make certain facts in the action possible at the time they take place, it is frequently found necessary to establish other facts previously. This is called preparation. That accidental knocking to the floor of the paper-knife with which Clay Whipple is later to kill Tom Denning, in "The Witching Hour," a drama by Augustus Thomas, is a well-known instance of dramatic preparation. And preparation often requires whole scenes for itself, although these should always pay for themselves in action of the moment. This is one of the devices employed to make a play self-explanatory, while the order and immediate relevance of the preparation itself, helps to make it self-progressive.

## CHARACTERIZATION

After the story is thus fully indicated in dramatic form, it is well to give considerable attention to the characters in it, for, the more lifelike they are, the more interesting will be their action. Each should be made individual, as the hermit in "Seven Keys to Baldpate," and consistent, like Wellwyn, the artist, in "The Pigeon;" while, if it makes the action more interesting and forceful, whole scenes may be devoted to their development.

## TESTING STRUCTURE

It now remains to test the structure, to see if the action is self-explanatory, self-progressive, cumulative, provided with suspense, action of the moment, variety, is objective as far as possible, and is otherwise supplied with the characteristics that have already been indicated.

One thing that is most important, is that in seeing that the action is continuous from beginning to end, in a self-

contained action, it be ascertained that the keynote—of what the play is to be about and of the spirit in which it is to be taken—is struck in the very beginning, that interest may not be distracted into some incidental path.

#### DIALOGUE AND BUSINESS

These two elements are finally employed to complete the play. Business has already been indicated wherever any physical action has taken place in the play; and, as it is most objective animation, there should be plenty of it. It should always be preferred to the spoken word if choice is presented.

Words, or dialogue, make the next most direct appeal to the mind through the ear; so they, too, should be handled with care.

To characterization, dialogue, and business, play doctors frequently devote the greater part of their time; but they are always incidental issues, and therefore I am not detailing them.



# THE DIRECTOR TAKES CHARGE

## CHAPTER VII

### CASTING

THE play has been accepted; the scenic artist has received his commission, and time of production draws near. The producer must cast his play with actors.

To get actors the producer has many sources of supply. The simplest method is to apply to some reliable actors' employment agency for persons having such-and-such qualifications. Probably very soon a steady stream of players in search of engagements will present itself.

Likely enough, the producer has been preparing for such an exigency for a long time past, and has, in some corner of his office, a stack of programs from various theaters, with names of worth-while players marked in them. He has seen them act, and has made an estimate of what they can do. And, while passing these names in review, if he comes upon one of a likely player, he endeavors to get in touch with him at once to ascertain whether or not he is "at liberty"—which means not "signed up" with some other manager—and, perhaps, to come to terms about an engagement.

Reputable managers are always seeking good actors. They are quite as scarce as good plays; and when one happens along, he must be placed under contract if possible. The constant search for actors is still another reason why producers are forever attending each other's plays.

Many producers look for their people in the stock companies. Others avoid stocks because a merely fair actor in a "scratch" organization, will sometimes appear so relatively good that he seems excellent.

Throughout the year actors call at the manager's office to see if he is projecting any production likely to concern them, and, in all events, to leave their names and addresses. If the manager feels the slightest interest in any applicant, he usually asks a number of questions, the answers being recorded with notes for future reference.

There are various systems of filing these notes; but most managers use the card index. Frederick Stanhope, when one of the Liebler Company stage directors, had to examine from seventy-five to a hundred actors and actresses a month. Details about each were recorded on a separate card. The name, post-office address, and telephone number were, of course, given whenever possible. Then came a record of previous performances, height, weight, color of hair, type of looks, and broadly, the kind of character he believed the applicant might portray. These cards were filed in two main sections, one for men, the other for women, and then subdivided into "lines of business"—leads, second business, ingénues, and so forth, terms which I shall describe presently. If he had ever seen the applicant act in another play, he wrote down the program number, keeping all programs, with penciled comments on individual work in each cast, numbered and in a separate file. At the end of the month he sorted out his cards for the preceding thirty or more days, destroying about eighty per cent. of them because the persons they represented seemed to him to be negligible. To be sure, each producer has his own method of keeping such records; but this method is representative.

The stage director is usually the person who selects the players, granting interviews to applicants, and examining

their credentials, although the ultimate decision usually rests with the producer. Adolph Klauber does the engaging for Selwyn and Company; Mr. Masson makes preliminary selection for Belasco; Bruce Edwards and R. H. Burnside do much of the engaging for Dillingham; Sam Forrest is the touchstone for Cohan and Harris; Herbert Gresham acts for Klaw and Erlanger, and George H. Trader for the Charles Frohman Company. In most cases, the stars, or leading man and woman, are picked by the producer, while minor players are selected by the director. Methods vary in different offices.

Great tact is involved in application of tests of any kind to players under consideration. Actors of standing are inclined to resent being classed and catechized as though they are utterly unknown, even though the director and producer may never have seen them upon the stage.

One frequently sees, in a printed review of a play, that it is "miscast," meaning that the players are ill adapted to the parts they have been called upon to portray. It is a free criticism, frequently made by facile writers who are not informed in ways of the stage, and who really do not know how to consider an actor separated from his part, or from the ensemble. The careful producer, however, knows the meaning of the word full well, and does everything in his power to get the right actor for the right part.

### TYPES

In this connection there at once comes up the question of "types." Actors find difficulty in securing engagements because they do not "look" their prospective parts. They complain that a manager wants a banker to play a banker, a bootblack a bootblack, an apple-woman an apple-woman, and so on, he completely ignoring the fact that the player on the stage must first of all know something about the art

of acting. The average actor will tell you that he can make himself up to represent almost any age or condition; but managers, he will continue, decline to admit it.

I do not think that this is altogether true of most reputable producers. The director says to himself not, "Does this actor look like a senator?" but, "Will he be able to create the impression of a senator?" Certain externals cannot be disguised. For instance, it is not likely that any amount of make-up would make Thomas A. Wise a convincing Mephistopheles in "Faust," or Constance Collier a plausible Lydia Languish in "The Rivals," although both are splendid players. It is not altogether the individual appearance of an actor that has to be considered; there is also his appearance in relation to that of others in the cast. A tall actor may be ever so well fitted to a minor part, but be excluded because his height above the principals would cause him to dominate all scenes in which he appeared with them.

However, for many years there have been broad types of actors, specializing in certain kinds of part—"lines of business," as the players call them. These are particularly evident in the modern stock company. There are the leading man and leading woman, who play, respectively, all male and female "leads," or two rôles of chief importance—like Camille and Armand in "Camille." Then comes the second man, who plays all male parts next in importance, called "juveniles." Ordinarily these are debonaire young men with boyish qualities, although sometimes villainous. The second woman plays all female parts next in importance to leads, and may do "adventuress" rôles. A heavily built man usually plays "heavies"—or villains—exclusively. Then there is the ingénue, who really plays opposite the juvenile man, and whose part is one of girlish *naïveté* and saccharine inconsistency. Then there is

the comedian, who plays the broadly humorous males, and who is frequently assisted in his campaigns for laughter by the character man. The latter is commonly a mere youth, with a deftness in making-up and playing tottering old men. Opposite the character man is the character woman, who is generally retired by middle age from greater triumphs, and plays hags and voluble domestics—in rare instances she is also able to play *grande dames*, like testy dowagers, duchesses, and, in a good social sense, militant mothers-in-law.

Most companies have this complement of players, bringing in "extras" as needed, one extra—they don't call them supernumeraries any more—ordinarily being played by the stage manager.

It is unfortunate that there is seldom time for exhaustive tryouts of actors; virtually the only guide to ability in most cases is brief recollection of what they have done. This encourages the "type" evil. Still, there is much to be said in favor of casting by physical appearance and resonance of voice, for these are what impress the audience first. Many an actor of unprepossessing manner, appearance, or voice, has to spend the better part of his performance to breaking down prejudices created at his first entrance. Physical defects, such as stammering, deafness, or lameness, militate seriously against an actor's chances, although in each instance there have been men whose genius has lifted them beyond. Undersized players, who are not so fortunate as to have a company selected to fit them, are generally confined to youthful, immature parts, or eccentric characters. Players who are moderately tall are usually imposing, and therefore better qualified for elaborate characterizations.

## FIVE LEADING QUALIFICATIONS

Franklin H. Sargent, head of the American Academy of Dramatic Arts, once told me in connection with judgment by past performances, that most actors play by extremes—that is, that the man who plays the best villain is likely also to be an excellent comedian. Mr. Sargent says there are five important points to be found in an actor of reasonably unlimited range: a good physique, including a good voice; a nervous emotional temperament—in other words, a responsive nature—for acting in general is more emotional than intellectual, despite the fact that intellect always governs emotion; an active imagination; theatrical instinct—which is the ability to interest by being interested; and dramatic intelligence—the power to reason out the constructive meaning of a situation, together with characteristic causes and effects and their evolution. Technical skill, he says, has nothing to do with dramatic ability, and may be learned by anyone with proper guidance.

## CONCEPTION OF THE PART

A more important actor may be given the prospective part to read and see what he thinks of it, and to form a conception of how it should be played. The producer does not always expect a correct conception, because the actor has not been made familiar with the rest of the play; but he does expect it to be reasonably consistent, unless it chances to be one like that in Oscar Wilde's comedy, "Lady Windermere's Fan," where a young girl says nothing but, "Yes, mama," with varying inflections, throughout performance.

Correct conception of a part is generally based on the purpose for which the character was created. As remarked,

a character is conceived mainly to fit some given situation. Thus, if a man is to kill another in a fit of jealousy, jealousy will probably be the dominant note in his character, with all other traits subordinate to, but consistent with, that. In this way the actor's conception is made to fit into the scheme of the play as a whole.

In appearance, an actor's typewritten part is just a series of "cues," speeches, and directions as to business. A cue is constituted by the three or four last words of the immediately preceding speech—this to be memorized that the actor may know when to begin his lines—and then the lines themselves. The cue may be a bit of business, in which case a brief description is given. Each page of the part is the size of half a sheet of manuscript paper, about five and one-half inches upright, and eight and a half inches wide. This is called a "side." An actor describes his part as being so-many sides. The size is small for convenient handling in study or at rehearsal.

### MAKE-UP

In make-up, actors are provided with descriptions of characters, but are usually allowed some latitude for conceptions of their own. Shown on the next page is a sketch, by Augustus Thomas, of Émile Bergeret, the leading character in his play, "The Model," to guide William Courtleigh in making up. The inscription reads, 'Dear Bill—I see him this way;' the note implying that Courtleigh was not expected to follow it rigidly. However, Courtleigh did make up an accurate resemblance. Details of costume are pointed out—if not actually provided—by the management.

Mechanics of make-up cannot be entered into here; but the routine—exclusive of wigs, crêpe hair, face putty, and so forth—may be indicated briefly. The work of making

up is done before a mirror, which is usually lighted to approximate the illumination of the stage. First comes ap-



plication of some cold cream preparation to the features, to facilitate subsequent removal of make-up. Then a body color, of grease paint, is applied—a color provided in all shades from the blonde and brunette of youth to the parchment of old age. Rouge, or deep red grease paint, is used for local coloring on cheeks and ears. Lips are shaped and colored with carmine. Eyes are made up with great attention to detail. Shadows are simulated usually with blue or brown. Brushes

are rarely used, "lining-pencils" being preferred.

As make-up must be clear to the most distant spectator, it is usually handled in broad masses, although I recall one time, interviewing Cyril Maude in his dressing room while he was making up as Grumpy, that when I shook hands good-bye, it was difficult to throw off the impression that I was confronted, at close range, with a very genuine old man. And his make-up was quite clear at any reasonable distance.

### VOICE

An actor's voice is highly important, and should be cultivated with care—although there have been many great actors, notably Charles Kean, whose vocal powers have been negligible.

First, the actor aims to be heard to the last row in the auditorium. Old actors say that if he keeps this constantly in mind he will always pitch his voice correctly for the



size of the theater in which he plays. He must next enunciate clearly; and this means that he may be heard everywhere without shouting. He must open his mouth on vowels, and properly shape the consonants. If his training has been thorough, he has learned, through various exercises, to speak with slightest expenditure of breath, to lend flexibility to his voice—thereby avoiding monotony—and to keep his voice constantly under control. The certain artificiality of crisp and careful stage enunciation, when consistently handled and not brought into contrast with sloven speech of others in the company, soon becomes pleasantly attuned to the ears of the audience.

Under these conditions, rapidity of speech is not easy; but it is then accomplished by selecting the significant words in a line, emphasizing these, and hurrying over the others. Correct pronunciation is a necessity, for most persons accept that of a gentlemanly or ladylike character in a play as authoritative. Still, unfamiliar pronunciations, however correct, frequently distract from more important issues.

In Percy Fitzgerald's "Art of Acting," the author points out the necessity of apparent spontaneousness in stage speech. There is the speech of actors as though things have occurred to them at the moment, he says in essence, a sort of hesitation before speaking. He supplements this with a quotation from Raymond Solly, "Before beginning to speak, some feeling or idea should be indicated in advance." Pauses, carefully employed, are valuable aids.

### GESTURE

Gesture, like body movements in general, is carried on only at significant moments, partly because reserve conveys the idea of a storage of force, as Fitzgerald says, and partly because the audience always attaches importance to the slightest change in attitude or position. In this regard

there is a tradition that the action must always precede the spoken word, speech being merely to supplement and amplify action. "Anticipation of the utterance by the gesture," says Fitzgerald, "gives the effect of rising in the passion of the scene."

Particular attention is given to grace. The actor occupies an elevated, detached, and conspicuous position; and, in adapting himself to the exigencies of that position, he must employ art—art, which, like that of every other division of the theater, aims not at the representation, but the illusion of reality. His gesticulations are rounded, his walk erect and clean-cut—unless he is striving for awkward effect—one stride on the stage being equal to many in real life.

I have heard actors of the "modern" school, decry this conception of grace; but it certainly seems to me a deal better for given types of play—for romantic drama and comedy, for examples, than the terse, angular movements that seem well adapted to grim, "realistic" plays. Like everything else in the theater, gracefulness has a time and a place.

To consider ideas of grace further, the center of gravity is maintained as far as possible on the downstage side of the actor—all perpendicular lines being kept toward the audience. Emerson Taylor, who wrote "Stage Directing for Amateurs"—a book which should be read by all professionals—provides examples. "At entrance from either side," he says, "the upstage foot should take the first step in; in kneeling, let the upstage knee sink to the floor last." This principle holds as good in the making of the stage picture as it does in draughtsmanship.

## SIGNIFICANCE

In spite of a widespread fallacy, an actor does not often submerge himself in his part. He rather keeps his faculties constantly on the alert to play his points with best effect. Of course, he brings to his rôle a certain physical enthusiasm, or deep personal interest, that invests it with a living quality; but the moment he "lets himself go," he is either over-playing or under-playing—if, indeed, he is playing at all.

He aims to convey what the character is thinking and feeling; and, if he is sincere in his work, aiming for unified effect of the play as a whole, his personal success will take care of itself.

One of the most vital points in this sort of co-operation is "listening"—being interested in whatever is said and done about him. To be sure, listening always enhances another's work; but it has been demonstrated many times that the minor player who survives disruption of an organization is usually the "feeder" or the "listener." He exists by himself, asking little from others, and, while making his effort the foundation upon which some other player rears his superstructure, his contribution has greater permanence. It will endure when the other has long been forgotten.

## CHAPTER VIII

### ACTORS' CONTRACTS

IN the outer office of a well-known firm of producers in New York there is a little sign which reads, "Artists are not to consider themselves engaged until contracts are signed." By the same view I may explain withholding until this time, discussion of actors' contracts.

In contradistinction to the belated efforts of native dramatists in evolving a satisfactory contract, is the work of the newly formed Actors' Equity Association, headed by some of the foremost players in America, and which has lately puzzled the theatrical world by joining the American Federation of Labor. This association grew from a meeting of about eighty actors, late in 1912, to hear the report of a Plan and Scope Committee appointed to consider conditions of native players. Francis Wilson is president, and to his efforts and to those of Howard Kyle, who spent nearly all of his time for something over three years, and much of his leisure since, organizing forces at the headquarters in New York, the firm establishment of equitable professional regulation in America is largely due.

The federation is an offshoot of the older Actors' Society, which had become more particularly a social organization; but matters of recreation were eschewed here once and for all, and the purpose of rectifying the grosser evils at least, unremittingly sustained. Years before, the Actors' Society had undertaken similar reform, but had been only moderately successful in securing practical allegiance of its

members, who, when out of engagements, almost invariably would make contradictory concessions for the sake of getting in. However, it waged a rather effective campaign in the matter of inadequate and unsanitary dressing rooms.

Experiences concerning the actor's condition rather than his convenience, continued to cry for remedy for many seasons. These specifically had to do first with the fact that actors were in the habit of giving their services gratis throughout the period of rehearsal, with no assurance that they would not be discarded at the end of that time as miscast, or yet, that when payment did begin it would last long enough to make up for the early gratuitous time and effort. The protest here was based, reasonably enough, on the circumstance that the manager asked the actor to gamble with him, but didn't increase his salary when the gamble turned out particularly well.

Again, it long was the custom for the rank and file of actors to accept half salaries for approximately six weeks out of their short year: two weeks before Christmas, before Easter, and before election—these presumably being the slack times in the theatrical season. But it so happened that many an attraction continued to play to heavy receipts over these periods—one striking instance said to be an edition of Ziegfeld's "Follies," playing to \$19,000 one Holy Week—and the actors still appeared for the reduced amounts; while one manager, at least, was known to play an election week engagement at half salaries in Canada, where they have a king and voting at another time than the American occasion. An account relates, too, how a "revivalist" of that popular melodrama, "Lost River," which calls for the services of some twenty "spirited chargers," telegraphed his manager on the road to this effect: "Next week Xmas week; half salaries actors; half oats horses."

Further still, it became a popular managerial coup to

play special matinées for nearly everything but Flag and Mothers' Day, the producer's expenses covering merely ushers, lighting, and so forth, actors being expected to throw in their services for the usual weekly arrangement. Many a civic regulation encountered en tour permitted Sunday performances, too; and here was an additional expenditure of time and energy with no pay.

Effect of continued work on the ensemble, with no rest, and quick jumps from town to town, lowered quality of performance; but few managers took that into consideration. During the first American tours of Tommaso Salvini, the great tragedian refused to give more than four performances per week, and declined to render his tremendously popular and profitable "Othello" oftener than once a week, declaring it impossible to make it worthy of his artistic standard without at least five-day intervals. But he was in a position to dictate. Companies playing one-night stands sometimes had to lose a Saturday night and its pay, in order to "jump" to a Sunday evening performance for which they received no recompense.

These were but the most ordinary evils, special consideration being required for such things as compulsion of actors to purchase their own costumes when these were useless for any other purpose in event of failure; irresponsible managers disbanding their companies many miles from home, leaving them to find their way back as best they could, a clause in their contracts probably providing for transportation only from the point of opening to the point of closing, wherever that might be; dismissal of players without just cause, or exorbitant fees charged by agents for securing engagements.

## A REAL EQUITY ASSOCIATION

From an impersonal viewpoint, the most praiseworthy feature of the association has been its absolutely impartial aim to insure equity not merely for the actor, but also for the manager; and among cases brought to attention of their splendid counsel, have been a number of players who have not lived up to their contracts—deliberately leaving engagements regardless of managers' convenience, to take others more congenial or more remunerative.

A set of rules is provided, to which every member pledges himself to subscribe; and among these are regulations directing all actors engaged in presentation of a given play to report at the theater for performance at a time designated by the manager or his representative; that rehearsals must be attended promptly; that actors must report as required at the railroad station when traveling, and that reasonably sufficient notice of inability to appear must be sent to the proper officer in order that substitutes or understudies may be gotten in readiness, accompanied by a doctor's certificate of indisposition if that is the plea. The last-named clause also stipulates that in cases of illness, the manager reserves the right to withhold or pay salaries. The stage manager has full control back of the curtain; and objections to his rulings are to be referred to the manager. Actors are to play their parts as rehearsed, unless otherwise directed by the manager or his representative. And so on, through a number of minor injunctions as to good behavior.

In remarkably short course of time the association won acceptance by most of the leading producers of America of a lucid and never ambiguous contract for equitable arrangements between actor and manager. This embodied clauses insuring a living remuneration during rehearsal,

rehearsal to begin not earlier than thirty-five days prior to the specified date of opening; due written notice of two weeks in cases of dismissal or resignation; one-eighth of a week's salary as additional pay for each extra performance beyond the regulation number of six evening and two matinée exhibitions—save for matinées on legal holidays in the State in which the company plays; full pay over the alleged "slack" weeks, with the proviso that the manager may "lay off" his company temporarily one week before Christmas Week, and one week before Passion Week, without salaries; safe return to the point where the production was originally made, and, very important to actresses, provision by the manager of all other than "civilian" costumes, together with appurtenances.

In several instances these conditions were already taken care of in standard regulations then in force. Charles Frohman and Winthrop Ames were notable examples of managers who had early anticipated the remedies called for by the Association in existing forms of agreement.



## CHAPTER IX

### STAGE DIRECTORS

THE stage director is the officer in charge of everything back of the curtain before the opening performance. After that time the play is supposed to be in such shape that it is necessary only to keep it running smoothly.

In years gone by, the director commonly exercised his authority with profanity and abuse; to-day he is a gentleman. That is, he is expected to be a gentleman, for there are still some rough customers in the game.

Among the more distinguished stage directors in America, without reference to personal methods, there are William Seymour, formerly of the Frohman Company; J. C. Huffman, of the Shuberts; R. H. Burnside, of the Dillingham forces; Robert Milton, who "free-lances;" Julian Mitchell, who usually stages the Ziegfeld "Follies;" George Foster Platt, who was stage director at the New Theater, and George Marion, who long directed for Henry W. Savage. Winthrop Ames, David Belasco, William A. Brady, and George M. Cohan are managers who direct in person. Mrs. Fiske is one of the best directors in America. So is Margaret Anglin. Augustus Thomas, Edwin Milton Royle, and James Forbes are author-directors. Henry Miller, John Emerson, Arnold Daly, and E. H. Sothorn are actor-directors.

It is the duty of the director to study a play manuscript all by himself before calling the first rehearsal. Indeed, he should consider it thoroughly before any member of the

cast is engaged; and, if possible, before the contract is given out for painting of the scenery.

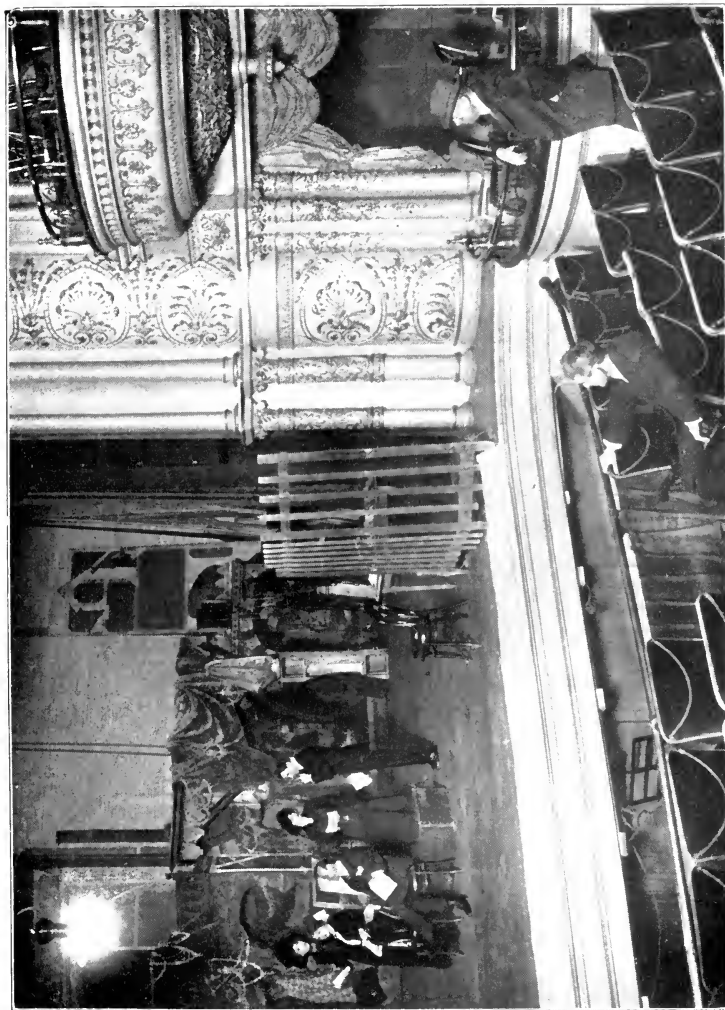
During this study he is usually expected to accomplish work properly belonging to the play doctor or to the author; but, assuming that little correction is needed, he applies himself mainly to realizing all "values"—interesting scenic and acting possibilities. Every ounce of value must be gotten out of every situation, line, and characterization; and means must be devised to do it. For his study of values, he particularly picks out the "high spots" in the story—the big scenes that are to carry the plot and put the message of the play "across."

When he has completed this stage of his labor, the typewritten play has begun its career as a "working manuscript." Penciled here and there on its pages are little diagrams of tentative positions of characters in stage groups; lines have been added, corrected, or deleted; and fresh bits of business have been interpolated. There is nothing that more quickly creates listlessness in an audience than a play where the actors sit about most of the time. There should be plenty of physical animation, but, of course, always consistent.

#### FIRST REHEARSALS

The next step is usually to read the play to the assembled company, and to assign the parts. At the next meeting, the actors are expected to have read these parts and to have formed conceptions as to how they are to be played. These conceptions are discussed with the director, who has views of his own; and then the play is perused again, but this time each actor reads his own part. Then a sort of open court is held, and points are carefully threshed out by all.

The third general meeting is usually in some rehearsal hall or on the stage of some theater. For the benefit of



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**A REHEARSAL OF "THE MODEL."**

Augustus Thomas, the author, is directing, while Thomas Dixon, Jr., is an interested spectator. In the stage group are William Courtleigh and Gail Kane.



the company, the director describes the settings, important properties, and so forth, indicates entrances and exits, and emphasizes details of period and locale. Then, at this single rehearsal, he tries to get his company roughly through the entire play, desiring to let them "feel themselves," to gain perspective for later working out of details, observing whether their personalities harmonize or conflict in team work, their relative sizes, and whether or not their combined coloring is effective. As to coloring, brunettes are generally preferred for serious parts, and blondes for comedy. At this point some of the players may be eliminated, for obvious reasons, and others engaged to take their places.

First rehearsals commonly take place about six weeks before the public "opening." They are usually held every day—rarely less than every other day—and are each something over two hours in duration until the final stages, when they are apt to run sometimes twelve or fourteen hours at a time, scarcely stopping even for meals. Ordinarily, rehearsal begins about ten o'clock in the morning and lasts till about noon.

At the fourth or fifth rehearsal, the general points of business and positions are usually well roughed out, while properties, or movable objects to be used in the scene, are represented by makeshift pieces. I know of no better instance of makeshift props than that described by Channing Pollock—an actor haranguing a dozen empty chairs which represent as many jurymen supposedly trying him for his life.

Now the various big scenes are taken up, and each worked out in detail—each player being told where to stand, what to do, what to say, and how. All this time the actors are interlineating their parts with penciled notes; the director, at his rickety wooden table at the curtain line, down center,

is whispering comments to his secretary, who jots them down for later reference; and the stage manager, seated at the table, and acting as prompter, is making notes of all progress and changes upon the manuscript itself.

Having worked out the big scenes to reasonable satisfaction, the director endeavors to get his players naturally from one to another. All the connective scenes are handled with greatest possible economy, making everything occurring in them almost sketchy. Everything is built up to the next scene; then from that scene to the next, and so on to the end of the play, always avoiding anticlimax, but every second paying for itself in immediate interest.

#### FINAL REHEARSALS

Development of the play is carried on an act at a time. Now, most of the necessary properties have been provided; and for the first time the setting shows signs of life. The first positions of all objects used are carefully noted by the property man and his assistant, who place the objects the same way at each new rehearsal.

When the play has been developed to the point of intelligible performance, the director moves the stage manager and his table into the wings, and himself takes position at about the fifth or sixth row of the orchestra, where he may converse with the actors without overstraining his voice—or theirs. It is interesting to note that, as rehearsals progress, he gets further and further from the scene until he sometimes stops in the gallery—trying to get full range of all effects.

Scenery is usually in place throughout the last week of rehearsals; and here the carpenter, electrician, and property man come in for their share of instruction. Music is not ordinarily rehearsed with the play until everything else has been attended to, excepting, of course, in a musical piece,

when there is at least a piano from the first rehearsal on. Costumes are not usually worn, or make-up applied, until about the second rehearsal before the last.

### GROUPING

Much of the director's proper work—and by this I mean when he is not fulfilling obligations of authors and actors—has to do with grouping players. There is to be considered first, however, that operation which is called “dressing the stage”—that is, keeping it “balanced”—with furniture well placed, and actors well distributed over it. This is a pictorial quantity as well as a practical necessity. The balance is one of significance rather than of people. Romeo and Juliet, seated at one side of the stage during the festivities at the house of Capulet, have no difficulty in outbalancing the crowd of merry-makers that fills the remainder of the space.

The director handles this problem much as he does his play—by working out the big situations first. And each situation is contrived to bring out a single big idea. Only one thing happens at a time on the stage, for interest must not be scattered.

Big dramatic scenes are almost invariably dominated by some one person. Consequently that person must be so placed that he is both well seen and well heard by the audience. For the time, all other characters are subordinate, and are to be so arranged that they will afford physical relief to the central figure. Presently the group must be redistributed, for interest has shifted to another figure. And so it goes throughout the action, the players moving from one important grouping to another.

Difficulty will be experienced in separating individuals from groups. Persons grouped together often seem to lose their individuality. This usually means that they are

grouped too closely. It will not help much to have each person in the group doing a different thing; that will not only modify the effect, but will also diffuse the interest.

Take this common problem: Two important characters stand close together, quarreling. They seem to neutralize each other, and the scene does not get over. How is it to be corrected? They neutralize each other because, together, they constitute a group. Put a table between them and note the difference. Attention shifts from one to the other as challenge and retort follow each other in quick succession. They are individuals now; and each has his share of undivided interest.

#### DOMINATING THE SCENE

An old rule says that the person upstage dominates the scene. This is frequently true because the person upstage usually faces the audience, while the other characters face him; but the rule is by no means invariable. Always speaking generally, the important zone is downstage—center for the biggest point, and either to right or left for the others. Effort is made to vary the greater number of important scenes by staging one first down right, and the next down left, and so on. This also gives each side of the audience a direct view of something important.

Important points are given, when possible, directly toward the audience, but as it is destructive to illusion to have the audience directly addressed, the actor makes his point by addressing some other character, the latter so placed by the director that, in talking to him, the actor is really addressing the audience without their being aware of it.

There are many methods of making an actor dominate a scene, among them, placing him upon some elevated point—as the top of a stairway—or merely having him sit



on a table when the other characters are seated on chairs; or building the group in the form of a triangle, with the leading actor at the apex—upstage.

Isolation is generally necessary to dominance. That is why important entrances and exits are usually made with plenty of clear space. Variable illumination of the scene is still another way—subtle, but decidedly effective.

#### MOVEMENT ABOUT THE SCENE

There should be little movement about the stage other than that called for by the play. Even these vital necessities of shifting from one group position to another, should be invested with other than mere technical reasons. One of the commonest methods of bringing this about is to let the actors walk about the scene as they feel impelled by their parts, and then to correct them as they depart from the exigencies of the case.

If an actor has nothing to do, he should remain still. This is particularly true when some other player has control of the scene. The function of the actor at such a time is generally to listen. Nothing whatsoever should be done to distract attention from the principal. And no actor should stand or sit so that he "covers" a principal—cuts off the view.

This brings up the subject of "crossings"—one actor crossing before another during progress of the scene. If the character is to be noted particularly by the audience, he usually crosses on the downstage side; if he is unimportant, he crosses above. If unavoidably managed downstage, the person beyond moves, at the movement of crossing in the opposite direction. This tends to relieve awkwardness.

## MISCELLANEOUS CORRECTIONS

The director often has to keep sharp lookout for selfishness of certain members of the company. One player will frequently utterly ruin another's scene by not "playing up" to him. When he is trying to "build up a scene" by growing emphasis of tone, the rival may keep answering him just a tone lower, and so spoil his crescendo.

An actor may spoil his own scene by pitching his voice so high that he can go no higher. Or his sense of contrast may be dulled by unconscious absorption of another's spirit. If he is supposed to enter joyfully upon a scene of sorrow, his work may be found wholly lacking in buoyancy because, while waiting in the wings to make his entrance, he has absorbed the sorrowful atmosphere.

Getting players to listen is no mean problem. Almost always it is necessary that they concentrate upon a single point of interest. Their attention must not waver. If it does, it will mean a corresponding shift in the attention of the audience.

Entrances are always made in the spirit of the character. Exits are generally handled in conventional manner, whereby the actor makes a feint of going, then returns, pauses, and at last goes out.

Each entrance and exit should have a specific reason assigned to it. There is more to be done than just to get the character on or off the scene. In "Kitty MacKay," produced in New York several years ago, characters were seen to go off left when it had been made manifest that the exit door was off right. Madame Simone did much the same thing in "The Paper Chase," produced in New York a couple of seasons before that. She opened locked doors by merely turning the knobs, and made her "big entrance" in an impossible place just because it was the most effective



Courtesy Triangle Film Corporation

#### SOME DETAILS OF DIRECTING METHOD.

These pictures were especially posed by well-known screen stars under supervision of Reginald Barker, director at the Triangle-Kay Bee motion picture studios, to illustrate a few general points of staging. *A.* shows Louise Glaum announcing her engagement to friends in a well-composed group; *B.* shows the same as it would be in real life. *C.* presents Dorcas Matthews in a scene staged against a background of too strong a character. *D.* and *E.* illustrate how interest may be directed from William Desmond to Clara Williams and the reverse, *D.* incidentally showing how an actress frequently destroys her partner's scene by not playing up to him. *F.* is an example showing the "funnel of interest," whereby no matter upon what portion of the picture the eye lights, it is naturally and inevitably led to Frank Keenan in the background. *G.* shows the same principle injudiciously applied in "comic opera" fashion, to a scene between Dorcas Matthews and Robert McKim. The grouping is not natural.



point for the purpose—center entrance. Characterizations are neglected with still greater frequency. In "Jerry," produced in New York in 1914, the English cousin (from Kansas City) develops most unaccountably, from a theatrical ass and nincompoop, into a fellow of spontaneous wit, with but a single entr'acte intervening.

There is a general spirit, or consistent tone, in which every performance should be given. The entire character of a play may be changed by varying this. The day before "Officer 666" opened in New York, it was a serious melodrama with little prospect of success; at the first performance the actors played it in flippant style, and it became a farce of great popularity.

For farces and melodramas—plays depending more upon situations than lines and characterizations—most directors work hardest upon situations; for comedies and dramas, where the condition is reversed, they work upon lines and character.

### TEMPO

Nothing more quickly destroys the interest of an audience than monotonous reading of lines, or monotonous playing of scenes. Therefore the director seeks variety in having the players read each new scene in a different tone, and in tones of varying volume. Comedy scenes, and scenes of hurry and bustle, are quickened; scenes of sentiment are commonly played slowly.

These are the broad problems of the stage director.

There is no final statement of the infinite detail in the work of the stage director. As far as his professional obligations are concerned, he is compelled to assume them virtually single-handed, while he is looked upon as the court of last resort in many problems that are by no means properly within his province.

Frequently a producer recognizes the need of having a technical expert to establish the correctness of decorative periods, or a super-electrician to achieve a psychological triumph in lighting, but is forced to forego them because his exchequer will not sustain them all. It is then that the director has to step into the breach and do the work ideally intrusted to assistants.

Almost all great American stage directors have passed through this embarrassing time in professional life; and I venture to say, with little fear of contradiction, that they have become better craftsmen in consequence. But, rather than go through the mill again, many of them have moved, like Reginald Barker, who was once making some of the best native productions on the speaking stage, into the field of motion pictures, where they have peace of mind, and, some say, greater opportunity for creative work.

# THE STAGE IS MADE READY

## CHAPTER X

### UNVEILING BACKSTAGE MYSTERIES

NOTHING more quickly destroys illusion for an audience than inquiry as to how it is done, unless it be new and intimate acquaintance with the device. Results are really all of the public's business, methods of work being for workers alone; but when the best in theatrical equipment is not generally employed in likely quarters, it is advantageous even to the playgoer, to be able to estimate shortcomings for the ultimate reform of his entertainment. Ordinarily, however, the knowledge should be confined to a very narrow circle of workers whose business is purely of the theater theatrical. For stage mechanics are little even of the dramatist's affair in his capacity as author.

Most beginners at playwriting believe that acquaintance with the means of creating stage thunder and lightning will help them materially. As a matter of fact, stage terms in the minds of new playwrights are about as dangerous as loaded firearms in the hands of children. They are really to be avoided, because the knowledge labels everything on the stage as pretense, mocks the assumption that anything there is what it seems to be, and robs the beginners of their enviable power to "make believe."

Yet the embryo author will not rest content until he knows what things are like "behind the scenes." Sometimes he is animated by the desire for shop-talk with which

to impress his friends; but generally it is just that curiosity that is common to the entire theatergoing public. Everyone, professional and unprofessional, has marveled at some time at the reality of stage trees, or at the brightness of artificial sunlight, or at the boundlessness of indoor skies: so the dramatist seeking information is not to be harshly judged. Of course, the belief that stage terms constitute the open-sesame to dramatic art is mistaken.

A knowledge of stage terms is of very little service to the playwright, as the entire building of a dramatic composition comes long before there is any recourse to the mechanics of the stage. The real danger to the rash investigator is that he is apt to emphasize the artificiality of the stage beyond the truth of his art.

#### STAGE ARTIFICIALITIES

Suppose a beginner is writing a play in which a character is killed by lightning. If he is the average proselyte, possessed of a smattering of theatrical jargon, he will think, while in the throes of composition, about a stagehand who makes the lightning (with carbon and file, lycopodium pipe, or with an electric flash operated with a fiber push), and of the fact that the actor interpreting the character, is only simulating death. Consequently, because he wrote in unreal terms, that part of his play probably will fail to carry conviction. A playwright must believe what he writes while writing it, or his audience will not believe it when they see it.

The reason it is difficult for the beginner in question to believe that the lightning really struck, and that the man is really dead, is because he is accustomed to think only in terms of the actual—that the stage lightning cannot strike, and that the actor must live to play another performance. He has not accustomed his mind to visualize



the abstract and to believe in it. That is demonstrated by the fact that there are many writers entirely familiar with the physical stage, whose works seem reality itself. They have purposely forgotten stage terms to think in terms of the stage.

It is not so hard to believe that effects are real, even when one knows the contrary. It is merely a habit of mind acquired by simple reasoning. All to be realized in the case in point, is that no matter how effective the lightning was upon the *actor*, it killed the *character* once and for all. And if the lightning was genuine enough for that, it is real enough for the author to believe in. Working by this principle, a playwright will not lack sincerity. Also, it is a good credo for the too-well-informed playgoer.

Along in the autumn of 1911, Lewis Hillhouse, dramatic editor of the Cincinnati *Times-Star*, and critic of capacity, added his voice to a quantity of other editorial protest against revelation of backstage mysteries. "The man who first raised a curtain on an empty stage, and let an audience see 'how it worked,' " he declared in essence, "should be swiftly apprehended, if still living, and given not less than ten years at hard labor in the common jail. Up to five or ten years ago the theater was a romantic and real world to nine-tenths of all the people. To-day most of us are ashamed to own it.

"Ten years ago, or even less than that, if an actor bowed himself out of a drawing-room scene, declaring that his carriage was waiting, one could see in his mind's eye the spirited horses spring forward as the carriage door closed with a bang. To-day what crosses our minds? Why, we see in our mind's eye a shirt-sleeved stagehand as he bangs down the lid of a trunk which has been placed in the wings to produce the desired sound effect. Everyone knows too much about mysteries which are no longer mys-

teries. There is too little illusion and too much intimacy, too little suggestion and too much explanation. All the glamor is gone. It has been going ever since the children of yesterday have been becoming the young people of to-day."

#### TRUE VALUES IN THE THEATER

To this severe but essentially just arraignment, recollection of the new playhouse delight of the grown and sophisticated Charles Lamb, affords slight opposition; and that the cheapening of stage effects through such intimacy, has resulted in truer values in the theater, remains a lame excuse for a work of this kind which is purely of the business of the profession. That dozens of books and hundreds of articles on the subject have found publication without visibly disturbing theatergoing taste, counts for little, and that playhouse workers are among the most enthusiastic of spectators and auditors, recovers the balance no more.

However, reflection that such an account was certain to make its appearance during an intense and universal interest in drama, without reference to these objections, and possibly from information that was not first-hand, determined that a record of immediate study—revised and supplemented by authoritative opinions solicited from all quarters—would prove suggestive without being, in intent at least, dictatorial. Above all, the pronounced and enforced disposition of modern audiences the world over, not merely to judge, but to dictate creation of their own entertainment, is sufficient excuse for making accessible to them some knowledge of working materials. It lends perspective to what might otherwise be a biased view of the theater.

## CHAPTER XI

### GENERAL STAGE DIVISIONS

A DEEPLY religious man was required to follow Virgil into the Great Unknown. And, in much the same way—if the comparison is not sacrilegious—one must have faith before crossing the footlights into the Land of Make-Believe.

It may seem that the proper entrance for the uninformed is the stage door. But no. Even if the investigator comes in that way, he will still be compelled to learn the close relationship of stage and audience first for clear understanding. He already has a good idea of that part of the theater accessible to the general public, or the front of the house, as it is called, so his natural progress is forward into the auditorium, which he is also fairly well acquainted with, over the footlights, and through the proscenium arch which frames the top and sides of the stage picture.

The moment one crosses the boundary-line of the proscenium, or that strip of stage visible when the curtain is down, or the curtain-line itself, his entire viewpoint is reversed. One now looks from the actor's position into the audience, instead of from the auditorium to the stage. Hence, what was the right hand of the spectator is now the left of the actor, with the corresponding change of onlooker's left to performer's right.

It is assumed, for convenience, that one is now standing directly in the middle of the stage visible when the curtain is up, or stage proper, which extends from the footlights to the back wall, and approximately the width of the

proscenium arch. The general term stage means everything back of the proscenium.

The cellar area beneath the stage, is sometimes, though not frequently any more, called the dock—from the old practice of storing scenery there. A long rack, to hold rolled-up drops in the modern Court Theater of Berlin, extends from the cellar floor to the stage level. It has a capacity of three hundred drops. A bridge elevator moves up and down beside it. In theaters devoted to vast spectacles, like the opera, the dock is often of great depth, for it must contain machinery for elevating scenery, and particularly for storage. Spaces at either side of the stage proper, to the side walls of the theater, running from front to back and upward to the flies, are the wings. The flies is that region above, over all the stage, from the top of the scene set for the play, to a height considerably more than once again that of the proscenium arch.

#### DRESSING ROOMS

In the wings, and often in the dock as well, are dressing rooms, rising tier above tier. More recently built theaters have their dressing rooms outside a side wall—technically, in a distinct building—so as to be quite separated from the stage. Fire laws in large cities are very stringent about the location of dressing rooms, for conflagrations have often begun in them. They are not to be open to the stage or to auditorium. They are reached from the stage by connecting flights of stairs, or, occasionally, elevators.

Dressing rooms are ordinarily graded to the importance of the actors by their accessibility to the stage. Those nearest are for principals, while those more remote serve for those presumably of less consequence. This distinction has led to many an awkward situation; and there have been countless efforts to abolish it.

In the Little Theater, New York, this difficulty has probably been reduced to its lowest terms by having all dressing rooms on one floor, branching out from a green room, which contains full comforts for the histrionic ensemble, from periodicals to tea, coffee, cigarettes, and a full-length mirror for survey of entire costume, and reached from the stage by an elevator operated by the call-boy. Incidentally, this lift is fitted with another adequate looking-glass for final touches in transit.

There are very few green rooms in New York theaters to-day. The Grand Opera House has one, but that is a relic of old times. The Century Theater has one, and so has the Lyceum. In the Little Theater, as in most new theaters of better class, there is complete isolation of the sexes; and, by the director's ingenious arrangement, the policy is never violated. Two aisles from the green room passage, serve respectively for ladies and gentlemen. Those dressing rooms located between the aisles, are fitted with two doors each, to admit persons from either side, although one door is always kept locked, the open door situated according to masculine or feminine preponderance of the cast. Ordinarily there are sufficient rooms—some eighteen in all—for players to find individual accommodation; but to provide for organizations of unusual size, each room is fitted with places for three and sometimes four persons. Indeed, one room is large enough for fifteen or twenty.

A large side skylight above each room, provides clear illumination in the daytime, and excellent ventilation always. An unobtrusive steam-pipe, raised out of the way, radiates warmth when required, and a permanent stand, having deep individual drawers for make-up, supports a broad mirror, before which are suspended unshielded electric lamps at appropriate distances, to approximate average stage lighting. Grace George and some other prominent

actresses, carry their own mirrors, outlined with bulbs, with them en tour.

Convenient wall-pockets provide for heating-irons and similar attachments, and a dust-cover over hooks, affords protection to the wardrobe. For ablutions, each room has a porcelain corner washstand, fully equipped. The floor, of course, is carpeted.

Where unusually quick changes are necessary, temporary dressing rooms are constructed on the stage itself in the wings, of a flat or two turned to screen those within from view. These are put up and taken down with the scene.

#### FLY GALLERIES

In the topmost part of the wings, scaled properly from the stage by ladders permanently placed, and sometimes from landings on the stairs leading to the dressing rooms, are the fly galleries. Occasionally there is but one fly gallery, and in that event the side it occupies is a matter of taste. It is usually the left-hand side, from the actor's point of view. The Prompt Side is the "working" side of the stage; and the working side is that in which there must be most available room. So it depends altogether upon the physical construction of the stage and relative positions of dressing rooms and offices, which is P. or O. P.—Opposite Prompt—Side. The idea is to keep all stage workers together as far as possible, for direct interchange of signals. Of course, counterweights are preferably suspended opposite the working side.

The fly gallery is where the free ends of ropes, or "lines," by which scenery is hauled up into the flies, are made fast upon cleats, or belaying-pins. A stage uses a deal of rigging like a ship. Indeed, sailors, accustomed to dizzy heights, adjusted the awnings in the great amphitheatres of ancient Rome.

Once in a while windlasses are used at this point; but ordinarily the scenery is so counterweighted with sand-bags and iron blocks, or the makeshift counterpoises such as coupling-pins, sash-weights, or chain-links, that one man may raise and lower them with ease and no need of further mechanical assistance.

The fly gallery is frequently employed for portable lights; and, as this sometimes limits facility in working lines, a few theaters have supplementary, modified galleries some six feet below, for lights alone. The hanging of fly galleries requires much care, for this not only affects the handling of scenery, but also the number of men needed to operate the equipment.

The lower a fly gallery is hung in a theater where practically none but manual labor is employed, less effort is needed at the free end of the rope to lift a weight at the other. But there is an arbitrary level below which a gallery must not come, for a certain height is necessary for stacking scenery in the wings.

#### SETS OF LINES

Each piece of scenery suspended has a set of usually three lines—four, and sometimes five, in manipulating an unusually cumbersome piece—attached to its upper edge, one line to the middle, another to the remote end, and a third to the near one. They are called, respectively, the long, middle, and short lines. A number distinguishes each set. The enormous stage of the Metropolitan Opera House, New York, uses five lines to each piece. In tying lines, the stage-hand has his own special kind of knots, just as the sailor has his.

Before electricity was employed to run the lines at the Metropolitan, twenty-eight flymen were necessary to handle the sixty-three sets of ropes. A veritable set of books is

kept there under supervision of Edward Siedle, the technical director, to indicate the lines to which each drop is to be fastened, the act the drop is to be used in, how high it hangs from the stage, when it is to be taken up or down, and other details.

#### GRIDIRONS

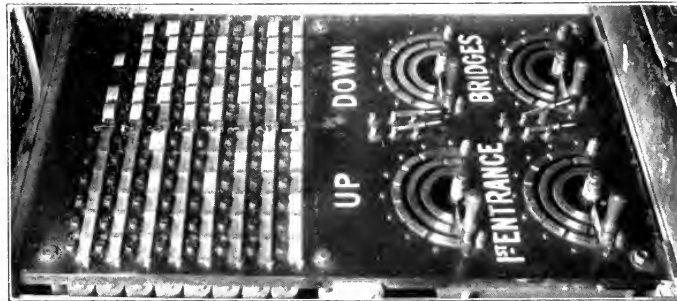
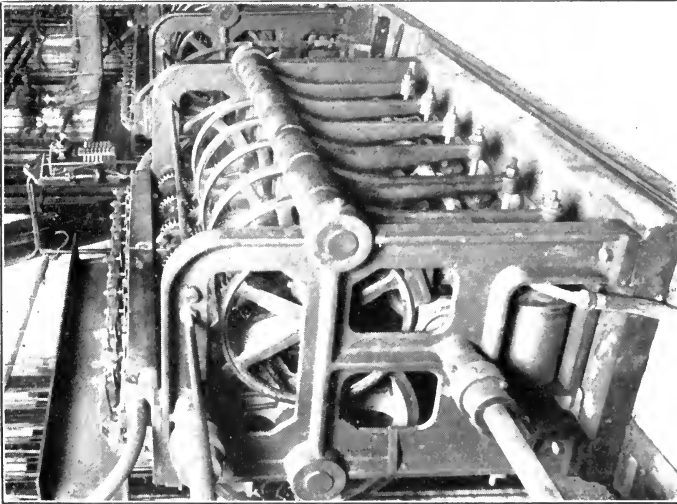
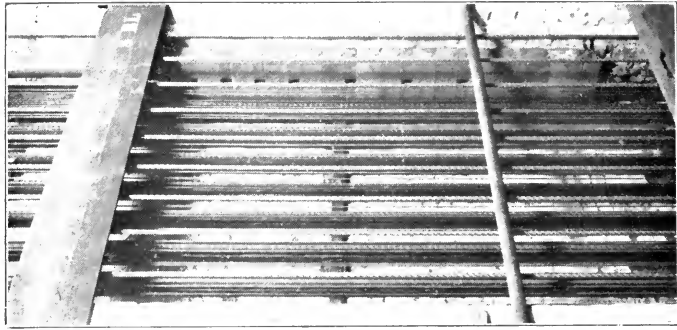
Blocks and pulleys through which lines operate, are fastened to what is known as the gridiron, a great horizontal iron frame—nearly always of iron or steel—divided into a sequence of parallel bars that run from side to side across the top of the flies. This is a convenient arrangement, whereby the blocks may be hooked or bolted to any desired point above the stage.

Gridirons have proven a source of considerable difficulty to theater architects. Curiously enough, these craftsmen, expert in auditorium design and arrangement, are not always familiar with needed facilities of stages themselves. Thus, it happened, within the first decade of this enlightened century, that a theater was erected in New York and completely equipped, only to reveal upon test that the fire curtain, which screened the entire proscenium arch, could not be raised vertically out of sight because the gridiron was in the way. Consequently, a slot was cut in the grid, and the necessary accomplished.

The architect felt that he had made a useful discovery, and, forgetful that there are sometimes scenes towering quite as high as the fire curtain, produced a sequel in a subsequent theater by slotting its gridiron after the precedent established, although on this second stage the gridiron was high enough to do without slotting at all. I am not naming these theaters because I do not care to mar the reputation of a generally excellent designer.

There have been numerous attempts to make a com-





HANDLING DROPS BY ELECTRICITY AT THE METROPOLITAN OPERA HOUSE.

At the supplementary switchboard shown at left, push-buttons set into operation machinery, shown in the second picture, which winds up or unreels lines, shown in the third, which in turn run through blocks in the gridiron overhead and support the drops. Lines are identified by numbers and arranged in eight sets of six each. This switchboard also controls two great "bridges" that raise or lower whole lateral sections of the stage.

*Courtesy of Metropolitan Opera Company*



bination roof and grid; but I know of no successful examples. Some of the theaters of Europe have two gridirons, one above the other, the lower having greater space between its bars, and sometimes the lower covering only the front half of the stage, with the other to the rear, but much higher, to accommodate itself to sight lines from the orchestra chairs. At the former New Theater, New York, the gridiron is 120 feet above the stage.

#### VENTILATORS

Looking directly upward from the stage through the bars of the gridiron, one may see daylight. The opening in the roof through which this is admitted, is the large ventilator, ordinarily adjusted by lines or a mechanical worm on a long handle, for regulating the exit of those currents of air which keep backstage atmosphere clean and fresh, and for smoke from mimic battles on the stage, and the like, but automatically worked by means of fusible connections in case of fire, to kill draughts and prevent the usual mushroom of flame which has gutted so many theaters.

#### PAINT FRAMES

Where there are two fly galleries, they were formerly often connected by a fixed bridge, or "paint frame," where scenic artists might work. Just how useful this bridge may be is appreciated in hearing the story of an artist employed by a stock company that was long in ingenuity but short in the financial sense. The play was "The Two Orphans." After the actors had performed before the canvas upon which was painted the snowy day, it was hoisted out of sight of the audience to beside the bridge, and from that position he transformed it so that it could be lowered later, in the same performance, as a picture of budding spring.

This curtain, he relates, was so treated twice a day for a week.

Then there are "flying bridges," bridges that may be raised and lowered like painters' scaffolds. Sometimes there are two or three tiers of these, and perhaps three in a row from front to back. Of course, this multiplicity of bridges is found only in very large theaters.

But the movement for fire prevention which has been steadily growing since the early eighties or before, has banned the paint frame, with its little stove for melting size—from stages in many larger American cities at least—together with all scenery not needed for actual use during performance. Casual permission is given, however, to touch up scenery with the brush, on the stage, before or after the play. The paint bridge now appears in modified form, but for another purpose—and made altogether of iron, while adjustable up and down—the purpose being to support lights and men to operate them. This is one form of the "flying" bridge.

## CHAPTER XII

### GENERAL TERMS APPLIED TO THE SET SCENE

A SCENE is said to be set when it is arranged for exhibition to an audience. The word is used in this connection both as a noun and as a verb. The action contrary to the latter sense, to take the scene apart, is to strike it.

Generally speaking, there are three kinds of scenery: drops, borders, and flats.

A drop is almost any flat piece, retaining its form by battens across top and bottom, and let down from the flies so that the lower edge joins the floor of the scene, and the top, as viewed by the audience, continues upward out of sight. Drops are perhaps better known to the public as curtains. Nowadays they more closely approximate flats, because their flapping edges of days gone by are held in position by light wooden frames in back. All drops are suspended in the flies and lowered as required. They are raised straight up—never rolled in better equipped theaters.

Borders are simply abbreviated drops, cut off near the top. They do not touch the floor of the scene, but are used to represent clouds, overhead foliage or ceilings—in short, almost any lateral, vertically hung piece used to make the top of the set scene. They are kept in the flies.

Flats are light wooden frames with painted canvas stretched over them. They are kept in the wings, or “at back,” against the back wall of the stage. Flats are kept in “packs.” The pack for the next set to be placed is called

the "live" pack; that which has been used and put aside, the "dead" pack. "Running the packs" is the vernacular for moving them to and from position.

### MASKING PIECES

In front of the actual scene are some pieces of a special nature, those which form, so to speak, the picture frame. The first piece inside the proscenium arch is the fire curtain, which, when let down, covers the entire opening. It is sometimes of iron or steel, but more frequently of asbestos cloth. It is also known as the asbestos drop, and occasionally as the green curtain. The law requires its use as a fire precaution. In most places, it is supposed to rise at the beginning and descend at the close of each performance, to insure its working when needed to shut off a blaze on the stage from the auditorium and the audience.

Perhaps the safest curtain in use during the first decade of the twentieth century, is that at the former New Theater, New York. It descends in a channel on either side of the proscenium arch, and completely seals the opening. In construction, it has a face, on the side toward the audience, of thin plates of steel bolted on angle iron; and, fastened to the side nearest the stage, is vitrified asbestos, to protect the metal and keep it from warping. Over the bolts that hold the asbestos, is a coating of fireproof cement, so finely secured that even smoke cannot penetrate it.

Of course, steel curtains are very heavy. That at the Century, as the New Theater is now called, weighs eleven tons. Its two counterpoises together register ten and one-half tons; and these are ingeniously contrived to sustain the weight. Thus, that at right is hung over two pulleys so that it supports the left side of the curtain, and that at left the opposite division of weight in the same manner, the arrangement providing that if either counterpoise should

let go—which is not probable, as it is constantly inspected—the other would check descent by wedging.

Various kinds of fire curtains have been suggested; and, for a time, the notion of an unbroken sheet of falling water was popular—until some one pointed out that the audience would be able to look through it, and possibly see a conflagration backstage that would start a riot. Edwin O. Sachs, the noted British authority on theater construction, advises a small sealed door in the fire curtain, that, after the curtain has been lowered, some competent person backstage may step through it to reassure the alarmed audience.

The next piece is a sort of border, in most cases representing festoons of rich hangings. This is called the “grand drapery,” although, curiously enough, in France, where Harlequin was an importation, it long has been known as “Harlequin’s cloak.” A simple, straight-edged form is called a proscenium.

A third piece is the act drop, which, as its name implies, is run up and down to define intervals in the play. It is upon this drop that much decorative genius is usually expended. It may be just the impersonal picture of nothing-in-particular, supported below by panels of local advertising—an advantage taken of audiences these many years; it may be designed with exceedingly bad taste; it may be a combination of gorgeousness and simplicity woven over fine tapestries, as the drop in the Playhouse, New York, or that in the Booth Theater of the same city; or it may be as beautifully ornate as the wonderful drop made by the Tiffany Studios for the Mexican National Theater.

But a curtain of the last-named sort, however beautiful, presents some practical—although not seriously important—handicaps. In fact, these may not exist at all if the theater is one such as the Moscow Art Theater and the modern German theater at Düsseldorf, where there are no

applause and responses. If there are such responses, then spectators may behold the familiar and much-decried acknowledgments of late villain and recent heroine, bowing, hand in hand, as the curtain rises and descends. Where this convention persists, playhouses may use the sort of double curtain, to be seen in the Century, Booth, and Little Theaters, New York.

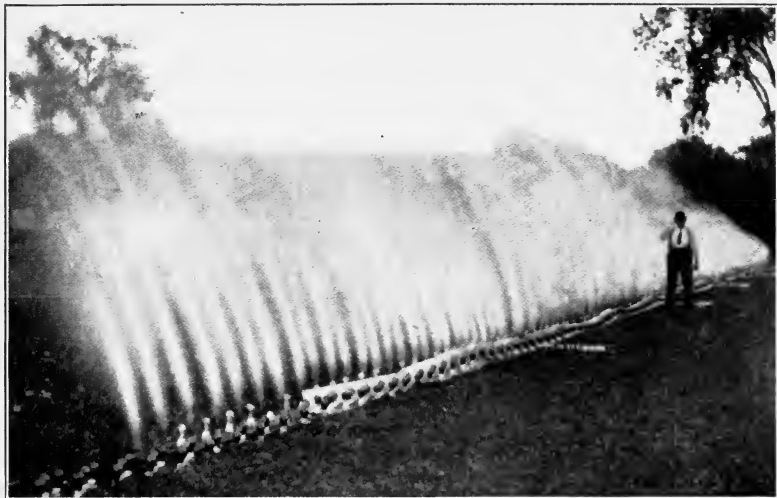
By its advantages, plaudits are acknowledged by the players removed from the scene and hence from their characters, without raising the drop at all. Here the curtain, sustained by wooden frames behind, which are hooked together during rise and fall, has its folds divided in the middle so actors may step before it; and the opening so made is screened by a flap behind, pulled back by attendant stagehands. One very great advantage of this is that histrionic acknowledgments may be made without delaying the striking of one scene or setting of the next. And—as remarked before—dispatch is an important factor backstage.

#### NOVELTY CURTAINS

A curious "act drop" that seems an adaptation or counterpart of the steam curtains used in the opera house at Beyreuth has been employed occasionally in outdoor American pageants, notably at the pageant celebrating the centennial of peace with Great Britain in 1915 at Lexington, Mass. This consists of a sheet of steam to shut off the picture, rising from a perforated pipe which extends across the scene. Upon this, colored lights are sometimes brought to play.

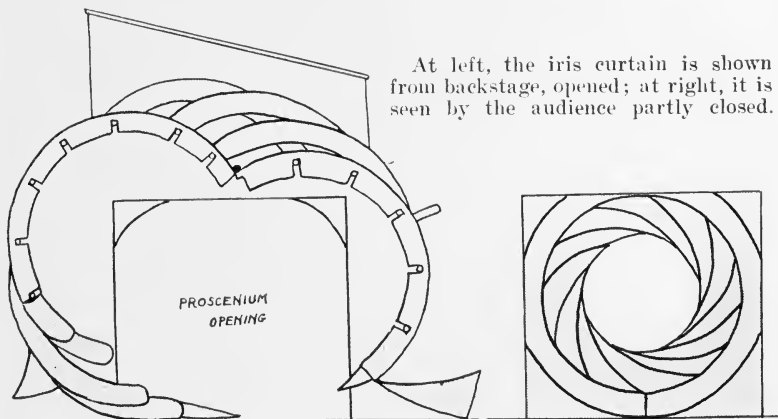
Another exceedingly unique "drop" was devised by the late Clyde Fitch, who was ever prolific in matters of stage contrivance. It was designed for his play, "The Girl With the Green Eyes," 1902, though never put into actual





From "Popular Mechanics"

Steam curtain in use at the Lexington (Mass.) Centennial celebration in 1915. A perforated pipe crossed the front of the outdoor stage for 1,500 feet, and at appropriate times, emitted a sheet of vapor upon which colored lights were played.



At left, the iris curtain is shown from backstage, opened; at right, it is seen by the audience partly closed.

This sketch is a suggestion for an iris curtain to close in from all directions at once. Of course a proscenium opening is not square; but this shows an elementary idea to be developed into a curtain that will close in at the level of the actor's head, and either to right or to left.

NOVELTY CURTAINS.



use before an audience because of mechanical difficulty. When the heroine plans to kill herself at the end of the play by inhaling sulphur fumes, the pans of sulphur were strung across the stage at the curtain line; and, as the "fumes" grew denser, strips and then broader tongues of silk were shot upward by currents of air from below to simulate flames and smoke, until the whole proscenium opening was closed in.

I must not dismiss the subject of theater curtains without mentioning the famous curtain at the New York Hippodrome, which sinks out of sight into the floor instead of rising. This is not precisely a novelty, for there remain indications that such a curtain was used in the ancient Roman theater. It is suspended from great cables, which come through openings in the ceiling. Incidentally, these openings are sometimes used as points of vantage for lights to be cast upon the stage. Of course, these cables make perpendicular lines visible during performance; but one does not seem to mind them at all. When Charles Dillingham assumed control of the Hippodrome in 1915, his stage director, R. H. Burnside, conceived the idea of using this curtain for a novel effect. At conclusion of one act of "Hip, Hip, Hooray," he had the entire chorus of girls range themselves in a single line across the stage, and, stepping on a little ledge just below the top of the curtain, ascend with it.

It has proven a source of some wonder to me that while we have had curtains that part as traverses and disappear at the sides—although these probably are the most natural because there is something decidedly ridiculous in seeing an actor cut off at the head and so on down by a descending drop; curtains that go up and curtains that go down, no one seems to have adapted the iris diaphragm of the camera to stage use. I mean that adjustable aperture before

a camera lens that begins as a pinhole which may gradually be made larger until it simultaneously disappears at top, bottom, and sides.

I proposed this curtain to Winthrop Ames; but he pointed out that in order to install it, it would be necessary to cut the floor; and, at the Little Theater, that would have interfered with the revolving stage. So I set to work to contrive an iris curtain that would not require cutting of the stage, and further, at suggestion of Robert E. Jones, the artist, one that would close in always at the level of the actor's head, that that would be the last thing visible, and, further still, one that might close in at either right or left. The result of my experimenting I am illustrating herewith.

Some other curtains that I should like to develop for use in revues, perhaps, or children's plays, are first, a curtain that will revolve from some small object, a parasol, say, until it grows into a whirling design that will fill the proscenium arch; then a curtain that may be apparently built up by masons as a solid granite wall at conclusion of one part, to be raised out of sight as a simple curtain at beginning of the next; or, perchance, a row of shrubs along the curtain-line that will grow even more wonderfully than the plant of the India juggler, into a wall of green leaves, before the very eyes of the audience.

Steele Mackaye, father of Percy Mackaye, planned, and, I believe, actually employed for a time at his Scenitorio in Chicago, a curtain of light. That is, he crossed the spread rays of two powerful calciums, one in each wing, at the curtain-line, with the rest of the stage in darkness. If one has particularly noticed a spotlight cast from the wings upon an otherwise darkened stage, he will recall that it was quite impossible to see through the beam to the space beyond. They were going to employ a curtain of light at

Percy Mackaye's masque, "Caliban," produced in New York in 1916 in celebration of the Shakespearean centenary; but for some untold reason it was abandoned.

#### TORMENTERS

Now come the sides of the picture frame. (Stage people do not call it that, but it is so termed here for convenience.) These are narrow, vertical strips of scenery—one upon either hand—painted as drapery, perhaps, or as columns, or, at any rate, something quite different from the settings in the play. Each is known as a tormenter. No one knows exactly why. The term is bewhiskered with cobwebs of ages past. An old actor once told Wendell Phillips Dodge, general press representative to David Belasco, that some famous thespian within his time had christened the piece because it always interfered with his exits. This would seem likely, provided one did not hear of the term so long ago that it could not have been applied in his generation, for the permanent side doors to most stages, that survived the Elizabethan period, were constantly employed by actors; and anything in the way must have been disconcerting.

It has been suggested that the name arose because a heavy curtain—as in the theater of Molière—once hung across the entrance at this point, and entangled the actors as they went on or came off; but more likely it was coined and circulated because it tantalizes the audience in cutting off its view of backstage doings. Possibly that also explains why the first border (all the borders are numbered consecutively from front to back) is called the teaser.

The range of a spectator's vision is limited quite effectually, for the combination of pieces about the proscenium arch may be adjusted to frame a small scene as well as a large one. Even when the set scene is so small that the extended tormenters cannot cover the gaps at the sides,

the spectator's opportunity is nipped in the bud by the artist, whose difficulty is easily overcome—most simply when the scene is a room. The side walls coming toward the audience, are turned sharply outward at right angles, and continued till they are overlapped by the tormenters. In exteriors, the same principle is applied by the employment of a house or wall, or a row of trees, or other readily conceived device. A prolongation of this kind is known as a return. The return is part of the scene itself.

#### ADJUSTABLE PROSCENIUMS

Sir Hubert von Herkomer, in his experimental theater at Bushey, England, has a contracting and expanding architectural proscenium to frame the top and sides of the stage picture, he contending that the drapery, tormenter, and teaser are obsolete makeshifts. "We would not make a frame too large for a painting at the Academy," he has said; "why do it for the stage picture?"

While I substantially agree with this view, I still cannot help but feel that there is something to justify the familiar devices—possibly that the framed picture of the stage scene cannot be variously hung, like a painting, or viewed at varying distances. The stage scene is ever compelled to be a compromise, like drama itself, for it appeals to many persons at once, while the painting is designed primarily for individual appreciation. It is emphatically true, however, that masking a scene by tormenters and border is not always satisfactory. In the first place, the frame itself may not by any means match the picture. That is one reason that when "A Pair of Silk Stockings" went on tour, it carried its own false proscenium.

At the Court Theater, Vienna, which was completed in 1888, the proscenium arch comprised two frames for the stage picture, a fixed architectural frame first, and an ad-

justable frame inside with wing pieces on chariots, which could be set closer together or further apart as occasion demanded, while the first border could be raised or lowered to correspond. The space between the frames—some three feet—was occupied by the act drop and the fire curtain.

#### MAKING ROOM IN FIRST ENTRANCES

It will be noticed that in the construction of most theaters, the sides of the proscenium arch extend as solid walls in a straight line to the side walls of the stage itself. They are pierced, perhaps, by those fireproof doors, intended solely for the use of inspecting firemen, that lead to the auditorium. Incidentally will be remarked the sides of the auditorium which begin at the arch and widen out to the last row of seats, thus leaving a sort of room, triangular in shape, on either side, between proscenium and auditorium walls. It is a space rarely utilized to the fullest possible degree by the boxes, which must be well forward to command full view of the stage; so in most theaters, it is just plain waste.

Of late years, those acquainted with the practical necessities of the physical stage, particularly with the glut of traffic in the front of the wings, on both sides, where electrician, curtain man, prompter, players, and others have to ply their respective duties, turned the proscenium walls so as to include this space and provide elbow room for all those named.

#### PROMPT DESKS

The advantage of this arrangement has been evident for some little time in Daniel Frohman's second Lyceum Theater, New York, where on the left side of the stage (always from the actor's viewpoint) is the unobtrusive cabinet for the prompter, so situated that it commands view of scene

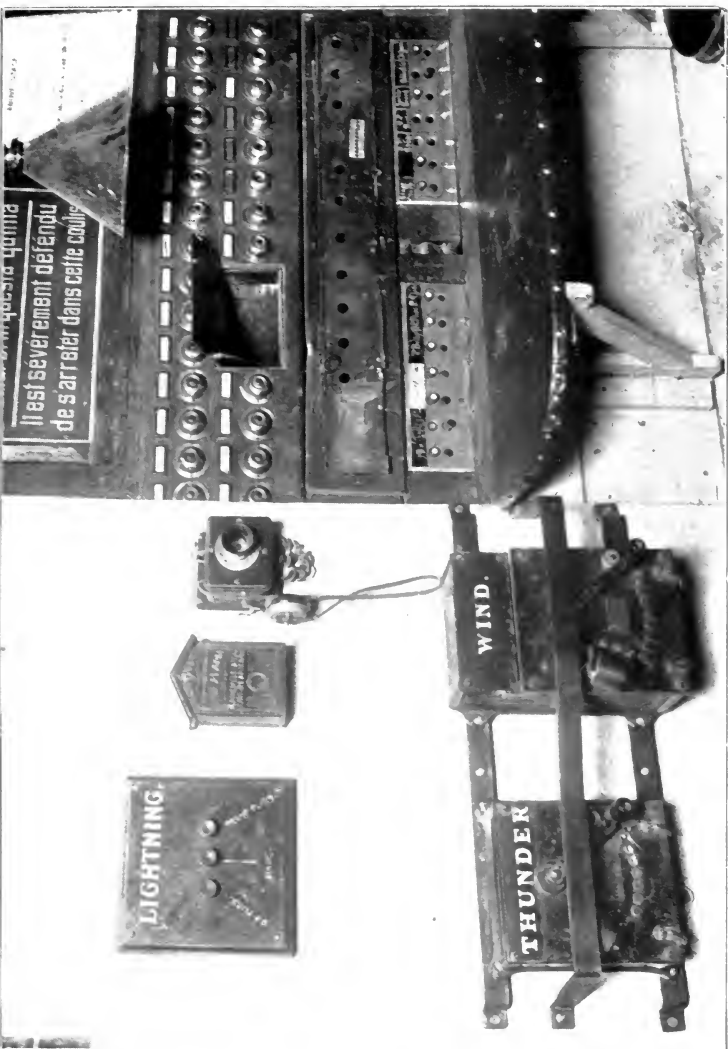
and of audience, and fitted with chair, rack for the prompt book, and full set of cue signals running to the various persons employed in progress of a performance.

A place similar, save that it requires the prompter or stage manager, as he is more honorably known, to stand, and not so far on the stage proper with the consequently better point of view, is to be seen at Winthrop Ames's Little Theater, but a block distant. Considered from the angle of comfort, this arrangement is better, for the prompter can run his own errands if the signals fail to work, and can stretch now and then, whereas the Lyceum plan makes it awkward to get out during the play.

It is always preferable to have instructions given directly from person to person, without any medium such as lights, bells, or speaking-tubes, just as it is desirable that carpenter, electrician, and property man command full survey of their respective fields from their working positions. It minimizes chances of error and accident. But, as omnipresence is generally out of the question, recourse must be had to mechanical aids. At the Metropolitan Opera House, New York, the prompter's table—a photograph of which is reproduced in the present volume—is equipped with a sort of hatch, through which the prompter may speak directly into the orchestra pit, and by an arrangement of mirrors, look down. Push-buttons signal the various portions of the stage; and close by are rheostats controlling the mechanism that produces effects of wind, thunder, and lightning.

In the Little Theater are supplementary speaking-tubes communicating with flies, electrician, dressing rooms, orchestra leader, and so forth. A series of electric pilot lights ranged above the prompter's desk, placed in circuit with the corresponding button signals, automatically informs the operator whether or not the cues are given. The elevator to the dressing rooms discharges its passengers





Courtesy of Metropolitan Opera Company

PROMPTER'S DESK AT METROPOLITAN OPERA HOUSE, NEW YORK.

Push-buttons signal the various workers about the stage, while the prompter himself controls wind, thunder and lightning. The opening between the buttons leads to the orchestra pit, and by an arrangement of mirrors, the prompter may see as well as talk down the chute.



immediately beside the stage manager, so he may check the actors, too.

Directly over his head are the electrician and his board. From his position, this controller of currents commands view of scene, flies, and from a little door but a few square inches in size, just outside the proscenium arch, of the house—and footlights when the curtain is down. In the Lyceum the switchboard is not so conveniently situated; but the electrician has a little platform jutting out over the prompter's head, where he may tiptoe on occasion, to see how things are getting on. At the Belasco Theater, the electrician has a large tilted mirror above his tall board, to reflect the stage; but a ceiling piece on the setting renders this useless.

#### ECONOMIES IN STAGE SPACE

The rise in value of real estate has placed stage space at a premium. Usually there is some cramping in consequence. It is always preferable to have the "shops" of electrician, property man, and carpenter directly in the wings for ready access to the stage; but these quarters rarely find themselves closer than in the dock. More frequently they are up two or three stories in the theater building, as in the Century Theater, New York. One may usually build up into the air or dig into the ground when side space is not available.

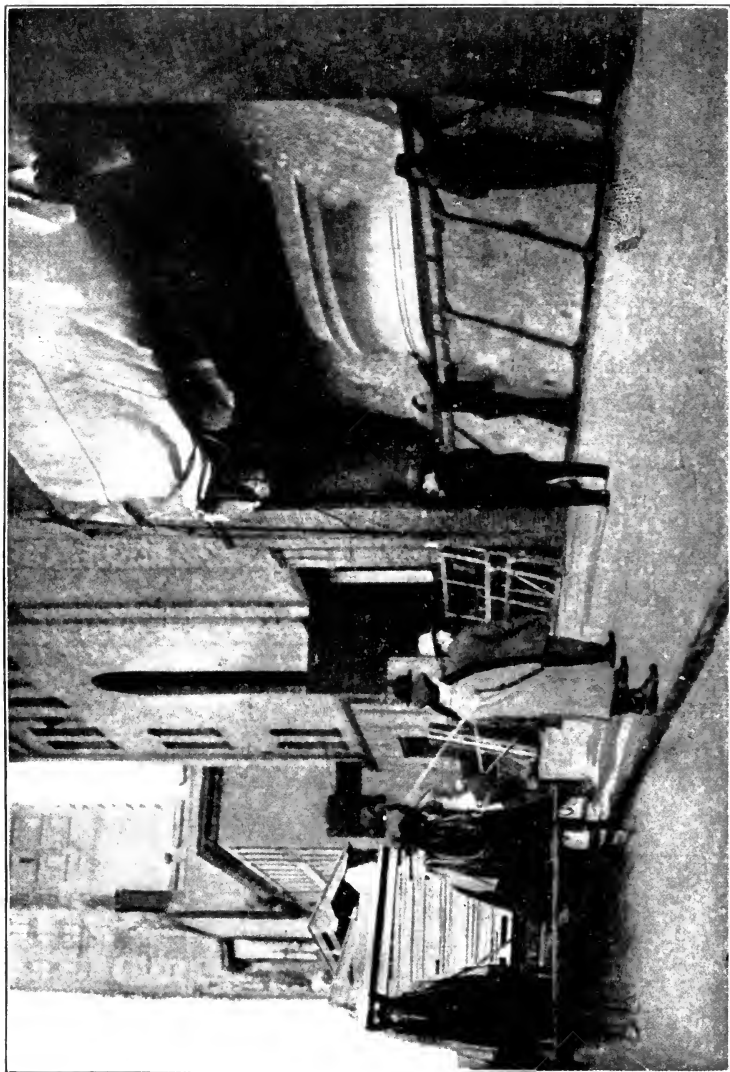
Two more features to be carefully considered in theater construction, are the stage doors, one to admit actors and other persons on pertinent business—past an attendant Cerberus, who is quite invariably stationed there if there is any discipline backstage at all, who keeps the dressing room keys like a hotel clerk, and who is usually retired from more distinguished service to the drama—and another, some six or eight times as large, closed by enormous iron shutters,

or, if too large for that, as in the Century Theatre of New York, by a large curtain of canvas, to let scenery in and out.

It is the latter opening which provides marked difficulty, for it must be so situated that through it may be brought mainly those long drops which are rolled on battens and cannot be folded. Here the wide side-alleys compelled by fire law for theaters of over a given capacity, are found exceedingly useful. In small theaters, where alleys are not required, the problem is solved in various ways. The old Hurtig and Seamon's theater—now revamped and called the Apollo—in New York, while not particularly diminutive, brought its scenery in from the street in front, through a passageway that led under the auditorium—although the auditorium happened to be raised considerably on a superstructure.

No arrangement seems quite as ingenious as that in the Little Theater, New York, where the back wall of the auditorium opens in two great panels like a Dutch window, and permits passing of rolled-up drops through the lobby, where the panels are hidden beneath a painting, directly over the orchestra chairs, to the stage.

Practically everything depends upon the physical arrangement of the house; and as this varies greatly with different sites, no hard-and-fast plan may be dictated.



*Photo Edwin Levick*

POCKET FOR SCENERY AT THE OPERA HOUSE

No property or piece of scenery is too large to be stored in this broad space at the rear of the Metropolitan, New York, pending the early need of it on the stage. A huge canvas tarpaulin may be lowered to protect the stored material from the weather.



## CHAPTER XIII

### ENTRANCES AND STAGE POSITIONS

NOT many years ago, before flats were joined to make the continuous walls of interior settings, a side wall was represented by three or four upright pieces of scenery, ranged in a row from front to back, each piece parallel to the others and run on from the wings. A character entered literally through the wall, for he came between any two of these pieces. There were no real doors, such as are in use to-day. In fact, the novel use of continuous side walls and actual doors is said to have had much to do with the great success of the first production of "London Assurance."

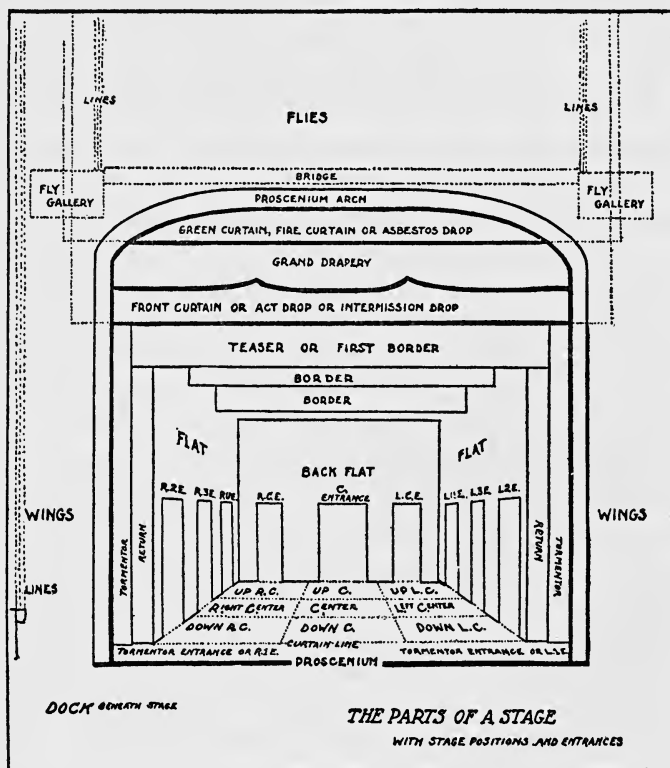
The four—sometimes six—early wing pieces, for interior use, were slid upon the scene in grooves in the floor of the stage and in slots above. These grooves and slots were permanent features of practically every stage of the time, and are to be found even yet in some of the older theaters. The heritage of this device is that it is still found convenient at times, to say that an act is played in one, two, three, or four, meaning that the set occupies the stage as far back as the point once marked by the first, second, third, or fourth set of grooves. So, by the regular interspaces between these wing pieces, side entrances became permanently fixed.

They soon become numbered. In following, it must be remembered that the actor's right and left are always opposed to those of the spectator. There was the tormenter

## THE STAGE IS MADE READY

entrance upon one side, which became R. 1 E., or Right First Entrance, and the opposite one that became L. 1 E., or Left First Entrance.

Next came R. 2 E., R. 3 E., and finally R. U. E., or



Right Upper Entrance, the corresponding entrances on the left being numbered accordingly. One, all, or none of these entrances may be used, or even really existing as entrances; but the positions are always there for possible employment. It is certainly more convenient to describe a door as R. 2 E. than to say that it is about eight feet from the right side



of the proscenium. William Archer, the distinguished English critic, advises abolition of these terms, and probably he is right; but it seems difficult to place entrances accurately in fewer words. These theoretical entrances remain the same in interiors and exteriors.

The three back entrances are C. E., or Center Entrance; R. C. E., or Right Center Entrance, and L. C. E., or Left Center Entrance, all being terms that are self-explanatory.

In most theaters, the tormenter entrances are seldom used, because a character, stepping across the curtain-line, or where the act drop rises and falls, comes out of the picture. Hence, in these houses, such entrances are made narrower. Also, most playhouses aiming to confine their work to the so-called "legitimate" stage, ignore the tormenter entrances altogether, and begin numbering with the first entrances back. In vaudeville, variety, or burlesque houses, where drops and scenes "in one" are frequent, the tormenter entrances, which are necessarily in constant use, are made very wide.

### STAGE POSITIONS

When a play goes into rehearsal, the stage director tells each actor just where to stand at certain moments during his occupancy of the scene, where to enter, and where to exit. That these instructions may readily be given and as readily remembered, the stage is divided and subdivided by imaginary markings.

The first division is into two parts, upstage, toward the back wall—a relic of the time when the stage was inclined down to the footlights—and downstage, toward the curtain-line. Practically all the older stages had an incline toward the footlights of about half an inch to the foot. Sir Herbert Tree was one of the first to use a level stage. That was at His Majesty's Theater, in London. I remember

how bitterly the members of the Serge de Diaghileff Ballet Russe complained about the level stage of the Century Theater, New York, when all their training had been on inclined stages.

Then the stage is separated into three parts, from right to left, and called Right, Center, and Left. Each of these sections is subdivided into three, from front to back. The middle of the Center section becomes Center, or C., which is just what its name conveys.

The parts above and below C. are Up Center, or Up C., and Down Center, or Down C. The middle of the Left section is Left Center, or L. C.; the parts Up and Downstage, Up Left Center, or Up L. C., and Down Left Center, or Down L. C. The Right section conforms: Right Center, or Right C.; Up Right Center, or Up R. C., and Down Right Center, or Down R. C.

For example, a table stands Down L. C. Jack sits R. of table; Will sits L., and Tom and Jerry sit Up and Down (or Above and Below), respectively. All words, save Up and Down, which are written in full, are abbreviated to their initial letters in the manuscript.

Playwrights use these terms very sparingly, avoiding them altogether whenever possible to express themselves without, unless, perhaps, they stage their own pieces, when they are apt to employ all manner of phonographic symbols. They are intended for use by the stage director, stage manager, and the actors, and seldom any more by them.

## CHAPTER XIV

### SCENE-SHIFTING DEVICES

CHANGING scenes in the dark, with the curtain up, has long been a familiar practice; and the necessity for keeping the spectators' attention during the shift, was early recognized.

One device of concentrating the attention on the flaring headlight of an oncoming locomotive, while stagehands worked all about it, unseen on the dark platform—each, as the saying goes, with half a castle in his grasp—is found mellowed by the fine Italian hand of David Belasco in his New York production of "The Phantom Rival" during the season of 1914-15. Here a marvelously quick change was made from an elaborate interior to a fanciful scene having a Cinderella staircase of monumental proportions and an absolutely clear foreground. All the while a soft light was kept on the face of the sleeping lady who was dreaming this transformation, while a veritable host of men, each hooded, gloved, and generally garbed in black, and with noiseless shoes, removed the mass of furniture and so forth that filled the scene. As the first setting was placed well forward, the staircase, of course, was ready erected behind, but the sweeping away of the portable pieces was amazing. Every move was planned out, to avoid collisions in the dark.

It follows that to bind together those lapses in dramatic action where crises are not provided by the author to sustain interest, facility of the changing scene must be extraor-

dinary. And here begins an examination of those devices which have been evolved to meet that situation, and also the case of the act interval that must not be over-long.

Edwin O. Sachs, the British authority on theater construction, and one of the best, it is said, in the world, divides stages into three classes: the wooden stage, operated by manual labor; wood-and-iron, also by manual labor, and iron, employing manual labor, hydraulics, or electricity, or a combination of any two or all three. In the Budapest Opera House, the stage is divided into many small sections supported on rams, and everything suspended above is also worked by hydraulics. The Court Theater, Vienna, has large sections suspended on cables and manipulated on small rams at the sides, while the upper pieces are moved by manual labor with the partial assistance of counterweights. "Asphaleia" is the term applied to the direct hydraulic system, from the Asphaleia Syndicate which promoted it. The Budapest Opera House had the first "asphaleia" stage ever installed. It was completed in 1884. In 1888 a modification of the system was shown in operation at the Court Theater, Vienna, where the rams were placed at sides of the stage, to engage with an arrangement of cables and pulleys, so as to leave the space directly under the stage free for working of traps and so forth. This system, to distinguish it from the "hydraulic lifts" of the asphaleia plan, called its units "hydraulic cranes." The difference, while not marked in description, is radical.

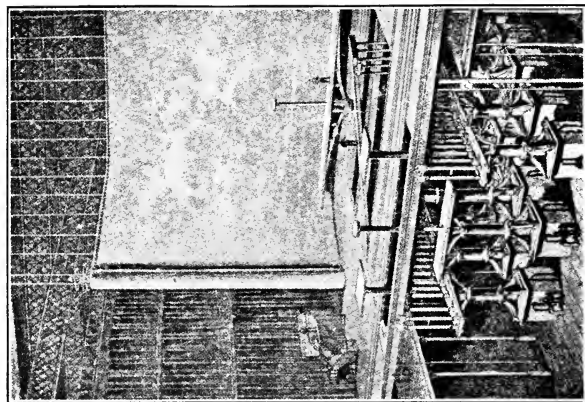
At the Auditorium, Chicago, is to be found a stage operated on rams. It was the first asphaleia stage in America. It is 59 feet wide and 46 feet deep. There are six lateral bridges, four moved bodily and two in sections. Any one, or part of one, may be raised from twelve to fifteen feet above stage level. The reservoir, supplying



*Illustrations from "Modern Opera Houses and Theatres"*

**DRURY LANE THEATER, LONDON.**

View of hydraulic bridges in sloping position.



**THE "ASPHALEIA" SYSTEM.**

"Under machinery" and "horizon."

HYDRAULIC STAGES IN THEORY AND PRACTISE.



water for the plungers, is in a tower, 200 feet high. Rams were used below the stage to raise and lower scenery in the old Booth Theater, New York, in 1870.

Wiesbaden, in its Court Theater, provides an example of the so-called "Brandt" type, where the number of stage sections is further reduced, with these operated by a combination of a central ram and a system of counterweights. It was patented by Fritz Brandt, engineer-in-chief of the court houses of Berlin, in 1888. The great merit of the Brandt under-machinery is that the work is all done from the sides, and does not interfere with openings in the stage. Counterpoises, moved by manual labor, suffice for the top work.

Sachs, by his own device, seen at the Covent Garden Opera House, moves lateral portions of the stage, or "bridges," above and below the regular level, by electricity alone, counterweights, of course, lightening the burden. These bridges may be moved singly or in unison, and are used to bring heavy properties from below, or to bring whole scenes bodily into view. Brandt methods balance the top work, with intermediate electric motors to undertake unusually heavy loads.

Summing up, after careful examination of statistics, Sachs concludes that the asphaleia plan is impractical; that the Brandt type is suitable for medium-sized theaters, and is not expensive to maintain, while his own arrangement requires but moderate initial cost, is deemed dependable, and uses a minimum annual sum for upkeep.

An electrically operated stage in America is that at the New Amsterdam Theater, New York, and also that at the Metropolitan Opera House. Of course, expense of operating any of these devices depends largely upon the theater. Some theaters really do not require elaborate machinery. Wherefore it seems utterly ridiculous that the Prince of

Monaco's diminutive Casino Theater should have a stage in every detail like that of the great Paris Opera House.

Indeed, electric power has been found of almost incalculably great service in modern theaters. An electrician is always on hand, while a hydraulic engineer, not required for other duties, may be absent. Most of the motors used in stage work are of American manufacture.

J. Harry Benrimo, author and director, had an amusing experience at the Moscow Art Theater which serves as illustration. A guide was showing him all the absolutely original features of the equipment, and Benrimo, duly impressed, asked who made the machinery. The guide said he didn't know, but that the name was cast on one of the pieces above. Benrimo ascended to the place, and found in unmistakable characters the name of the Otis Elevator Company, New York. The incident was doubly funny because enthusiastic persons connected with this undeniably great Russian institution, have been at pains to impress all who came that way with the idea that the playhouse has taken precedence over all Europe. In matters of the theater, America has been quite ignored as a country in embryo. Two New York stages, at least, the Lyric and the Harris, have powerful motors mounted on their fly floors to engage, by levers and belts, with any given sets of lines.

#### IMPROVEMENT OF THE COUNTERWEIGHT SYSTEM

But in practically all plans of stage equipment, the old counterweight system plays a great part; and it was with much wisdom, it seems, that designers of the former New Theater, New York, found it expedient to develop that instead of wholly employing newer supplements.

The stage of that vast edifice is a marvel of counterpoise. One ordinarily great difficulty of attaching the counterweight was obviated by the use of small shot, so fine that



its shifting was as noiseless as the pouring of sand. In truth, sand has long been employed for counterweights, the nicety with which it attains balance through addition of ounces, if need be, making it popular. But even sacks of sand require great effort to lift before balance, and no little removal and addition of quantities for close adjustment.

The New Theater went further. It not only used shot for balancing, but also for power in raising and lowering the drops. In the very top of the theater, on the left edge of the gridiron, 120 feet above the stage, was placed a long trough, running from front to back. This contained a vast quantity of shot. It was fitted at close intervals beneath, with valves through which the shot could be let out into rectangular metal buckets, each bucket being attached by lines to the particular weight to be balanced, and sliding up and down the side wall in a chute. At a signal from below, when the free ends of the lines had been fastened to the drop or other weight, an attendant at the trough opened the given, numbered valve, filled the bucket until the balance was perfect, and then gradually added more until the weight ascended smoothly into the flies.

When it became desirable to lower it again, the attendant pulled one way on a fine cable attached to a sleeve which fitted over the bucket, and so uncovered an opening in the bucket through which the shot ran out, down the chute, to a vast chamber in the cellar, and thus lightened it until the drop outbalanced it and descended. Then the sleeve was pulled back into place and the flow of shot stopped.

An endless chain of small scoops, operated by a motor, much smaller than would be necessary to move the lines directly, carried the shot from the chamber below back to the trough above, whenever the supply ran low. Through careless handling the device sometimes became disordered; but, on the whole, it was declared an innovation of worth.

Of course, like ordinary block counterweights, the buckets were enclosed to prevent their breaking loose and doing damage.

### FRONT SCENES

The simplest and perhaps commonest arrangement for changing scenes on the modern stage, is probably the front scene, a painted curtain dropped far front on the stage with the action continuing before it, that the setting behind may be changed for a third scene which presently will be revealed when the curtain is raised. It probably is a heritage of the Elizabethan "alternate" stage, the revival of which will be discussed later in more fitting place than among "innovations."

As due allowance for this device has not always been made by authors, diverting episodes, noisy in character to drown out the rumbling and hammering behind, have frequently been contrived and interpolated to carry the action on until the next scene is ready. For years, and for an obvious reason, this has been called the carpenter's scene. And such an episode, in earlier theaters, where variety performances required more or less continuous action of rough-and-tumble kind, was given a name, like all things that became familiar, and was called an olio.

The scene "in one" is sometimes called an olio scene, while, by analogy, the drop itself is occasionally termed an olio. The olio scene is not to be dismissed lightly, for there are occasions when its use is commendable. In a crude way, it demonstrates the idea which persists in most plans for facile manipulation of settings, to do the work lesiurely elsewhere than on the scene of action.

## REVOLVING STAGES

In accordance with this principle exists the Japanese revolving stage, said to have been first introduced into Europe in 1896 by Carl Lautenschläger, at the Residence Theater, Munich—although it was known prior to 1880 in a French playhouse—and into the United States by Harry Bishop, of the Liberty Theater, Oakland, California.

Upon this stage, seen in elaboration at the Century Theater, New York, where it is 56 feet in diameter, usually half of it may be set with one or more scenes in back, while another scene is in progress on the front half. At the proper time, the back half is merely turned front. When not required for use, the turntable, with all its machinery below, leaves a clear stage. In some of the theaters abroad, where it is mounted in the center on a steel shaft, sunk in an oil-filled pit, and revolved on ball-bearings, all sections of the stage are not readily removable.

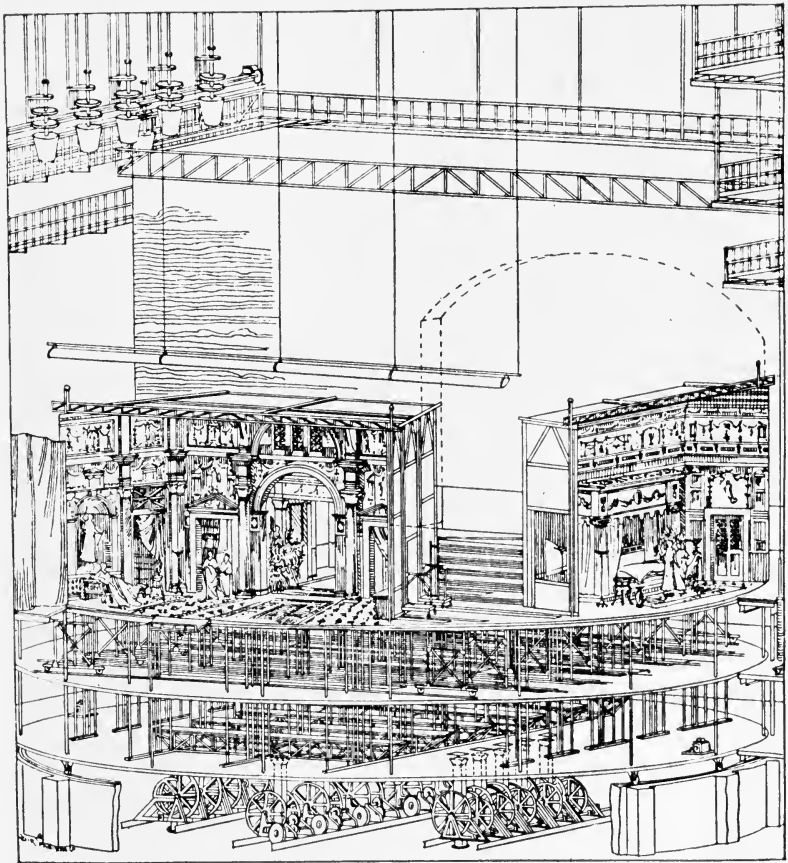
On the other hand, the Century scheme turns it on ball-bearing units on a circular track beneath the outer edge, by means of a continuous steel cable, the tension of which is maintained by an enormous weight below. This cable is passed around it for maximum leverage, and wound on a drum below, where an electric motor furnishes the power. A second motor is in readiness for emergency. In this Century arrangement, there is no shaft to interfere with workings below stage, and the entire middle of the stage floor may be taken out, leaving an absolutely open space, for use of a tank, for instance. Manual labor turns the stage in the Little Theater, New York, which is on the Century plan, ball-bearings and all, but without the cable. Four levers are obliquely inserted in pockets in the outer edge, and the turntable is revolved by as many stage hands.

One minor objection to practically all revolving stages—save the last-named, where the weight placed upon it is never excessive, and excessive weight has been known to make a cable slip—is their noise in moving. Wendell Phillips Dodge, general press representative to David Belasco, has privately made a suggestion of rubber caterpillar wheels to deaden the sound, but practice has not tested it out.

In opposition to this, there is a pleasant story of Reinhardt, at one of his German theaters, trying to increase the noise of his turntable stage, to impress his audience beyond the curtain—like Buffalo Bill in James Hopper's amiable little tale, clipping the pinions of the man with wings to make his flight seem more of an effort to patrons of the show. In all events, that a revolving stage may be made noiseless in operation seems certain, for nothing is more quiet than the turntable of a well-regulated railroad yard, where many tons are moved at one revolution.

Having a noiseless stage reminds me that Winthrop Ames once contemplated a rubber stage for the Booth Theater, New York. I learned of it when I proposed a rubber sidewalk to deaden street noises. The estimated cost proved prohibitive. Relinquishment of the idea was probably wise, for a rubber stage might have seriously impaired acoustic properties of the house.

The revolving stage has a great supplementary advantage in carrying the loose weights all about it; a convenience that was appreciated sincerely by the stage hands of the Century Theater when it was called the New. They used it to carry their heavy pieces across from one side to the other by placing them on one side of the "revolver" and taking them off when they reached the desired point. Moving these loose weights is the great problem of scene shifting. Flats may be joined and drops let down at lightning



From "Modern Opera Houses and Theatres"

#### FIRST REVOLVING STAGE OUTSIDE JAPAN.

This is a diagram of the stage installed by Carl Lautenschläger at the Residence Theater, Munich, in 1896. It is said to have been the first revolving stage in Europe, although there is record of one in a French playhouse prior to 1880. The illustration is from a monumental work by Edwin O. Sachs, noted theater architect.



speed; but fountains, tables, benches, pianos, and the like, are clumsy and take valuable time to carry about.

It is evident that there must be no projecting edges to catch at the sides or in the drops above, when the stage is turned. Failure to realize this, and nothing else, has led to much grumbling about many newly installed turntables. Projecting flaps must be hinged and turned in, and drops above must be raised out of the way.

Claude Hagen, when technical director of the New Theater, invented a special contrivance to place and remove ceiling pieces that had to be turned with the stage. This recalls the arrangement of Walter Dando, at D'Oyley Carte's London Opera House, to set a ceiling piece at any angle. The lines supporting the ceiling piece are fastened to nuts threaded on long screws. As the screws are turned the nuts travel on them, and so pull the piece upward or let it down. This does away with fine adjustment of the lines.

#### BISHOP'S REVOLVING GRIDIRON

It was in trying to surmount these difficulties that Harry Bishop, of Oakland, lately conceived his idea of a revolving gridiron and revolving fly galleries, the motion, of course, to take place above the proscenium arch and coincident with the turning of the stage below. At its bare mention, many objections will oppose this scheme. The necessarily great height of the fly galleries—the counterweights may be supplanted by motors—and the difficulty attendant upon revolving those drops that are considerably wider than the stage is deep, will be serious ones.

There is a use to which the revolving stage has been put—and it may be decried as basely theatrical—of turning the stage while characters walk without leaving the "acting zone:" Faust, in the garden with Marguerite, did

so at a playhouse abroad; and more ingenious was the intended device in the production of "The Merry Wives of Windsor" at the New Theater, carrying those concerned from Page's House to the Garter Inn and back. Only the scenery shook so in transit that it became palpably unreal. In 1904, at the Metropolitan Opera House, New York, a similar change was made in "Parsifal," from the woodland scene to the Hall of the Grail, while Gurnemanz and Parsifal appeared to be walking the entire distance. Only, in this instance, the trick was done with a panorama.

#### NOVELTY REVOLVING STAGES

Novel uses may come further when the double, concentric stages are brought from the Japanese theaters, although their novelty will doubtless exceed their practical worth. A triple concentric stage was installed in the London Coliseum about 1911. It weighs 160 tons, and is 75 feet in diameter. The parts may be turned separately, each at a different rate of speed, or all locked together, if desired, by flat tablets of iron dropped flush into the upper surface. The outer edge of each part carries mast-holes for panorama scenery, but these were found impracticable. The intermediate ring has water tanks of 1,000 gallons' capacity, for use in aquatic spectacles. The central table has a trap which connects, by way of a circular staircase, with a stationary platform below, from which a chorus may be "fed on" the stage even when in motion. At top speed, the outer edge may be turned at twenty-five miles per hour; and it may be stopped by electric and hydraulic brakes in two and one-half revolutions.

At the World's Fair at St. Louis, and later for "Creation" at Coney Island, there was used a form called the "annular" revolving stage. It was in the shape of a flat



ring, revolving about the entire auditorium. Spectators entered from above. As many as a dozen complete scenes could be set on this at once, each to be swung into place at the proper time.

#### REVOLVING STAGE PROBLEMS

In its ideal use, the revolving stage has the full complement of large and small scenes set up once and for all upon it, for service throughout the entire engagement. But the consequent necessity of fitting them all accurately within the circle, seems to cramp them unduly at times. Besides, in some American cities, the fire law will not permit a manager to leave any scene standing between performances. It must be struck at conclusion and erected again when needed. But, even where such regulation does not obtain, it generally seems more satisfactory to build some of the scenes, at least during actual use of the turntable. There is ample time in which to do this, and to do it well, without feverish rumble, clatter, and banging to disturb the scene in front.

Experience with the revolving stage in America has drawn two conclusions, both based largely on the circumstance that the "road" means so much to native theatricals. The first, lightly dismissed in some quarters, is that much of the scenery has specially to be constructed for it, and is thus cumbrous, fragile, and disproportionate elsewhere; and the other, less readily denied, is that the revolving stage is not worth while as a venture save in those houses where productions are made and designed to remain indefinitely. In "one-week" houses they can find little or no place.

#### DROP STAGES

Steele Mackaye's invention of the "drop" stage, arranged in tiers, one above another for successive showing

of the settings contrived on each, installed at the old Madison Square, New York, was speedily discarded as a fad, although it was used in considerably modified form by David Belasco—who had earlier been associated with Mackaye—at his Republic Theater, New York. Its impracticability was found more in the necessity for making special scenery to fit it, awkward for use elsewhere, than in any clumsiness of setting it in motion.

A deep excavation under the stage of the Century Theater, New York, shows the place intended for a sort of drop stage, the plan being given up only because the directors of the organization which built the house, preferred to wait until justified by the success of the venture, which never came. Had that stage been completed, New York would have had in one theater practically every successful mechanical arrangement known to the theatrical world. It would have been a revolving, transverse, and vertically moving stage.

#### SLIDING STAGES

As yet Europe appears to be the sole possessor of the true sliding stage, said by some to have been invented by Brahm, head mechanical inspector at the Royal Theater in Berlin, and by others to have originated with Brandt, of the Berlin Court Theater, who dubbed it the "reform stage." This variety, a platform, extending all the way from front to back of the stage proper, and the distance of the proscenium width plus the equal width of one of the wings, is contrived to slide from side to side. Thus, one scene the full depth of the stage may be shown on half of it, while the next setting is being erected on the other, this to be slid into view when necessary. At the Court Theater, Vienna, a "rolling way," a great movable platform, carries the whole scene forward or backward when

the bridges beneath it are to be raised or sunk. This, of course, is not the true sliding stage.

Unfortunately—and here may be found the principal reason that the sliding stage has not made its appearance here where property valuations are high—this requires a large free space, as large as the stage proper, to admit of the lateral motion; and this space may be used for virtually nothing else.

#### LIFTING STAGES

At the New Court Theater in Dresden, Germany, an effort has been made to overcome this drawback, while retaining advantages of the device, by making it a platform but half the size, and equal to the depth and width of the stage proper, sinking it some 33 feet below stage level, and then sliding it off to one side under the adjoining property, which here happened to be a street, circling behind, while another stage, already set, is moved in from the other side and lifted to position. The stage platform in this case, is divided laterally into three sections, each supported by two steel hydraulic shafts, and movable separately or together. Electricity operates the sliding portions which cover merely the two front sections. The third section is used only in scenes of great depth. There is a "lifting" stage somewhat on this order, at Covent Garden, in London.

#### SWINGING STAGES

Probably the latest variant of the sliding stage is that contrived by Joseph Wickes, a scenic artist, and Arthur Hopkins, a producer, both Americans, for the New York production of "On Trial," first presented in Stamford, Connecticut, late in 1914. The course of the play, which acts out the testimony of a number of witnesses at a murder trial, demanded lightning changes from the court room to

other localities; and these shifts were accomplished by the use of two platforms, each mounted on casters, and swung alternately from the stage out of sight into the wings, on a king-bolt through one corner at the side of the proscenium arch. In brief, each of the wings had its own platform. The rumbling would have gladdened the Reinhardt of the anecdote, but it achieved its end nobly and electrified a blasé theatergoing public.

### WAGON STAGES

Notable even among the other praiseworthy innovations in the wake of the Austrian stage reform is the wagon stage, a means whereby the sliding platform may disintegrate as readily as the proverbial "one-hoss shay," and so eliminate "waste" space. The wagon stage is a low platform, usually about six feet by twelve, mounted on rubber-tired wheels. The scenery upon it hangs down over the sides to the stage floor. This wagon may be clamped to others very quickly, in order to make a line of, roughly, any given length.

Granville Barker introduced a modification of the wagon stage—the unit slightly smaller—to America during his New York engagement at Wallack's, 1914-15, although his use was of restricted kind, merely to slide his heavier pieces upon the scene, and not, as frequently abroad, to move the entire setting. In his production of "Androcles and the Lion," the outside and inside of the arena were set back to back on the same platform. The platform was pivoted in the middle so that by swinging it, the scene was changed.

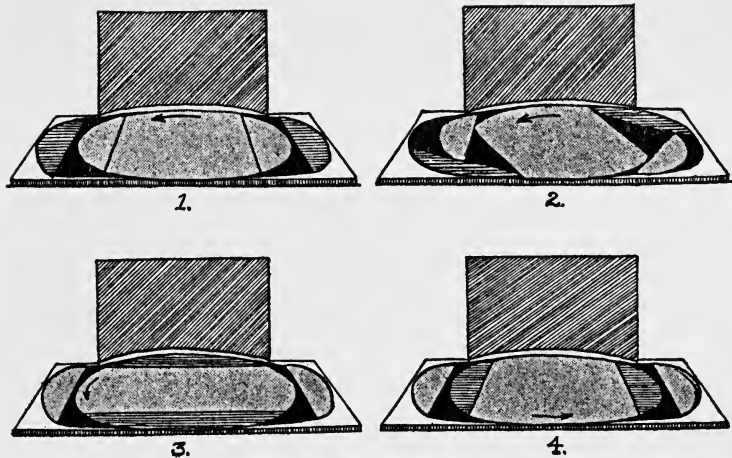
The real problem of scene shifting is to move the heavy parts, rostrums, set pieces, pianos, bookcases, and the like. Therefore, only part of the stage need be moved to convey these things from one point to another; but that part should

include the immediate boundaries of the scene. This seems to be accomplished by use of the wagon stage; but that means serious disintegration of the scene, with much undoing of stage-braces, lines, and so forth. The sliding stage requires too much free space at the sides; the revolving stage in operation prohibits active use of half the stage from front to back.

How are these difficulties to be overcome?

### THE INTERCHANGEABLE STAGE

I append this suggestion as a line of technical development: Divide each of two full-stage settings in halves.



INTERCHANGEABLE STAGE

An arrangement for quick changes of scene that, unlike the revolving stage, permits use of the full stage from front to back at all times, and, unlike the sliding stage, does not demand too much free space at the sides. The real problem in scene shifting is not to move the entire setting but just heavy pieces, leaving the acting zone clear.

Set one scene up intact on the stage proper; then set one-half of the remaining scene in one wing, the other half in the other. By mechanical shift, make the stage scene divide

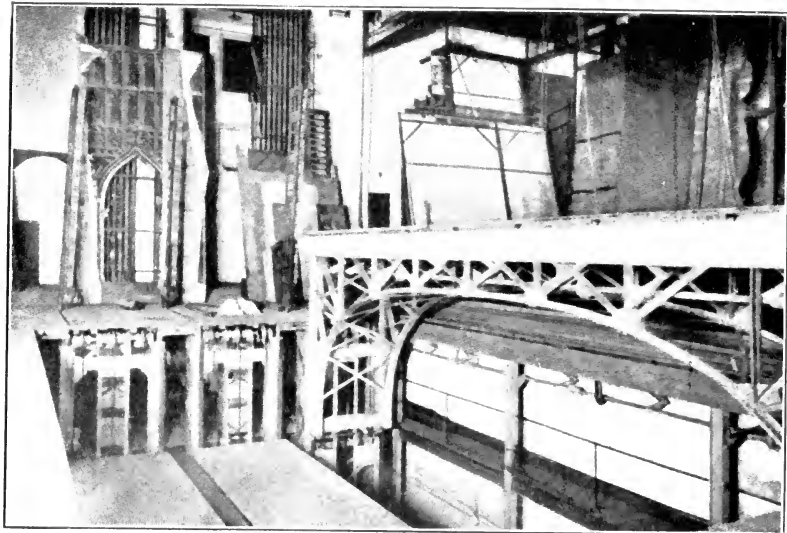
itself and the two parts take the place of those in the wings, which, by the same operation, combine on the stage proper as the second setting. Refer to the diagram herewith. We have a stage here that may be used as a revolving stage without disturbing the halves in the wings; a stage that may be set all the way to the back wall; a stage that moves the heavy pieces and most of the setting without dismantling; a stage that does not require much free space.

Few theaters anywhere have their stages at "dead center"—that is, with an equal amount of space in both wings. Usually one wing, on the side nearest the lobby, is much smaller than the other. The larger side is, of course, almost invariably used as the working side.

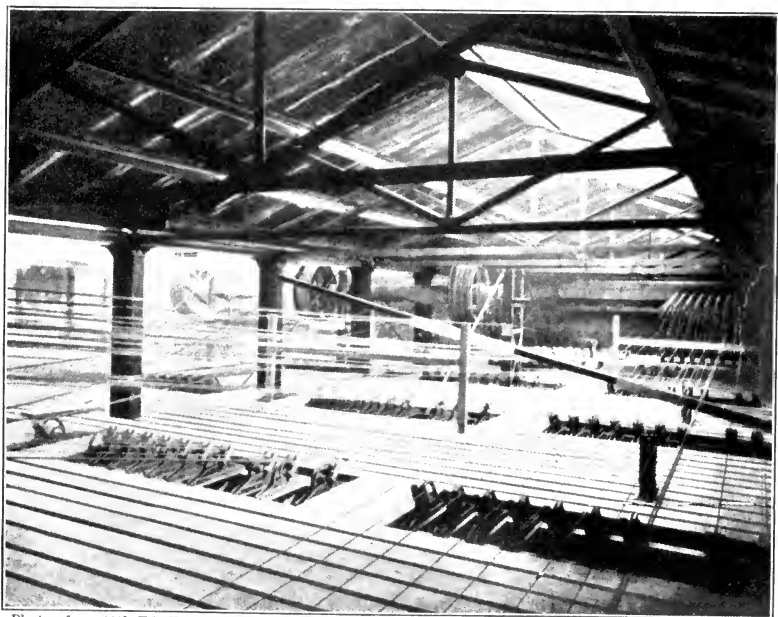
In Europe, the wagon platform, in varying sizes, is frequently employed in conjunction with the sliding and revolving stages. It is inexpensive and economical, for there are times, as indicated, when both sides of the platform may be used for different scenes, the wagon merely being turned about for the change.

#### CONVENTIONAL STAGE CUTS

Elaborate use of traps for "transformations" and so forth, seems a convention of a century gone. A sort of drama less dependent upon mechanical effect has come into vogue. Still, the modern stage remains in readiness to be pulled up in sections at any point for the fitting in of tanks or frames for traps. Now and then a little touch, such as the perforated pipe around the front of a trap for a cloud of smoke in which "Snow White" may disappear, is added to the traditional forms; but, on the whole, this phase remains with little change. The simple moving of the stage floor into alternate bits of solid ground, and lateral spaces between for the dropping of painted strips of houses that their "ruins" may be disclosed already in place behind, in



Sachs Electric Stage Bridges.



*Photos from 11th Ed. Encyclopædia Britannica. By Permission*

### The New Gridiron.

STAGE EQUIPMENT AT THE ROYAL OPERA HOUSE, COVENT GARDEN.





an earthquake or war picture, is but application of an older idea—serviceable still, as many old ideas are. Indeed, some old ideas are now being hailed as the "New Movement."

The old stage almost always had a "grave" trap well down center. The floor parted at that point in two sliding panels, and a small platform below it was made to rise and fall smoothly in a frame, with the aid of counterweights. Thus, old-time theatergoers knew exactly where the ghost of Hamlet's father was going to disappear. But now that arbitrary arrangement is done away with; the stage is removable in sections at any point, and the frame of the trap may be fitted in beneath. Back of the grave trap were three narrow transverse slits, or openings, technically known as "cuts," closed, when necessary, by "sliders." In Germany the cuts are closed by hinged flaps, or "kasettenklappen." These are followed by a wider transverse opening filled by an adjustable section called a "bridge"—in France a "rue;" in Germany, "versenkung." Then come three more slider cuts, then a bridge, and so on back, depending on the depth of the stage.

Slider cuts are used variously. Sometimes the cut has a transverse bar rising and falling in grooves beneath it, for raising and lowering scenery through the opening. At the Municipal Theater of Amsterdam they frequently use "double-deck" drops—that is, a drop with two scenes painted on it, one above the other—moving upward or downward through slider cuts, on light iron rails at the sides, that extend from the cellar floor to the gridiron. Again, the slider cut uses the chariot and pole. The chariot is a small truck, frequently moving on a track from one side across to the other, on a mezzanine level beneath the stage floor.

This mezzanine level is frequently fitted with windlasses to raise and lower pieces through the stage floor. It per-

forms practically the same function beneath the stage as the fly gallery does above.

A standard may be screwed into the chariot through the slider cut, and, projecting above the stage floor, serves as a stage brace to hold strip-lights or support wing pieces, or yet to be moved transversely to any point in the cut, to hold an isolated bit of scenery. They are convenient in showing ships, for instance, moving across the stage. At the Coliseum, in London, they tow pieces like ships or trains, by invisible wires attached to a traveling crane on a track running across above the stage between the fly floors. It can tow a hanging platform weighted up to eleven tons, at twenty miles per hour.

In order to fill up the open space of the cut, grooved sliders are attached piece to piece on one side, and detached on the other as the chariot and pole move across. If the chariot and pole are used for a stationary object, the cut is filled with laths. Walter Dando, at D'Oyley Carte's London Opera House, has devised an arrangement whereby the space is automatically filled up as the chariot and pole move along.

The chariot and pole are to be seen in use at the Metropolitan Opera House, in New York, where they have a strictly European stage. It was built by the celebrated Carl Lautenschläger, who came to America in 1904 for the express purpose of designing and installing it in time for the scheduled production of "Parsifal." The stage was built in co-operation with Theodore G. Stein, the architect. The first four bridges are made to sink or to rise, the floor of the stage being removed in sections to permit the motion. Electric motors now operate the first two bridges; but originally they were moved by two men at a winch. Each bridge is forty-six feet long, four feet wide, and twenty-one feet deep.

# SCENERY, DECORATION, AND COSTUMES ARE PREPARED

## CHAPTER XV

### SET INTERIORS

THE floor of the stage is a part that few persons in an audience notice. Yet it is prepared with as much care as any other portion of the scene. It is always in harmony with the rest—that is, without quibbling, wherever the set is properly arranged; and, to all intents and purposes, it really is what it represents.

Much ingenuity is exercised in covering the bare boards; and recent seasons have seen some truly wonderful examples of it. The ordinary device is what is known simply as a “ground,” “floor,” or “stage” cloth. This is neither more nor less than a great sheet of painted canvas, or other material, spread over the entire visible stage. It is made in various patterns, representing anything from a lawn to a parquet floor or a tessellated pavement. The imitation is usually worthy, and will bear close inspection.

Rival managerial interest was mildly aroused during late seasons, by the use of a shellacked linoleum, which proved excellent counterfeit of a hardwood floor. Examples were seen in Margaret Anglin's 1914 American revival of “Lady Windermere's Fan,” staged by George Foster Platt, and later in the New York production by J. Fred Zimmerman, of “Within the Lines.” The hardwood floor, made, like the front of a roll-top desk, of narrow strips glued to a

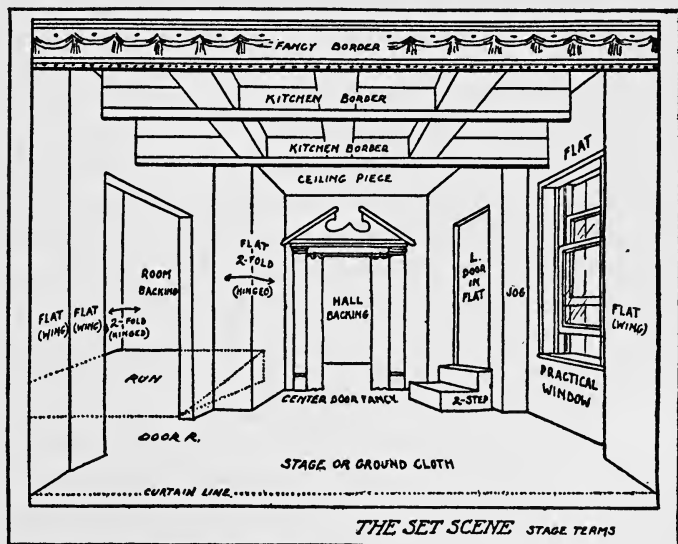
cloth in back so it may be rolled up, is in common use for clog dancers in vaudeville and revues. Of course, rugs are used frequently for interiors, but almost always on top of ground cloths.

Care is taken, too, that adjoining rooms, showing in glimpses beyond the scene proper, are provided with rugs or carpet of different design, to aid the illusion of their being separate compartments, complete in themselves, and furnished in individual style. This principle is, of course, applied to everything seen thus through a doorway—save an alcove, perhaps, such as that seen through a modified doorway in the second scene of "The High Road," in which Mrs. Fiske lately appeared—although there are occasional difficulties to complicate its working.

In "As a Man Thinks," by Augustus Thomas, produced about 1911, one act showed a setting with two doors at back. The hall and stairs, glimpsed through the door at right, and the room through that at left, were arranged with the excellent taste and rare directing skill of the author; but it happened that the tones of the backing walls were respectively of contrasty colors, and it was difficult to imagine anything but an impenetrable division where they were supposed to run together behind the wall of the scene. Accordingly there seemed a jarring note when a character walked directly through, past both doors, from the wall to the contrasting room. It was entirely possible, of course, but disturbed for the moment. The colors were too much divorced from each other. This digression still has a lesson which applies to coverings of stage floors.

When a ground cloth is employed, it is the first part of the scene to be placed in position; and upon it is erected that structure which is to impress audiences with the joint air of stability and beauty. One thing that quickly destroys the illusion of floor cloths, and incidentally is a menace to

those actors who walk "with their eyes on the stars," is their tendency to wrinkle and curl at the edges. A guard against this was invented along about 1914 by William A. Hanna, master carpenter to Winthrop Ames, and installed



in the Little Theater, New York. It is in the form of a long, flat iron plate, about six inches wide, extending across the curtain-line and clamping down upon the cloth, its weight holding it in position. This also prevents curling.

### CEILING PIECES

If the scene is a room it is soon closed in. (In fact, there are few settings used in the average production that may not be placed, if necessary, within five minutes. But that is no reason for overworking a stage crew.) The ceiling piece, which is usually just a large flat, is lowered in a vertical position from the flies just back of the teaser,

and the bottom edge swung upward until it is on a level with the top. If there is room enough, the set of lines that produce the upward turn, are kept permanently fastened to the far edge. Then the flats which are to constitute the walls of the room, are slid into place and lashed together.

#### LASH LINES

Lashing flats together so their edges fit snugly enough to conceal the joining, is a comparatively simple matter by what appears to have been an American invention, a way of starting a light line from a ring at the top of usually the right side of one flat, over a row of single-pronged cleats running alternately first on one flat and then on the other, from top to bottom, and fastening it on a double cleat near the bottom of the second piece.

When the foreign company of "Sumurûn" was imported to New York by Winthrop Ames about 1911, they brought an unsatisfactory system of wooden buttons for accomplishing the same end, but were quick and glad to discard it for the method described.

This kind of interior—all enclosed save by the "fourth wall," through which the audience looks into the heart of things—is known as a "box," or "sealed," set.

Removal of the fourth wall has been presented as the most convincing proof of inherent falseness in arrangement of the modern theater. Consequently there have been attempts—although rarely in conscious exploitation of the theory—to treat the fourth wall as an entity. Hamlet, we are told by some champions of the notion, refers to his father's picture as hung there.

Forbes-Robertson, as the Passer-By in "The Passing of the Third Floor Back," sat with a companion, in the forefront of the stage, and warmed his hands at a glow from a

fireplace imagined in the fourth wall; his disposition of doors and window in the other three walls militating against any other arrangement. Indeed, use of the fourth wall, in a broad sense, is hoary with tradition; and characters without number have beheld their Nemeses, saviors, race-horses, and what-not in a distance that, to non-acquiescent minds, was merely the front of the balcony.

The uses mentioned are no more novel than the spectacle of the *dramatis personæ* of "Seven Days," produced several seasons ago at the Astor Theater, New York, looking from a housetop into a "street" occupied by the audience itself. However, the objection that these things—like the remark of the character that "this could have happened only in a play"—only emphasize the unreality of convention, can find little ground in Trilby singing her hypnotic "Sweet Alice, Ben Bolt," to her real audience that is still imagined in the dramatization. Further discussion of the fourth wall will be made in a more pertinent connection.

There are times when one ceiling piece may do for two settings in the same play; and there is nothing inartistic about the economy, even sometimes when there are material differences to complicate its use. An example of this occurred in "Beverley's Balance," the comedy in which Margaret Anglin appeared at the Lyceum Theater, New York, in the spring of 1915. In one act a chandelier was suspended from the ceiling; in the other there was none. The solution was simple. First, the chandelier was attached and drawn up in the usual manner, and for the second, the chandelier was removed and a conventional decorative piece was drawn up after the same fashion. It was by no means incongruous.

All sets must be elastic to a certain degree for adjustment to the various stages while on tour. One often observes, from behind the scenes, that a ceiling piece extends

backward considerably more than is warranted by the side and rear walls of the room. This usually implies that the stage is smaller than that upon which the initial production was made. Upon the next stage where this play is presented, this ceiling piece may be used to its outermost edges, and almost every square foot of it may be in full view of the audience.

If the scene is stretched to its utmost at the sides and still fails to fill the available stage, it may, of course, be masked by moving the tormenters closer together and lowering the teaser. If so very low, as Act I of "A Fool There Was," in which Robert Hilliard appeared for so long, and adjustments of teaser and grand drapery fail to cover the gap between, the act drop may be halted at an appropriate point in its ascent, the point marked on the curtain rope by tying a bit of black tape, perhaps, about it.

#### BORDERS

Sometimes borders are used to represent the ceiling, an old-fashioned way, but a trifle more economical in the financial sense and in the way of setting the scene, than the single piece. Of course, each variety of border has its special descriptive term; but the borders also fall into general divisions, of which, owing to frequent use, the "kitchen" border (usually depicting the cross-beamed ceiling), and the "fancy" border (for parlors, drawing rooms, and the like) are familiar to the most uninformed persons about a stage.

#### FLATS

Walls of a room are not always made of flats. There are occasions when they are made entirely by the carpenter without a touch of the artist's brush. Such were those in Alan Wilson's fine room in "The High Road." But flats



may be so well painted that they serve the purpose quite as well. The only real fear need be the careless slamming of a door to make the canvas quiver. Margaret Anglin had a solid mahogany set for "Beverley's Balance," said to be from the original production of "Within the Law," but finding it cumbrous in transportation, she discarded it for walls of canvas. And no one seemed to notice the difference. Certainly the substitute answered all requirements.

Flats used for interior walls are either "wing" flats (or just "wings"), for the sides, or "back" flats, which require no comment. Flats—particularly the wing flats—are often hinged; and then they are known as two-folds and three-folds, but rarely of greater division.

#### DOORS

A very common thing in set interiors is the "center door fancy." This is the more or less ornamented entrance placed in the middle of the back wall, and always distinctive enough to be recognized. It is the only "set piece" that is suspended in the flies when not in use. Hennequin tersely describes the set piece as any structure built out from a flat or standing isolated on the stage.

The set piece is usually supported from the rear by an adjustable prop known as a "stage brace." I do not find mention of the stage brace until about 1888, and then it is referred to as a new device. This merely is an extension rod fitted at the upper end with a hook to catch in a corresponding eye placed on the scene, and at the bottom with a large thumb-screw to fasten it to the stage floor.

It scarcely is necessary to say that the center door fancy belongs to a fancy set, and would be incongruous with anything else. But it is a piece in good standing, as has been attested by Howard Lindsay, stage manager for Margaret Anglin, in a poem he composed in its honor. It begins:

O Center-Door-Fancy that hangs in the flies,  
 Do you feel that you have been given a raise?  
 As you room with the borders—the kitchens and skies?  
 Do you join them in play—or only in plays?  
 Are you dropped by the drops? And do they criticise  
 By saying they think you too *set* in your ways,  
 O Center-Door-Fancy that hangs in the flies?

In the flats are doors, windows, and other openings, as needed. Windows that may be opened—and nowadays most of them are so contrived—are rather heavy affairs, and hence are well supported in stout frames, the whole detachable from the scene, and firmly braced from the rear. The door that shoots its bolts so truly home, and fits so evenly in its place, is never removed therefrom, for jamb and door are permanently hinged together, the former having a triangular brace that swings out at a right angle at back, and holds it securely in position. When the scene is struck, this brace folds in against the door, out of the way.

Wherever the exigencies of the scene permit, doors are opened outward, and, in side walls, are hinged to the up-stage sides of their frames. This arrangement admits of effective entrances and exits. If it becomes necessary to have a door turn inward, it is still swung on the upper side so as not to conceal those going in or out.

Clayton Hamilton, in his "Studies in Stagecraft," makes mention of that winding staircase, elaborately devised for the New Theater revival of "The School for Scandal," which led upward from below, so that actors going out that way, were compelled to impair the effectiveness of Sheridan's witty exit speeches by turning their backs upon the audience. He pointed out, too, that had the staircase been arranged so the actors would face front in going out, the

corresponding entrance lines would be lost. The old way, he concludes, by which the characters went out a door in the back flat to a stairway imagined offstage was infinitely better.

While compensations of this interesting experiment were probably not enough to outweigh its disadvantages, there were some—for instance, the exit of Snake, excellently played by Cecil Yapp. Mr. Yapp, a pantomimist of no mean ability, had given his character a peculiar, clammy, Heep-like gesture of the hands, and this, the last thing seen of Snake as he descended the stairs, left a vivid impression of the figure.

### BACKINGS

Through the doorways, windows, and other apertures of a scene, are observed the necessary backgrounds. These are termed backings, named individually in accordance with what they represent, as "street" backing, "hall" backing, and so on. Usually these backings are two-folds, turned like screens so the audience may not see beyond them; but, when possible and practical, they are just drops, which are readily disposed of in being hauled up into the flies. Drop backings often each serve for two or more doors, or a door and a window. Upon backings are painted what one is supposed to see when looking through a door or window or other opening.

An interesting, although not exactly unique, use of backing was in Margaret Mayo's "Polly of the Circus," produced in New York, 1908, by Frederic Thompson. The scene first showed an upstairs room in the parsonage; and the adjoining church could be seen through the window. Only that portion of the church that corresponded in height to the second story of the house could be presented to view. Accordingly the backing was lowered to that position.

A later scene revealed the back yard of the parsonage, where the same backing was used, but this time showing the church from the ground up. Therefore the backing was raised to its full height. However, in this case, the backing was more correctly known as a "back" drop. When the production went on the road the crew was not always particular about lowering the drop for the early scene; and audiences were sometimes startled to see a second story that was apparently on the first floor.

### RUNS

Occasionally, on a very narrow stage—narrow from front to back—one sees a character stroll through a doorway into a conservatory, perhaps, which apparently recedes further than the stage itself; and, while one knows the impossibility, the character continues his walk to the very end of it. That illusion, so familiar to the playgoers of a past century, is created by the use of a false perspective. The floor, beginning at a point just beyond the door sill, ascends gradually on an incline—imperceptible to the average spectator, but quite sharply at that—giving an excellent effect of considerable distance. The bottom of the back wall of the conservatory is in reality higher than that of the stage, but it appears further away in being nearer to the vanishing point in the perspective. This incline is known as a "run." Runs are always "practical."

Practical is an adjective applied to anything on the stage that may be put to actual use. A window is practical if it may be raised or lowered; a door if it may be opened; a chair if one may sit on it. As a matter of common sense, however, the term is not applied when the practicableness of an object is obvious.

According to the same common-sense way of looking at things, small sections of steps are known as one-step,

two-step, three-step, and so forth; but fourteen stages of progress ordinarily would not be called a fourteen-step, but, quite prosaically, a flight of stairs.

Backstage veterans do not use technical terms needlessly. They are intended for purposes of clearness and quick understanding, and not for dialect.

## CHAPTER XVI

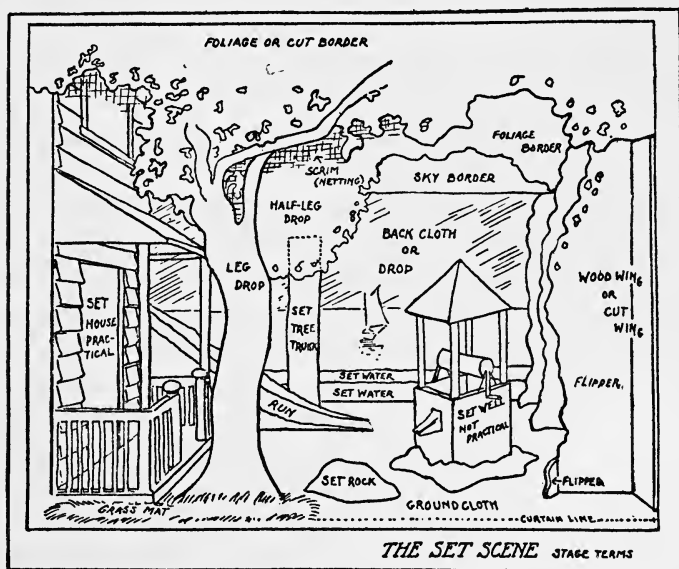
### SET EXTERIORS

PROBABLY the greatest difficulty confronting the scenic artist is to design—although not to execute—the outdoor setting. The interior is merely a false approximation of a man-made spot; the exterior is an artificial semblance of a further removed, natural place. This is doubtless why English scene painters of the final decades of the nineteenth century, exulted in their declared superiority of counterfeiting exteriors while belittling French excellence of interior design.

It is difficult to conceive of many outdoor sets that do not require floor covering of some kind. There was one in Chauncey Olcott's American production of Rida Johnson Young's "Macushla," about 1913, showing the interior of a large tent, with a board floor, from which the Celtic hero watched the race won by the mare in the title rôle—or "name part," as professional jargon hath it. One is disposed to think this must have been an accident in the single performance where it was seen, for not merely the boards must be covered, but also the many crevices where the floor is sawn up for traps and so forth.

Steamer deck scenes also may employ the stage floor; but even that is unusual. The green cloth is most commonly used, probably because it wears well and may be had at nominal cost. In fact, it used to be a sort of institution in most theaters, having the painted cloth laid over it. The latter must be carefully spread so its design is not

distorted, and both must be stretched until no wrinkles are visible—that is, as long as the ground is supposed to be level, and particularly if any dancing is to be done upon it. A loose fold would throw a dancing performer headlong.



If verdant Nature occupies the scene, the ground is built up with grass mats, little patches of imitation greensward, scattered about, with intention, of course, like oases on a desert. Their position is primarily decided by the necessity of concealing unnatural contact of certain scenery—rocks, trees, and the like, and the back drop and wings—with the floor. A grass mat once used on the enormous stage of the New York Hippodrome, weighed three tons and required about ten men to move it.

## LINKING THE PAINTED PERSPECTIVE WITH THE REAL

There are innumerable devices of this character employed to link the painted perspective with the real; for instance, half a bush may be painted and the rest genuine. In Richard Mansfield's production of "Henry V," called "King Henry," real soldiers in the foreground of the battle scene were incongruously combined with combatants in cut profile upstage. The New York production of "The Suburban" made an advance with painted spectators in a grandstand, having real handkerchiefs, hats, and parasols set in motion of frantic waving by a battery of electric fans offstage. Something similar was done in "The Pit." At the Gettysburg panorama, so long on view at Chicago, there was wholesale use of tricks generally like these, but without the movement; and, according to accounts, they were effective, too. In a seashore setting, one or two profile strips, appropriately painted, running the width of the scene and resting on edge upon the stage floor, *may* cause the illusion of painted water on the back drop washing directly on the foreground. Then the spaces between these pieces, or strips of "set water," will permit boats to glide (realistically?) upon the picture without baring the dry mechanism that keeps them afloat.

## BUILT-UP GROUND

The stage rock is a nondescript article. Most casual examination of it at close range will reveal its construction of folds and twists of padded canvas drawn over five sides of a box, and the whole covered with a mixture of left-over paint.

A road that leads up a hillside generally is a separate structure, the outdoor form of a run. The actor using it



descends offstage from the elevation by means of a ladder, or rough steps.

### WINGS

Wood wings (suggesting the woodland) constitute one of the oldest devices retained by the modern stage. In the oldest recorded scene plots of the German theater one still finds the designation "Waldflügel." Each is hinged and set upright, the two sections forming a little more than a right angle at the side of the scene, with painted surfaces in view of the audience, and the back part serving the purpose of a backing. If a wing is not a two-fold, but just a single piece, it may be held in place by a stage brace, or a sort of garden rake fastened to the lower rail of the fly gallery, and adjustable at any angle. The part extending outward upon the stage, known as the flipper, often has a reinforced, irregular edge, simulating a bush, rock, or tree trunk in profile. This is the cut wing. If the wing is an unusually tall one, such as they use in large opera houses, it may have a small additional piece, hinged on the front edge of the flipper, close to the floor, and turned inward to make a more stable three-sided foundation. This little part also is known as a flipper.

### BACK DROPS

The back cloth or drop is painted in flat or in perspective. Painted perspectives for stage use are mostly generalized below the eye because of the many points of view in an audience. The level of the eye (or center of vision, as some artists call it) is ordinarily that of the spectator seated in a middle orchestra chair. In some of the older theaters abroad the center of vision was gauged from the king's box.

## PRACTICAL PIECES

Practical, as a term applying to things that may be put to actual use, does not necessarily mean that every part is genuine, or, rather, "built." A wall may be practical at one point only, as was the case in an operatic production some ten years ago, when a soldier supernumerary placed his scaling-ladder against an insecure place in counterfeit masonry, and so crashed through, as he mounted upward, into the false and uncomfortable bushes on the other side.

This sort of uncertainty, as to physical permanence of scenery, requires the actor to be ever ready to meet the exigencies of his particular case. No better illustration of this may be found than that occasion, localized in an early American theater, when a scene showed the prows of two vessels of war, projecting on the stage from either side, while players, representing sailors, fought back and forth, and stagehands, on their hands and knees, labored up and down beneath painted canvas to simulate waves. Then one of the latter unexpectedly put his bewildered head through a rotten bit of the "ocean." The moment was excruciatingly funny. But it was a "sailor" on a ship above, who had presence of mind to shout "Man overboard!" and pull the stagehand through to safety on deck, and so save the play.

A practical set house would be one where a person may enter; but the windows may be merest pretenses, neither to be opened nor looked through. Yet, in the same category is the first act setting of "The Temperamental Journey," produced by Belasco in New York, 1913, showing at left a house which not only might be entered, but the windows of which might be raised and lowered, shutters opened and closed—and it may be depended upon that Belasco, with his customary taking advantage of every possibility in a

scene, did raise and lower and open and close—while the room seen through was actually furnished throughout with chairs, pictures, curtains, and so forth.

In most cases, however, a practical set house may be relied upon to serve as real with its steps, its porch, and its door. In the same way, (without discussing how near the seashore wells may be sunk), a practical well-head implies not merely that water may be drawn from it, but also that windlass and spout are workable. To be sure, a well has but one function, whereas a house has many.

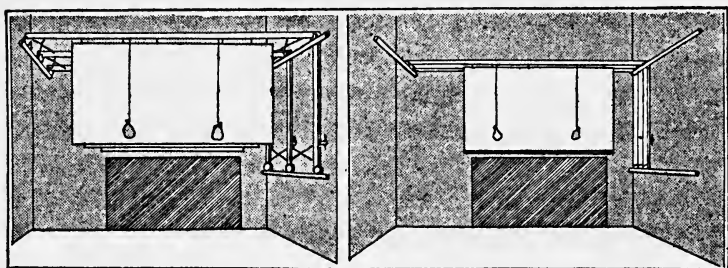
Occasionally trees appear as practical pieces. In Galsworthy's "Joy," produced in America at a special *matinée* of the American Academy of Dramatic Arts at the Empire Theater, New York, early in 1914, and particularly in Besier's "Lady Patricia," produced in the same city along about the same time, with Mrs. Fiske, where the entire scene was in the branches, they may be climbed; in "Sky Farm" a tree may not only be climbed, but the village cut-up may pick real apples from certain of the limbs.

### SKY PIECES

Borders are by no means imperative in outdoor sets. In "The Greyhound" a great blue backing, or "cyclo-rama," stretches around, upward, and leans forward to indicate the heavens about the marine picture; in the first act of "The Marriage Game," the last of "Madame Sherry," and the final scene of "Polly of the Circus," similar devices are supplemented by sky borders—simple, straight-edged strips of blue cloth, plain, or more deplorably, representing clouds.

The prime purpose of the sky border, or almost any other border employed in exteriors, is not so much to frame the picture at top as to hide the naked stage and the hanging stuff in the flies. Could some method be devised to

move this hanging stuff temporarily away there might be infinite stage skies with apparently no interference between the ground and the blue dome above. I append a suggestion to this of a folding gridiron, made on the plan of the familiar collapsible hat-rack, on toggle-joints at the sides, to close forward, with all its pendant drops, and so forth, to a position masked by the teaser; and, when the drops are needed for use, to glide back to its opened form and smooth operation. With reasonable care in suspend-



THE FOLDING GRIDIRON

The sketch at left shows it expanded, that at right shows it closed. Tracks upon which it travels might be inclined to make it expand by gravity, using a winch for contrary movement. Sandbags are used as counterweights. Note the working side of the stage is left clear.

ing heavy doors and other miscellaneous projections, there should be no damage done in closing them all together. For use of the regular grid the supplementary device might be pushed close together in the other direction, against the back wall.

In German theaters, they long ago overcame the ugly joining of wings and borders by making each set of them in a single piece, having the wings just leg drops at the sides. This form is known as the bogen.

The continuous cyclorama—that is, one that is continuous around the sides as well as the back—is of German

origin. To make room for it at the sides, the flying bridges have hinged ends that may be raised up out of the way.

Moving panoramas are of comparatively early origin. They have continuous lateral movement—like a roller-towel turned sideways—over vertical cylinders placed in the wings, and are used chiefly to present the illusion of progress of what are really stationary figures. Approaching land in a vessel supposedly at sea, finds splendid presentment here. An improvement was made by Neil Burgess, who so long appeared as the Widow Bedott in "The County Fair," by Charles Barnard. Burgess used the moving panorama in conjunction with a tread-mill upon which ponies ran in the horse-race. This device, leased from Burgess, later proved a striking feature of "Ben Hur."

In that popular melodrama, "Shadows of a Great City," two prisoners escape from Blackwell's Island and swim for the New York shore. The scenery moves while they remain fairly still; yet the illusion comprehends the complete progress, and would be excellent indeed but for some halts filled in with intercalary dialogue.

At the Metropolitan Opera House, New York, Lautenschläger installed four panorama drums at either side of the stage. At the Coliseum, in London, they keep the upper edge of the full-height moving panorama from flapping by threading it in and out between a series of small supplemental rollers in the flies.

Now and then one does see a stage sky that seems to go endlessly upward without the view being intercepted by those painfully disillusionizing "sky borders," as in "Prunella," at the Little Theater, of New York, in 1913, which used the same scene, with minor changes, throughout. There were borders here made of overhanging branches of trees; but that the sky was infinite was readily apparent.

The foliage border, used in a sort of glorified form in "Prunella," is a more elaborate and familiar affair than the sky strip. It generally shows interlacing branches, of which the wings are the trunks.

#### LEG AND HALF-LEG DROPS

Sometimes it is not advisable to have the trunks in the wings, so some of a given border is made to hang further down (at one or more points as desired), and tree trunks, built in the round, are placed on the floor of the stage so that their tops are hidden by the low portions. Such a border is known as a half-leg drop.

In the leg drop, the tree trunk is a continuation of the tree border itself, simply a cut-out strip of canvas with a short, heavy batten at bottom, and not round, or half round, as the other trunks are. Legs and half-legs are used in interiors sometimes, to show columns and so forth. The gigantic Egyptian columns in the setting designed by Jules Guerin for the production of "Antony and Cleopatra" at the New Theater that was, were made almost completely in the round, in sections that might be fitted one on top of another, and large enough to carry stagehands upward inside on ladders, to arrange lines and other fastenings.

#### GAUZES

It is a marvel to many people how the detached, or semi-detached, bits of canvas one sees on a foliage border, are held in place without sagging and showing themselves to be what they are instead of what they represent. This difficulty is met by the use of a coarse netting called scrim, that may be seen through, that covers the apparently open places, and upon which the cut-out sections are glued or sewn. Scrim, and a firmer, closer-woven material known as gauze (some varieties of which are opaque until lighted from the

rear), are used to suggest haze or distance by blurring objects behind.

Nothing, it seems, could have been finer in this respect, than the clearing of the mists by means of gauzes in Belasco's production of "The Darling of the Gods," New York, 1902. But delicate scenery of this order is very expensive, and soon wears out. In a production that went on the road a season or two ago, a new set of gauze drops had to be discarded as too worn for use at the end of six weeks' traveling.

### STOCK SETTINGS

Nearly every "house" formerly maintained a reserve supply of scenery. This usually consisted of a "street" drop, in one, a "woods" scene with wings and borders, for a full stage, a "bedroom" set, and a "fancy" or "parlor" set, including a center door fancy, all of these designed with intentional vagueness that they might be "faked" on occasion, for locality and period. But theaters in large cities do not encumber their stages with this extra material, mainly on account of amended fire laws, although here and there a vaudeville theater, or a "town hall," is found with the traditional complement.

In most centers of population, scenery may be obtained at short notice from the "bone-yards," or storage-houses for retired productions of varying ages, where rejuvenated old settings and new mountings of attractions that have failed to attract, are kept, and disposed of at surprisingly nominal rates. A typical instance is called to mind where a nursery set that cost some \$500 to build was sold for a tenth the price.

Curiously enough, store-houses that frequently amount to "bone-yards" when projected resurrection of stored materials by original owners never takes place, are often

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maintained by the transfer company; so even the most successful production has the undertaker ever on its trail. Regular producing managers, however, usually save their mountings of short-lived plays and use them, in part or altogether, in new arrangements and color schemes for subsequent attractions.



## CHAPTER XVII

### HOW SCENERY IS MADE

QUITE as individual as the way in which a scenic artist works is the manner in which he receives his commission. One producer may provide no more than an order such as that said to have been given by Granville Barker to Robert Jones during preparation of the American production of "A Man Who Married a Dumb Wife," for "a door, two windows, and a room;" another may virtually act out the entire play for him, as Belasco is said to have frequently done for his painter, Ernest F. Gros.

The fact is that the more an artist knows about a play, the more likely he is to provide a fitting complement of scenes; but it is a fact often lost sight of in the preparatory hurry and bustle so common in American theatricals. However, there is now a certain class of native producers, typified by Belasco and his customary six or seven months of preparation—his minute study of the vegetation, sand, dust, gravel, and so forth of the plains, with which to fill in the foreground of "The Girl of the Golden West"—who rehearse a play till it is ready, and put their workers under no undue restrictions as to information and time.

Ernest Albert, an artist of distinction; whose work has been familiar these many years on the American stage, is one who is usually in a position where he may insist on examining the full script of a play before touching his pencil, to determine, for instance, whether a window must be practical or not, to be looked or jumped through. More

often the artist sees merely a scenario, or hears merely an inflexible scheme of arrangement and even of color, that the manager has devised himself, or that the author has designated in a crude sketch with angles to represent walls, perhaps, open spaces for windows and doors, and small semi-circles for chairs and tables. The ideas are somewhat vague; but they are ideas, and that is what the artist is after.

#### THE AUTHOR AND THE SCENE

It is surprising that an author's conception of his own scene generally is so indefinite. Whereas the dramatists of two or three centuries gone were at pains to indicate locale in the body of their texts, as, for a random illustration, Shakespeare, in the opening speech of Act III of "Much Ado About Nothing," has Hero say:

"Whisper her ear, and tell her I and Ursula  
Walk in the orchard;"

the modern playwright is prone to leave such matters to a program and an ingenious but puzzled painter. The ingenuity of this painter is probably to blame for the carelessness of the playwright.

This is excepting those authors like Augustus Thomas, and particularly Haddon Chambers, who seems to do his writing of an act in the actual scene he has chosen for it. In "Passers-By" Chambers duplicated his old apartment at 14 Waverton Street, London, and, in his dramatization of "Tante," he reproduced for the last act the best room of "The Compleat Angler" at Marlow, a place where he had frequently put his pen to paper during progress of the work. In any event, true it is that, with scenery to express its own message, drama has become less "literary" and more economical in the use of words.

There is, too, another class of writers who have hazy



ROBERT E. JONES AT WORK.

Called the first American to follow the new movement in the European theatre.



*Illustrations Courtesy of "Vogue"*

SCENE FOR "A MAN WHO MARRIED A DUMB WIFE."

Designed by Robert E. Jones. His instructions were, "A door, two windows and a room."



conceptions of adjoining rooms offstage, and consequently bewilder the artist as to his backings. A by no means unusual instance came to hand within the past two or three years, in a melodrama where the author provided a cleverly contrived cabin of a yacht. Further room at back of the scene, was shut off into a compartment by sliding panels; and a variety of entrances through companionways, hatches, port holes, and what-not was provided; but the bow and stern were so indicated that the scene, like the mining tunnel described in Mark Twain's "Roughing It," must have hung over the side on a trestle. This same play had another setting, an interior in a city house, with a sequence of scenes on either side that would have required some two blocks for accommodation.

Knowing the adjoining places offstage aids the artist much. Particular care of Cyril Harcourt, in this regard, helped Mrs. O'Kane Conwell, who designed the bedroom setting of the second act of the American production of "A Pair of Silk Stockings," Winthrop Ames, 1915, to indicate the character of offstage places by symbols painted on the doors. The bathroom door has milady at her ablutions in a dainty tub; the boudoir was marked by a maid with puff and powder-box; the wardrobe by bandboxes, bonnets, and slippers, and the hall door showed milady complete for admiring inspection.

#### TECHNICAL RESEARCH

Having received, or frequently extracted, his instructions, the artist uses them as clues in seeking out his material. For this purpose, a library in his studio affords a veritable storehouse of matter in histories of architectural and decorative periods, volumes of art and handicraft criticism, personal first-hand sketches, and scrapbooks, the whole constantly augmented by further collection. Here

may be found full suggestions for scenes of any clime, character, or age of the world. Thus this monumental labor has been done, for the most part, once and for all. Still, with an elaborate "morgue" of this kind at his disposal, from which he could resurrect a wealth of detail at short notice, Ernest Albert spent six months studying out chiefly archæological phases of the scenes for "Ben-Hur." Incidentally, at the end of the time he remarked that he knew the exact height of every arch and gateway in Jerusalem.

#### SKETCHES AND MODELS

Guided largely by this conglomerate mass, the artist makes his sketch of the given setting, in water colors, on a flat surface, and submits it to the producer for criticism. In showing it, he has to remind those concerned that built-out perspectives, lighting, texture, and movement are lacking; that it merely is a general impression of the first three, and that it is offered mainly for accuracy of arrangement. Sketches like this may be made many times before satisfaction is expressed.

The model, which follows, is a miniature setting, complete in every detail as far as appearance is concerned, constructed of cardboard, wood, cloth, clay, and plaster as required, and painted usually in water colors, but sometimes drawn in pastel. In scale, it is a half inch to the foot or three centimeters to the meter, and conforms, as far as possible, to the theater in which it is to be presented. In Europe, "house" artists usually have scale models of their theaters in their ateliers, or printed plans of their stages with the various openings and sections indicated in detail. Criticism may direct certain parts to be more within view of the audience or may condemn the whole. Even this model is subject to much change.

## CARPENTER WORK

But, when the model has been approved, the painter draws up a careful plan from which the carpenter, at his shop, constructs to full scale—which ordinarily means 14 to 18 feet in height to varying width to 40 feet—the pieces, which are later to be delivered to the artist's studio for painting. Drops are provided merely with battens of necessary length, although these battens, when subjected to heavy strain, are made double, and scarfed and spliced together; but supporting frames have to be made for flats, and canvas stretched over them.

Joinery for flats is not elaborate, though light and substantial. Frames usually are made of seasoned white pine, mortised and tenoned, and clout-nailed together with corner blocks and "keystones." Each usually has two stiles, or vertical side pieces; two toggle-irons, or pairs of rods strained together by reverse threads, with nuts; two braces, and top and bottom rails. Doors and arches have flat, iron sills to keep them firmly in shape. All frames are provided with cleats, lash-lines, and so forth; and for ready identification, each is stenciled with abbreviated title of play, number of act, and of scene if the play is so divided, in which it is to be used.

Pieces in the round, like tree trunks, are usually made of hollow cylinders of light lath, or frames covered with wire netting, over which canvas is stretched and twisted. The tall green hedges which inclosed the garden in the American production of "Prunella," made by Winthrop Ames, were constructed of frames covered with wire, and spotted green velvet over that.

Flat pieces are designed to fold in book condition, with the painted surfaces inward, in case they have to stand out in the weather. Tarpaulins are depended on to protect

odd pieces. Also, full provision must be made for the ready transportation of the full scene, from one place to another.

This last-named fact seems to give little concern to producers abroad; but it must be constantly borne in mind in America, where the longer part of the life of any successful play is "on the road." When "Sumurûn," the Reinhardt production which Winthrop Ames brought to America, was set up in New York, the scenery was found to be much more substantial than most critics in front imagined. A staircase in particular, following the Reinhardt policy, which generally aims for an impression of solidity in scenes, was an amazingly heavy affair, and required much labor to be moved. And when this "wordless play with music," by Freidrich Freska, was taken to another city, it could not be transported in the usual manner, but required a railroad car such as is ordinarily used for automobiles, open at one end. The American carpenter makes all his pieces of a size that will go through a car door that measures five feet nine inches.

It must be confessed that this arbitrary restriction is a severe handicap at times, for folds and joinings are not easy to conceal, even with combined efforts of a number of craftsmen. But certain it is that everything on a stage that goes up must, in a sort of ridiculous conformation to Newton's law of gravitation, come down. So the carpenter plans and plans for simple construction.

One of the greatest aids to a carpenter in elaborate settings, is what is known as the "pin hinge," a pair of sort of modified staples, each driven in one of the two edges to be brought together, and held in place by a short, bent wire, slipped through both. Whole flights of stairs are made in this way, and may be taken apart with little trouble.

One kind of scenery called "aniline dye stuff," requiring no preliminary carpenter work at all, has made its ap-



pearance of recent years, notably in smaller vaudeville theaters. As its name implies, it is colored with aniline dyes. It has no frames, but is tacked over the regular scenery used by the house. An entire set may be carried in a single trunk.

### PATTERNS

While the carpenter is making his pieces, boys at the painter's studio are enlarging the painted detail of the model by means of squares, on large sheets of manila paper. No shading is put in, shadows and masses of color being merely outlined for proportions. These lines are then perforated throughout at intervals of about an inch. At which point the work must await the carpenter.

Delivery of the completed frames is the signal for men in the studio to prime the canvas by applying a solution of gelatinous material and usually whiting, which affords colors a substantial, creamy white ground. When this is dry, the manila-paper patterns are held against a given piece in desired positions, and the perforations gone over with a little cloth "pounce" bag filled with pulverized charcoal. This leaves the design in dotted lines on the canvas.

Straight lines, such as moldings, may be marked with a stretched string, chalked, and then snapped smartly against the surface. Sometimes the artist prefers to sketch the scene himself without all this preliminary care; so he stands before his canvas with a piece of charcoal on a long stick that reaches every part, and so indicates the various portions of the picture for the brush.

The first coat, which is merely a light filling in of the indicated masses of color, is usually entrusted to helpers. It would be absurd to tax the painter with moldings which he has already drawn in the model, and stenciling, of which there is not a little.

Pigments used are known as "distemper" colors. They are mixed with water—usually about a pound to a pint, although some colors require more water than others. Broader portions of the second coat are generally brushed in by the more experienced assistants; but the finishing touches are left to the artist himself.

### MECHANICS OF SCENE PAINTING

Scenery is ordinarily hung at full length in the studio, by the English method, while a movable bridge, supporting the worker and his materials, is moved up and down beside it. The Lee Lash Studios, of New York, are 70 feet in the clear for the hanging of large drops. Sometimes, particularly in smaller studios, drops are raised or lowered as required by a winch through a slit in the floor; while a third fashion, common to France and Italy, and likely to be adopted temporarily anywhere, is to put the piece flat on the floor, and paint it with long-handled brushes, by walking over its surface.

This method was employed to color what was probably the largest canvas ever made for a stage, the cyclorama for the quondam New Theater, New York, which measured 117 by 200 feet, and was painted by a veritable host of men at the Twelfth Regiment Armory in the same city. It was designed for permanent use in the theater, to be raised and lowered just in front of the back wall, to give any effect of sky desired.

### THE STUDIO STAFF

A large studio frequently employs as many as twenty men, whose salaries range from \$10 to \$100 or more, depending upon the capacities in which they serve—and there are artists, assistants, "liners," paint boys, and general helpers. Of course, the full staff is maintained only during

the "rush" season, which, in America, runs from about May to January of each year, and then frequently keeps the men working in double shifts, day and night. Going at such tension, about five large sets may be evolved in something over a week. Longer time must be taken with more elaborate subject matter, interiors, which require a deal of architectural detail, taking ordinarily about two weeks each, and an exterior, which is general in character, about one week.

### COLOR CHANGES

Fireproofing, which is applied to scenery from the back after painting is completed, has a chemical effect harmful to colors, much as a pencil or charcoal drawing is affected by fixatif. Recent experiments to do the fireproofing before applying the paint, which is made fireproof in itself, promise to overcome the difficulty.

In addition to bearing this matter in mind, the painter must anticipate changes which necessarily take place when the setting is transferred from his studio to the stage. In the first place, lighting always grays down the values, just as reproduction does an illustrator's work, so colors like yellow must be made more positive to counteract. Yet, strong blues must be avoided, for they become blackish, while vivid greens become coarse. All this is corrected, as far as possible, for a spectator's viewpoint that is some distance away—about a diagonal and a half of the scene, which is said to be the scientific position for viewing any picture.

It can be no easy matter in painting, to carry in mind the same general tone which must pervade all parts of the set. The setting, as pointed out by Homer F. Emens, the American artist, may at times run to forty pieces; and none of these may rightly be out of key.

Then all joinings must be concealed as far as possible, particularly those of real pieces with the painted perspective. Josef Urban, the Viennese artist, was severely criticised concerning a setting for "Twelfth Night," in which Phyllis Neilson-Terry appeared at the Liberty Theater, New York, in 1914, for the obvious juxtaposition of a genuine box tree and a painted arbor which was supposed to branch from the same trunk.

Josef Urban, however, is truly a great artist of the theater. He was at first an interior decorator and all-around artist like our own Jules Guerin. He decorated and furnished the Abdin Palace for the Khedive of Egypt; won an international prize for designing a bridge across the Neva at Petrograd, and designed the rooms for Austrian art at the St. Louis World's Fair in 1904.

#### ARTISTS AS COLLABORATORS

When Ernest Albert told me, in an interview in 1913, that an artist's function does not cease until scenery is all in place, lighting arrangements—where an unexpected orange light on violet may give everything the appearance of a dirty brown—are complete, and groupings are fixed, he repeated a plausible argument for that modern movement which would have the painter attend to all of these save the last. Some, Gordon Craig first among the number, would have him do that, too, although I am becoming convinced that Craig's real purpose is, to use his own words, "to have a man who knows the ropes but no longer handles them." Certainly, at this point in a production, where all minds concerned are in active collaboration to produce a desired harmonious effect, it seems only right that the painter should have a voice about his special art.

Truly the scene painter has little but financial encouragement to lavish genius upon a stage setting. Ernest Albert

devoted some of the best that was in him to the mounting of "Herod," and the production went promptly to the storehouse as another failure; the beautiful colorings of Urban in Sheldon's "The Garden of Paradise" enjoyed but a transitory public view, although the work brought him to prominence as never before.

The credit given the artist generally appears with that meted out to wig and boot makers in the program; and with this public acknowledgment of his services he must be content. In many cases, however, this is where his credit belongs, for what August Wilhelm Schlegel said in his "Lectures" in 1808, remains true: "Most scene painters owe their success to the spectator's ignorance of the art of design."

## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE PICTURE FRAME

FROM time to time in the past thirty years or more, the stage picture has emerged upon an extended apron from the frame in which it had been set with so much difficulty. Upon this apron actors came forward in much the old manner, and discussed their affairs.

At first it seemed like the mere overlapping of tradition, and so excited comparatively little comment; but, with the more recent appearance of the platform stage in America in the 1914 revivals by Margaret Anglin, in the revivals by Annie Russell—who used work of Grace Olmsted Clarke, said to be the only woman who literally painted scenery in addition to designing it—and, more particularly, in the 1915 productions of Granville Barker in New York, it was hailed as a distinct step forward in the “new art” of the stage.

In all likelihood, its purpose now and then has been new; but, fundamentally, it seems but a revival—or, to admit of two minds both innocently running in the same channel—a re-creation of so-called “alternate” stages known to Shakespeare. When an Elizabethan dramatist wanted to change his setting, which in his case consisted of just a few essential properties, he could save delay by revealing it behind the drawn traverses, and confining the second part of his action to the inner stage. His next change might be to close the traverses and bring his players to the fore again. Thus, it was a method of quick shifting that may or

may not have generally obtained then, but which has survived as a simple expedient more elaborately illustrated in revolving drop, sliding, and wagon stages.

This fact was attested a full season before Barker invaded New York, by Livingston Platt, an American artist, who was discussing his use of the forestage in Margaret Anglin's then current Shakespearean revivals in the metropolis. Its greatest advantage, he said, was the elimination of waits; and he pointed out that the longest delay in the Anglin productions was thus fifty-three seconds, and the shortest ten. And Mr. Platt spoke from a varied experience gained at the Royal Opera House at Bruges, and the Toy and Castle Square Theaters in Boston, while he remarked the Elizabethan derivation of this device, which he had employed a considerable time before in the New England city.

Indeed, use of the alternate stages formed by platform and the space beyond the curtain, made it possible to do justice to Shakespeare, for frequent changes of scene in his works, readily made in his day when so much was left to the imagination, have taken so much time in elaborate revivals, that the text of his plays has necessitated cutting to conclude them in time for commuters' trains.

#### WAGNER'S "MYSTERIOUS FOREGROUND"

Leaving this application of the forestage temporarily aside, one recalls the Festspielhaus which was erected for Richard Wagner at Bayreuth, Bavaria, in 1876, under the "master's" direction, with funds secured by floating of bonds and broadcast formation of Wagner societies. On the stage of this famous house, which was designed by Gustav Semper, was what Wagner called the "mysterious foreground," a front proscenium in addition to the regular frame, intended to separate the stage from the audience,

give the necessary effect of distance, and add mystery to the presentation.

But for the fact that Goethe, under influence of Elizabethan tradition, had previously, in 1829, planned a similar forestage for his Weimar Theater, designed by the architect Schenkel, as permanent side curtains at the front, one might take this for an outgrowth of the two sloping platforms between which Wagner's orchestra played, and which cast the sound forward toward the stage for full support of the voices.

Here, then, is another use of the forestage, making it not primarily for change, not essentially for actors, but to remove the picture far enough for the spectator to get a proper perspective—almost like a frank attempt to approximate that scientific manner of looking at a picture a diagonal and a half away.

But as long as there are producers who must utilize every nook and cranny of their houses for either patrons or literal play—and these business men have sound justification—and as long as there are actors striving to get as close to their public as possible—and physical nearness is a quantity to most of them—the forestage will not remain untenanted.

#### INTIMACY

In use for action, it gains something in coming down a couple of steps to a ground below the stage level; and this is found in Europe in one of the theaters of Max Reinhardt, who uses it to further his theory of intimacy, and in America in the 1915 productions of Barker. One of its advantages was particularly evident in Barker's interpretation of "A Midsummer Night's Dream," where the nobles at the "play within the play" occupied the foreground, and the action could readily be seen over their heads. But, after



all, people could see over their heads when the traditional platform was erected on the stage proper to show the same.

### THE "FOURTH WALL"

Use of the forestage for "intimacy" immediately resurrects the old question of the "fourth wall." In a unique "review," to be mentioned in some detail later, Royal Cortissoz, the eminent critic, expressed a happy conception of the "fourth wall," which seemed absolutely new. It ran to the effect that instead of the fourth wall being located at the curtain line, as an imaginary boundary for the scene, the stage scene itself, regarded in all its length and breadth and thickness, is the fourth wall *of the auditorium*.

This is amplified in a much earlier expression of Percy Fitzgerald's, in his interesting collection of papers entitled "The World Behind the Scenes." "Spectators have a kind of power of being present in a sort of supernatural way, and are, as it were, in company with the figures," he says in his opposition to the familiar geometrical way of looking at the matter. "The scenery is for them but an indication, as some background is necessary for a statue, or as we look from a window on a landscape. We are in the room, listening and looking on, but in no particularly defined locality."

### A REINHARDT METHOD

One may easily develop this theory of intimacy and consequent desire for everything plastic or "in the round" into an unlimited encroachment upon the auditorium—as Reinhardt is sometimes doing, notably in "The Miracle," in his effort to create an emotional unity—with no intervening curtains, proscenium arch removed, or disguised, to destroy all idea of division, a background of solid structures, with massive corners and angles for greater verisi-

militude, that may clutter up the stage as much as need be because his players have, on the Greek principle, a space in the amphitheater itself with spectators sitting around, and free entrances and exits.

Abroad, the circus is frequently mentioned in the same breath with Reinhardt; so why may not Americans think, by way of illustration, of their own Col. William F. Cody, "Buffalo Bill," who has long come, with the other members of his "Wild West Show," through a proscenium framing an elaborate stage picture, into an arena, say of Madison Square Garden, New York, about which sit a multitude of people, ranged in tiers?

The Greek orchestra has been named, antedating the Italian and English court masques which used the entire floors of their halls as well as their stages. Developing the intimacy idea this far seems to reduce the stage scene to a negligible quantity—to all intents and purposes a "two-dimension" stage; and when it gets to that it has fallen far from its high estate.

#### FORESTAGE ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES

The three great values of the forestage thus appear to be, first, a facility for quick change; second, a removal of the picture to a nice distance from the eye, and, finally, an intimacy for those scenes enacted directly upon it. The two last-named advantages can never come together; and, as for the greater part, only nondescript scenes that are generally of broad character are performed on this conventional front, it seems in most cases like a waste of good space, and no real advantage over the ordinary arrangement.

The ordinary way offers a compromise between intimacy and aloofness; and it really has a modified forestage marked off by tormenters and teaser. If the aloofness here seems a

negligible quantity, one surely may find artists—the same who, to borrow a celebrated expression of Gordon Craig's, "on a paper but two inches square can make a line which seems to tower miles in the air"—to decorate the familiar narrow proscenium frame, without widening it, with an effect of distance.

It appears that the proscenium arch may be too far removed from the front of the stage, or too ill-defined. When Charles Dillingham assumed control of the New York Hippodrome in 1915, he realized that the existing arch which was located almost at the extreme back of the stage, leaving the stage floor itself projecting in a vast semi-circle out into the audience, made the stage picture somewhat far off from the spectator, while the players, necessarily stepping out of the picture, tended to destroy the illusion. So a false proscenium arch was built much further front; and it was surprising how much the intimacy was increased, while they were enabled to create an illusion of great depth by building scenery at the sides, far out on the stage.

Where the emotion of a scene is broad enough to stand by itself without the slightest dependence upon locality—like the badinage of Launcelot Gobbo and his father in "The Merchant of Venice"—the conventional forestage, which is confessedly no-place-in-particular, becomes a convenient ground; but it may be questioned whether or not it would lose if indicated, by decoration or otherwise, as a pertinent place. In other words, it might be quite as far front, before the other scenes, as the neutral place, and still use scenery.

Yet, in maintaining the neutrality of the ground as an intermediate strip between the world of Reality and Make-Believe, there may be times when the significance of the play comes closer home in bringing the characters forward. Does not Peter Pan frankly say to the audience, in the

midst of events, "You *do* believe in fairies, don't you?" But it would seem that this coming away from a play while still trying to remain in it, is not always the right thing.

It may do for "Peter Pan" and "Sumurûn" and other fanciful compositions where everyone is only pretending anyway, but for the grim dramas of Ibsen it would be a mockery. I want to note here the curious but striking observation made by Huntly Carter in his valuable work, "The Theater of Max Reinhardt," that "intimacy resides in high-spirited, not low-spirited, drama."

In "Sumurûn," the production made first by Reinhardt in Europe, and then imported to America by Winthrop Ames, the idea that all the characters were only pretending their bloody tale, was emphasized (to prevent the audience taking it too seriously) by using a pathway from the audience to the stage, upon which the fantastic figures made their first entrances. This pathway was welcomed as an innovation in the theater; but it really was an adaptation of a convention of the old Chinese theater, where the audience is even more frankly asked to pretend. The pathway there is used to indicate that characters come from a distance. All through "Sumurûn," the audience, when likely to become appalled at the series of gruesome murders, is reminded that the characters are but puppets, and not to take them too seriously, by the dreamland scenery, the procession of shadows, and when the hunchback, alone among the litter of bodies, at the very end, motions the curtain down.

#### THE TRUE PRINCIPLE

Here, then, is what appears the true principle in all this shifting back and forth over the curtain-line: There are plays where a forestage is pertinent and plays where it is not; and these misconceptions that would keep a forestage

as conventional ground, in acting use, throughout a repertory of plays ranging from imagery to stark realism, are not to be followed.

It is true that Barker, at Wallack's Theater, New York, retained in "The Doctor's Dilemma" the conventional front he had used so tellingly in "Androcles and the Lion;" but the reason merely was that to remove it when he wanted it for coming productions, would have been unnecessary expense and would have kept the theater dark for several nights. As partial proof that he had no other reason was the fact that he kept the action of the first-named play entirely within the frame, even folding in a rug that projected on the platform in a "V-shaped" set. It is true he thus set his picture back at nice distance from the eye, but the acoustical improvement without the apron, would have been compensation to many for its loss.

#### SPECIAL PROSCENIUMS

In the scenes designed by Josef Urban for the Boston Opera, particularly in "The Tales of Hoffman"—virtually the first basis for American judgment of his work—is observed a tendency to make this neutral ground a temporary thing depending on the attraction. He designs a new one for each piece. Urban's proscenium thus has something of the character of the play, and is an expedient a trifle less artificial than that of more than one contemporary. An example of the Urban inner arch—though not nearly so pronounced in kind as that for the opera—was shown in the production of "Twelfth Night" for Phyllis Neilson-Terry in New York in 1914.

A curious inversion of tradition occurred at the time, when critics, particularly Lawrence Reamer, of the *Sun*, noted the fact that action on the forestage was inadequately lighted, and one could not see the faces of those who came

front, not even the features of that lady who was the main attraction of the reviewers' evening. It was largely on account of bad lighting that the platform stage was retained for so long; and here the bad lighting was advanced as a reason for abolishing it.

Kenneth Macgowan, dramatic editor of the Philadelphia *Evening Ledger*, writing in the *Century Magazine* in 1914, describes the special Urban proscenium for "The Tales of Hoffman" as an unobtrusive gray, with square doorways in them; for "Don Giovanni," "a brighter gray-green, with doorways curved to Saracenic arches of Spain; and through these doors came the people of the operas."

## CHAPTER XIX

### THE STAGE PICTURE

WITH all this harping on the old problem of the stage picture—which has not been without its beneficent effect—have come a few true variations on the leit motif. One of these developed in Germany within the decade, at the Künstlertheater at Munich.

Its director, Georg Fuchs, based his experiment on the premise that the third dimension in a stage scene is an impossibility. Therefore he gave it up entirely, and confined his settings to the twin dimensions, length and breadth. The result was, as the director desired, that the actor, who is the mouthpiece and living symbol of the actual play, was kept constantly in the foreground for emphasis of voice and gesture, by a perfectly flat scene, against which he was thrown in virtual silhouette. This "relief" stage, as it is called, has been illustrated at the Little Theater, Chicago, in a production entitled "The Sermon on the Mount." Maurice Browne, a young Englishman who began directing the destinies of the Little Theater in that city in 1912, has been the means of bringing a number of the "newer" stage principles to this country.

While the much-talked-of scenery of Léon Bakst usually, if not invariably, is designed for a full-dimension stage, his work is lacking in plastic features. The quay scene in "La Pisanelle," has ships, cordage, intended cargoes, and all, painted with gorgeous effect in flat on the back

drop; and other examples of his work show human figures painted in as well. The harem scene in "Scheherazade," which first won him fame, is almost all on a single drop.

In 1899, considerably earlier than the Fuchs innovation, Adolphe Appia, a Frenchman, writing in an alien tongue and an alien country, curiously enough, published a series of designs in a book called "Opera and Stage Mounting" ("Die Musik und die Inszenierung"), chiefly to reform the backgrounds of Wagner operas previously postulated by the "master's" elaborate productions at Bayreuth. This volume anticipated the doctrine of Fuchs, that the actor must be the all-important factor in a production, but accepted the principle which had been in universal practice, that, to all intents and purposes, the stage is a three-dimension space, and should receive emphasis of its plastic qualities. This Appia proposed to give in the way of "atmosphere," by means of dextrous lighting of simple scenery. In brief, it essentially was a flat scene *to be given a plastic appearance*.

This seems in accord with the view of Sir Hubert von Herkomer, the celebrated English artist, who has done much experimenting with lights in his private theater at Bushey. He believes in visual illusion. "Painting and modeling," he says, "should be no more obvious than make-up." Wagner, too, pointed out, in his dramatic writings, that mental deception is preferable to physical deception in stage mechanism. "Appia's suggestion that the lights should increase and diminish, rise and fall, with the emotion of the scene," says C. Ricketts, writing in the *Fortnightly Review* in 1912, "and that shadow should blot out Tristan when he falls in imagined death, might be effective if the means are not too obtrusive. Many of Appia's effects are finely imagined, the luminous rock in 'Rheingold,' the drifting shadows in 'The Walkure,' the





Third Act setting of "Children of Earth" without stage lighting.



*Photos, Courtesy of Winthrop Ames*

The same setting with stage lights on.

THE VALUE OF STAGE LIGHTING.



incandescent pillar in 'Manfred;' others are merely ingenious, such as a shadow cast by a trellis in the moonlight in the second act of 'Carmen.'" Many of Appia's designs are reproduced in the closing pages of his book. They show not only the lighting of one part of a scene, but different stages of lighting of the same scene. They are well worth examination. I wish we could have an adequate translation of the book into English.

An older device was taken down from the shelf and dusted when Karl Hagemann, of Mannheim, Germany, and now of the Deutsches Schauspielhaus at Hamburg, lately recreated in effect the "relievos" or "practicables" mentioned by Algarotti in 1767, and won for his experiment the appellation of "plastic" stage. Hagemann made his entire scene in relief, ranging the pieces before a semi-circular cloth sky drop which extended around from one side of the proscenium arch to the other. Incidentally, he employed a sort of conventional front for his plays, in the shape of two great "built" columns, running up into the flies on either side of the stage. The stage was made smaller on occasion, by lowering black draperies before the rear pair.

#### PERMANENT SCENES CHANGED BY DECORATION

Ponderousness of the properties employed by Hagemann militated against their extended use when the action required shifting. Still, he managed to change his scene now and then by using a revolving stage. But he became more and more sparing in his decoration, indicating new scenes, as in his production of "Hamlet," by hanging pictures and draperies on the conventional front.

Josef Urban produced a development of the permanent scene changed by decoration alone, at the Boston Opera House, everything being changed around a "skeleton" set.

In Hagemann's "Faust," the church scene consisted of but two columns, draperies, and tall candlesticks bearing lights. In the witches' scene in "Macbeth," there were merely dark, indistinguishable draperies, and a caldron from which came a weird light on the faces of the closely grouped hags; and, incidentally, the two highest notes of an organ were played a blood-curdling pianissimo throughout.

Hagemann's perfected plan is therefore not one of absolute realism, but merely an extreme example of a three-dimension stage, having length, breadth, and thickness. In its essentials, it follows out that principle spoken of so long ago, iterated by Charles Lamb in "Of the Imaginative Faculty in the Production of Modern Art," and reiterated by Percy Fitzgerald in "The World Behind the Scenes," 1881.

"When Jennie Deans found herself at the Palace," says Fitzgerald, in his statement of advantage of suggestion over reproduction in scenery, "there was not before her eyes a sort of upholsterer's inventory of rich furniture and such details of royal decoration, but simply the idea of magnificence and general impression of costly things."

#### FADDISTS

This idea of suggestion in stage settings has become even more literal than Hagemann's interpretation of the "plastic" stage. "One tree," says E. H. Sothern, as mock prophet of the "New Movement" in the *Chicago Record-Herald*, late in 1912, "with a limelight on it, solitary on a dark stage, will, perhaps, after the Japanese fashion, suggest a forest; one plate a banquet; one swallow a summer," adding that the chief aim in such symbolism seems to be to achieve its end by being "as obscure as possible." And bearing in mind the great expense of the

usual production, he thinks that, on the whole, such economical conditions will be welcome.

Every one may not agree when he remarks the negligible influence of such radical departures in saying "Men and women who followed in the steps of Oscar Wilde, and actually walked the streets of London with lilies and sunflowers in their hands, who perambulated in knee-breeches and 'greenery-yallery' frocks, did, in the end, affect the color of wall-paper." For, after all, the "Impressionist" school—which is not new, either—made substantial changes in art, bringing about a compromise between the existing rut and the newer extreme. The far-removed experiments of Craig, Fuchs, Hagemann, and the rest, are likely to produce a reaction that will strike a happier and saner medium between their efforts and a deplorable tendency in another direction.

Leaving the correctness of two or three-dimension settings as an issue to be debated for a long time to come—although the present tendency is truly toward the latter—the "function" of the scene is approached as another angle. And one thing here seems to find a place in common agreement: that the scene is primarily a background to the action.

Therefore, there early appears a "school" to hang all settings as simple, unobtrusive curtains. Jozsa Savits's new Shakespearean stage at the Court Theater in Munich in the late nineteenth century, was one of the first of these, being designed to eliminate distractions that might come through appeal to the eye. The plan has since been followed, in variously modified forms, for productions in general, not only abroad, but on this side of the water.

## GORDON CRAIG'S SCREENS

An advance from this "return" to simplicity, which is supposed to provide the worker with a dispassionate viewpoint, is the system of screens devised by Gordon Craig, put into concrete form by Constantin Stanislavsky at the Art Theater, Moscow, in the Craig version of "Hamlet," 1910, and shown in reduced, rudimentary form in a number of productions by Maurice Browne at the Chicago Little Theater. Indeed, Craig's earlier drawings—and he studied draftsmanship for the specific purpose of making these—provided great curtains for almost everything.

In the Moscow "Hamlet," occupying three years of preparation, which Craig publicly wished had been twenty, the scenes were shown as successive arrangements of a few curtains with some most particular folds, a gray, hinged screen, devoid of decoration, rising to the full height of the proscenium arch, a blue background glimpsed now and then, and some supplementary cubes, squares, and cylinders. The masses of shadow that Mr. Craig loves so well to play with, were shown contrasted in the deep recesses of the partially folded screen, with high-lights projected by a number of flood lamps. Where possible, but a single ray of light was employed, in conformation with Craig's plea for simplicity.

Conservative reviewers pronounced it all monotonous in line and mass (a radical verdict at that); and, of course, others were wildly enthusiastic and disseminated the Craig propaganda to the four corners of the earth. Certainly the production has had its theatrical influence.

Even the skeptics confessed that one really could tell the locality intended in each scene. Whether this recognition came from textual earmarks or not, one cannot say.

However, Louis Calvert—himself a practical stage director with some advances to his credit—lost all patience, and in the *London Era* in 1912, declared that “Mr. Craig’s scheme has nothing to do with the art of acting at all; and what I wish this admirable designer would do is to establish his own theatrical art quite separately, and allow actors and the current art of the drama to go on in their own historic fashion.”

Indeed, it does seem that Craig is a bit hypnotized by beauty for its own sake, a view sustained by the story recently told by St. John Irvine, the distinguished English critic. Craig was privately showing a model for a scene in the room of William Butler Yeats, Irish poet and dramatist. “What a pity,” exclaimed Craig at last in rapt admiration of the lighting, “we can’t abolish the seats from the theater so the audience can move about and see my shadows!”

Browne’s foremost example of Craig in Chicago appears to have been more Browne than the gifted son of Ellen Terry, for he aimed to produce a tincture of Craig and rather more radical Chinese simplicity of line and color. The bill was a farcical comedy entitled “*Delphine Declines*,” by Oren E. Taft, a sort of play that seemed ill-adapted to “new” mountings. An embankment scene, overlooking a river at night, was indicated by a fairly low screen covered with ordinary undyed sacking, backed by a tightly stretched dark blue curtain—a version of Craig’s celebrated plain blue background—upon which was cast a slight red light from below. The effect was carried out in decoration and costumes. Two tables and four chairs, of absolutely simple design, sufficed for four persons moving about, the characters costumed in black and white save one, who had her black dress relieved by a red flower.

Martin Harvey, the English producer, whose work of

recent years has been seen in Canada as well as in England, even expressed a belief, in a London interview in 1913, that there will come a time when stage backgrounds will be quite as vague and shadowy as those to be seen in paintings by the old masters. "I am convinced," he said, "that just in this way, producers can well afford to leave a large amount to the imagination of the audience, who may be trusted to fill in the gaps for themselves." Harvey has been influenced by many leaders in the new movement, particularly by Reinhardt, in whose London production of "Oedipus" he appeared, and with whom he collaborated in producing a version of "The Taming of the Shrew."

#### BARKER'S "DECORATIVE" SCENERY

Along in 1914 Granville Barker—by his own statement largely guided by Craig—made his London production of "A Midsummer Night's Dream," which was subsequently brought to New York. In response to the vast amount of criticism to which he was subjected—an experience duplicated in the American metropolis—he stated that he simply would not have "realistic" scenery.

"For one thing," he said, "it is violently at odds with everything in the plays themselves, and for another it is never realistic. In the second place, I do not care to go in for an exact reproduction of the Elizabethan stage. Historical accuracy, which is its sole virtue, is wasted on a present-day audience. And so we have come to adopt a conventional decorative background, one that will reflect light and suggest space; and to this we have added, where necessary, something which, while formal and decorative, will suggest whatever of the garden green or of the out-of-doors is needed."

This decorative background, contrived by Norman Wilkinson, was something startling in its curious green mound





*Courtesy of "Vogue"*

GRANVILLE BARKER'S SCENE FOR "TWELFTH NIGHT" IN LONDON.

"The trouble with 'realistic' scenery," he says, "is that it is never realistic." Among the players are Henry Ainley, Leah Bateman, Arthur Whitsby, Mr. Nicholson, and Leon Quatremaine.



constantly used to show out-of-doors, conventionalized trees, which resembled the old-fashioned tiers of comports employed to sustain quantities of fruit on holiday tables, and unwieldy looking white gauze canopy with entwined electric lights and colored glass balls, for Titania.

The whole was arranged for ready change, on "alternate" Elizabethan front, middle, and rear stages—only, unlike the Elizabethan stage, a curtain was used between front and middle sections.

As Huntly Carter suggests in an appendix to his illuminating and authoritative book, "The Theater of Max Reinhardt," Mr. Barker, wanting neither empty stage nor customary scenery, strikes a compromise in a sort of *décolleté* stage—a decorated screen to hide the stage walls. Nay, rather mainly to hide the *side* walls, for Mr. Barker used a whitewashed back wall as part of his scene. One is informed by divers mediums through which he conveys his views to a gravely attentive public, that he would do away with scenery altogether, only that he fears to shock audiences accustomed to some sort of pictorial background.

Truly, most scenery for several centuries, has been devised, partly at least, to gain a simple end that frequently has been lost sight of in scenic estimate—to hide the secret regions of the stage. This accomplished, much scenery has stopped there. In all events, the necessity of hiding the walls seems tacitly admitted everywhere and at all times. Can it be that Mr. Barker, who has produced Sophocles, derived his idea of a decorative background that is more or less permanent, from the ancient theater? Or is that making the distinguished gentleman too much of an archaeological product?

Barker's productions seem to have evolved another platitude—that the now common desire to abolish scenery is

inspired by the inadequacy of present devices to produce illusion. Specifically, his decorative background may be construed hereby into an expression of weakness, a feeling that we haven't the means to do it rightly, so why try? Accept instead something that appears to be no more than what it is.

## CHAPTER XX

### FUNCTION OF THE SETTING

IN "A Study of the Drama," by Professor Brander Matthews, an entire chapter is devoted to traditions and conventions of theater and drama; and in it is what appears to be conclusive demonstration that the playgoer who refuses to accept any convention cannot consistently be a playgoer at all. For instance, a convention that appears even in works of "advanced" dramatists is having characters in a play localized in Italy, perhaps, conversing in an alien tongue—say French.

It is because people have been willing to accept conventions, to be dispensed with when possible to get along without them, that drama has endured throughout many vicissitudes. It was because Count Leo Tolstoi declined to accept conventions of the opera, such as the fact that its people sing instead of talk, remarks Professor Matthews, that he found nothing but disillusionment in a contemporary production of "The Ring of the Niebelungen" at the Moscow Imperial Theater, regarded by most others as an artistic event.

"In a wood-and-papier-maché cavern, the first act of the second day," said the Count, betraying himself at once, "an artificially bewigged and bewiskered singer swings, with the thin, white hands of a loafer, an absurd sledgehammer above a fantastic anvil, making unseemly grimaces while he sings incomprehensible words; another actor, dressed like a bear, walks about on all fours, and finally

Wotan, King of the Valhalla gods, who is no bigger than an average-sized man, struts about also rigged out in wigs, and sings to his comrades what is actually meant for the public to hear." And so on wrote the irritated Count through a long protest that seemed less against the use of scenery and stage decoration in general, than in opposition to its inadequacy.

#### FROM THE PICTORIAL VIEWPOINT

It is Royal Cortissoz who, invited by Granville Barker to consider his New York productions, particularly of "A Midsummer Night's Dream," from "a purely pictorial point of view," defined, in the *Tribune* of February 22, 1915, not merely the position of Mr. Barker, but also the seeming fallacy of most leaders in the "new" scenic movement. In the work of Norman Wilkinson, who designed the scenes under direction of Mr. Barker, Mr. Cortissoz finds "a detachment from the fundamental conditions of the stage, a detachment shared by more than one member of the newer school of dramatic decorators.

"In the criticism of art, questions of fitness are constantly to the fore. Is the easel picture in scale? Is the mural painting part and parcel of the wall in which it is embedded? Does the façade of a building exactly express the inner organic purpose of the structure? It is equally pertinent to ask if the stage picture is in harmony with the genius of the theater. Is it adjusted so perfectly to the spoken word and the appropriate action that the eye and ear register a single sensation?

"Above all, does it make an inevitable fourth wall to the darkened house, its lights exposing another world as the latter is exposed by an open window? To receive the ideal impression of such a picture, the beholder should use his imagination; he must give the stage director his due 'poetic

license; ' must meet him half way." The critic continues that the producer is called upon to strike a perfect balance between two issues that are, indeed, interdependent: "to beguile the spectator with his picture as a picture and yet preserve the dramatic illusion, all life and atmosphere, which is what the spectator is there for."

The setting designed by Robert Jones for "A Man Who Married a Dumb Wife," was the only one found entirely satisfactory from the pictorial standpoint. "Here the idea of pictorial treatment of stage things might easily enough be regarded as conclusive," he said. "The scene being laid in a street, with the action going forward therein, or in a house whose windows look down upon it, it is legitimate for us to be shown it 'in the flat,' so to say. The matter of atmosphere, which goes with depth, is quite reasonably excluded. To observe the actors as so many figures in a painting or a print, seems the most natural thing in the world."

#### ACCURACY

Imposed upon the scene, after it has fulfilled its function of being a background, is the obligation of accuracy. It must clearly visualize the place and period in which the action is situated, leaving out superfluous details as in any work of art, but still having enough to lend interest to the whole.

"Characters are formed for their association with the actual topography," says W. T. Price, discussing scenery in his "Philosophy of Dramatic Principle and Method," "modified by the architecture and many things involving habits and point of view of life. The mountaineer could not well do without his altitudes and perspectives. The cotton field is the conventional expression of Southern life; and, in short, many actions could take place in but one lo-

cality, and certain characters and modes of thought are found there only."

Desire to establish place led to a pretty device, seen in Belasco's production of "The Darling of the Gods," 1902, where the first thing disclosed to view was a front drop showing a picture, in which had been incorporated into a pleasing whole, the essential features of a Japanese landscape. Presently this faded out—it was a gauze, lighted from behind—into the first setting of the play itself. It would be hypercritical to say much about the ugly opaque batten on the gauze drop, which marred the illusion as it was drawn up out of sight.

To obviate this evil one thinks, parenthetically, of heavy glass weights to keep the gauze in shape and yet be transparent, or a light cast on the batten alone to keep it from showing black. Better still, why not keep them straight by having weighted wires running through openings in the stage, attached to the lower edge? They would not interfere with the actors, and certainly not with the view. But pardon me; my parenthesis threatens to become a digression.

Benjamin Chapin used a device in the vaudeville adaptation of his play "Lincoln," where the gauze at opening showed the general exterior of the White House, with its lawns and foliage, just before the interior which followed, gradually came into view. It appeared even before that in vaudeville in a nautical sketch of the singing partners, MacKenzie and Shannon, showing the deck of a yacht before the cabin. A still more ingenious plan was devised—although not put into practise—by Winthrop Ames for his production of the prize play, "Children of Earth," 1915. His program was to show a frontispiece—actually designed by Franklin Booth—a country road leading to the village in the valley beyond, where the action was set. The symbols were forceful and all in the best of taste.



There are other angles of accuracy, too, illustrated in the scene of the Governor's room at the Albany Capitol, in the Fiske production of "The High Road," in which Mrs. Fiske appeared at the Hudson Theater, New York, in 1913. This scene was shown as part of the exposition to the modern action which began in a subsequent act. Therefore, some of the portraits of governors on the walls were not given as in the real room, because several terms had passed before the coming of the scene where the present day began. Thus, the exposition was quite literally in the past.

Tradition frequently dictates its own variety of accuracy in a scene. That is why Appia tried to combat the traditional productions of the Wagner operas. It was to break away from the hide-bound prescription that the English artist, Hugo Rumbold, completing scenery and costumes for William Faversham's projected "Romeo and Juliet," showed a setting in which the famous balcony was dispensed with. Mr. Rumbold argued that the rope ladder was superfluous in the old arrangement, which came merely from the physical state of affairs on the Elizabethan stage; so he had the lovesick maiden stand, instead, in an arched window some fifteen feet up in the pink wall of a Veronese villa, the whole situated in a moonlit garden of blue and purple cypresses.

#### DISTRACTIONS

Novelty of scene is desirable as unusual viewpoint is needed in the play itself, and for much the same reason, although it must not distract at wrong moments. Therefore clocks used in settings are usually made small and dark, or turned at angles so the audience is not constantly inquiring the time. It is no advantage to make a distracting note obscure in character, like the bold motto over the fireplace in "The Talker," with its quaint un-

familiar lettering, for the spectator automatically reverts his attention to it time and time again, to puzzle it out.

Frederic Thompson had installed, at great expense, a wonderful effect of moving shadows of leaves on the parsonage lawn in "Polly of the Circus;" but he had to relinquish it because people would nudge each other to remark it. The gentle swaying of the boughs in the American production of "Prunella" came perilously near distracting, only the producer, Winthrop Ames, had them moved just at lulls in the action. The sense of sight is ever quicker than the sense of hearing; even a dangling sash has been known to distract playgoers' attention from more important things.

It is because it is well to have novelty that will not distract, that the practice of nineteenth century managers, whereby no one entered upon a scene after the curtain rose until every detail of the setting had been observed by the audience, is commended. The setting thus is comprehended once and for all; and further reference to detail is casual. David Belasco has been particularly apt in combining this space of time with that necessary to get belated playgoers seated, and at the same time having actors on the stage occupied with some simple "business."

His production of "Marie-Odile" in 1915, is a convenient illustration. It was some time after the curtain rose, before the heroine, who was discovered dusting the convent table, chairs, floor, and so forth, or any other character, uttered an *intelligible* word. Nuns passed and repassed, the bell was rung, Latin prayers were mumbled, and so on. The complete atmosphere of the convent was conveyed with the scene *before the play began*. Those who missed the atmosphere did not miss the play; and those who were present for the atmosphere found that much more enjoyment. But here was a setting that stood throughout the performance.

Curiously enough, and because it is apt to jar at wrong

moments, simple beauty in a scene is an almost dangerous element. A beautiful scene, when first disclosed to view, almost invariably will get a round of applause for its own sake. If the producer checks this by prompt entrance of character, the audience will take its time to see it anyway, in odd glimpses between more diverting things. Of course the painter is pleased with this approval of his services; and it may have been because of this, in contradistinction to Belasco's aim, that Garrick's scene painter, De Louthembourg, stipulated, as tradition says, that his scene must occupy the stage alone and first for a given length of time, for full appreciation.

#### EMPHASIS

Literal dramatic fitness imposes further demands upon a setting that have particularly to do with that portion of the stage known as the "acting zone." This term is probably a successor to the "focus," which was correct before the picture-frame stage came in. The acting zone generally is the middle of the stage proper, which Huntly Carter says may be found worn into a hollow in most modern theaters where vanity of the actor holds sway. In brief, it is that part of a stage which may best be seen from any part of the auditorium. And here the scenic artist endeavors to place all important and much-used points in his setting.

A point of this kind may be a table, such as that used to stand about while cross-examining the unfortunate young murder suspect in "The Third Degree;" or a closet, such as that in which the supposed burglar hides in "A Pair of Silk Stockings;" or a door, similar to that through which "Medea" appears after her infanticide, or that through which "Tess of the d'Urbervilles" emerges with her bloody dagger.

The matter becomes complicated when more than one

point in a setting requires emphasis. I tried to cover this in "Master of Myself," a recently written play. In Act III the emphatic point is a French window through which one man was to throw another; in Act IV, where the same interior setting served as background, it was a door through which a dreaded appearance was to be made.

The scene was designed in the now-familiar "V-shape"—that is, two walls of the room being slanted backward to meet each other, so as apparently to show just a corner of the interior. At right was the door; at left the window. In Act III the left wall was made longer and the right shortened so that the window came center; in the final act the order was reversed—the right wall extended and the left shortened, so the door became the dominant thing. Something of the kind was devised for a production at the former New Theater, New York, but it was feared the change would distract attention from the play, and it was abandoned.

But it was Clyde Fitch who, in his last play, "The City," derived most profit from the "V-shaped" set; and, as already pointed out by that critic of discernment, Clayton Hamilton, in his collection of reprinted pieces entitled "Studies in Stagecraft," the scene was made to achieve its effect as an integral part of the play, with no actors on the stage. A wide doorway in one of the slanted walls, revealed a hall and staircase beyond. The father went out through this door, a sound was heard as of something heavy falling, and voices of people who at once came rushing through the hall and down the stairs, disclosed the fact that the old man had died suddenly of heart failure.

It is not the mere placing of an emphatic point, but also the artist's deftness of pictorial composition, which contrives all lines of his setting to converge at the center of interest. Mr. Hamilton, whose fund of splendid illustra-

tion seems exhaustive, here points to the third act setting of Knoblauch's "The Cottage in the Air" at the former New Theater, as a masterpiece of the kind. In the foreground of this beautiful landscape, designed by Hamilton Bell, of the New Theater staff, the receding walls and sloping thatched roofs of charming cottages to right and left, inevitably led the eyes to the gate at center, where characters came and departed.

#### PSYCHOLOGICAL APPEAL

The better setting has a psychological as well as a literal side; and in it is found the first real step toward a unified appeal of action and scene. It is observed in the third act setting of "The Truth," revived by Winthrop Ames in 1914, where the conglomerate room in the apartment of Mrs. Crespigny, reveals at once the character of the woman who occupies it with poor, foolish old Roland. It is seen again in "The Music Master," Belasco, 1908, where the cheap room of Herr von Barwig and its threadbare furnishing, immediately strikes one as a vivid, symbolic summary of its inmate.

And the message need not always be positively conveyed; it may be an effect of contrast. Could anything have intensified an action more than Clyde Fitch's setting of the hanging of Nathan Hale in an orchard in full bloom? In "Children of Earth," Winthrop Ames, 1915, in which a middle-aged woman suddenly realizes that she has never lived her life, there is a vast significance in the dead-looking old apple tree which blooms forth in a burst of glory with the coming of spring. Further, the somnolent air of the country in "The Rose of the Rancho," Belasco, 1906, is projected with the first rise of the curtain.

In 1882, Belasco, in the "Passion Play" at "Lucky" Baldwin's Grand Opera House at San Francisco, trans-

formed the auditorium to represent a cathedral, and used hangings of sackcloth as he did in 1915 at the Belasco Theater, New York, for Edward Knoblauch's story of poor little "Marie-Odile." At the "Passion Play," he carried his atmosphere even into the lobby of the theater.

## CHAPTER XXI

### UNION OF THE ARTS

THERE is more than character to be considered in the stage scene—the emotional tone of first the act and then of the play as a whole, to be incorporated in the setting.

Huntly Carter notes that M. Meierholdt, manager of Mme. Kommisarzhovsky's theater at Petrograd, "was probably first with the idea that the drama is to be represented and interpreted in a 'spiritual theater' by means of an outer synthesis expressing an inner synthesis." This is what in the theaters of Europe is called "stylization." "Simply stated," says Mr. Carter, "this is a demand for the representation of the soul of the drama by every means available.

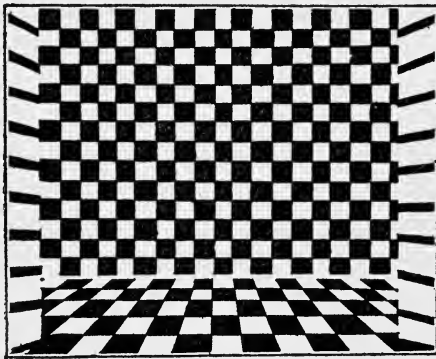
"When Wagner first made known the theory of his synthesis of music, chant, and color," Mr. Carter continues in essence, "it came as a revelation to most men. Here indeed was a means of realizing the secrets of the spiritual world. Here was a way to express the subtle nuances of the poetry of life. When chant failed, there was music; when music failed, there was decoration to carry on the action. Or so it seemed. Gradually, however, reformers began to detect a serious flaw in the 'Master's' scheme. It was found that he had invented not a unified design, but a threefold one, composed of music, chant, and decoration running simultaneously. Then the complaint arose, 'This is wrong; you cannot hear the chant for the music; and you cannot enjoy academic scenery while the music and

chant are going on.' None the less, the Wagner synthesis has invaded and held the stage till to-day the sins of the poet of the 'Niebelungen' are still repeated; and even Max Reinhardt repeats the fallacy of the Wagnerian three-fold motive. He gives us music, song, speech, acting, dance, and decoration, repeating instead of expanding and supplementing each other."

Reinhardt, it appears, was the first to call into his search for the simplified scene, work of the great plastic artists, men who sought the soul rather than the representation of it; and thus, says Mr. Carter, he "has given the scene a 'feeling' part instead of a 'thinking' part in the play, and enabled it to contribute to the general effect of sensation in mass, and not in wearisome detail."

#### PSYCHOLOGICAL SCENERY IN VAUDEVILLE

An attempt of considerable interest was made in 1913 to provide "psychological" scenes for the variety "turns" at



POSTER SETTING

Designed by H. Kemp Prosser for a London revue, about 1913.

the London Coliseum. The task was entrusted to H. Kemp Prosser, and, in keeping with the frank character of the



entertainment, he aimed for a poster effect throughout. Therefore, the act typified by the monologist and singer of topical songs, had a great yellow drop, with variously expressive faces painted upon it. For the ballet or revue, there was a black-and-white room, showing a window with squares of black around it, a design repeated on the floor, walls, and so forth; and an orange-dotted background to a green scene, with wheels and scintillating stars to suggest movement, served for the bicycle act.

### COLOR

Here is where color comes in. There is a physical connection between those things that influence the eye and those to which the ear is attuned. A certain number of vibrations produce sound; more, heat, and still more, light through the color gradations of the spectrum.

So the artist chooses his colors for the general tones of the act and play in which his settings are to serve, by the well-known laws that blue is mysterious, yellow cheerful, and so on, modified by the knowledge that the setting is but a background, and by the fact that places have conventional color values of their own—the tropical lands of great passions, hues of barbaric intensity; the countries of the north the slower vibrations of cold color; Egypt its blue; India its ranges of primaries, and China its nocturnes. Thus the artist finds a combination of color notes, in addition to his tricky schemes of diverging lines, for emphasizing his points and contributing to beauty.

With the element of beauty for its own sake, which, important as it is, seems to be the least vital thing in a setting, the matter of harmonious colors is concerned greatly. In general, the scheme of so combining and contrasting warm and cold colors that the background is always made of cold, or receding, colors, and the foreground, where the

action takes place, is emphatic with warm, affords satisfactory results; but now and then an artist appears like Léon Bakst—of Oriental inspiration—who is daring enough to put unmodified hues of emerald-green, orange, and deep violet in unheard-of artistic juxtapositions, and successful enough to find his striking creations hailed around the world as excellent adaptation of means to an end.

#### BAKST AND HIS THEORIES

Léon Bakst was born in Petrograd in 1868, but came to Paris at the age of twenty-seven, where he has lived and worked practically ever since. He received his early art training under Albert Edelfeldt, a Finnish artist of the "Impressionist" school. He returned to Petrograd somewhat later, and started a magazine called the *World of Art*, to which he contributed a series of grotesque but remarkable designs and caricatures; but Russians were not kindly disposed toward his work, and he went back to Paris. Shortly afterward, Serge de Diaghileff, a wealthy Russian nobleman, came into the life of Bakst and became his patron. At an exhibition in Paris in 1906, arranged by De Diaghileff, Bakst was "discovered." In 1909, with the première of "Cleopatre," the first of the De Diaghileff Ballets Russes, for which he designed scenery and costumes, he made his stage début; but his present name was made principally through his harem setting for the ballet "Scheherazade." He lately was given the Nobel prize for art for his achievements.

His ideas of color are very well defined. "I often have noticed," he told an interviewer in Paris shortly before the Ballet Russe sailed to America in 1916, "that in each color of the prism there exists a gradation which sometimes expresses frankness and chastity, sometimes sensuality and bestiality, sometimes pride, sometimes despair. Any of

these may be given over to the public by the effect one makes of the various shadings. That is what I tried to do in 'Scheherazade.' Against a lugubrious green I put a full blue of despair, paradoxical as it may seem. There are reds which are triumphant; reds which assassinate. There is a blue which can be the color of a St. Madeleine, and there is the blue of a Messalina.

"It is in lines as well as in color that I make my emotions. In 'Thamar,' in 'Narcisse,' in 'Antar,' I sought to bring out in the costumes the plastic ideas which correspond to ideas in literature. It is in the costume, as well as in the decoration and ornaments I put in, that I carry the unity of line. Sometimes I bring out the purely mystic in stage settings, as in D'Annunzio's 'St. Sebastien,' which I produced last year. Because the subject-matter was essentially Christian, I used the cross in a thousand variations for the basis of my linear ornamentation, not only hidden in the costumes and accessories and ornaments in the beautiful play, but even in the lines of the landscape and building of the scenery. My method is generally to take a simple motif and vary it indefinitely so as to create a harmony of color and line."

Ronsin, who collaborates with Poiret in Parisian gowns and house furnishings, designed a somewhat startling interior setting for the New York production of the Hungarian operetta, "Sari," made by Henry W. Savage in New York, 1913. It was splashed with vivid color and outlined with a broad, flat strip of complementary hue.

Several important observations remain to be made concerning the stage work of Léon Bakst, but none more imperatively than that these weird figures and scene designs that have come as his forerunners to America show but a phase of his work—the decorative, the fanciful, part of the drama where imagination runs rife, the spectacle, the revue,

and the ballet. America waits to see his mounting of a grim realistic play where the decorative would be out of place.

#### RELATIVE IMPORTANCE OF SCENERY

It seems a truism that a background ceases to be such when it obtrudes, acts, as has been said, more than the actors. Yet the strong contrasts and vivid coloring of the real out-of-doors may well appear at times in exteriors. But even here, good taste seems to prohibit the use of complementary colors—from opposite ends of the spectrum—together in their full intensity, though they may prove effective if neutralized by mixing each with some of the other—the resultant tones being quite in keeping with the infinite reflections in nature. Once more in general, when intense colors are to be used, they should be confined to small areas, balanced by larger areas of much less intensity.

Livingston Platt, in "Twelfth Night" for Margaret Anglin, endeavored to be "strictly Oriental in feeling and atmosphere, the gardens brilliant and splashed here and there with scarlet, the palace languorous and dim with soft suggestiveness. In 'As You Like It' the woods are purely of the outdoors, reaches and stretches and colors of the forest, oaks and stumps and leaves. In 'The Taming of the Shrew,' the endeavor was to imitate the wealth of the Renaissance, dark woods, tapestries of mauve, scarlet, black, and splashes of yellow, with little furniture but that for actual use, carven chairs and tables; and for the outside scenes floods of light and hidden shadows. All these," he thinks, "have combined to make pictures appealing to the imagination and reminiscent to the informed."



*From the New York Tribune*

“THE PALACE OF BEAUTY.”

Being Joseph Urban's setting for the “Beauty Number” of Ziegfeld's  
“Follies of 1916.” Note the great simplicity but richness of design.



*Copyright Berlin Photographic Co.*

“THE SECRET OF SUZANNE.”

A Bakst setting that shows the distinguished artist in a new light,  
something radically different from his now familiar “ballet style.”

NEWER EXAMPLES OF URBAN AND BAKST.



## CHAPTER XXII

### PAINTING WITH LIGHTS

FROM the pigments that must be permanent, the natural progression in following the ever-changing, kaleidoscopic stage design, is for the artist to find lights that may be changed in hue and position at will, on a permanent ground. Herein lies a principle of Adolphe Appia, who aims for "pure atmosphere" in a stage scene. Light is necessarily more "living" than color, a fact of which I have never been more convinced than in seeing the swaying opalescent curtains in Margaret Anglin's New York production of "Twelfth Night," which were contrived almost wholly by illumination.

It may be said, subject to discussion, of course, that no pigment color may be as luminous as a similar hue provided by light. In all events, the tendency of the modern scene painter seems to be toward greater dependence upon light, while some artists are designing all their scenery for the collaborative effects of stage illuminants.

Livingston Platt brought such a method with him to the Toy and Castle Square Theaters in Boston as result of his work at the Royal Opera House at Bruges. But first he drew forth all the luminosity he could from intelligent combinations of pigments. Instead of the heavy blues, deep browns, and soggy reds so common in stage settings, with their fierce lightings that aid them not a whit, and bearing in mind the pink and blue-washed walls of the countries where color contributes to the joy of living, he reversed the

usual process, and painted his presentments of solid objects in pale monotonous, lighted by a meager, much-suffused illumination.

The luminous quality of his pigments is obtained in an adaptation of the "Pointilliste" system of the Impressionist school of art. He uses only primaries. The colors are not mixed on his palette, but placed together in tiny brush strokes, side by side and over and over again, across the surface of his canvas, so that they blend together when viewed from slight distance—a sort of exaggerated application of the principle of two and three-color printing. Each color thus has its positive value, even when run into another by the eye.

Josef Urban also introduced what *he* called the "pointillage" system at the Boston Opera House, and so won the observation that his scenery had a "leprous look." Only his object was more subtle. He wanted a surface which had a local tone befitting place and action, upon which he might produce still other different tones by means of lights. Therefore, he spotted his scene with all the colors to be used throughout, and then brought each into prominence as required by a similarly toned light. A red light, for instance, absorbed everything but the red on the surface, and showed the scene as such.

His complication of the device in using mixtures of mixtures instead of simple primaries, which he put into most successful operation, may be imagined when it is realized that a set of primaries is used for light different from that used for pigments; that yellow and blue lights, for instance, produce the appearance of gray, and the combination of similarly colored pigments produces green. Then, more delicate mixtures of pigments must carefully be matched by appropriate illumination.

Urban's plan was yet a compromise between the old



system and the new, for his settings still could stand as something indicative of place and character without the aid of light. Other men had contrived scenery that was so much dependent on light that it could not exist as such without it. Whether this was a merit or not remains undetermined here; though the fact is remarked that shadowy backgrounds against which vague figures move, are not popular as a steady diet. As a variation, in pertinent places, the indefinite, "atmospheric" scene becomes an object of delight; and it would seem that lack of appreciation in that event, betrays a degree of refinement as rudimentary as the over-sedulous desire for just "atmosphere."

There is, on the one hand, the work of the late John W. Alexander, long president of the American Academy of Design, whose association with the stage chiefly through the offices of the late Charles Frohman and his leading star, Maude Adams, made him a practical man of the theater; and, on the other hand, that of young Ottomar Starke, of Mannheim and Frankfurt-am-Main, an avowed "secessionist" from traditional methods. Herr Starke believes in "atmosphere" throughout, and achieves his hazy effects with a quantity of gauze drops, coarse and fine, transparent and semi-transparent, to transmit and diffuse lights cast variously from above, at sides, and at back.

#### THE "CHANTECLER" EXPERIMENT

Mr. Alexander placed his scheme in operation with the American production of Rostand's "Chantecler" at the Empire Theater, New York, 1911. It was arranged particularly for the forest scene, painted by J. Monroe Hewlett. His tall tree trunks in the foreground, were cut in profile from semi-transparent gauze stretched on chains and merely toned in—there with blue—to show gradations of bark. A more elaborate group of trunks and foliage in

the flat, made on the same general plan and mounted on a single curtain of scrim, came behind that, and backing all was a great black velvet drop. A sort of trough depressed in the stage floor, just in front of this drop, contained a blaze of light directed not against any of the scenery in front or the drop behind, but straight upward.

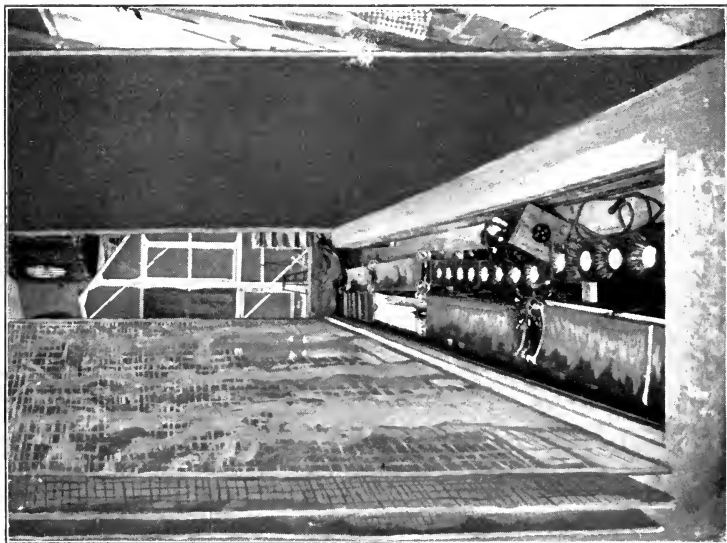
Looking from the audience, the opaque portions of the gauze became shadow, and the transparent parts lent an appearance of rotundity, all with the illusive shimmer of Nature. Best of all, the light-absorbent velvet, seen through the upward flare, provided an effect of infinite distance. And, in describing the effect, John Alexander, practical man of the theater, particularly remarked that the entire setting could be packed in one trunk for transportation.

The secret is in the velvet, one learns; and if the effect of daybreak and the gradual increase in light to the point of high noon is desired, just paint in a sky and foliage and whatever else is needed, in usual colors, merely making the distinction that sky and necessary portions are opaque for shadow at first. Then light the succession of gauzes from the front, beginning with the first and continuing to the last—the flare in back going all the while—and so bring the sky from a black through a dim radiance, to the full light of day, the rest of the landscape becoming proportionately clearer and clearer.

The real inventor of the process—and Mr. Alexander gave him credit to the full—was J. Monroe Hewlett, a young architect, who, with Ralph Willis, an artist, exhibited some specimens of stenciling through gauze one year at the architectural exhibition in New York. Mr. Hewlett passes the credit along to the Japanese, who long have been securing delicate effects by stenciling through gauze. Mr. Hewlett, his brother, A. T. Hewlett, and Charles Basing, a landscape painter, worked over the "Chantecler" scenery



*Photos Copyright by Charles Frohman*



THE WOODLAND SETTING OF "CHANTECLER."

In its way, this setting was one of the really notable innovations in modern stagecraft. The gauze drops, used in the scene, could be packed in a single trunk.



for six months. After study and sketches were complete, a model was made, one-sixteenth of the actual size. After completion, this was taken apart, and each gauze screen was used as a stencil and projected in greatly enlarged form on gauze and canvas stretched on the floor. The finished surfaces were made with a spray of dye and a brush. The idea is still being employed by the Frohman Company—lately in the revival of "The Little Minister."

#### SUGGESTION

The keynote of it all is suggestion, the first principle in the stage scene, and the line of demarcation between reality and art. As the demands of a play may go first on one side of this line and then on the other, there should be allowance made for the poetry of imagination and the sordidness of truth—for both artist and tourist.

"The dignity of the snow-capped mountains is lost in indistinctness," says James MacNeill Whistler in his "Ten O'Clock," but the joy of the tourist is to recognize the traveler on the top. The desire to see for the sake of seeing is, with the mass alone, the one to be gratified; hence the delight in detail. And when the evening mist clothes the riverside with poetry, as with a veil, and the poor buildings lose themselves in the dim sky, and the tall chimneys become campanili, and the warehouses are palaces in the night, and the whole city hangs in the heavens, and fairyland is before us—then the wayfarer hastens home; the workingman and the cultured one, the wise man and the one of pleasure, cease to understand as they have ceased to see, and Nature, who for once has sung in tune, sings her exquisite song to the artist alone."

And the artist, having recorded his impression, raises the "others" from their depths, unconscious of the means, to heights of beauty. Carroll Beckwith, noted artist and

instructor, took his pupils to study the settings of "Sapho and Phaon" when produced in New York by Harrison Grey Fiske as an invaluable lesson; and Henry Ranger, whose paintings hang in the Metropolitan, waxed enthusiastic over the famous lettuce field in "Leah Kleshna."

#### STAGE FACILITIES

In surveying the facilities of latter-day scene painting, one is struck with the fact that each is appropriate to time and place—that individually they are circumscribed by conditions in which they are to be used. The peculiar wide, high, and deep recess at the back of the Lyceum Theater stage in New York, made possible the street disappearing straight away into murky darkness punctuated by pitiful lights at the curbs, down which the thief ran in "The Dawn of a To-morrow," where it could be but the merest makeshift in other places; the poetic pools and shallows of a play by Maeterlinck admit of an atmosphere of a dim suggestiveness, while the gauzes there might seem absurd for even the fjords of Ibsen.

While their permanence cannot always be recommended, neither may their abolition be recommended. They are instruments to be employed for appropriate purposes, and the rest of the time kept hidden away. Ideally, every stage should be prepared to accommodate any or all. Unfortunate it is, sometimes, that high values in real estate cramp life within. Winthrop Ames was found hard at work at his drawing board one day while convalescing from an illness, and when asked what he was doing, replied, "Designing the theater I'd like to have if I had my choice of any place for a site of any size and shape."

## CHAPTER XXIII

### STAGE DECORATION

THAT stage atmosphere, in the matter of decoration of the scene, readily may be provided by an upholsterer, is a fallacy that has put into practise these many years. Yet one cannot forget that magnificence of mounting in the Attic theater, provided by rich citizens who knew little or nothing of poetry, frequently won tragic prizes over intrinsically better work.

In the test wherein "a single impression must reach the eye and ear," this time-worn method is found wanting. An artist in charge will achieve an infinitely better effect with a fraction of the material brought by the mechanic; and he will not yet reduce his furniture to the traditional two chairs, indicating that two persons are to be seated, removed when they are not. He may use pictures that are not to be pointed at, flowers that are not to have their fragrance remarked or that are not to be used in corsage or buttonhole, and pianos the keys of which are not to be touched; but one or all will have contributions to the unified impression.

Like the scenery itself, the decoration should be not so mean as to excite ridicule or contempt, or so gorgeous as to divide eyes and ears. But every picture, every rug, every piece of furniture in a setting, should be part of the general composition, and should be balanced and arranged with good taste—after the specific accommodation for the action has been made. The figurines that

stand prominently at left in Act I of "As a Man Thinks," are splendid examples of accommodation of the action in this manner. They are much interwoven with the main situation of the play.

Just how far this "good taste" may go is a matter of opinion; decorations supposed to conform are found as meager as the Browne scene for "Delphine Declines," or as elaborate as the Harrison Grey Fiske mounting for Edward Sheldon's play, "The High Road," in which Mrs. Fiske appeared along in 1913. Tireless search on the parts of author and producer—and Mr. Fiske has made some truly distinctive productions—made every article used in the second scene—second named here and second of the play—an authentic copy of some famous work of art.

This, for a casual reason in the text, was the home of an art connoisseur—although it was his cultured influence that provided the heroine with an excellent education. Even the walls and moldings, one is told by an account so enthusiastic that it must have found inspiration in the press department, were reproduced from originals in European art galleries or museums. The walls—which are unique in being made entirely without an artist's brush—are hung in sea-green, interlaced with gold threads; the baseboards are of solid wood, as are also the moldings, one of the latter being a reproduction of one in an old Florentine palace; the large curtain in the archway leading to the dining room, is of English manufacture, of a pattern showing again the Chinese influence of the wall hangings; the tapestry above the mantelpiece is a copy of a priceless original owned by the Town of Saumur, on the River Loire, in France; the double doors in the center are, to the most intimate detail, reproductions of those made by Jean Goujon for Saint Malou in northern Rouen; the archway, separating the drawing room from the dining room, is Italian Rennais-



sance, and its prototype can be found at the Palazzo Vecchio in Florence; the Romanesque recess is of Venetian inspiration, while the small Byzantine altar in the interior of St. Mark's, suggested its shape and decorations.

A peculiarity of this deep-set window is the variety of the columns, no two of which are alike. They represent different periods of art, and include straight, fluted, spiral, and other forms. The originals of the early Italian Renaissance mantelpiece and of the Louis XIV "lit de repos" can be found in the famous Museum of Decorative Arts in Paris.

The two black lacquer chairs are Chinese Chippendale, upholstered in Chinese patterned brocatelle of the same period, and are originals, not reproductions. The National Museum of Florence holds the originals of the sculptured side chair and the Gothic wedding chest, both of which are of the fifteenth century, while the design of the prie-dieu was taken from one of the paintings in the Venetian Carpaccio. The book of illuminated Gregorian music is a copy of a volume in the Municipal Museum in Venice, and the Gothic reliquary comes, by way of American craftsmanship, from the Cathedral of Aosta.

Above all, the piano that stands off in an upstage corner is a reproduction of a painted one by Burne-Jones; and Burne-Jones was the first artist, it is said, to so decorate pianos.

And when one sees this fine scene out of the exposition of the play, and is duly impressed by its general air of magnificence, one's mind reverts to Jennie Deans' vision of the Palace. Besides, the point was not the influence that educated the heroine, but her accord with it—shown readily, and at infinitely less expense. The instance stands, a lesson.

## THEORIES OF JONES

As a contrast to this method of procedure, it is pleasant to turn to the work of Robert E. Jones, a young American artist, who shows promise of big things in the theater. Mr. Jones is a former instructor in the fine arts department at Harvard, and has had considerable experience in poster work, a form that undoubtedly has left its stamp upon him.

Mr. Jones was commissioned by the Stage Society of New York, which brought Granville Barker to this country, to make some experiments toward a better theater. In his characteristic manner of trying to find out reasons for all things—his attitude toward expressions of opinion is ever "How and why?"—he journeyed abroad, and made an effort as a student to reach Gordon Craig at his school in Florence, only to give up the task when nourished on naught but familiar platitudes. He thoroughly examined the Dalcroze School at Hellerau and closely studied work of Max Reinhardt, the distinguished German producer. So he is rather familiar with the "New Art."

In due course of time, he was asked to design the setting and so forth of Granville Barker's New York production of "A Man Who Married a Dumb Wife." Instead of consulting books and museums for what is grossly called the "smell of the period," he let himself be guided by the atmosphere and spirit of the play—a method that may be safe with so accurate an author as Anatole France, but not always with others. The result was a peculiarly simple and effective arrangement, with no superfluous details. I have spoken of its place in the opinion of Cortissoz.

His theory of work is that an artist should be free in technique, and should live and work in a state of creative ecstasy in which all things are possible. This theory came

to him after seeing a big pageant that had been hastily devised and costumed by a band of strikers. It was to him a convincing demonstration of what intense enthusiasm can accomplish unaided by preparatory training.

Yet there may be scenes, lavish in decorative detail, that have more than the merit of mere accuracy. Belasco has provided instances of both types: Laura Murdock's cheap bedroom in "The Easiest Way," 1909, which in itself was a marvel of characterization, and the last act of "The Governor's Lady," 1912, which photographically showed one of many cheap restaurants opened and controlled by a large New York company—a company which, indeed, actually furnished the elaborate equipment then used on the stage of the Republic Theater, New York, providing a full supply of cakes, pies, and so forth for each performance. In the latter scene, intended just as the reconciliation ground of the Governor and his Lady, one could have filled an order for two fried eggs, a cup of coffee, and some incidentals common to an institution of the kind. It had not merely a scrubwoman, but also an elevator to send butter-cakes from the griddle in the front window, to the room upstairs.

#### EMOTION AND CIRCUMSTANCE

Due proportion must exist between the emotion and the circumstance. The stronger the emotion to be portrayed, as Henry Carlisle Wilson pointed out in an article in the *Theater Magazine* several years ago, the less elaborate, generally speaking, should be the decoration. Let the scholar be indicated by a cultured atmosphere, by books and other pertinent objects; the millionaire of parvenu type, by coarse luxury; the sneak thief, by squalor, and so on. And, as color is a personal and individual thing, let there be that, too—passionate hues, scarlets, lusty russets, and strong con-

trasting blacks for the adventuress; chaste mauves, pinks, and dove-grays for the modest bride, and splashes of raw color for the room of the college boy.

#### PROPERTY RESOURCES

Confessedly, it is not a simple matter to provide pertinent items for a stage scene, either those adapted to actual use in the action, or those merely for atmosphere. Consequently, most producers are found covertly making collections of articles they are likely to need. Belasco has an amazing amount of such things stored away. It is said, too, that every time he goes out of town to open a new production, a certain "second-hand" man will ship a carload of "antiques" on ahead, open a store in the town, and contrive to have the distinguished manager informed of the opportunity for bargains.

When they wanted furniture in the old days, they frequently manufactured the unused, purely decorative pieces of papier-maché, when they didn't paint them on the scenery; but all that is gone by now. Fannie Brice once told me how in the early days of her career, she used to borrow the window curtain of her hotel room to help dress the set. The efficient property man maintains a list of sources where he may procure any and all of the manifold portable objects in any scene. In Winthrop Ames's production of "Children of Earth," in New York, chairs were gathered from old houses in New Jersey and Connecticut, and from old curiosity shops, the pewter from an old New England farmhouse through a dealer, a saw, saw-buck, and some rain-barrels from Mr. Ames's farm in Massachusetts, and so on through a long list of objects quite as imposing as that of art miscellany in "The High Road."

## CHAPTER XXIV

### COSTUMES

Most scenic artists acquainted with the "joy of work," are found expressing a preference for "costume" plays, because these afford opportunity for an unusual amount of color; and color here takes precedence over line. Costume thus, in stage parlance, has come to imply color.

Costumes were once devised for most managers by ordinary dressmakers; but now recourse must be had to the expert costumer—even to the *couturier*, setter of modes. Does not Lucile, Lady Duff-Gordon, design gowns for a whole "nest" of plays season after season? Did not the eminent Paul Poiret provide a *creation de luxe* for Winthrop Ames's production of "The Philanderer," at the Little Theater, New York? Of course. But the most elaborate of the new gowns to be seen on the stage are found in ballets, music comedies, and revues, where pretty pictures are at a premium.

#### THE STAGE AS LEADER OF FASHION

Frequently, at an early performance of a piece where late styles are on exhibition, fully two-thirds of the audience on the orchestra floor are dressmakers in search of ideas. Charles Frohman copyrighted the stage gowns of Julia Sanderson in "The Girl from Utah;" but when it was proposed to Winthrop Ames that he copyright the bevy of Lucile designs in "A Pair of Silk Stockings," he replied that anyone who wanted them was welcome to take them, for he'd have something new when that person came out

with copies. That the stage does tend to set the modes is attested by the letter Caroline Bayley, leading lady in "A Pair of Silk Stockings," who wore a striking garment of military cut, wrote to her husband. "It strikes you pink," she said, "to see you always walking ahead of yourself on the avenue."

Gowns like this cost an incredible sum of money, and help to send the aggregate costs of a production skyward. There are other expensive angles, too. In "Prunella," when the gay party returns from its world wanderings, their fine clothes are in tatters. This meant two complete sets of costumes, one in the pink of condition, the other tattered and torn. However, some saving comes in the fact that cheaper stuffs have expensive sheen and gloss under stage lights.

#### BAKST COSTUMES

Some remarkable facts about the costumes designed by Léon Bakst are that he frequently employs imitation precious stones and metals in them—and even uses the human skin upon which to paint his patterns. The little negro in "Cleopatre," has his skin transfigured by the artist from black to inky blue, and wears silver bracelets for wrist, arm, and ankle, silver earrings, silver tassels and tabs, and beading and breastplate.

#### SPECIAL REQUIREMENTS

However, the *costumier*, like every other newer artist brought into the theater, must be informed of the peculiar limitations of the medium. He, or she, must learn to provide costumes new and distinctive in individual examples—not always a fashion-plate by any means, but a garment representative of character; must learn to give a chorus girl a gown that may be changed with dispatch without



Scheherazade.



The Peri.



Potiphar.



The Blue God.



The Peri.



Narcisse.



Papillons.



Narcisse.

*Courtesy of Metropolitan Ballet Company*

BAKST COSTUME DESIGNS.

Redrawn from color plates of the Serge de Diaghileff Ballet Russe.





elaborate buttoning or hooking that would require further payroll expenditure in the form of a personal maid; must learn to "under-dress," or allow for putting one costume on over another for quick change, and so on through a number of details.

Mere "period" in dress is not enough, though it must be present. And period does not mean that time in which the particular play was written; in Shakespeare's day, Julius Cæsar probably wore Elizabethan ruffles. This fact is more delicately illustrated by greater remoteness of time. Professor Gilbert Murray has remarked, in answer to objections that characters in his translation of "Iphigenia in Tauris" were not dressed by Granville Barker's designer in traditional flowing white robes of the Greeks, that Iphigenia did not belong in period to the day of Sophocles, but to a time considerably earlier, and that costumes of Sophocles's day, which had color and were not all of the statuary order, would be as inappropriate as Garrick's "Macbeth" in wig and court coat of scarlet and gold lace.

Norman Wilkinson, the designer in question, went further. As the action passed in barbaric Tauris, he tried to incorporate a barbaric note in his work. He gave Thoas a flaming red beard because it was a savage custom to dye beards; and, as the scepter of Thoas originally was the branch of a tree, he tried to make it look as much like a tree as possible, and covered it with living birds—a touch that proved a constant source of delight and distraction to the American audience that witnessed the production at the Yale Bowl at New Haven, Connecticut, in 1915. Then the heroine's costume becomes more and more barbaric, the longer she remains under barbaric influences.

Psychological costumes in all likelihood were known before psychological scenery, probably because they were familiar in real life. The red gown for the "dangerous"

woman and the black to signify almost any kind of distress from widowhood to poverty are probably as old as Job's comforter—forgive me that pun; I shall not perpetrate another. A. E. Haigh, in his fine book, "The Attic Theater," tells at length about the stage costumes of the ancient Greeks. In the first place, "the characters almost always had some small emblem for ready identification—Apollo with his bow, Hercules with club and lion skin, messengers with crowns of laurel or wild olive, and so forth. . . . The costumes were designed for viewing at distance. . . . Tragic queens wore white mantles with purple borders; persons in exile or misfortune wore garb of mourning—black, dun, gray, yellow, or dirty white." Nowadays actresses are found taking a personal interest in correct costuming. Therefore Maude Adams, Elsie Ferguson, Julia Marlowe, and a host of others whose excellent taste may be relied on, regularly provide themselves with gowns that tell their own stories. Lina Cavalieri, the singer, even insists on "feeling" after a systematic course of study, the traditions of her dress.

#### THE ARTIST AT WORK

Realizing that it certainly is the duty of the artist aiming for unified effect, to design costumes as well as scenery and decoration, Robert Jones did not hesitate to undertake those in "A Man Who Married a Dumb Wife." One finds this same striving for unity in the De Diaghileff Ballet. When a composer has completed his score for this organization, the various other artists make a study of it; and just how this work is developed may be seen in sketches made by Valentine de Saint-Point for Igor Stravinsky's "Sacre de Printemps." She has copied a bar of music, for instance, and above it has placed the corresponding movements of the coryphée in drawings as delicate as those Meissonier

used to place beside the titles of his larger canvases. No more did Jones hesitate actually to paint and dye canvas and draperies with his own hands.

His self-assumed obligation, according to an excellent estimate of his own work in *Vogue*, early in 1915, kept him going daytimes and a good part of each night for a considerable period, with no stops for Sundays or holidays. He had had little or no experience in designing gowns, but he realized first that each gown must express a character, and then that elaborate trimmings on dresses arrest people's attention too long for the good of a play. Therefore, he reduced each dress to its lowest terms in color and design—a method approved by Reinhardt, but unlike Bakst, who, though his schemes are broad effects, is lavish in costume detail—that the audience could get all in a flash and then concentrate on character. Next, he emulated in practise a theory of Craig's, and set out literally to make his own costumes from the drawings.

Material was selected and bought—in colors that were strong and full of life, but not sharp—with the following questions in mind: What results will it give? Of what treatment will it admit? What will it do under given conditions? What folds will it take? What sheen will the folds have? What will the effect of the color be? What will the person who wears the costume do? And what will be the effect or action on the costume, in bringing it into juxtaposition with another costume, perhaps? For other costumes must be in harmony.

“With some one to stand by to hold pins and scissors, he hung lengths of the material he had selected for the costume upon the actual person who was to wear it. As a rule, he used wide stuffs in long pieces; if the material was narrow, he joined several widths before beginning on the costume.” It is very naïve and also very interesting.

And here is his working plan, expressed in his own words: "Wherever it needed a pin, I put a pin. I used hundreds of pins in each dress. Wherever there was a place to be covered up, I just covered it up. Seams go naturally; that is what happened when primitive people made dresses. At last the person stands complete in every detail, but bristling with pins, and asks how I am to get her out of her garment. This is where my smartness comes in! I have left a place—I think of it as I work—and I am going to cut her out of it. I just leave a large fold somewhere on each costume. Then I cut away, and out she—or he—slips, and all I have to do to complete the costume is to put a stitch in place of each pin."

Americans have Granville Barker to thank for some interesting experiments; but most of all have they to express gratitude first for Robert E. Jones, and then for Royal Cortissoz in capacity as a dramatic critic.

Norman Wilkinson's idea of gilded fairies in "A Midsummer Night's Dream," Mr. Cortissoz in his review calls "a really unfortunate emphasis. These are ambient, insubstantial creatures if they are anything, but Mr. Wilkinson turns them into statues. The grave error of the gilded fairy folk is an index to what is lacking in the production as a whole—subtlety, depth, enchantment. Without felicity of color, without felicity of atmosphere, this play, that is all poetry and magic, is robbed of half its spell. We freely admit that Mr. Wilkinson is 'different.' We cannot admit that he is right."

What *is* the character? It is the dominant note of the "new" costuming. And from the stage hand's dusty overalls snatched by Cecil Yapp properly to dress his conception of the crazy Uncle Eph in "Children of Earth," to the filmy *creation* of the popular modiste, it remains inflexible.



The Page.



The Dumb Wife.



The Attorney's Wife.



The Serving-Maid.

*Illustrations Courtesy of "Vogue"*

COSTUMES BY ROBERT E. JONES FOR "A MAN WHO MARRIED A DUMB WIFE,"  
PRODUCED BY GRANVILLE BARKER.



# LIGHTING AND "EFFECTS" ARE "WORKED" BY THE STAGE CREW

## CHAPTER XXV

### LIGHTING DEVICES

FOR Edison's invention of the electric light, Brander Matthews holds him responsible for not only the withdrawal of the apron and the making of the picture-frame stage, but for the banishment of the soliloquy. Thus, the matter of lighting has brought about actual changes in stage construction—and in drama itself.

There are five general ways of lighting the stage: by the spotlight in the gallery, by the footlights in front, by the portable strip and bunch lights, and by the border lights from above.

The footlights, or "foots," is a row of lights in a metal trough along the front edge of the proscenium. In England they call them "floats," because in bygone years, the trough was filled with oil, in which wicks floated. Sensational and rapid changes undergone by this particular feature of playhouse illumination probably account for much of the demand that it be done away with.

Argument seems to be that there is no natural lighting that comes from below. Light reflected from water may be an exception, although the source is above. However, the attempt to inaugurate a "natural" system of chiaroscuro seems really nearer to "deadly realism" than the efforts deplored by these same would-be reformers. The stage is

a narrow place whereupon large things are suggested; and it cannot employ the system of universe without reducing everything in it, characters included, to scale. The theater is for conveying impressions, and so long as they are projected truthfully, there need be no particular question on the part of the public as to the means employed.

Footlights have come to perform a contributory service in a highly complex piece of machinery, instead of shouldering, as formerly, almost all the burden of stage illumination. In the newer theaters, the footlights occupy but a comparatively small stretch of the proscenium.

Concerning footlights, George Foster Platt, former general stage director at the New Theater, has made a pointed comment. "It appears to me that it would be as wrong to eliminate footlights," he told me once, "as it would be to have them all the time. Suppose you have a beautiful woman in a big picture hat on the stage, and all the lighting is from overhead. Her fine face would be in darkness."

David Belasco has been eliminating footlights for many years. He did it first about thirty-six years ago at "The Passion Play" in San Francisco, using the old locomotive bull's-eyes from the balcony to light the distant stage. As the overhead lighting system developed at his New York theater, he installed reversible footlights that could be turned out of sight at will. When it came to his production of "The Phantom Rival," in 1914, he dispensed with footlights altogether after the first act; and, with the opening of "The Boomerang," he leveled off his stage front, rounded it out into an "apron," and had practically all his lighting from above. When he had his overturning foots he had an added row of "linolites," long incandescent finger-bulbs, placed end to end in a thin line, particularly for use when the foots were inverted.

Footlights are commonly divided into three or four sec-





*Courtesy of David Brasco*

#### LIGHTING EQUIPMENT FOR "THE RETURN OF PETER GRIMM"

This lighting arrangement at the Belasco Theatre, New York, was changed substantially after producing "The Return of Peter Grimm"; but at the time, it was perhaps the most complete equipment of any American stage. The lower picture shows lights in the fly gallery, footlights, border lights, bunch lights (at the right), proscenium lights, and the portable light bridge which is shown above, in use.



tions from side to side of the stage, separately controlled, each color of lamps on a separate circuit. At the Little Theater, the division is into three. The two side sections are rarely turned on to the full; but the middle section is powerfully bright, with a silk screen over it to diffuse the glare.

#### “STRIPS” AND “BUNCHES”

Strip lights vary in length and position. A strip is usually a long zinc box—much like the boxes umbrellas come in—with the bulbs set one above another in little oblong niches in the face of it, depressed flush with the front. On the back are hooks or rings, by which the strip may readily be fastened in position. Its uses are legion. It may rest lengthwise on the floor—it is not more than about eight inches wide—behind a low hedge, or ridge of grass, perhaps, to light a portion of scenery not reached by the regular illumination; it may be over the outside of a doorway to show the backing; it may be inside a fireplace, or it may do one or a dozen things, all depending upon the exigencies of the action in which it serves.

The bunch light is another portable affair. On a small, round base is a slim standard rising to a round or square reflecting head that has bulbs clustered or studded in it. It is a much stronger and more concentrated light than the strip, but is used for much the same purposes.

#### FLOOD LIGHTS

The flood light—particularly the olivette, or open-faced arc—resembles nothing so much as a giant “horseshoe,” or king crab, standing on its tail, the point of which has been thrust into a mound of sand. The upper half of this “tail” telescopes up and down, while the head is movable and can cast the light in any direction. These lamps are

often capable of illuminating an area of forty square feet, with a spread light of some four thousand candle power.

As danger of fire is increased with naked arc lights, fire laws compel managers to maintain a separate attendant for each, to stand beside it as long as it is used. This is expensive. An added objection to the open arc is that it has a tendency to flicker and may not be dimmed. Several seasons ago, John A. Higham, master electrician to Winthrop Ames, conceived the idea of adapting the new 1,000-watt nitrogen lamp to stage use. It is incandescent—enclosed in glass—and therefore involves no fire risk and requires no attendant. By connecting it with the switchboard it may be dimmed to any desired degree. This lamp was carried with the road company of "Sumurûn" in America; and thus it became well known to all theaters. The celebrated forest scene in "Children of Earth" was lighted by five floods of this character, the entire equipment being operated from the switchboard by the electrician and his assistant.

All portable lights, as strips, bunches, and floods, and isolated lights, as brackets, table lamps, and so on, are supplied with current through insulated wires, terminating in plugs which are thrust into sockets in the stage floor, or above. These plug sockets, or "dips," as they call them in England, are, of course, connected with the switchboard. Chandeliers are hooked to permanent cables, and lighted by means of plug connectors. Wall brackets are also linked into circuit by connectors.

#### BORDER LIGHTS AND LIGHT BRIDGES

Border lights are long, inverted metal troughs, each holding a row of lights, and running from side to side of the flies, parallel to the stage floor. They may be raised or lowered. Of course, their use is curtailed when the set-

ting has a ceiling piece. There are usually three to eight border lights from front to back. One or all may be used.

They are provided with colored lamps in much the same manner as the foots. Separate circuits are maintained for separate colors, and each border is divided from side to side in from two to four sections.

A supplement to the familiar border light is the light bridge, which is usually a slender steel affair, generally running from one fly gallery to the other, just back of the curtain.

The first "light bridge" of which I ever heard was that used by Sarah Bernhardt in "Camille," during an American "farewell" tour in 1900. She sent a man up over the stage in a basket with a calcium light to keep fixed on her throughout the performance.

When Maude Adams completed her third year in "The Little Minister" several seasons ago, Charles Frohman, her manager, gave her permission to fulfil one of her many ambitions and experiment with stage lights. One result of these experiments was invention of a bulb stain for fine gradations of color. The stain she used first was some kind of beauty lotion she happened to have on her dressing room table. But the important invention was the light bridge—thirty-seven feet long, about two feet in width, and divided into seven compartments, in each of which was a great lens capable of illuminating any given space or corner of the stage with diffused, evenly rayed light, or with a concentrated spot. Each compartment had a special operator.

With the opening of "The Return of Peter Grimm," about 1912, David Belasco employed a much simpler light bridge that could be folded and transported with ease. I am reproducing a picture of it herewith. He employed it again for "Marie-Odile," but discarded it at the end of

that time at the Belasco Theater as inferior to an improved arrangement.

### SPOTLIGHTS

I cannot venture to say when the practise of following an actor about the stage with a spotlight began, but certain I am that Belasco first refined the practise. With "baby" spotlights, or "chasers," in the wings and above, projecting strong beams of light that may be dimmed as necessary, he follows his important characters about the stage. Each lamp is controlled by a special operator. The spotlights in balcony and gallery booths are too familiar to require comment here.

When Harrison Grey Fiske produced "Hannele" he had nineteen characters on the stage picked out by nineteen individual spotlights. Belasco used thirty-two separate lights, each with its own attendant, in addition to foots and borders, in "The Grand Army Man," but how many of these were chasers I am unable to say. An interesting variation of this idea was provided in Richard Walton Tully's play, "Omar, the Tentmaker," produced in 1914. In one scene Omar, as played by Guy Bates Post, had to move very elaborately about the stage, and a light had to be kept on his face throughout, while all the rest of the stage was in darkness. The problem was solved by John Higham. In Omar's turban he placed a little incandescent bulb, focused upon the actor's features. Omar himself pressed the button concealed elsewhere in his costume.

### FORTUNY BANNERS

We get another plan to do away with the familiar border light from Venice, Italy, from an architect named Mariano Fortuny. Instead of casting the light directly upon the stage, Fortuny reflects it to the floor from serried, black

and white banners, which modify the colors into tints and shades. The general "quality" of the diffused light is said to be remarkably effective. Still, it must take up much space in the flies, and must call upon the flyman for temperamental work.

### NEW BELASCO LIGHTING

At close of the season of 1914-15, Belasco introduced further innovations in lighting at the Belasco Theater, New York. First he did away with the footlights. Then he had a curved apron built out from the straight proscenium—something over seven feet at the most extended point. At the top of the proscenium arch, an iron hood was placed, following the same sweep as the apron. Fronting the edge of the hood he hung a French curtain that may be raised or lowered to accommodate itself to the balcony sight lines.

Inside the hood, within a foot of the bottom of the drapery, is a row of sixteen reflectors, holding powerful lights in sheet-iron boxes, four to a box, and with slides for gelatin color mediums. Another set of sixteen, exactly like the other, is suspended just back of the proscenium. Still another gang of fifteen lights, slightly different in appearance but acting on the same principle, is further back. This was the arrangement for "The Boomerang."

All these lights are on dimmers, and may be modified at will. These, with the local lights at the side of the proscenium arch, admit of great variations in illuminating the scene. In Stuart Walker's Portmanteau Theater, two rows of the new border lights are employed in precisely this manner, but they are so wired that each lamp may be separately controlled. The lights may be focused on any given spot on the stage by adjustment of the boxes, so, for instance, that correct shadows will be given from a table

lamp without having too meager lighting of the scene, and without having the table lamp itself too bright. Naked lights are avoided wherever possible on the stage proper.

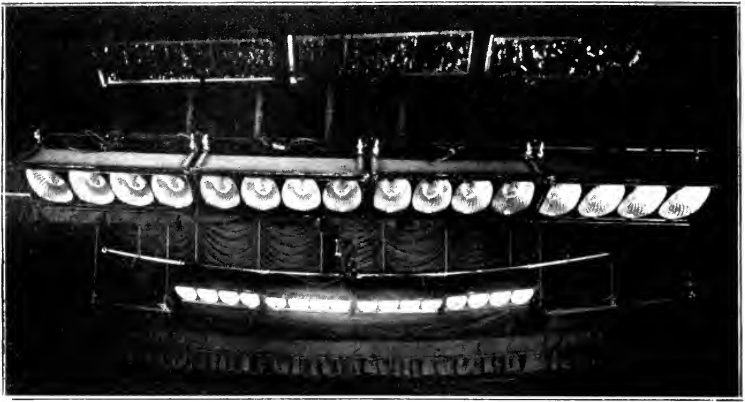
### THE HORIZON

Efforts to obtain "atmosphere" in stage lighting remind one of the celebrated "horizon"—or cyclorama drop—a dead-white wall, formerly made in most cases of canvas, and now frequently of concrete, with colored lights thrown upon it for effects of sky. We have one made of concrete in this country at the Neighborhood Playhouse, New York. At the sides, this horizon curves toward the proscenium arch so there may be no broken lines. This is a modification of the "round horizon."

In Europe there is what is called the "domed horizon," with a dome over the top, the lights in this case being thrown upward from below. This dome is sometimes detachable, made of canvas, and may be raised or lowered independently. In some cases it is permanent, made of concrete, and continuous with the cyclorama itself. Still another form has it upon a gigantic steel frame, which may be moved up and down bodily, or brought forward. This form was invented by Fritz Brandt, of Berlin. The horizon in the new Dresden Theater, Germany, has an inner "shell" of gauze, about six feet away from the backing, for effects of atmosphere. The horizon at the Opera House in Beyreuth, which was installed by the Asphaleia Syndicate about 1884, is raised about six feet from the floor, so actors may walk under it.

The great objections to the dome are that it interferes with hanging stuff in the flies, and has a bad acoustical effect on the stage. The great objection to use of horizons in general is that they tend to undue silhouetting of the figures before it. It is imperative that actors be seen.





*Courtesy of David Belasco*

#### NEW BELASCO STAGE LIGHTING.

The overhead stage illumination at the Belasco Theater, New York, is mostly from a hood over the stage apron. The picture above shows the lighting system from the rear, back of the French curtain that fronts the hood. Color mediums have been removed from all lighting units save the last row, to show up in the photograph.



## SWITCHBOARDS

Switchboards are usually on the prompt side of the stage, where the electrician in charge may receive his instructions first-hand from the stage manager. At the Metropolitan Opera House, New York, the electrician looks at the stage from below through an opening in the footlight trough, while in his hands is a sort of yachtsman's wheel which is a master control for all the dimmers on the enormous switchboard. This board controls 11,488 sixteen candle power lamps, besides motors, 44 arc lamp pockets, and 228 incandescent stage pockets.

At the Century Theater, New York, the electrician has a sort of prompt hood in the footlight trough immediately adjoining the hood of the prompter, and instead of having just a master dimmer wheel, he actually controls all switches and dimmers individually in the marvelous stage equipment. By simply moving little disc indicators, he may cause one gang of lights, or them all, to wax bright or diminish at any of five available speeds. Thus, the coming of night from late afternoon may be set for automatic accomplishment in perhaps fifteen minutes, so slowly that it is almost imperceptible.

Many suggestions have been made to station the electrician in the rear of the auditorium, where his perspective would be correct, and let him operate his lights from there at will. But "synthetic lighting," as this is called, is hazardous business. The time for experiment is at rehearsal.

Boards are usually divided so that the various switches and dimmers may be found even in the dark. The Little Theater board, designed and installed by John Higham, is a marvel of scientific arrangement. Everything at right—on the side nearest the auditorium—is devoted to house lights; that on the left to the stage. The position of the

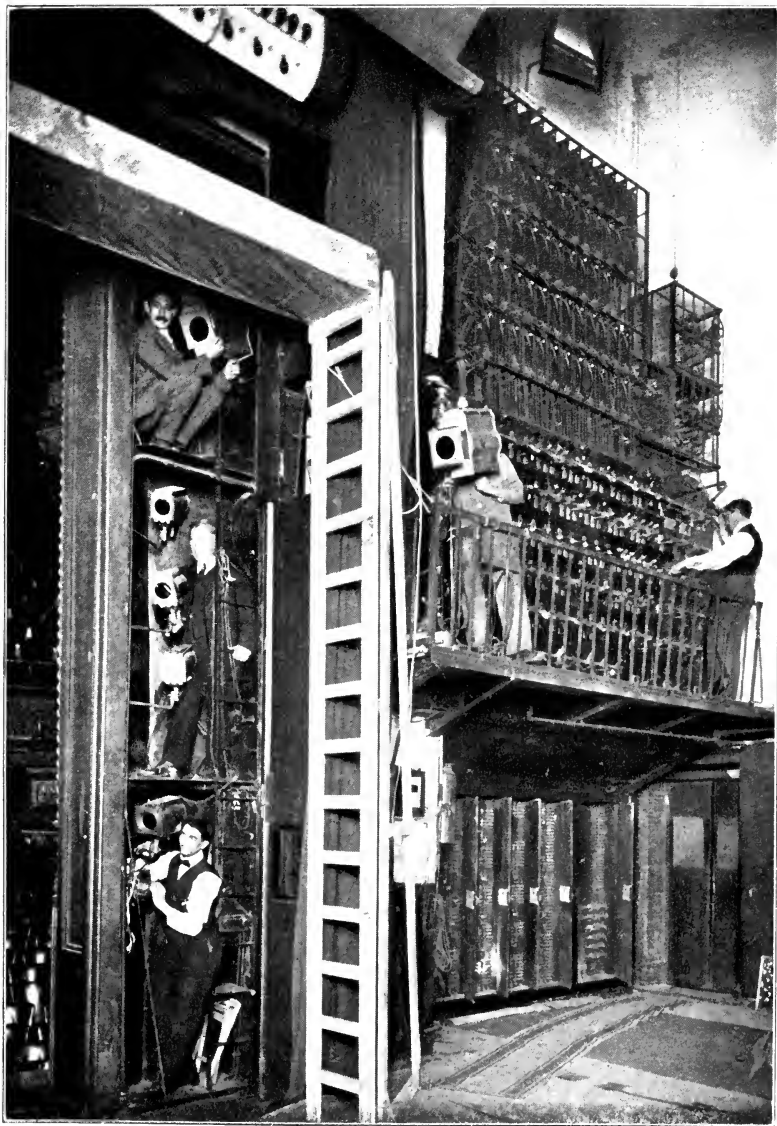
board is directly over the prompter's head, running parallel to the side wall of the theater. At one end, the electrician may look through an opening into the auditorium and see his spotlight, his footlights, and the chandeliers and brackets of the house. At the other end, he may look upward and see all borders and lights in the flies and most of the stage lights, even when the scene is a boxed interior. A separate switch controls each circuit and color; and each has a corresponding dimmer with interlocking master handles.

### COLORED LIGHTS

Effects of color are obtained by the use of stained bulbs in conjunction with clear ones. They are usually arranged in sets of three: amber, red, and blue, and sometimes a fourth, white—or frosted. Spots and floods change color by the use of mediums. Rheostats and dimmers at the switchboard regulate the quantity of light, and consequently combinations of colors. Tints of fixed hues are produced by the addition of white light: shades by checking toward darkness.

Arrangement of colored lights varies. For simple lighting, amber lamps preponderate over white about three to one. For elaborate effects they sometimes run two white, one blue, one red, and so on.

Gelatin and silk mediums remain in favor because they do not soon fade. Stains, in which the electrician dips his bulbs, fade quickly, and sometimes a whole lighting effect will be ruined in this way within forty-eight hours. One form of silk medium that seems to be of French origin, is on rollers that the silk may be turned until a lighter tint or darker shade is brought before the illuminant. A picture of one may be seen in the "Chantecler" arrangement, illustrated opposite page 186 of this book.



*Courtesy of David Belasco*

#### SWITCHBOARD AT THE BELASCO THEATRE, NEW YORK.

Showing also proscenium lights. The smaller lenses are used to "spot" actors and follow them about the stage. Note the inclined mirror high above the switchboard reflecting the stage for the operator's guidance.



## CHAPTER XXVI

### USES OF STAGE ILLUMINATION

MIXING colors in stage lighting is quite unlike the putting together of pigments. For instance, a mixture of yellow and blue paints will produce green, whereas the blending of yellow and blue lights shows gray with a pinkish tint. White light may be decomposed by a prism into red, yellow, orange, green, blue, and violet, and resolved into white again by the use of a second prism; but a mixture of the separated colors will not produce white. There are sound scientific reasons for this that may not be entered into here.

As red, yellow, and blue are roughly assumed to be the pigment primaries, so red, blue, and green are ordinarily accepted as constituting the three colors from which—by combining any two in given proportions—any other color of light may be produced. Yellow may be derived from red and green; purple may be made from red and blue, and other combinations will be found by simple experiment.

Mere colored light thrown upon an object will not necessarily give it the same hue. In this connection the story is told of a scenic artist who painted "hell" for a stage version of Dante's "Divine Comedy." The scene in place, the stage director turned upon it all the red lights he had in the place. The effect was miserable. In a rage he sent for the artist, who calmly replaced nearly all the red lights with amber and an occasional blue, and produced the illusion of almost everything but the smell of brimstone.

It is possible nearly to destroy the actual color of any

object if the light is strong enough, or if the object has a highly polished reflecting surface; but almost invariably the contrast of two shades of one color serves only one to deaden the other. In a white light, that "inferno" setting would have absorbed the blue and green rays and most of the yellow; in a yellow light it would have appeared yellow and the characters would scarcely have been seen against it; and in blue or green it would have appeared black.

With the red, amber, and blue lights, and the green mediums in the floods and spots, an approximation of all colors is possible. That the color is not exact is a delicate matter, of course; but it is not as serious as it might be because, owing to an almost universal color-blindness and to difficulty in determining the actual color of an object with its reflected lights from other sources, no standards have been set. It may be remarked, incidentally, that the spectrum is said to contain one thousand distinguishable tones, which may be made even millions by very slight variation in the light producing them. The aim in stage lighting should be to produce a color sensation, rather than any technically exact combination.

#### GENERAL LIGHTING OBLIGATIONS

Use of light as a factor in dramatic production resolves itself to the matter of harmonious background—and even atmosphere, in a considerable sense—for character. The general tone of it all must first befit the place; second, the time of day; third, the use of light for emphasis of significant points, and, finally, the regulation of it for moods and states of mind conveyed by the action as a whole. These, of course, are divisions that allow much latitude.

The lighting of *place* is a consideration that has the most permanence. It should be simple, without sacrificing individual appeal. Appeal will exist if there is harmony, and



harmony may be secured by judicious use of broad effects, when even groups of small colors will blend at short distance. The aim is that character should stand out clearly against an unobtrusive but consistent background. To that end, necessary lighting, that would be disagreeable if contrasted with a moving figure, should be so arranged that it will not be of stronger color than that of the figure moving against it.

One may easily imagine difficulties in reproducing *time of day*. In what position does the house stand with reference to the points of the compass? Northern light or southern exposure? Then, if it is early morning, does dawn of the clear day come from blue through red to full up, or is it red through blue? When evening approaches, and daylight is still in the room, the illumination is dimmed toward the windows, and not beginning there, as is frequently done. These little things barely suggest the many problems in this regard, that confront the director.

Under the head of *emphasis* comes Belasco's use of the baby spot for each character on the stage; under the last-named division of *tone* will be found the strong local lighting of tables about which characters are, or are about to be, grouped.

It is a fascinating art; but it must be kept in its place or it is no art at all.

### PSYCHOLOGY OF LIGHTING

Perception of light—or, rather, the projected influence of light upon the audience—is largely a psychological, a spiritual, temperamental matter. That is broadly demonstrated by the court record of the Parisian wife who tried to divorce her husband because he refused to change the depressing color of the parlor wall-paper. While the comparison may seem far-fetched, the influence of wall-paper

upon her was not one whit less than the influence of stage lighting upon any audience.

Augustus Thomas has made some striking observations concerning this, notably in his play "The Harvest Moon." Yellow, he said, (or had his character say), will encourage laughter; green, content; red, stimulation; brown, fear; violet, tears, and blue, mystery. It is an interesting matter. Even after casual reading one is disposed to ponder it seriously.

### " RULES "

Consider for a moment the " rules " about lighting that the average theater electrician has deduced from his experience. In the foots he has a preponderance of white and amber bulbs with a sprinkling of blues, but few or no reds. In the borders he uses mostly whites, with quite a few ambers, and some blues. Red light, like rouge on an actor's face, is apt to make the effect " patchy " and unreal; so red is used preferably in strips, bunches, and the like. It is necessary to sunset effects and in fireplaces, perhaps, but not in many other quarters. The electrician prefers to get his warmth of color from ambers. For general lighting, whites are used extensively, with touches of amber to soften the glare. Effort is made, however, to keep the entire lighting system so that the various parts are in harmony, counteracting shadows cast by the foots, and other distorted values, by means of borders and side lights.

The common aim is to get most light upon the acting zone, which in most cases is somewhat below center stage, where everyone in the audience may see what is going on.

When Granville Barker began his interesting productions in New York in 1915 his audience wondered greatly at a series of large lights placed singly about the balcony front. These were " base lights," to fix the general illumination of

the scene, to be modified as needed by local sources of illumination. They were for the same effect as those employed in his earlier productions in London. There, his balcony lamps—meaning now the familiar balcony spotlights—projected two strong violet beams. Six lamps, hung around the face of the balcony, variously emitted white and amber lights. Lamps in the proscenium boxes and above the stage, mixed their rays with the others, and so made footlights unnecessary. In London, it is said, the balcony lights had some effect; in New York the overhead lighting was practically all that counted, the studded balcony contributing more propaganda than direct service.

A constantly recurring error in production is lighting the scenery and not the actors; but it is an error that better electricians, like Hartman, of the Belasco Theater, and Higham, of the Little, know themselves how to avoid.

In Fred Pease, Margaret Anglin is said to have one of the best stage electricians in America. It has been remarked of him that he has an unerring sense of "quality" in light. He it is who carries out suggestions of Miss Anglin and of Livingston Platt, her scenic artist, in intelligent practise. He will begin with a blue cyclorama, for instance, and by combining blue and green local lights make the color seem to converge into infinite distance, and yet closer definition of the acting zone. In the Anglin production of "As You Like It," there was a simple drop showing a river winding its way across from side to side. Pease fairly painted the scene anew by lighting the near bank with a blue bunch, the far with a green bunch, and the river—a transparency—with white lights from behind.

The acting zone is continually changing; so the electrician must be prepared to light his scene in new ways, with important masses of light and shade moving imperceptibly or naturally, about the stage. Lighting of the

central position, whether over a table, or just over the floor or any other likely place, affords the keynote for the degree of illumination. Frequently this spot is too bright; and instead of modifying it, the director will raise all the other lights on the scene to match, and so have an overlighted stage.

Livingston Platt, when at the Castle Square Theater in Boston, carried on some valuable experiments in this line. He had noticed the custom of using dark canvases in scenery, necessitating a glare of light to show them up. He tried the reverse—of having all his scenery in pale monotonous, using then a soft, diffused illumination. His gain was great in investing his productions with rare imaginative quality.

#### CHANGES WITHIN THE ACT

Particular difficulty in lighting has to do with changes during the act—from afternoon to evening, light to darkness, and so on; but they are "set" in time to be "worked" at cues with more or less effectiveness. Consider, though, lighting a stage in such manner that it will appear to receive its whole illumination from a small oil lamp on a table, with shadows correctly given; consider, then, how the stage is to be convincingly illuminated by outside means if that lamp is moved about the scene. In "The Great Divide" Margaret Anglin crossed the darkened stage with a lighted candle in her hand. The whole illumination of the scene followed that candle. How was it done? A row of incandescent bulbs in the footlight trough were switched on and off in succession as she passed. In "The Return of Peter Grimm" Belasco used the same effect for the passing candle.

There was an exaggerated attempt to convey "the soul of the drama" through light in Walker Whiteside's pro-



*Courtesy of Metropolitan Opera Company*

#### DIMMING THE LIGHTS AT THE METROPOLITAN.

The electrician at the big opera house in New York overlooks the stage through a special covered opening in the footlight trough. In his control is the master wheel which operates all the interlocking dimmers on the main switchboard.



duction of "Mr. Wu" in New York in 1915. In the last act, which takes place in the palace of Wu Li Chang, Wu is discovered at his devotions. As he bows over the urn from which flames and smoke ascend from burning incense, the light, we are told by Whiteside's press agent, "suggests the religion of the ages." The knight of the pen describes further changes in this manner:

"As young Basil Gregory is brought into his presence, the light changes to leaden blue, indicative of the spirit of revenge; for the youth has brought dishonor into the house of Wu Li Chang, and must pay the penalty. When the boy's mother is ushered into the mandarin's treasure room, a golden hue envelops the scene, which, as Wu declares his passion for her, alters to a rosy pink. Eventually a light green suffuses the room, presaging, as it were, the death of the nefarious Chinaman. In the throes of Wu's demise, a ghastly yellow beam filters through the open window; and, at the end, a great splash of red strikes the recumbent figure of the great mandarin as he lies dead on the floor of his gorgeous habitation."

The story of a play may be told in light, just as it is told in pantomime or in dialogue, each new presentation supplementing, emphasizing, and enriching the others. There was psychological reason in raising all the stage lights three or four points when Forbes-Robertson, in character as the Passer-By, entered upon the scene in "The Passing of the Third Floor Back;" there is quite as much in raising the lights whenever Frances Starr comes upon the stage in any play. In subtler fashion it achieves the same end as the old-fashioned music at entrance of the leading man.

#### TRADITIONS OF LIGHTING

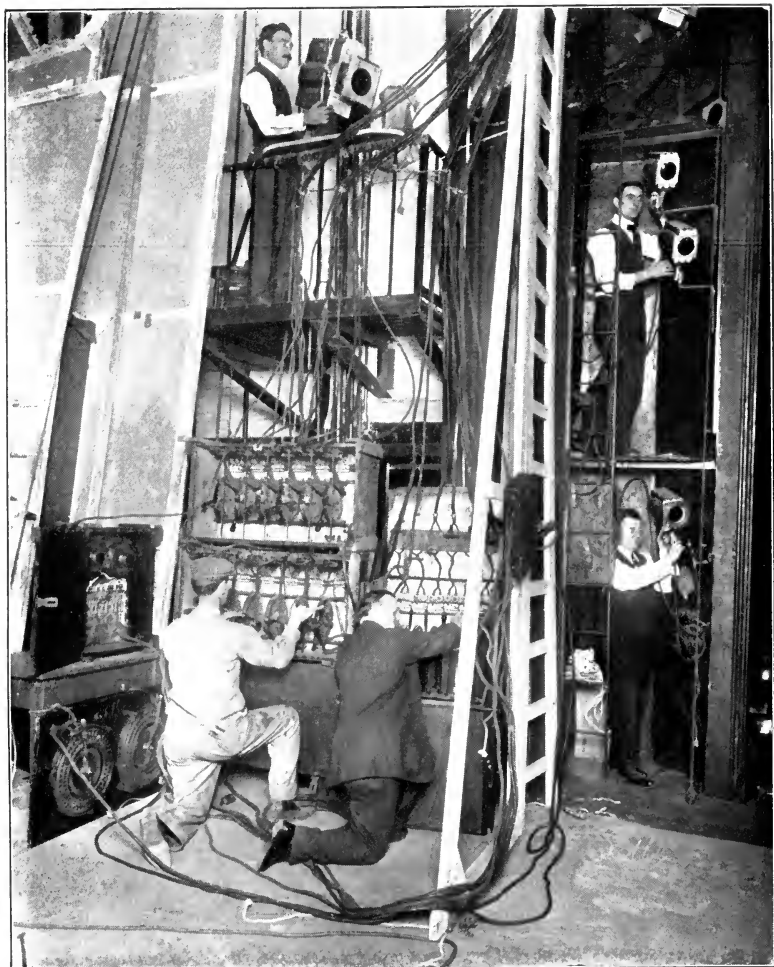
It has long been a tradition of the theater that "comedy lighting" is "full up." While this is generally true, there

are many exceptions where comedy scenes are played on a darkened stage. Take the end of Act I in Galsworthy's "The Pigeon," and the close of Act I in "Madame President"—where the lady and her lover appear by the light of two bedroom candles, which presently are blown out for the biggest laugh of all. Another tradition places death scenes on darkened stages; but see the passing of Peter Grimm at high noon. Still another tradition would seem to ban all shadows; see the wonderful scene in Galsworthy's "Justice," where poor Falder, in prison, is driven almost frantic by his own shadow on the wall. Indeed, one now finds lights focussed for the express purpose of casting shadows.

Shadows should be prevented where they interfere with intelligibility of the action. In Winthrop Ames's revival of Clyde Fitch's play, "The Truth," it was necessary that the audience see the full expression of the face of Grace George, who played Becky Warder, as she sat at a table writing a letter. A lamp, concealed in the table, illumined her face as she leaned over, and another from the first—or "concert"—border caught her expression as she raised her head. Each light was dim as she brought her face into it, and then brightened, so the change would not be perceptible.

Probably no American stage director understands the subject of lighting better than Hugh Ford, who long produced plays for the Liebler Company. His method is generally to determine the big scene of each act, and light the rest of the act in sympathy with it. By bathing the act in this color, the big moment imperceptibly gains force and vitality in the audience's mind when it arrives, while the act itself shows a unity of purpose not otherwise possible to obtain.





*Courtesy of David Belasco*

#### PORTABLE SWITCHBOARD.

This system of switches and dimmers was used for "The Return of Peter Grimm" at the Belasco Theater, New York, and on tour. It was used particularly to control the illumination from the Belasco portable light bridge shown in detail opposite page 204.



## CHAPTER XXVII

### MECHANICAL ILLUSIONS

THE showing-up of stage tricks is probably more destructive of stage illusion than revelation of any other "mysteries" behind the curtain. But, as they are necessary to illusion in many cases, a book of this kind would not be complete without some reference to them. Besides, it can work less harm here, because enough has been given in foregoing pages to persuade the reader that lasting effect in the theater is created by more dignified things.

A convenient instance of a necessary "effect" is the rainstorm in George Bernard Shaw's play, "The Devil's Disciple." It is necessary for Dick to put on the parson's coat in order that he may later be mistaken for that saintly gentleman, and sentenced to die in his name. What could be more plausible than to have a rainstorm from which Dick seeks shelter in the parsonage, and is given by the good wife within, a dry coat of her husband's? The rainstorm there is part of the plot.

Effects have so many different applications that it is difficult to classify them. For the moment I can think of no better division than that of the natural elements—land, air, fire, and water. The "land" division has been described at some length in various references to scenery. Therefore I shall endeavor to make the present divisions, air, fire, and water, tagging on miscellany at the end.

Air immediately suggests the wind machine, a huge slotted cylinder revolved by a hand crank against a sheet

of canvas drawn tightly about it, the force of the gale depending upon the rapidity with which it is turned. A more compact wind machine is a modified siren with a megaphone attachment, so that the sound may be directed toward any given part of the stage. Silk-covered discs whirled together in opposite directions, constitute an old method, said to have been invented by Garrick's scene painter, De Louthembourg. Silk discs whirled by electricity contributed to the storm effect in the Liebler production of "The Garden of Allah."

"The Garden of Allah," when produced at the Century Theater, New York, in 1912, probably used the most elaborate wind effect ever devised. It was the illusion of a sand-storm on the Desert of Sahara. Under the Century Theater stage was installed a series of powerful blowers, with pipes piercing the stage floor at various points and at various angles. The pipes were so arranged that when a stream of sand would be driven by the blowers out of one vent, it would be struck by other streams and so given the necessary spiral motion. The pipes were worked in rotation, too, so that the swirling effect was carried rapidly from place to place all over the stage. A sheet of air from pipes along the curtain line, kept the sand from blowing into the audience. The "sand" itself was really three hundred pounds of a well-known breakfast food. Actual sand was too heavy to manipulate. Cloud effects were played directly on the swirling "sand" by a stereopticon.

Moving clouds are usually made by means of a stereopticon with a clockwork attachment. This mechanism turns before the light a gelatin disc upon which the clouds are painted. The stereopticon idea is used for many other light effects, snowstorms, waves, falling flowers, and so forth.

Thunder is usually made by turning a cylinder which

has a couple of heavy iron balls rolling about inside. Another familiar method has been to shake a large sheet of metal suspended in the flies. Lincoln J. Carter, who has invented a great many mechanical effects in the theater, is said to have been one of the first to break away from the old convention of the thunder box and the thunder curtain. He used what is called a bull drum—a steel cylinder about three times the size of the familiar bass drum, with heavy rawhide stretched taut over the ends, the rawhide being struck with a heavy drumstick.

Modern lightning effects are a far cry from the method in the ancient Greek theater when they used to paint a bolt of lightning on a board, and cast it from overhead on one side, to a box below on the other. A familiar method is to scrape together a piece of carbon and a file that are connected with an electric current. Invention of this method is attributed to Carter. Then there is the "magnesium gun" and "lycopodium pipe," in both of which a highly inflammable powder is blown in jets across an open flame. Lightning is made in modern theaters by an instrument in which an electric spark is jumped between carbons. Duplicate instruments are placed in various parts of the flies, and worked in rotation.

#### " FIRE EFFECTS "

Conflagrations are commonly shown by lighting transparencies and profile strips from the rear, dropping counter-weighted pieces suddenly for collapsing walls, outlining beams and rafters with winking lights, and using torches, stereopticons, and many floods. In Carter's melodrama, "The Heart of Chicago," based on the Chicago holocaust, there was a scene showing blazing ruins. He used profile strips, braziers of lycopodium, and live steam to simulate smoke. About this time came the American agitation

against stage fire risks; and he placed into service strips of silk, colored to represent flames, fastened at bottom, and the loose ends blown upward by electric fans, while most of the remainder of the illusion was created by stereopticons with mechanical attachments. Nowadays they use much silk, more lights, and occasionally a chemical smoke made by releasing an acid into air.

One finds little tongues of silk in stage fireplaces, the light being given by an electric lamp, and the draught by a fan. If papers are to be burned in the grate, a stage hand stands behind with a lighted taper, and accomplishes the necessary point.

A splendid example of a modern stage fire was in "The Daughter of Heaven," produced by the Lieblers at the Century Theater, New York, season of 1912-13. The Chinese Empress, in this play, outside her palace at Nankin, having witnessed the blasting of all her hopes, applies a torch to the funeral pyre upon which her defeated soldiers of Ming fling themselves to death. The pyre is kindled at a dozen places; it springs into flame and soon becomes a roaring furnace.

The pyre was situated over a large trap in the stage. Through this trap from below, a number of pipes led to various parts of the pyre. At the bottom of each pipe was a lighted smoke pot. Great orange silk and feather streamers were blown up through the pyre by a huge bellows, while amber lights played on them gave the illusion of hungry flames. Batteries of electric fans kept confetti whirling to represent sparks. And when the fire was supposedly at its height, with the soldiers throwing themselves on the pyre, a man, dressed in orange, and whirling long plumes of the same color, jumped through the trap to the top of the pyre and increased the illusion.

The logs themselves were made of wire netting of close

mesh, so that they could be made to glow within. Bits of tinfoil pasted on them here and there, caught the light and gave the appearance of charred wood, while confetti pasted elsewhere, helped intensify the heart of the "fire."

### WATER EFFECTS

The readiest instance of water on the stage is, of course, the perforated pipe for rain, connected with a hose to the nearest tap. The water is caught below in a trough and runs thence to a barrel under the stage. It seems to me that the motion picture directors have something to suggest to stage rainmakers. When they want to produce a rainstorm in the open for the cinema, they plan it almost as stage lighting is planned—a general tone, and then local lights to modify that—with a perforated rain pipe first, and then sprays variously placed.

Of course, the faithful stereopticon may be used to produce the illusion of rain, just as it may be used for snow. The "snow-cradle," by the way, is just a long, narrow cloth full of holes, supported on each side by a transverse batten. The sagging portion between, is filled with bits of paper. Then one batten is gently raised and lowered a foot or more, paper working its way through the holes and fluttering down realistically. Snow on clothing—when characters enter from a storm without, for instance—is simulated by the use of wet, coarse salt.

Rainbows are sometimes cast by stereopticons; but there is a better instrument available that actually decomposes light into the colors of the spectrum by means of prisms.

Speaking of stereopticons calls to mind the extensive use of the motion picture machine for various effects—sometimes frankly and sometimes in clever combination with something else. It is exceedingly effective for showing moving fish on a gauze before a scene that represents

the bed of the ocean, for example; or for breakers on the seashore, with pretty girls thrusting their heads and arms through holes in the screen to look as though they are in the surf.

Real water, in a tank, rarely looks real on the stage, although there are times when other compensations make up for its use. In the American production of "Kismet," by Harrison Grey Fiske and Klaw and Erlanger, there was a tank representing the harem bath, in which Hajj, the beggar, drowns the Wazir Mansur. For this sort of tank, which occupies but a small portion of the scene, the stage floor is lifted in sections to reveal the water, and replaced when necessary, the tank remaining in place throughout the engagement. For transportation, this kind of tank may be shipped in parts. The Little Theater of Philadelphia, has a built-in tank by means of which the entire stage may be flooded with water; it was used in a regatta scene in the opening production.

#### THE HIPPODROME TANK

The notable stage tank of America is that at the New York Hippodrome. This tank occupies the space of the entire apron. It is permanent, constructed of steel and concrete. When the tank is to be used, the stage floor is depressed out of sight into the water, and raised again when necessary. There really are two tanks; water is pumped from one into the other as required. The stage tank is partially emptied as the floor is lowered into it to prevent splash, and then filled again. Of course, when the floor emerges, it is dripping wet, and has to be covered with an enormous tarpaulin.

The opening attraction at the Hippodrome showed persons diving into this tank not to appear again while the scene was open to view, while others made their first en-



trances by rising from the water. This was accomplished by Frederic F. Thompson, a young American engineer, who designed the stage, by an adaptation of the diving-bell. It was a sort of inverted, elongated wash boiler raised on four standards to somewhat more than the height of a person's head. Divers simply came up underneath so that their heads were in the air space. This device was used in "Kismet" for the drowning of the Wazir.

A few seasons ago, the novelty of having persons arise from under diving bells beneath the water of the Hippodrome tank, began to lose its freshness. R. H. Burnside, who was then the stage director, looked about for something new. Why not reverse the process and have persons go down into the water instead of coming up—not dive down, but march down? He tried it and found that the players could go only to a certain depth when they began to float.

"We tried fitting them with weighted diving shoes," he told me, "but these looked clumsy and were discarded. Then all at once I found the solution. But it is a secret, because we may want to use it exclusively again; but we had a genuine sensation that season, when a veritable host marched down into the water and completely disappeared." I did not press Mr. Burnside to explain, but I strongly suspect that the simple device was just a handrail, or, for a fantastic notion, magnetic shoes.

In 1915 the Hippodrome tank was put to a new use. It was frozen over for performances of the ice ballet, imported from Berlin. Some 16,000 feet of ammonia piping were installed in the tank at a cost of about \$24,000. Of course it prevented other use of the tank, but its end fully justified the investment. The idea was not new. It had been done by Florenz Ziegfeld a couple of years previously at the New York Theater for an edition of his "Follies;" but it

was a decided innovation in a house where the water tank had long been a feature.

In planning a play one time, I conceived what I thought was a new way to create the illusion of water on the stage. I would use a bluish-green oilcloth on the floor, well glazed for purposes of reflection; and for movement of waves I would use flood lights, fitted with appropriate mediums, in the wings. Lo and behold! In ransacking some old files, I found that the perennial Lincoln J. Carter had been before me—that the scheme had long been in general use. He had employed it first, it seems, in showing a view of Niagara Falls from the Suspension Bridge. Incidentally, he used live steam to represent mist. In his next venture, "The Tornado," he had two ships colliding on this same kind of green oilcloth, with débris flying into the air (from a released trap on the stage) and breaking of heavy timbers (in the wings). The spray was coarse salt, also flung into the air by traps.

Waterfalls and ripples are contrived almost invariably with lights projected by stereopticons, either from the front, or through transparencies from behind. Occasionally, real water is used for brooks and pools.

Swish of waves, including action of the surf, may be made by rubbing two sandpaper blocks together, or by rocking a rectangular box, or a cylinder loosely filled with peas or broken seashells.

#### MISCELLANEOUS EFFECTS

Among minor effects are large bells—church bells, train bells, and so on. These are generally long metal tubes hung by cords from some convenient piece of scenery, and struck with a mallet. It is scarcely worth while to describe many of the minor effects, such as cocoanut shells slapped on a board for the galloping horse, the steamboat whistle,

and so forth, because the public is rather well aware of their nature.

Offstage automobiles are usually imitated by the theater vacuum sweeper, supplemented by a couple of revolver shots for backfires. This is how they did it in Edgar Selwyn's farce, "Nearly Married." In "The Dictator," by the late Richard Harding Davis, a motorboat was imitated with an actual motorboat engine. In "June Madness," by Henry Kitchell Webster, the aeroplane motor was simulated at first by a motorcycle. Automobile horns are provided in several sizes, blown successively according to the distance at which the machine is supposed to be.

Stage moons have long been contrived of a box containing a light with a transparency on the side nearest the audience, pulled jerkily upward as the moon is supposed to rise. They also are projected, in combination with a moving cloud effect, by the stereopticon. Lincoln J. Carter made his moon-box a cornucopia, silvered on the inside, with a powerful white light in the small end, and raised steadily into place by clockwork. But the tendency nowadays is not to show the moon at all—merely its rays. Stars are projected by stereopticons upon the cyclorama or back drop, and, by special device, may be made to twinkle.

Battles scenes are generally rather simple affairs. The mine explosion in the trenches of "Under Fire," is merely a slight shift of set pieces. Troops passing beyond a tall hedge, may be just a lot of gun-barrels on an endless chain, gleaming above it. Bombs are usually boxes with glass fronts upon which the bursting shells are painted, lighted from within when necessary, the noise being made elsewhere. Racing scenes, with horses on treadmills and moving panoramas at back, are very old stuff.

I may touch only the "high spots" of stage illusion in a single chapter; but I cannot conscientiously pass over the

famous "River of Souls" in Belasco's production of "The Darling of the Gods." The noted producer spent \$6,000 on elaborate mechanism to show the souls of Yo San and her lover floating through the thousand years, and at the last moment he remained unsatisfied. Then a stage hand chanced to pass across the stage between the gauze drops. As he did so, he cast twenty shadows. It was the big idea. Discarding all his expensive machinery, Belasco had eight girls walk across the stage as the stage hand had done. From their shadows, they looked like no less than one hundred and fifty persons. And all it cost was \$200.

#### TRAIN EFFECTS

In "The Fast Mail," which Lincoln J. Carter wrote about 1893, there occurred one of the earliest American "scientific" attempts to show a train of cars speeding across the stage. The train was merely a strip of canvas, about three hundred feet long, unwound from a drum on one side of the stage and wound upon another in the opposite wings. The engine chimney was a smoke pot, and the headlight a magnesium affair attached to the canvas. Wire brushes beaten on iron drums, and a piece of tubing struck with a mallet, provided the noise, including the clang of the bell. In a subsequent production, Carter used a more elaborate train, working on the same principle, but with engine wheels moving properly, and showing a dummy brakeman on top of one of the cars, waving a lantern.

In "The Heart of Chicago" Carter had an engine that came out of the distance directly toward the audience until stopped by the fall of the curtain. It was built like an accordion, pressed flat against the back wall until the effect of the headlight had become nearly full size. This was the patent effect used a few seasons ago in "The Honeymoon Express," produced at the New York Winter Garden. In

"Bedford's Hope" Carter showed a race between a train and an automobile. Both were stationary save that their wheels turned furiously. But the scenery moved. There were a series of panoramas, those in the foreground moving very rapidly, those in the middle more slowly, and those in the background scarcely at all.

During 1913, "The Whip," a celebrated Drury Lane melodrama, was brought to America. In it is a marvelously real train wreck. A race horse is seen being put into a box car at a station. The train starts, covers considerable territory, and then enters a tunnel. In the tunnel the villain, who hopes to ruin the horse's chances in a race, disconnects the box car from the train. It comes to a stop just outside the tunnel on the other side. The horse is rescued, but barely in time, for another train runs into the box car and smashes it to kindling.

Herbert Mather, chief mechanic at Drury Lane, was largely responsible for the success of this spectacle. Part of his equipment was a "puffing machine," of his own invention, that made the "choo-choo" of the engine and puffed live steam across the stage. As in the Carter plan, the train remains stationary, while wheels of the engine and coaches are in swift motion, and a moving panorama shows the passing country. A tin trough, placed alongside the outer rail, contains a row of lamps flashed alternately at intervals, to give the effect of train lights reflected on the rails. In the wreck scene, stage hands back of the cars merely shake the scenery well, pull down some removable sections of the box car, topple the engine over on its side, while its wheels spin in the air, and steam and red lights envelop the scene.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### MECHANICAL DEPARTMENTS

THERE is no organization more smooth running than that which operates behind the curtain in a first-class theater. The idea of "a place for everything and everything in its place" is exemplified in such a house to a remarkable degree. So it is no wonder that the uninitiated person who has the good fortune to see a fine theatrical mechanism first, does not suffer disillusionment, but is fascinated and impressed by the perfect correlation of the parts.

Indeed, it is in seeing the stage crew at work that one becomes entirely conscious of the dovetailing of many seemingly distinct factors in making a single play. At first, seeing the stage crew at work looks like chaos; but each man knows what to do and when, and how he may move about without getting in the way of his fellows.

As a rule, one does not see the crew in full operation until the curtain descends at the end of the first act. That is because the first act setting is generally placed at conclusion of the preceding performance. However, in larger cities, authorities compel managers to "strike" all sets immediately after the final curtain.

It is about seven-thirty at night. Players are drifting in and going to their dressing rooms—two or three in one room, perhaps—excepting in those of the more important members of the company, who have individual quarters. There is a constant murmur of voices as the actors, busily applying grease and paint and powder, talk among them-

selves. At about seven-forty comes a call, "Half hour!" This means that there are thirty minutes remaining before the overture.

The voice is that of the call boy—that is, occasionally, because his office is usually filled by the stage manager. This latter personage is usually an actor who has a small or "bit" part. He receives an extra weekly consideration for his work. In the profession he sometimes is known as the "dog," on account of the variety of obligations he is expected to fulfil.

In practically every case I have encountered, the stage manager is a studious young man, anxious to learn his art to the full, and undertaking this mainly because of the executive experience in it. One finds him of keen technical knowledge as a rule, and frequently with ambitious ideas which he hopes to execute some day in an ideal theater of his own. His office has been the responsible, if humble, position in which most of our great stage directors have served their apprenticeships. The circumstance explains why one frequently finds a small part in a production played with rare skill. The stage manager is the actor. It may be a "bit" like the apothecary in "Romeo and Juliet," that should be well done or not at all; and the stage manager assumes it rather than permit some untrained extra person to stumble through it.

The stage manager—who must not be confused with the company manager or house manager—oversees everything that is carried on in connection with the mechanical production, and artistic effects as well. The first is his obligation; the others represent his personal efficiency. If performance is unsatisfactory, actors forget their lines, overplay their effects, try to "hog the show"—which means to appropriate all the sympathy or applause by tricks of various kinds—or yet "kid" their parts with "ad lib."

matter—which means to interpolate lines and business of their own not provided in the manuscript—he is vested with authority to call rehearsals—notice of which is posted on the "call" or bulletin board in a conspicuous place—and so make them act properly.

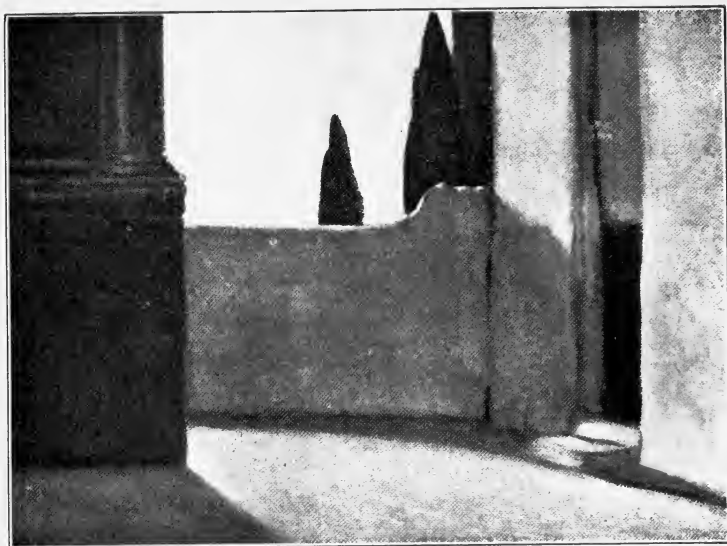
In well-regulated companies the stage manager keeps a "time sheet" for each rendition. This is a record which gives, under name of play and the date, the number of the performance, whether *matinée* or evening, time of the overture, when the curtain rises and falls on each act, the running time of each act and scene, length of any "waits," number of curtain calls, and pertinent remarks.

During performance, either the stage manager or his assistant, who probably is another actor playing a bit part in the company, is the prompter. He is expected to be "up" in all the lines and business of the play, himself ready to understudy certain parts if necessary, and familiar with all working details backstage. He keeps a "working" manuscript, or prompt copy of the play, before him in his place in the wings, and reads it a line or two ahead of the performers to be ready for emergencies. This script contains all cues for "working the production."

Rehearsing the company does not mean directing. It is assumed that the play is now in working shape, rehearsal being merely to insure even performance. In addition to rehearsing the company, the stage manager must maintain discipline back of the curtain line, must provide Herr Director with his table of orchestra cues; "Juice," the electrician, with a light plot; "Carp," the carpenter, with a scene plot, and "Props," the property man, with a list of the properties to be used in the play.

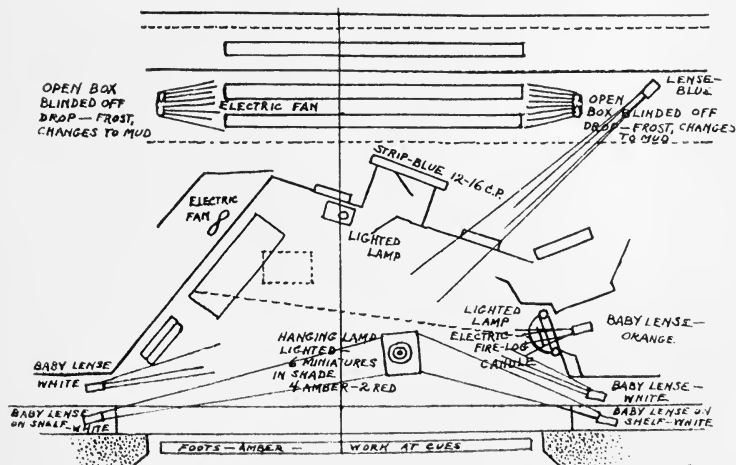
"Hand props"—that is, properties like knives, decanters, revolvers, fans, and so forth, that are to be handled by the actors during the action—are kept by the stage manager





LIGHT PLOT FOR PRIORY SCENE IN "THE COMEDY OF ERRORS."

Livingston Platt, at the Toy Theater in Boston, painted a water-color picture of the scene for information of the electrician.



Courtesy of David Belasco

LIGHT PLOT OF "THE GIRL OF THE GOLDEN WEST."

Here is a more explicit electrician's chart from another master of lighting, David Belasco. This was before he discarded footlights.

TWO KINDS OF LIGHT PLOT.



on a table in the wings, and gotten by the actors as required.

At the proper moment the stage manager signals the orchestra leader, rings the curtain up and down, and notifies the carpenter when to strike the set. But before considering these we must return and begin from the cry of "Half hour!"

### A TYPICAL PERFORMANCE

Fifteen minutes before the overture—at which time the asbestos curtain usually rises—the stage manager notifies the company a second time, and then again five minutes before. But the buzzing of conversation continues until the act is "called," when his cry is "Overture!" Then the performers who are to appear in the early part of the act, go to the stage.

But the manager, himself, has been on duty for some time. "Clear!" he exclaims. The electrician, who has been connecting the lights for the scene, and other persons who have no immediate business upon the stage, scurry off into the wings. "Places!" cries the manager. The actors who are to be "discovered" get into position; those who are to enter at once stand at their entrances. The manager signals the orchestra to conclude the overture; the electrician lights the foots and turns out the house lamps; the manager turns the switch or rings the bell, and the curtain rises.

A couple of minutes before the "tag," or last line of the act, is spoken, the manager warns the curtain man to be ready by usually two pushes on the signal, and then, at the proper time after, gives the one signal that rings down the "flying wall of canvas." Perhaps he takes an encore or two. If the play does not receive encores enough to satisfy him, he may resort to trickery.

He keeps the curtain down, but the footlights remain lit,

and the house lamps out. The audience, expecting another rise of the curtain, applaud. When the applause has gathered enough volume to seem real, the curtain goes up. The second time, the manager may do the same thing, save that, after the curtain has been down a moment, he shakes the edge of it gently, creating a ripple across its surface that seems to presage another rise. The rise not readily forthcoming, the audience is inspired to a more insistent demonstration that, nine times out of ten, evokes not only the ascent of the curtain, but a grateful speech by the star. It is just another advantage taken of human nature.

At last the manager decides to keep the curtain down. "Strike!" he calls. After that word is spoken, no more encores are taken—that is, rarely, because for an audience to see an "undressed" stage is quite properly held to be destructive of stage illusion—and this, although there have been plenty of examples before Sheridan's "The Rehearsal" and since Belasco's "Zaza."

Before anything is done to strike the set—which is here assumed to be an interior—all persons not having business on the stage proper, must be off. Then the electrician disconnects the lighting fixtures at the connectors, and removes the portable lamps.

Now the stage carpenter assumes command; and under his direction three or four "grips," or stage hands, take the wing and back flats apart and stack them in "dead" or used packs, usually in the wings against the back wall—"running" the packs, as it is called. These flats have been lashed together while in position upon the stage; but a grip is as dextrous as a cow puncher in snapping the light lines off and on the cleats above his head. There are also stage braces to be removed, and wooden props to be turned in. The flats now being out of the way, the flymen lower the back end of the ceiling piece, and raise the whole vertically into the flies.

After this, the center door fancy is lifted up, and also, perhaps, some of the larger flats, like the entire back wall of a room; and the stage is clear for the new command of "Props."

"Props," as I have remarked before, is the property man. He is in command of usually four or five "clearers"—the New Theater that was, had thirty-two—who carry off the furniture, rugs, and so forth, and place them in convenient but unobtrusive positions at back or in the wings.

In some of the older theaters, a trap was opened in the middle of the stage, and through this the properties were passed below; but the practise was generally abandoned in favor of leaving space for the property man and clearers to go on and off the scene while it is in course of erection or in course of dismantling. I have seen a property man with an armful of china, walk nonchalantly through a doorway to the stage, while the doorway, as part of the scene, was being slid into place from a distance.

The next set may be an exterior. The ground cloth is spread first, or the cloth of the preceding act may be removed revealing the new one already in place beneath it. Then the property man brings on the movable objects in his charge, benches, rocks, flower-beds, and so on, and piles them in the middle of the stage so that the grips may build the scene without interruption. He works from the middle outward, usually completing his work at about the time the grips do theirs. Flymen are occupied, meanwhile, in the lowering of drops and borders, and the grips in placing the flats, representing houses, perhaps, or walls.

At this point the electrician becomes active. He must adjust his border lights, place his wing lights, strips and bunches. After connecting the plugs, he places an assistant at each open lamp, as the law requires, and tests the entire

arrangement to insure smooth operation. This over, the scene is ready.

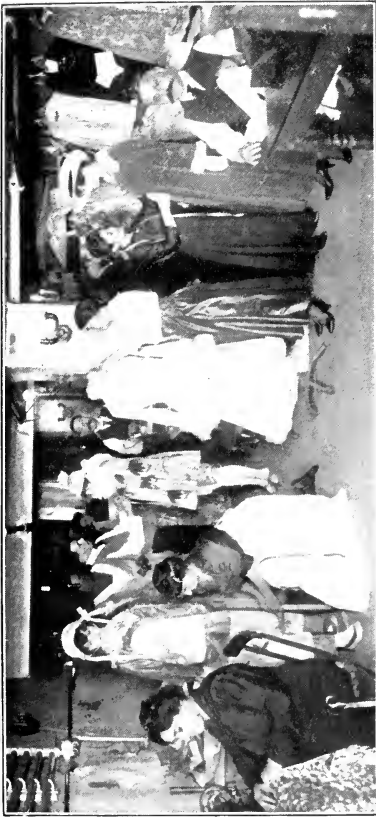
Props, Juice, and Carp notify the manager to that effect, and the second act is called. "Clear!" and "Places!" bring the actors into position. A red lamp, winking of the musicians' lights, or a buzzer, tells Herr Director to conclude his entr'acte music. The foots go on and the house lights out. The bell rings, or the switch is turned, and the curtain rises.

### THREE DEPARTMENTS OF THE CREW

It will be observed that the stage crew is divided into three departments, Carpentry, Property, and Lighting, each independent of the others, but all three working harmoniously toward a common end. Largely for purposes of publicity—although the stage manager declared he did it for convenient identification—the three stage departments of the Punch and Judy Theater, New York, were once outfitted respectively with red, white, and blue caps.

At the Metropolitan Opera House, New York, where the change of bill is frequent during the season, day and night crews are maintained. The night crew takes down all the used drops and carefully packs them with reference to their numbers, and next day the day crew places them in the storehouse.

The force at the New York Hippodrome is frequently as many as two hundred men—about sixty electricians, sixty property men and clearers, twenty-five grips, and thirty-five engineers who attend the pumps that fill and empty the big tank. All properties and scene pieces there, are numbered to correspond to the men who are to handle them, while cues, on a darkened scene, are given by lights placed high in an alcove on one side of the stage. All men in the crew are rehearsed in their parts as thoroughly as the actors; con-



TECHNICAL DEPARTMENTS AT THE NEW YORK HIPPODROME.

These pictures were taken during the New York run of "Hip Hip Hooray." Above, at right, is the wardrobe room; below, the property room. At left, property men are seen moving the huge soldier,





sequently few changes of scene there—and there may be nineteen or twenty—take more than thirty seconds each.

It would require many pages to do more than indicate the duties of the various members of the stage crew, for they are constantly being confronted with new problems. A stage hand has little time to loaf, and full opportunity to build himself up from trade to profession.

Occasional disagreements are about all that inform the great theatergoing public that such occupations exist. It is at such times that one hears talk of “unions” and “associations” that sound singularly inappropriate concerning attachés of Fairyland.

### UNIONS

When one hears of union stage employees, he should remember that there is a distinction between their union proper—the I. A. T. S. E. (International Association of Theatrical Stage Employees)—and their fraternal order—the T. M. A.'s (Theatrical Mechanics' Association). To join the first, one must have worked in a theater two years, and, before going on the road, been in the union two years. It is a powerful organization, and has settled, as an instance of its value in arbitration, what was formerly a prolific cause of argument—what is property, and what is scenery? Say a fountain is used in a set. What is it to be called? The union calls it property; so Props and his clearers are compelled to set and to strike it.

### ON THE ROAD

On the road a special crew is carried with the company, and works in conjunction with the house crew at each stand. Both crews see that scenery is put on and off transfer trucks, and, before that, that it is properly packed. Furniture is carried in crates, although there has lately been in-

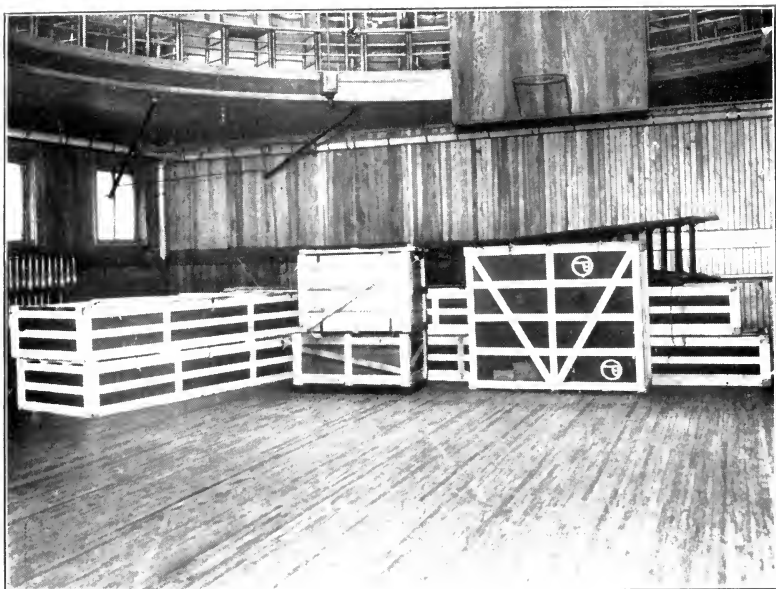
vented a wooden base with a laced padded cover, which has advantages that may not be detailed here. The electrician sometimes carries a special switchboard, in addition to his lamps, with dimmers and all complete.

One of the most remarkable touring arrangements I know of is the Portmanteau Theater, contrived by Stuart Walker, the stage director and author. It is a completely equipped stage, proscenium, curtains, and all, which may be taken apart, placed in ten large boxes of varying sizes, and shipped anywhere. It has a complete lighting installation, including dimmers and effects of color, and a horizon. For ready shifting of scenes, it uses the simple Elizabethan principle of alternate stages. It carries a professional company and full stage crew. The crates in which the scenery is carried, form the stage floor, and there are many other interesting economies. The theater is intended particularly for exhibition in clubs, colleges, and schools—nearness no object.

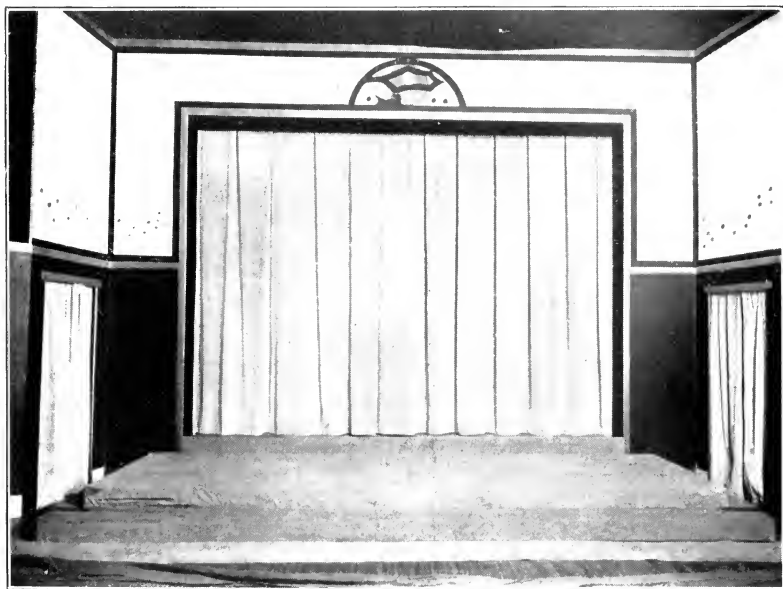
#### WARDROBE MISTRESSES

I have neglected to mention the wardrobe mistress. She may scarcely be called a member of the stage crew; but, for that matter, neither may the manager nor his assistant. She usually belongs to the company, as they do. She is frequently an actress who, like the stage manager, for an incentive of some few dollars in addition to her salary, undertakes to defy the instability of warp and woof. She, or her assistant, gathers the costumes from various dressing rooms at conclusion of each performance, examines them to see that they are in good condition, mends them if necessary, and then redistributes them in time for their next appearance.

At this point, having seen all the various parts of "back-stage" set into motion, we may proceed into the other great division of the theater known as the "front of the house."



Packed in Ten Boxes for Transportation.



*Photos Courtesy of Stuart Walker*

Stuart Walker's Portable Stage Set Up and Ready for Performance.

THE PORTMANTEAU THEATER



# MANAGERS BEGIN THEIR ACTIVITIES

## CHAPTER XXIX

### PRODUCERS

It is paradoxical that managers, the most undeniably commercial persons in the theater, generally conclude their worldly obligations as poor men, while stage artists, upon retirement, often rank as nabobs. Augustin Daly, Lester Wallack and A. M. Palmer, the three grand managerial figures of the "good old days" of the drama in this country, and Bronson Howard, the first native playwright of distinction, provide early cases in point, for the first three died comparatively poor and the last left a considerable estate. Without taking the circumstance as text for defense of commerce in the theater, it yet may help to illustrate the certainty that playhouse control by bread-and-butter standards is not necessarily a money-grabbing system.

In fact, the tendency in the theater seems ever and inevitably to be toward business organization; those who essay management with high ideals and altruistic intentions, arrive sooner or later, at merely some modification of accepted method. The actor, as a salaried artist, is free in advocating an untrammelled institution; but, as the responsible head of personal enterprise, he promptly becomes conservative like radical critics of government—stock speculators, for instance—elected to office.

"The commercial instinct has been found to be so much keener and more correct in its ability to gauge public taste

than the more artistic judgment and experience of the actor," wrote A. M. Palmer January 3, 1896, in a private letter replying to some authoritative objections to contemporary theater management, "that the former everywhere has been substituted for the latter throughout America." And in this dictum may be found a summing-up of the attitude toward the theater which gives title to this book—or to the present adventures in playdom.

An indictment of this view seems constituted in those constant fluctuations in prosperity which characterize the business side of the theater. But these take place frequently because most men proceed into the business upon the untrained supposition that the whole thing is a gamble anyway, or because managers of ability, tried and true, grow negligent in press of work, and, having their better judgment biased by personal feeling, fall into the slough of bankruptcy.

Of course, play production at best ultimately depends upon that curious quantity known as public favor, which has swift, complex and generally unaccountable shifts; but it remains that more successes are achieved through careful marshaling of those known elements that go to make up plays, playhouses and playgoing, than through random "hunches."

Any way the manager is placed, he remains the hub of the entire scheme of activity, and so stands to win or lose more than any of his associates. Therefore, when a failure is heavy, he frequently totters on the verge of bankruptcy—or actually enters it, dragging minor associates, like players and mechanical workers, into the vortex. These may get not even carfare back home.

However, a roll of honor has been kept in America, of a few leading producers whose reverses have driven them temporarily to relief afforded by bankruptcy statutes, pre-

ferring to devote renewed effort to full payment of all creditors, and succeeding to the slightest obligation. Of this group, Harrison Grey Fiske is conspicuous. When it came to sale of assets, he threw his fine library and other private property of value into the balance with the holdings and equipment of his business, while his creditors rallied to his side as friends.

#### DEVELOPMENT OF THE PRODUCER

Inquiry into the process which evolves a successful manager, draws the conclusion that he has experienced dramatic inclination long before, and that his vicissitudes have covered big theatrical lessons from which he has had good sense to profit. Marc Klaw was dramatic editor of the *Louisville Commercial*, and Abraham L. Erlanger was in the box office of a Cleveland theater when they decided to combine for inception of the so-called Theatrical Syndicate; the Shuberts were ushers in theaters of Syracuse, N. Y., before beginning their business as haberdashers in that city, and subsequently their national careers as managers; William A. Brady early was known as a call boy in a San Francisco playhouse; and Oliver Morosco was chief assistant to his father, a celebrated acrobat in his day and founder of an early "one-to-two-bits" popular-price stock company in the Golden Gate city.

That Frederick Edward McKay started as manager through his marriage to Blanche Ring, is a mere high light in his career. He previously was an advance man for the Empire Theater Stock Company of New York, a staff writer on the *Dramatic Mirror*, on the *New York World*, and subsequently became dramatic editor of the *Evening Mail* in the same city. Similarly, Maurice Campbell was on the staff of the *New York World* before directing the stage appearances of his wife, Henrietta Crosman. George C.

Tyler, one of the noted American producers, left the *Mirror* as an advance man for an obscure musical comedy company, and then directed the tour of Charles Coghlan in "The Royal Box," a venture which marked practically the beginning of the Liebler Company—Theodore Liebler having been a theatrical printer.

The *Dramatic Mirror* long has been a stamping ground for embryo dramatic celebrities because its early profits financed the first starring tours of Mrs. Minnie Maddern Fiske, and so established affiliation with the producing end of the game. Harrison Grey Fiske, distinguished as a producer and husband of this lady who now is known as the most intellectual actress in America, was for many years editor and proprietor of the weekly.

David Belasco toiled from an humble position as an actor, but from an acting family, and learned his lessons at the butt end of a vigorous experience. Winthrop Ames rose theatrically from traditions of the attic playhouse of his childhood and his father's ownership of the first Booth Theater, New York, to become, first, manager of a musical and dramatic stock organization at the Castle Square Theater in Boston, then chief executive of the New Theater, then director of his own Little Theater, and also manager of the new Booth Theater, which books outside attractions. Thus, his experience covers neighborhood, national, "intimate," and "commercial" institutions. It contributed much to an already remarkable education in matters theatrical that had included a post-graduate course at Harvard in history of the drama and allied subjects, and a twelve-month first-hand study of construction, equipment, plan, scope, and policy of the representative theaters of Germany, France, and England, and, of course, America.



## PRODUCERS AND MANAGERS

There could be plays without the manager—but not so many; appointments probably would not be so lavish, and other workers would have to share his manifold duties. For, contrary to popular notion, he has other important functions beside depositing money in the bank. He really does bother, now and then, to produce plays.

Popular conception of a theatrical manager is so far from that of a busy man of affairs, that he is constantly besieged by trivial persons with imagined claims upon his time. William A. Brady once tabulated a list of such visitors and their purposes, covering a period of less than a week.

It remarked one who wanted him to prepare data for a lecture on the drama to be delivered by the applicant before a private dramatic club; another asked advice to his society on instituting a dramatic censorship; a third wanted \$200 advance royalty on a relative's play, unread and unknown to fame; still another urged him personally to conduct a student body about the New York theaters to determine the extent of ticket speculation; a fourth solicited his membership in a society for the advancement of bill-board art; a fifth requested subscription of \$100 to an organization for the reading of plays by unknown American dramatists; a sixth calmly stated he came for a 5,000-word article on "defects of our national dramatic tendencies" to be delivered by him next evening at a church sociable; and a seventh, who by no means concluded the list, came for financial support of a high-school dramatic club in a small Connecticut town.

The term manager is applied, like a whole thesaurus of other good words, a bit carelessly, and therefore fits manager and producer equally well. Indeed, preference inclines toward the latter sense, as the producer is the personage

more in the public eye. He is the power; the manager is the executive.

Thus, America has producers of the magnitude of Klaw and Erlanger, the Shuberts, Winthrop Ames, David Belasco, the Charles Frohman Company, Charles Dillingham, the Selwyns, William A. Brady, Oliver Morosco, A. H. Woods, and Cohan and Harris, and others in a long list, all known as managers. And there is no quarrel with this application of the word, because authoritative usage is the standard of correctness, and, doubtless, there were managers long before it became necessary to coin the less familiar term. The distinction is drawn here only temporarily to define two estimable officers; in pages past, as in pages to come, there is many a lapse to the ordinary form and sense.

#### DIFFERENCES IN PRODUCING METHOD

Probably there is no detailed common agreement as to just what a producer is—save on the fact that he is the court of the last resort in all issues pertaining to his theater and attraction, before, of course, the ultimate decision of the theatergoing public. In nearly every instance, he is found undertaking particular duties, elsewhere entrusted to special workers.

Winthrop Ames personally directs production of all his attractions from first to last; David Belasco prefers to leave the preliminary rehearsals to a professional director, and then, with fresh perspective, attend to the final “whipping into shape;” Selwyn and Company is headed by a sort of triumvirate, in which Edgar Selwyn, excellent actor and author of “Rolling Stones,” “The Country Boy” and “The Arab,” guides the staging; Adolph Klauber, for many years dramatic editor of the *New York Times*, reads and selects plays and engages players—duties for which he is eminently fitted through critically having examined hun-



*Photo White*

Winthrop Ames knows what he wants down to the last stick of furniture when mounting a production; and if he cannot make his need clear in any other way, he draws a picture of it. He is literally an artist in the theatre.



*Photo De Strelecki*

#### Two Distinguished PRODUCERS AT WORK.

David Belasco pins all his notes to large screens when working on a new play to facilitate reference. If he hasn't room enough, he pins up envelopes and puts his notes in them. This is his working costume in the studio.



dreds of plays and thousands of actor-folk over and over again on countless first nights, apart from having been an actor himself; and Archie Selwyn, manager of wide experience, attends to business details. One might supplement this with an amplified account of personal methods throughout the managerial rank and file; and the sum-total of all probably would be no nearer a satisfactory definition.

A producer may not be named even as the man who pays all the bills—assuming that all bills *are* to be paid—for frequently there enters into the plan a sort of silent partner who furnishes necessary funds. This factor is technically known as the “angel;” and angels here, in contradistinction to heavenly messengers, must be material above all things.

Sometimes they are authors determined on production of their plays, or, like Augustus Thomas with “The Witching Hour,” so confident of success that they speculate for a share in receipts—and Thomas later, it is said, refused something like \$100,000 for his fifty per cent. interest; they may be monied youths bent on making stars of their Totties Dimpletoe; husbands of stars, aiding personal schemes of success; rich investors seeking bonanzas, or wealthy citizens, like Otto H. Kahn, who, in the importation of the *Serge de Diaghileff Ballet Russe*, was ready, if called upon, to lose vast sums in the interest of Art.

In all likelihood, the producer passes on the cast; and probably he judges scenery too; but these results are generally specially achieved by subordinates. Consequently, the matters of casting and scene painting have been relegated to more pertinent places. Similarly, separate accounts have been provided of different divisions of theatrical work, because, while the producer may descend at times to share in the labor of his aides, he properly, in his capacity as producer, is a general whose duty is efficient organization,

and whose instructions to his subordinates are to do; he leaving them, as trained workers, to find out how.

Therefore, the soubriquet, "Little Corporal of the Drama," originally applied to A. L. Erlanger by, I believe, Rennold Wolf, of the *Morning Telegraph*, was a singularly apt description of his office—as apt as David Belasco's adoption of Napoleon's emblem of the busy bee (as punning allusion to the initial of his surname), at the suggestion of Marie B. Schrader, lately the "Madame Critic" of the *Dramatic Mirror*, and then a special writer on the *Washington Post*.

So one must find the adventures recorded here pervaded by a sense of the producer's omnipresence—just as all columns of the great American newspapers of a bygone generation, were found bristling with ubiquitous personalities of their war-horse editors.

## CHAPTER XXX

### GENERAL MANAGERS

THE number of workers employed in a theater is determined mainly by one or another or all of three considerations: finances, size of the institution, and nature of production. Members of the personnel tend to specialize only when all other things are in due proportion.

Repertoire naturally requires more services than the single "long run" production with a company of exactly the same number of players, and the opera reasonably calls for a longer salary list than the "intimate" theater. Therefore, it is rare indeed to find members of a theater staff each of whom specializes in just one department. This is generally excepting those who are governed by union or association rules.

Producers are frequently their own general managers and stage directors, as Arthur Hopkins, producer of "The Poor Little Rich Girl" and other plays; general managers are often press representatives, too, as Edwin A. Weil, nephew of A. R. Cazauran, was for H. H. Frazee prior to his own embarkation as a producer, and as James Shesgreen was for Margaret Anglin; or a press representative may be playreader in addition, as Samuel Hoffenstein, quondam dramatic editor of the New York *Evening Sun*, became for A. H. Woods.

As his title implies, the general manager is in charge of all theatrical business affairs of the producer. These in-

clude leasing the theater—assuming the producer is to have one of his own—rentals, overhead expenses, initial outlay for scenery, properties, costumes, and so forth; contracts with authors, actors, and so on; engagement or dismissal of workers; conformation to workmen's, building, and fire laws; exclusion of undesirables; obviation of nuisances; stock leasing and routing, and exercise of power of attorney in business agreements. Business departments of the theater are loosely known as the "front of the house," probably because auditing is done in the box office.

Usually the general manager is relieved of the burden of bookkeeping by an auditor; if the matters of stock leasing and routing have developed into large issues, as with A. H. Woods, whose list of plays available for stock production is remarkably long, and whose road companies at times number in excess of thirty, a department may be instituted and a special officer placed in charge. In the case of Woods that man is Victor Leighton, the former Woods press representative and a worker of marked efficiency, with physical and economic conditions of literally hundreds of long-run, week and night-stand theaters at his fingertips. Mr. Leighton's position and thoroughness make him one of the best informed men on the immediate theatrical situation in America.

#### SOME EXPENSES OF PRODUCTION

In summarizing the various expenses incurred in making a production, one may but reiterate the statements made by George C. Jenks in the *Theater Magazine* some few seasons ago. Mr. Jenks, equipped with intimate knowledge of his subject, prepared a table showing approximate costs of an average three-act drama with three settings and a cast of seven to ten persons before the curtain rises on the first performance. This table follows:



Author's advance royalty .....	\$ 500
Cast (advance) .....	300
Scenery .....	1,500
Printing (paid) .....	1,000
Properties .....	200
Rehearsal hall .....	100
Working force .....	600
Stage director or "producer" .....	500
Billposting .....	50
Newspaper advertising .....	1,000
Sundries (not named) .....	1,000
	\$6,750

An accompanying explanation details accumulation of these items. The cast is engaged, a process of elimination covering rarely less than two weeks, and involving deadlocks over salaries. The salary list of a first-class company of seven to ten persons runs from \$1,200 to \$2,000 per week. The advance is given because most of the persons engaged need money with which to purchase wardrobes and so forth. Three settings will appear on the scenic artist's bill as at least \$500 each. The stage director's fee will come to about \$500 for four or five weeks' service, or more if his reputation is great. Then with inauguration of rehearsals begin wages of the working force—carpenter, electrician, property man, and their assistants—adding about \$150 per week to preliminary expenses. At dress rehearsals the stage hands get about sixty-eight cents an hour, with double pay at special hours and on Sundays. At performance the rate is about "\$2 per show," or fifty-six cents an hour.

It must be remembered that these costs represent outlay before the curtain rises on the first public performance, and that the customary out-of-town "tryout" in the United States, swells the total to much more because this is anticipated generally as serious if not total financial loss. The

gain comes in constant revision of the production. Provision is made, indeed, for possible loss during the first two weeks after the metropolitan première, for many a dubious play has achieved success after this crucial time. It takes that long for the public to get acquainted.

There always is a salvage of some sort from a failure, or even from a production that has worn its life out on the road. Scenery may be repainted, or frames recovered with canvas, and the properties disposed in new arrangements, while skilful dressmakers or wardrobe mistresses (there is a remarkable wardrobe mistress on the staff of Margaret Anglin) may furbish up the costumes. Therefore, a manager who has been in the business long enough to present two consecutive attractions, probably makes his second production at much less expense approximately than his first.

#### THEATER LEASES

Leasing the theater—quite different from booking it—is a comparatively simple matter. The document which records the transaction, is in nature not unlike the lease marking the transfer of any other bit of real estate. It particularizes the purposes to which the structure is to be put—sometimes even confining it to one type of attraction—and rounds it out with customary legal phraseology.

Rent is claimed for usually forty weeks in the year, this presumed to cover the period of the theatrical season; and in this clause is found the reason so many attractions are able to subsist on moderate business until late in the summer, and why so many others are begun while the weather remains warm. Not paying the landlord is a material reduction of expense, for yearly rental of theaters in large cities, runs staggeringly far into the thousands. To be sure, an owner of theatrical real estate is careful to com-

pute his earnings during the paying period so as to recompense him amply for the time the house is technically closed—in professional jargon, “Playing ‘A Bunch of Keys,’ or a new play called ‘Darkness.’”

A theater lease usually is for a long term—twenty-one to ninety-nine years—so it almost implies ownership. Sometimes the manager enters into the agreement because the playhouse has been erected by the owner solely in consideration of his becoming its tenant; again, a desirable site in a playgoing center may not be for sale. It is this latter handicap that restrains so many managers in New York’s theater district. Property is held largely by the Astor estates (John Jacob and William Waldorf); and the policy which has obtained for years is not to sell.

#### THEATER SITES

Success of a play is not dependent altogether upon site of its theater. The public will throng to an out-of-the-way playhouse to *hear* Arnold Daly in “Candida” as the maiden American offering of the struggling Shaw, or to see the Washington Square Players disseminating propaganda of the “new movement.” But site may be a contributory factor of success. If the offering chances to be merely “just-as-good,” accessibility will help much to determine its patronage. See, for illustration, the subscription lists of neighborhood stock or one-week houses. Producers in search of sites upon which to *build* their theaters bear these facts in mind.

In the first place, a theater, while desired by many residents in a locality, may not be welcomed at all by owners of adjacent property. Primarily, it raises their insurance rate. Next, it is in bad repute with most merchants of other things than beverages, confectionery, and cheap novelties, because it occupies considerable space, and, for the

greater part of the business day, maintains a blank and deserted exterior.

Its performances are so gauged that they allow patrons little more than time to arrive and time to depart, while the traffic at such periods surges by the nearby store windows, hiding display and making doors inaccessible to regular shoppers. Then, where there are but two or three matinées a week, chances of possible trade with theatergoers is comparatively slim, while evening performance comes when most shopkeepers have switched off their lights and called it another day—perhaps, in the ironical scheme of things, even gone to the theater themselves. All this is very galling to admit in contemplating a plan of unalloyed public betterment through institution of a theater, but, after all, if one is willing to regard the theater as a business, active in commercial competition, survival of the fittest there becomes an admirable policy.

One sop of satisfaction to adjoining property holders comes in the circumstance that higher real estate valuations by the front foot have led the architect to keep his theater auditorium and stage to the rear, and the lobby to the front as a narrow passage flanked by rent-paying stores. So the front area of the theater proper, being smaller, is not nearly so drear, although the lobby, not being as spacious as formerly, compels the management (now and then) to form its lines to the box office out on the sidewalk.

To this one may oppose pictures of magnificent façades of the theaters of Continental Europe; but from the shopkeeper's viewpoint—which I am not assuming by any means—no unendowed tradesman would esteem it an advantage to be set up in business beside the long, imposing front of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. This suggestion can work no mischief, because that New York institution is situated in a park, with no likelihood of the hypothesis

ever being substantiated in fact. And, indeed, managers themselves are not inclined to have their theaters beside blanker spaces, like churches, public parks, or schools.

### THEATER POLICIES

In the course of events, the general manager is confronted by opportunities to rent the theater while not in use for rehearsals or the regular attractions—mornings, or afternoons when there is no *matinée*. And, naturally, he here finds a way to pay something off on the rent, and to aid in carrying out the usual aim of making ten per cent. on the house investment in ten years. However, he has to avoid conflict with the specific policy of the house.

This means not the policy dictated by the lease, but that established or intended by the producer. For instance, A. G. Delamater has won some attention of late seasons by billing himself as the "producer of clean plays," and, when having a theater of his own, would not want, of course, to have even a single performance of an outside play the moral appeal of which is open to question. Lectures, recitals, and most benefits are generally acceptable for brief special rentals; but other plays are sometimes regarded as cases of the manager blunting his chances and confusing his public by competing with himself in his own house. Even when the notices specify no interference with the current attraction, the situation is liable to be misconstrued.

The commoner interpretation of the term policy, as applied to theaters, primarily has to do with mere types of attraction. A theater may be a "stock" house, implying weekly change of bill constituted by outworn road or metropolitan attractions, with a resident company of players. This may be musical stock, "dramatic" stock, or both. The repertory theater also has a standing company, but attempts new or individual productions, which, if success-

ful financially or artistically, may be kept on "in repertoire" for occasional revival.

A repertory theater is generally regarded as an ideal form. It is commonest in Europe, where it often enjoys civic or court subsidy; but America boasts of a few important repertory organizations on tour, such as that of Margaret Anglin.

A "one-week" or "week-stand" house is a theater used for week engagements of traveling organizations. A "night-stand" or "jump" explains itself. There appears to be no generic term to indicate a metropolitan theater that produces its own play and presents it for an indefinite series of performances, or that books a success originally produced elsewhere, for a "run." Fundamentally, this theater is precisely like the night and week stands; it sustains a longer engagement because its situation gives it a larger drawing population.

A policy of any kind is not established readily. The manager may aim for one policy at first, only to have it substantially changed through economic and other demands. Grand opera and burlesque may flourish side and side in a factory town where "problem" plays would unravel to empty benches; a program of one-act plays may come to grief in the vicinity of an amusement park, and a lurid melodrama of full evening's length, win plaudits of thousands on the same stage.

Or the usual situation may be entirely reversed. Dainty "Prunella," with the most beautiful mounting in a generation, had dwindling patronage in a Boston theater because next door were the more glittering allurements of "The Queen of the Movies." The policy may change with the rising of the moon, or, more truly, with the passing of the hour. The New Theater, so enthusiastically begun in New York, was compelled to close its doors as such more because of an

unattainable policy, a new play every three weeks, than because of the popular notion that it was ill-constructed for its peculiar end.

In Continental Europe there are other classifications of theater, beyond the ordinary commercial or "garden" variety, either entirely unknown here or rarely familiar. These are the "court" theaters, maintained by nobility, and defraying a fraction of their expenses in occasionally admitting the public at slight fees, and the state, civic, or municipal theaters variously endowed.

#### MINOR DUTIES OF GENERAL MANAGERS

A sort of tacit agreement exists between managers to use one another's theaters, when needed and available, for rehearsals, the only provisos being that properties, or movable objects used in productions, like chairs, tables, and so forth, are to be furnished by the visitor, and any other incidental expenses, such as extra lighting, defrayed. Under such circumstances I have seen in a New York theater, as one of an audience of perhaps ten persons, a fairly complete presentation of a play which was to have its "first performance on any stage" in Chicago. A distinguished and very considerable audience of managers and stars, witnessed the dress rehearsal of "The Eternal Magdalene," in which Julia Arthur returned to the stage, at the Forty-eighth Street Theater, New York, the afternoon of the day before its "initial presentation" at Wilmington, Delaware, October 22, 1915.

The rehearsal arrangement is a slight saving in the expense of mounting a production, as, failing permission to use a stage without charge, a producer is compelled to hire some neighboring gymnasium, roller-skating rink, dance, or so-called "rehearsal" hall, according to his requirements. These needs may include necessity for simultaneous

drilling of chorus and principals in separate rooms, or mere quiet direction of a tiny group. The usual charge for such a hall is about \$25 per week.

Not a few of the general manager's duties have to do with federal, state, and civic laws in contradistinction to union rules, which in the theater, amount to intricate regulation. Highly important is the workmen's compensation act; but, as this is substantially the same in the theater as elsewhere, details are omitted. Then comes the income tax, which again is general in its application. Yet, it may be noted that not a little confusion has arisen through difficulty of collecting the tax from actors who hold a great many positions of varying remuneration during the year, and the circumstance that the manager is liable in a measure for his employees' non-payment. This is ignoring the detailed regulation concerning alien actors, of whom there are many in the United States.

Local laws have mainly to do with safeguarding human life; and accident and fire insurances here supplement structural precautions, of which some account has already been given, with more to follow.

Then there are licenses theaters are compelled to secure. In large cities the fee per theater runs into several hundreds of dollars; and if the season has but one day to run into another legal year, that fee must be paid again for a new permit. In 1915 the end of the New York legal theatrical year came on Friday, May 31st. Some theaters closed for the summer on that day rather than pay so much for the sake of finishing the week. Several others paid for the extra day on the ground that the license would be good in the autumn when they opened again.

Obviation of nuisances may have to do with chasing from the street a crowd of urchins whose noise at play outside the theater, distracts the audience within; it may



be politic handling of a contractor, whose excavation to repair a main interferes with the carriage service; it may have to do with ticket speculators, whose leather-lunged obnoxiousness must be overcome.

Another thing: The producer, as a theater owner or lessee, is a responsible person and consequently must be guarded at all points against civil action. The man who rips his coat on a tin sign fastened to the lamp-post outside, may not get his \$45 demand for a new garment, but he may get \$5 to hush his complaint and release the manager from liability. That curled-up corner of the foyer rug, or that break in the sidewalk which threatens to trip the unwary person, must be remedied before the manager suffers the consequences.

An attempt of a thrifty manager to furbish up his faded carpet with aniline dye, a few seasons ago, resulted in the ruin of at least one evening gown that trailed over it; and he had to pay for that and for the dry cleaning of several others. That explains the managerial anxiety caused by newly varnished seats on a midsummer night. Probably every scheme ever devised to make a manager liable was put into practice at the former New Theater, for the large circle of millionaire founders and directors constituted a possible liability that would have made an injured person independent for life.

These many considerations compel the general manager to be a sort of compendium of useful knowledge; and they explain, too, much of the respect accorded such men as John Brown, business comptroller of the Metropolitan Opera House; John D. Williams, formerly manager for Charles Frohman; Benjamin F. Roeder, general manager for David Belasco, and Edward E. Lyons, general manager for Winthrop Ames. So encyclopædic and thorough is the astuteness of the last-named that he was taken from the manager's

post at Daly's Theater, New York, to be made house manager of the New Theater; and to his good will and unfailing observation I am indebted for much accurate judgment, and a fund of specific examples from commercial, technical, and literary phases of the playhouse.

## CHAPTER XXXI

### ROUTING

IN regarding the country at large with a view to estimating its theatergoing propensities, the manager goes hot and cold, now with hope and again with fear, that his attraction will meet with changed reception from place to place. The estimate is necessarily colored by traditions. For instance, the manager knows that the South is noted for its partiality to musical pieces. Two and three attractions of that type have commonly been known to follow one another in the same Dixie town for consecutive engagements, and all play to enormous business. But if cotton is poor in the South this year, he is aware from the lessons of everyone's experience, that theatrical business there will be bad. Even a minor flood in Galveston creates apprehension concerning a wide area. In the same manner the manager watches the green crops in the West, and states of industrial affairs in the North and East.

Modifications of business generally correspond to the season. The coming of lumbermen in late spring, after being snowbound in the woods, with their earnings in bulk, may mean a wave of prosperity through some strip of country in the great Northwest. Horse Show Week in New York, before the advent of the motor-car, used to be dreaded by local managers; and beginning of the opera season usually cut serious inroads in profits of "regular" theaters. In the spring of 1916, Mark Luescher, press representative at the New York Hippodrome, tried to off-

set the influence of the coming of the circus by holding an elaborate street parade a day before that of the tanbark show.

Suburban auto, horse, and aero meets are looked upon with apprehension, while baseball and football seasons undoubtedly give good cause to managerial worryment. These last-named events, however, are frequently diverted in their theatrical influence, by lowering weather, which frightens intended excursionists into seeking their recreation at home.

Yet the very rival attraction may prove a boon in drawing crowds from outlying towns. The Automobile Show brought so many strangers to New York for two weeks that "Hip Hip Hooray," at the Hippodrome, had an enormous increase in business during that time. Auspicious occasions are periods when low "excursion" rates offered by railroads, bring to town an influx of strangers who must be amused throughout their stay, and that time when the host of buyers arrives for advance styles. Smaller towns are hardest hit by these shifting conditions, because theirs almost necessarily are fewer. Yale students' desertion of their alma mater for the nonce at holiday seasons, usually causes an appalling slump in the theatrical business of the Connecticut city of New Haven. Or, graver still, nothing could be more dismal than the general theatrical condition in the ordinarily prosperous city of Pittsburgh when the miners or mill workers are on strike.

A long strip of territory down the Mississippi, below the twin cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul, has for years been studiously avoided as theatrically barren by many producers. Yet Margaret Illington in "Within the Law," had so many patrons there fighting for admittance that the police were called out to keep them in line. Thus, the principles of routing seem as full of contradictions as the rules of German grammar. No hard-and-fast scheme may be established.

## “WEATHER-VANES” OF ROUTING

It here becomes pertinent to inquire the source of a manager's information concerning these various cities and towns. Obviously, he cannot depend on glowing circulars issued by civic pride associations, or on haphazard estimates of persons unacquainted with theatrical demands. However, he can learn something from the local manager of the theater he tentatively intends to play, and he can glean something from the daily or weekly newspapers of that place, particularly if there is more than one.

Information of more or less stable kind, such as local and drawing populations, number and character of competitive houses, facilities of stages, and so on, may be culled from publications like “Gus Hill's Directory” and “Julius Cahn's Guide,” compiled for just this purpose. But important facts are gleaned only by a reporter's assiduity in finding them out. Some assistance comes from the fact that company managers, returned from their tours, are inclined to be boastful of business in territories they have covered, or vindictive in complaint, or yet gloomily silent—but always affording clues to accurate estimate.

## SOME ROUTING ECONOMIES

Having fixed upon a territory in which he would like his attraction to play, the manager plans for engagements of sufficient physical nearness that the jumps may be made without losing any time. That is, consecutive dates would almost certainly be broken in a jump from New Orleans to San Francisco, or Seattle to Chicago; but it is surprising how much ground may be covered by an entire production between the close of the Saturday night engagement and the beginning of the Monday evening performance. Klaw and Erlanger closed “The Trail of the Lonesome Pine”

at the New Amsterdam Theater, New York, on a Saturday night and opened it the following Monday in Milwaukee. But even when long jumps may be made in time, they are not accomplished if any shorter stages of progression may be arranged, because railroading costs much money. I recall abandonment of the tour of a minor play because the route began from New York to Toronto, to Brooklyn, to Newark, and to Chicago.

Taking precedence even over time is money, for routing is a commercial enterprise. So the decision is reached promptly as to nature of the circuit of houses played—whether it is to be “first-class” (dollar-fifty to two dollars), or “pop” (popular-priced). First-class theaters in the large cities, usually offer week engagements; but in smaller towns, they frequently play “split-weeks” or “time” of perhaps three different attractions in six days, regular matinées Wednesday and Saturday. Among the best theaters of second-class cities (the rating is official, so casts no reflection here), like Syracuse, Buffalo, and Albany of New York, and New Haven of Connecticut, the split-week policy prevails. The classification refers more particularly to scales of prices. Therefore, one may think of technically first-class theaters where the clientele is infinitely inferior to that of certain others of second-class professional repute.

Effort is made to earn traveling expenses in the long jumps by playing the night stands; and, of course, this is trying not merely to the company, but frequently to the patrons. I have seen a company omit whole scenes and even destroy intelligibility of a play in order to conclude it in time to make the transfer and the train. To be sure, this must have been with authorization of the company manager.

Allowance must be made not merely to cover the actual



FIRST ACT SETTING OF "THE TRUTH"

As Produced by Winthrop Ames at The Little Theatre, New York.



*Photos Courtesy of Winthrop Ames*

THE SAME SETTING AS PRESENTED ON TOUR.

Furniture in the New York setting was too heavy for cheap transportation.





playing engagement, but to get scenery and trunks and other items in and out of the theater. The preceding attraction must be out at a certain time, and room must be made at a given hour for the incoming attraction. If scenery, properties, and trunks are not unloaded from the cars within a specified period, or if they occupy the transfer trucks beyond a set limit, storage charges will add to those of transportation. Under fire laws of larger cities, scenery cannot be stored in the theater unless it is to be used in the current attraction, so regulation must be accurate.

A particular difficulty comes in routing an attraction so that it does not conflict with another of the same type, or follow a production that has temporarily exhausted the drawing population. Here the manager is working much in the dark. Even if he could provide himself in advance with a route sheet of each contemporary attraction, he would still be more or less uncertain, for the best arrangement is subject to change. Therefore, the company manager is vested with authority to apply for an altered route if he finds that expedient.

#### CENTRAL BOOKING OFFICES

A panacea for most of these ills is declared found in an institution known as a central booking office. But, before sketching its nature, recourse must be had to a bit of history. Indeed, its nature will be largely explained by that history.

For many years prior and up to the mid-nineties of the century past, New York virtually was the producing center of the entire United States; and the out-of-town manager desirous of booking a series of worth-while attractions at his house, hied himself there to contract for the coming of those he could get.

In the seventies of the nineteenth century, Hal Sleeper

Taylor started in New York, an agency for systematization of miscellaneous bookings—that is, a meeting ground of house, company, and producing managers, where engagements of touring attractions might be arranged. This agency was acquired, early in 1896, by Marc Klaw, once dramatic editor of the Louisville *Commercial*, and Abraham Erlanger, previously treasurer of a Cleveland theater. They were speedily joined in combination by Nixon and Zimmerman, managers in Philadelphia; Rich and Harris, of Boston, and Al Hayman and Charles Frohman, of New York. The last-named had just started a booking agency of his own; but he relinquished control in favor of his more influential rivals.

In a short time, the powerful organization announced that some thirty-seven first-class theaters were under their direction, and that they could give each thirty consecutive weeks of attractions. The booking fee was five per cent. of the house share of the gross receipts. Close record was to be kept of theatrical conditions in each town; there were to be no very long jumps, and there were to be no conflicts with other attractions booking through the agency.

#### RISE OF THE SHUBERTS

About 1900, the name of Sam S. Shubert, who began to control a string of up York State theaters, became familiar in professional circles; and presently he came to New York and leased the Herald Square. Almost from the beginning, Sam Shubert and his brothers, Lee and Jacob J., were in opposition to the syndicate; and now, having secured financial backing—to-day vested largely in the hands of Joseph L. Rhinock, of Cincinnati—they allied themselves with the independent forces of Harrison Grey Fiske and Mrs. Fiske and David Belasco.

Losing the Fiskes and Belasco meant a severe blow to

the syndicate, for all three had established reputations for highly artistic work; so, after patient endeavor, a compromise was effected, whereby Fiske and Belasco might book at will through either syndicate or opposition houses.

With their secession began the shifting of a number of other managers from syndicate to opposition. First and foremost was George C. Tyler, who lately has returned. Then came William A. Brady and John Cort, with his circuit in the Northwest, and Julius Cahn and his chain in New England. And so on the accretion and alternation continued until the two factors in the field were, all things considered, of nearly equal magnitude. The situation was serious indeed, as, by the letter of their agreements, a manager booking through one agency was to be excluded during that time, and probably longer, from the theaters of another. In practise, however, there were many newcomers in the field booking indiscriminately in first the theaters of one faction and then in those of the other.

This culminated in the organization of the National Theater Owners' Association, by managers of some twelve hundred one-night stands; and their efforts supplemented the movement known as the "open-door policy," started by the Shuberts, which made it possible for a theater manager to secure any desired available attraction, irrespective of party difference, and not be compelled to accept what his particular agency sent him.

### SHARING CONTRACTS

The central booking office, in the form known to-day operated by Klaw and Erlanger or the Shuberts, with Os-good or Jules Murry as the respective executives in charge, offers a producer consecutive bookings for his attraction more or less in line with his desires, as open dates permit. Presumably it avoids conflict with like attractions, and

makes stands of sufficient physical nearness to prevent eating up profits in railroading.

When the producer has agreed to the route laid down upon a large "route sheet," upon which the several theaters to be played are named together with their stipulated percentages of receipts, the producer signs contracts with the various house managers, subscribing to certain conditions named therein.

Such a document is known as a "sharing contract," because it establishes the percentage of receipts producer and manager of the house which plays his attraction, are to receive. The manager agrees to play the given production at his house for a term of so many nights and so many matinées, making in all a total of so many performances. He agrees to furnish light and heat, and his house is to be cleaned and licensed and maintain necessary attachés, including stage hands under a house carpenter. He is to take in scenery and baggage immediately upon their arrival, and place them respectively on the stage and in the dressing rooms; and at conclusion of the last performance, these are to be immediately placed outside. A doorkeeper is to be maintained, vested with due authority to keep unconcerned persons out of the stage part of the theater. Customary billposting is to be done. Further, the manager is to share *pro rata* on cost of musicians carried at the union scale. Also, he is to place at disposal of the traveling stage crew, the "property" resources of the theater. Free list and prices of admittance are to be mutually arranged.

On the other hand, the producer agrees faithfully to perform the play in first-class manner, to give royalties and author's fees, provide display printing properly dated, and to conform generally to local and house regulations. Returns of the house are to be made from collection boxes regulated by the box office sales. Only regular tickets are

to be sold or received at the doors. Settlement and payments are to be made at the theater's usual time.

In event of fire, national or local calamity, or any unforeseen occurrence, legal obligation and responsibility is canceled. This clause permits sudden cancellation of engagements, so familiar to local managers the country over.

In event of closing the theater for further rehearsals of the visiting company, the producer must pay rent for the time closed, and incidental expenses. Members of the company shall abide by the rules and pay for any damage caused by them. The producer, party of the first part, is to receive fifty to seventy per cent. of the gross as his share, this percentage, of course, being definitely fixed.

To this are added requirements peculiar to the house, such as that "Box A is to be reserved by the theater for the theater owners at all performances." For many years the Goulds retained a box through such contract clause, at the Grand Opera House, New York, as proprietors of the structure.

Signatures and usual statements that the contract is to become void automatically if erased or interlineated without mutual consent, round out the agreement.

## CHAPTER XXXII

### STOCK LEASING AND STOCK COMPANIES

THE great old stock companies, like Daly's and Wallack's, have few surviving prototypes; and "stock" now commonly means the cheap companies, generally changing their bills every week.

Practically the whole matter of leasing plays for production in "stock" is subject to the more vital consideration of stock manager's requirements. Unlike some other managers, he is not ordinarily compelled to accept attractions he does not want; and, therefore, it is better, perhaps, to approach the subject from his point of view.

Not many years ago, before the advent of motion pictures, the stock company was the final refuge of a worn-out play, and in that friendly shelter it was apt long to remain. But times have changed, although it is said that Augustus Thomas is still drawing royalties from stock productions of "Alabama." For twenty years, I understand, he has received royalties from "Arizona."

The average stock company of to-day has for some time been on the wane with competition of cheaper and better amusements; and the revenue is much reduced. Indeed, the filming of a play hurts stock value, for some local exhibitor is bound to book the "release" at the same time that it is done by the stock, benefit by all the stock advertising, and run it at ten or even five-cent prices, which the stock can by no means afford. The observation about modern stocks being on the wane does not reflect upon the repertoire house

itself; it implies only that through sheer insufficiency of financial profit, the stock company, as the small city ordinarily knows it, is unable to achieve real distinction.

But the royalty charged for a drama placed on the stocks, after road seasons are over, is but a small item in the aggregate cost of operating any stock theater. The price runs, in the majority of cases, anywhere from \$75 to \$1,000 for a week's use of the manuscript and typewritten individual parts. There is no set figure, but it is quite often graded by "what the traffic will bear."

Where there are two stocks in a town, they almost invariably pay more for their releases than an organization without a rival, for two companies mean competition and greater demand for real attractions. However, the average price for a big metropolitan success originally produced the preceding or second preceding year, may be given as \$500. David Belasco sometimes charges \$500 and a ten per cent. share in the gross over a certain amount; but this is fair, because he does not make increased money unless the company profits, too. This is giving the company a fighting chance.

#### METROPOLITAN FAILURES IN STOCK

New stock releases are often late metropolitan failures, and may be rendered by resident companies within a few weeks after closing on Broadway. Even the Belasco production of "The Man Inside," by Roland B. Molineaux, was bulletined for stock soon after its initial New York engagement. "The New Sin," by B. Macdonald Hastings, after running but one disastrous week at old Wallack's, New York, became a popular stock bill, while "The House of a Thousand Candles," a dramatization by George Middleton, that met with little appreciation on Broadway, is making a small fortune in the humbler field. After failure, this latter

play was on a broker's shelves for six months until some Western manager decided to try it. It broke his record for receipts, and from that time on, the play has never been idle.

"Lovers' Lane," "The Marriage of William Ashe," "Janice Meredith," and "The Crisis" are still active in stock. "The Lion and the Mouse," "The Squaw Man," "Paid in Full," and dozens of other successes that metropolitan theaters have forgotten, are being done, sometimes simultaneously, in a number of theaters. "The Man on the Box," "Strongheart," and "Brown of Harvard" thus remain paying attractions to this day.

#### MEETING DEMANDS FOR PLAYS

As seasons pass stock royalty is reduced, and so a play becomes available for cheaper and cheaper productions until it is worn out completely, unless it happens to be another "Uncle Tom's Cabin," "East Lynne," "'Way Down East," or "Two Orphans," or unless it receives first-class metropolitan revival, like "Arizona," or "Trilby," or "The Liars," or "Lady Windermere's Fan," or "The Truth," when the royalty goes soaring again with fresh public interest.

Producers having plays released, keep close watch upon these shifting conditions, for they mean great variance in demand. In printed bulletins, they inform stock managers of the pieces scheduled for production in given theaters over the country, and what other plays are coming, always listing proofs of their timeliness. Details of characters and settings are provided, too, for size and adaptability of cast and quantity of scenery are important items in weekly stock expenses.

Most of the leasing done is handled through large broking concerns. These make a specialty of such service to pro-



ducing managers. Of them, the American Play Company and Sanger and Jordan are, perhaps, best known. The former has for its bulletin a fair-sized magazine called *The Show Shop*, while the latter firm has long issued the familiar *Tip Folio*, with its plots, its schedule for the immediately forthcoming week, and its earnest (withal ambitious) recommendations of good, paying bills.

The stock manager in the small town watches his public with quite as much trepidation as the Napoleonic producer of the metropolis. In large cities, stock patrons come from the neighborhood. They are mainly women and girls who prefer matinées. There, afternoon performances are the money-makers; business falls off at night. Or sometimes trade is good only on certain days, so matinées may be given every day throughout the week save Monday; or the "mat" days may be Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, and Saturday. Wednesday, for some good psychological reason yet to be determined, Thursday, and Saturday are generally the best "mat" days. In smaller places, where there are not many, if any, competing amusements, evening business is better, for there men attend, too. They come after their day's work is done, and their sweethearts, wives, and daughters wait to come with them. All these considerations have bearing on the possible vintage of plays.

To one mindful of tendencies in the theater, it is striking to note that the most successful plays in stock are melodramas and farces; the subtle things rarely carry, because the director has no time to give to delicate staging, and because there is no room for other than sketchy work on the part of the harrassed actor. In all events, one generally finds the subtle play being discarded by the director, or whoever selects the forthcoming bill, as "talky," which means that it has not enough *action*. And he is right, because the objective is the most dramatic of play qualities.

The precise theme of a play, to become successful in stock, should conform, it seems, to the demands of "human interest." Heart-throbs are best. Plays of laughter and tears without compromise, are perennial in stock; the bizarre or subtle pieces commonly fall flat. "Madame Sans Gene" plays to crowded houses, while "Peter Pan" and "The Servant in the House" usually fail.

#### COST OF OPERATION

Inquiring now into actual figures of operating the stock in a town of perhaps thirty thousand, one may do no better than to revert to the data prepared by William Parke, a former director for Richard Mansfield, who in 1912 undertook, with a guarantee of \$5,000 a year to make up possible deficit, to open a stock at the Colonial Theater, Pittsfield, Mass. Pittsfield is a New England town, and New Englanders do not often take kindly to the playhouse; but Mr. Parke made good, a fact attested by expressed satisfaction of that group of leading citizens who owned the house.

Mr. Parke first pointed out that there is no city of thirty thousand where competition for a stock organization is lacking. In Pittsfield there were five other theaters, three playing vaudeville. And with competition, Mr. Parke said further, either the manager must lower the standard of his company or run the risk of annual deficit. With his guarantee Mr. Parke, of course, preferred to run the risk, but yet tried in every conceivable way to safeguard the investment.

Throughout the season his company comprised from twelve to fourteen persons. Four of them he paid weekly salaries of \$100 or more, these being probably leads and players of "second business," or parts next in importance. The leading lady usually gets most because of her costume

requirements; but in the East she gets less than in the West, where the modern stock company is better patronized, and where, indeed, it is an older institution. She may receive \$125 in the East as opposed to \$200 in the West. As Adolph Klauber has often said, the compensation is not high, for the labor is tremendous. "The average leading woman of an average stock company will play twelve new parts in as many weeks. That means memorizing from 1,200 to 2,000 pages of manuscript text averaging say 150 words per page, including cues, or an equivalent of 180,000 to 300,000 words."

The leading man probably receives \$100 to \$125. The second man and woman often are content with \$75 each, the woman probably receiving a little more on account of her gowns, while the rest of the players on regular salary, get amounts ranging down to \$35 and \$40. No one in Mr. Parke's company received less than \$25, save an occasional extra who may have gotten \$10. Actors are willing to work for less when they are to be located in one place, for they may board in the vicinity at a monthly rate, or even set up light housekeeping. Aggregate salaries of Mr. Parke's organization came to about \$700 per week.

As to royalties, Mr. Parke paid none on two plays in his season's schedule, "The Taming of the Shrew" and "The Rivals;" but on the rest he never paid less than \$75 apiece or more than \$250, averaging \$150. In a large city he would have had to pay more, perhaps \$1,000 for one that here cost him his top figure. He opened the season with "Arms and the Man." The remainder of the year he played a series of popular pieces from which the following titles are taken as representative: "The Little Minister," "Are You a Mason?" "The House Next Door," "Wild-fire," "Fifty Miles from Boston," "Madame X," "David Harum," "Mrs. Temple's Telegram," "The House of a

Thousand Candles," "The Man of the Hour," "Alias Jimmy Valentine," and one new play never before produced, "If You're Only Human," by Earl Derr Biggers. "The Rivals" and "The Taming of the Shrew" were purposely played one immediately after the other because the next week Mr. Parke planned to put on "Forty-five Minutes from Broadway," on which there was a royalty of \$250 and an additional cost of \$150 for a chorus. Yet, as a little illustration of stock patrons' likes and dislikes, he made more from the last than from either of the preceding two. This in contrast to the statement of John Craig, several seasons before, that his stock experience at the Castle Square in Boston, had convinced him that the public wants Shakespeare.

A matter of \$100 per week covered scenery, because, for an outlay of about \$1,000, Mr. Parke was able to purchase enough cloth and frames for the entire season, to be used over and over again. As the artist could be obtained for about \$2,500 per season, and needed the assistance of only a low-salaried paint boy, the allowance was ample. Advertising cost him only about \$75, which he spent mainly on billboards, with posters obtained from New York, for the semi-municipal character of the theater brought him newspaper advertising gratis. Lumping other expenses, office help, rent, printing, and so forth, brought the total to about \$1,300 per week, which therefore was given as the real cost of a good stock.

Mr. Parke's maximum receipts averaged about \$1,350 at ten, twenty, and fifty cent prices—although capacity would have been \$3,000 at the same rates. The first night's business generally was slow, and he had to make up his profits at the end of the week, and with Wednesday and Saturday matinées. During summer months he made money rapidly; in winter he frequently found loss—not easy to explain.

I have drawn my illustrations from the Pittsfield company mainly because I had their details convenient. The celebrated Northampton Theater, run along similar lines by Jessie Bonstelle and Bertram Harrison, I do not mean to ignore, because it has done much to raise the standard of good stock companies in America.

A stock company operated a few seasons ago at an amusement park in Maine by Bide Dudley, writer of the splendid theatrical column in the New York *Evening World*, in conjunction with Nat Royster, an advance agent, paid for its newspaper advertising, but secured its billing gratis. The theater was owned, with the rest of the amusement park, by the local traction company which made it a source of profit by running trolley excursions from outlying districts; and in the contract it was stipulated that cars running to and from the park, should carry advertising cards front and back.

## CHAPTER XXXIII

### PIRACY AND COPYRIGHT

To discuss the matter of play piracy nowadays, is like reopening on old wound, for the offense has dwindled mightily within the decade. Still, with substantial modifications, it does continue.

Piracy is not to be confused with plagiarism, which I have considered at some length in earlier pages. Plagiarism is entirely in the department of the playwright, while piracy belongs to the manager. Piracy has particularly to do with unauthorized performance of a produced play; plagiarism is unacknowledged appropriation in whole or in part of another's literary or artistic work.

When play piracy was at its height in the United States—say twenty to thirty years ago—the most persistent offenses were found in the West, probably because royalties were high and the long arm of the law, which in the theatrical sense stretched from the East, was not long enough to worry about. Piracy flourished there so well, in fact, that when, within the decade, producers united as the National Association of Producing Managers, mainly to overcome this evil, they found piracy organized into a system.

Most of the cases investigated by the association, were traced to the Chicago office of a man named Alexander Byers. For more than twenty years he had been a thorn in the sides of producing managers in duplicating plays and selling copies to others at slight increase over copying cost, even selling posters to go with them. It was found that copyright regulation then in force, was not stringent enough

to touch him; so it was up to the association to secure passage of a copyright law broad enough to restrain piracy forever.

To this end, Lignon Johnson, reputed to be one of the best theatrical lawyers in the United States, and retained as counsel of the association, was directed to frame an adequate copyright bill. He did so, and accompanied his application to the Government by a list of flagrant offenses demanding protective measures. According to the old law, only actors and managers could be punished for participating in pirated performances; by the new arrangement, stenographers who copy plays as well as those who illegally sell copies, may be restrained. This copyright amendment was signed by President Roosevelt March 4, 1909, the last day of his administration.

By virtue of this new regulation, the Managers' Association brought Byers to trial before the Federal Court of Chicago on twenty specific charges, holding him for at least two reasons in connection with each play—sending a stenographer to copy the piece, printing the play, and circulating it or producing it. He was indicted fifteen times by the Federal authorities.

When Byers agreed to turn over his books and papers to the Government and assist it in trapping other play pirates, twelve of the indictments were dismissed, demurrers to two sustained, and only the fifteenth was held against him. This charge, to which he pleaded guilty, was that on August 26, 1910, he had sold a copy of "Baby Mine" to M. Stillman, of Vancouver, B. C., assuring the latter that the sale gave him production rights. This play previously had been written and copyrighted by Margaret Mayo Selwyn, who retained all rights and interests in the piece. Byers is now himself a member of the Managers' Association, enjoying its many advantages to the full.

## THE CANADIAN SITUATION

Importance of international copyright was brought home when American plays were openly being pirated in Canada with practically no redress possible, for Canadian law failed, until recently, to protect dramatists, applying to plays only when published as books, and then not forbidding unauthorized production. Among American plays pirated in Canada, were "The Lion and the Mouse," "Get-Rich-Quick Wallingford," "Alias Jimmy Valentine," "The Deep Purple," "Baby Mine," "The Third Degree," "The Fortune Hunter," "Arizona," "The Man from Mexico," "Seven Days," "Polly of the Circus," and a number of others. The list was so long, in fact, that the Managers' Association investigated; and, presently, William A. Brady, then president, made public a letter from the Canadian Registrar of Copyrights, stating that any play copyrighted in England would be protected in Canada. This was the cue, then, for American authors to copyright their plays abroad. But even here was a difficulty that I shall take up presently in considering British provisions.

## SIGNIFICANCE OF COPYRIGHT

Pause for a moment to inquire what copyright means. Nine out of ten persons believe it to be an excellent watchdog, a good friend, an ominous threat, and a swift justice dispensed by an all-powerful, omnipotent thing called Government. When a playwright says that he has copyrighted his work, an admiring coterie of friends thinks that the Government has officially approved of his contribution to dramatic art. When copyright has been granted, the author feels that he controls the exclusive right of presentation, that anyone whose play even remotely resembles his, may not secure registration at all. It is a comfortable feeling.



But alas, even a most superficial investigation of the facts will dissipate these ideas. Theoretically, copyright aims at violators of justice; but practically, it punishes very few in proportion to the number at large. Tom, Dick, and Harry, with John Doe and Richard Roe, may each receive certificates of copyright upon the identical play, provided that the requisite number of copies have been deposited with applications, and that the full amount in fees has been paid. The underlying propriety of the matter must be determined in a court of law. Almost needless to say, it would be sheerly impracticable, as a measure to prevent copyright falling into wrong hands, for the Government to compare each new work for which protection is sought, with the thousands registered before it.

Copyright seems to exist for two purposes: to prevent theft and for assignment. In essence, it is just a registration; but the circumstances of that are so qualified, that the work to be copyrighted must actually be provided and not merely described.

#### HOW REGISTRATION IS SECURED

Application forms are supplied, upon request, by the Register of Copyrights at the Copyright Office, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C. If the work is reproduced in copies for sale—that is, such as in a book or in a magazine—one particular form is used; if it is not duplicated for sale and is intended for just stage presentation, a slightly different form is employed. It is only the unpublished play that is considered here. The filled-out application form (a small index card with spaces for the name and address of the copyright claimant, the names of author or authors and nationality, a brief title of the work, where the certificate of registration is to be sent, and for the name and address of the person remitting the one dollar

statutory fee for registration), is enclosed with the money order and sent to the Register of Copyrights. One copy of the play is sent under separate cover.

The one dollar mentioned includes the cost of the "certificate of registration under seal." This certificate is only a small card, but it has the distinction of being admitted in court as "*primâ facie* evidence of the facts stated therein." The entire cost of the copyrighting process is the one dollar fee, with three cents for the money order (remittance must be so made), two cents for the stamp on the letter inclosing it, the labor of filling out the card, of making the copy of the play, and doing up the parcel.

There is no charge for the parcel because the law provides that any postmaster shall, upon request, place a frank label upon it and mail it free of charge to its destination. He is also expected, if desired, to give a receipt for the parcel when it is delivered to him.

These steps are all that are taken by those persons who advertise that they will secure copyright for authors. This is no depreciation of their efforts, but a frank statement of the slight labor entailed. Copyright is readily obtained, as the Government is prompt and careful to explain.

The old law, whereby registration could be secured by filing a title in advance, was abrogated by the law of 1909.

A foreign citizen or subject may secure registration only when living in the United States at the time of depositing his work, or, when his native laws grant, by treaty, convention, or law, benefit, to American citizens, of essentially the same character as that given in the United States.

#### PRESENT COPYRIGHT LAW

While there has been and still is altogether too much literary pilfering and thievery in the United States—if it is reasonable to admit of any quantity at all—this country

has profited by both painful and happy experiences of other nations.

Under the law of 1909, copyright is granted for a period of twenty-eight years from the date of first registration. The work may bear the author's name or pseudonym, or may be anonymous. It may be a translation, adaptation, or dramatization of another's copyrighted work, but as long as it is produced with the consent of the owner or owners of that work, it is regarded as a new piece, subject to copyright.

At expiration of the first period, an extension is granted for twenty-eight years more. The application for this extended time must be made to the Copyright Office and registered there within one year of the expiration of the first term.

If a copyrighted play is changed by the author, the work does not require re-registration unless the changes are of a substantial nature. The mere substitution of a new title does not necessitate fresh entry. A second copyright will protect new matter, but will not extend the term of copyright in the older portions.

In no sense is copyright compulsory.

Infringement upon dramatic copyright is punishable by a fine of one hundred dollars for the first unauthorized performance, and fifty dollars for every subsequent representation. Plagiarism, whether in produced or unproduced work, is actionable as an ordinary civil damage suit.

#### TRANSFER OF COPYRIGHT

As a drama is a negotiable thing, it may be made over from one person to another with all rights. This assignment must be recorded in a written instrument signed by the copyright proprietor. If the transfer is made in a foreign country, it must be formally declared before a

United States consular official. Domestic assignments must be entered in the Copyright Office within three calendar months after making; foreign, six months.

#### INTERNATIONAL COPYRIGHT

There is no one international copyright as far as the United States is concerned. Most of the other nations subscribe to what is known as the "Bern Convention," a treaty signed at Bern, Switzerland, September, 1887. It provides that citizens or subjects of countries represented, shall enjoy, in each other country represented in that copyright union, the same protection accorded native authors.

The United States was unable to subscribe to this convention because national copyright laws, which cover books as well as dramas, require, in lieu of a protective tariff, that all types and metals used be made in this country. But the United States has various separate treaties whereby, when an author registers his work at Washington, he automatically gains protection in Great Britain (including Canada, Australia, India, and the Colonies), Belgium, France, Switzerland, Germany, Italy, Denmark, Spain, Hungary, Portugal, Mexico, Sweden, Norway, Chile, Costa Rica, Holland, and, of course all possessions of his own land.

English copyright on plays by American citizens has long been subject to ambiguous interpretation; and in 1911 a new law was passed, primarily designed to clear up old complexities.

In July, 1914, Frederick F. Schrader, then editor of the New York *Dramatic Mirror*, and an authority on American copyright, attempted to clear the situation by writing to Bernard Weller, editor of the London *Stage*, and author of "Stage Copyright at Home and Abroad." Mr. Weller replied at length, deploring the ambiguity of clauses in the new law, and emphasizing the need of American



It having been represented to Me by  
the Examiner of All Theatrical Entertainments  
that a typed copy, entitled,

"Mother"

being a Play, 4 acts

does not in its general tendency contain any thing  
immoral or otherwise improper for the Stage. The  
Lord Chamberlain of His Majesty's Household  
do by virtue of my Office and in pursuance of the Act  
of Parliament in that case provided Allow the  
Performance of the said typed copy  
at your Theatre with the exception of all Words and  
Passages which are specified by the Examiner in the  
endorsement of this License and without any further  
variations whatsoever.

Given under my hand  
this 21<sup>st</sup> day of March 1980  
J. Eckert  
Examiner of Plays

Albany  
Lord Chamberlain.

To The Manager of the Daly's Theatre, London. W.

Courtesy of Jules Eckert Goodman

BRITISH CENSORSHIP OF PLAYS.

Reduced facsimile of the certificate issued to Jules  
Eckert Goodman, the American dramatist, for the London  
production of his play, 'Mother.'



publication in England or her possessions, or in some other country belonging to the copyright union, within fourteen days of United States issue. There is no stipulation as to the number of copies to be sold, says Mr. Weller; but publication must be *bona fide*. The American play not published at all is in a very doubtful position. Yet the common law right may make English infringement of a play by an American actionable, as it would that by a British subject.

The United Managers' Protective Association worked long and earnestly to secure definition of these rights, for a protocol of the Berlin convention, among other proclamations, made it possible for Britain, or any other country in the copyright union, to modify her relations with a non-union country not giving reciprocal protection—and America, be it remembered, requires resetting of all foreign works published in the United States, or a high duty on imports—while the new law itself made room for a possible proclamation by the king to adjust registration of foreign works.

The hoped-for Orders in Council were issued by King George V in February, 1915. They provided, by the common law right, that any person who pirates an American work for production in Great Britain, may be either fined or imprisoned. Term of copyright extended to Americans is the same as in the United States, as opposed to an Englishman's "life and fifty years." Orders are silent, however, on American works made but not protected prior to the passage—or between coming into force of the Copyright Act, July 1, 1912, and January 1, 1915, when the orders went into effect.

Credit for this proclamation is due to Lignon Johnson, counsel of the Managers' Association. He went abroad for the express purpose of securing it, and conferred with Premier Asquith and Mr. Buxton, head of the London Board of Trade. The matter was incorporated in the

English law just before the final hearing and adoption of the copyright act by the British Parliament. President Wilson reciprocated with a proclamation protecting English music here from unlawful mechanical reproduction.

Rights secured under this law extend to all British dominions save the self-governing Dominions of Canada and New Zealand, the Commonwealth of Australia, and the Union of South Africa, and Newfoundland.



## CHAPTER XXXIV

### LOCAL AND COMPANY MANAGERS

THEORETICALLY, the local or resident manager of a theater booking touring attractions, is just a general manager on a lower plane; practically, he often has no greater status than that of a janitor, denied all initiative, and hence performing his duties in a sullen, perfunctory manner.

When, in smaller towns, he is virtually compelled to accept what the booking office is pleased to send, he is not disposed to welcome visiting companies with enthusiasm, or to minister to their comfort, although he sometimes has the right to reject undesirable attractions—leaving him the alternative of keeping his house dark and unprofitable.

From stories brought in from the road, one infers that the average janitor-manager is not even a good janitor. Like the independent personage with whom so many of us cliff-dwellers are familiar, one has to bang on the radiator pipes now and then to get him to send up the steam, or to point out the place where he has swept the dirt in a corner and hidden it behind the broom. The actor, from his point of view, doesn't care to make it an issue. He knows that in five or six days—perhaps less—he will be moving on to the next stand, probably never to see the offender again.

Bruce McRae, the actor, once told me of a company that did take this definite ground. At dead of night, just before train time and immediately after the last performance, they went to the home of the local health officer to register protest against conditions of their dressing rooms.

The officer rose from his bed, lit a light, and came downstairs to answer the knock; but no sooner did the indignant company see his face than they withdrew. The health officer was also the local manager.

Sometimes it is not so much that the manager is inconsiderate as that he is thoughtless. Not many seasons ago, a large company arrived at a theater where absolutely no provision had been made for ablutions. Then and there they refused to appear upon the stage until basins were brought, and this although the house had been sold out in advance. Through force of circumstances, no basins were to be procured in the immediate vicinity. So the resident manager, who was a good fellow after all (not to dilate upon his being forced into it), sent to his own home and confiscated all the basins, bowls, pitchers, and other receptacles he could find, and thus saved the day—or, more correctly, the night.

It does not seem unreasonable to ask a resident manager to provide adequate facilities for the members of his visiting attraction. Most of them are accommodations that once installed will remain serviceable indefinitely with little further attention; and the other little things are gratuities he is well able to afford.

#### ADVANCE WORK FOR THE INCOMING ATTRACTION

That which brings money to the box office is vital to the prosperity of the theater. In this case it is the attraction. It is here that the resident manager has greatest opportunity to display his genius.

The agent ahead of the coming attraction—a week, or ten days, or less, as the case may be—sends to the house the specified amount of “paper”—snipers, heralds, one, three, sixteen, and twenty-four sheet posters—leaving it to the manager to distribute it over an area that, in his opinion,

will be most productive of results. In some cases, all of this advertising matter is thrust into a cellar or a vacant lot after the agent has gone on; and when the attraction itself has arrived, there naturally is little or no advance sale for the simple reason that the public never knew it was coming. This is assuming, of course, that it is a real attraction. Poor advance sale for a poor attraction explains itself.

For the incoming play, the resident manager's service begins with the building of clientele, which implies maintenance of the physical theater, and general public service; but those probably exist before the attraction itself is dreamed of. Direct benefits begin with signing of the contract between house manager and producer, although that often enough is canceled soon after. Even the arrival of the advance agent to arrange details of prices, scenery and baggage transfer, and other matters to be described in due course, does not mean positively that the production is coming.

However, the manager is not actually obliged to do anything for the attraction until the agent puts in his appearance. Then he is expected to facilitate the work of that officer so he may proceed in due course to the next stand. Here and there one finds managers who will take the agent around and introduce him to the various local dramatic editors, describe their idiosyncrasies, and recommend certain action; in other places managers themselves undertake distribution of the press matter brought by the agent. F. P. Martin, of the Wieting Opera House, in Syracuse, N. Y., is one of the readiest I have ever known to extend cooperation. I am not likely to forget his great courtesy when, as an inexperienced agent, I came to his theater ahead of an attraction which, ironically enough, never played there, the contract having been canceled.

Another manager whose name I record with grateful

feeling, is Edward M. Hart, of Harmanus Bleecker Hall at Albany. Still another is D. W. Eldridge—an uncle of the Shuberts—at the new Shubert Theater, New Haven. I am writing of these from brief personal associations; and if my average of courteous gentleman in the particular profession thus far, is so high, it is reasonable to assume that there must be many, many more.

To the incoming stage crew there are more courtesies to be extended. Certain mechanical resources of the theater are to be thrown open to them; recommendations of certain merchants whose goods are required, are to be given, and co-operation of house attachés is to be assured.

When the company manager arrives with his "troupe," the resident manager should assist him in placing the people in comfortable quarters and in making them familiar with their surroundings. Duties are not particularized at this point because details belong to forthcoming descriptions of those other persons, particularly the agent, who enter the manager's sphere of activity.

#### LOCAL INFORMATION

So much information is required of the manager by these visitors, that in many theaters it is ready prepared in printed form. Hart, at Albany, provides an elaborate booklet, compiled and published by a local printer. It gives names and addresses of those on the theater staff; two sets of possible scales of matinée and evening prices; papers and critics; local representatives of out-of-town papers; reminder of special licenses necessary for child actors who may be in the company; stage dimensions and description of equipment; constitution of the orchestra; transfer companies; printing required, with extra advertising to be undertaken; railroads and their agents; express offices, telegraph companies; physicians, lawyers, imperative free-list

names, and a list of hotels. It really is what it purports to be, a manager's, agent's, and company's guide.

As this information is forwarded by the advance agent to the company manager, who redistributes it to the various departments as required, D. W. Eldridge, when at the Majestic Theater in Utica, classified it by departments on a single sheet, with perforations between, that any part might be detached from the rest. In more compact form, it provided much the same matter as the Hart booklet.

### WEEKLY STATEMENTS

Duties of the resident manager of a house playing road attractions are generally less than those of the man in charge of a house playing permanent stock, for instance. At the latter house they still more closely approximate obligations of a general manager. The stock manager's weekly statement includes not merely tabulated costs of light, heat, and expenditures shared with the visiting company, but actors' salaries, royalties, and so on.

For convenience, this weekly statement is presented without details, minor items being kept on separate vouchers. On the left side, listed by performances beginning Monday afternoon or evening, as the case may be, are noted the gross receipts, totaled at bottom for the week. On the right are listed the expenses of the week, with a number at the side of each item, corresponding to that of the separate voucher.

Thus, the "company salary list" will be marked No. 1. By referring to Voucher No. 1, the manager finds the receipt sheet for salaries paid. Upon this voucher begins the date, of course, and then comes "Received of the Blank Theater Company one dollar and other sums in full payment of services to date," followed by individual signatures. Amounts are not specified because one actor signing might

note, for example, that some fellow-player is receiving more, and become dissatisfied. A private slip accompanying, however, gives full salary list, with names, and corresponding amounts.

The weekly account goes on in this manner, ranging the various expenses in toto: salary list of house attachés, printing, regular advertising, extra advertising, and so forth, concluding with the grand expense total, compared at once with total receipts carried across to show gain or loss on the week. A notation, still further down, computes the gain or loss on the season.

#### COMPANY MANAGERS

The company manager, an officer who has entire charge of a company on tour, keeps a similar account, save that it covers no expenses of the theater played. One of the best systematized accounts for company managers I have seen is that especially prepared by Selwyn and Company for its men on the road.

It covers the same general points already indicated, but on the expense side has some items peculiar to a traveling organization: railroad transportation; individual fares; department bills for property men, carpenters, and electricians; scenery and baggage transfers; expense accounts of managers, agents and others concerned, and sundries, such as wardrobe expenses, telegrams, telephone calls, and postage.

A company manager, like his cousin, the local manager, generally stands in need of greater authority. His initiative is required frequently in unforeseen situations that arise miles from home. As has already been remarked, he is vested with the right to apply for an altered route if his present schedule seems unprofitable for pertinent reasons; and he may alter transportation arrangements without changing "dates" to be played.

In any event, while he is the personal representative of the producer, who is usually too far away to guard his own interests, with almost as much authority over his company as a sea captain over a ship outside the three-mile limit, there remain a few points, always depending on the particular case, wherein his discretion counts for little.

As to his broad obligations, he counts up at each performance with the treasurer and the house manager, pays the company's salaries and other bills due, puts in extra performances beside those "holiday" performances already named in the contract, provided they seem advantageous; engages understudies and extra people, calls rehearsals, and maintains company standards in general.

Of the two kinds of manager—company and local—the former is infinitely more picturesque. The local, or resident manager fulfils obligations in the everyday manner of the regular business man; and it seems to the casual beholder that he would be quite as much at home in an executive position at the head of a large department store. Vital as he is to the success of any considerable theatrical enterprise, he does not seem to fit in, some way, with the atmosphere of the theater.

The company manager, on the other hand, is in the thick of the mysteries, so to speak, and carries some of the illusion about with him. He is able to bring to acquaintances of the prosaic world outside, anecdotes of famous stars, tales of temperament and other small-talk of the wings, all stamped with a certain authority.

By and large, the company manager is a better-informed man than his cousin, the local manager. He is with the same company from beginning to end of an engagement, and has had time to make friends or enemies of the members. The other, in the very small theaters, is frequently a man who is on the outskirts of the profession, deceived,

he thinks, into putting his money in an investment of which he is gradually learning the sordid details. Companies come and go at his theater. He rarely meets the actors or members of the stage crew. His pertinent business is done mainly with the agent and the company manager in "the front of the house." He sees the first local performance from over the last row of orchestra chairs, with a critical eye that carries a box office implication. His psychology, one may say, is that of the audience which demands results and does not inquire into whys and wherefores. He is, like his humblest patron, merely an onlooker at things great and glorious.



# THE PLAY IS ADVERTISED AND TICKETS ARE SOLD

## CHAPTER XXXV

### ADVERTISING MANAGEMENT IN THE THEATER

PRESS agent, as a term, always seems to connote a theatrical connection, although there are press agents of federal and civil governments, of electoral candidates, of insurrections, of trade unions, of educational institutions, of industries of all kinds, of even the press itself, not to enumerate hundreds of other activities wherein advertising is considered profitable. The theatrical press agent stands patent probably because the rest of his craft are cloaked by the non-committal description, advertising managers.

Frankly, the term press agent is a misnomer. Acting as intermediary between a theatrical manager and the press, securing printed publicity and suppressing information that may exploit disadvantages or may be employed to better effect later, constitute but one of the officer's manifold lines of endeavor. He must command the entire field of theatrical advertising, billposting, street-car cards, throw-aways, pick-ups, snipers, heralds, sandwich-men, window displays, canvassing, mailing-lists, follow-up letters, souvenir performances, and so on, while acting in the general diplomatic service of his firm.

Advertising managers have developed their methods of securing publicity to definite science, happily in ignorance of their affiliation with the flamboyant type; but the kinship

has caused the familiar definition of press agent as reckless purveyor of lies, to lose its patness. The old-time "press yarn," typified by the pleasant fabrication sent broadcast by Wells Hawks, when that splendid promoter was on the staff of the New York Hippodrome, to the effect that a stage hand there had found a four-leaf clover in a grass mat, has a certain merit in conveying to an attentive public the name and whereabouts of a certain attraction; but its effect is negligible in creating what, in the butter-and-egg business, is called "consumer-demand."

Likely because of the greater uncertainties of play success, the theatrical press agent has not developed as rapidly as the advertising manager. Therefore in the majority of cases he meets the whimsical shifts of his peculiar consumer-demand with equally haphazard displays of imagination, his schemes being to "put it over" with the editors rather than with his public.

This circumstance impressed itself upon me when, as a theatrical press agent for a splendidly mounted attraction, I had exhausted many of the common resources of my craft without materially affecting that barometer of success known as the box-office statement; and my employer had determined to experiment by calling in an international expert accustomed to advertising other lines of business. This gentleman, prompt to respond, pleaded unfamiliarity with playhouse conditions, but agreed to try briefly. His result was, as he had feared it would be, as unproductive as my own.

Although I could judge only from externals, his mode of procedure seemed to carry about it a certain economy of time and effort and soundness of reasoning that commanded my profound respect; and presently I became persuaded that had this man persisted after his one excursion into the realm of the theater, he would have brought about material

changes in time-honored method. The new light completely altered in my eyes the aspect of successful press work; and from that time on I spent spare hours studying the huge library of advertising management where before I had been unable to find even a lucid definition of press agent.

#### FIELD OF PATRONAGE

Some things found already were part of press agent's routine, although not vested with the same importance. For instance, there was consideration given to class of people to be reached. The ordinary way is tacitly to accept the entire theatergoing public—a generality like the mighty terms war and peace—as potential patronage, and let it go at that. This all is very optimistic and commendable.

Combined populations of men, women, and children in Kankakee, Keokuk, Kokomo, and Kalamazoo should be regarded as material for ultimate attack; but there is always one particular class, convenient, remote, rich, poor, prodigal, sedentary, or particular in some respect, to which the play in question will have strongest appeal. One of Louis Mann's dramatic pleas to keep the old home and six, eight, or ten commandments intact, is certain to grip the heart-strings of a declining generation, which, in any age of the world, is bound to feel a bit neglected; while the topical froth in any edition of Ziegfeld's "Follies" will pick off a few members of the same group, grown bald, lonely, and desperate, or merely self-indulgent, adding them, however, to its particular market, the entire leisure-loving class.

They may say all they like about drama being a democratic muse; but in her specific examples she maintains a well-defined caste system. Indeed, there are productions like glittering "Chin-Chin," artfully composed of universal favorites that the result may contain something for everyone; but the tendency of most plays is to become more or

less insular in their subject-matter, and so deserving of concentrated treatment. The circus, "Snow White," "Racketty-Packetty House," and "Alice in Wonderland" mean most to children, although Grandpa finds the little ones merest excuses for personal gratification. Grandpa will be automatically taken care of if the press agent succeeds in arousing the tots. So, often do vigorous young people, newly arrived at man and womanhood, select attractions for their fathers and mothers who, left to themselves, might prefer something else. I should not care to handle an attraction that appeals to old people alone.

Market for a play may be selected by class, geographic distinction, or income. Class, as remarked, means that group of people most interested in subject-matter, and best able to appreciate subtleties of the action. Geographic selection implies convenience—trolley lines, accommodation trains, boats, and so forth, with their respective rates, all of which, together with numerous other inventions, have removed many of the old limits on radius of sale. But probably most important is income.

#### PRICES IN RELATION TO PUBLICITY

A theatergoer may belong to a class in virtually every way best adapted to patronage of a given attraction. He is even anxious to attend. But his income makes the price prohibitive. Specifically, a Shakespearean revival means most to a wage-earning class that is battling for education against heavy odds—long hours and short pay. To a representative of that group, revival of a given classic is a lesson in literature; and it may be the only theatrical offering he will attend in a year. Here the press agent may have his sales point and his market; but the barrier remains the price.

If practicable, he must reduce this price for availability

to his class—possibly increasing his seating capacity by removal to a larger theater. Discussion of just how this is to be done belongs to another division of the subject. However, it must consider cost of production, running expenses, and profit, and the price must bear comparison with prices maintained by competition. Incidentally, it may be remarked that variable rates often encourage patrons to haggle over consumer costs and, figuratively, to gauge value received as so much per pound.

A theatergoer's spending power is not necessarily stable because his earnings are fixed. Lower cost of living may enlarge his opportunities. So may accumulation of pennies saved. I am acquainted with an elderly couple, of moderate means, who make a practise of going to see a first-class metropolitan play on every wedding anniversary. The rest of the time they content themselves with movies Saturday nights in the home town.

While admitting this variableness, it is well to inquire into conditions upon which the playgoer's earning power depends. Are they industrial, manufacturing, trade, or professional conditions? Are members of the class wealthy, well-to-do, poor, single, married, young, middle-aged, old, skilled, or unskilled laborers, farmers, clerks, business men, servants, factory, office, trade, or professional workers; leisure class and so forth, not forgetting the importance of dividing into sex. Women count for more theater patronage than men.

Sight must never be lost of the fact that the theater is a luxury, despite the curious circumstance that playhouse prosperity often seems greatest when a country is in a state of war. There are times when, as propaganda, a play may appear an educational necessity; but, at best, the condition essentially is false. This becomes a handicap in stimulating demand.

## QUALITY OF PRODUCTION

Nothing stimulates demand as much as positive quality in the production itself. Inevitably this will noise itself about. The profession is full of stories telling how excellent plays have hung fire for two or three weeks and then, in consequence of "walking advertisement," or direct recommendation from one satisfied person to another, caught on and developed into sensational theatrical successes. The spoken commendatory word is the most valuable press agent achievement. It meets the objection instantly, which the printed word cannot; and it has personality back of it. But, whether spoken by theatergoer or press agent, the striking sales argument counts more immediately with the body of patronage than inherent virtue in the production.

Generally speaking, play quality is an indeterminate thing. A trained playwright usually knows when he has told his story dramatically; and the producing staff knows when it has provided adequate mounting. But with economic and other extraneous conditions in a state of constant upheaval, no one may foretell accurately the probable reception of theme and subject-matter.

Metaphysicists have their own definitions of quality; but, in the broad world of the theater, and certainly from the press agent's standpoint, there is but one final statement of the case: The dollar is the touchstone. A good play draws money within reasonable time for the public to become aware of its presence; an attraction that does not draw money has something the matter with it. It is presented now as being apropos; if it is not apropos, it is not adequate now, although it may be splendidly devised to meet some future state of affairs. Either some revision must be made to create that fitness, or the production permitted to run

haltingly on, or yet be discarded altogether. Commonly, little or no radical corrective work is done after opening.

Allowance of time must be made for quality to assert itself. With silks and satins the tentative buyer may examine the goods before accepting them; the playgoer, in a measure, has to buy a pig in a poke, knowing in advance only the testimony of the press or of a more venturesome friend. It is during this period, when the question of quality is held in abeyance, that the press agent may accomplish some of his best work in helping the public to make up its mind.

Intrinsic quality seems a comparative thing. If the standard of quality established by the general run of productions, has lately been higher than the average, the present production will have added difficulty in living up to the record; conversely, a run of inferior attractions will make even a slightly better one seem relatively good. But patronage is always discouraged by prolonged inferiority, so the improved offering must persist over-long in order to win it back again. Many a manager of a good stock company has been compelled to live a hand-to-mouth business existence because his indifferent predecessor has permitted trade to run down.

Real quality of some sort is the only reliable aid to the press agent in securing results. He may get his patrons into the theater through misrepresentation; but no space need be wasted to amplify the business axiom that misrepresentation ultimately never pays.

Generally, before having my experience with the international expert, I had been content to make two points: name of the attraction and where it was located. These had accomplished the purpose of better business because my employer had already established probable quality and positive convenience. So two excellent sales points had been

provided before I began; and the truth came home to me of that old saying that "the good show makes the good agent."

Now I realized that under other circumstances I might have been called upon to work without this splendid start, and that the rule, which doubtless would work both ways, would make me an inferior agent for a poor attraction. This condition advertising managers are taught to meet by creating a sales point where none has existed before; and, if the employer declines to admit this innovation, to seek another job. Thus part of successful press agency seems to be careful selection of one's employer.



## CHAPTER XXXVI

### PRESS AGENT EFFICIENCY

ELEMENTARY advertising in any line is to attract attention to wares offered. One frequently sees this accomplished by a quantity of loose toy balloons, for instance, being blown about a confectioner's window; a steel ball, suspended apparently in midair, in a millinery display; tea pouring endlessly out of a kettle which seems to have no way of being refilled, in a cigar store; a huge bird's-eye view of a popular baseball diamond, in a hat shop; a set of four or five news photographs repeated in the plate-glass fronts of several miscellaneous emporiums within short distance of one another, or, perhaps, a huge, garish topical cartoon employed to insinuate that a pawn-broker holds forth within.

Indeed, these examples go a step further than merely attracting attention. They hold it, too. But there is nothing psychological or otherwise, directly to link balloons with confectionery; a steel ball with millinery; pouring tea with cigars; the baseball view with hats; the news photographs with the various shops, or the political cartoons with the sign of the Medici. Still, they have accomplished something in getting the crowd outside. And the innermost circle of persons, in most such gatherings, hides the detail of the variant of the cartoon, so that others, crowding to find the nature of the thing, see the pawn-broker's direct display alone.

However, it is a long route for impatient people to go

in transferring attention from one thing to another quite remote, even when the link is provided; and therefore the thoughtful advertising man prefers to concentrate his appeal by attracting attention, holding it, telling nature of goods and shooting his sales argument across all in one effort. But that is only modification of method; the primary thing is to find his sales point.

### SALES POINTS

In brief, there must be one main fact about a play that makes it not necessarily different from other plays, but of decided interest to as many persons as may be—certainly to a sufficient number to insure life-sustaining patronage. To this will be added other sales points; but all of them will be subordinate to the main point which has the great function of closing the deal. These others may secure attention, hold it, and may even sell tickets themselves in being better adapted than the main argument, to personal needs of particular patrons. They are not to be underestimated. But they must always be pertinent to the matter in hand. Nothing could be closer to the object of increased sales than the prize offer for the millionth ticket to “Chin-Chin,” or the opening of an all-night box office at “Hip Hip Hooray,” with four box offices handling the crowd during the day.

Some of these lesser points may exist before the play. And, having more or less independent stability, they lend themselves, in the campaign to securing possible elements of permanent patronage. I am referring now to reputations previously established by producer and by players engaged, and even by the theater itself through having lately housed a series of successes.

This qualifies the old idea that a fresh beginning must be made with each new production. Certain it is that mere announcement that a new play is to be presented by Ames,

Belasco, Dillingham, Fiske, or Savage, arouses respectful attention based on recollection of past achievements. As the late Marshall Field said so repeatedly, "Appreciation of quality remains long after price is forgotten." Ames and Belasco have unique theaters which house only their own productions; the others have not. Dillingham has a theater, but he admits outside attractions. However, he affords splendid illustration of the manager whose proved efficiency has made of his name a trade-mark that to-day is practically a guarantee of quality.

When Selwyn and Company bought the waning attraction "Twin Beds," Margaret Mayo's dramatization of the novel by Salisbury Field, it was their general press representative, Charles Hayes, who made it one of the genuinely "smashing" hits of the season, largely by consistently following out the keynote expressed in the happy catch-line, "This is the life." It is a good instance of selecting an efficient point and sticking to it. Even the stupendous national campaign for the Serge de Diaghileff Ballet Russe, so magnificently waged by Edward L. Bernays, had but one dominant idea, that the ballet, in being a perfect synchronization of all the arts as expressed in its peculiar form, was not a "show" but an artistic movement, and, so, vital to one's æsthetic education.

It would be difficult for anyone to say that a production absolutely lacked a sales point. A clever press agent usually can find one in any offering, however inferior, and although it might eventually not be enough to combat losing factors that make withdrawal of the production imperative.

Creation of a sales point in a play, where one is lacking, is not easy. It may be just indication of the need to be worked out by dramatist or producer in their respective departments, something inherent in the production, compelling and positive. Simple declaration that a play is

“the best to be seen,” or “a dramatic hit,” conveys nothing distinctive or original, although I must confess that “the Greatest Show on Earth” was made, through constant iteration, to mean the Barnum and Bailey Circus. It should consider that plus the want created in a potential patron, are certain individual prejudices to be overcome. A possible seat behind a post may be quite as vital to some mind as question of quality. Two of my important sales points in the Little Theater were that one could see and hear excellently from any seat in the house. The real advantage was that these points were absolutely substantiated in fact.

To make the sales point something unique, a detailed study is made of recent and contemporary theatrical conditions. It was because sex discussion was occupying the theater at the time, that Leander Richardson was enabled to get thousands of clergymen to recommend the wholesomeness of “The Things That Count.” If the public has shown sudden dislike of plays of unmoral character—not to say immoral, for few plays are that—it will never do even to suggest spice here. On the other hand, it may not be well to over-emphasize moral quality for fear of creating suspicion of the reverse. But knowledge of what competition is using for its sales arguments, proves a key of what not to use if the campaign is to be distinctive.

A fixed policy is imperative in a successful campaign, for the campaign must be concertive in order to bring about the large number of small sales necessary to make up paying receipts in the aggregate. The tone is generally that of the play itself; dramatic if that is the nature of the attraction, or humorous if that is consistent. Blood-curdling stories do not ordinarily succeed in conveying the spirit of comedy. Advertising that strikes the spirit of the play is not apt to carry a bad reaction. It does not misrepresent. It brings not only the first patron, but also his friends.

## NATURE OF ADVERTISING

Better business ever being the positive aim, it remains for the press agent, after he has selected his employer, has determined the class of persons to be reached, and has found his sales point—which is to say, the message he wishes to convey—to consider character of the advertising and “copy” to be used.

This depends on what one aims to accomplish, the field one desires to cover. Newspapers and magazines are to be selected not merely by their net circulations, but by the classes of people they reach, two things which change more or less from year to year. Vested with proper authority, I often have taken display advertising in a paper of limited circulation at the same time that I have given minimum representation to another of enormous reaches, because the first was read by the exclusive group I then desired, and the other reached chiefly persons who could not afford our price, and who, if they could, probably would select broader types of amusement.

Unfortunate it is that in a huge metropolis, such as New York, one is apt to forget other places outside, and confine effort to the local press. In reality, New York is “the dog town of America”—meaning that its productions are important nationally mainly as “tryouts” for the rest of the country. And although the press agent, eager to show results for the security of his position, generally is wary of bothering with cumulative “stunts” which take time to mature, he is trifling with his most valuable potential business by ignoring pertinent mediums that have interstate and national circulations.

For every successful attraction there is a probable route of engagements to be played when the metropolitan run is ended. These places should be made aware of the attrac-

tion and its important sales arguments. To that end, most resident press agents rewrite their metropolitan matter for distribution to certain out-of-town editors, in the form of a weekly letter; but it is up to the editors to make the matter available for local consumption.

But every "news" item, article, interview, or "human interest" story sent forth, should convey a sales point. Paid advertising should do the same; and, as it is buying merely a chance to distract the reader's attention from editorial matter, it should not stop at simple representation. Definite purpose should be assigned to each effort, whether posted on a billboard, thrown in an areaway, folded as a herald in a program, or otherwise distributed. Perhaps, then, particular press work will achieve the dignified stability which is its due.

The true definition of a press agent, theatrical or otherwise, is just another definition of efficiency or of a sense of duty, from the respective viewpoints of employer and promoter. It may be telling lies glibly, dressing news attractively, or frankly advertising to create demand; but in any case, it should check up its own results in patronage.

## CHAPTER XXXVII

### GENERAL PRESS REPRESENTATIVES

THE person in charge of the general publicity work is the general press representative. Under him may be divers other agents out on the road ahead of touring attractions controlled by the same management, or even in the very city where the general press representative has his headquarters, each promoting publicity for one or more of several plays sponsored by the firm.

Competition between press representatives for newspaper space has made newspaper appeal the bulk of office routine; and that routine has become so elaborate that it has left little room for initiative beyond.

Beginning at the beginning, probably the first announcement to be made to the papers is that a play, by So-and-So, has been accepted. This may seem a meager bit of information; but the press agent, figuring by the likelihood that he will have to secure fresh publicity for the attraction for an entire season or more, husbands his material so as to disclose but one fact at a time. The title of the play, then, becomes a separate item for publication another day.

In some offices, the aim is to supply a new story every day in the week. A "story," in the newspaper sense, is anything intended for publication, from a line to a page or more of material. Other offices contend that editors resent being "flooded" with bales of "copy," and give out no statements to the press save those sought by reporters or absolutely imperative to public understanding.

Julian Johnson, at present editor of *Photoplay Magazine*, was exponent of the former idea when press representative to Comstock and Gest at the Princess Theater, New York, several seasons ago, and wrote an almost unbelievable amount of matter about his management and their attractions. Of the latter, John D. Williams, before becoming a producer on his own account, and as author then of practically all the important special articles and announcements issued by the Charles Frohman Company, probably stands foremost.

Acceptance of a play and its title having become separate items, the press representative finds other details in painting of scenery, gathering of properties, and engaging the cast, with individual names of leading players as distinct notes, and unimportant names grouped by twos and threes. Beginning of rehearsals is another point; so is composition or arrangement of incidental music; so are any interesting incidents at rehearsal, or in the daily lives of any important persons concerned. Date of opening is a big point, and date of beginning seat sale is bound to be printed here and there.

#### REGULAR ADVANCE NOTICES

About a week before the opening—assuming that there is to be no out-of-town tryout, and that the engagement is likely to be unlimited, or, at any rate, of several weeks' duration—the metropolitan agent prepares opening notices for publication the Saturday and Sunday preceding the first performance, these being the days when display space is usually given to theatrical affairs. In cities like New York and Chicago, these notices may be duplicated for all papers; in smaller places, each must be written afresh, although embodying the same material.

Ordinarily, they must reach the dramatic editor before



noon on Wednesday, Thursday morning being last call. This is the time when Saturday and Sunday pages are made up, with "layout" of pictures and quantities of text. And, naturally, early applicants get preferred positions, unless the late offering is of sufficient importance to displace them.

This is also about the time that advertising begins; but details of that will be considered later. It also is the time to prepare copy for signs before the theater, at either side of the entrance, and that beside the box office window, which holds the scale of prices, and for the electric sign, if there is any, and for the program. The hand-painted signs are generally attended to by some local artist who charges a certain rate per letter, and merely fits new boards in the frames after removing the old.

Program copy is sent to the printer in time for him to submit proof for correction. In New York, fire laws compel the manager to head his programs with admonitions to the audience on how to act in case of fire, to locate exits, by comparison with the theater diagram at back of the program, and *walk*, not run, to the nearest.

The text copy for the opening notice, covers from one to one and one-half typewritten pages. At the top, at left, it says, "From John Jones, General Press Representative to George Blank," assuming that Blank is a well-known producer. Otherwise, the office address and telephone number may follow. At top, at right, it says, "Released for Saturday and Sunday, January 5-6"—or whatever the dates may be. Room is left then for the editor to write in his own headline—although a striking suggestion now and then by way of a tentative "head" may not be amiss, provided room is left for another should it prove inadequate—and the story is begun.

It proclaims that George Blank will present a new play by Henry Dash at This-or-That Theater on such-and-such

an evening. The play, it continues, details the story of a man who, returning from an auto trip, discovers his wife in the arms of another. She calmly announces that in the stranger she has found an affinity to whom he must yield place, granting her divorce that the newer union may be consummated. Finding himself powerless to prevent, the husband arranges divorce, but plans to compel the correspondent to marry the woman—which the interloper had not intended doing. The outcome is said to be a thrilling sequence of scenes, offering a possible solution of a life problem to persons unhappily married. The cast is headed by So-and-So, and includes the following players. The first matinée will be given Wednesday afternoon.

Many editors decline to carry more than this routine matter in their columns until the play has had its opening performance and has demonstrated that it is likely to remain. Later, however, they welcome anything printable. This is an inflexible rule of Alexander Woollcott, dramatic editor of the New York *Times*.

#### PHOTOGRAPHS

A sort of tacit understanding exists between editors of illustrated newspapers and publicity men, that a picture pertaining to the new attraction will be printed the Saturday or Sunday before the opening, and another the morning or afternoon following the first performance, to supplement the review. As the first set of pictures are required usually before the first dress rehearsal, when flashlights of the characters and scenes are made, the agent commonly prepares the set for distribution from the quantity of personal and individual portraits he has solicited from the several members of the company, or has had taken at some neighboring studio. Effort is made to avoid duplication, for each paper prefers to have its material exclusive. Text may be

rewritten by the editor, but not much may be done to disguise pictures.

Perhaps Sunday afternoon preceding the opening, which is scheduled for Monday evening, a dress rehearsal is held, and flashlights are taken of characters and scenes in the play. Dispatch is necessary, mainly because the stage hands, waiting for the photographer to complete his work before "striking" the scene, are being paid for all time on duty, whether active or not.

At conclusion of each act, the photographer, with a couple of assistants, erects his heavy tripod in the auditorium at about the middle of the eighth or tenth row of the orchestra, so as to give his camera proper range for comprehension of the entire stage. Then, in swift succession, by instructions from the producer or stage director, the actors arrange themselves in poses from the preceding action.

First a "record" of the scene itself is made, without any characters upon it. This will be useful later to the stage carpenter and property man as a guide, and to the stock company director in the dim future in duplicating the original setting.

All pictures of individuals and groups are made to show the figures as large and as close together as possible, for newspaper pictures, like newspaper text, must make every bit of space count. From the press agent's point of view, photographs of large groups are not generally worth the paper they are printed on. They are usually full of superfluous detail; and the important figures are so small that they are utterly lost in reproduction.

Usually from twenty to thirty flashlights are taken at rehearsal. However, "Anatol" had but about ten, while "Town Topics," produced by Ned Wayburn at the Century Theater, New York, in 1915, had more than three hundred. The usual price is four dollars per plate, six sets of prints

being included in the amount. This does not mean necessarily six prints of each picture, but a total of prints on the whole order, equaling six sets. An active press department soon exhausts six sets, and then additional prints are delivered to the manager at a special rate of forty cents each. It is not expected that the six sets will be delivered immediately, but the number is soon made up by repeated orders.

### DELIVERING THE STORY

Mention has been made of sending stories to editors without description of the magic process. The box of tricks is incorporated in a boy or young man, usually assistant to the press representative, who inserts in envelopes addressed to the various dramatic editors, stories and pictures to be submitted, and leaves them in person at the respective editorial rooms. He may show an assortment of pictures to the editor, who thereupon selects what he is likely to use. But the story is left on the editor's desk, or with the boy in the outer office, or thrust in the editor's compartment of the mail box.

The daily story is usually sent out in time for the boy to cover the route between 4:30 and 7 P. M. Comfortably to make the rounds of the eighteen or so leading New York dailies takes about two hours. The less important local papers, and those issued weekly and monthly, receive their stories by mail. Editors of both morning and evening papers are usually to be found in their offices around 5 P. M., remaining there until 6 or thereabouts, although the former commonly arrive at their offices around midday, and happen in and out on no particular system throughout the afternoon. These editorial habits seem the rule in newspaper offices the country over. And the observation is found useful by the agent when he takes to the road.

## FIRST AND SECOND NIGHT LISTS

The day of the opening usually sees in the papers in "theatrical notes," a brief announcement that the given manager will hold the première of a certain new play at some theater to-night, the principal part to be taken by this or that star.

It may be during the course of this very day that the dramatic editor receives his two complimentary tickets for this performance. When possible, he should receive them not less than three days prior to the opening, for previous engagements may interfere with his coming, in which case he should have time in which to return the coupons. Incidentally, the critic's eleventh-hour worry that the management has neglected him is not conducive to his indulgence during the performance should things go wrong.

Sending tickets to the New York critics involves the taking of rarely less than 180 from the box office. These are for the first and second nights, the second night reservations for critics not compelled to write immediate reviews, their publications being generally weeklies or monthlies. Some deviations from this rule exist. Editors of the more important weeklies and monthlies are frequently represented in the first night crowd.

Seats are carefully arranged by the theater diagram, each critic being made as comfortable as possible. One is far-sighted; he is placed at appropriate distance from the stage. Another is near-sighted; another cannot hear well; a fourth must be seated on an aisle because he suffers from fainting spells, and must be able to get out into the air quickly. And so on. Because this adjustment is necessary to the critics' satisfaction, each has the same seat at every first night in the same theater. Dramatic editors of the big dailies are perforce given the best locations, and practically

all on aisles. Therefore, on a New York first night, one may see in a couple of rows from front to back, practically all of the city's critical experts.

It would be quite possible to seat both first and second night reviewers in one theater on the same evening, but the critical body, even when scattered, is already sufficiently large to dampen enthusiasm of the actors, who are nervous under survey, while its members rarely applaud for the natural reason, among others, that the press agent may see them and record that fact in his advertising. It is not so many seasons ago that the billboards cried forth the information that a certain popular melodrama "Made Alan Dale cry!"

The list prepared for both nights by the New York press agent, and approved by the producer who has a list of his own composed of names of friends and prominent persons likely to wield influence, is given to the theater treasurer. He pulls the needed tickets from the rack, receives the press agent's receipt, and the tickets are mailed, or delivered by messenger.

On both first and second nights, the press agent is on hand about the theater, prepared to minister in every way to the comfort of reviewers. This critic may have brought with him a friend who must be given a seat even if there is danger of violating the fire law by placing him in a chair in the aisle; or newspaper men who are not reviewers, but society reporters, perhaps, getting lists of who's who in the audience, and who must be passed in as standees. Or some busy critic may be annoyed because the curtain does not rise at the time scheduled in the ads.—first-night performances usually are delayed, mainly because the chatty much-acquainted audience is so long getting seated—the "bulldog" or first edition of his paper requiring his review before the play will be over; and he must be palliated.

As a press agent I always tried earnestly to get reviews in that bulldog edition, because it usually stands for the suburban circulation, rushed out to be on the newsstands and read by the commuter coming in on the morning train.

### MAKING TIME FOR THE CRITICS

It is important that the performance conclude by 11 P. M., or there is little chance of getting extended reviews. Ordinarily the critic must dash madly to his office, record his impression, and get it on the linotype machines before 1 A. M.

When George C. Tyler, as head of the Liebler Company, produced "The New Sin" at Wallack's Theater, New York, he made time for the critics to write adequate reviews by giving them a private showing, their notices not to be released for publication until twenty-four hours after the performance. The arrangement, which had English precedent, became the established convenience for critics at Ames's Little Theater. The Liebler production of "The Garden of Allah," when presented at the Century Theater, New York, was so long in performance that Tyler gave the critics a private showing in the afternoon.

### LATER ROUTINE NOTICES

With the opening of the play, publicity routine is extended. Advertising is increased. The daily story goes out as before, but a "week-end notice," stating that on Monday night the attraction begins its second prosperous week, with details of cast and so forth, comes into being for use in the Saturday and Sunday pages under such headings as "Plays That Remain," and "Reigning Attractions." Some agents send out a "midweek," too, stating that the play continues; but this seems to be a convention from the house playing split-week attractions, and to be rather a superfluous

effort where the play is fulfilling an indefinite engagement.

The week-end notice virtually completes the routine of the agent as far as the metropolis is concerned. He has yet to consider out-of-town papers, particularly those in cities likely to be played when the metropolitan engagement is over. For this he has his "weekly letter," which consists of his week-end notice, most of his late daily stories amplified, and perhaps a fresh special article or so. At the Little Theater, I planned a "monthly special," in addition, to consist of about a thousand words pertaining to some interesting phase of the production, sent to perhaps fifty selected dailies all over the country, released simultaneously, and never duplicated in the same city.

#### "DEADHEADS"

Much of the press department routine is replying to requests for passes. Now, while managers are glad to accommodate persons entitled to free admittance, a pass is really a token of a trade—it is one favor returned for another if the person is there for pleasure only, and it is accommodation if the person is there for material—for criticism, for costume hints, or for any other legitimate purpose, it being assumed, of course, that credit will be given the source.

Passes become useful at times in filling the house, for probably nothing tends to discourage patronage more than empty seats. For first nights, the house is practically all "paper," save in instances where the opening is of great importance, the Weber and Fields Jubilee, the "Follies," the Russian Ballet, and so on.

Consider for a moment the difficulty of the press agent who is called upon to distribute many tickets for seats in a large theater. Of course, orchestra chairs are simple to distribute, but everyone will not accept balcony, and particularly



gallery, seats. For the last rows in the balcony and the gallery, department stores are convenient points of distribution. Friends of the management give out more. For musical shows, song publishers take whole blocks of seats, instructing their occupants to applaud certain numbers the piano and band parts of which they have for sale; friends of the players take more, and perhaps the manager pays twenty or thirty boys a quarter apiece to whistle refrains from the gallery. It all sounds very simple. But it means considerable effort to get all these tickets distributed where they will do the most good, within very short time.

## CHAPTER XXXVIII

### PAID ADVERTISING

As I arrive at this meeting of the ways in our adventure, I am disposed to leave several pages blank and skip the chapter. For, in the world of the theater, there is no subject more truly sordid than that of paid advertising. Of course, practically all publicity is paid for by the manager, if it is no more than the salary of the press agent; but I am referring now to posters, printed matter, lobby display, and more particularly, newspaper advertising.

I once had shown into my office when at the Little Theater, a man who introduced himself as dramatic editor of a daily paper for Hungarians published in New York. The editorial staff, he explained, considered for publication only matter pertaining to plays taken from Hungarian sources, like the Savage production of "Sari." Therefore he had no space for our current production. But he felt entitled to a pass for two because he had not attempted to solicit our advertising. "My department," he said, "is run for a box-office reason, too."

But the legitimate press agent does not exist for purposes of "putting it over" on the press any more than the legitimate dramatic editor exists for purposes of "putting it over" on the theater. The former's function, in this regard, is to facilitate the gathering of news about his attraction, and to prepare generally interesting facts for special articles or paragraphs. In the name of his manager, he gives for nothing, matter as good as, and frequently better than,

that ordinarily purchased by the newspaper from free-lance writers or staff reporters working on "space." He is satisfied in getting it printed.

### THE LINE RATE

Theatrical advertising occupies peculiar place in the newspaper business office. It pays a much higher rate per line than any other classified advertising, and is subject to peculiar restrictions. Prices in leading New York morning and evening papers, range from forty to fifty cents an agate line, single column, with double rates in some for display type or "cuts," and, in one particular instance, seventy-five cents per line for representation on Sunday. The basis of advertising charges is by no means the same in all cities, although the line rate is general. In Pittsburgh they estimate by the "square," which is a space a column wide and a half inch deep. In some other cities, the charge is by the "inch," meaning a column wide and an inch deep. The slightest attempt to maintain representation for a single attraction in the important New York papers, costs at least \$200 per week. This representation will be just in the little newspaper theatrical directory.

There is no minimum size of ad., but it seems quite impossible to give theater location, play title, matinée days, and time of performances in less than four agate lines. Fifteen lines is about the Sunday minimum. A four-line advertisement is so insignificant in appearance that it may be tucked almost out of sight at bottom of a page.

As the matter of position on the page is so important, most New York managers have enlisted their advertising under either the Shubert or Klaw and Erlanger banners, and so made up two large blocks of matter, each large enough to be conspicuous and to demand place toward the top of the page, and each counting as a single ad. Within

the confines of each block, the various small ads. are shifted about under the direction of the Shubert or Klaw and Erlanger general press representative, so that that of the newest attraction remains at top. As the block technically is but one ad., the little rules separating the unit ads. each count as one line, to be paid for at the line rate, the total expense of these shared by the individual advertisers in the block. The block in some daily papers is two columns; in others, where the minimum theatrical ad. must occupy more space—a quarter page or thereabouts—it is only one. The *New York Sun* allots it two columns; the *World* but one.

Most theaters share *pro rata* with their respective attractions on regular advertising, all expense of extra or “display” advertising being borne by the attraction alone unless otherwise agreed. Some theaters have a fixed weekly amount—say \$200 in a large city—to be used for paid advertising of any kind, all over that sum to be provided by the attraction. Newspaper advertising bills are payable weekly.

#### REGULAR NEWSPAPER ADVERTISING

Routine theater advertising usually begins with the “underline.” That is, a small ad., printed below that of the theater and its current attraction, giving the name of the attraction to follow and date of its beginning. This is run in the daily papers for from three days to a week before the opening, when the ad. of the old bill is entirely supplanted by that of the new. The expense is charged to the incoming attraction, of course, unless the house has agreed to share.

On the day of the opening, the regular sized daily ad. is used. It is also usually used on the day following the opening, when the critics’ reviews are printed. However,

on the day after appearance of the reviews, display space of forty to fifty lines single, or twenty to twenty-five double, is commonly taken for the purpose of quoting favorable lines from the notices. Incidentally, I have heard agents boast that they could cull a quotable line from the most unfavorable review ever written, although, I am glad to say, they do not commonly practise it.

After this splurge of advertising, the routine ad. drops back to the four, five, six, or ten lines in each important daily paper, save on Sunday, when the space is greatly increased. Few theaters take less than fifteen lines double on Sunday.

Here and there managers are beginning to feel that the Sunday ad. is rather profitless, for, while Sunday editions are frequently of much larger circulation than the daily issues, the reader has so much in the way of text to peruse and pictures to examine, that he has little time for ads. So extra money formerly devoted to the Sunday increase, is now sometimes devoted to increase of the week-day showing, where it has more chance of being seen. Anyway, people do not commonly make up their minds about going to the theater, on Sunday. In a sense, it is a holiday with its own recreations; and when it is over, most persons are thinking of staying home to rest, or of beginning the week's work. This explains, too, something of why Monday is the "off night" in theater patronage everywhere.

Fortunately for the busy press representative in New York, he is not compelled to negotiate advertising with separate papers. Otherwise, he might spend a good part of his time just doing that. There are brokers, notably Capehart for the Shubert block, and Muller for the Klaw and Erlanger, who arrange matters on commissions from the papers and gratis to the managers, and submit the

itemized bills on a single sheet as one account payable to them. My own relations in this regard were chiefly with Mr. Carey, representative of Capehart; and from his splendid judgment and keen sense of advertising copy and values, I have learned much.

#### “ EXCHANGE COURTESIES ”

There are certain varieties of advertising where the cost is nominal. But they are so many that the aggregate expenditure is apt to be great. Editors of most weekly suburban papers will run cuts and any press story of four or five “ sticks ” in length, chosen by the agent, each for a pair of seats some convenient evening, the seats representing four dollars of the producer’s money, and hence that much of an investment. The same will pay for somewhat extended representation in booklets that list local attractions and points of interest, and that are distributed gratis by railroads or placed in hotel rooms.

A pair of tickets to a hotel clerk now and then, is supposed to impel him to recommend the show to inquiring guests; but I have reason to wonder how a clerk who receives seats from four different theaters in a single week, is going to divide his allegiance. Sometimes advertising space is taken in programs of other theaters where the clientèle is deemed desirable. Shubert theaters, in New York principally, each have frames in the lobby listing attractions of others in the chain, the cost being merely the actual lettering of a given number of cards. Some ticket agencies display photographs of scenes from the play, gratis, provided the management will pay for the enlargements.

Here and there modest window displays may be had for the exchange courtesy of tickets. Then, a firm selling silver picture frames to jewelers and novelty stores, is willing to

frame and display throughout Greater New York, a matter of 1,600 autographed portraits of the leading lady, charge being only making and supplying of the photographs, the concern finding their frames shown to better advantage when holding likenesses of attractive stage favorites.

#### SMALL PRINTING

A not inconsiderable item of paid advertising is small printing—folders, booklets, and blotters to be distributed. This matter is generally of pictorial nature, scenes from the play, with quotations of favorable notices to fill in. People will look at pictures when they will not bother with text.

A. H. Woods, Cohan and Harris, and the Selwyns have been particularly lavish in use of such small matter, ordering in some cases as many as a half million copies of a single booklet to cover an extended road tour. Anna Marble, wife of Channing Pollock, and one of the best press agents in the game, has been particularly apt in devising clever booklets. One of her best was the miniature book of cloth samples for "Potash and Perlmutter."

Heralds are single octavo sheets, printed on one side with something about the incoming attraction, and distributed through the mail, or by carriers, or as inserts in theater programs. Folders are also single sheets, but printed on both sides and folded three or four times to fit in envelopes or programs. The two terms—heralds and folders—are commonly interchangeable. Folders and booklets designed for casting into areaways and other likely places, are technically known as "throwaways;" and for a first-class attraction that generally is just what they are.

In New York, where there are large groups of theaters under the same management, a reciprocal arrangement permits one attraction to insert its advertising into the programs

of another. At times a single program will contain a jumble of matter for as many as five distinct plays. This extravagance of "cuckoo-advertising" leads to littering up the auditorium with discarded material—not an inviting spectacle. The matter is inserted in the programs by the ushers just before each performance.

Other small printing includes the "tack-up," a heavy card of approximately twelve by twenty-four inches, tacked up, wherever possible, by men who raise them to place with long-handled hammers. Tack-ups serve for windows of miscellaneous shops, proprietors of these places being rewarded for their indulgence with pairs of seats now and then—usually once a week—or with "litho" tickets, which entitle bearers to material reductions in box-office prices. These tickets may be real progenitors of the "cut-rates."

#### LOBBY DISPLAY

Lobby displays were indulged in to much greater degree years ago than now in the day of newer and more extensive avenues of publicity. "Shenandoah" has had its real cannon before the theater, with soldiers on guard beside it; orchestras have played in lobbies of older theaters to stimulate trade much as the clown blared the trumpet and rolled the drum to accompany the "ballyhoo" boy outside the circus tent. Throughout the run of "Under Fire" at the Hudson Theater, New York, the lobby held a small display of relics from modern European battlefields—a rifle taken from a dead German soldier, aeroplane darts, hand grenades, and other things—brought to America by Malcolm Robertson, a soldier of fortune. A form of lobby display was the exhibition of beautiful gowns worn by the mistresses of "Anatol," shown in the tea room of the Little Theater, New York, when "Anatol" was the current attraction at the diminutive playhouse.



The most familiar lobby display is the frame—the picture frame with props behind, designed to hold several flash-lights. Frames are generally kept moving along the route ahead of a touring attraction, although many theaters—particularly vaudeville houses—have their own permanent frames, into which transient matter is placed. When frames are portable, those of the current attraction are kept well in the foreground, the others conspicuous but subordinate until their turn arrives. Cohan and Harris, Selwyn, and Woods theaters have been partial to a frame of enlarged colored photographs of scenes from the play, ranged above and at sides of the lobby entrance. The Selwyns, notably in the case of “Rolling Stones,” when at the Harris Theater, New York, had the lobby doors fitted with placards upon which appeared bright lines from the play.

#### POSTERS

From small printing and lobby display, it is an easy step to posters, or “stands,” as they are called. These range in various sizes, but are gauged always from the largest size sheet that may be printed at one time. Large stands, therefore, are constituted not in a single piece, but of a series of these sheets properly assembled. The sheet, which is the unit, measures twenty-six by twenty-seven inches. Thus, we have three-sheets—the sheets running longitudinally, one above another—eight-sheets, sixteen-sheets, twenty-four sheets, twenty-eight sheets, and, infrequently, forty-eight-sheets. I note, however, that in the biography of Charles Frohman, first published serially in the *Cosmopolitan*, there is reproduced a rough plan of a sixty-sheet stand. Poster advertising was once very extensively carried on by theaters in this country; but times have changed.

The twenty-four-sheet stand is the regular size of the large poster, although this does not include the four-sheet

space at one end, reserved for the "date," a separate sheet giving time and place of performance, and changed from town to town. There has been a practise these many years, of splitting the date space in half from top to bottom, and putting one at either end, with the date sheets themselves made in the form of huge theater tickets, thus planting the sales idea in the minds of passers-by. A date is usually pasted as a strip diagonally across the face of a three-sheet, on top, or at bottom, according to location. One-sheets invariably have the date printed on.

Prices for type printing run about three to five cents per sheet; for specially engraved colored lithographs, ten cents per sheet up, depending on the design. Charges run lower when large quantities are ordered—from a thousand at a time up—but managers do not care to overstock on matter that will be of little use if the play fails. Here the lithograph companies speculate somewhat, taking chances of loss on elaborate work. Most poster designs are silver print photographic enlargements, colored by air-brush.

In ordering quantities, the press agent tries to get as much as possible printed at once, because each time the presses are freshly inked for a short run, it costs considerably more than if all are done together. When the road tour is planned, the agent finds through the booking office or by direct correspondence, the poster requirements of each theater likely to be played. Then he totals the figures, adds a small number for waste or emergency, and orders them in bulk, to be shipped in separate lots on given dates.

Actual posting of bills costs three and four cents a sheet, with the billposter usually controlling his own locations, some of which charge twenty-five dollars per week or more for their preferred spaces.

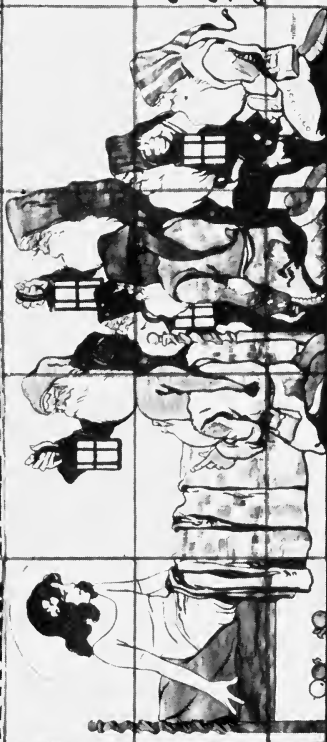
In addition to the regular billposter is the "sniper," who takes around a quantity of half-sheets and a pail and brush,

# SNOW WHITE

AND THE SEVEN DWARFS

A FAIRY-TALE PLAY FOR CHILDREN

*Every Evening and Daily Matinees Beginning Wednesday at 3:30 o'Clock*



with MARGUERITE CLARK

*Every Evening and Daily Matinees Beginning Wednesday at 3:30 o'Clock*

Courtesy Strohbridge Lithograph Co.

A TWENTY-FOUR SHEET STAND.

Diagrammed to show divisions. Each sheet is printed separately and then all are matched together on the stand by the billposter. A four sheet giving theater and date is usually posted at one end.



and puts them up in places the billposter would disdain to touch—ash-barrels, contractors' shanties, and other likely places when watchmen are not looking. There is nothing the sniper likes better than to cover a "post-no-bills" prohibition with his paper.

## CHAPTER XXXIX

### SPECIAL PUBLICITY

As so much theatrical publicity is contrived for newspaper publication, it is pertinent to inquire into organization of a newspaper; and this, although to many press agent and editorial minds, news of the theater belongs in the dramatic department. If a bomb placed before the Belasco Theater, sent it to ruins with a capacity audience inside, some staid daily would probably report it under the general heading of Drama.

But there are other departments on a newspaper beside the dramatic, calculated to interest certain, if not all, classes of readers; and while the duties of the editor of each are well defined, department boundaries are not generally so rigid as to give the publication a cut-and-dried appearance. It is as vital to the prosperity of the sheet legitimately to awaken the sporting reader's interest in drama, or the fashion reader's interest in politics, as it is for theatrical managers to seek audiences among others than newspaper readers. The real appeal is to the great general public; and departments are maintained so there will be something for everybody, and that something easily found.

Still, while many editors on the newspaper staff may not be disposed to consider theatrical matter, items and articles designed for them will generally remain acceptable to the dramatic editor, lending to his page a necessary variety.

The salaried staff of a metropolitan morning or after-

noon paper commonly consists of the managing editor, who is the executive head; assistant editor, associate editor, night editor, political editor, telegraph editor, exchange editor, literary or book editor, humorous editor, music editor, dramatic editor, photoplay editor, agricultural editor, Sunday editor, art editor, financial editor, sporting editor, automobile editor, women's page editor, copy editor, or rewrite editor, make-up editor, state editor, city editor, assistant city editor, night city editor, society editor, court reporter, one or two police reporters, dramatic reporter, railroad reporter, real estate reporter, several general assignment reporters, staff correspondents, and special correspondents.

Routine general news assignments that are scheduled to occur at a certain time and place, such as fashionable receptions or weddings, are listed in a day book; and when the time arrives, reporters are sent to "cover" them. Only department or "star" reporters are left to their own initiative in scouting for news, and most of these work on "space," or usually from two to eight dollars per column, depending upon the importance of the "sheet."

Most of the titles given are self-explanatory. The telegraph editor receives and determines the value of news sent over the wire; the exchange editor reads and clips copies of newspapers sent in exchange and distributes the clippings to the various departments likely to be interested; the agricultural editor specializes in news likely to appeal to farmers; the copy editor prepares news brought for publication, and rewrites news matter clipped from exchanges, and the make-up editor arranges the matter on the page.

Not much may be done by the press agent with the city and general news departments, because the theater is not of vital interest after all. Yet press agents do break into news columns from time to time, but their matter then usually is theatrical only in an incidental way, the press agent ap-

peal riding through on the strength of something more universal. In fact, they begin with the universal note and "hook up" the sales point after.

### "NEWS"

News is first-hand information that will excite interest. The more interest it will excite, the greater its value as news. Accuracy, unfortunately, is a secondary consideration to the reader; the more sensational it is, the greater the interest. News values are estimated less by facts than by relation of facts to something already known to the readers. However, to prevent "come-backs," the editor generally investigates his news as far as possible before permitting it to be set up in type. If a rumor sounds likely, even though denied, he will print it together with the denial, so no other paper may "scoop" him with the news if it really does "break."

Even news may not be acceptable at times, if popular interest is concentrated upon some greater issue that occupies all available newspaper space. So the press agent must calculate his time carefully, although he may "ride in" by employing an untouched or still interesting phase of the big news. Thus, the crowding out of theatrical matter in first rush of news about the great European war, brought in war stories by or involving theatrical personages. Angles of big news are about all the "P. A." may touch, for great national news services, like the Associated Press, cover the actual news in detail.

Monday papers usually have more available space because Monday follows a day when most vital activities are suspended; and Monday papers in summer have less space than Monday papers in winter, because in summer people travel to beaches and parks, and news of accidents and "traffic stories" come in by dozens.



Editorial comment, opinions, and all matter not relevant to telling a story, are "blue-penciled" out of news. It must be written in simple language, without frills. If it is real news, the bare facts are all that are necessary; the editor will arrange it to suit the policy of his paper.

### "PLANTING" STORIES

The time to send news, to quote instructions of a great New York daily to its correspondents, is "one day ahead of everybody else if possible." With press agent news, it rarely is ahead of everybody else, because the agent wants as many papers as possible to print it; therefore he releases his news to all papers simultaneously. Nine-fifteen P. M. is practically the last opportunity for minor news in a morning paper, although anything pressing may generally get in up to one A. M. For out-of-town papers at great distance, differences in longitude and time must be borne in mind and calculated carefully. Telegraph matter sent to editors in official capacities, is charged for at a low special press rate.

With important news stories, it is customary to inquire of the city "desks" whether or not they will prove available if they are sent in. Good news should be sent immediately; so the agent usually waits with his until the last moment, to make it appear more pressing. For local papers, a 'phone message to the city editor tells him nature of news and about how many words the story will be. He rarely promises to use it, but requests that the story be sent for him to look over. It is sent usually by a district messenger. The scanning it receives depends upon dependability of the agent as a source of information; and if important, and time permits, a reporter is sent to investigate. In all events, if the story is used, those passages directly concerning the theater, will be printed as authorized by the manage-

ment through its representative. For out-of-town papers a "bulletin" is sent, making the same inquiry as the 'phone call. In this case, if the editor replies to send the story, he is expected to pay toll charges for the resultant telegram; but the press agent is glad to pay at his end.

There are times when journalists gain information that is apt to prove derogatory to an attraction if printed, such as a change in the cast, investigation of which uncovers managerial disagreements or merely a case of illness. It is not generally wise to make known changes in a cast, because theatergoers who have seen the original company and those who have seen the succeeding players, both are then inclined to feel that they have missed something worth while.

#### SUPPRESSING FACTS

Which brings up the matter of suppressing facts as well as exploiting them. If a star suddenly quits his management during the run of a play, the natural assumption is that there has been trouble between them, and, although this may be denied, undesirable publicity is almost certain to follow. The press agent suppresses news in much the same manner that the editor "breaks" a story by printing a rumor together with an official denial. He anticipates the reporters, and throws them off the scent. When Julius Steger left the employ of Charles Frohman as star of "The Laughing Husband," the news had barely sifted to Broadway when a brief, courteous account of the affair, with Steger vindicated of all blame and a simple reason for the move assigned, came from the diplomatic hand of John D. Williams, then the Frohman general manager.

#### SPECIAL STORIES

The energetic agent usually prepares at least five or six special stories per week, ranging from 300 to 1,500 words

each. These are designed for magazine or feature sections of the paper, and are "placed" with the editor, who promptly states whether or not the matter is available. They are provided not later than Thursday for the following Saturday and Sunday, and are not duplicated. These stories, of course, aim for a certain timeliness, but in them news value is not accentuated. They "get over" mainly through wealth of incident and more or less picturesque expression, and occasionally through unusual point of view.

In the special story, more than in any other direction, the "P. A." learns that there are more departments on a paper than the dramatic. Of every story sent out a copy is kept in well-regulated publicity departments; and it is rewritten or frankly duplicated later for the weekly letter service to out-of-town papers, for road use, and for that more or less distant time when the play goes into stock.

Many press agents supply newspapers with "cuts," which is to say, engravings, or perhaps with matrices—heavy paper impressions from which metal castings may be made after they have arrived at their destinations.

#### CO-OPERATIVE PUBLICITY

Any publicity in which the editor shapes and uses material provided by the agent is, of course, co-operative; but there are other phases, more frankly accomplished on a *quid pro quo* basis. I mean serial novelizations of plays, made generally by some writer on the newspaper staff, publication rights ceded the paper in time for accruing publicity—text, pictures, and extensive advertising on news-stands, or news-delivery wagons.

Edward L. Bernays struck a newer field of co-operative press work in persuading large metropolitan department stores to incorporate pictures and items concerning the Serge de Diaghileff Ballet Russe, in their daily advertising.

## ORGANIZING AUDIENCES

Direct organization of audiences instead of by suggestive publicity, results of which are almost impossible to check up, generally is accomplished by offering special rates to clubs, members of which are likely to have peculiar interest in the production, lawyers for a play like Galsworthy's "Justice;" physicians for "Maternity" and "Damaged Goods." Leander Richardson, who long was press representative to William A. Brady, has positive genius for such organization, and by virtue of his happy faculty, has literally turned the tide of success in favor of many plays. His organization of clergymen for Lawrence Eyre's play, "The Things That Count," through its wholesomeness during a trend of sex plays, and for "Sinners," by Owen Davis, through another kind of moral quality, are matters of theatrical history. His successor, David H. Wallace, a man of splendid newspaper and theatrical training, makes his campaign chiefly one of printed publicity; and it would be difficult to deny its equal effectiveness.

Ben Atwell, one of the best-known and most capable press agents in America, when at the New York Hippodrome, realizing that the bulk of patronage comes from out of town, used to charter steamboats and bring patrons down from towns along the Hudson River on holiday excursions. The towns were well billed in advance, and he always had a crowd.

Self-organized audiences are discussed in coming pages.

## CHAPTER XL

### COMPANY ADVANCE AGENTS

THE press agent who travels on the road ahead of a touring attraction, is not greatly different from the agent in town, although he is more closely allied with the actual business of the theater. Hence he commonly refers to himself as the business manager.

Few road shows employ a highly specialized publicity representative, preferring to depend upon one general agent. He travels about ten days to two weeks ahead of his attraction, arranging transportation, transfer of scenery and baggage, printing, scaling the house, and attending to general publicity, including paid advertising. Large touring enterprises, like the circus, may have two or three agents in advance, the "thirty-day man," "two-weeks man," and "twenty-four-hour man," the last-named being an expert not hampered with transportation routine, and devoting his time to special publicity.

Actual routine of the touring agent's publicity work is designed for one city, and then duplicated for the others. That is why many advance men labor for perhaps the first two weeks of the season and the remainder of the time merely distribute mimeographed copies of what they have written. Much of this routine material—called a "set of press matter"—may be compiled during the original metropolitan run, if there is such a thing, being rewritten with blanks for city, "date"—which means name of theater, too—and duration of engagement at the local house.

Anna Marble, who in private life is Mrs. Channing Pollock, is one of the best compilers of a set of press matter of any agent of my acquaintance. Her set for Margaret Mayo's farce, "Twin Beds," was a model of perspicacity. Wells Hawks, Glenmore Davis, Percy Heath, Joe Drum, Al Strassman, Townsend Walsh, Chester Rice, Campbell Casad, Wallace Munroe, Jack McMahan, Ruth Hale, William Bartlett Reynolds, Will A. Page, and many more, are American agents known to the road, whose ability is recognized in constant employment.

I know of no more elaborate set of press matter than that prepared for the road tour of the Serge de Diaghileff Ballet Russe early in 1916, under supervision of Edward L. Bernays, the general press representative. The matter was classified according to newspaper departments; and not one was ignored. In its way it probably set a precedent.

In addition to this material, Bernays had made special arrangements, chiefly exhibits, for other than newspaper publicity. Important art stores in a city were given timely displays of original drawings and prints dealing with the Ballet; book stores were shipped a large number of volumes on consignment, to make up a bibliography of the Ballet; music stores were provided with the scores; jewelers showed Bakst ornaments; department stores exhibited Bakst wardrobes—and so the city was made to fairly ring with De Diaghileff and his Ballet Russe.

Actual publicity work of the man on the road has already been well indicated in description of the agent in town, so attention may be given to business details.

#### BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Before leaving the home office for the tour, the agent usually takes the signed contracts with managements of all theaters in which his attraction is scheduled to appear. He

also finds out approximately how much the show costs to operate that he may arrange scales of prices to cover the amount. From the stage carpenter he learns how many "long" and "short," or twenty and forty-foot, loads will be necessary to transport the scenery, and whether one car will be sufficient in railroading, and how many extra stage hands will be needed at each stand. The electrician informs him what equipment he will require at each house, and how many men are wanted. So with the property man. And the orchestra leader provides like information. As noted in previous pages, stage instructions of these various offices are known as "plots"—light-plot, scene-plot, music-plot, and so on.

The exact number of persons to be transported, and quantity of their professional luggage must be computed. If the stage crew is to travel at a different time than the company, that fact must be noted. Children in the cast must provide data for securing licenses where necessary. A trunkful of cuts is usually carried, for many newspapers decline to run pictures of plays when called upon to pay engravers' bills themselves. Lobby frames are other important items.

Advance agents are supposed to work in conjunction with company managers. The company manager meets all company bills legitimately incurred by the agent, and pays his salary from week to week as long as the exchequer will stand it, and frequently longer. He picks up the cuts left by the agent after they have been used, and forwards them to the agent at the next stand. He also forwards advance lobby frames and pictures. A goodly quantity of photographs is always taken along by the agent for distribution en route, for there are newspapers that make their own layouts, particularly for Saturday and Sunday editions. Posters are generally printed in fairly large quantities, as already remarked, before the attraction takes to the road,

and the supply drawn upon as required by the agent. So with folders, although much small printing is done in the town where the agent intends to use it.

A consultation with the general passenger agent of the railroad is next in line, special rates being made for touring organizations. Contracts are signed by managers and railroad agents detailing time the cars are to be ready for loading or unloading, liabilities, and so forth.

Formerly, twenty-five tickets at the special two-cent-per-mile rate, gave the company an extra baggage car; if a second baggage car was needed, it was available for fifteen cents per mile. By the increase of rates on lines east of Chicago, which went into effect April 30, 1915, forty tickets are required to move a baggage car, while a company of not less than ten persons, get the two-and-one-quarter-cent mileage rate, with the charge of twenty cents a mile for an extra baggage car beyond the customary baggage arrangement. The parties concerned must all travel on the same car at the same time, or else purchase individual tickets.

These general points and many more are considered by the agents ahead. Of course, they make new contracts for each railroad line as the necessity arises, and not all at once.

The first thing upon the agent's arrival at the theater to be played, is to seek out the resident manager or his representative, and fix the scale of prices to be charged. Here the agent must bear in mind how much the company must make in order at least to cover its expenses, and, at the same time, not frighten away potential patronage. While the local manager is usually anxious to get his attraction at as low prices of admittance as possible that patronage may be stimulated, his advice in this connection is generally well worth listening to. On the other hand, if there is



time, the agent does well to inquire about local conditions himself before setting the scale.

With some attractions that are in particular demand, the local manager occasionally guarantees a certain amount in receipts; but ordinarily he agrees only to give the attraction a certain percentage of the gross receipts.

#### THE AGENT'S "ADVICE"

When the scale is agreed upon, duplicate contracts are signed by manager and agent. Three contracts are commonly printed in blank upon what is known as the agent's "advice-sheet"—a document, one copy of which, when filled out, is sent by the agent to the company manager.

In addition to scale of prices, the advice sheet specifies the regular house free list—so many seats for newspapers, so many for rental of billboards, and so many in return for lithograph displays. The manager acknowledges receipt of line, light, scene, and property plots, newspaper notices, copy for advertisements and program, lobby frames, and cuts and posters and small printing duly described. In rare instances, the manager agrees to post and distribute this matter as per contract, or forfeit five per cent. of the gross receipts. Also, rarely, he agrees to pay forty cents apiece for cuts lost or not returned. He understands that the company is to arrive from a given city at a certain time, and will depart also at a certain time for the next designated stand. He will have the orchestra called for rehearsal at such-and-such a time, and agrees to share on certain extra expenses scheduled elsewhere on the sheet—bill-posting, extra newspaper advertising, and, perhaps, the electric sign.

The agreement next in importance, printed on the advice, is the transfer contract. This is signed by the repre-

sentative of the transfer company. He agrees to move the scenery and baggage of the company to the theater and hotels as required, directly upon their arrival, which is expected at what time, at so much per twenty and forty-foot loads, and to return same at depot or boat, upon departure, for the flat sum of so much, or usually from four to six dollars per scene-truck load, and twenty-five to fifty cents per trunk, all depending on the distance. All articles not designated as trunks are to be hauled as scenery or properties unless otherwise specified. Other details, such as guarantee of safe delivery, tarpaulins to be provided in case of snow or rain, are enumerated then; and, very important indeed, the name, address, and telephone number of the transfer company are recorded.

A third contract upon the advice-sheet may be an agreement with a hotel landlord to board and lodge the company of so many persons for a given number of days, at the rate of so much per person. The agent himself is lodged and fed at the "party rates," which for him frequently means for nothing at all, for Mine Host is anxious to have the agent recommend his place to the organization. But the agent's life is not enviable for all of that.

The remainder of the advice is for the company manager and his staff. What is to be the next stand? When do they arrive and leave, and by what means of transportation? Do they change cars? If so, where? When? What is the distance? Rate to be paid? Any excess? Names of theater manager or representative, treasurer, resident property man, carpenter, electrician, and orchestra leader are given together with their respective addresses in case they should be required suddenly. Stage dimensions are provided in detail, and number of stage hands is given. Whether the electric current is alternating or direct, and voltage, are important items for the company electrician.

What pieces are in the orchestra is the concern of the man who arranges the incidental music.

Hotels, boarding and lodging houses in the place, European and American plan, with their convenience to the theater and their respective rates, single and double, are of vital interest to the entire organization.

Lists of opposition or counter attractions, with titles of preceding and succeeding attractions at the theater to be played, are read with care by the company manager, for they have decided influence upon probable business. In a space headed "Remarks," the agent notes things likely to aid the company manager—for instance, that permits will or will not be necessary for children in the cast. Local newspapers and their dramatic editors are named. And there is a final space headed "Bills to Pay," in which the agent approves special expenditures, such as the making of a scrap-book, with all his ads. and notices, telegrams, taxi, and so forth, money for which he has borrowed from the box office on his I. O. U., which is to be canceled by the company manager out of receipts at the first local performance.

Usually the manager's assistant attends to distribution of routine press matter, such as daily bulletins, midweeks, advance notices, and ads. delivered in bulk by the agent—so the agent is reasonably free to pound away at general business acceleration.

## CHAPTER XLI

### THEATER TREASURERS

WHILE there are many instances of a person seeking to purchase a theater ticket, treated by the box office man as though he or she came to rob the management, the tendency has been to recognize the box office as the first direct meeting-ground of producer and public. For instance, William A. Brady long ago had a sign put up over each box office he controls, with the name of the person in charge and the assurance that he is put there to be accommodating. The old idea of box office efficiency was quickest disposal of a line of patrons; now that carries a corollary—quickest disposal of a line with entire satisfaction of each patron. I know of no finer exponent of this latter idea than Jed F. Shaw, formerly treasurer at the New Theater, and now auditor for Winthrop Ames.

The box office window is open usually from 10 A. M. to 10 P. M. An assistant, who in reality is generally an apprentice due to graduate at some indefinite time as a theater treasurer himself, works in shifts with his chief, and at rush hours with him, the treasurer taking charge of sales at the busiest times, from three-quarters to a half-hour before the curtain rises, to the count-up. He is usually bonded by some surety company, the bond being technically broken if anyone but his assistant crosses the threshold of the box office during his occupancy.

From three weeks to a month before the season opens at a popular house, the treasurer is called to his post. He

orders tickets for from four to six weeks in advance, keeping usually two weeks' coupons in the advance sale rack.

Actual sale of seats is commonly begun the Thursday preceding the Monday of the opening week. No tickets are issued until then. First the tickets for the critics, or other first and second night guests, are pulled from the rack and delivered to the press agent. Each is punched once in the coupon and twice in the body of the ticket to show it is not paid for, so it will not be reckoned as cash returned in the count-up. Advance orders are attended to then, tickets being mailed to those who have remitted the price; and regular subscribers are notified that the tickets are ready and will be held for them until a certain time.

Of course, the first performance is not usually a *matinée*, but, for convenient description of box office routine, I am assuming the first day to be a *matinée* day.

#### “ RACKING ” TICKETS

Tickets for the day's sale are “ racked ” as soon as the treasurer or his assistant comes on duty in the morning. Box office racks are of various sorts; but the up-to-date form holds each ticket on the rack in a vertical slit, leaving the coupon end sticking out where it may be seen. These slits are arranged in lateral rows to correspond to the seats on the theater diagram. Thus, the treasurer has in his day's rack a plan of his auditorium; and he may tell at a glance just how well his theater is filled. A separate division holds balcony tickets. Gallery seats are rarely reserved; and admittances there are commonly paid at a special window. In large theaters, the separate slits contain from three to four tickets each, instead of one apiece. This form is known as a “ bunch ” rack. All racks are fitted with sliding covers that may be locked down.

Tickets for advance sale are kept in a separate rack in

little stacks, each constituting a set for one performance, and each kept in a separate pigeonhole. The pigeonholes are arranged to hold, in one row, from left to right, the tickets for one week. Before each week's set is placed in the rack, when received from the printer, the tickets comprising it are carefully counted. A theater treasurer counts by sound, rippling the tickets through his fingers. To one unfamiliar with his work his speed and accuracy are amazing.

Before opening the box office to the public, a stipulated number of tickets is pulled from the rack for distribution to the ticket agencies a week in advance. These agencies are usually independent of the theater. They are not common in America, the system being practically confined to New York, Philadelphia, Boston, and Chicago. Agencies return the day's unsold tickets by messenger before 1:30 P. M. for the *matinée*, or 7:30 P. M. for the evening performance, together with a check for those disposed of. If all tickets taken are sold, and more are demanded, the agent telephones the treasurer to reserve specified available seats, and sends the patron to claim them with a written order which is reckoned as cash in the count-up. Once a week a runner for the agency pays up these orders.

#### “DRESSING THE HOUSE”

Where a “sell-out” is certain, the treasurer does not take much pains to get rid of inferior locations. But if business is only fair, he distributes his tickets so as to “dress” the house—that is, to scatter the people so the auditorium will not betray its true state of emptiness. He works to sell alternate pairs, working from side to side, and through the center. Difficulty is experienced, then, with higher-priced seats, for they are harder to sell. When business is really bad, the treasurer can do little in the way of dressing the

house unless he gives out passes, and this he does in the extremity, keeping at his elbow a list of persons who will be genuinely appreciative of the courtesy, even if it is extended to them at but a few minutes' notice. The aim is to get the house filled before the first intermission, for it is then that the emptiness is first really noticed by patrons.

The old system of handling passes at the box office is still in common use. The pass—a filled-out form—is presented to the treasurer. He issues coupons of the number called for, tearing off and retaining the long ends, and giving just the checks with seat numbers to the applicant, together with the pass itself, punched with the number of seats given. Then the pass is given to the ticket taker, who deposits it in his box, while the seat checks are shown to the usher in the ordinary manner. The newer method is not to return the pass form at all, or to retain the ticket stubs. Instead, the tickets are each punched once in the check and twice in the stub, just as the tickets for critics on first and second nights were handled.

#### ORDERS

Telephone orders are recorded and kept in the reservation pigeonholes, alphabetically arranged by names of applicants. The patron, having decided to accept certain available seats, agrees to apply and pay for them before a certain time—usually from a quarter to half an hour before the particular performance. Desired tickets are placed in an envelope endorsed with the name of the person who is to claim them and the time they are to be called for. If the date has a ring around it, it indicates that the tickets within are for a *matinée* performance. In most details, the telephone order is quite the same as though the patron stood at the wicket, covering the same points of inquiry and accommodation. State of emptiness or fulness of the order

box is generally a splendid indicator of the state of business. It represents the demand.

### EXCHANGE CHECKS

The exchange check system is probably the most elaborate in the sales routine of the box office. If, for instance, a patron who has purchased a dollar seat and has entered the theater, comes out and wants to change to a better location, the treasurer must negotiate the transfer and yet record it in such manner that evidence of both seats will not appear in the count-up.

When the doorkeeper is handed a theater ticket by the patron on his way in, he tears off the stub and returns the check or coupon to the patron who uses it to identify his seat. The stub is dropped into a box kept by the doorkeeper, into a special compartment in it. There are usually special compartments for boxes, orchestra, and balcony tickets, and passes, for, by their collective evidence, receipts are to be checked up. So, to return to the hypothetical case of the man with the dollar seat wanting to change to one for \$1.50, say,—change is never made to a cheaper location—there must not be added to the \$1 stub already deposited by the doorkeeper, the \$1.50 stub of the new seat, because then the count-up will show \$2.50—a dollar increase over the actual amount received.

In coming from the auditorium to the box office, the patron has been given a "pass-out check" by the doorkeeper. This is good for one admittance; and should he get his second ticket intact, that also will be good for one admittance. Two persons have actually been found entering a theater on one pass-out check and one exchange. To prevent this and to correct the count-up, the patron desiring better location, delivers to the treasurer his pass-out check, his seat check, and the cash difference. Whereupon he is



given a seat coupon of the new location, torn from the stub, and an exchange check representing the difference in price, this being given to the doorkeeper, who deposits it in its proper compartment. In counting up, this exchange check is recorded on the statement.

Changing to a seat of the same price, the treasurer issues a new seat check in return for the old, which he resells with the stub of the new.

#### STATEMENTS

As soon as the seat sale is over, which generally is about three-quarters of an hour after the rise of the curtain, the company manager and the treasurer, who represents the theater, count up. For their findings they use a slip of paper called the box office statement. Form of this highly important record is very simple. At top are the names of theater, management, and attraction, whether evening or *matinée* performance, the day and date, the state of the weather—for this is a very good “reason why” for the state of business. Then comes the number of orchestra seats sold and unsold at stated price, with their totals extended, respectively, in two right-hand columns. The quantities of other seats, balcony, box, and gallery, sold and unsold, are given in the same manner. Then comes the number of exchanges at the same price. If the number of passes issued does not equal the number of unsold they commonly are counted as unsold tickets; if more, they are charged to either company or house, according to who has issued them, and counted, consequently, as sold. Total sales and total unsold are given at the bottom of the columns. Capacity of the house is indicated by the whole number of seats accounted for. Space is left at bottom for signatures of theater treasurer and company manager.

As many copies of the statement are made as there are

persons financially interested in the production—that is, producers, managers, play brokers, and authors. It is an old box office superstition, based on the old adage about too many cooks, that the greater the number of statements duplicated, the poorer will be the business.

#### THE COUNT-UP

Actual counting up is a matter of routine. The box office window, while this is going on, is turned over to the assistant. Ticket boxes from the various entrances are brought to the box office by the attendants and unlocked by the treasurer in presence of the company manager.

First the treasurer marks on his statement the number and prices of seats he has in his house, representing the capacity of the theater. Then a rough count is made. All tickets unsold are removed from the rack, bundled according to prices, each bundle marked with price and quantity, and deducted from the original capacity as shown on the statement. Unsold tickets are known in box office parlance as “deadwood.” Classified deadwood having been subtracted, the result, multiplied by the price of seats in each location, gives approximately the number sold at the performance. Stubs of tickets from the boxes, with passes and exchange slips, are bundled and marked in the same manner as the unsold. These are checked against the amount called for as having been sold, on the statement.

Any tickets missing through inability of persons holding them to attend, are noted in the count-up. Tickets not used for the performance stipulated are generally considered good for a future admittance—although the person using them will probably have to stand up. Refund on unused tickets is rarely made after performance, but an exchange for some future performance is fairly common.

After the count-up, the treasurer makes up his cash in

bundles of various denominations, and gives checks and all save the money necessary for change during the next day's sale, to his manager for deposit. In return the manager gives his I. O. U. to the treasurer. Full settlement between producer and manager is not made until the season's end. Settlement with the company manager is made at conclusion of the engagement, or each week, when he makes up his salary list and pay envelopes.

## CHAPTER XLII

### TICKET SPECULATORS

THIS account of the ticket speculator is begun from the premise that he is a necessary "evil," created by the theater patron and existing for his convenience. Unfortunately, the business of ticket speculation includes the "scalpers," who formerly infested sidewalks in front of theater entrances and who now hawk their wares from adjoining doorways, but they are not truly representative of their profession.

It is often inconvenient for a person who has reserved seats by telephone to call for them by or before the time set by the theater management, when, if unclaimed, they will be placed on sale again. Yet, the management should not be compelled to meet that inconvenience by supporting distant and miscellaneous branch offices where the patron may purchase his seats at the same time he orders them. It is not practicable under present conditions; and therefore the ticket broker exists, deriving his profit from a commission of about twenty-five per cent. advance over box office prices, paid by the patron who benefits by the arrangement. This commission is usually split with the manager; but the bonus to the theater is merely a partial guarantee against loss if unsold tickets returned at the last moment cannot be sold before performance begins.

His booth situated at some point more convenient to potential patrons than the box office itself, at railroad terminals, in department stores and hotels, the ticket specu-

lator of better standing does business. Generally speaking, he could not earn his living selling tickets for just one theater; but he can by selling them for many.

Theaters co-operate by supplying him with actual coupons, which he requires to satisfy his customers. These persons view him with suspicion, always inclined to doubt his authority to act for any management. It must be remembered that choice locations are issued by the theater to more than one speculator. Together, they constitute but part of the choice locations of the house, the others being kept on sale at the theater box office.

#### THE TELEPHONE COMPANY PLAN

When Winthrop Ames served on Mayor McClellan's committee of prominent New York citizens to solve the local ticket speculator problem, he proposed the splendid scheme of making the operator of every telephone pay station a ticket broker. This operator would call up the theater, learn the available locations, reserve those desired by the patron, and issue an order for them, charging perhaps twenty-five cents for the service, whether it concerned one ticket or twelve. Thus, theaters would have agencies everywhere for general convenience. The telephone company was enthusiastic over the idea, but pointed out that to undertake the work would necessitate amendment of its charter; and to accomplish this, special legislative action would be required.

#### THEATER PRICES

We have, in the theater, an important instance of a price that is arbitrarily set irrespective of value received. Theater prices in general do vary; but each house endeavors to maintain its fixed scale because regular patrons have their own ideas of how much they can afford to pay for their

entertainment. One pays a top price of two dollars to see "The Bubble" at the Booth Theater, with a cast of six characters and a single setting throughout, and a top price of \$1.50 to see "Hip Hip Hooray" at the New York Hippodrome, with perhaps five hundred players, Sousa's Band, a skating rink, and elaborate scenic investiture. The first must make perhaps \$3,500 a week to show profit, and the other possibly \$18,000. Where is the adjustment?

We have always the average cost of a particular kind of production, and also the fact that the maximum price the American theatergoer cares to pay for the privilege of attending his first-class attraction is two dollars. In order to make some kind of accurate estimate, I have made a composite chart of regular scales of prices of a number of first-class but popular houses scattered throughout the United States. I find that five per cent. of the audience will pay \$2; twenty-five per cent., \$1.50; twenty per cent., \$1; fifteen per cent., 75 cents; ten per cent., 50 cents and, twenty-five per cent., 25 cents, with a reduction of approximately thirty-three and one-third per cent. on these prices for matinées.

The chief objection to the "ticket library" plan, seems to be that those persons who take the trouble to apply in advance at the theater box office, are often unable to get desired locations there, but may purchase them from speculators at a twenty-five per cent. increase in price. Admittedly, that situation is forced and wrong; but the beginning and continuance of the evil seems to rest largely with the public itself, which demands that the same tickets be on sale in several places at once, and admits of no compromise. The Ames plan would dispose of this particular condition in a manner that would restore the box office to its original policy of first come first served, without issuing seats to any but actual purchasers; but until that—or some equally

good—plan obtains, the clumsy adjustment must continue. It will end when Metcalfe, of *Life*, gets full support.

Before going further into the matter of juggling ticket prices through indiscriminate speculation, let us inquire further into the question of the price itself.

I have already hinted at my conception of the audience as constituted by a group of persons pooling their available funds to finance a production presented for their mutual benefit, the size of each person's contribution toward defraying the general expense, estimated by the number of his associates; and by this view, prices should be set according to their notions of value, or according to their resources—for a poor man may have a two-dollar desire with but the price of a fifty-cent seat.

Actual money value of a good theatrical attraction is supposed to be many thousands of dollars to any person who witnesses it; by co-operative method, he receives that value for \$2, \$1.50, 75, 50, or 25 cents, as the case may be. On this basis the patron cannot reasonably complain of the difference in cost of "The Bubble" and "Hip Hip Hooray," for it is a question only of how many persons join him in defraying it. The cost to the individual is automatically reduced as the number of spectators concerned increases, although it must be borne in mind that "The Bubble" presented at the Hippodrome, or "Hip Hip Hooray" at the Booth, would suffer untold disadvantages. The right theater for the right play is an important problem to be solved for successful play production in America.

#### CUT-RATE TICKETS

Theatrical business to-day is just rallying from the bad moral effect of the cut-rate ticket that in 1910 or thereabouts, began its domination of the American theater, particularly in New York. It represented a method whereby

the management of an attraction not playing to very good business at regular prices, undertook to draw patronage of persons of limited income by selling blocks of tickets at reduced prices.

It is strange that any manager, having made a production that fails to draw patronage, should ignore the question of intrinsic value and seek to remedy the trouble by reduction in prices. One may sell inferior goods at bargain rates; but the practise lowers the standard of the theater, and makes it difficult to build up the scale with improved value later.

So, even for the producer who is in the business just to make money, it is generally better to let an inferior play fail at well-formulated prices, than to reduce the scale as an inducement to bargain-hunters who may applaud something only fairly good because it is just a trifle better than entertainment to which they have been accustomed.

I am a stickler for positive value in the production itself. Either it should interest, entertain, please, and generally satisfy the class of audiences for which it is designed, be remade to suit a wider class, or should naturally disappear altogether from the world of the theater. There should be no compromise.

The cut-rate ticket system is simple. Managers issue special coupons which, when presented at the box office with twenty-five, fifty, seventy-five cents or a dollar each, are redeemable for regular tickets of much greater face value.

These coupons were at first distributed under guise of special rates to organizations, so as not to antagonize regular box office patrons who paid full rates. By degrees, the distribution became more open. It was even proposed by a large chain of grocery stores in Greater New York to use cut-rate tickets as premiums with goods. An ac-



quaintance of mine, chancing to find himself in Brooklyn one day where there was no convenient place save a delicatessen where he could get luncheon, was given a coupon with his sandwich, entitling him to reduced prices at a theater showing a "leading Broadway hit." At last one manager came out frankly and hurled quantities of redeemable coupons labeled "advertising tickets," from the upper windows of a tall building, to be picked up by passers-by.

Speculators were quick to appreciate the little scheme of the managers, and began to make their shops points of distribution. Joseph Leblang, perhaps the most ingenious, and certainly the most successful "rate-chopper" in New York, called his concern the "Public Service Theater Ticket Office." Incidentally, Frederick Schader, assistant editor of *Variety*, and one of the first persons to enjoy Leblang's confidence, noted a significant fact in the business.

"The class of people buying," he said in his paper, "showed that they were of the real type of bargain-hunters. Women were in the majority at the counter. The noticeable part of the whole proceeding, however, was the manner in which buyers were shifted from one show to another, and from one evening to another. It was a case of the public not caring where it went or on what night as long as the ticket was cheaper than the printed price on it."



On account of the wide scope of this book, there is not space in which to dwell upon the quarrels of contemporary

managers over the cut-rate ticket, and their enlightening points of view as expressed in the press; but at last the Managers' Association agreed to abolish the cut rates, any member violating the agreement to pay a large forfeit. All seemed serene for a time, although some managers found it difficult to fill their balconies and galleries. Then strife began again.

Sale of blocks of seats at "Around the Map," then playing at the New Amsterdam, to the Tyson Company, by Klaw and Erlanger, was held to be in violation of the agreement. Klaw and Erlanger replied that William A. Brady, of the Shubert forces, was then making arrangements to issue reduced-rate tickets for his revival of "The Liars," to the Workers' Amusement Club. One accusation led to another; the entire embargo was literally violated to pieces, and the cut-rate ticket flourished again like the flowers that bloom in the spring (tra-la!), which have nothing to do with the case.

#### THE RIGHT PRICE FOR THE RIGHT PLAY

For my part, I believe emphatically in stabilization of theater prices. If managers would make their cost of production conform to them—set the maximum figure of expenditure allowing fair margin of profit—and keep the prices reasonably near that limit, there would generally be higher standard of value received.

Ordinarily, it seems unfair for a management to charge its patrons, collectively, \$10,000 for an attraction that costs \$4,000—giving management, authors, and others concerned a net profit of 150 per cent.

For what constitutes a fair percentage of profit I must refer the reader to economists who have threshed the question to reasonable basis; but from what I have observed in

various lines of endeavor, 10 per cent. seems to be considered a generous return on any investment. It is not the fault of the public that a play fails; so it should not be compelled to maintain, through excessive prices, a sinking fund that tides the manager over misfortune due to his own error of judgment.

If the \$4,000 attraction is well adapted to the house in which it is presented, it would be unwise to move it to a theater of more limited seating capacity for the sake of maintaining the \$2 scale, which then would produce a smaller revenue. As many persons as may be accommodated with practically the same individual advantages of seeing and hearing, should be admitted to any attraction; and if the number is sufficient to defray the expenses and provide a fair profit at a given, reasonable price to each, that should be the scale.

By this arrangement we would have houses adapted to the showing of \$1.50 productions at all times; others to those costing \$2, and so on. The producer would not make all his miscellaneous productions in one type of house, but would present them variously and appropriately in these fixed-price theaters.

It is the dream of many producers to maintain a house with an elastic capacity—one that will seat only three hundred persons at a matinée, perhaps, and seven hundred at night. The idea is to do away with seats that are not in use, but yet call them into service when needed. Schemes are various. Winthrop Ames thinks of a series of panels to be erected at short notice, to shut off so few back rows that the audience will not notice the change. A fantastic notion of my own proposed a small balcony that could be let down when needed, out of the rear wall. Any change in shape of the auditorium, however, would require corresponding changes in acoustic properties of the stage. Shut-

ting off part of the auditorium would probably mean that the stage would have to be muffled—possibly by hanging extra cloths or drops in the flies. But a successful elastic auditorium would go far toward adjusting the theater price.

# AND THE THEATER IS OPENED TO AUDIENCES

## CHAPTER XLIII

### THEATERS, OPEN AND CLOSED

ONE may say that a theater is designed to present a given attraction before an audience under the most advantageous conditions. This goes considerably beyond the literal Greek derivation of the word, which says a theater is "a place for seeing," making it a place for hearing as well.

Its aim, as far as recorded history determines, is adaptability to its given end. Therefore, the same theater that held the famous tragedies of ancient Greece, would not do for the plays of Shakespeare, any more than Shakespeare's theater would do for the drama of to-day. Its adaptability is not merely to period, but to style of drama—the opera house is not a fitting shell for the so-called "intimate" play. For this reason, there can be no one theater for adequate presentation of all kinds of play; their respective subtlety and breadth require particular auditoriums as well as stages.

This is where a common fallacy has crept in. It concludes that because an auditorium is small, the plays presented in it must be limited in appeal. On the contrary, the small auditorium, constructed with well-defined policy, implies mainly that a larger audience which might be eager to witness the attraction, would, for the greater part, be out of range of its subtleties. Chiefly, they could not hear.

As I have remarked elsewhere, to see and hear well is as vital to a patron's appreciation as inherent fineness of the attraction itself. And art, as Clayton Hamilton has sagely observed in his "Studies in Stagecraft," thrives on appreciation. "Better to be appreciated by a few at a time than condemned by the many at once." It takes longer for the small theater to exhaust its patronage than the large house; but the clientèle, in actual numbers, may be about the same. However, alas, theaters of to-day are more commonly built to fit the scale of prices than to fit the play.

#### "THE LITTLE THEATER IDEA"

Clayton Hamilton once consulted Sir Arthur Wing Pinero and Granville Barker on the "little theater idea." Pinero stated it as his opinion that any performance that can be rendered intimately to three hundred persons, may be rendered just as intimately to a thousand.

To that, one may object, and in replying, state that the thousand may be adequately cared for at that kind of performance only in three installments of approximately three hundred each, and one of one hundred, but not at once. To enlarge the auditorium is to modify the auditory and visual advantages of those seated outside the original zone as calculated by the architect for that kind of play. Within the zone there are no "worse" seats.

Barker declared that the little theater is merely solution of a problem of real estate—occupying minimum space on valuable ground. He supported the Pinero view, and estimated the capacity of his ideal theater for the presentation of modern plays at between one thousand and twelve hundred.

In *Vogue*, April 1, 1915, Hamilton adds a corollary—that no play that cannot sell out to three hundred persons is worth producing—that up to that time, none of the

little theaters inaugurated in New York had made money. In this he was misinformed. To my own knowledge, the Little Theater of Winthrop Ames showed a substantial net profit on the season of 1914-15. The Chicago Little Theater, seating less than a hundred, which began with an indebtedness of \$10,500, paid off 55 per cent. of its account in less than three months of active operation, producing, incidentally, eighteen plays at the amazingly low total cost of \$868.82.

One point raised by Hamilton is grave. He says that at the pioneer Little Theater of America, that of Winthrop Ames—"where every seat is as good as another—it is impossible to obtain admittance for less than \$2; and this restriction, though contributing a certain increment of enjoyment to those who can afford to pay the price, excludes many of the most intelligent and most appreciative members of the general theatergoing public."

"The little theater," he says elsewhere, "is a theater for the few; and by reason of its very restriction of capacity, it becomes—to use the snobbish adjective—exclusive. Is such a theater desirable from the point of view of those who deeply care about the evolution of the drama? The answer to this question must be made emphatically in the negative. Any movement that tends to drive the theatergoing public into special cliques and clientèles, is disruptive of that democracy of the drama in which the greatness of the art is rooted. Plautus was hampered by an audience overwhelmingly plebeian and Racine was hampered by an audience overwhelmingly aristocratic. A good play should be equally accessible to people who can afford to pay two dollars, and to people who can afford to pay 50 cents."

In considering that, I first inquire why a producing manager should assume responsibility for the financial state

of the public at large, when there is a satisfactory amount of patronage ready to meet his scale. If the 50-cent man longs to go to the exclusive house, let him attend the theater once instead of four times, and he will find himself with the \$2 price. The scale of prices is naturally based, as I have indicated in previous pages, on value received; the entertainment has been placed as nearly within the poor man's reach as possible without sustaining loss. Let him, if he must, come the rest of the way.

#### CLASS DISTINCTIONS IN DRAMA

Phases of the drama are democratic; others are not. Yet, there are groups of persons who enjoy the latter; and as long as they are of sufficient number to sustain them, there is no valid reason why they should be suppressed. Progress in any art is not made by the common advance of those persons to whom that art is directed. Best drama is never democratic; it is a kind of higher education that is not yet comprehended by the public at large. However, it is apropos to a certain class, and that class is going to interpret its significance to those who are, for the time, incapable of understanding its terms of expression. Thus, the best drama of to-day will become the type of good drama to-morrow. And through specialization in any department, drama in general will improve.

Vaudeville is not strictly democratic; neither is the motion picture. There are persons who dislike them because they refuse to accept their terms. Tolstoi did not like the opera. Some prefer tennis to golf; rowing to swimming; horseback riding to motoring. Is there any reason why they should not have their enjoyment apart from other recreations in which they are not interested?

I welcome the various American experiments of little theaters, big theaters, open-air theaters, women's theaters,



children's theaters, and the rest, for they signify a place for everything and everything in its place—with pleasure for all, varying scales of prices stabilized in each theater, for development of clientèle, and, above all, support of plays for which it would be impossible at the time to secure general public approval. The theater is being classified; that is all.

To Winthrop Ames, the ideal—but, of course, admittedly impractical—theater is the theater with one seat, from which viewpoint the stage design would be correct, to whose visual, mental, and auditory facilities everything in the play might be made to appeal. To Alexander Woollcott, dramatic editor of the *New York Times*, that one seat would be untenable, because much of his enjoyment of the theater comes from persons about him. His appreciation blends with theirs and reacts upon him; the “smell” of the theater is part of his delight. But, before deciding with which to agree, consult Le Bon, on “Psychology of the Mob,” and Davenport on “Primitive Traits in Religious Revivals,” and learn from them how finer feelings disappear into elemental emotions in the crowd, and intellectual delight is supplanted by human passion.

#### OPEN-AIR THEATERS

Another kind of theater that has developed all at once in America, is the open-air theater. Of course, there have been open-air performances of various kinds in this country for many years; but their theaters have been generally more convenient than well adapted. Like many of the little theaters, they were begun without particular sense of their propriety, plays that were ridiculously out of place being presented in them. In time, persons who had the courage of their convictions, recognized the fact that there are

only certain kinds of play properly employing their advantages, and selected programs accordingly.

Shakespeare's plays, which were written for theaters in the open air in the daytime, have proven admirable when performed in the open air by the Coburns and Ben Greet. So have the mighty Greek tragedies as done in the open by Margaret Anglin. These plays, with their colorful costumes, their descriptive passages, and their generally decorative qualities, are splendidly fitted for stages where the background is simple and unobtrusive, where there is no necessity of a curtain to shut off the scene, and mechanical illusions are out of place. Of the modern pieces in open-air theaters of moderate size, I know of none better than "Prunella," that beautiful fantasy that is enacted in a garden fenced in by tall hedges. Ben Greet has lately added it to his repertoire.

One advantage of the open-air theater seems to be relief from the oppressive conventions of indoor staging—an infinite sky above, and nature itself all about. Then there is a largeness of stage that permits elaborate groupings and the dignity of distance.

"Plays that are especially suited to production in the open air," says Sheldon Cheney in his book, "The New Movement in the Theater," "are plays of broad rather than subtle spiritual significance; plays that hold primarily by their poetry, and, most of all, plays that depend largely upon decorative movement, upon moving processions, pageantry, and dancing. The large mass, the broad sweep, the big spirit and the shifting lines and colors are the things that count out-of-doors."

## CHAPTER XLIV

### SEATS AND GENERAL ACCOMMODATION

PROBABLY not one person in a thousand who attend the theater is aware that theater seats vary in width. Yet there sometimes is as much as two inches difference between two chairs in the same section of the house. This is to make the rows come out even on the aisles. The law makes provision for this variation. In New York, a statute places the necessary width of a theater seat from nineteen to twenty-four inches. The law also demands at least thirty-two inches from row to row.

A chair with a seat that may be turned up when not in use, has proven best for economy of space, affording room to pass. To achieve this end, the fixed arms must be short, or, if long, must automatically turn up out of the way with the seat itself at the proper time. Simple movement of the seat alone, however, is the favored form, although a self-raising seat, with or without automatic arms, has met with some success in the market. Of course, the wire hatrack is found beneath practically all theater seats, for gentlemen patrons like to stroll at intermission for a smoke.

Arms of a theater seat seem necessary to comfort, and manufacturers give them much consideration. Chair arms are of many kinds. In most theaters, the seat at the end of the aisle has its outside arm elaborately made; but that on the inside is the merest makeshift, cheaply constructed, and shared by the occupant of the seat adjoining. This is another managerial economy of space, and has some practical arguments in its favor that cannot be given here.

Arms of the chairs at the Little Theater, New York, are of decided interest. The wooden end-piece is repeated between every two chairs, in contradistinction to the usual cast-iron subterfuge. The arm itself is fixed and short, but still long enough to support the occupant's forearm below the wrist. The end is rounded to fit the hand and fingers, but is not curved so far under that it catches a gentleman's coat pocket as he attempts to rise. The upper surface is sagged so the spectator may rest his elbows in comfort, and slightly grooved so his elbows will not slip.

As to the back of the seat, most persons like it to come up well about their shoulders, slightly concave above and slightly convex below, to support the back naturally, and tilted backward, like the seat itself, to take the weight off the base of the spine. But it happens that assorted sizes and shapes of persons occupy the same chair in course of time, so here the upholstered chair that adapts itself to its occupant, has its great advantage. Seats that have high backs are likely to dearrange fashionable coiffures and hide pretty necks and shoulders in decollété that their owners are anxious to display. Managers frequently aim to keep the seat backs as small and as far apart as possible, mainly because the modifications mean that much less obstruction to the view from the rear.

A seat that requires no effort at all to sit in, induces somnolence in the patron. The occupant should at least hold his head up. It is quite possible for a seat to be too comfortable and so militate against alert appreciation of the play.

#### CLOAK ROOMS

It would be a big help to managers if they could persuade patrons to check wraps and so forth at a cloak room. Carrying these various items into the seat reduces certain

conveniences of the auditorium—and on a wet night, when soaked umbrellas are added to other moist articles, it makes the air damp, and spectators generally uncomfortable.

The great cloak room problem is the tipping evil. Some theaters, like many restaurants, lease the cloak room "privilege" to outside concerns that seek it because tips are substantial revenue. Effort is constantly being made by thoughtful managers to discourage the evil; but the public itself persists in giving dimes to attendants, even when the management requests in programs and on placards that no gratuities be given, and declaring that if any attendant is found accepting them, he or she will be summarily dismissed. If the attendant would refuse the tip, I am quite sure that the patron, far from being offended, would tell his friends about it, and so provide the manager with one more good sales point.

If it is inconvenient to check wraps, it is still more difficult to deliver them promptly when called for. People are not disposed to wait patiently in line until their turn comes at the cloak room window, for it makes it impossible to leave the theater promptly after performance, and generally compels a lady to stand in the darkening auditorium amid busy charwomen, while her escort is getting her wraps. Acting on the principle that "many hands make light work," some managers turn nearly their whole corps of ushers into the cloak room at conclusion of the performance. In this manner, in some of the larger theaters, six to a dozen patrons may be accommodated at a time.

#### USHERS

Ushers have created a problem of their own. Like box office men, they are in direct contact with patrons, and offenses on their part are likely seriously to hurt future business. Their pay averages fifty cents apiece a perform-

ance. Therefore, boys usually regard the work as mere "filler-in," stepping-stones to places more lucrative. Ten or twelve years ago, girl ushers began to be seen in American theaters, but now they are almost as common as in the playhouses of Europe. Edward E. Lyons, when manager of Daly's Theater, was probably the first to introduce them to New York. He has found them so efficient that he has employed them ever since in all theaters with which he has been connected.

Under the Dillingham régime at the New York Hippodrome, Mr. Matthews, the house manager, demonstrated what could be done with boy ushers. He systematized them and drilled them as though they were soldiers. To use up their surplus energy and keep them alert, after being instructed in diplomatic handling of patrons and in selling souvenir programs, they were put through exercises in the lobby, marching and countermarching while performance was going on. They were officered from their own number, and rewarded for particularly efficient service. They were aided in starting a little weekly paper all their own—written, edited, and made up by them. In short, they were made the more efficient by being given an interest in their work.

A most important duty of the usher is to be at his post in case of fire. The head usher, who usually is a person of some experience, directs the corps. Word of the fire is sent to the box office and from there to the fire department. At prearranged signal, each usher goes to his post at a given exit, opens the door, which is generally secured by a panic-bolt, opening outward at slightest pressure from within. While this is going on, the stage manager steps out before the asbestos curtain is dropped to seal the proscenium opening, and delivers a short speech calculated to reassure those present. If the audience must go, it is

directed to file out in orderly manner. I have actually seen a theater containing 1,200 persons, ablaze at top of the auditorium emptied with everyone safely on the street, within three minutes after the alarm was given; and this is by no means a record.

#### VENTILATION AND HEATING

Two items vital to comfort of theater patrons are the systems of ventilation and heating. These are quite as vital to the manager, for there are no audiences more unresponsive than those in a cold or overheated auditorium, or one filled with foul air. There is much natural heat in a person's body; and when there is a congregation of persons, the temperature is raised very considerably. Therefore, it requires less artificial heat to warm a well-filled room than one with few in it. These differences are cared for automatically by the thermostat, but the engineer who is back of the instrument knows how to act if it fails to work.

One does not find clanking radiators in up-to-date theaters. Heat is evenly distributed through mushroom registers, one beneath each seat, while a steady circulation of air is kept going out through ventilators in the ceiling. Before the air is sent up under the seats, it is purified through many fine screens. This system also permits cooling the air in summer.

#### INTERMISSIONS

Before telling how audiences are handled at intermissions I want to say something about intermissions themselves; and once more I must call upon the Little Theater of New York for my instance. The *matinée* performance at the Little Theater begins at 2:45, the evening performance at 8:45—in both cases, fifteen minutes later than other

theaters in the city. Yet both conclude at the usual closing time of other theaters—4:45 P. M. and 10:45 P. M., respectively. Paradoxical as it may seem, the play is no shorter than one in another theater that holds its patrons fifteen to thirty minutes longer.

The secret is in the intermissions. In most theaters, waits between acts are long; at the Little Theater there is but one long intermission, and that lasts fifteen minutes, long enough to stroll, smoke, or partake of other refreshment.

To begin with, there is reason in the Little Theater beginning its performance late. Winthrop Ames, the director, had observed that in most theaters that begin at 8:15 or 8:30 P. M., patrons are constantly arriving late. He made a canvass of the leading hotels and clubs and learned the time that most people finished dinner. Then he allowed time for them to dress and come to the theater. His opening hour, therefore, became 8:45. Next he was confronted with the problem of concluding his performance at the usual time—from quarter to eleven to eleven o'clock—without making his play unduly short, for, following the metropolitan engagement, it had to be presented on the road under ordinary touring conditions. The only place for adjustment was in the intermissions. These he shortened as far as possible.

Now, he conjectured that the audience, having been kept in their seats for a sustained period, would probably become restless, so, to give them opportunity to rise and stretch their limbs he threw all spare time into one long intermission, lasting fifteen minutes. This intermission was placed at that point where the greatest scenic change was to be made, giving the stage hands opportunity to accomplish their work. Figuring, further, that there might be persons who would not be disposed to rise and stretch,



he decided to lure them forth by inviting them to become his guests in a delightful tea room and a fine smoking room downstairs.

A couple of minutes before the curtain is to rise again, bells controlled by the stage manager at the prompt desk, are gently rung in smoking room, tea room, and lobby—so gently, in fact, that chatty groups are loath to disperse. But Mr. Ames is determined to get his audience seated and quiet before the curtain rises again; so, in a moment more, half the lights in the tea room, smoking room, and lobby are switched off from the electrician's board backstage, and patrons, instinctively feeling that the other lights are to be extinguished too, hurry to their places. Next the auditorium lights dim down to faintest glow, while the footlights slowly come up. Chimes sound, and, as the curtain rises, the last glow of the house lights dies out. The Little is, in many senses, a psychological theater.

#### PASS-OUT CHECKS

If a gentleman prefers to smoke his cigarette on the street, in the open air, he strolls out, past the doorman. Probably he asks the doorman for a pass-out check. But, with a smile, this officer informs him that there are no pass-out checks at the Little Theater; his face will be his passport when he returns. And the gentleman, mystified, but pleased at the trust reposed in him, is impressed with one more feature of the unique house. No one has ever taken advantage of this system since the house was opened; and, even if one did, there would be no difficulty in separating the goat from the sheep, for each patron is able to identify his place with a ticket stub given into his possession when the usher shows him there.

Smoking rooms are usually also gentlemen's rest rooms, with male attendants. Ladies have their rest rooms, with

maid on duty. Physicians are on call at all times from the immediate neighborhood.

#### AFTER THE PLAY

Facility of handling the audience at conclusion of the performance, depends largely upon construction of the house. Most theaters merely remove all brass rails and fixtures that have been in place in the lobby to admit patrons one by one, and open all lobby doors. Here and there special exits are opened to let the people out more quickly, fire exits being frequently used.

Practically all theaters have special exits for carriage and automobile patrons. A doorman flashes on an electric sign the number given the chauffeur upon arriving with his party, and this signal is duly received and responded to by the waiting driver. These flash signs are now made so they show up even in bright sunlight; but in many cases during the day the carriage porter calls the numbers up and down the street through a megaphone.

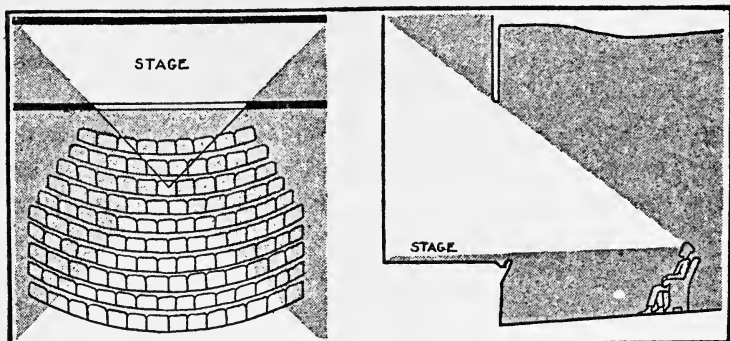
After the *matinée*, or the morning after the evening performance, charwomen enter the theater, pick up scraps of paper, or lost articles, which are placed in the box office to await claimants; polish rails, and clean up the theater generally. Vacuum sweepers are used almost exclusively nowadays, and are plugged in for electric current in various wall pockets about the auditorium.

## CHAPTER XLV

### LINES OF SIGHT AND ACOUSTICS

FROM the theatergoer's standpoint the best seat is that from which he may see and hear well. One may not see well if line of sight is obstructed by bobbing heads or posts—although in modern theaters that have their balconies built on the cantilever principle, there are no posts—and one may not hear well if noise in the street drowns out voices on the stage. So the definition is quite inclusive. However, it carries these corollaries: a patron must not be blind or hard of hearing, and he must understand the language in which the play is rendered—these if he would enjoy advantages of the good seat to the full.

Necessity of a direct line of sight from a theater seat to the stage, presents a problem comparatively easy of solution—although it is rather a range of sight than a single line. If one might have an "ideal" theater—which, of course, one never may for sheerly practical reasons—one might wish for seats where occupants not only could see both sides of the stage, but also could *not* see too far into the wings. In interior scenes the view is effectually cut off by the side walls of the settings; but in exteriors, stage mechanism is too frequently revealed, or else too obviously screened with makeshift scenery. For this reason, in an ideal theater, there are certain "dead-lines" beyond which seats may not be placed. These are indicated in the diagrams printed at top of the next page.



SIGHT LINES

The white section of seats, in the diagram at left, indicates the zone at any point within which the spectator may command good view of the stage without being able to see too far into the wings at either side. In the diagram at right is shown approximately how close one may sit without seeing too far up into the flies. Of course, the matter of acoustics and other practical reasons compel substantial modification of these ideas; but they may be presented as common-sense aids to solution of a serious problem.

It would not help matters much to extend the scenery further into the wings and have seats all the way front, because the stage space to be comprehended is just the zone of action. To be sure, no manager is going to let all that space between the first row and the stage go to waste; he prefers to mask the wings arbitrarily. There is, however, a tendency to throw the stage picture further back from the eye with a forestage, although not for the purpose of hiding the wings.

Interference of heads in front is reduced by placing seats directly behind divisions between chairs in the row ahead, and frequently eliminated by ranging the seats on a sharp incline. In New York, the law forbids a fall of the orchestra floor of more than three inches to the foot, but a sharper "rake" is permitted in balcony and gallery. In the large cities there is scarcely a structural point with reference to theaters that is not fully covered by building or fire laws.



From "Modern Opera Houses and Theatres"

FALSE VIEWS OF THE ACTOR.

At left, the actor is seen from the third balcony; at right, from the orchestra floor. The drawings were made under direction of Sir Hubert von Herkomer, in his experimental theater at Bushey, England.



## THEORY OF ACOUSTICS

Passage of sound from the stage to the seat is beset with many difficulties. It is such a tricky subject, in fact, that most theater architects let it severely alone and build their houses on seemingly tried and proven plans without inquiring into scientific whys and wherefores.

We have in America one of the greatest constructive authorities on theater acoustics in the world—Dean Wallace C. Sabine, of Harvard. He has made his findings public on many occasions for the good of the theater in general. His views were expressed at considerable length in the *American Architect* of December 31, 1913.

He takes his text from Vitruvius, the ancient architect, who said that for a theater, a place must be taken where the voice falls softly and not so reflected as to produce a confused effect on the ear, natural obstructions being interference, reverberation, and echo.

“Just as a tidal wave, a storm wave, or a ripple may be made to separate and recross by some obstacle around which it refracts, or from which it is reflected, and, recombining, produce regions of violent and regions of minimum disturbances,” says the Dean, “so sound waves may be diffracted or reflected, and recombining after traveling different paths, produce regions of great loudness and regions of almost complete silence. In general, the phenomenon of interference is produced not by the crossing of two waves only, but by the crossing of many, reflected from the various walls, from the ceiling, from the floor, from any obstacle whatever in the room, while other trains of sound are produced by the diffraction of sound around columns and pilasters.”

As to reverberation, he says, “When a source of sound is maintained for a sufficiently long time (a few seconds

ordinarily) the sound becomes steady at every point in the room. If suddenly stopped, it requires some time for the sound in the room to be absorbed. This prolongation is called reverberation." Of echo, he says, "If the source of sound, instead of being maintained, is short and sharp, it travels as a discreet wave, or group of waves, about the room, from wall to wall, producing echoes. The rapidity with which sound dies away depends on the size of the theater, on its shape, on the materials used for its walls, ceilings, and furnishings, and on the size and distribution of the audience."

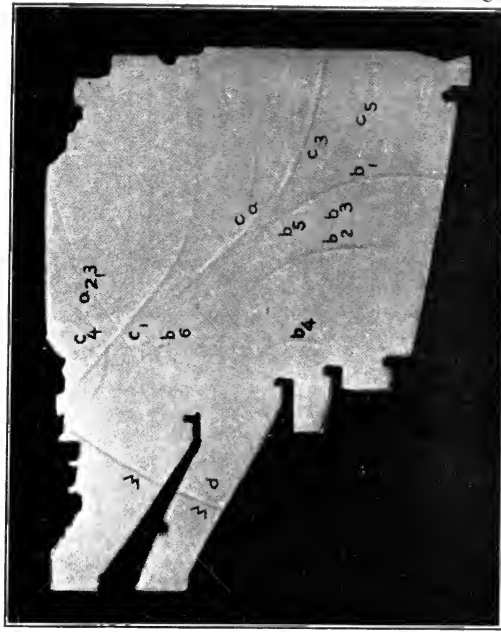
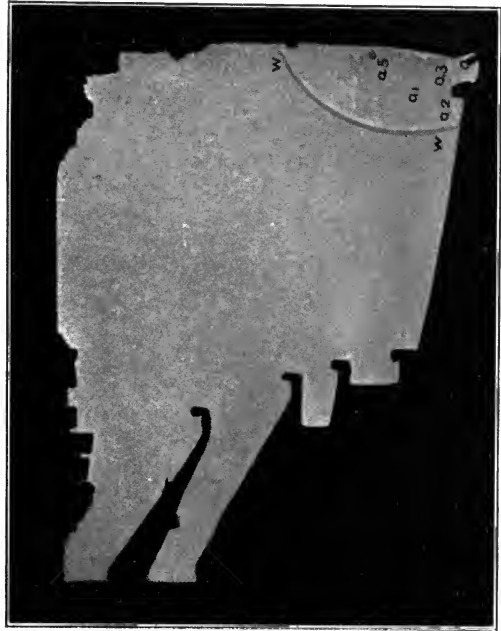
Dean Sabine was called upon by Winthrop Ames to correct the echoes and interferences of the quondam New Theater. He succeeded so splendidly that when Mr. Ames prepared to build his own Little Theater, his plans were submitted to the Dean for criticism from the acoustical standpoint. And the Little Theater is therefore one of the most acoustically correct theaters in America.

Acoustics of a theater are now determined in advance from the plans, almost as readily as lines of sight; and the method of doing so is intensely interesting.

#### PHOTOGRAPHING SOUND WAVES

The process in favor is that known as the Toeppler-Boys-Foley method, devised by three authorities on the subject. First, a scale model of the projected theater is constructed. Sides of this are removed, and a sound is produced at that point corresponding to the acting zone of the stage. As the sound is passing through, the model is illuminated from one side by a fine and somewhat distant electric spark. After passing through the model, the light falls on a photographic plate placed at a little distance on the other side. This light is refracted by the sound waves, which act as their own lens in producing a photograph. The resultant picture





Photos Courtesy W. C. Sabine and *The American Architect*

#### PHOTOGRAPHS OF SOUND WAVES.

Taken by Dean Wallace C. Sabine with a scale model of the former New Theater, to determine acoustical correction subsequently made in the auditorium itself. In the picture at left, the sound wave,  $a_1c$ , is seen entering the auditorium, with echoes,  $a_1$ , produced by the orchestra screen;  $a_2$ , from the main floor;  $a_3$ , from the floor of the orchestra pit;  $a_4$ , reflection from the orchestra screen of the wave  $a_3$ ; and  $a_5$ , the wave originating at the edge of the stage. The picture at right shows a more advanced stage of the same sound wave and echoes from the various surfaces.  $a_{2,3}$  is a wave, or echo, due to a combination of two waves which originated at the orchestra pit;  $c_1$ , from the oval panel in the ceiling;  $c_2$  and  $c_3$ , from the ceiling mouldings and cornice over the proscenium arch;  $c_4$ , a group from the moulding surrounding the panel;  $c_5$ , from the proscenium arch;  $b_1$ ,  $b_2$ ,  $b_3$ ,  $b_4$ ,  $b_5$ , from the screens in front, and the walls in the rear of the boxes, balcony, and gallery.



shows a silhouette frame from shadows cast by the model; and all within this frame constitutes an actual photograph of the sound waves and their echoes. By taking a series of pictures at different times after the sound has been started, a complete record of the waves, their interferences and echoes, is obtained.

Through such analysis the new Scollay Square Theater in Boston was prevented from being acoustically faulty by a change in plan before any building operations were commenced. Minor adjustments are made in the actual theater after construction, for the scale model does not take account of seats, draperies, and so forth. These minor changes are commonly accomplished by placing reflecting walls and panels of acoustic felt—invented by Sabine himself—in various parts of the auditorium, removing heavy valances, rehanging chandeliers, and adjusting other details. There are architectural firms that make a specialty of acoustical correction.

Of the corrected New Theater, which, with its echoes, had been a target for much ridicule by persons who did not understand its problems, Sabine says, "It is safe to say there are few—possibly no modern theaters or opera houses—so free from this particular disturbance as the New Theater at the present time."

#### ACOUSTICAL CORRECTION

Sabine found the plans of the Little Theater, New York, well defined and presenting all points necessary for his profound consideration. It was designed, he was told, for production of plays which could be adequately rendered only by the most delicate shades of expression; it was to seat just less than three hundred, and all seats were to be as nearly as possible of equal excellence. The important assurance was given that every seat should be occupied at

every performance. (Which indicates, parenthetically, another danger of empty theater seats.)

The Dean himself explains what happened: "The first sketch showed a slight reverberation; so the floor was lowered at the front, the ceiling was lowered, and the walls near the stage were brought in and reduced in curvature, with corresponding changes in architectural treatment. The rear wall was made straight; the side walls, near the stage, were curved. In order to still further reduce reverberation, and to break acoustically, the curvature of the side and rear walls, 'acoustic felt' was applied in panels—three panels on the side walls and seven panels on the rear wall." These panels, I may add, are hidden beneath painted tapestries.

When I issued a story from the press department of the Little Theater in 1915, declaring that in that playhouse the stage whisper had been perfected, I meant it. One can sit in the last row of the Little and actually hear a genuine whisper on the stage.

## CHAPTER XLVI

### ORCHESTRAS

A FEW years ago American theater managers had so much trouble with musicians' unions that some abolished their orchestras altogether, and reverted to a form of the old three knocks made by the prompter on his desk to demand attention for the rise of the curtain. David Belasco introduced it at his present Belasco Theater, then called the Stuyvesant. He used a set of chimes; and the favorable reception accorded it induced other managers to bring it into their houses.

In other places, notably at the Harris Theater, New York, a mechanical orchestra was imported from abroad, recalling—but not by way of invidious comparison—the barrel-organs used years ago in some of the smaller play-houses of England. No less than nine of these mechanical orchestras were almost simultaneously placed in leading New York theaters when their use was new.

Notable among them all was the Robert Hope-Jones "unit" orchestra, which was installed for the opening of the old New Theater under title of the Century—a compact, electrically operated instrument that seemed to compass all others, and that retained the human touch in a single player seated at the elaborate keyboard.

But it was not long before the instrumentalists came into their own again, even though their body was no more pretentious than piano, violin, cymbals, and drum.

Regularly concealed musicians were known to New

York theatergoers with the opening of the old Madison Square Theater. Here they were placed, in accordance with the old Elizabethan idea, in a loft above the proscenium. This arrangement was soon abandoned, however, because most of the music was lost. But now musicians are usually to be found in a well between the stage front and a closely balustraded rail.

An arrangement at the New York Hippodrome once placed its musicians in boxes high in the wings on the stage side of the proscenium arch; but the sound did not carry satisfactorily, and the scheme was discarded. When instrumentalists are needed for special purposes, they are frequently brought on the stage with the players, just as in the time of Shakespeare; or one may be placed in the flies above to supply the deficiency of a mock musician on the stage below. Madison Corey, long general manager for Henry W. Savage, and now a producer on his own account, had, as one of his earliest engagements, to play a piano supposedly played by Caroline Miskel Hoyt in a piece by the comic dramatist, Charles Hoyt.

#### ORCHESTRAS AND BANDS

It depends altogether upon the size of a theater and volume of sound necessary to fill it, whether an orchestra or a band is best adapted to its purposes. In most of the very small houses, one finds the music composed entirely of stringed instruments; as theaters become larger, one finds gradual intermingling of softer wind instruments, like the flute and clarinet; then, in theaters still larger, come saxophones, French horns, and cornets, and, eventually, in huge houses, one comes to the entire brass band.

Discrimination as to character of the orchestra is generally observed. Still, there are occasional experiments to prove the inappropriateness of certain kinds of music.



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“UNIT ORCHESTRA” ONCE USED AT THE CENTURY THEATER.

This is the Hope-Jones instrument that has at command of one player foundation departments of string, wood-wind, brass, and percussion.





When "Ready Money" had its première at Maxine Elliott's Theater, New York, a fair-sized house of perhaps eight hundred seating capacity, the management presented a quartet of mandolins which was quite drowned out in the chatter at intermissions.

The orchestra at the New York Hippodrome has been noted since the opening of the house, but never before to the degree attained when Dillingham produced "Hip Hip Hooray" there. In previous years, that particular appeal to the ear had been made by swelling the size of the usual theater orchestra to an aggregation of pieces fortified by some intermingling of brass. Here the brass was made the all-important feature, and the stringed instruments the adjunct. And, in accordance with the Dillingham policy, this brass was made the finest procurable—John Philip Sousa and his Marine Band.

It was R. H. Burnside, general stage director for Dillingham, who explained this point to me. "In the first place," he said, "a Hippodrome show requires extraordinary considerations. In a broad sense, it, of course, aims at virtually the same end as any kind of attraction; but the medium of achievement is very different. A highly successful thing in an ordinary theater of limited seating capacity, increased in size, would not meet the larger demands of the Hip. One must have something colossal with which to begin. Subtleties are out of the question on such a scale, so the things we are forced to consider all must have inherent bigness."

#### CONSTITUTION OF THE ORCHESTRA

A representative first-class American theater usually maintains eight pieces—double bass, first violin, piano, flute, clarinet, cornet, trombone, and drums. Extra pieces—second violin, a viol and a French horn or, perhaps, a saxo-

phone—may be added and charged to the visiting attraction, or may even be carried with the company. This organization is commonly deemed sufficient for interpretation of the dramatic entr'acte and incidental music. Of course, elaborate musical comedies require more. The manner in which these various instruments are combined involves what is called "tonal balance"—a nice adjustment which musicians tell me is rarely attained.

There are instruments in use to-day quite unknown to the orchestras of a century ago. About 1911 Lawrence Gilman, writing in *Everybody's Magazine*, described some of these curious pieces. "The modern orchestra, like the 'Gaul' of our troubled youth," he says, referring particularly to that of the opera, "may be divided into three parts, with a subsidiary part—which is, perhaps, a Celtic way of saying that it comprises four main groups or families. They are called by musicians the 'strings,' the 'wood,' the 'brass,' and the 'battery'—which, being interpreted, mean respectively the instruments played with a bow—the violins, violas, violoncellos, and double basses; the wood wind instruments—flutes, oboes, English horns, clarinets, and bassoons; the instruments of brass—horns, trumpets, trombones, and tubas, and, finally, the less important 'battery,' or instruments of percussion—the various kinds of drums, the cymbals, triangle, gongs, and so forth. The harp, as suits its seraphic and supermundane character, transcends these utilitarian classifications."

In the "unit orchestra" of Robert Hope-Jones, a sort of organ arrangement to which I have already referred, the foundation departments of string, wood wind, brass, and percussion, all are present, each enclosed in its independent "swell-box." By means of an electro-pneumatic action, all of the stops may be drawn upon the manuals, or on the pedals, at any pitch. There are no bellows in the in-

strument, wind being supplied by electrically driven fans and compressors.

Most classic plays have their traditional orchestral accompaniments—some written by great maestros, more of it arranged by composers whose names have been forgotten. Names of celebrities are attached to accompaniments for many of Shakespeare's plays.

#### FAMILIAR ORCHESTRAL ACCOMPANIMENTS

One is inclined to wonder at times, whether or not much traditional music is as fitting as it is merely familiar. Dear to memory is the "tum, tum, tum, tee, ta-a-a-tum!" signifying the approach of the villain; the fidgetty "ghost melody" by Varney, that was originally brought from Paris to London and thence to America, for the apparition in "The Corsican Brothers;" Rubinstein's "Melody in F" for the wife just deserted; Schumann's "Traumerei" for the fall of evening upon the old home; the "Wedding March" from "Lohengrin" for nuptials; the "Toreador" song from "Carmen" for anything likely, from dark-eyed vampires to Spanish omelettes; the "Intermezzo" from Mascagni's "Cavalleria Rusticana," or "a la bien Aimée," for stage waits; the "Flower Song" and "Hearts and Flowers" for love scenes; the "Sextette" from Donizetti's "Lucia," or Mendelssohn's "Spring Song," for offstage orchestras in ballroom or restaurant scenes.

#### PSYCHOLOGICAL MUSIC

Herr Director will tell one that good music in the theater is not music that conveys merely the theme of the play and the particular emotion, but also atmosphere. Thus, Elliott Schenck, musical director for Winthrop Ames, arranged music for the American prize play, "Children of Earth," from old New England hymns, while the incidental music

itself breathed of the soil: "Come, Lassies and Lads," "Early One Morning," and "Spring is Icumen In."

All incidental orchestral music is "worked" on cues from the action, or signals from the stage manager.

Robert Housum, author of "Sylvia Runs Away," wrote an article for the *Theater Magazine* of January, 1913, in which he remarked that even the realistic drama of to-day, from which the romantic is so rigidly excluded, has place for music.

"When Wagner perfected his system of leading motives, upon which, as a framework, the structure of his great music dramas is reared," he says, "he gave to the world a technical method—it is too fundamental to be called a trick—which has since been adopted and utilized very generally by composers; more rarely, but no less significantly, by dramatists. . . . Eugene Walter himself might be surprised to learn that in 'The Easiest Way' he has made use of the Wagnerian leading motive."

Mr. Housum points out first that "not all of Wagner's leading motives are, or in the nature of the case could conceivably be, descriptive. He uses them to represent things and ideas which it is impossible to characterize exactly in music, such as the 'Tarnhelm,' or 'The Dusk of the Gods.' Unless the dramatist uses music in precisely the same arbitrary fashion, to represent abstract ideas, his claim to the title of Perfect Wagnerite is incomplete. In 'The Easiest Way' Eugene Walter has done exactly this. His own stage directions show how closely analogous to Wagner's is his use of music. Immediately after Laura's frightful line at the end of the play, 'Yes, I'm going to Rector's, and to hell with the rest!' Walter writes:

"'At this moment the hurdy-gurdy in the street, presumably under her window, begins to play the tune of "Bon-Bon Buddie, My Chocolate-Drop,"' a bit of fine business.

“There is something in this ragtime melody which is particularly and peculiarly suggestive of the low life; the criminality and prostitution that constitute the night excitement of that section of New York City known as the Tenderloin. The tune, its association, is like spreading before Laura’s eyes a panorama of the inevitable depravity that awaits her. . . . Here Walter has used ‘Bon-Bon Buddie,’ so to speak, as a ‘Tenderloin motive.’”

## CHAPTER XLVII

### AUDIENCES, ORGANIZED AND OTHERWISE

ONE day, when Arthur Voegtlin, then presiding genius at the New York Hippodrome, was walking home after a *matinée*, his attention was attracted to a crowd about a doorway. Forcing his way to a point of vantage he discovered the cause of the gathering—a fat, sleek cat toying with a poor mouse it had caught. Every time the mouse would gain temporary liberty, the crowd would surge in its anxiety to see all of the performance. Voegtlin turned away, leaving the cheering crowd standing in the cold, awaiting the moment when the cat would decide to eat its captive. “That’s the public,” he said to himself in disgust, “that some of us spend hundreds of thousands of dollars and sleepless nights to entertain!”

That is the sentiment of an intelligent producer when thinking of an audience that must be constituted by the whole public. With a portion of the public he may hope for better things. The whole public means a lower average of intelligence than that in a well-selected group of well-informed persons, and consequently a less-refined attraction, for the successful entertainment cannot be above the comprehension of its audience. I think this statement will be accepted as indubitable.

As I have remarked elsewhere, the theater audience is a co-operative body, pooling the immediate resources of its members for individual benefit. This individual satisfaction should be extended equally to them. Therefore, the

attraction must compromise in meeting differences in their personal likes and dislikes. Common appreciation must be gained, or the dissatisfied patron may well feel that he has not received full value in return for his investment. In short, a producer may not rise from mediocrity in his profession unless his appeal is made to better than mediocre audiences; his entertainment, to be immediately successful cannot aim higher than the intelligence of the persons to whom it is presented. It is presented at selected time and place as being apropos; if it is not apropos, it frankly deserves to fail.

“If you want an intellectually aristocratic drama,” said Winthrop Ames at a New York dinner given in honor of E. H. Sothorn and Julia Marlowe in May, 1916, “you must have an intellectually aristocratic audience. . . . The trouble with the drama now, and for several years in the past, is that it is dominated by a great, new, eager, child-like, tasteless, honest, crude general public; and, as for blaming anybody—well it’s pretty poor fun blaming a great primal force like gravitation or democracy. We’re probably just going through a disagreeable but necessary period of gestation; and when the potentialities of our audiences have time to develop, they may develop with it an American drama that—like the drama of Elizabethan England—will give us a place in the sun.”

From this standpoint, it seems wrong to speak of the theater or drama in platitudes. To what public must this given play appeal, and under what physical conditions is it to be presented? These seem leading questions.

#### “DECLINE” OF THE DRAMA

“Any broad statement that the drama in our day has gone backward is obviously too sweeping,” said Mr. Ames. “What chance would Mr. Thomas’s subtler plays, or those

of Shaw, or Galsworthy, or Barrie in his more fantastic vein, have had with the playgoers of our fathers' generation—playgoers who considered 'The Lady of Lyons' a masterpiece!"

"I think we shall diagnose the trouble more accurately," he continued, "if we say that the *average* is not as high as it ought to be—that the good plays are so submerged and overwhelmed by a flood of inferior rubbish that they seem to have got lost in the shuffle altogether, and so given the stage an air of general retrogression. A constant diet of ten trashy plays to one good one, is what has disgruntled and alienated so many of our more intelligent theatergoers.

"Well, who is to blame, do you think—we behind the curtain or you in front of it? Neither, I think. Evil springs sometimes from beneficent sources—as floods from rain and droughts from sunshine. I believe that the average quality of stage plays has declined in America during the past twenty years for these surprising reasons: First, that America is a democracy; second, that we have free public schools; third, that these twenty years have brought us unexampled material prosperity, and fourth, because of the labor unions and their influence.

"I am not aiming at a paradox. Democratic America has stood for the right of the lowest citizen to better his social position; and he has taken full advantage of this opportunity; our schools have made a certain level of education not only free but compulsory; the national wealth has increased by leaps and bounds, and various social forces, chief among them the labor unions, have been sifting this wealth down through all classes of society. The result has been that in the past twenty years, those in America who would be called peasants abroad, have advanced a stride in the social scale; and this pressure from below has correspondingly increased the lower middle class, and, in turn,



this has doubled—it is hardly wide of the mark to say it has quintupled—our theatergoers. . . .

“ We found, to our regret, that it was not the intellectual public that had quintupled—it was the less intelligent. They were ignorant of dramatic standards of culture. To them a play was just a ‘ show ’—and their definition meant a simple, rapid, exciting story told in terms of action. The more intelligent public had increased, too, of course, but in comparison its increase was so small as to be negligible, and the so-called ‘ advanced drama ’ began to lead a hole-and-corner existence.”

#### THE METROPOLITAN SITUATION

In “ first-class ” American cities—statistically first-class—the playgoing situation is radically different from that in civic centers of second class. They maintain more theaters, and hence encourage greater discrimination of patrons in selecting their entertainment. New York, for instance, has a theatrical situation not paralleled anywhere else in America. The Borough of Manhattan has some forty-nine first-class houses, presenting a variety of full evening’s entertainment, ranging from comedy to tragedy, musical farce to burlesque, vaudeville to circus.

At the outset, the Tired Business Man—assuming the existence of that popular managerial myth—is presented with a wide choice of playhouse recreations, and is not, like the theatergoer in the small town, compelled to accept what his few leading theaters have to offer. Almost on the spur of the moment, he may find almost any kind of amusement dictated by his mood. It tends to make him a “ provincial ” theatergoer because he falls into a rut; he can always find the type of attraction he formerly has found to suit his taste, and has little real inducement to try drama instead of musical comedy—or vice versa. This is the real T. B. M.

### “ PSYCHOLOGY OF AUDIENCES

Consideration of audiences by their moods has led to a deal of theory expressed under the heading “ Psychology of Audiences; ” but none that I have seen has quite the practical value to theater managers of that set forth by William H. Crane, the actor, in the Sunday Magazine of the New York *Tribune*, in August, 1913. He does not discuss the tastes of audiences nearly so much as the difficulty of winning them over. He divides audiences in this manner :

- 1—The deadhead audience.
- 2—The ultra-fashionable audience.
- 3—The fashionable audience.
- 4—The speculator-ticket audience.
- 5—The cold-theater audience.

“ These five species of audience,” says Mr. Crane, “ are, in the order named, the most stubborn kinds of theatrical audiences. Let us see why. An audience composed of deadheads is the hardest audience for actor and playwright to please, because, like all other individuals who get something for nothing, a deadhead is suspicious of the quality of the thing he is getting for nothing. . . .

“ An ultra-fashionable audience is a severe proposition, because, being ‘ all dressed up,’ it will not unbend. It is a fact that the more a person is dressed up the more formal he becomes. Accordingly, an ultra-fashionable audience will not applaud or laugh openly, or even let a tear get into its eye. They are in the theater not so much to see the play as to let other persons see them, or to kill a couple of hours until the time for supper, the dance, or whatever engagement of a social nature their cards may call for on the particular evening. The merely fashionable audience occupies a position just below.

“Then comes the audience made up largely of persons who have been compelled to pay an advanced price for their seats. These persons not unnaturally enter the theater in a hostile mood. Their attitude, already irritated, resolves itself into ‘By George, this show has to be a mighty good one to please me!’ They sit tight in their seats, and it takes a doubly hard endeavor to win them. Last of the five hardest audiences is in a cold theater. I do not use the word ‘cold’ in the sense of unresponsive; I mean a theater that during the winter season is poorly heated. If the audience feels physically chilly, it is a demonstrated fact that they will feel mentally chilly, too.”

#### AUDIENCES THAT PRODUCE PLAYS

Of late years the theater has found audiences that not only determine fate of plays by the simple method of patronizing those they like and staying away from those they do not like, but that, like the Stage Society, undertake to produce plays themselves, hoping thereby to raise the artistic level.

I cannot agree to the general idea of an audience as its own producing management. In the first place, I do not think it a necessary state of affairs.

If the civic theater, for instance, is composed of the body of the people, its average of entertainment should meet their intellectual level; if above that level, which it must be to make drama literature, they are making a painful sacrifice on the altar of art. It is unfair to ask the audience of to-day to be making constant preparation for the audience of to-morrow. It is taking the joy out of their lives. The drama is above all an entertainment, and it may consistently develop other reaches only after it has achieved that end. It seems to me that the only healthy way for the theater to develop is naturally, without any “forcing” process; and

the natural manner is to let each play find its peculiar audience without trying to match the wrong audience to the wrong play, any more than it is right to attempt to match the wrong play to the wrong theater.

Audiences seem normally interested only in results; methods of work are details for workers alone. The audience actually conducting its own theater is inquiring into methods of work as well as results, and therefore going beyond its province. In this dabbling in unaccustomed materials, members succeed in amusing themselves very much, like children preparing their attic charades; but, by the very nature of the case, they then cease to be representative theatergoers.

To begin with, in the communal theater, subscribers are binding themselves in advance to support something the value of which is not yet determinable, and in which, through commitment of judgment, they will not be disposed to relinquish faith even when the result proves negligible. In the commercial theater a playgoer is not compelled to subscribe until he has heard critical verdict on the result, while, if the play has nothing particular to commend it, it will die promptly without public regret.

Drama is a form of expression, like music or painting; and if its peculiar form is not observed in a given composition, that composition has no place in the theater. Hence it seems a false move unqualifiedly to encourage continuance of a poorly constructed play merely because its message is worth while. Either a play should be constructed so that its message is adequately expressed, or the message should be presented in another form—in a newspaper, or as a book. The inevitable answer to the preacher who essays to convey his message through a play without observing its technical requirements, is, "Hire a hall!" Audiences should not combine for the false purpose of elevating isolated

methods of work as finished products in themselves. To be specific, the detail of characterization cannot create American success if the characters created move to no advantage; neither does the public approve of a play that has novelty presented off-stage; nor yet does it find complete satisfaction in a work having introduction, exposition, climax, dénouement, and catastrophe—with the climax “in the mathematical middle” (a supposedly desirable condition)—if the fine mechanism accomplishes nothing.

#### THE DRAMA LEAGUE OF AMERICA

At the same time, organized theatergoing may be of great benefit to the theater. We have, in this regard, a remarkably intelligent combination in the Drama League of America.

In the spring of 1910, several good ladies of Evanston, Ill., a suburb of Chicago, made the surprising confession to one another that they loved the theater. Finding that interest in common, they bound themselves together into a club having the incorporated desire to encourage better examples both of acted and printed drama in the home town and afield. That was the beginning of the Drama League. And it grew. Statistics of the league are not available at this time, but it is estimated that it has more than one hundred thousand affiliated members (almost as many men as women), while seventy-five universities and more than three hundred clubs are enrolled. It has many state federations and about sixty metropolitan centers.

The aim of the Drama League, as explained to me by its founder, Mrs. A. Starr Best, is never to produce plays, but to encourage production of better plays by providing audiences to appreciate them now, and, especially in the future, by educating the young folk by reading-lists and study courses, among other things. A playgoing committee

is sent to various theaters to report on the general character of their entertainments, and their reports are circulated to the members in the form of bulletins. Plays found wanting are not condemned, but simply ignored. Members are urged to attend as many bulletined plays as possible during the first ten days of their run. In most centers the league charges but a dollar a year for its bulletins, admittance to meetings, and other privileges.

In course of time the Drama League has come to modify certain clauses in its policy, notably that saying that they would "support creditable plays that appeared destined for early failure." Few managers cared to have publicity given the fact that a play stood in need of such attention, and playgoers, however public-spirited, were not fond of attending "attractions" likely to fail. There has, of course, been considerable criticism of the Drama League on the frequently true but general basis that "there is no accounting for tastes;" but, on the whole, the League seems a beneficent influence in the American theater throughout the country, particularly as a clearing house for dramatic interest and information, especially in last year's nation-wide celebration of the tercentenary of Shakespeare's death, which it inaugurated and which in New York City alone, included some two thousand separate celebrations, besides the huge community masque "Caliban." The League plans to make 1917 American Drama Year.

#### THE DRAMA SOCIETY

In 1913 there was organized the Drama Society, operating, as far as I know, only in New York City. John Corbin, once literary director of the New Theater, a critic of note, became its secretary. The plan was based on the League idea—to introduce the right audience to the right play; but in certain important features it departed radically. Seats

in the front of the house are purchased en bloc, the purchase being negotiated directly with the management. While it is not "a rescue league for unpopular plays," naïvely declared Mr. Corbin upon one occasion, it is intended "to *prevent* unmerited failures."

The Drama Society imposes two conditions; first, that the members of the society be limited in number, and, second, that they yearly attend ten productions "found worthy of the intelligent playgoer" and selected for them by their committee within the first month of the run. For two seats in the front part of the orchestra, to the ten plays chosen, bulletins, and so forth, each member pays \$42 a year. There is also a supplementary membership that pays but two dollars, but receives no seats.

It is not to the purpose here to discuss various other details of the membership plan. However, the Drama Society, like the Drama League, has found certain modifications of policy advisable. At present, it occasionally produces plays, notably "The Tempest," in 1916, with professional casts, and creditably, too, it must be confessed; but, I fear, complicating the American theatrical situation more than eradicating or minimizing its difficulties. I have tried but have been unable to get information about the Drama Society's plans for 1916-17.

#### THE STAGE SOCIETY

The Stage Society, which, like the Drama Society, confines its activities pretty much to New York City, has a number of excellent productions to its credit, and gave Granville Barker and others notable support. The annual dues to this society are \$20, for which members receive two seats to each production. There are about four productions in a season.

Numerous minor organizations of audiences exist in this

country; but I know of none serving better than the Drama League, with its nation-wide organization, which is accomplishing its end without causing economic upheaval.

#### IN RETROSPECT

It may seem strange, bearing in mind that, after all, the audience is really the first consideration in the theater, that I have reserved this chapter until the last. The idea is, as it has been throughout, to follow the consecutive steps in preparing a theatrical production before it is ready for the public and before the public responds to its appeal, without upsetting convenient minor classifications.

Everything in the theater leads so inevitably to the audience, that this chapter becomes the best possible place for viewing in retrospect the matters treated of in preceding pages. In such consideration the reader finds that he has entered the theater at the logical point of beginning, with the dramatist and his play, and has followed the play through the various stages of its life.

At the close of the adventure one is ready, I hope, to take his place in some convenient theater seat (without being too particular), prepared to say "On with the play!" with a new understanding of what it means.



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