

1. The Modern Drama.

It was only a little more than a generation ago, when some of us were students at school and college, ~~that~~ we were taught there were three or perhaps four great periods in the history of the drama: the period of the Greeks at the time of Sophocles, the ~~time~~ ^{period} of the Elizabethans at the time of Shakespeare, the period of the Spaniards at the time of Calderon (our teachers were ^{so} vague about this period, ~~as~~ ^{we} wonder if they knew much about it) and the period of the French at the time of Corneille, Racine and Molière. Each of these periods widely separated by time. We were never told that there was any drama worthy of study in ^{the} nineteenth century ~~drama~~ ^{nor} that contemporary play-writing was of any consequence. Yet an important new drama had been started about fifty years before, when the French Romantics led by Victor Hugo and Alexandre Dumas, pere, had

2. revolutionized the art of the stage. This drama had been developed later by Emile Augier and the younger Dumas, and had been passed on to a genius in Norway the gloomy and combative "giant of the north," Henrik Ibsen, with his profound knowledge of human nature, and "his ability to reveal the remote spiritual causes of the tangible results seen upon the stage." In 1890 he had reached the climax of his career, and his influence was being felt in many countries. There was important dramatic work being done in Germany, by Hermann Sudermann and Gerhart Hauptmann, - the mystic and poetic Maeterlinck had appeared in Belgium, with his perfect examples of symbolism - "his blue bird of happiness which was so hard to catch, and so impossible to cage." In England, also a vivid new drama was being launched by Sir Arthur Pinero, quickly followed by Mr. Edward Jones, Mr. Bernard Shaw, and Sir James Barrie. Yet, with all this important dramatic work done in many

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countries, the contemporary drama was still looked upon with doubt, and considered unworthy of serious study. Perhaps the reason for this was, that it seemed too near, and too new. The professors thought it would not last. Time had taught them to be sure of Shakespeare, but they were not yet sure that Ibsen, for instance would outlast the 19th century.

Almost every body nowadays has become aware of the fact that we are actually living in the midst of a quite wonderful period, a period more varied, more widespread in its productiveness than those other great periods I have mentioned, - the Greek, the Spanish, the Elizabethan and the classic French.

Anyone who has been delving into our subject, and reading some of the plays assigned is quite sure of one thing, - that it is great in quantity at least, - and such an one becomes reasonably sure that much of it is worthy of serious study. At any rate we are living in the midst of it all, and have been and are able to watch it come into existence. Read Baker 526

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Think of all that has happened in the theatrical world in the last forty or fifty years! At the beginning of that time *Graus de Bergerac* had not been written, - it is now established as an immortal masterpiece. Bernard Shaw was unknown, Sir James Barrie had not commenced to write plays, Mr. John Galsworthy had not been heard of. Ibsen, of course, had nearly completed his life-work but the first performances of his plays had barely commenced in America. Think how much has been given to the world since the death of Ibsen! For instance, the entire literary movement that culminated in the establishment of the National Irish Theatre was started only thirty-odd years ago, and it has given the world something genuine and beautiful. Whenever we think of the Irish Plays we feel that some of them must always have belonged to dramatic literature.

A very interesting point about the drama of today is its internationalism. In the history of the,

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drama, this is the first period when there have^{as} existed in the world, anything like a standardized theatre, - when there have been theatres very much alike in their appointments in different countries, inhabited by different races, speaking different languages. In the other periods mentioned, dramatic art was confined to a single nation, indeed, almost to a single city.

The Greek plays of the great period were written by Athenians, and for Athenians, and the drama then existed in no other country. In the Elizabethan period the drama was confined to a single country and practically to a single city. When Shakespeare wrote a play he knew that his audience was to be ~~composed~~ of English people, people of the same race, speaking the same language, all living in the same community. He never gave a moment's thought to a possible market for his plays across the Channel? In the classic period of the French drama

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dramatic art was again confined to one country and centralized in one city, Paris, and when Moliere stepped upon the stage to act a comedy he had written, he knew exactly the sort of people who would be in the audience.

Today, the problem of the playwright is much more complicated. Although his first thought is of an audience in his own country, it is natural, if he rises to a certain degree of success, that he should hope that his plays may be done elsewhere in the world. He hardly realizes how many American plays are exported, not only to England, but also to other countries of Europe! How strange to find, for instance, that Miss Margaret Mayo's farce called Baby Mine - forgotten here long ago, has held the stage in Spain for years, as one of the most popular modern plays!

Seven of our American plays are done in

7 several European countries, and we know that many European plays are being acted successfully on the American stage. To illustrate further this international characteristic I remember during a visit to this country about ten years ago by the Italian actress Eleonora Duse, she gave several Italian plays in New York. They were written in the Norwegian language for Norwegian people by a Norwegian author who lived in Germany. They were translated into the Italian language, acted by a company of Italian actors before an English-speaking audience in the metropolis of the New World. Whether an author can consciously make a successful effort to address a world-wide audience is an interesting question, - but it is readily seen that the dramatist of today is expected to put into his work a quality not merely local, but one that is above and beyond the boundaries of race and language. - he must be not only an imitator of life, but an interpreter of life as well.

8. We all remember when we went to the theatre to see the actor, - we went to see Edwin Booth, or Mary Anderson, or Joseph Jefferson, or Sir Henry Irving - the play was of comparatively little importance. That was the golden age of the great actor, admired for his feats of acting, and for his displays of personal magnetism. Our interest was not in the thing written, but in the thing done. During the Euc. Britt: "famous actors were rivals in the great historic roles, - they appeared to knowers, who would match their Hamlets or Macbeths against another". In the 19th century most of the great actors when they were not playing Shakespeare were playing imitations of Shakespeare by contemporary writers, or adaptations of foreign plays, particularly French. They did absolutely nothing to encourage dramatic authorship. As the great actors died away leaving for the most part no successors the author began to recover his position in England and America

9. In the late 80s and the 90s, Sir Arthur Pinero and Mr. Edward Jones began to write drawing-room drama and problem plays, which caused an immediate sensation, and became the subject of constant discussion among educated people.

The second Mrs. Taugheray was first produced on May 27th 1893, and was tremendously successful. It ran in London for hundreds of nights and has held the stage intermittently in all parts of the English speaking world from that day to this. One eminent critic says of it that "it was the first great play written in the English language for 116 years." It initiated the modern social drama and established it not only as a possibility, but as a fact. Its historical importance, therefore is even greater than its value and vitality as a work of art. By this play and others that ^{immediately} followed it, Pinero brought the cultivated British public

10. back to the theatre, and prepared and organized an intelligent, serious-minded audience for later dramatists. In craftsmanship, the second Mrs. Taugheray and its immediate successors revolutionized the Eng. drama, because they were written with an entirely new technique. Clayton Hamilton says: "they were the first plays in the Eng. language which dispensed with those first aids to exposition, - the soliloquy and the aside. Ibsen, in his later realistic drama had discarded these labor-saving devices, and Pinero made up his mind to do without them." Can. Drama, Pages 111-112.

A new generation of play-wrights rapidly appeared whose object it was to interpret the exciting and important changes which were then taking place in the national life of England. Theatrical managers began to see the possibilities in using the fresh work of English and

¹² debated question. Have we an American drama in the sense the term is used when we speak of the French, the Norwegian, the British or the Irish drama? Progress in art and letters is of slow growth in a vast country like ~~ours~~ - Dana Pinner in *Our Changing Theatres* speaks of ^{the} ~~it~~ ^{outlook} in an unusual way, and I would like to read you what he says. Page 26

It is the habit of many of us to lament the low estate to which the stage has fallen, and to regret the grand old theatre of the past. I wonder if people did the same thing in the days of Shakespeare. We must admit that there are things to condemn now as always. How could it be otherwise with the whole world at war, and at war about answers to social problems, about ideas and ideals. The plays that are written today reflect this conflict, these changes in manners and even principles, sometimes with a complete disregard of moral and spiritual values. ^{Changing Stage} page 18

" and American authors instead French and German and Italian adaptations, and the result is that nowadays people are going to the theatre to see certain plays because they are written by certain authors. The modern dramatists took their work seriously as will be seen by what Pinner wrote some years ago Baker, page 518.

In our own country dramatic authorship as a profession was impossible until 1891 because of the lack of ^{international} ~~adequate~~ copyright legislation. Until then an American manager could steal any play from France, and produce it here without paying anything for it. Consequently, the average theatrical manager could scarcely be blamed for producing a play which had already been successful abroad, and for which he paid no money, rather than risk his investment on a new play by an American author who would demand a royalty. Whether the dramatists of America are making the most of the opportunity offered them today is a much

Among other influences at work are the Community Theatres in many towns, the Theatre Guild, the Provincetown Players, the little Theatres everywhere, ^{the Repertory Companies like} the Hodge Podge Players of Rose Valley, so near at hand, and perhaps more than any other organization Eva Le Gallienne with her Civic Repertory group, which she organizes and directs.

We read of a direct result of all these educational efforts. Many of the young people who are now coming into the theatre as actors and producers have a high respect for it. They believe in it as an art, and as a social forum. The theatre cannot be reformed from the inside, but it can be reformed from the outside, by intelligent ^{high-minded} audiences, and by high-minded recruits.

There are influences at work throughout the country to keep alive the particular magic which belongs to the theatre at its best. Among them are the classes in Dramatic Literature in our Universities, the courses in play-writing begun by Professor George Pierce Baker at Harvard, those in acting and producing taught at Carnegie Tech. Iowa, Yale and other colleges, with their M. A. degrees conferred for creative work. The drama has invaded the schools also, and we read of teachers who have adopted the theories of a remarkable woman, Emma Sheldon Fry who has charge of the Children's Educational Theatre a pioneer school begun in New York some years ago. We haven't time to go into her theories, but if any of you are interested in this phase of our subject read Chapter Eleven of "Fastlights across America, Towards a National Theatre," by Kenneth MacGowan. The title of the chapter is suggestive; ^{as well as its contents} "The High Schools breed a new audience."