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THE THEATRE IN MY TIME

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THE THEATRE IN MY TIME

by

ST. JOHN ERVINE

LONDON

RICH & COWAN LTD.

Maiden Lane, Strand

First published October, 1933
Reprinted November, 1933

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PRINTED AND BOUND IN GREAT BRITAIN BY R. CLAY & SONS, LIMITED,
BUNGAY, SUFFOLK, FOR MESSRS. RICH & COWAN, LIMITED,
27 MAIDEN LANE, LONDON, W.C.2

TO

HENRY AND ANN GAME

I

In my lifetime, which began at the end of 1883, I have seen, and so has everyone who is my age or older, a revolution in the world of entertainment as abrupt and sweeping as any, perhaps, in the history of mankind. Flying-machines, motor-cars, moving-pictures and wireless-sets, all of which are the commonplaces of our day, were unknown, and some of them even undreamt of, except by a very few persons, in my boyhood. The gramophone was a despised toy, used only by vulgar people. The speed with which the radio or wireless has become part of the normal equipment of almost every household is astonishing. Twelve years ago—that is to say, in 1921—there was probably not a single loud-speaker or head-phone in any house in the world. When people spoke of "the wireless," they referred to Signor Marconi's expensive system of sending radiograms, a miracle of which they had heard or read, but of which they had no personal knowledge. They assured each other that it must be very useful to sailors, and were confident that it would greatly reduce the loss of life through the wrecking and foundering of ships. But that it would become, within a year or two from that time, a means of introducing almost

every kind of entertainment into their own homes, so that they might sit by the fire on a winter's night in any house between John o' Groats and Land's End or Slyne Head and Yarmouth and set their clocks by Big Ben or listen to Beethoven's *Seventh Symphony* or *The Tales of Hoffman* being broadcast from Savoy Hill in London, was an idea that had not entered their heads. If they had been told that Miss Amy Johnson would fly to Australia in less time than their great-grandfathers took to travel by coach from Edinburgh to London, and that they would be able to sit in their own homes and listen to that gallant lady telling them, *from Australia*, what adventures she had had on her journey, they would have replied that that sort of stuff was all very well in a novel by H. G. Wells, but that anyone who tried to make them believe in it as a practical possibility was insulting their intelligence and proving himself to be a fool. . . . To-day, however, it is estimated that twenty million persons in Great Britain and Ireland habitually listen to wireless programmes, broadcast not only from London, but from every part of Europe. Sounds can occasionally be caught from across the Atlantic. In a year or two, television will be upon us! . . . If my father, who died in 1886, were to be raised from the

dead, his bewilderment at events would be not less than Shakespeare's if he, too, were to be restored to life. The development of machinery between the middle of the eighteenth century and the present day was great, but the rapidity and variety of that development in the last twenty years have been enormous. The days when bicycles were still expensive novelties, and those who used them were stigmatised as "cads on castors" by stiff-necked old gentlemen and stiffer-necked intellectuals, are within the recollection of millions of people. I am not yet fifty years of age, but I can remember the first bicycles—chain-driven machines with solid tyres, which were thought to be very unsuitable means of locomotion for clergymen and women. I can recollect the bone-shaker or velocipede on which men learnt, after much suffering and in great danger of death, to ride that queer machine, colloquially called a penny-farthing, which had a front wheel of fifty-six inches and a back wheel of no more than a foot. It was not until I had seen one of my uncles, a large, abundant man, bravely pedalling down our road on one of these fearsome machines that I realised what is meant by the faith which moves mountains. Electricity was then an unusual and dangerous and highly distracting means of illumination, and was almost

unknown as a means of propulsion. The idea that this mysterious power would affect our entertainments had not occurred to many people. The lamps in our street were lit by gas, and every evening, as the dusk descended, a man, carrying a ladder and a small lantern, came round to light the lamps. He was a romantic figure to me, a man who spread illumination wherever he went, and I read and re-read many times a little pious story which was called *The Lamplighter*. In some places, the streets, if they were lit at all, were lit by oil-lamps. Horses were everywhere. One went "to town" in a horse-drawn tram, and I recall my excitement when I saw a tram operated by an underground electric cable moving up the Brixton Road in London. But that excitement would have been greater if I had not seen the first electric tram in the world, unostentatiously running from Portrush to the Giant's Causeway. I was born, then, at the beginning of a period of great change in the mechanical organisation of the world. I came to London while the old organisation was still in a flourishing state. The theatre continued to be the chief entertainment of intelligent people, and it had just experienced a remarkable revival. Brilliant authors were hurrying hard to the stage! . . .

II

In my childhood, a boy or girl, if taken to the theatre at all, was taken three times a year: once, at Easter, to see the pantomime; once, to see the Benson Company in a play by Shakespeare; and once, at Christmas, to see another pantomime. The custom of producing pantomimes at Easter ceased in my boyhood, and theatre visits, therefore, for the majority of children were reduced to two. Mr. Benson, who had not yet been tapped on the shoulder by the King, included in his repertoire a few pieces that were not by Shakespeare: *The Rivals* and *The School for Scandal* by Sheridan, and *She Stoops to Conquer* by Oliver Goldsmith; but I cannot remember that I was ever taken to see them. Benson meant Shakespeare to me, and when I heard Bassanio say to Antonio:

> In Belmont is a lady richly left;
> And she is fair and, fairer than that word,
> Of wondrous virtues,

my assurance of the reality of the scene became positive, for was not Belmont, a suburb of Belfast, at the end of the tramlines which passed our door? That night I went home in a Belmont tram, and I should not have been at all astonished if Portia, with her sunny locks hanging on her

temples like a golden fleece, had stepped into the tram and handed the conductor twopence for her fare. When I heard Romeo arranging to marry Juliet at Friar Laurence's cell, I begged my aunt to let me go to the wedding. Who would not gladly see so gallant a youth married to so lovely a girl? . . .

Luckily for me, my aunt had a passion for the theatre no less than my own, and a taste in drama that was equally catholic, for we could enjoy *The Lights o' London* by George R. Sims as heartily as *The Merchant of Venice* by William Shakespeare, and every year, as regular as clockwork, we went to see both. She was eager to be told, as I was to tell, all the particulars of the play coming to the Theatre Royal on the following Monday. For in those times, managers were as generous with coloured pictures of the play as cinema-proprietors are to-day with pictures of the film; and on Friday morning, a man distributed placards to tradesmen, who, in return for two free passes to the upper circle once a month, exhibited them in their windows. Hairdressers were favoured above all men in this respect, but I knew a tobacconist and a greengrocer who received placards and had the good sense to show them in a part of their windows where I could see every detail in the coloured

pictures and read every word in the play-bill. Great posters, almost all of them drawn by Albert Morrow, whose father had a shop next to the Orange Hall in Clifton Street, were plastered on "stations," as they were called, every Friday morning, and were generally more enthralling than the play, for Mr. Morrow could obtain effects on the hoardings that were impossible to the actors on the stage. I would gaze at these posters until they were photographed on my mind, and would then hurry home to tell my aunt the sensational details. There was a woman tied to the table of a circular saw, and in great danger of being sawn down the middle—"Oh, dear!" said my aunt, shuddering—but, of course, the hero would leap through the window in the nick of time and stop the saw! . . . My aunt and I would discuss at length the unlikelihood of finding the play as good as the picture, and by the time our discussion was over, we felt that we had seen the play. I soon discovered that the best pictures advertised plays that were not greatly admired by persons of culture and refinement. That was a frightful blow to me, especially as the advertisements of plays that were admired by persons of culture and refinement were very dull. There were no pictures at all, only a chaste piece of paper on which was

printed the information that Mr. Benson and his Company would be at the Theatre Royal for a fortnight, and would appear in the plays whose titles were set out. One of them had, I thought, a singularly silly title: *The Merchant of Venice*; although I agreed with my aunt that the play itself was good. I had seen merchants in Belfast, and could not bring myself to believe that they were really suitable persons to be in any play. How drab the advertisements of that piece were in comparison with those of *The Streets of London* by Dion Boucicault! That was a play, with a most hissable villain in it. I could not understand why I might hiss Gideon Blood in Boucicault's melodrama, but might not hiss Shylock in Shakespeare's. But my aunt, who was as ready as I was to boo Gideon, always hushed me when I tried to hiss the Jew. This piece, I learnt, was different from Boucicault's. Look, there was Mr. Jefferson, the schoolmaster, two rows in front of us. What would he think if he heard me hissing? . . . I could never prevail upon her to take me to see Irish plays, such as *Arrah-na-pogue* and *The Shaughraun*, for although she had seen them herself, and had repeated the plot of *The Shaughraun* to me so many times that I knew it by heart, she was fearful lest there might be a row in the gallery between the Papist and

Orange corner-boys who congregated there on "Irish" nights to make a demonstration of their religious beliefs: one side cheering the British authorities, while the other side pelted them with orange-peel and objurgations. Some of those lads, she said, might have a rivet or two in their pockets, purloined from the shipyards on the Queen's Island, and how was she to know that I, who had a perfect genius for getting into the middle of any row or disturbance, might not find myself blocking the way of a rivet to the stage and have my eye knocked out?

"But they wouldn't clod rivets at the stage, would they?" I asked in my innocence.

"Wouldn't they?" she answered very grimly. "You never know what a man will do when he has drink and religion in him!"

The pleasure I drew from my visits to the play in my aunt's company—she had a passion, and I had, too, for plays in whose title the word *London* occurred—was marred by the panic into which she occasionally fell when she thought of what would be the state of her immortal soul if God should call her home while she was in the theatre. I was not at all hopeful about my own hereafter, wherever I should die, but I knew that if I should be caught dying in a playhouse, my destiny was certain; and on the nights when

my aunt indulged her taste for eschatology in the theatre, I did not feel very easy in my mind until we were out in Arthur Square again and the risk of being eternally damned was reduced by the fact that, if I should suddenly pass away, at least I should die in the comparatively pure street. I mention this matter because the belief that the pit of the theatre was only another name for the pit of hell was prevalent at that time, and has not yet died out.* There is a legend that Roman Catholics are less austere and puritanical to actors and the theatre than Protestants. It is untrue. The history of the relations between the Church of Rome and the theatre is infinitely harsher than that of the relations between the theatre and almost any Protestant church.

* I have heard of a clergyman who forbids his children to go to the theatre, but allows them to go to the cinema, where, one would have thought, the imagination may be more easily debauched than it can be in any theatre. No one has yet told this clergyman that the cinema is a house of sin, but everybody who had influence on his youth assured him that the theatre was.

III

RELIGIOUS people, after the Greeks, have never greatly liked the theatre, and many of them have persecuted it. The single reference to a theatre which occurs in the Bible appears in the nineteenth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, and is made, not to a theatre as we know it, but to an arena, a place for which the first Christians had no cause to feel any affection, unless, indeed, they were addicted to martyrdom. St. Paul had caused an industrial crisis in Ephesus by asserting that the manufacture of idols and silver shrines was not one in which godly and intelligent persons should engage. He had quoted Isaiah to them: "They that make a graven image are all a vanity; and these delectable things shall not profit." The effect of Paul's preachment seems to have been precipitate, for Demetrius, a silversmith, roused his fellow-craftsmen to swift action by telling them that St. Paul was an interfering foreigner who was not only sapping the foundations of morality and religion, which was bad, but jeopardising a legitimate and very profitable industry, which was worse. The incensed manufacturers immediately rent the air with patriotic and pious exclamations, such as "Buy Ephesian!" and "Great is Diana!" and

ran about the city in confusion, a condition from which business men seem unable to escape, until they caught a couple of St. Paul's travelling companions, whom they seized and "rushed with one accord into the theatre." There was unity in Ephesus at last. St. Paul was, with difficulty, dissuaded by his disciples and some Asian friends from following the captives into the theatre, and the episode, we may be sure, fortified him in his objection to any arena, circus or playhouse, and made him find little worth in art or entertainment, although there is evidence that the early Christians were less indifferent to beauty in their meeting-places and services than is commonly supposed.

The general Puritanical objection to the theatre, however, has a deeper foundation than the mere fact that it was once the scene of suffering for Christian men and women; it is founded, and is still maintained, on the conviction that the mummer violates the commandment that we shall not make unto ourselves graven images. He violates it, indeed, more awfully, if that be possible, than Demetrius and his friends did, for they made graven images only of metal, but the mummer makes a graven image of himself!

What was begun by Isaiah, when he saw a vision concerning Judah and Jerusalem, and con-

tinued by Paul in Ephesus, has been continued throughout the history of the Christian Church so successfully that persons who do not call themselves Christians, but live in Christian countries, are influenced by it. The theatre is still, in some degree, supposed to be a sinful institution: the player remains, in the estimation of many who would say they were broadminded, a rogue and a vagabond. When a man who is connected with the stage, however remote or slight that connection may be, is brought before the magistrates for some offence, his occupation is included in the newspaper headline. Yet no sub-editor would dream of entitling an account of a police-court case, "Chartered Accountant Charged with Drunkenness," or "Actuary Fined for Furious Driving," or "Popular Cartographer's Peculiar Conduct," or "Numismatist in Night-Club Scene," or "Well-Known Wharfinger Divorced." If a sub-editor were to use such a headline, no one would assure himself that these actuaries and cartographers and numismatists are no better than they ought to be. The Puritan has successfully infected persons who are antipathetic to Puritanism with his belief that there is something about the actor's profession which renders him peculiarly liable to lapses, because, presumably, he is engaged in work which in-

volves him in the display of his emotions. The last person to reproach the actor in this respect is the Puritan himself, since, in spite of his profession of austerity, he has generally expressed his religious feelings in scenes of unparalleled emotion, and is accustomed to boast of his tears and trances as if they were signs of ineffable grace. All the great evangelists and holy men wept profusely on the slightest provocation, and the more lachrymose they became, the more highly they were esteemed. St. Augustine confessed that he wept "almost daily." St. Thomas Aquinas constantly wept and fell into faints. "Not a day passed," writes Tocco, "but he was ravished out of his senses," an assertion which may be extravagant, but must have had some foundation in fact. He often wept while praying, and very often, during Mass, would burst into tears. John Wesley caused men and women and little children to become intensely emotional, so that he sometimes had trouble in making himself heard above the cries and moans and lamentations of his congregation. There was a woman at Newgate who, while Wesley preached, broke out into "strong cries and tears," while great drops of sweat ran down her face, and all her bones shook. She was one of a multitude of persons similarly affected. George Whitefield

not only induced what seemed to be madness in those who heard him, but was himself violently upset by his own eloquence. "Such," said a Mr. Winter, who lived with him, "is the scope he gave to his feelings sometimes that he exceedingly wept, stamped loudly and passionately, and was frequently so overcome that for a few seconds you would suspect he never could recover." His addiction to oratory seems to have acted on him as an addiction to drink acts on other people, for Mr. Winter, with disgusting detail, states that sometimes he was only able to recover from his apocalyptic eloquence by vomiting. It is notorious that the after-effects of evangelistic piety on those who are subjected to it profoundly disquiet many pastors and parish priests who are less sympathetic to peripatetic preachers than they might be expected to be. The actor, then, will concede nothing to the devout man in this matter, but will stoutly maintain that when it comes to displays of emotion, the evangelist has excesses that are beyond his capacity or his desire.

IV

THAT fact, however, will not save him from the disregard of the Puritan, nor will it prevent the worldly man from supposing that these actor fellows are a rum lot. The Puritan's fear of all the arts, but especially of the art of the theatre, lest it should divert him from the contemplation of the Creator to the contemplation of the created, is familiar. "When put on its mettle," says Professor Grierson in *Cross Currents in English Literature of the Seventeenth Century*, "the Christian Church has always distrusted and must always distrust the arts, for in them the free spirit of man will endeavour to express itself uncurbed and in its entirety." Art, of course, has kept on breaking into religion, and has even been encouraged to do so by some devout persons, but periodically, it has been put back in its place; and in every period of repression the first, sometimes the single, person in the artistic professions to be punished has been the player. He, unlike the sculptor and the painter and the composer, lives and works in public, and cannot, therefore, expect to escape notice. The studio may be obscure, but the theatre must be conspicuous. This puritanical tendency to repress players and to decry

drama is not confined to Nonconformists and Dissenters in Protestant countries; it is to be found continually recurring in the Roman Catholic Church, where, indeed, so far as ministers of religion are concerned, it is more intolerantly displayed than it is among Methodists or Presbyterians; for in our time Dissenting ministers may visit the playhouse, but a Roman Catholic priest may not. The Archbishop of Canterbury can go uncondemned to the Old Vic. to see *Hamlet*. So may the Moderator of the General Assembly, and the President of the Methodist Conference, and the Chairman of the Congregational Union. But the Cardinal-Archbishop of Westminster may not. Dr. Bourne can go to a cinema or a music-hall, since these were not in existence when the ban on playhouses was imposed, but he must not go to any public performance in a theatre. I am told that the officers of the Church Army are under the same illogical law; they may go to a cinema to see *Up in Gertie's Room*, but they may not go to a theatre to see *Romeo and Juliet*. The Roman Church, no less than that of the Protestants, has had its Calvinists. When Racine's first play was performed, the Jansenists of Port Royal were in a sad way about him, and his grandmother and his aunts, who were nuns, "refused to have any-

thing more to do with him, and sent him what were to all intents and purposes letters of excommunication in which they implored the youthful sinner to 'have mercy on his own soul and think of the abyss for which he was heading.' "* Nicole, who was Racine's tutor, was shocked to find that his former pupil had fallen a victim to the "poison of authorship." "Everyone," he wrote, "knows that this gentleman has written novels and stage-plays. . . . In the eyes of right-minded people, such an occupation is in itself not a very honourable one; but, viewed in the light of the Christian religion and of the Gospel teaching, it becomes a dreadful one. Novelists and dramatists are poison-mongers who destroy, not men's bodies, but their souls."† In the time of Molière, the Roman Catholic Church was oppressively severe in its attitude to the theatre. "The actor," writes Mr. John Palmer in his *Life of Molière*, "was an excommunicated person. He was only admitted to the sacraments as an act of indulgence. Upon his deathbed he was required formally to renounce his profession before he was allowed to receive them. If he died unable or unwilling to comply

* *The Power and Secret of the Jesuits.* By René Fülop-Miller, p. 107.

† *Ibid.*

with this formality, he was in law deprived of Christian burial, which could only be accorded to him by connivance or special dispensation." When Molière lay dying, he sent for a priest, but none would come, and when he was dead there was unseemly and uncharitable disputation over his body.

V

THE repressions and suppressions of the theatre in the time of Shakespeare, which culminated, after Cromwell, in the closure of all theatres in London for a period of sixteen years, need not now be narrated, since they are familiar enough; but it may, perhaps, be interesting to observe with what asperity ministers of religion in the nineteenth century were accustomed to refer to it. An eminent and popular Nonconformist minister, the Rev. Dr. Cooke, who was tutor to General William Booth, published a work called *Explanations of Difficult Portions of Holy Scriptures, etc.*, in 565 *Queries and Answers*, in which he very succinctly stated the beliefs, not only of Nonconformists, but of many Evangelical members of the Church of England, about imaginative literature and any diversion from the awful contemplation of eternity. "Cricket," he wrote, "if viewed as an athletic exercise and apart from all gambling and excess, is not evil for children and young people, but is beneath the dignity and gravity of adult Christians. In our view, time is too precious, death is too near at hand, the business of life too solemn, and the realities of eternity too momentous, to allow our golden hours to be squandered

in anything that does not bring glory to God and minister some real good, either to ourselves or our fellow-men." Wesley was less tolerant of games than Dr. Cooke, for they were forbidden at the school which he founded at Kingswood. "Who plays when he is a child," Wesley said, "will play when he is a man." Dr. Cooke, questioned by an anxious youth who wished to know if he might go to the circus without throwing God into a violent rage and incurring eternal damnation, replied, "Let me ask you, would you like to die there, or to be found there when summoned to judgment?" Pious persons were, and still are, fond of asking that question. An important Congregational minister of the middle of the last century, the Rev. Dr. John Campbell, of Whitefield's Tabernacle in Tottenham Court Road, asserted that, although some playgoers might be reputable citizens, the majority of them were either "accomplished blackguards" or well on the way to becoming such! When he was asked by a godly youth if he might go to the theatre without committing a sin, he replied, "When the sorrows of death and terrors of judgment are before you, it would minister no solace to introduce the player. It would then be felt an unpardonable insult, a cruel mockery of your woe, were a play to be read to you, or a

comedy acted in your presence." It is difficult to see the relevance of this reply to the question it is supposed to answer. By what process of reasoning, one wonders, does a man conclude that because no person wishes to have a comedy acted or read to him while he is in the throes of death, playgoing is, therefore, proved to be wicked? No one about to die, although he might have been an ardent politician while he was in health, would wish to be visited by a Royal Commission or to hear an address on Proportional Representation, even from the Prime Minister himself; but we should deride any one who suggested that this disinclination to be entertained in our ultimate hour by political polemics proves that politicians are accomplished blackguards and that any person who frequents the House of Commons is in danger of being eternally damned; although it might fairly be claimed that more men and women have been financially, mentally, socially and spiritually ruined by Acts of Parliament than by plays.

VI

In spite of the puritanical panics and disapprovals of that time, the theatre was a fairly flourishing institution, even in Belfast, although I have since heard that dividends were more often passed than met by the shareholders. It had scarcely any rivals for popular favour. Working-men went to it as eagerly as men of university education, and Mr. Benson, when he brought his Shakespearean company to the Theatre Royal, could be certain that if the directors of the shipyards and the linen-factories were in the stalls, the "Islandmen," as the shipyard workers were called, and the linen-lappers were in the gallery and pit. On Students' Nights, the boys from Queen's College would fill the gallery and, between the acts, entertain the audience and the playgoers, who listened behind the curtain, to a concert of songs that was sure to include one written for the occasion. I can clearly recall the performances I saw in my boyhood, and I will here indulge my sentiment by describing a night at the play between 1890 and 1900. I would seat myself in the auditorium long before the hour at which the curtain was due to rise. It rose early, for few of us were late diners, and we went to the theatre,

not with distended stomachs and brains fuddled with heavy food and wine, but with clear heads, because we had eaten our evening meal at least an hour before entering the theatre. There were Early Doors then, and eager playgoers would actually pay an extra sixpence to be allowed to use them, and would patiently sit in a dim light until the Ordinary Doors were open and the thriftier or poorer playgoers clattered in. There are no Early Doors now. Nobody would use them if there were, for this is the day of the damnable Late Comer, for whose burning there is, I hope, a well-stoked place in hell. From the moment when I passed out of the street into the theatre, I felt myself to be in an enchanted country. The very passages of the theatre, paved with stone, were romantic, and I never approached the small aperture behind which sat the man who took my money in exchange for a ticket, without a feeling of awe and respect. He was the guardian of the magic gate. The dim gas-light flickered in the draught that blew down the passages as the doors were swung open, and cast long, jumping shadows on the dark-stained walls. The lights in the auditorium, kept low by the thrifty manager until the last moment, blinked in the crystal chandelier which hung from the roof, and turned each large glass drop

into a flashing diamond, so that it glittered like the Queen's crown. A few minutes before the hour at which the performance was to begin, sad-eyed men, wiping their moustaches, if they had any, emerged from a dark trap-door beneath the stage, carrying cornets and flutes, fiddles and trombones into the dungeon which was called the orchestra. I pitied these men because, night after night, they sat close to the stage, but seldom saw anything that happened on it. The conductor, perched higher than his men and facing the stage, could see everything, and the man who played the clappers, as we called the cymbals, and the big drum could see much, partly because he was better placed than his colleagues, but chiefly because, having less work to do than the other musicians, he could stand up and, in the pretence that he was tightening the cords of his drum, take a good look at the stage. Little did I dream then that a worse fate was to befall the orchestra, that a time would come when its members, including the leader himself, would be hidden under a pall of imitation palm-leaves, lest the sight of a bare fiddler should offend the fastidious, and that eventually the musicians would be abolished in favour of an ear-splitting instrument called a Super Heterodyne Automatic Radio Gramophone.

These disasters, however, were far off and unsuspected in those days, and a fiddler would emerge from the trap-door beneath the stage without the slightest suspicion that his days were numbered. As the musicians assembled, the mystery of the theatre deepened for me. A thrumming of instruments being tuned stirred expectancy in me, and I gazed at the shaded lights above the music-stands in as much awe and wonder as a devout person feels in a sanctuary. When all his men were in their seats and ready to follow his lead, the conductor would bustle very briskly through the trap-door amid tappings of bows on lampshades, and mount his high perch, from which he would give a greeting to favoured persons in the stalls, and then, with a dramatic sweep of his arms, abolish the applause and call his men to attention. Deep silence! . . . Then the conductor's arms would move and the fiddles would respond to his waving arms, and at the first note, the safety-curtain would start from the ground, creaking its way up, as if the music had moved it; and when it had gone, I would see a sight that never palled on me: the drop-curtain which was decorated with what appeared to be the remains of a French Court circling round one of the Lakes of Killarney. It was the old-fashioned

roller-curtain which curled up to the top of the proscenium with a motion that was indescribably fascinating, and I can think of nothing in the modern theatre so beautiful and alluring as the spectacle of that old roller-curtain when, at the end of the overture, the house-lights were lowered and the gas footlights were raised, and a soft golden-yellow light suffused the French Court and Killarney's lakes and fells. No curtain, or so it seems to me, descends so dramatically as the old roller drop-curtain. Even now, three decades after I last saw one, I can hear the thud with which it rolled down on a tense scene, closing it in with a bang that was as effective as an orator's thump on a table. It seemed to run out of the proscenium arch, gathering speed as it fell, and to hit the stage with dramatic deliberation. There! it announced, making its tactful thump, *that's* a conclusion! . . .

As the overture came to an end, the house-lights were lowered, a feat which enthralled me, for I wondered what would happen if the gas-man, in a careless mood, extinguished them, as I had seen a sexton do in a Presbyterian church. He never did, but always left them faintly glimmering. Queen Victoria's crown faded into the roof, and the leader of the orchestra, having ended his overture, now tapped the shade of his

lamp, and drew soft, shivering music from his men. The curtain rolled up. First, we saw the feet of the players, then their knees, then their faces, and, finally, the whole scene. The play was unveiled. But a veil of a sort remained, rising from the fumes of the footlights, a trembling, transparent curtain between us and the players, who thus, although they were near and actual, seemed remote and mysterious. Sometimes, indeed, the fumes were too much for girls who posed in the transformation scenes of the pantomimes, and a fainting young woman had occasionally to be taken off the stage. When Ellen Terry, as a child, acted the part of the "top angel" in a "vision" scene, the heat of the gas at that dizzy height made her sick at the dress-rehearsal. Steps, I have no doubt, were taken to see that she did not sicken during a performance. Many hard things were to be said of those gas footlights in the future, but they were important in the creation of the stage's mystery, and I was not astonished when I read, in a Life of Sir Henry Irving, that the great actor would not use electricity in his productions, but, after the abolition of gas-floats and footlights, took his own gas-jets and brackets with him wherever he went. Is it sentimental to suppose that the last great personality of the English

theatre saw an enemy in electricity and instinctively avoided it? "We never had electricity installed at the Lyceum until Daly took the theatre," says Ellen Terry in her *Memoirs*. "When I saw the effect on the faces of the electric footlights, I entreated Henry to have the gas restored, and he did. We used gas footlights and gas limes there until we left the theatre for good in 1902. To this I attribute much of the beauty of our lighting. I say 'our' because this was a branch of Henry's work in which I was always his chief helper. Until electricity has been greatly improved and developed, it can never be to the stage what gas was. The thick softness of gaslight, with the lovely specks and motes in it, so like *natural* light, gave illusion to many a scene which is now revealed in all its naked trashiness by electricity."

VII

THE scenery we saw when the curtain rolled up was crude stuff in comparison with the magnificent box-sets which prevail on the stage to-day. Pieces of upright and frayed cloth, suspended from the roof and carelessly touching the walls of an interior set, did well enough for a ceiling and equally well for a sky. A coloured cloth, painted in a slapdash style and cut to look like the leaves of a forest, did for a wood. There were "wings" on the stage then, as there are "wings" on the French stage to-day, and an author could solve many difficulties of entrance and exit by merely increasing the number of his "wings." We should feel affronted if a manager were to "decorate" a play in that artless manner to-day, but I doubt if our well-made realistic sets are better at creating illusion than were those crude cloths. The audience, at all events, was willing to help the play with its imagination, and when a manager exhibited a tattered curtain, with crumpled, dirty edges and peeling paint, and said, "This is the Forest of Arden!" the audience leant forward and replied, "So it is!" I am sometimes tempted to believe that the skilfully-contrived modern set abolishes illusion because it approximates so closely and so cleverly

to reality. It looks so like a real room that we begin to notice the difference rather than the resemblance!

In this gas-lit, crudely-painted show, illusion was created, and passions, although sometimes torn to tatters, were also sometimes transfused into something very beautiful. Passions are seldom, if ever, torn now. There seem not to be any passions to tear. All our heroes now are fretful and petulant and full of nerves. They fly to the piano on the slightest provocation and breathe heavily as they play Bach's Prelude and Fugue in C Minor or a few bars from Beethoven. The commonest stage direction in the new, "nervy" plays is *He speaks with impatience* or *with forced calmness*. But acting in those days was still romantic and robust, although the refining influence of Irving was preparing the way for the casual and conversational style which now prevails and is driving audiences from the theatre because they feel like eavesdroppers or cannot hear a word that is said on the stage. Actors, in spite of Irving's knighthood and Mr. Alexander's society friends, were still members of a withdrawn craft, aloof in their private lives, lest they should take the mystery from their public performances. When they went on tour, they stayed in theatrical lodgings,

and not in Station Hotels. They had their own way of living and manners, and their own style of dress. They were "theatricals," at once terrifying and alluring to the godly, a source of amusement on Sunday when they climbed into railway carriages that were shoved for hours into any siding that happened to be vacant, and a source, too, of intense interest to plain, substantial people who lived in one place and were highly esteemed by their neighbours. The players had scarcely any contact with the general public, apart from the stage, and neither knew nor wished to know people who were not in "the" profession. Their friends were actors, and they had not yet created class distinctions among themselves. A member of the Garrick Club had not learnt to look down on a member of the Green Room Club or to belittle a Savage. Henry Irving found nothing incongruous in his intimacy with John L. Toole! . . .

This aloofness of the player from the crowd of everyday people had, of course, its critics, who complained that he lived like a pariah or a priest, and insisted, as Mr. Harley Granville-Barker was accustomed to do, that the actor cannot interpret the life of his time faithfully unless he mingles with his neighbours on terms of equality. The point is disputable. The cir-

cumstances forbid him to live as actuaries and wharfingers live, for he begins to work when they cease, and has his leisure when they are busy. He is free to mingle with the general public only when he is unemployed, and that freedom is not wanted. He has a matinée on Saturday afternoon, and may not, therefore, put on flannels and adjourn with ordinary people to tennis-courts. His intense conservatism prevents him from associating comfortably with "advanced" people, and his easy manners and gaiety as successfully prevent him from enjoying the society of the conventional people with whom he has political sympathies. He is conscious, too, that his opinions are not regarded as serious or important, although they are probably as sensible as most, and he knows that his occupation is still considered to be the last refuge of a man who cannot obtain a good billet in an insurance office and is not competent to be a chartered accountant. He may wonder, too, whether there is much in Mr. Granville-Barker's belief that he should take every opportunity of attending meetings of the Fabian Society. Is the imagination really stimulated by listening to Lord Passfield describing the incidence of taxation? Will a lecture on local government by Mrs. Sidney Webb add anything to an actor's

ability to create beauty? Hazlitt, in an essay in his *Table Talk* on "Whether Actors Ought to Sit in the Boxes?" is downrightly on the side of those who would have the players keep themselves to themselves in deep seclusion from the daily crowd. "Actors," he says, "belong to the public: their persons are not their own property," and, therefore, should not be freely exhibited. They can only enhance their public appearances on the stage by concealing their personal and private lives. "An actor," Hazlitt adds:

> after having performed his part well, instead of courting further distinction, should affect obscurity, and "steal most guilty-like away," conscious of admiration that he can support nowhere but in his proper sphere, and jealous of his own and others' good opinion of him, in proportion as he is a darling in the public eye. He cannot avoid attracting disproportionate attention: why should he wish to fix it on himself in a perfectly flat and insignificant part, viz., his own character? . . . An actor, like a king, should only appear on state occasions. He loses popularity by too much publicity; or, according to the proverb, familiarity breeds contempt. Both characters personate a certain abstract idea, are seen in a fictitious costume, and when they have "shuffled off this more than mortal coil," they had better keep out of the way—the acts and sentiments emanating from themselves will not carry on the illusion of our prepossessions. Ordinary transactions do not give scope to

> grace and dignity like romantic situations or prepared pageants, and the *little* is apt to prevail over the *great*, if we come to count the instances.

Duse was as emphatic on the point as Hazlitt. "From seven to eleven I belong to the public. But for the rest of my time I am a woman like anybody else and have the right to keep my life to myself." And this right, her biographer, E. A. Rheinhardt, asserts,* she defended against all aggressors, whether they were interviewing newspaper men or irrelevantly inquisitive people or exacting admirers. When an English woman journalist insisted on interviewing her, Duse dressed up her maid in her bed, and the maid received the importunate reporter and answered her questions. Queen Margherita of Italy commanded Duse to the royal box during a performance, but the great actress replied that she could not go into an auditorium "in her stage character," adding, "Your Majesty will understand!" Her Majesty did, but the King of Wurttemberg was less sympathetic to her plea for privacy. He "begged first through his adjutant, and then in person to be admitted into her dressing-room, and was only persuaded to withdraw by her announcement that the play would

* *The Life of Eleonora Duse*, pp. 151–6.

not proceed until the King was in his box again." Mr. Granville-Barker, himself eminent, has eminent supporters, and Constantin Stanislavsky, the great Russian actor and one of the founders of the Moscow Art Theatre, quotes with approval in his brilliant book, *My Life in Art*, the opinion of a distinguished teacher, Mikhail Shtchepkin, who said, "Try to appear in society as much as your time permits. Study man in the mass, do not let a single anecdote pass without giving it attention, and you will always discover the reasons why the thing happened as it did and not otherwise." But neither Hazlitt and Duse, on the one hand, nor Mr. Granville-Barker and Stanislavsky, on the other, would, I feel sure, approve of a way of living which makes the actor off the stage so familiar a figure that illusion on it is impossible. The actor cannot express emotion until he has experienced it, but he must not let the public see him acquiring his raw material. We are interested in the picture, not in the mess on the painter's palette.

Familiarity does not, as Hazlitt asserted, breed only contempt. Who has not been inexpressibly shocked at finding himself admiring a person who, until he was encountered, seemed utterly detestable? If familiarity breeds only contempt,

then we had better abolish the League of Nations and scrap all means of communication. Familiarity shatters illusion, and in no place can its shattering effect be more plainly observed than in a repertory theatre. The London playgoer seldom sees any actor more often than once or twice a year, and may not see him so often; but a regular attendant at a repertory theatre, such as the Playhouse in Liverpool, or the Abbey in Dublin, or the Repertory in Birmingham, is likely to see the same players from thirty to forty times in a single season. He cannot, in these circumstances, long continue to regard the actor as a character in a play, and soon begins to regard him as Mr. Thespian in a part, and, in some cases, as Mr. Thespian in the same part throughout the season. When I was manager of the Abbey Theatre in Dublin, I received a signal proof of the disillusionment which is bred by familiarity. In one of our productions, a player with a distinctive and adenoidal voice, who had been associated with the theatre almost from its opening performance, made his first speech offstage. One night, I was sitting in front of two girls who were, I gathered, habitual visitors to the theatre. When they heard the actor's voice "off," they immediately began to laugh, and one, turning to the other, said, "Ah, would you listen

to Joe!" *Joe* was the name, not of the character in the play, but of the actor, and I realised then that he would for ever be Joe to those two girls who, because they had seen him many times and knew every tone in his voice, had no hope of persuading themselves to believe in him as a person in a play. Illusion was lost in familiarity. Joe week after week stepped on to the stage! . . .

It is because of this appalling dispersal of illusion that actors ought not to remain in any repertory theatre for more than three years.

The shedding of mystery is now common, in the West End Theatre as much as in the provincial repertory theatre, and our players are paragraphed and photographed and reported in every conceivable situation—opening bazaars, nursing their infants, making omelettes, playing golf, even acting—until we feel that we know so much about them that we scarcely need to go to the theatre to see them. Mr. Granville-Barker's dictum, that the player can only hope to give a faithful representation of life if he freely and familiarly mingles in it, has been faithfully followed, and our players are now repeating the polite mumbles of the drawing-room so exactly that they can with difficulty be heard in the stalls and cannot be heard at all in the pit and gallery. They do not act: they behave; and there are

times when the difference between a word rehearsal and a performance is negligible.

Mrs. Siddons, according to tradition, could reduce an audience of Scotswomen, a fairly tough lot, to hysterics. "The music of that wonderful actress's voice, looks, manner and person," said Sir Walter Scott, "produced the strongest effect which could possibly be exerted by a human being upon her fellow-creatures. Nothing of the kind that I ever witnessed approached it by a hundred degrees." She thoroughly upset a supernumerary actor in Edinburgh by her performance of Queen Katharine in *Henry VIII*. His part was that of the Surveyor, and as he came off the stage, having received the Queen's rebuke, "You were the Duke's surveyor, and lost your office on the complaints o' the tenants," he was sweating with agitation. "What's the matter with you?" one asked. "The matter!" he exclaimed. "That woman plays as if the thing were in earnest. She looked me so through and through with her black eyes, that I would not for the world meet her on the stage again." Macready in his *Reminiscences* relates a story of her effect on an audience, while playing the part of Arpasia in Rowe's *Tamerlane*. The words she had to say were these:

> Oh dismal! 'tis not to be borne! ye moralists!
> Ye talkers! what are all your precepts now?
> Patience? distraction! Blast the tyrant, blast him,
> Avenging lightnings! Snatch him hence, ye fiends!
> Love! Death! Moneses! Nature can no more;
> Ruin is on her, and she sinks at once.

They seem sad stuff, and difficult even for a genius to speak with any fire, but Mrs. Siddons delivered them in such a fashion that the audiance was almost stunned. "In the last act," says Macready, "when, by order of the tyrant (Bajazet), her lover, Moneses, is strangled before her face:

> she worked herself up to such a pitch of agony, and gave such terrible reality to the few convulsive words she tried to utter, that the audience for a few moments remained in a hush of astonishment, as if awestruck; they then clamoured for the curtain to be dropped, and, insisting on the manager's appearance, received from him, in answer to their vehement enquiries, the assurance that Mrs. Siddons was alive, and recovering from the temporary indisposition that her exertions had caused. They were satisfied as regarded her, but would not suffer the performance to be resumed. Still more remarkable than the effect of this performance on the general public was its effect on two seasoned actors, the elder Macready and Holman, who happened to be seated in the pit. Holman turned to his companion, when Mrs. Siddons had fallen, and staring in his face, said, "Macready, do I look as pale as you? "

When Macready himself was rehearsing a stock company that was to support him in *Macbeth*, an actor who was taking the part of Donalbain slouched past the Duncan of the cast without any sign of respect or deference. Macready flew at the super in a rage.

"Do you know who that is?" he shouted in terrifying tones.

"M-m-m-m-mister Smith," the startled actor replied.

"Nothing of the kind, sir," Macready roared. "That is the anointed King of Scotland. Take care, sir, to treat him as such!"

And according to the narrator of the story, the super was so deeply impressed by Macready's menacing visage and terrific voice, that for the rest of his life, when he met Smith in the street, his hand automatically seized the brim of his hat and he stood humbly bareheaded until they parted. How different is this situation from that of to-day! Gallery girls now address players by their Christian names, even by their private nicknames, crying, "Bravo, Bunny!" or "You're wonderful, Tallulah!" while keyhole reporters fill vilely-written paragraphs with intimate references to Gladys and Diana and Owen and Gerald. There was an air of awe about an actor in earlier times, and he could

communicate that awe to the public, which, while it pretended to be superior to him, secretly admired and respected him. When Barry Sullivan went to his native city, Cork, to play with the stock company in *Macbeth*, a super, who was unacquainted with the piece, had to take the part of the Messenger in the fifth act without a rehearsal.

"All you have to do, Danny," he was told, "is to walk on the stage like a man, and say to Mr. Sullivan, 'Me lord, Birnam wood is even now marching on Dunsinane!' " a very free rendering of Shakespeare's words. And on the night, Danny did, but when Sullivan turned round and, whirling his great two-handed sword above his head, shouted "Liar and slave!" his awful visage so frightened the poor super that the unfortunate man fell upon his knees and, holding up his hands for mercy, cried, "I declare to Jases, sir, they toul' me to say it inside!"

Can any actor to-day create so much illusion as that?

VIII

It was the end of this theatre that I saw as a boy in Belfast. It still lived in the provinces, although it had ceased to live in the West End of London, and it still had the power to enthrall responsive hearts and to quicken imaginative minds. The theatre of Henry Irving, although it seemed to be more refined than the theatre of Barry Sullivan and Edmund Kean, was, in fact, the same theatre as theirs: its climax. And here I must interrupt my story to remind my readers that I am describing a gas-lit world. Electric light was occasionally used, but only occasionally, and never in the theatre. The provincial city was an intimate community, from which trains slowly and infrequently travelled. A man, if he wished to move about, must walk or entrust himself to horses or, if he were exceptionally adventurous and were indifferent to ridicule, might mount a monstrous wheel and dash about the streets at the rate of six or even eight miles an hour. Young ladies played tennis, when they played it at all, with genteel incompetence, missing the ball nine times for every once that they weakly hit it. They were encumbered by petticoats. But the community was compact and neighbourly, and the remotest house was within walk-

ing distance of the centre of the city. The theatre was the chief source of amusement, in spite of the horror with which it was regarded by many persons whose piety was more Calvinistic than Christian. Everyone knew exactly where it was, and its manager was a popular and respected citizen. He belonged to a family long and honourably associated with the town. The Gunns of Dublin and the Wardens of Belfast had a high place in the esteem of their fellow-citizens, and because they had this high place, they strove to keep it by making their theatre a place in which people of culture and taste had a reasonable expectation of obtaining pleasure. I can recollect the veneration in my aunt's voice when, one morning in Arthur Square, she said to me, pointing to a handsome gentleman as she spoke, "That's Mr. Warden!" She made no other remark about him, nor had I to inquire who Mr. Warden might be. *I knew*. I greatly doubt if managers of provincial theatres to-day are known, even by name, to more than a hundred or two inhabitants of their town. Here and there, a manager of a repertory theatre, such as Mr. William Armstrong, of the Playhouse, Liverpool, or Sir Barry Jackson, still, in spite of his West End associations, of the Repertory Theatre, Birmingham, is familiar in our mouths

as a household word, just as Miss Horniman was when she owned the Gaiety in Manchester; but the rest are chiefly resident clerks-in-charge, the local representatives of London syndicates.

Playgoers in that time were interested in acting, and would compare one man's Hamlet with another's, and weigh Juliet after Juliet in the balance, finding this one wanting and that one sufficient. But there is little interest in acting now, and less knowledge of it. Our gallery girls are absorbed, not in acting, but in actresses, and will shriek themselves into hysteria over performances which ought to be regarded as public exhibitions! Bernhardt and Réjane did not disdain the English provinces then, and rumours were heard even in remote places of a strange, disturbing actress, an Italian woman called Duse! The taste of the time was for romance, and the actor, by clothing himself in odd garments and living apart from his fellow-citizens, maintained a romantic air in his private, as well as in his public, life. Interest in acting, indeed, was greater than interest in drama, and I can recollect the horror with which I, a rebel against the authority of my betters, heard a lady say that she had seen Ellen Terry in a piece, called, she thought, *Captain Brassbound's Conversion*,

by an author whose name she could not for the life of her recall. George Somebody! . . .

It was, perhaps, a narrow world, that compact provincial community, but its mind was tougher than ours, and it did not shiver with dismay at the prospect of using it. The very smallness of this world, in the physical sense, was good for the theatre. Any able-bodied person, in my boyhood, could comfortably have walked from the centre of Belfast to his home, and this, I daresay, was the truth about almost all provincial cities then. Had the Rev. Dr. Hamilton, the President of Queen's College, wished, he could have walked from the Theatre Royal to his house in twenty minutes, although it was then on the rim of the city, at the end of the tram-lines. The city clung to its centre in deep intimacy. Everybody was to be met, sooner or later, at Gibson's Corner. One ate a cookie at eleven in Linden's! . . . The city, too, had its own opinions, ably expressed in its own papers, and it did not depend for its view on the London press, of which, indeed, it had little knowledge. *The Times* came a day late, receiving, as it came, the tribute due to a venerable institution, but none was so poor in spirit in our town as to suppose that the opinions of *The Times* were better than those of the *News-Letter* or the *Northern*

Whig. We read what London had to say, but took care to let London know that we also had beliefs. These local beliefs may have been crude in comparison with metropolitan beliefs, although there is doubt about that, but they were our own beliefs: they were not borrowed or derived; they were not echoes from London. The metropolitan papers quoted the provincial press. Now the provincial press quotes the London papers, and smart up-to-date young men in Belfast buy the *Daily Mail*, while their sisters read the *Daily Mirror*.

In that community, gone now, the theatre was something more than a means of passing the time before going to bed. I doubt if any cinema matters to any place as the theatre mattered to Belfast, as it mattered to any city, in those days. Do students go to the gallery of the local cinema in festive attire as they went to the gallery of the Theatre Royal when Benson's Company came to town? Does anyone suppose that the great sprawling mass of unfriendly bricks and mortar which is now called a city is an improvement in every or in any respect on the compact and neighbourly towns of forty years ago? We spend hours in merely getting to destinations, driving in deepening boredom past streets and streets and more streets, in none of which lives any-

body we know, in none of which lives anybody we wish to know. Our motor-cars have lengthened our distances and congested our streets so that we ride more slowly than we walk, and we daily anticipate the stoppage of all activity because of a traffic block which cannot be released. Our workmen are trying to return to their slums because they spend more money on travelling to and from their excellent county council cottages than they receive from their increase in wages! . . . Because the community was compact before 1900, because neighbourliness prevailed, because a man could easily walk from the door of his own house to the door of the theatre, the theatre had an importance then which it has lost, and that importance was not, I think, due to the absence of rival entertainments; for we were not entirely dependent on the playhouse for our fun, but had other resources, less ample, perhaps, but good enough for an evening's amusement. The theatre mattered to the town. It had significance. If the quality of the plays and actors brought to the Theatre Royal was less than that prevailing at the Gaiety in Dublin, we wrote to the press about it. When Mr. Warden's eldest son, Fred, built the Grand Opera House, many were offended when they heard that the best plays and actors were to be seen in future

there, while the old Theatre Royal was to become a mere place of melodrama. (Alas, it has disappeared now, and its site is occupied by a quite terrible-looking cinema!) These offended ones liked the old theatre. The very building mattered to them! . . .

IX

THE interest in acting was, I have said, greater than the interest in drama, but it was beginning to wane, and the signs of its waning were grateful to dramatists who gloomily reminded themselves that the quality of the play is always poor in an age in which actors are exalted. For the last forty years of the eighteenth century and the first seventy-five of the nineteenth, the English drama was in an appalling plight, but acting flourished. Between the time of Goldsmith and Sheridan and the time of Gilbert and Sullivan and Arthur Pinero stretches a great dramatic desert, in which appear only a few small oases of no great value, except for the work of Tom Robertson, which, despite the disesteem in which it is now held, was as revolutionary in its day as Goldsmith's "naturalism" was in his. Sheridan Knowles, Bulwer Lytton, Douglas Jerrold, Charles Reade, Tom Taylor, Dion Boucicault and H. J. Byron were the best of a poor lot. Had Tom Robertson, the eldest brother of Dame Madge Kendal, not lived, we might ask to be allowed to forget all the plays that were written in England from the date of Sheridan's death until the date of Pinero's first appearance on the stage. A flourishing trade

was done by gentlemen who undertook, with the aid of a dictionary, to translate any French farce not only into English, without the troublesome formula of paying the author of the original work anything for the labour, but also into decent and respectable English! These authors, whether they wrote their own plays or adapted those of foreigners, were hacks, hired to knock up job lots of drama for actors with healthy lungs. William Archer, who must have read almost every play in the English language, quotes the dialogue of some of these singular pieces in a courageous book, called *The Old Drama and the New*. Here is a sample taken from *Speed the Plough* by Thomas Morton. This piece, which was first performed on February 8, 1800, is notable only for the fact that the phrase, "What will Mrs. Grundy say?" was part of its dialogue. Archer describes the plot and quotes some of the dialogue:

> The baronet in *Speed the Plough*, Sir Philip Blandford by name, is not exactly wicked, though he believes himself a murderer. He is a fury-haunted personage of the type of Manfred or the melancholy Earl in Scott's *Antiquary*—one of the thousand characters of the period who have "Made in Germany" legibly stamped upon them. Here is part of the scene in which Sir Philip tells his sad story to a very odd confidant, by name Handy junior:

Sir Philip. Now listen to my story.

Handy Jun. You rivet my attention.

Sir Philip. While we were boys, my father died intestate; so I, as elder born, became the sole possessor of his fortune; but the moment the law gave me power, I divided, in equal portions, his large possessions, one of which I with joy presented to my brother.

Handy Jun. It was noble.

Sir Philip (*with suppressed agony*). You shall hear, sir, how I was rewarded. Chance placed in my view a young woman of superior personal charms; my heart was captivated. Fortune she possessed not—but mine was ample. She blessed me by consenting to our union, and my brother approved my choice.

Handy Jun. How enviable your situation!

Sir Philip. Oh! (*sighing deeply*). On the evening previous to my intended marriage, with a mind serene as the departing sun, whose morning beam was to light me to happiness, I sauntered to a favourite tree, where, lover-like, I had marked the name of my destined bride, and, with every nerve braced to the tone of ecstasy, I was wounding the bark with a deeper impression of the name—when, oh God!——

Handy Jun. Pray proceed.

Sir Philip. When the loved offspring of my mother and the woman my soul adored . . . placed themselves before me; I heard him—even now the sound is in my ears and drives me to madness—I heard him breathe vows of love which she answered with burning kisses. . . . Picture the

young tiger when first his savage nature rouses him to vengeance—the knife was in my gripe—I sprang upon them—with one hand I tore the faithless woman from his damned embrace, and with the other—stabbed my brother to the heart. . . . That chamber contains evidence of my shame: the fatal instrument, with other guilty proofs, lies there concealed—can you wonder I dread to visit the scene of horror—can you wonder I implore you in mercy to save me from the task? Oh, my friend, enter the chamber, bury in endless night those instruments of blood, and I will kneel and worship you.

The "guilty proofs" had lain there undisturbed for a quarter of a century, and might, one would think, have been left in peace. As a matter of fact, Handy junior, for no very clear reason, does not disturb their repose. They remain unburied in endless night until the castle happens to take fire. This is the chance for Henry, the offspring of the traitorous brother and faithless lady, who has been brought up in bucolic innocence by Farmer Ashfield and his wife—consequently, it will be observed, under the immediate supervision of Mrs. Grundy. He precipitates himself into the flames, and rescues his cousin, Miss Blandford, with whom he is of course in love; and then again he rushes into the furnace, to emerge once more scatheless but horror-stricken. Then this dialogue ensues:

Miss Blandford (*shrieks*). Thank Heaven, he's safe! What urged you, Henry, again to venture in the castle?

Henry. Fate! the desperate attempt of a desperate man.

Sir Philip. Ah!

Henry. Yes: the mystery is developed. In vain the massy bars, cemented with their cankerous rust, opposed my entrance—in vain the heated suffocating damps enveloped me—in vain the hungry flames flashed their vengeance round me! What could oppose a man struggling to know his fate? I forced the doors, a firebrand was my guide, and among many evidences of blood and guilt, I found—these!

(*Produces a knife and bloody cloth.*)

It would be curious to know what were the other "evidences of blood and guilt": for, as a matter of fact, the traitorous brother was not killed, but has through all these years been watching over Sir Philip's career, like a sort of pseudonymous Providence. The disappearance of the body never seems to have struck Sir Philip. Yet it is notorious that one of the inconveniences of murder lies in the fact that the corpse seldom or never walks away under its own steam, so to speak.

This is, undeniably, fustian stuff, but it lends itself to full and round declamation. An actor could let himself go on it, and many eminent actors did let themselves go on stuff no better or actually worse. When Frank Rochdale, in Colman's *John Bull*, a work produced in 1803, had to inform a young woman that he could not

marry her although she had been compromised by him, he struck her dumb with the following words:

> Oh, Mary, how painful if, performing the duty of a son, I must abandon, at last, the expiation of a penitent! But so dependent on each other are the delicate combinations of probity, that one broken link perplexes the whole chain, and an abstracted virtue becomes a relative iniquity.

The work of Tom Robertson, in comparison with this kind of play, seems inspired by Heaven. It still retains its hold on popular affection, and I can testify to the favour with which a London suburban audience saw *Caste* played about the year 1906, for I was a member of that audience, and was one of those who greatly enjoyed it. Archer quotes a famous passage of the play, the passage in which Old Eccles, a drunken tub-thumper, harangues his infant grandson, the child of Esther Eccles and the Hon. George D'Alroy. Here it is:

> *Eccles* (*goes up, L. of table, smacking his lips*). I'm as dry as a lime-kiln. (*Takes up jug.*) Milk! (*With disgust*)—for this young aristocratic pauper. Everybody in the house is sacrificed for him! (*At foot of cradle, with arms on chair-back.*) And to think that a *working-man*, and a member of the Committee of the Banded Brothers for

> the Regeneration of Human Kind, by means of equal diffusion of intelligence and equal division of property, should be thirsty while this cub—(*Draws aside curtain, and looks at child. After a pause.*) That there coral he's got round his neck is *gold*, real *gold!* (*With hand on knob at end of cradle.*) Oh, Society! Oh, Governments! Oh, Class Legislation!—*is this right?* Shall this mindless wretch enjoy himself, while sleeping with a jewelled gaud, and his poor old grandfather want the price of half a pint? No, it shall not be! Rather than see it, I will myself resent this outrage on the rights of man! and in this holy crusade of class against class—(*Pointing to child*) I will strike one blow for freedom! (*Goes to back of cradle.*) He's asleep. It will fetch ten bob round the corner; and if the Marquissy gives us anythink it can be got out with some o' that. (*Steals coral.*) Lie still, my darling!—it's grandfather's a-watching over you. . . .

Twenty-seven years have passed since I heard that speech spoken, but its delivery is fresh in my mind, far fresher than speeches I heard in plays a month ago.

X

THE historian has a hard job to explain why the English drama was in such a poverty-stricken state, and I do not suppose that any explanation I have to give will seem satisfactory to my readers. The mind of England was, perhaps, more closely engaged with machinery and middle-class morality than with art and literature, but there were authors a-plenty, and a large number of them were great, but they did not often, if at all, concern themselves with the stage, for reasons which I will presently state.

We cannot, therefore, account for the dearth of drama in these years by scorning the authors, nor can we account for it by saying that our grandfathers and great-grandfathers were so busily engaged in spreading the Empire that they had little time to think of painting and poetry and no time to think of plays. When men go pioneering, they go, as it were, primitive, but not so primitive that they cannot find time to express themselves in the genius of a Kipling, an author who, I learn to my astonishment, is not entirely approved by persons with what may disrespectfully be called local and municipal minds. "They tell me we have no literature," said Napoleon. "I must speak to

the Minister of the Interior about it." But what could the Minister of the Interior do for him when the Minister of War was so busy? A feeling that the pursuit of art was not an occupation for men prevailed among the Victorian manufacturers who were willing to let their daughters indulge in the more genteel forms of it, but were exceedingly affronted by artistic tendencies in their sons. That feeling survives in the United States of America, where a man who shows signs of interest in art is regarded as effeminate. The most popular theme in modern American popular magazines ten years ago, was the story of the young girl who, although she was brought up in a good home by reputable and pious parents, took an interest in art and was in great danger of being seduced by a villain who wrote books or played the piano or painted pictures, and was rescued just in time by the hero, who persuaded her to take an interest in Big Business and leave art alone. The fact that poetry is the conversation of heroes, that all men in their greatest moments, when they are in love and when they go to war, instinctively express themselves in verse, seems not to have been noticed by the mass of Americans, who persist in regarding a poet as a moral and physical degenerate. An American friend once assured me that this

belief is based on the fact that the majority of the lectures on poetry and literature given in American schools and colleges are delivered by women. Poetry is regarded in the United States as women's stuff! . . .

The destitution of the drama in England in the last forty years of the eighteenth century and the first seventy-five of the nineteenth may be accounted for by the rise of the novel and the great favour shown to actors. A nation seems not to have enough spirit to make all the arts flourish alike, but is able to cultivate one only by neglecting the rest. The drama had come to a fallow period after the death of Sheridan, and the energy of English literature went into the novel. It is sometimes said, but, I think, very nonsensically, that Fielding was diverted from the drama to the novel by the maleficent activities of the Censor; but it is surely a fact that Fielding and the master artists of his time were more attracted by the new literary form than by one which seemed to them old and worn and was, moreover, hard to master. Anybody can, and almost everybody does, write a novel, but only a person of exceptional skill can write a play. The problem most of us have to solve is not how to encourage the poet, but how to restrain him, and we may believe that if Fielding

had had a serious call to write plays, no censor could have prevented him from writing them. The rise of the novel, then, was probably the most serious factor in the decline of the play, but we must also note the popularity of the actor as an important factor. As a dramatist, I do not resent the fact that people are more interested in players than in authors, because the actor has to take his popularity in his lifetime and has little hope of immortality, although I ought, perhaps, to qualify that statement by asserting that he has more hope of immortality than is commonly supposed. Henry Irving's name is better known than the name of the author of *The Bells*, and Sarah Siddons is more familiar to us than some of the writers in whose plays she performed. But broadly speaking an author may be good-natured about the applause the player receives because he knows that the player's life is brief and he hopes that his will be long. Students of the theatre have heard of an actor called Burbage, but the wide world knows that the plays in which he acted were written by Shakespeare. It is bad for the drama when actors are very popular, for actors are not interested in drama: they are interested only in acting. For them, as Israel Zangwill said, the part is greater than the whole. The acting in the period we are con-

sidering was undoubtedly great, although it might seem ranting stuff, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing, if Kean and Phelps and Macready and Barry Sullivan were to be resurrected from the grave and put on our stage exactly as they were put on their own. But the plays were undeniably dreadful, and were not defended by the most ardent lovers of the theatre in which they were performed, and were regarded merely as a means of enabling an actor to open his lungs and show how he could shout. It was, indeed, a sign of an actor's greatness that he could obtain an effect with such trash. How often have we read of Modjeska's feat in drawing tears by reciting the alphabet in Polish to an audience which did not know what she was saying! Acting, in those times, was regarded as an operatic performance, and just as anything that is too silly to be said may be sung, so anything that was too stupid to be read could be acted. Browning and Tennyson attempted to write plays, but either they had not the craft of the dramatist or they would not take the trouble to acquire it, and their works, therefore, were ineffective. Many scenes in *The Dynasts* show that Thomas Hardy, had he given as much of his mind to the drama as he gave to the novel, would have become a very great dramatist. The

brief incursions of the great Victorian poets into the theatre, however, do not substantially alter the fact that there was a wide gap between the time of Robertson and the time of Pinero.

XI

How poor a place the actor's theatre was is evident to any person who bores himself by reading the plays that were performed in it. The fact that our grandfathers in 1871 were excited by the first performance of *The Bells*, a three-act play adapted by Leopold Lewis from "a dramatic study" called *The Polish Jew* by Erckmann–Chatrian, is sufficient in itself to denote the poverty of the plays which prevailed in the English theatre. *The Bells* is a paltry piece which was transformed by the genius of Henry Irving, but in comparison with the stuff that was commonly produced before, and, indeed, for a long time after, 1871, *The Bells* appeared to be an intellectual treat. It had some relation to the world of ideas, and may have roused some hope in ambitious authors that at last the public was ready to witness the performance of plays which did not commit an outrage on the mind. But the hope was not very vigorous or widely held, for in 1873, Charles Kingsley, in an essay on *Plays and Puritans*, asserted that "few highly-educated men now think it worth while to go to see any play, and that exactly for the same reasons that the Puritans put forward; and still fewer highly educated men think it worth while

to write plays; finding that since the grosser excitements of the imagination have become forbidden themes, there is really very little to write about." That is an odd reasor for abstaining from the writing of plays, but the prohibitions of the Censor had confined the dramatist to so small a territory of interest that he could not express any vision of life that was broader or deeper than that perceived by an earnest member of a Band of Hope. It is an odd fact that in times when the behaviour of the audience is most shocking, the dramatist may deal only with the tritest themes. John Larpent, who was the Censor for the first quarter of the nineteenth century, and was, according to Professor Allardyce Nicoll in his erudite work, *A History of Early Nineteenth-Century Drama* (1800–1850), a common sneak-thief, "quietly" converting "to his own uses the dramatic manuscripts submitted to him in the course of his long career," forbade Theodore Hook to put a Methodist in *Killing No Murder*, on the ground that the "Government did not wish the Methodists to be ridiculed." As Larpent was a Methodist, this was, perhaps, a way of protecting himself, although it is hard to understand why a dramatist should be forbidden to treat a character as ridiculous merely because he happens to belong

to a particular sect. Hook was roused by this prohibition to make a few inquiries into Larpent's behaviour, and he discovered "that John Larpent, Esq., was *clerk* at the Privy Seal Office, that John Larpent, Esq., was *deputy* to John Larpent, Esq., and that the *deputy's secretary* was John Larpent, Esq." The discovery must have enabled Hook to realise why Larpent regarded the theft of other men's plays as no more than a perquisite. George Colman the younger, who succeeded Larpent as Censor on January 19, 1824, was notorious for the licentiousness of some of his own plays, but he was very strict in his attitude towards the work of other men after he had been appointed to Larpent's place. He forbade any author to put the expletive "Oh, God!" into a character's mouth, nor would he allow a lover to call his sweetheart an angel. Angels were heavenly bodies, he said, and it was a blasphemy to call a woman one. So much delicacy as this would, one might pardonably suppose, have been caused by a very fastidious audience, but the fact is far otherwise. "All contemporaries are agreed on one thing," Professor Nicoll says:

> the spectators in the larger theatres during the first decades of the century were often licentious and debased, while those in the minor playhouses were

vulgar, unruly and physically obnoxious. The tumult in a nineteenth-century theatre was one of those things which bound it to the theatres of the past. *The Theatrical Repertory; or, Weekly Rosciad* for Monday, Dec. 28, 1801, describes, without too much horror, a disturbance which took place at a Covent Garden performance of *Richard III:*

> A Ruffian in the Two Shilling Gallery threw a quart bottle upon the Stage, which fell so near Mr. Betterton as to strike the hat which he held in his hand, but fortunately did no injury either to that gentleman or any of the other performers.

There was a "Tailors' Riot" at a benefit of the actor Downton at Haymarket on Aug. 15, 1805. "There was much fighting," says a critic of a performance of *The Pirate's Doom* at the Adelphi on Feb. 12, 1827, "which probably would have been more effective, but for a real battle in the pit, to which the screams of the women imparted a truth and reality, that quite spoilt the effect of the stage combats." A riot during a performance of a French play at Drury Lane in 1848 recalls the earlier *Chinese Festival* disturbances. These riots and disturbances, which thus remind us of the theatres of Dryden and of Cibber, were set in a constant noise and confusion.

Here is Hazlitt's picture:

> Everything . . . has its drawbacks; and the Little Theatre in the Haymarket is not without them. If, for example, a party of elderly gentlewomen should come into a box close at your

> elbow, and immediately begin to talk loud . . . your only chance is either to quit the house altogether, or . . . to remove to the very opposite side of it. . . . At the great Theatres, it is sometimes very difficult to hear, for the noise and quarrelling in the gallery; here the only interruption to the performance is from the overflowing garrulity and friendly tittle-tattle of the boxes. The gods . . . at Drury-lane and Covent-garden, we suspect, 'keep such a dreadful pudder o'er our heads,' from their impatience at not being able to hear what is passing below; and, at the minor theatres, are the most quiet and attentive of the audience.

At both the major and the minor theatres, companies of "*would-be* young men of fashion" would indulge in

> the witty explosion of six-penny crackers. This is now an old joke as well as a bad one—but it still affords amusement to some courageous and gallant Gentlemen, for it never fails to frighten the women; and, from the difficulty of detection, they feel perfectly secure from the angry indignation of those who could resent it.

Colman the younger, who had experienced the difficulties involved by such behaviour, has his comment upon it:

> Whence arise the deafening vociferations, when there is a full house, of "turn him out!" and "throw him over"? Why is a vocal performer so often kept on a see-saw, called back,

sent off, called back again, about the *encore* of a song, and at last, after ten minutes, perhaps, of confusion, obliged to sing it in the midst of the "tumult and disorder" of a divided audience?

Again, why is a play, on the first exhibition of a Christmas Pantomime, acted almost in dumb-show, like the mummery that is to follow it, in consequence of the "tumult and disorder" of the spectators? . . . Why, during the intervals, is the stage strewed with apples, and orange-peels, accompanied in their descent thither by the shouts, groans, whistles, catcalls, yells, and screeches of the turbulent assemblage which has so elegantly impelled its vegetable projectiles from the upper regions? . . . Why are disturbances in the upper boxes, and lobbies, among blackguards and women of the town, by no means rare? The notorious "O.P. Riots" were thus in no ways exceptional, and probably Thomas Dibdin was right when he declared in his *Harlequin Hoax* (Lyc. 1814) that only at a pantomime were the spectators "very silent and attentive," while "tragedies, comedies, operas, and farces are doom'd to suffer all the complicated combinations of 'Pray ask that gentleman to sit down,' 'Box Keeper, where's my fourth row on the second circle?' 'Take off your hat,' and 'Keep quiet in the lobby.' . . . In a Pantomime . . . the moment the curtain goes up, if any unfortunate gentleman speak a word, they make no reply but throw him over directly." Various actor-managers attempted to make improvements, but not always with suc-

cess; even in 1841 Macready found opponents in the press when he tried to stem the "improper intrusion" associated with certain parts of Drury Lane. "The feelings of performers," says a writer in *Oxberry's Theatrical Inquisitor*, speaking of Easter pieces, "are martyred by playing to a noisy, drunken set of auditors, who are impatient throughout the play, from an anticipation of the 'glorious pageantry' that a specious program-matical play-bill has prepared them for," while Sir Walter Scott reflects grimly that the theatres in general are "destined to company so scandalous, that persons not very nice in their taste of society, must yet exclaim against the abuse as a national nuisance"—"prostitutes and their admirers usually" forming "the principal part of the audience." Even the ordinary critics of the newspapers took constant notice of these abuses. "We regret to observe," says the dramatic correspondent to *The Times* in 1801, "that no measures have been yet taken to prevent the indecent and scandalous conduct of the loungers, both male and female, who infest the lobby of the Theatre," and his remark is but one of many. There can be no doubt, when thus we find anonymous critics, playwrights, theatre-lovers and actors all united, that the auditorium of an early nineteenth-century playhouse was a place lacking both in taste and in good manners, a place where vulgarity abounded, where true appreciation of the drama was subordinated, not to witty if somewhat improper badinage as in the Restoration theatre, but to rude and foolish

> practical jokes, to the roaring of a drunken bully, to the besotted solicitations of a prostitute. Such an audience necessarily reacted both upon actor and upon dramatist, and a good deal of the roughness in texture in the histrionic art and in the ordinary theatrical fare of the time must be credited to these spectators who were, in the opinion of Sir Walter Scott, nothing less than "a national nuisance."

The existence of an unruly audience accounted for the abstention from the theatre of educated people. It accounted also, said Leigh Hunt, who was subsequently supported by Professor E. B. Watson in *Sheridan to Robertson*, for the refusal of poets and authors of quality to write for the stage, for what man of sensitive nature, he inquired, would willingly submit to be tortured by a vulgar rabble? This is an argument which Professor Allardyce Nicoll has no difficulty in refuting. An author must indeed be thin-skinned if a few boos and cat-calls, or even many hisses, may deter him from doing his work. The poets abstained from the theatre, not because they were too sensitive to bear abuse, but because they were unwilling to learn the theatre's very difficult craft, because, too, they regarded the playhouse with great contempt, and, finally, because they wrote plays, when they wrote any at all, in the Elizabethan manner,

instead of making a style of their own. The result was that the few pieces which were written by Byron and Coleridge and Browning and Shelley and Tennyson were clumsy and turgid and, for that reason, were unsuccessful. The poets, unwilling to find themselves in fault, attributed the failure of their work to the obtuseness and vulgarity of the audience, the vanity of the actors, or the limitations of the stage. Precisely the same excuses for their own awkwardness are made to-day by novelists who, eager to receive the rewards of popular playwrights but unwilling to learn their craft, cock snooks at the theatre when their lamentable productions ignominiously perish.

XII

PROFESSOR NICOLL hints that a more potent factor in the poets' and novelists' abstention from the stage was the fact that the pecuniary rewards of playwrights in the first half of the nineteenth century were meagre. Dramatists were then paid a small lump sum for each play, as little as £50 and seldom more than £500. Colman, as Professor Nicoll points out, was regarded as a very fortunate person because he received £1,200 for a special success, *John Bull*, which was performed at Covent Garden in 1803. Mr. Noel Coward must often have received that sum in a single week from the various performances of some of his plays. The most famous play of its age, *London Assurance*, which was performed at Covent Garden in 1841, brought its author, Dion Boucicault, exactly £300. The fortunes made by novelists of this period were such that the receipts of dramatists seemed penurious, and we need not feel surprised that Sir Walter Scott and Charles Dickens treated very lightly a branch of letters which promised them poor rewards for prolonged labours. Scott built Abbotsford out of the fortune he made from the Waverley novels: he could not have built himself a week-end cottage out of the

receipts from any plays he might have written. Terms have changed since those times, and authors of novels, their mouths freely watering, jealously listen to tales of fortunes nowadays made by successful authors of plays, and are tempted, in their spare time, to try their luck on the stage, but neither their talents nor their skill are sufficient to enable them to win even a modest renown as playwrights. The alteration in the terms of a dramatist's remuneration was almost accidentally made, and was not welcomed by the dramatists, who, indeed, suspected that they were being scurvily treated by managers. It is improbable that the managers, who were irritated by the fact that they had paid lump sums for plays that were total failures, had any philanthropic intentions when they decided that they would, in future, pay for plays on a royalty basis, and it is known that many authors who lived in a state of chronic financial embarrassment were dismayed when they heard that they were to receive a percentage on the takings rather than a lump sum on the delivery of the play. For what takings were their pieces likely to earn! But time proved to be on the side of the authors, with the result that Mr. Sherriff earned more from *Journey's End* than the entire body of English dramatists earned in

several years in the first half of the nineteenth century.

These are some of the factors which made the theatre a place to which eminent authors occasionally and carelessly condescended, if, indeed, they troubled to notice it at all. Kingsley's jeremiad made little or no impression on the actors who regarded the play merely as a means to their end, which was the exercise of their lungs on a gorgeous bit of rhetoric. Henry Irving, according to Ellen Terry, "was always attracted by fustian. He simply revelled in the big speeches." Some actors did not trouble to read the play, contenting themselves with learning their "lines," nor were they sufficiently curious about it to listen to the whole of it. Their parts performed, they went home, and there are records of actors who, despite their appearance in, say, *Macbeth*, had not the faintest notion of what the play was about. They could declaim their own parts with considerable effect, and were familiar with those of the actors with whom they appeared on the stage, but there their knowledge of the play stopped. Why should they know any more? Their minds were cluttered with thousands of "lines" from dozens of plays, and it was too much to expect a poor actor to burden his thoughts with other

people's "lines"! It would be a sad day for the drama, they thought, when ideas were let loose in it. The statement that intellectual men and women avoided the theatre did not upset them, for they did not think so very much of intellectual men and women, and in any event were disinclined, by Henry Irving's time, to believe that there was anything in the statement; for those of them who worked in the Lyceum often saw Mr. Gladstone sitting on "a little seat in the O.P. corner. Henry Irving"—it is Ellen Terry who is writing—"covered the seat with red baize, and hung up curtains so that our great visitor should be protected from draughts. It was not only on account of his deafness that Mr. Gladstone preferred this corner close to the actors to a stall or a box. He could come and go without attracting attention. But he seldom took advantage of this, nearly always arriving five minutes before the curtain went up, and staying until the end of the play." What imagination he must have had to be able to sit in the wings and obtain an illusion! It is a feat that scarcely any other human being can perform. The actors at the Lyceum, observing Gladstone tucked in red baize in the O.P. corner, and aware that if they looked beyond the footlights they were almost certain to see the som-

brely handsome head of the Poet Laureate, were not impressed by their belittlers, who tried to convince them that the thinkers had no great opinion of them. If Tennyson and the Prime Minister were not intellectuals, the actors asked, then who were? Nor were they abashed when cynics replied that Gladstone and the Laureate were actors like themselves. It was true, the actors admitted, that Matthew Arnold had appealed to someone to organise the theatre, but Matthew Arnold, although he was, no doubt, an excellent poet and quite a superior person, was also a school inspector and had, perhaps, a passion for lessons that must not be indulged in the playhouse.

The actor was still, but precariously, the thing! Irving had raised the position of the actor and redeemed him from vagabondage. The public schools and universities were beginning to be academies for the training of actors. Young Mr. Frank Benson came down from Oxford early in the 'eighties, and immediately took to the stage. Young Mr. Arthur Bourchier followed him, also from Oxford, which, indeed, seemed to have given up the pursuit of lost causes and to have devoted itself to the elevation of the theatre and the profitable practice of acting. Cambridge remained

mathematical and aloof. A time was to come when an actor-manager would boast that he had seven public-schoolboys in his company, nor was he abashed when a cynic inquired if he had any actors. The stage became genteel, and players developed a shocking disease called "good form." They did not ask whether a man could act. "Is he a gentleman?" they said. Authors could hope for little grace from such actors as these.

But although the actor was still supreme on the stage, the author was hot on his heels, and Mr. Arthur Pinero, not yet knighted or even expectant of such honour, was beginning to be talked of almost as respectfully as Irving. Old actors felt ominous about these authors. This Henry Arthur Jones, for example, was always listening to Matthew Arnold and talking about ideas. Ideas, indeed! A lot of good his ideas were going to do the stage, and they would hurry into corners of the Bodega and tell each other horrifying stories of the "lines" Henry Arthur Jones tried to put into players' mouths. Ideas took Jones to such lengths that in 1900, in a play called *The Lackey's Carnival*, lovely Evelyn Millard was asked, but flatly refused, to say, "I swear to you by my unborn child!" She had recently married, and was not, she said,

going to have audiences "looking at her like that." Jones would not alter the "line," and Miss Millard threw up her part. "I ask you, old boy, how could she, old boy, say a line like that, old boy!" Such were the remarks made by horrified actors who wondered whether it was safe for any woman to be left alone with a dramatist capable of writing words so indelicate. This sort of thing was all due to that Ibsen, a bearded Norwegian with a buttoned-up mouth and an indecently frank habit of mentioning facts. There was an Irishman, too, a George B. Shaw, who was addicted to vegetables and talk, and wrote a trifle tartly about the drama in the *Saturday Review*. He had no respect for Henry Irving.

XIII

ECHOES of these controversies and alarms reached the provinces, and even in Belfast, where the theatre had declined in authority and was not visited by great actors, reports would come of imminent changes. Our newspapers were sometimes filled with letters from indignant playgoers, inquiring why Henry Irving did not come to Ulster, and suggestions were made that Mr. Fred Warden, who had succeeded his father, was a round peg in a square hole. Mr. Warden might justly have replied that Belfast was afflicted by a plague of puritans whose anxiety for the welfare of their immortal souls seemed to be excessive.* He had lost money

* Ellen Terry tells a story in her *Memoirs* of Mrs. Henry Ward Beecher, the wife of a famous American minister, which illustrates the lengths to which Puritans, in the middle of the nineteenth century, would go. "She told me once that when she and her sister were children, a friend had given them some lovely bright blue silk, and as the material was so fine they thought they would have it made up a little more smartly than was usual in their sombre religious home. In spite of their father's hatred of gaudy clothes, they ventured on a little 'V' at the neck, hardly showing more than the throat; but still, in a household where blue silk itself was a crime, it was a bold venture. They put on the dresses for the first time for five o'clock dinner, stole downstairs with trepidation, rather late, and

on the engagement of eminent actors, and was in no mood to lose more. But although our theatre was no longer frequented by distinguished players, we heard the rumours from London, and scarcely knew what to make of them. I listened to my elders as they assured each other that things were in a terrible state, and I wondered if anything would last long enough for me to grow up! One night, very audaciously, I went off to the Theatre Royal by myself to see the Benson Company in a Shakespeare piece. My right-hand neighbour in the pit was a rough-looking lad who filled in the time before the play began and the intervals between the acts by singing over and over again one mirthless and almost tuneless line from a popular song, only interrupting this melancholy performance to tell me that he thought very

took their seats as usual one on each side of their father. He was eating soup and never looked up. The little sisters were relieved. He was not going to say anything.

"No, he was not going to say anything, but suddenly he took a ladleful of the hot soup and dashed it over the neck of one sister; another ladleful followed quickly on the neck of the other.

" 'Oh, father, you've burned my neck!'

" 'Oh, father, you've spoiled my dress!'

" 'Oh, father, why did you do that?'

" I thought you might be cold,' said the severe father significantly and malevolently."

little of the piece and would rather have a good song and dance any day. His anger at a misspent night increased to such an extent that he presently offered, without any provocation whatever, to fight me. I declined the offer, but almost had it pressed upon me against my will. When I told my aunt of this lad's antipathy to Shakespeare and his love of dancing-girls, she shook her head very sadly and said, "There, that's what the world's coming to!" It was coming, she thought, to no good. There were some very queer plays about, and she sometimes felt that it was hardly worth her while to go to the theatre at all. It was not easy for me to believe that the world could ever become so bad as all that, and when Mr. Warden announced that Mr. Forbes-Robertson and Miss Gertrude Elliott would visit the Grand Opera House with a repertoire of plays, including one called *The Devil's Disciple* by George Bernard Shaw, I felt inexplicably excited. The name of the play was in itself perturbing. All my life I had been a little afraid of books and plays with titles of that character, and I had an aversion, which I still feel, for novels which have the word "Dead" in their name. *Dead Man's Rock* was a story I could not read because of its title, and I still look askance at Ibsen's *When We Dead Awaken.*

Merely to say *The Devil's Disciple* was shocking to me, and although I talked about *Othello* and *Mice and Men*, two of the plays Mr. Forbes-Robertson was to perform, I could not bring myself to mention Mr. Shaw's romantic comedy. But I was determined to see it, for I had read an interview with its author in a paper called *Cassell's Saturday Journal*, to which my Uncle William subscribed, and was inquisitive about the very queer person who was there described. He was, he said, commonly supposed to be an atheist, but, in fact, was almost a churchwarden. This, I said to myself, is a much misunderstood man, and any play he has written must be worth seeing. I saw it, and was left in a fog at the end, although my recollection is that I was entertained. But what *was* the play about? It was very different from *The Lights o' London* by George R. Sims: it was equally different from *Othello* by William Shakespeare. Never in my life had I seen such a piece! . . . In spite of my bewilderment, I was amused. I was then short of sixteen, and I am able to fix my age because Mr. Forbes-Robertson and Miss Gertrude Elliott married each other a month or two after I had seen them in Belfast. I did not say anything about *The Devil's Disciple* to my relatives, for I should have had very great difficulty in

explaining to them that a girl in the play was a bastard! That was the sort of play *The Devil's Disciple* was! I did not know that Shakespeare actually called a character The Bastard or that he was a more outspoken man, in many respects, than Mr. Shaw, but even if I had known this fact, I should not have regarded it as an excuse. I knew a boy who was a bastard, and I never looked at him without expecting something fearful to happen. I knew a little girl who was a bastard, and the fact that she was very pretty only made her blemished birth all the more awful! . . . To make even an indirect reference to illegitimacy in a play was, I thought, very terrible. If this was the new drama, then, indeed, my aunt's mournful prophecies of the state to which the world was rapidly coming were not unjustified! . . . I forgot these fears in the news that was next announced by Mr. Warden. So successful had the visit of Mr. Forbes-Robertson and Miss Gertrude Elliott to Belfast been, that Henry Irving had agreed to visit the Grand Opera House, too, and a few months later, he and Ellen Terry came. The prices of admission were raised, and I had to pay a shilling, instead of sixpence, to get into the gallery. I went four times that week, rifling a missionary box for the purpose. I feel no shame in confess-

ing this crime, for I was forced to contribute pennies that I could ill afford to a fund for the conversion of the heathen in the South of Ireland, and I felt, therefore, that I was only taking my own money and using it for better purposes. What did I care whether Roman Catholics went to heaven or hell? Whoever wanted them could have them, so far as I was concerned. It was more important to me that I should see Irving and Ellen Terry than that Papists should be persuaded to become Protestants, and I feel no compunction at the thought that a Roman Catholic may spend eternity in everlasting flames because I pinched four shillings from the family's missionary box. I saw Irving! That is reward enough for me. I saw Ellen Terry, and fell instantly and incurably in love with her. Would the redemption of a Southern Irish Papist have been worth the sacrifice of that happy experience? It would not. I shall shock some readers by saying that I would gladly have let the entire Papist population of Southern Ireland perish in hell rather than have foregone those nights of joy. I have seen many actors and have fallen frightfully in love with many actresses in my time, but no actor has ever inspired such awe in me as Irving, no actress has ever subdued my heart as Ellen Terry did. It

is a sorrow to me that I never met Irving, but I have a happy recollection of the only time I met Miss Terry. She was old and blind and near her death, but her heart was as young as ever. She had sent me a message to say that she would like to hear me speak, and one afternoon, when I was to debate at the London School of Economics with, I think, Sir Nigel Playfair, she came to hear me. I was led up to her in a room where the platform party assembled before the debate was to begin, and she said, "Let me hold your hand! You see, I'm blind! . . ." I wanted to cry because her lovely eyes were dim, but I didn't cry because her lovely heart was still bright. I had seen her as Portia, as Nance Oldfield, as Olivia in the play of that name, made out of *The Vicar of Wakefield*, and also, I think, in a poor part in *Robespierre*. *Nance Oldfield* was a curtain-raiser to *The Bells*. In each of these parts, she had enthralled me, nor was the memory of my enthralment obliterated by seeing her, as she sat in a corner of that ante-room in Houghton Street, old and blind and forgetful.

XIV

I RECALL, as if it had happened yesterday, the last time I saw her act. The occasion was a charity matinée at the Palace Theatre in Cambridge Circus. She came into the great auditorium leaning heavily on someone's arm, and her head was covered with a piece of lace which fell like a mantilla about her shoulders. She seemed infinitely frail and old, but her face lit with pleasure when she heard herself cheered. For Ellen Terry was almost always recognised and applauded, even by young people who had never seen her act, but knew of her only from the lips of their elders. She had promised to "do something" that afternoon, but as she entered the theatre, I felt certain that she would not be able to keep her word. I hoped that she would not, for it is pitiful to see the old attempting and failing to repeat their triumphs. So frail and old a woman as that, I said to myself, should be in her bed, saying her prayers and waiting for her end. But when the time for her "turn" came, she went through the pass-door on to the stage, and as she emerged from the wings, she was transformed. Her fragility and old age dropped like a shawl from her shoulders, and she tripped lightly on to the centre of the stage,

as lightly as if she were a girl again, and an extraordinary air of youth and vivacity invested her. She was to recite Portia's Speech on Mercy! . . . She moved very gracefully to the centre of the stage and stood in front of a back-cloth and prepared to speak. Her memory suddenly failed her, and she put out her hand as if she wished to lean against the back-cloth, and said to someone standing on the O.P. side of the stage, "How does it begin?" The reply was, "The quality of mercy is not strained," and as she heard the prompt, she took up her lines and did not falter again. After she had finished the speech she must have spoken hundreds of times, she gave a deliciously funny imitation of a stupid young man dancing with a girl. That was the end of her "turn," and she tripped into the wings, still young, still gay, brought back to life by the very odour of the stage. I watched to see her come through the pass-door into the auditorium again, but when she came, she was once more the frail old lady, with bent head and darkened eyes, but still the darlingest creature that ever acted.

XV

I DATE the beginning of my serious interest in the theatre from the visits of Forbes-Robertson and Gertrude Elliott and Henry Irving and Ellen Terry to the Grand Opera House in Belfast about the year 1900. The theatre was a different place to me thereafter. I had seen a play by Bernard Shaw and I had seen great players! . . . I did not know that my beginning was almost simultaneous with Henry Irving's end, that Irving and the actor's theatre were about to die, that Bernard Shaw and the author's theatre were rising to great renown. The change, of which rumours had reached us in Ulster, had already been made. The actors had been crushed and overpowered by Arthur Pinero, who had made such a breach in the walls of their theatre that other authors were able to follow him without sustaining a wound. This I was to learn later, but then it was all new to me, very exciting, if a little bewildering, and my interest in the theatre, which had been immensely keen before, now became absorbing. Any enterprise that bore some relation to the theatre, however remote it might be, captured my regard. I went to penny-gaffs where I could find one, to the circus, the music-hall, even to the

wax-works. For a time I used to hang about a caravan and a tent which were pitched on a piece of waste land near my home, merely for the fun of seeing the queer workman who, with his wife and two daughters, all as dark as he was fair, acted in the "shows" in the evening. He was a mechanic by day and an actor by night, an odd, theatrical man, with lavish gestures and an air of indifference to other people's opinions which, it was said, was a sign that he was sure to be eternally damned. One Saturday afternoon, while I was prowling around his caravan, convinced that even its wheels were romantic, he suddenly appeared before me, carrying a large jug in his hand, and invited me to go to the nearest public-house and get it filled with porter. As a reward for my labour, he would let me into the show that night for nothing. I took the jug from him, and prepared to fly to the public-house, but was halted, as I came round a corner of the caravan, by one of his dark-haired daughters, who begged me not to get drink for her father. I took no notice of her! . . . He had promised to let me into his "show" that night, and I would have emptied a brewery for him, although a dozen daughters, each dripping with tears, had begged me to make a teetotaller of him. I brought the jug back, foam-

ing with Guinness's stout, and the mummer took it from me, but forgot to let me into his gaff. That night, in bed, I realised that I had been heavily punished for my sin. I had jeopardised an immortal soul for the sake of free admission to a "show," and well was I served for my selfishness and sin.

There was a wax-works in North Street and another in Castle Place. I frequented both, and sometimes in the early morning would see a forlorn giant looking out of an upstairs window and sniffing the fresh breeze which blew down from the mountains behind Belfast because he did not dare to go into the street and let the people see him for nothing. These wax-works shows were generally exhibited in derelict shops, which were let at a low rental to the showman on condition that he vacated the premises at a moment's notice if a better tenant offered himself, and sometimes, when the attractions of the wax figures waned, a freak would be engaged at enormous expense to revive the falling fortunes of the show. There seemed in those days to be an unlimited supply of fat men and women, giants and midgets, men with indiarubber skin which could be stretched to enormous length, armless wonders, tattooed people, living skeletons, and dog-faced men from Russia. What

has become of all these oddities? Have they disappeared from human society, or are we so humanitarian that we will not allow them to earn a living by exhibiting their deformities? There was a man with a withered arm who thrilled me by outlining the figure of a girl with knives. She would stand against a wooden frame, and the man would fling great daggers at her until her form was sketched in steel. The times turned against him, and years later I saw the poor wretch in the gutter of an open-air market in South London, selling a curative chewing-gum which, he announced, could snatch the dying from the jaws of death. He recited a speech about his chewing-gum which ended with this assertion, breathlessly delivered, "If you take a bit of this 'ere chewing-gum before goin' to bed at night, you'll never wake up in the mornin' an' say, 'For God's sake gimme a glass of water, I'm a-chokin'.' " What a fall from the glories of Broncho Pete who outlined a girl's figure in knives to the ignominious traffic of a chewing-gum pedlar!

XVI

It was in one of these derelict shops that I saw the beginning of the great change in entertainment. Round the walls of the shop were a number of iron pedestals, on each of which stood a small box with a peephole of glass. The box was called a mutoscope, and those who slipped a penny in the slot and looked through the glass could see a number of photographs whirled round so rapidly that the figures in the photographs appeared to be moving. The novelty of the mutoscope did not make it popular except among youths like myself, who, profoundly stirred by the information that if they dropped a penny in the slot they would see moving pictures of a young lady undressing, squandered large sums on disappointing exhibitions. For, immediately after the lady had removed her blouse, the light went out. Hollywood has learnt a lot since the days of the mutoscope! Soon after the introduction of the mutoscope, I saw my first moving-picture in the sense in which we understand "moving-pictures" to-day. The uncle who had excited me by mounting and riding the penny-farthing, suddenly said that he would take me to the pantomime, but the decision was made too late

in the evening, and when we arrived at the theatre, we could not obtain admission. A great crowd swiggled and swayed before the doors of the pit and the gallery, for there were no queues then, and only the fittest survived in the struggle for cheap seats. My suggestion that since we could not obtain seats in other parts of the theatre, we should join this struggling, pushing crowd was not well received by my uncle, and in consequence of his pusillanimity, he lost some of the glory with which I had invested him when he mounted the penny-farthing and threw our neighbours into a panic. He must have realised his fall in my estimation, for, as suddenly as he had expressed his intention of taking me to the pantomime, he said he would take me to the Empire Music-Hall. This was the most audacious of all his deeds, for if the theatre was the entrance-door to hell, the music-hall was hell itself. Neither he nor I had ever been in a music-hall before, and I clung to his hand as he led me into the wicked, wicked place, feeling certain that fire and brimstone would consume me before the night was out. I have to confess that, as a form of debauchery, that music-hall was a failure, and I cannot recall anything that happened on its stage, except that I saw the moving-pictures for the first time, and of these,

I recollect only the fact that both my uncle and I were frightened almost out of our seats by the appearance of a railway train, running at what appeared to be a very great rate. As it grew in size and filled the whole screen, I gave a little shout of dismay, for I thought I was about to be run over, and I am positively certain that my uncle was as dismayed as myself.

The moving-pictures soon exhausted their novelty, and they relapsed from the middle to the bottom of the bill. They were brief things, full of jumpy blobs of light that tired the eyes, and were little more than modern news-films. Smart young men about Belfast showed how satiated they were with this world's vanities by leaving the music-hall before they were exhibited. If a comedian, on first seeing the moving-pictures, had felt alarm, his fears were quickly calmed; for the bioscope looked as if its appeal would be limited. And if the little Cockney boy from Walworth who sang with the Eight Lancashire Lads, and later on acted with the comedians who did acrobatic feats in Fred Karno's sketch, *The Mumming Birds*, had ever stayed to watch the bioscope in the evening after his turn was over, he would have been astounded if anybody had told him that, one day, these pictures would go all over the world,

and that, through them, he would become the most widely celebrated clown in the history of mankind. His name was Charles Spencer Chaplin.

The revolution had begun. Electricity was in the theatre. Gaslights went out. Almost before one knew what was happening, bulbs full of bluish light were coldly gleaming from the front of the stage where the warm yellow gas footlights had glowed, and the old roller-curtain with its view of the Lakes of Killarney was taken away and replaced by heavy curtains which were hauled to the sides of the proscenium, and all the mystery was gone. Henry Irving, already a knight, and still faithful to the gas-jets, left the Lyceum and became, to all intents and purposes, a touring actor. He was still our leading actor, and still a noble and impressive figure on the stage, but his day was dwindling. A morning came when he received a blow to his pride. The manager of a music-hall offered him an engagement to act in a sketch! The old man turned his face to the wall and wept. This, he said, was the end.

But it was not yet the end. The authors, clamouring for a dramatists' theatre, rushed and overpowered the actors, and in a brief while the dramatist was supreme and the actor was the

author's subordinate. Pinero and Henry Arthur Jones, Bernard Shaw and J. M. Barrie, John Galsworthy and Harley Granville-Barker rushed through the stage-door of the English theatre and made the actors take the count. Henrik Ibsen, almost forgetting what a poet he had been, became a despondent sociologist, and the dramatic critics, led by William Archer, ceased to be interested in acting and wrote only of the play. A line or two at the end of a notice was all that an actor received from the new critics. Ideas were everywhere, bewildering and even disgusting the general playgoer, who, going to the theatre to see villainy triumphant until the penultimate scene, found himself invited to listen to four acts on main drainage and the housing question or the relationship of sweated industries to prostitution. There was a night when a gentleman under the influence of intoxicating liquor lurched into the Theatre Royal in Dublin during the performance of a play by Mr. Shaw. He sat, in some dismay, through three acts, and then, unable to bear the play any longer, cried out in a voice husky with drink and indignation, "D'you call this a play? The lasht time I was here I saw a fat fella and a tall thin fella slapping him in the stummick wid a walkin'-stick. That was a grand play! . . ."

Unfortunately, the authors stormed the stage with the help of queer allies, called producers, and allies are notoriously quarrelsome people. No sooner had a victory over the actor been won than the allies began to fight for his place, and although a peace was patched up between them which seemed to leave the author supreme, the producer, a sly and crafty fellow, eventually took so much of the dramatist's authority from him that, in many places, he barefacedly asserted that he was the leader in the theatrical hierarchy. He has not yet been reduced to his proper place.

XVII

THE immediate result of his and the author's struggle with the actor was a decisive victory for the dramatist and an instantaneous improvement in the spiritual and intellectual quality of the play. Acting suffered less under authors than plays had suffered under actors. The change in the drama was profound and swift, and a dreadful desert, after the arrival of Pinero, was turned into a luxuriant garden in which a great variety of flowers and plants profusely flourished. Young gentlemen, new from the universities, are accustomed to dismiss the Victorian age as if it were exclusively inhabited by persons in a state of acute barbarism, but we shall fall into a sad mess if we suppose that the age in which Matthew Arnold, the Brontës and the Brownings, Thomas Carlyle, Charles Dickens and George Eliot, Thomas Hardy, George Meredith and William Morris, the Rossettis, John Ruskin and Robert Louis Stevenson, Alfred Tennyson and William Makepeace Thackeray flourished has any cause to hang its head in the presence of the year 1933. We forget that many of the writers, such as Arnold Bennett, John Galsworthy, A. E. Housman, Henry Arthur Jones, Rudyard Kipling, John Masefield,

George Moore, Arthur Pinero, Oscar Wilde, H. G. Wells and William Butler Yeats, who are commonly regarded as modern authors, grew up and became famous while Queen Victoria was still alive. Mr. Moore was nearly fifty and had published the greater part of his work when she died. Mr. Shaw was forty-five and had written eleven of his plays. Sir Arthur Pinero was in his forty-sixth year, and, in addition to all his early comedies and farces, had written, *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*, *The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith*, *Trelawny of the Wells*, *The Gay Lord Quex* and *Iris*. When the Queen died, Mr. Henry Arthur Jones was in his fiftieth year, and the best of his plays had been produced. Sir James Barrie, almost the youngest of them all, was approaching his forty-first birthday and was giving his elderly rivals a fright. I am not, I hope, being indiscreet in revealing these facts, any of which, after all, can be discovered in *Who's Who*, but whether it upsets them or not, I have to inform Sir Arthur Pinero and Sir James Barrie and Mr. Bernard Shaw that they are almost as Victorian as the author of *Only a Chestnut Burr* and *Queechy* and *The Lamplighter* and *Christy's Old Organ*. Arthur Pinero raised the English theatre out of the gutter. The actor was deposed from the chief seat of authority, and

the dramatist took his place, and in a comparatively short time, playgoers, who in a previous generation would have said that they were going to see Irving in his new play, were going to see the new Pinero, the new Henry Arthur Jones, the new Shaw, the new Barrie and the new Galsworthy.

A few facts will suffice to show that the theatre between 1875 and 1914 was infinitely superior to the theatre between the time of Sheridan and Goldsmith and the time of Pinero. In 1877, Ibsen extended his attack on the Norwegian Theatre to an attack on the European theatre. *Pillars of Society* was performed in that year, and was followed, at intervals of two years, by *A Doll's House*, *Ghosts*, *An Enemy of The People*, *The Wild Duck*, *Rosmersholm*, *The Lady rom the Sea*, *Hedda Gabler*, *The Master Builder*, *Little Eyolf*, *John Gabriel Borkman* and *When We Dead Awaken*. The last-named was performed in 1899. Seven years later, in 1906, Ibsen died in a silence almost as profound as Shakespeare's. In 1891, a young Dutchman, named J. T. Grein, who was an enthusiastic lover of the drama, started a society called the Independent Theatre, and in January of that year revived Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, which had been performed in London for three weeks in

1889. This run was regarded as a success, and the sponsors of the production were so elated at almost covering their expenses that they behaved as if they had made a fortune. In February, Grein produced *Rosmersholm*, and in March, *Ghosts*. The impact of Ibsen on the minds of the London dramatic critics resulted in an outburst of hysteria which no critic to-day, not even a film-critic, could possibly surpass. Elderly and bearded men screamed at *Ghosts* in print as if they were neurotic young ladies! It is impossible for us to understand the vehemence with which almost the entire English press assailed Ibsen and the Independent Theatre. Grein asserted that he was cut in the street by many of his acquaintances and was in some danger of arrest. It is hard to understand why the critics should have complained so bitterly of Ibsen's dramas of disease, when they loudly applauded Shakespeare, who wrote about the demented on more than one occasion, and threw Othello into an epileptic fit, and even mentioned fistula in a play. We shall make a mistake, however, if we suppose that the revival of adult drama in England began with Ibsen's tempestuous entry into London. That revival had already begun. Gilbert and Sullivan were glorifying the stage with their comic operas, and Arthur Pinero and

Henry Arthur Jones were steadily increasing their authority and renown.

In 1889, Pinero challenged the conventional conception of the theatre with the production of *The Profligate*. It had hitherto been regarded as a place of easy and shallow amusement. The idea that any person could be entertained by a serious theme had not penetrated the mind of the average playgoer, who, if he thought about the matter at all, invariably asserted that serious subjects were not suitable for plays, but should be reserved for the pulpit, the press and the study, and, even there, should be discussed with the greatest reticence. Those were days when a pregnant woman was said to be in an interesting condition, on the supposition, perhaps, that between births she was not interesting at all, and the impending birth of a child was never mentioned except in coy whispers and, among men, with shouts of ribald laughter. Into this indecently delicate world Pinero charged, announcing that death is death. I am personally prepared to quarrel with Sir Arthur about the original ending of his play. The hero, Renshaw, in the version preferred by the author, commits suicide, but in deference, it is said, to public opinion, the end was altered and Renshaw left alive. My instant conviction, when I read the play, was

that the public were right, not because a happy ending is preferable to an unhappy one, but because the logic of events in the play demanded it. That point, however, is immaterial to the present argument. The substantial fact is that, in a time when playgoers seemed to be determined to have only the most trivial aspects of life treated on the stage, Pinero dared to deal with self-inflicted death. He claimed and won the right to be a serious author, and in claiming and winning it, won a position which, in the technical term used by soldiers, was quickly consolidated by other authors.

XVIII

We have become so habituated to the liberties taken by the contemporary playwright and the still greater liberties taken by the contemporary novelist that we scarcely realise that liberties are being taken at all, and are sincerely astonished when we read in our newspapers that works, innocuous to us, have been banned in the Irish Free State, a country which seems to be occupied chiefly by elderly maiden ladies, on the ground that they are generally indecent. What Cowper said of the poor may, perhaps, be said of us:

> The poor, inured to drudgery and distress,
> Act without aim, think little, and feel less.

George Moore's *Esther Waters* was expelled from Mr. Mudie's Select Library on grounds which would now secure its prompt admission. Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* was loudly condemned by gentlemen who, if they were our contemporaries, would probably be recommending it as a school-prize. Ibsen's *Ghosts*, as I have already stated, threw hardened dramatic critics into paroxysms of moral rage. The more hardened the critic was, the profounder was his fury. The stage, they loudly affirmed, was no

place for this sort of thing. These critics passionately believed in what may be called the Nice Drama, the drama, that is to say, which did not disturb anyone's thoughts. A gentle tear or two for a distressed heroine, and sighs of sympathy for a greatly harassed hero, but no more than that, and only that much on condition that the troubled pair were left in ecstasy at the end of the play. The theatre was not a laboratory nor was it a pulpit nor was it a school of sociological research. It was, instead, a place where comfortable people went for an evening's mild entertainment. The effect of *Ghosts*, in which the hereditary effect of venereal disease is treated, on this comfortable world may be imagined. It is easy now to deride the gentlemen who squealed so long and so loudly on the iniquities of Ibsen, but we must acknowledge that the shock of seeing a play like *Ghosts* to people who were accustomed to shed their tears over *Caste* was profound. If this sort of thing were allowed, to what lengths might not other authors go? How could a man take his daughter, even his wife, to the theatre for a night's amusement when he might find himself obliged to tell her of nameless ills before she could understand a word of the play? The explanations would be endless. An inquisitive girl, investigating the

theme of *Ghosts*, would have to be told a devil of a lot before her curiosity could be satisfied and the play made intelligible. Why, for instance, did Oswald go out of his mind? Because he was suffering from hereditary taint. What sort of taint? Well, his father was a loose-living man, and had contracted venereal disease, and then had begotten his son, Oswald . . . and, well, it's all very difficult, my dear! And, pray, papa, what is venereal disease? . . . The upset of such a cross-examination would be frightful; nor was it likely to end there, for a bright-witted girl might have said, "Well, papa, would it not have been wise of Mrs. Alving to leave her husband when she knew what sort of a man he was?" That, indeed, was what Mrs. Alving had wished to do, but Pastor Manders, a firm believer in conventional morality, had dissuaded her from flight and had induced her to remain with her husband. "And the result was Oswald?" "Yes, my dear!" Conversations of that sort did not, in fact, occur, because Nice People abstained from plays like *Ghosts* and forbade their public performance. The young and ignorant were told that Ibsen was a nasty-minded Norwegian, a man with a mind like a cesspool, and that only people as nasty as himself would even read his work. Plays of that sort were, Heaven be praised,

kept off the public stage, and could only be seen in little furtive theatres, conducted on Sunday night by alleged intellectuals, who were really prurient people—long-haired men and short-haired women!—and Not At All Nice to Know. In spite of these prohibitions and warnings, however, the inquisitive young persisted in asking questions, and occasionally parents were very hard put to it to evade replies. A young lady, learning Shelley's *Ode to a Skylark* with the intention of reciting it at the earliest opportunity, might begin to read *The Cenci*, and wonder why it was forbidden to be performed. Here again, an embarrassed father, a still more embarrassed mother, might find themselves involved in dreadful explanations. What is incest, papa? . . . The situation was likely to be even more embarrassing if Brieux' play, *Les Avariés*, Englished under the title of *Damaged Goods*, was to be allowed to be publicly performed. Brieux, a very earnest and sober-minded author who used the stage entirely for propaganda purposes, was determined that there should not be any doubt in the mind of his audience as to the subject of his play, and he stipulated that each performance should be started by the manager of the theatre who should come before the curtain and say:

> LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,
>
> I beg leave to inform you, on behalf of the author and of the management, that the object of this play is a study of the disease of syphilis in its bearing on marriage.
>
> It contains no scene to provoke scandal or arouse disgust, nor is there in it any obscene word; and it may be witnessed by everyone, unless we must believe that folly and ignorance are necessary conditions of female virtue.

An author so resolved as Brieux was to have no misunderstanding of his meaning was a very disconcerting person in an English theatre, and so *Damaged Goods* was banned until, in terror lest the troops should become physically incapable of waiting in a hole in the ground to be bayoneted or blown to pieces because they were syphilitic, the Government annulled the ban on Brieux' play, and it was publicly performed everywhere throughout Great Britain, after it had been enticingly advertised as "For Adults Only." It was licensed in the interests, not of art or literature, but of sanitary science. A licence was subsequently granted for the public performance of Mr. Harley Granville-Barker's play, *Waste*, which had been banned because it referred to the subject of abortion. *The Cenci* was licensed, although its theme was incest, and so was Mr. Shaw's play, *Mrs. Warren's Pro-*

fession, which had been prohibited, not because it dealt with procuration and brothels, but because the subject of incest was, in an oblique manner, mentioned. Suddenly, and to an extent that would have appalled the most licentious libertine of that appallingly wicked period, the first fifty years of Good Queen Victoria's reign and would certainly have thrown into paroxysms of rage the vast majority of her subjects in 1890 plays were being performed in which the unmentionable was not only mentioned, but underlined. Liberties were everywhere demanded and taken.

XIX

Nor were these liberties to be limited to the subject of sexual relations, a subject awful enough in itself, but were to be extended to every department of life. Authors were claiming the right to treat any theme that occurred to them. They demanded the right to criticise and examine the whole human system, its politics, its religion, its social organisation, its most intimate relations. If the reader will recollect the theatre of 1900 or even the theatre of the first six months of 1914, he will instantly realise how radically the theatre of 1933 differs from either. Ideas which were then discussed only in carefully chosen company, are now bandied about in any company; and involved facts of human nature which were vaguely mentioned in the society of the very learned, are now part of the common knowledge of young ladies. A single example will suffice to make my meaning plain. The most daring English dramatist would not have dreamt of introducing a homosexualist into the cast of a play before 1914. After the War, it became almost common to see perverts of both sexes on the stage. Young girls in the gallery giggled very knowingly when an effeminate youth wriggled his way across the stage in a

musical comedy and were quick to point out to each other notorious youths in the stalls, especially at the Russian Ballet, who were, so gossip said, addicted to unnatural vice. The word *Lesbian*, unknown to the overwhelming majority of English men and women before 1914, became familiar to many, even the young of both sexes, and a Frenchman, M. Edouard Bourdet, actually wrote a clever comedy on the subject, entitled *La Prisonnière* (*The Captive*) and had it acted in London and New York. The entire cast in the latter city was eventually arrested for acting in an immoral play, but the charge was absurd, for Bourdet's play is written with great delicacy and discretion, and might easily leave an audience with no other impression than that two women were unduly fond of each other. In 1933, Mr. Mordaunt Shairp's tragi-comedy, *The Green Bay Tree*, was performed at St. Martin's Theatre in London, and was received with considerable favour. Here, too, the theme of homosexuality is treated with immense discretion, and an audience might witness a performance of the play without receiving any other impression than that a youth had been corrupted by luxury. The substantial fact, however, is that the subject was treated at all, and that a large number of people knew that it was being treated.

I do not think I am exaggerating when I say that if either *La Prisonnière* or *The Green Bay Tree* had been performed in England before 1914, the vast majority of people would not have known that each of them treats of sexual perversion or that there was such a subject to treat. I doubt if there was one person in a thousand in Great Britain who, before 1914, knew the meaning of the word *Lesbian*. It is notorious that when a novel on the subject was banned in England, and a discussion on its prohibition took place in the House of Commons, the great majority of the members of the Labour Party had not the faintest notion of what the book was about. The freedom which was enjoyed by the dramatist was more impressive than that of the novelist, for the latter has always had a larger liberty than the former. Much may be written in a novel which may not be seen in a play. We may doubt if Mr. Somerset Maugham would have been allowed to retain the line, "And who will forgive God?" in his play *The Unknown*, if it had been produced before the outbreak of the War. The distance travelled in the theatre in the past hundred years will be plain to the most casual eye when the reader remembers that the Censor eliminated the line, "I love you, and may Heaven pardon and protect you," from Douglas

Jerrold's *The Rent Day*, which was produced at Drury Lane in 1832, but that the present holder of the office permitted Mr. Maugham's line, which some people might regard as blasphemous, in 1920. As late as 1909, Mr. Bernard Shaw's religious play, *The Showing-up of Blanco Posnet*, had been banned by the then Censor because it contained the following, among other passages of dialogue presumed to be objectionable:

Elder Daniels (*fervently*). Oh thank God selling drink pays me! And thank God He sent me that fit as a warning that my drinking time was past and gone, and that He needed me for another service!

Blanco. Take care, Boozy. He hasn't finished with you yet. He always has a trick up His sleeve——

Elder Daniels. Oh, is that the way to speak of the ruler of the universe—the great and almighty God?

Blanco. He's a sly one. He's a mean one. He lies low for you. He plays cat and mouse with you. He lets you run loose until you think you're shut of Him; and then, when you least expect it, He's got you.

Elder Daniels. Speak more respectful, Blanco—more reverent.

Blanco (*springing up and coming at him*). Reverent! Who taught you your reverent cant? Not your Bible. It says He cometh like a thief in the night —aye, like a thief—a horse-thief——

Elder Daniels (*shocked*). Oh!

Blanco (*overbearing him*). And it's true. That's how He caught me and put my neck into the halter. To spite me because I had no use for Him—because I lived my own life, in my own way, and would have no truck with His, "Don't do this," and "You mustn't do that," and "You'll go to Hell if you do the other." I gave Him the go-bye and did without Him all these years. But He caught me out at last. The laugh is with Him as far as hanging me goes. . . .

The ban on *The Showing-up of Blanco Posnet* was not removed until 1916, when I was given a licence to produce it at the Playhouse, Liverpool. Eleven years after Mr. Shaw was forbidden to sully Blanco Posnet's lips with that "crude" speech which is, however, an affirmation of faith in God, Mr. Maugham was allowed to put his line into a lady's mouth, letting her suggest to the pious that God has a good deal to answer for.

XX

THE change in the administration of the Censorship corresponded with a profound change in the public taste and the public attitude towards all questions of human association. The War had undoubtedly a loosening effect on English conventions, and habits that seemed important before 1914 appeared to be trivial and even silly thereafter. When, in 1900, at the age of seventeen, I landed in London in a tweed suit in which yellow and green strands contended for supremacy, I was politely told by the Chief Clerk of the department of the insurance company in which I was employed that I must not come to the City in a suit like that! A darker and demurer dress was required of me. Top hats and black morning coats were then almost the general wear, and I have heard a solicitor say that he would have felt exceedingly uncomfortable if he had walked up Threadneedle Street in a lounge suit and a soft hat. I can recall the disgust with which the Secretary of the Fabian Society, then intellectually the most advanced society in Great Britain, beheld a Fabian woman walking about the town of Keswick in a short skirt. The War upset every convention, and women who would have been

regarded as loose if they had been seen inside a hansom cab a generation earlier, now drove hansom cabs! . . . Inevitably, this alteration affected the theatre, not always for the theatre's good, and plays seemed to be produced chiefly for the purpose of enabling ladies to remove their clothes; and we, who formerly regarded improper exhibitions as suitable only for continental Europeans, allowed ourselves to witness them without a tremor. The exhibition of a bed on the stage was, in 1900, thought to be frightfully daring, although bedroom scenes are common in Shakespeare, and only a very innocent person can see *Romeo and Juliet* without realising that the young lovers have slept together when, in the third scene of the fifth act, Juliet pleads with him to stay a little longer.

> Yond light is not day-light, I know it, I:
> It is some meteor that the sun exhales,
> To be to thee this night a torch-bearer,
> And light thee on thy way to Mantua:
> Therefore stay yet; thou need'st not to be gone.

Pinero had put a bed very audaciously, it was thought, into the third act of *The Gay Lord Quex*, although all that could be seen of it was one end and a portion of the counterpane, and no one lay on it. Quex himself did not even approach

it. The lascivious French, of course, were very indelicate about furniture, and would not only show a whole bed to the audience, but would make no bones about popping a lady into it. I have myself seen a comedy, and a very poor comedy it was, in a Paris theatre, which opened with a lady and a gentleman, exiguously clad, in bed together, and making no secret of what they had been up to. Such scenes as that, I assured myself, were unlikely ever to be witnessed on a London stage, where, too, we might never expect to see naked girls, or girls as nearly naked as makes no difference. Within a year or two of that time I saw plays produced in the West End in which the performance of the sexual act on a sofa was vividly represented. In Mr. Cochran's spectacular piece, *Helen*, we saw the lady in bed with her lover, who, however, added a trifle of chastity to the scene by wearing full armour. The calm with which her husband perceived the sleeping pair may have been due to his appreciation of the fact that a lover who is encased in metal is unlikely to be able to make a cuckold of a man. Bare young women became so common on the stage that playgoers scarcely noticed their bareness. The language spoken in the plays was so free that it was hard for young

playgoers to realise the sensation Mr. Bernard Shaw had caused when, in April 1914, his play *Pygmalion* was produced at His Majesty's by Sir Herbert Tree, and Mrs. Patrick Campbell, as the flower-girl, said "Not bloody likely!" Tree had trembled with apprehension during the rehearsals, and regarded himself as an immensely daring man in allowing the adjective to be said on his stage. But after 1914, bloodies were common in plays, and audacious dramatists were wondering if they could not introduce less polite words into their work. If D. H. Lawrence's novel, *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, had not been banned, words used there might have been pronounced in a play. Elsewhere in this book I have remarked on the fact that Miss Evelyn Millard refused, in a play by Henry Arthur Jones, to speak a line in which she had to swear by her unborn child. Sir Arthur Pinero, in a charming comedy, *The Enchanted Cottage*, which was produced after the War, made a clergyman speak of his wife's pregnancy and imminent delivery in the baldest terms, and a character in a play will now say, "I'm going to have a baby," as calmly as if she were announcing her intention of "doing the flowers" or taking the dog for a walk. . . .

It is argued by hypercritical people that our

authors have sometimes taken more liberty than they ought, and that they have been more anxious to be panders than playwrights, but the complaint is ill-founded, especially as there is a Lord Chamberlain, and a very able and wise one in these days, to see that authors who *are* eager to exploit any pornographic tendencies shall not be allowed to do so. Our dramatists, on the whole, are decenter than our novelists, although the latter may say that the decency of the former is more apparent than real, since they are under restraint and may not, as freely as novelists, say what they like. But the fact is that the circumstances of the theatre compel those who work in it to keep closer to the general opinion than other writers need. We see a play in company: we read alone; and in spite of all we may say about the need for frankness, we cannot, in any comfort, listen to difficult discussions in a very mixed company. It simply is not possible to speak as freely in the society of people whose ages range from nineteen to ninety as we speak in the society of people of our own sort and years. The play is a communal entertainment: the novel is the entertainment of the individual. The comparatively great freedom enjoyed by authors to-day is the result of a great change in the mind of the community, and in my judg-

ment it is better that this freedom should be contingent on the readiness of the community to take it than that it should be forced on a community which does not want it: it is likelier to be lasting.

XXI

A PROFOUNDER change in the theatre than any that have yet been named has now to be mentioned. The play, which had hitherto been chiefly the recreation of men *and* women, after a period in which it had been chiefly the recreation of men only, now became the recreation chiefly of women. It is generally agreed among men of the theatre that women enormously prevail among playgoers, and that this prevalence has no relation to the numbers of men and women in the population. According to the census of 1931, there are 21,531,158 men and 23,401,726 women in Great Britain and the Islands—the latest figures for Ireland available to me are those for 1911, so I have omitted them —and the numerical superiority of women over men is, therefore, only 1,870,568. But if we were to judge the division of the population by the people in the theatre, especially those of them who stand in queues, we might pardonably suppose that there were at least ten women in this country to every man. This disparity is apparent in every part of the theatre, from the stalls up to the gallery, and its effect on the drama must be profound; for a theatre in which women largely prevail must be a very different

place from one in which men and women are nearly equal in numbers, and even more different from one in which there are no women in the audience at all. The theatre in which Shakespeare worked had no women either in the auditorium or on the stage. It is difficult to say what is the difference between a womanised theatre and one in which the sexes are equally mingled and one in which only men are to be found. My own opinion that tragedy is commoner in a man's theatre than in a woman's, where, indeed, tragedy is rare, has been disputed by many women, but not, I think, with success. Mr. Shaw is reported to have said,* in explanation of my assertion, that "women, having all the trouble and pain of creating human life, are less tolerant of slaughterous waste of it; and as tragedy used to mean simply strewing the stage with corpses in the fifth act with no excuse but balderdash, I think the influence of women has helped to banish tragedy of that kind from the literary stage—and a good job, too!" The theory does not impress me, especially when I remember that tragedy has prevailed among the great races of mankind at the period of their greatest power, and that a decline towards comedy, and eventually to spectacle and sheer

* *The Table Talk of G.B.S.* By Archibald Henderson.

buffoonery, coincides with the appearance of degeneracy. We suffer appallingly from the lack of able men of vision in our own time, with the result that all our liberties are in danger of extinction as a result of the Youth Movement, which is a system for enabling louts to elect bloody-minded fools as dictators. The moving-picture, which is almost mechanically perfect and almost intellectually and spiritually empty, is the art of the Age of Youth; and its utter worthlessness is evident when we remember that in spite of its immense resources, its extraordinary mechanical efficiency, and the enormous wealth at the disposal of those who make it, it has not yet produced a poet, has not, indeed, produced an author. Authors are not welcomed in studios, although their names are purchased at high prices, and a person whose sole connexion with literature appears to be a long servitude to the advertisement of stockings, will be hired to "adapt" the dialogue of a distinguished dramatist to the "talkies." The dramatist himself will not even be asked to revise the scenario which has been made from his play, nor will his advice or counsel be sought.

The substantial fact is that tragedy has, to all intents and purposes, been abolished from the theatre. Whether that fact be due to the pre-

ponderance of women in the audience or to a change in general taste, I am not able to say. Serious, or perhaps I might better say, argumentative and sociological drama has not declined in appeal or in production, and it may be that our tragedies are changing their character, and that a new kind of tragic play is being developed. Propaganda pieces appear to flourish in countries like Russia, where Youth is in authority. A young producer, André van Gyseghem, who, despite his name, is English, visited Russia in June 1933, and reported his opinions of the Workers' Theatre Movement in Moscow to the readers of *The Observer* in an interview with Mr. Hubert Griffith.* "Were all the plays that you saw propagandist?" he was asked:

> "Practically all," said Mr. van Gyseghem. "I purposely avoided the opera and the classics (which are still, of course, played continually), because I only wanted to see the newer manifestations; and this, in effect, left me almost entirely among 'propaganda' plays. But this 'propagandist' atmosphere does less damage to their artistry than one might imagine. After all, if one sees a succession of plays dealing, say, with conflicts between factory-managers, the problems of production, and the difficulties of

* See *The Observer* of Sunday, July 16, 1933.

farm-collectivisation, and so forth, one realises that it is simply a succession of plays dealing with the everyday and immediate life of the people—with things that touch them at every point, and that they are deeply interested in."

"Is there to be no room left in the theatre for such a non-propagandist play as, say, *Romeo and Juliet*?" I asked. But Mr. van Gyseghem, in the rush of his new-found enthusiasm, was not to be tripped up by this, and went on to demonstrate that *Romeo and Juliet* would now be a far better play if it did deal in immediate realities, exchanged Mantua for Manchester (with rain), doublets for mackintoshes, and the sundering influence of hereditary feuds for the likely circumstance that Romeo had no money to support a wife, or that Juliet was a school-teacher liable to the sack on getting married. . . ."

Propaganda pieces, in the opposite direction, are beginning to prevail in Germany, and the truth that is art is foundering between Marx and Hitler. In a remarkable book, *Lances Down*, the author, Richard Boleslavski, who was an actor in the Moscow Art Theatre, reports a conversation in which a Bolshevist announced his opinions on the nature of drama. A play is being discussed:

Boris looked over the pages of the manuscript and scratched his head. "Something's wrong, Hope," he said finally.

Valka stepped out to the centre of the room and began to speak to Boris, stuttering with excitement. "I know what's wrong. I know, Boris. Let me tell you. There is too much talk, too much explanation. The scene is too placid. It is a conversation between the characters. It is not a declaration of two forces. . . ."

"But they are not forces. They are two human beings," Hope interrupted him.

"Wait—wait, Hope—no more human beings on the stage."

"What?" came in a long drawl from Lyda.

"Exactly what I said—no more human beings. Do you think you can top the performances of human beings during these last thirteen days? Do you think you can interest them with a logical development of dialogue or any kind of thoughts growing out of individual reasoning—out of their own personal attitudes? No more, Hope. You've got to make a general statement. Then another statement on the opposite side. You've got to make it clear to the audience which side the performers want them to choose. The playwright and the actors must steer the audience towards the goal. You've got to use argument piled upon argument without any concern for personal or individual feelings. But with the gravest concern towards the proof that the goal you choose is the right and only one. The words must scream like a row of twenty-four sheet posters each one telling the world that the goods it represents are the best—are the only ones in the world. . . ."

"How can you act that kind of stuff?" asked Lyda. "Maybe I'm stupid, but I couldn't do that."

"You'll have to. You'll have to from now on. I know it for sure. You see, in a capitalistic world the theatre is the medium for stimulating the digestion of a dinner. In our world it must be digested food for the brain. The proletariat is nothing but a child yet; while it is growing it must get its brain-food in a clear and easily understood form, that of the theatre. And that food must give the brain the nourishment it needs most. That nourishment comes from class consciousness, class problems, class beliefs, class aims. Do you understand me? Elementary formulas for the half of the world that was, until to-day, refused the right to think. . . . You see, Hope, from now on intimacy or nuances have no place before the kind of audience you'll see here to-morrow. Yesterday their cue was a rifle shot, or the corpse of a brother, or a wall pecked with the bullets of a firing squad. Now do you want them to care what Mary, Ann or Lisa feel or suffer or love? They want to know what throws masses against masses, what brings a spark into a mob. They want to justify their own actions of yesterday and to-morrow in a mass. They want to understand their own force in thousands. They want a perspective on themselves. They want to hear the formulated cry of thousands of their own hearts."

This stuff summarily means that anyone who dares to differ from Valka will be "signed off," in the expressive phrase of the revolutionary Russian—that is to say, will have the back of his head blown off. Even Calvin was scarcely more dictatorial than Stalin in Russia or Hitler in

Germany or Mussolini in Italy or than De Valera proposes to become in the Irish Free State. "Think as I think," says the dictator, "or, better still, don't think at all—do what I tell you without argument or question."

XXII

Two dangers at present threaten the theatre, then. One that it may become womanised; the other that it may become a machine for party propaganda. Are these dangers grave? The first is graver than the second, for a nation cannot long live on propaganda, which, indeed, inevitably provokes counter-propaganda. Intelligent people in Russia do not now disguise their boredom with the propaganda theatre, and will, without any effort to lower their voices lest they should be heard by a secret agent of the authorities, assert that the theatre in Moscow is worthless. Young gentlemen from England and the United States of America may be impressed by stuff and nonsense about the need for a drama concerning "the difficulties of farm-collectivisation," but Russians themselves, if they have minds of their own, yawn their heads off on the few occasions when they deign to visit the theatre. A theatre in which women predominate must become a theatre in which their views will be reflected—unless they are the plays will fail to find remunerative audiences—and their tastes satisfied. It may justly be said that such a theatre will be no worse than one in which only the views of men are reflected and *their* tastes

satisfied; but it may also be said with equal justice that a prime difference between the man's theatre and a womanised theatre is that women eagerly sought admission to the former and were not happy until they obtained it, whereas men have no wish to enter the latter and increasingly abstain from it. The man's theatre became the recreation of the community; the woman's theatre is likely to be the recreation of a single sex, and *that* will kill it. I greatly doubt whether the theatre will become womanised to the extent that its existence may be endangered because it no longer reflects the life of the community but only the life of a sex. Women are less apt in drama than men, and they cannot cope with tragedy. There is no woman who approaches Æschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Shakespeare, Racine, Molière, Congreve, Goldsmith, Sheridan, Goethe, Schiller, Ibsen, Strindberg, Chekhov or Bernard Shaw. Why is this? Is it, as some people assert, because women have had full access to the theatre for a shorter time than men, or is it, as others say, because women have less ability in play-writing? "She's a oncer—like all the other women dramatists!" an actor said to me of a woman dramatist, and in saying that, he expressed a widely-held opinion. Even a casual examination of the history of the English theatre

is enough to prove that the exclusion of women from the theatre is a less satisfactory explanation of their insufficiency as authors of plays than is commonly supposed, for the period of exclusion was a brief one, so far as the English theatre is concerned. Apart from the three centuries of religious plays, all of which appear to have been as freely witnessed by women as by men, English drama may roughly be said to have begun with the Elizabethans. Between the date of Shakespeare's death and the birth of Mrs. Aphra or Aphara Behn, the first English woman dramatist, only twenty-four years elapsed. Her first play was written in 1671, when she was thirty and Shakespeare had been dead for fifty-five years. It is evident to the student that women have been practising the craft of drama for a much longer period than feminists suppose, and that the period of their prohibition from the theatre was too brief for us to attach importance to the theory that it gave men an advantage over women in the production of plays which has heavily handicapped women as dramatists. For the best part of two hundred years only five women, Mrs. Behn, Mrs. Susannah Centilivre, Mrs. Hannah Cowley, Mrs. Hannah More, and Mrs. Inchbald, seriously followed the craft of play-making. There

were, however, a notable number of "oncers" and authors of inconsiderable pieces. In the first half of the eighteenth century, plays by seventeen women authors were produced. In the second half of the same century, the number of women dramatists had increased to sixty-six. There were forty-seven women dramatists in the first half of the nineteenth century, but when we recollect in what disrepute the theatre was then held, this number is remarkable. Women, in such a time, could scarcely hope to escape censure for aspiring to write plays, yet forty-seven of them, including Elizabeth Barrett Browning, engaged in the dreadful traffic. In the second half of the nineteenth century, the number of women dramatists was negligible, but in the twentieth century, women again took to the stage as authors, and at least fifty have had plays performed in London since 1900. The greater part of the work done for the theatre by women has been comic. Only on rare occasions has it been tragic. Miss Clemence Dane is the most distinguished woman dramatist in the history of the theatre, but even she has not produced work equal in merit to that of the great men dramatists. Women may become as able in drama as they already are in fiction, but the pessimist has ample ground for his gloomy

belief that they are "oncers" at best and unlikely ever to offer serious rivalry to men. If that opinion is warranted, we are confronted with the singular fact that the theatre itself is womanised, but that the production of drama largely remains a man's job. If that fact continues to be operative, the danger that the theatre will become the recreation of a single sex will be averted, and we may, much sooner than we anticipate, find it once again the recreation of the community.

XXIII

I MUST note, but briefly, another difference between the theatre of my youth and the theatre of to-day, one, too, which threatened to cause great harm to the drama. There were Gallery Boys before the War. After the signing of the Armistice they had almost disappeared, and in their place came the Gallery Girl, whose capacity for emotional excitement was almost inexhaustible. Wild-eyed young women, hysterically greeting favourites on the stage or in the auditorium, appeared likely to make every first night in London a riot. The state of their mind will be evident from their favourite expression of admiration, which was, "It's a scream!" These girls, ignorant of any art of the theatre, worked themselves into a highly nervous state on seeing an actress fling herself violently about the stage or roar her head off in an attempt to portray passion. Time and economic strain have reduced the numbers of the Gallery Girls and even subdued their enthusiasms. Briefly, but disturbingly, they agitated the theatre, which now, happily, has almost forgotten that they ever existed.

XXIV

AFTER Pinero had breached the actors' theatre, an amazing variety of writers entered the citadel and, in a brief period, established a stronghold. Oscar Wilde appeared in 1892, and, in three years, produced *Lady Windermere's Fan*, *A Woman of No Importance*, *An Ideal Husband*, and *The Importance of Being Earnest*. Then he was arrested and sent to prison. Pinero, who had pierced the fortress, scattered the enemy in 1893 with *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*. In 1891, Henry Arthur Jones, an equally valiant warrior, had produced *The Dancing Girl* and *The Crusaders*. In 1892, Grein, unabashed by the noise he had evoked by the production of Ibsen's *Ghosts*, added to the uproar by producing Bernard Shaw's *Widowers' Houses*, a piece which he had incited Shaw to finish. Authors leapt up from every corner of the kingdom. The pioneers, Pinero and Henry Arthur Jones, were immensely active and prolific, and so were the recruits who joined them. In six years, 1902–8, J. M. Barrie produced *Quality Street*, *The Admirable Crichton*, *Little Mary*, *Peter Pan*, *Alice Sit-By-The-Fire*, and *What Every Woman Knows*. The Stage Society was founded in 1900. In 1904, the Vedrenne–Barker seasons started at the Court

Theatre, in Sloane Square, and in three years, 1904–7, the following plays were performed either for the first time or in revival:

The Hippolytus of Euripides, translated by Gilbert Murray.

Aglavaine and Sélysette by Maeterlinck.

John Bull's Other Island by Bernard Shaw.

Prunella by Laurence Housman and H. Granville-Barker.

You Never Can Tell by Bernard Shaw.

The Trojan Women of Euripides, tr. by Gilbert Murray.

The Thieves' Comedy by Gerhardt Hauptmann, tr. by C. F. Moles.

Man and Superman by Bernard Shaw.

The Electra of Euripides, tr. by Gilbert Murray.

The Return of the Prodigal by St. John Hankin.

Major Barbara by Bernard Shaw.

The Voysey Inheritance by H. Granville-Barker.

The Silver Box by John Galsworthy.

The Charity That Began at Home by St. John Hankin.

The Doctor's Dilemma by Bernard Shaw.

The Campden Wonder by John Masefield.

Votes for Women by Elizabeth Robins.

Candida by Bernard Shaw.

Captain Brassbound's Conversion by Bernard Shaw.

The Wild Duck by Henrik Ibsen.

The Philanderer by Bernard Shaw.

Hedda Gabler by Henrik Ibsen.

The Vedrenne–Barker management of the Court Theatre in these years has justly been described as "one of the most notable theatrical enterprises of the modern stage."

There was ample evidence, too, that the revival of the drama was not a London fashion only, for in a remarkably short time, local theatres, inaccurately called repertory theatres, were established in various provincial cities. The Abbey Theatre was founded in Dublin in 1904, and in 1907, Miss A. E. F. Horniman, who had subsidised the Abbey, took a derelict and not very reputable theatre in Manchester, called the Gaiety, a name which many people thought was a misnomer, and produced a succession of plays which but for her enterprise Northern playgoers would never have seen. In fourteen years, 1907–21, she staged over two hundred plays, of which more than a hundred were new. The history of the modern English theatre would be a very different one if Miss Horniman had not been born. In 1911, a repertory theatre,

now called the Playhouse, was opened in Liverpool by Basil Dean, who had been associated with Miss Horniman in Manchester. Alfred Wareing started one in Glasgow, but the Scots, who are more interested in engineering and theological disputation than in art, have never taken very kindly to the drama or to any attempts to create a Scottish theatre. In 1913, a group of amateur actors, led by two young men, Barry Jackson and John Drinkwater, opened a repertory theatre in Birmingham. Out of these small, struggling repertory theatres came some of the most notable actors and authors of the present day. As an immediate result of the movement begun by Pinero and vigorously supported by Bernard Shaw, there were many signs throughout Great Britain and Ireland at this time of an intensely interesting and even of a thriving theatre. Those who had been least encouraging to the new movement were compelled to admit that what was called the commercial theatre had, as a result of that movement, been improved out of all recognition. The actor's theatre was now indisputably an author's theatre.

XXV

In 1905, Irving, a shooting star, died in Bradford, and already the change in the state of entertainment was evident. Bicycles, which had been enormously improved, were giving place to motor-cars. Trams, impelled by electrical power, were taking longer and longer journeys. In 1903, King Edward and President Roosevelt exchanged wireless telegraphy messages, and in 1909, even while people were saying that no one would ever fly, Blériot flew across the Channel, and alarmed gentlemen wrote to *The Times* to say that England was no longer an island. Gramophones were improving, but no one paid much attention to the queer people who were busy with moving-pictures, except on occasions, to complain of their disastrous activities; for, on January 11, 1908, there was a panic at a cinematograph exhibition in Barnsley, and sixteen children were killed, and two days later, a cinematograph exploded at Boyestown, Pennsylvania, and more than 160 persons were killed. The connexion between these events and the theatre was not evident to anybody. The play was at last the thing, and although there was a healthy and energetic criticism of the theatrical system, especially of the actor-managerial part

of it, the majority of people who loved the playhouse were convinced that all was now as well in the theatre as it was ever likely to be in any human organisation. In 1910, Charles Frohman, who was drowned in the sinking of the *Lusitania* during the War, in association with Harley Granville-Barker and the late Dion Boucicault, opened a repertory theatre at the Duke of York's Theatre, and the old theatre dipped its flag to the new. Eight new, and two old, plays were produced in the season of seventeen weeks, February 21 to June 17. They were:

Justice by John Galsworthy.
Misalliance by Bernard Shaw.
**Old Friends* by J. M. Barrie.
**The Sentimentalists* by George Meredith.
**The Twelve-Pound Look* by J. M. Barrie.
The Madras House by Harley Granville-Barker.
Helena's Path by Anthony Hope and Cosmo Gordon-Lennox.
Chains by Elizabeth Baker.
Trelawney of the Wells by Arthur Pinero.
Prunella by H. Granville-Barker and Laurence Housman.

In 1912, Harley Granville-Barker and J. E. Vedrenne, needing a more centrally-situated theatre, removed from the Court to the Savoy,

* Those marked with an asterisk were one-act plays.

where they began their season with a remarkable revival of *The Winter's Tale*, and followed it with an incomparably beautiful revival of *Twelfth Night*. This was, I think, the high-water mark of the English theatre, an exquisite performance which remains bright in the memory of all who were lucky enough to see it. The actor-managers, although they felt themselves to be secure in their fortresses, eyed the young producer with some alarm. Was he about to overthrow them? They comforted themselves with the thought that he was an intellectual and altogether too intelligent for English taste, but he gave them a fright, although his seasons made no fortunes. In August 1914, the war for culture began, and culture was the first casualty. It has not yet recovered from its wounds. The actor-managers were the first to vanish from the scene. Lewis Waller died on November 1, 1915; Herbert Beerbohm Tree on July 2, 1917; George Alexander on March 16, 1918; and Charles Wyndham on January 12, 1919. Death was kinder to them than death customarily is, for it took them from the scene of their great triumphs while they were still flushed with victory, and did not leave them lagging superfluous on their stage. Immediately before the outbreak of the War, the actor-managers were flourishing, and

the theatre was in a very healthy state. At the end of the War, the theatre was in a parlous condition, the actor-managerial system was wrecked, and the actor-managers were in their graves. At His Majesty's Theatre, where Tree had established a record of which he had every right to feel proud, a piece, called *Chu Chin Chow*, was performed 2,238 times, while a farce, called *A Little Bit of Fluff*, received 1,241 performances at the Criterion. When this dreary farce was revived in 1923, it was performed only thirty-nine times. Granville-Barker's brave ventures at the Kingsway and the Savoy came to an abrupt end, but not before he had endeavoured to keep the theatre out of the midden by producing scenes from *The Dynasts*. Like Job, Granville-Barker could say, "Changes and war are against me," but, unlike Job, he went to the United States to see if he could withstand them, and there he directed a millionaires' theatre which, however, lasted only for a brief time, because the number of millionaires who were able to associate on terms of intellectual equality with him was so small that there was not enough audience to keep a play running for a week. He would have done better to produce musical comedies for his millionaires. With Granville-Barker's departure from our shores, the life

seemed to leave our theatre. General disintegration of the drama began, and several of the provincial repertory theatres had to shut their doors, although the principal ones, as a result of modifying their ambition, were able to continue through the War and to survive it; and all of them, with one notable exception—the Gaiety at Manchester—are still at work. When peace set in with unusual severity, efforts were made to rescue the theatre from the morass into which it had fallen while we were fighting for culture, and for a short period, the efforts seemed as if they might succeed. Our returned soldiers, we thought, would recover what the appalling civilians had lost. But new complications had arisen, and the soldiers were defeated. While the actors and authors and producers were fighting for the right to dominate the theatre, the queerest sort of people were quietly preparing in Hollywood to make the world their playhouse as John Wesley had made the world his parish.

XXVI

SIR ARTHUR PINERO was the first serving soldier in the fight of the authors against the actors for the mastery of the theatre, but the principal protagonist on the authors' side was Bernard Shaw. Pinero had been an actor for a brief period, and he remained the actor's friend, even although he was attempting to put the author first. It was impossible for him to fight against his former associates as fiercely as Shaw, who has never acted on any stage but his own, and his friendship for Henry Irving, in whose company at the Lyceum he had acted, prevented him from assailing the great actor. But Shaw, who always attacks the strongest of his opponents and leaves the weak ones to lesser men or to surrender when their leader is vanquished, went head first for Irving. Until Irving was overcome, the authors' fight was not won. Shaw, therefore, directed his attack on the greatest actor of his time. Those who, like Mr. Gordon Craig, attempt to belittle Shaw, insist that the dramatist fought the actor because the actor refused to produce the dramatist's plays. The argument is paltry, as paltry as Irving s own belief that Shaw could be bought off by an advance on account of royalties on *The Man of Destiny*, a

short and poor Shavian piece which Irving thought of buying. It is equally foolish to suppose that Irving's disinclination to produce plays by Shaw was due to dislike of him. Irving obviously could not make head or tail of Shaw's plays, and his inability to see worth in them was not lessened by *The Man of Destiny*, which is tedious to read and to see performed.* Irving was a romantic actor: Shaw is an intellectual author who would rather be known as the writer of a pamphlet on economics than as the writer of *Saint Joan*. Between these two men sympathy was nearly impossible. There are some who regret the difference of outlook on life which kept them apart. They say that Irving and Shaw, each supreme in his craft, should have been colleagues, and not enemies. But to say that is, surely, to be sentimental. The great do not inevitably appreciate or even recognise each

* Shaw was not the only notable person in whom Irving could see no merit. Ellen Terry says that he could find nothing remarkable in the acting of Sarah Bernhardt or Eleonora Duse, and in an interesting account of his character, printed on page 270 of the revised edition of her *Memoirs* (Gollancz), she says that his worst defect was "his being incapable of caring for people, sons, friends, any one, and his lack of enthusiasm for other people's work, or, indeed, for anything outside *his own work*. It has caused him, I should say, a great loss of happiness, yet the *concentration* has received results."

other. Strindberg detested Ibsen. Ibsen thought that Tolstoy was a fool. Tolstoy had little respect for Shakespeare. Dickens and Thackeray were cool to each other. Meredith was full of contempt for Dickens, and Henry James and George Moore had no regard for Thomas Hardy. Dr. Johnson preferred Richardson to Fielding. Voltaire thought that Shakespeare was a savage. Lytton Strachey wondered why anybody liked Molière better than Racine. The breath was scarcely out of Anatole France's body before a host of French authors were assuring each other that he was a writer of absolutely no importance. Mr. Paul Morand described France as "an old collector of second-hand chasubles, no more," and André Maurois said of him that he deserved no further attention! A Mr. Joseph Delthiel, who, presumably, is somebody, although I doubt if more than seventeen persons have ever heard of him, had the hardihood to say that "you read France, but do not re-read him." Mr. Delthiel admits that he once read Anatole France, but there is no evidence that Anatole France ever read Mr. Delthiel or, indeed, that anybody else reads him. André Gide, that oddity, remarked that France was "not a writer of any considerable importance." The unanimity with which these writers discharged their venom over

Anatole France's coffin seems to indicate that they assembled in a café while the cortège was passing its doors for no other purpose than, squid-like, to exude offensive fluid. The battle between Irving and Shaw was not of that sort, a contest among pigmies in the belittlement of a giant, but a battle between minds utterly dissimilar in make-up and outlook.

We shall be foolish and petty if we attribute these distastes to mere jealousy. A great man's vision of life is so intense that he either cannot see the vision of another great man or may deeply dislike it. Strindberg had beliefs which were directly opposed to those of Ibsen. He could not, therefore, do other than challenge Ibsen to a duel of thought. In Irving's theatre, the actor was supreme; in Shaw's, the author; and these two contestants had to fight, and one of them had to die. It cannot be said that either of them greatly suffered from the neglect or opposition of the other. Irving had his day, and it was a great and glorious day. Shaw had his, and it was no less splendid. If Irving was the first to fall, that was because he was the older man, and the day for a new system was due. Shaw has lived to see a wide reaction against the intellectual drama, and to hear himself assailed by the D. H. Lawrence school of emotionalists

and intuitionalists as violently as he assailed Irving. Between them, Irving and Shaw enormously increased the worth of the drama and raised the status of the author and the actor. Had Macaulay been writing to his sister in 1933, as he wrote to her in 1833, he could not have referred to a dramatist as "a writer of the class which in our time is at the very bottom of the literary scale." William Archer insisted that the age which began with Pinero and is ending with Noel Coward would be judged by posterity to be greater than the Elizabethan age, so far as the theatre is concerned; and it is hard to see how his argument can be disputed. Remove Shakespeare, and how little is left with which to glorify the stage of his time! But what a list of names of fine dramatists who flourished between the last decade of Queen Victoria and the first decade of George the Fifth will have to be compiled by the future historian of our stage!

XXVII

By the time the War began, the English drama had achieved an extraordinary fluidity of manner, and English acting was supreme in one domain —that of comedy. The French theatre had lost the impulse of life, both in acting and in writing, and was merely a well-oiled machine repeating very skilfully an old pattern. But in England, life overflowed in the theatre. The authors were many and various; the actors had developed an amazing power of portrayal and were generally acknowledged to be supreme in comedies of manners. Critics, hard driven for a cause of complaint, even asserted that the general level was so high that men of genius could not easily be seen! A valuable connexion had been established between the commercial West-End theatre and the provincial repertory theatre, so that actors and authors, after they had been tested and trained, could emerge from the latter and take their proper place in the former. The Little Theatre flourished in Great Britain and Ireland and the United States of America, and there were Little Theatres, too, in France and Germany, Russia and Scandinavia. How few of us realise the debt owed to the Little Theatres by lovers of drama! In the Little Theatre of

Bergen, a bandbox of a building, young Ibsen learnt his craft, after young Björnson had learnt his, and a group of amateurs, acting in a barn outside Moscow, founded a theatre in which Chekhov, who had been so heartily hissed in St. Petersburg that he contemplated suicide, obtained an audience and world-renown. John Millington Synge might never have written a play had not a stage been made for him in the Abbey Theatre in Dublin, and half-a-dozen authors, including Sean O'Casey and T. C. Murray and Lennox Robinson, would have found no place for their plays and little inducement to write if W. B. Yeats and Lady Gregory and "A. E." and George Moore, enormously helped by the money of Miss Horniman, had not established the Irish Players. Out of Miss Horniman's theatre, the Gaiety, in Manchester, came Stanley Houghton, Allan Monkhouse, Harold Brighouse, Charles McEvoy and others. Sir Barry Jackson's Repertory Theatre in Birmingham gave John Drinkwater a training-ground for his talent and enriched the stage with *Abraham Lincoln*. The Provincetown Players of America provided a theatre for Eugene O'Neill. Out of a small, impoverished group of unknown actors and lovers of the theatre grew the Theatre Guild of New York, which is perhaps the greatest

single theatrical organisation in the world. If the Little Theatres of the world had never been opened, the history of the drama would be vastly different, and probably less important.

In this theatre began a change in the method of acting which was to have profound effects. Acting, until the founding of the Little Theatres, was the business of great individualities who reduced other actors to small proportions. The theory that Henry Irving deliberately surrounded himself with inferior players so that his own ability might be seen to greater advantage does not bear examination. Many actors of great talent graduated at the Lyceum, and Irving always had in his company players of conspicuous ability. But it is true to say that the grouping of the stage up to the end of the actor-managerial day resulted in the aggrandisement of a single great individual. Time has not proved that this system was wrong, but in the Little Theatre it was regarded with dislike and even contempt. Here, team-work, as it is called, was considered to be more important than the exploitation of great personalities. Bernhardt and Duse and Ellen Terry and Irving and Coquelin and Salvini were, undoubtedly, people of genius, but in the Little Theatre, where genius did not easily disport itself, the idea was all against the

great actor and in favour of the actor of talent who could combine with other actors of talent in a good display of team-work. Aristocracy was abolished in the Little Theatre, where democracy prevailed. The value of team-work was first manifested to English playgoers by the Irish Players from the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, and the effect on the public was instantaneous and almost sensational. These amateurs—for it was plain to discerning critics that their performances were not the result of superb technique but of an almost total lack of technique—overthrew the reason of many intellectuals who went about the town asserting that a miracle had been performed and that the day of the skilled actor was done. The jaded minds of the London intellectuals were stimulated by simplicity and naivete; and a cry was raised for artlessness which was to grow into a roar when, after the War, a new generation grew up in the misery of a world which had been wrecked by machinery. Out of the Little Theatres came an exceptional number of fine acting "supports," superb players of secondary and subordinate parts, but not one genius. The repertory theatre has given the stage a host of Higher Grade Civil Servants, but not one Dictator. There was a crowd of good "supports," but no genius for them to support.

The authors, either because they were themselves infected with this idea of democracy or were compelled to pay heed to it, began to write plays in which no one "took the centre of the stage," and, eventually, to write plays about unheroic characters. The nadir of this neo-democracy was reached, in England, in John Galsworthy's dramas of depressing people, such as Falder in *Justice*, and, in America, in the plays of Elmer Rice. A vogue of Expressionism began, and authors produced dreary works on people who had neither character nor purpose, not even names. They were called Mr. X or Miss Z or merely a Lamplighter or A Blonde Woman. In these plays, bank clerks, more than other men, were portrayed as objects of contemptuous pity. After a long and dreadful day in a bank, counting other people's money, a cashier or teller would go home, as uncomfortably as possible, to a nagging wife and unsatisfactory children. At last, infuriated by the capitalist system and his wailing spouse, he would lose his wits, and run away with some of the bank's money and say awful things to his wife and children—if, that is to say, he failed to murder them—and finally, after a dull effort at an orgy with a prostitute, shoot himself! . . . I found myself unable to respond sympathetically to this drama. The

bank clerks that I met in my few visits to banks appeared to be unusually cheerful men, and were not, as far as I could see, nagged by their wives or, at all events, were not nagged more than was good for them. Democracy had taken the heart out of the theatre. Intellectualism had drained away the drama's blood. People went to repertory theatres as some Dissenters had formerly gone to chapel, woebegonely and as if they had come to atone for lamentable sins. Others went to push their propaganda. A night in a repertory theatre was almost as cheerful as a night in a morgue. There was even a period when the performance of a play was preceded by a lecture on prison reform or the inner meaning of *The Cenci* or the extreme need for nationalising the means of production, distribution and exchange. Had Henry Irving come out of his grave to see to what a state the intellectual Bernard Shaw had reduced the romantic theatre, his chuckles would have been exceptionally sardonic. I recall a night in the Gaiety Theatre, Manchester, when John Galsworthy and I, while watching performances of our plays, were suddenly harangued by an earnest student of the drama who had the appearance of a funeral mute. He was dressed in a suit of solemn black, and might pardonably have been thought

to have sauntered into the theatre immediately after depositing a body in the burial-ground. A black frock-coat was surmounted by a black tie. Black gloves, no doubt, were in the pocket of the black frock-coat. Sallow features were darkened by raven hair and a straggling black moustache which dribbled into its owner's mouth. Neither Galsworthy nor I had ever seen him in our lives before. We were quietly talking to Mrs. Galsworthy when he heaved up before us and, waving gaunt arms in the air, assured us that the city of Manchester was spiritually and intellectually dead and damned. Gesticulating at the thirty-nine persons in the pit, who were innocent of all offence, he shouted out, "Look at them! That's the best Manchester can do for the drama! . . ." There was more, much more, in that strain, and Galsworthy, a shy man, blushed and writhed, while I, who am irreverent, tried in vain not to laugh. At the moment when it seemed that neither Galsworthy nor I could bear any more, three dreadful blows of a mallet were heard on the stage, announcing that the play was about to be resumed, and the earnest student of the drama went away and left us in peace. In those days, the highbrow theatre would have no orchestra. The audience sat in silence, afraid to speak to each other, and waited

for the awful thumps of the mallet, as the victim of the guillotine must have waited for the swift down-rush of the knife! . . . I whispered to Galsworthy, as the curtain rose on his play, "Now, I know who is killing the repertory theatre! The earnest student of the drama! . . ."

XXVIII

In 1914, the second great period of the English theatre came to an end. The authors had won the war against the actors, with the aid of the producers, and the prospects of a long and successful era of great drama and fine acting were brilliant. Then a crack-brained youth fired a revolver at an archduke in Sarajevo and wrecked Europe! . . .

We hear an intolerable deal of tosh about the idealism of youth, and are assured that if only the elderly and the old would clear out of the way, the young would quickly put the world to rights. We forget that it was a lad who put a match to the train of powder that blew the world to pieces; that it was old John Burns and John Morley who resigned from the Cabinet rather than be parties to the effusion of young blood; that it was old Henry Asquith who wept when the ultimatum to Germany expired, while young Winston Churchill walked across a corridor in Downing Street with a look of joy on his face; that it was young Rupert Brooke who wrote:

> Now, God be thanked Who has matched us with His Hour,
> And caught our youth, and wakened us from sleeping. . .

and that it was old Thomas Hardy who cried out in grief:

> I walked in loamy Wessex lanes, afar
> From rail-track and from highway, and I heard
> In field and farmstead many an ancient word
> Of local lineage like "Thu bist," "Er war,"
>
> "Ich woll," "Er sholl," and by-talk similar,
> Even as they speak who in this month's moon gird
> At England's very loins, thereunto spurred
> By gangs whose glory threats and slaughters are.
>
> Then seemed a Heart crying: "Whosoever they be
> At root and bottom of this, who flung this flame
> Between kin folk kin tongued even as are we,
>
> "Sinister, ugly, lurid, be their fame;
> May their familiars grow to shun their name,
> And their brood perish everlastingly."

We forget, too, that it is youth which everywhere supports the reactionary and the tyrant, that elderly and old men endure imprisonment and exile and even death for freedom's sake, while young men throw their hats in the air and cheer lustily when Mussolini declares freedom to be a fetish; that youth runs in hot haste after De Valera and Lenin and Hitler; that youth, at the moment of writing, is brutally beating Jews with bands of steel. In this world of cracked youths, culture quickly fell to pieces, and the slowly and painfully accumulated treasures of civilisation were shattered and thrown away.

XXIX

At the outbreak of the War, all actors and authors of plays were filled with fear. The demand for ammunition and guns was certain to exceed the demand for drama, and many persons felt assured that the theatre would have to close its doors. Some stern-eyed persons almost demanded that they should be closed at once. All forms of art, apparently, are foolery and unimportant in comparison with the great and serious business of blowing away the world's wealth and destroying life. Owners of theatres appalled themselves by thinking of their liabilities. There they were, contracted to pay as much as ninety pounds a week for a theatre, and how could they hope to raise such a sum in a time of general ruin? They felt extremely ominous about their future. But their apprehensions quickly passed away, for the new armies brought millions into towns who had hitherto seldom seen a play, and all these millions, away from their homes and the normal entertainments of their lives, had to be amused somehow. They generally were . . . somehow. The alarmed lessees soon discovered that their theatres, so far from being grave liabilities, were valuable

assets. The recruits were not exacting in their demands, and were ready to pay handsomely for their entertainment. It became a commonplace of the theatre that a play could not be bad enough, although it might be too good, to fill the house. The realisation that there was money in the theatre soon pierced the minds of Big Business Men whose interest in the drama became cupidinous in both senses of the word. Woolmerchants from Lancashire and Yorkshire, and persons who dealt in cutlery and hides, having heard what fortunes were to be made in the West End, fell on the theatre in hordes, and each of them, Eh-laadin' and Ba Goomin' all over the place, commenced manager. One gentleman, in the subsequent bankruptcy proceedings, coyly confessed that he could neither read nor write. Another used the national adjective so often that many persons were convinced that he knew no other word. It is reported that when a third was invited to finance a play which was not a revue, he replied, "Eh, laad, A doan't want nowt to do wi' no 'igh-brow mook! . . ." The advent of these Big Business Men who were doing very well out of the War almost finished the theatre, so far as its artistic and intellectual worth is concerned, just as their advent to Whitehall almost

ruined English government and probably prolonged the War. Their exit from the West End was, eventually, as abrupt as their entry, and I am happy to say that some of them returned to their dreadful homes in the North with less money in their pockets than they had when they irrupted on London. I wish I could add that all of them were irretrievably ruined. They were a frightful affliction, and I hope that the League of Nations, in the event of another war, will devise some means of keeping such persons in prison for the whole period of the hostilities.

The immediate result of the impact of Big Business Men on the West End, was to raise the rents of theatres out of all reason. We know that the Big Business Men in the Government made the money flow as freely as the blood, and it is our bitter experience that these lamentable people, when they are confronted with a difficult situation, have only one idea—to increase the general expense, on the principle, one supposes, that there will be pickings for them. Where the body is, there will the vultures be. I am personally acquainted with a lady who had inherited the lease of a theatre from her husband, and was in deep distress when she realised that she was liable for a weekly rent of £90. Her

tears were chased away by the Big Business Men, and soon after the War had begun, she was receiving not less than £400 per week for her premises. For a considerable period, she made £300 per week in clear profit, although she did nothing whatever in return for that sum. Nor did rents remain at £400. They rushed up to dizzier sums, and there was a period when certain theatres could not be hired for less than £600 per week. One theatre was actually rented at £700. The cost of production became enormous. Salaries rose out of all reason, and players who could scarcely articulate demanded and received more money than a field-marshal was paid for fighting the Germans. "In the 'seventies of the last century," said Sir Arthur Pinero, "a leading actor or actress would be glad of twenty pounds a week. Now that is paid to a subordinate actor for speaking twenty lines." So crazy was the finance of the theatre, that plays which were drawing £1,000 per week were failures and had to be withdrawn, although the receipt of such a sum in the days which immediately preceded the War would have been regarded as a sign of success. When Vedrenne and Barker were running their brilliant season at the Court Theatre in Sloane Square, providing

playgoers with superb acting in great plays, takings of £600 per week were thought to be fine, but Sir Barry Jackson had to withdraw Mr. Bernard Shaw's *Too True to be Good*, although its weekly receipts were £1,000. I have been informed, but do not vouch for my information, that the cost of running Mr. Somerset Maugham's tragedy, *For Services Rendered*, was £1,435 per week. It is doubtful, indeed, if any play in 1932 could cover its expenses on takings of much less than £1,600. This meant that unless the theatre was crowded at almost every performance, there was very little prospect of profit for the manager. In the pre-war days, a profit could be made when the theatre was only three-parts full. Sir Squire Bancroft used to insist that expenses should not exceed one-third of the holding capacity of his theatre. If that capacity were £1,200 a week, he would not spend a penny more than £400 on salaries and other expenses. He could thus afford to play to houses which were not full at every performance. The singular state of the war-time theatre's finances will be plain when I say that a woman dramatist whose play ran for a year, herself informed me that she had lost about two thousand pounds on the production, in which she had a considerable

money interest. I suspect that someone behaved badly to her. The late Lord Lathom lost an immense sum on a revue which ran at the Prince of Wales's Theatre for more than a year. I suspect that he behaved badly to himself.

XXX

ALL sorts of excuses have been given for the production of the frightful trash which prevailed in the West End from 1914 to 1918, including the ignoble excuse made by debilitated civilians that "the boys" had to be cheered up when they came home on leave. What a misunderstanding of the mind and spirit of mankind it is to suppose that they can only be nourished and strengthened by rubbish! The soldiers themselves were in no doubt about the stuff that was supposed to put heart in them, and it was commonly said in the trenches that the War Office was subsidising the performance of appalling twaddle in order to make the soldiers glad to go back to the Front. Ten days of West-End plays, the authorities said, and the men will go quietly to the trenches. Had the conditions of life, so far as the theatre is concerned, remained as they were before 1914, I do not doubt that we should have seen a great renascence of drama in these islands. We talk, and rightly, too, of the immense waste of life and energy in the War, and we cannot forget the million who died and were among our best and most vigorous; but we must not forget that in the War, millions of men and women had had their minds extraordinarily quickened. They

acquired, through experience, a knowledge which they had hitherto only known, if, indeed, they had known it at all, through books or newspapers. It is true that the troops were tired at the end of the War, but they were not bored. They were tired, as men are tired after a great effort, and not as men are tired when all their energies have been exhausted. I think it is proper to insist on this point. We are too accustomed to think that the mind and spirit of our people were worn out when the War ended, and some of our politicians even went so far as to tell our rivals abroad that we were down and out. In my own journeys across the Atlantic, I constantly met Americans and even Canadians who assured me that England was finished, and when I asked their authority for so singular a statement, they gave me the name of The Man Who Won the War! . . . There was a night in New York when an eminent American politician, who was a member of the party which had been returned to office because of its promise to enforce more strictly the laws of Prohibition, solemnly and alcoholically assured me that America would maintain England as a pleasure resort. Every year, for the few weeks when the rain stopped, his countrymen would visit us. We must, however, accept our fate without repining, and our fate,

apparently, was to be a poor relation of the United States. The gentleman was drunk, and would not now be so bold as to make that promise. I refer to it merely because it was a sign of the attitude, not only of many foreigners, but of many of our own eminent countrymen, towards England. It was, they assured us, a down-and-out country. When I reflect that after taking our part in the War, we have maintained the whole of our unemployed, re-housed many of our people, raised the standard of living of our working-class, paid our debts, and borne the heaviest taxes in the history of the world, I cannot agree to these melancholy conclusions, but am more inclined to believe that, great though this nation has been in the past, it has never been so great as it has been in the past nineteen years. It is this belief which sustains me in my assumption that had the conditions of the West-End theatre remained after the War as they were in 1914, we would have seen a renascence of our drama that might have equalled that of the Elizabethan era. I do not despair of seeing it yet. The spirit was there. The men who came back were not beaten men, nor were they in any respect despondent. They had won a frightful war, and their hearts were lifted up. Given any reasonable conditions in

which to work, they must have expressed in art the greatness that was in them. "Will you tell me, Master Shallow, how to choose a man?" said Falstaff. "Care I for the limb, the thewes, the stature, bulk, and big assemblance of a man? Give me the spirit, Master Shallow." And the spirit was there. But the place was altered. I shall not waste time with an argument on the effect which environment has on those who live in it, although I believe that man is finally the master of his surroundings. It is impossible for people to disregard the circumstances in which they find themselves. They must be affected, even if only temporarily, by a succession of inimical events. That is a truism, but, like many truisms, it is sometimes forgotten. Moreover, an effect, although "temporary," may last long enough to seem permanent to those who suffer from it, and may do grave injury which cannot easily or quickly be repaired. The effect of the War on the English theatre was so drastic that it appeared to be fundamental, and it has not yet been removed, nor can anyone see signs of its removal.

The actor-managers had faults and were frequently told of them. They preferred plays with good parts for them rather than good plays, and they exploited the theatre in the interests of their

own personality; but they were lovers of the theatre, they took pride in their craft, and they had personalities to exploit. In spite of their obsession with themselves, they maintained a high level of production, and they produced a great many plays of fine quality. A cursory glance at a list of their productions in the two decades which preceded the War enables us to see a record of which the actor-managers, if they were alive, might well feel proud. I am less certain than I used to be that the exploitation of a rich and exuberant personality in the theatre is a crime. In wakeful moments of the night, a fear crosses my mind that the actor-managers were in the right more often than I supposed, and that the exploitation of personality is an important part of what we call "theatre." Be that as it may, this is true, that under the actor-managers we had a more interesting and vigorous theatre than we now possess. It is common to complain of the Shakespearean productions made by Beerbohm Tree at His Majesty's, but it is impossible to deny that there *were* Shakespearean productions at His Majesty's and that they occurred every year. We pay compliments to ourselves because we have improved the method of performing our poet's plays, but an innocent observer of the West-End theatre might justly

say that we seem to have improved them out of existence, since they are no longer to be seen. Those who would see *Hamlet* or *Romeo and Juliet* or *Twelfth Night* must cross the Thames to the Old Vic. or venture into the wilds of Islington to Sadler's Wells. They must not loiter in the West.

XXXI

THE returned soldier was defeated by the crazy profiteer. Soon after the signing of the Armistice, the theatre ceased to have an intelligent and educated audience. If it had retained the audience which supported it before the outbreak of the War, or if the returned soldiers had not been driven out of it, it could still, I think, have kept itself in some civility in spite of the increase in the cost of production, in spite, too, of the rivalry of other attractions. But its old audience was gone. A million men had been killed in the War, and these were, for the most part, the flower of the nation. Millions of people, half educated and nervously agitated, were growing up without any discipline or training, to take the place of the dead. These were restless, uninstructed people, whose only notion of entertainment was a frightful noise. Jazz bands took the place of musicians, cocktails took the place of decent drinks, and an extraordinary mania for shuffling movement possessed the young, who waddled like demented ducks through some of the ugliest acrobatic performances, miscalled dances, that have ever afflicted the human species. It is said that when men go mad, they tear off all their clothes. An alienist, looking at

many of the young in the past ten years, must have felt that the entire rising generation had gone off its head. Haste and noise became the essentials of entertainment. The young said, "Quick, quick, quick!" and were irritated by anything which demanded patience and repose. The theatre could not appease this nerve-racked, speed-maddened population which found its relaxation, if such a word can be used of its amusements, in swift ironmongery. Cooks began to give place to tin-openers, and orchestras were replaced by canned music. "Quick, quick, quick!" said the young, "no time to eat, no time to rest, no time to talk, no time to think, no time to listen ; quick, quick, quick!" They leapt into powerful cars and drove at full speed from A to B and back again from B to A, knowing little of A, less of B, and nothing at all of any part of the road between. For these people, the moving-pictures were a godsend, since they were swift and involved those who saw them in no mental exercise. The queer people who had been working away in Hollywood while cultured Europeans were slaying each other, now advanced upon the world and found awaiting them an audience as queer as themselves. How odd these Hollywood merchants were and are may be learnt, not only from the satirical novels and plays which have

been published in the last five years, but also, and better, perhaps, from the accounts of them given in works written by gentlemen more or less sympathetic to them. A. W. L'Estrange Fawcett, an English observer of the moving-picture world, in a book called *Films: Facts and Forecasts*, describes a visit he made in 1927 to the home of the late Marcus Loew:

> Marcus Loew started life as an errand-boy, without a dime to bless himself with. But he had a pretty good sense of putting two and two together, and today you can see him in his wonderful Long Island home with his private bathing-beach and pier, his golf-course attached to the house, his sixty gardeners, his acres of greenhouses, his great circular bathing-pool set in a tropical conservatory.

This errand-boy mind prevailed among the movie-merchants of Hollywood, who very skilfully imposed it upon the world. They were fortunate in finding a half-educated and neurotic population. An immense campaign of "publicity" was begun. Newspapers were "captured." Some newspaper proprietors, indeed, had large holdings in film-companies. Lord Beaverbrook, according to L'Estrange Fawcett, "owns the English Pathé Frères, and is said also to have other interests." "It is not, perhaps, without significance," Fawcett continues, "that the

Daily Express is the only paper in London which devotes space to films every day of the week as a regular feature." That, of course, was written in 1927, and is no longer true. All the popular papers are now almost trades-papers for the films. "Obviously," Fawcett adds, "a newspaper proprietor who is interested in the film-business is going to be sympathetic to the movies in his columns." "Sympathetic" is a good word! Someone, it is said, once remarked to William Randolph Hearst, the American newspaper proprietor, that he supposed there was nothing really in motion-pictures. "There are several millions of mine in them," Hearst promptly replied.

XXXII

In these facts we may perhaps find a solution of the problem which has puzzled many readers of popular newspapers—namely, why it is that the theatre in recent years has either been crabbed or ignored in these journals. Infinitely more space is given to moving-pictures than to plays, and it is notorious that certain newspaper proprietors, known to have shares in film-companies, have deliberately disparaged the theatre and praised the cinema. Their attitude can, of course, be justified on the plea that the public is now more interested in pictures than in plays, but it becomes less justifiable when we realise how much it is to the financial interest of the newspaper proprietor to encourage the public to take an interest in films. The methods used to obtain publicity for pictures are familiar. "The public," Fawcett asserts, "is worked up into a frenzy of excitement over the alleged amours, divorces, quarrels, money-earning capacity, and amusements of the film-folk, until, when a big film comes along, an entire romance, true or false matters not at all, has been woven round every personality in it, and the public go to see the picture, not because it is good drama or good

comedy, but because Miss So-and-so has been married five times. That is what is known in America as 'the personal touch' in advertising. When Rudolph Valentino 'lay in state' in New York . . . there was a riot, twenty persons were injured, the windows of the undertaker's were smashed in by the crowd, and unbreakable glass had to be put in the lid of the coffin to prevent the ghouls stealing souvenirs from the body." The vogue of the late Valentino among emotional women was, and continues to be, remarkable, and I may perhaps intrude a proof of it here from my personal experience. Several years ago, I wrote a play called *The First Mrs. Fraser*, in which references had to be made to a speciality dancer. In the original version of the play, I called this man "Rudolpho," but I was gravely advised to change the name lest I should give offence to the hordes of women to whom Rudolph Valentino is still a romantic dream.

In 1925 or 1926, Robert Nicholls, the poet, contributed a series of articles to *The Times* in which he stated that the American film-manufacturer produced his pictures for the hick-audience—that is to say, the half-educated yokel. Fawcett does not believe in this theory, although

his disbelief seems to be based on the singular assumption that half-educated people are to be found only in rural areas. He himself insists that pictures cannot profitably be made for what he calls an eclectic public, by which, presumably, he means a public of intelligent and educated people. Dixon Scott, an architect who owns a cinema in Newcastle-on-Tyne, informed the readers of *The Times* that the average moving-picture is intended for unintelligent young women of eighteen, and I have yet to meet the cinema proprietor who does not share his opinion. It is notorious that every effort to produce "good" films, that is to say, films equal in intellectual content to a moderately good play, empties the cinemas. Fawcett is justified in saying that educated people have only themselves to blame for the mental deficiency of the moving-picture, because they derided it as mere photography and allowed it to fall into the hands of uneducated Jews, but it may be doubted if better pictures would have been appreciated by the post-war film fans. "Every one of the big men in the film-business to-day," he says, "started life in penurious circumstances: one was a trouser-presser, another kept a second-hand clothes shop, a third was a clerk, a fourth

was a bandsman." And these "big men" spread their illiteracy over the whole world. That is the most impressive fact in the situation we are now considering. The mechanisation of amusement has produced a universal vulgarity which seems, at present, to be irremediable.

In my boyhood, it was customary for a child to be taken to a pantomime and to a Shakespearean play and to a circus once a year. I doubt if any boy or girl in any class was taken to a theatre or circus more than three or four times in a year, and I should say that the vast majority of children went no oftener than once or twice. The case is altered now. There is ample evidence that about fifty per cent. of the elementary school children in towns go to the pictures once a week, while seventy per cent. of them go at least once a month. In Birkenhead, it was found that one hundred out of the 1,653 children questioned went to the pictures twice a week, while eighteen children went oftener than twice a week, and there was actually an instance of one child who went five times. An appreciable number of children admitted that the pictures frighten them, and about fifty per cent. confessed that they sometimes have bad dreams after they have been to a cinema. A lad of twelve stated that

he sometimes woke up in the night thinking he was going to be murdered. Another lad, aged eleven, who goes to the pictures once a week, said, "I generally dream terrible things after the pictures." A boy, aged thirteen, said, "I feel that there is someone in the room after seeing a mystery picture." A boy of nine, who is a weekly visitor to the pictures, said, "When I see murder pictures I shiver with fright," and a girl of ten-and-a-half said, "Yes, I have to close my eyes till it goes." Another girl said, "After murder films, I think it will step out of the wall." "I feel frightened to go to sleep in case the person is there," says another girl, "and put my head under the clothes." A boy of nine, who goes to the pictures every Saturday afternoon, said, "I have had horrible dreams after seeing the pictures." A child in Birmingham said, "My cousin went to see a picture called *The Bat*. When he came home, he would not go to bed alone. He kept on shouting '*The Bat!*' " And another child in the same city said, "The pictures have often kept my sister and myself from sleeping after by causing us to go hysterical." The headmaster of a Birmingham School informed the Cinema Enquiry Committee, of which the Vice-Chancellor of Birmingham

University, Sir Charles Grant Robertson, was President, that "one boy had to be taken out of the cinema when the film *Atlantic* was shown. This film has caused many children in the city to have nightmare." An investigator, appointed by this Committee, saw a programme of pictures on a Saturday afternoon at a cinema which was crowded with children, apparently between the ages of four and fourteen. The investigator, who, I may say, is scrupulously fair, gives an account of the chief picture in the following terms:

> Chief picture—*The Lily of Killarney*—a love story of which the climax was the attempted drowning of the heroine by a hunchback from a boat on a moonlit lake. Just before this act occurred the repulsive face of the hunchback, with expression of murderous intent, was put upon the screen as a "close up," the hideous face growing larger and larger as it came out upon the screen to meet the audience, the majority of whom shrieked with terror. Eventually, upon his deathbed, the murderer confesses to a priest, death takes place, and over the deformed body the priest draws a white sheet. My neighbour, a little girl of ten, squealed with fear, clutched me and cried, "Oh, my, I shan't 'arf be walking in me sleep after this."

It is easy to make oneself excessively alarmed over these accounts of children in cinemas, and

the reader is invited to keep his fears under control. I am impressed, however, by the fact that none of the plays I saw in my boyhood sent me shrieking into the street, or made me afraid to go to bed in the dark, or disturbed my sleep with evil and terrifying dreams. I went joyfully to bed in the hope that I should dream about the play! . . . I realise now that the penny dreadfuls which I read, to the consternation and alarm of my mother, did me no harm—did me, indeed, much good. In these works, according to my recollection, I was urged to admire and emulate brave men. Villains, although they might triumph at the beginning of the "blood," were eventually discomfited and defeated. Virtue was triumphant in the end. In none of my "bloods" and "dreadfuls" was I frightened out of my wits by monsters, or invited to admire crooks and thugs, or to take an interest in the sexual vagaries of the characters. There were villains a-plenty, but they were villains, and not victims of their environment or persons of inhibited passions or tortured complexes. The hero did not mouch about the house, grumbling at all his friends and relations, and informing the universe that he was much misunderstood. A liar in a "blood" was a liar, and not a person with

an impediment in his speech. The "bloods" and "dreadfuls" of forty years ago were superior in style and tone to the works which now reduce the denizens of Bloomsbury to a state of stupefied awe and wonder. The fact that boys like films about war and cowboy or Wild West life, of life in the underworld or among the gangsters of New York and Chicago, does not denote depravity in them or any more, generally speaking, than a wholesome love of courage and adventure. But we may justly tremble for the future when we realise that, subtly and continuously, children are being induced to believe that the cut-throat and the footpad, the gangster and the vamp, are people to be admired and emulated. A generation is growing up in the belief, acquired from the pictures, that a life of fatuous luxury is the life for them! The fact that multitudes of boys and girls are being brought up on this entertainment, about fifty per cent. of them seeing fifty-two puerile pictures a year, is, to say the least of it, disturbing. One of the first plays I saw was *Romeo and Juliet*, and I can recall my young-eyed wonder at that lovely tragedy, although I make no claim to have been more than boyishly moved by it. I pity the child who is brought up on *The Crooks of Chicago*, and is given no chance

to see Shakespeare, for, although it is fashionable among the half-educated and the totally underbred to jeer at the idea that boys and girls should be taken to see *Romeo and Juliet*, I have a profound conviction that I was more fortunate in the gas-lit theatre where I saw that play performed than is a child who sees Violet the Vamp in a super-cinema.

It is estimated that there are four thousand cinemas in Great Britain. Five years ago, there were about five hundred theatres in the United Kingdom, offering performances of plays, operas and musical comedies. Now, in 1933, there are about two hundred and fifty. There is scarcely a theatre left in what is called a No. 2 town, and some of the theatres in No. 1 towns are in suspended animation, waiting to be wired for the talkies. The city of Cardiff has 223,648 inhabitants, but now has no regular theatre. There are 175,583 people in Dundee, but no theatre regularly engaged in the performance of plays. Who could suppose on that night when I sat in the Empire Music Hall in Belfast and saw my first moving-picture, a crude thing, full of blobs of light that burst in one's eyes, that less than forty years later, the Theatre Royal, where I had been infinitely stirred by the love and death of *Romeo and Juliet*, would be torn down and a slap-up

Cinema put in its place? Shall I ever forget my dismay when, on pilgrimage to Bergen to see the little theatre in which Ibsen learnt his craft, I found that it, too, had been given over to the pictures! . . .

XXXIII

In 1933, Mr. John Mackie compiled and edited a report for the Edinburgh Cinema Enquiry Committee on the result of their investigations into the effects of moving-pictures on children and adolescents.* The investigation was made among children of every class, whose ages ranged from nine to eighteen, and enquiries were also addressed to parents and teachers. The schoolboys who were questioned numbered 1,310, and the schoolgirls 1,270. In addition to these, about 250 adolescents, who had left school and whose ages ranged between fourteen and twenty-one, were invited to answer questions. Nine hundred parents, 649 teachers and 270 adult visitors to cinemas were also interrogated. The Enquiry based its report on the opinions of about five thousand persons, and was the most extensive that has yet been made. The prime fact which emerges from the report is that seventy out of every hundred children in the capital of Scotland go to the cinema once a week, and that nineteen out of every hundred go twice a week. Boys go more often than girls, and "the children in the poor districts'attend more frequently than

* *Report of the Edinburgh Cinema Enquiry Committee* (27, Rutland Street, Edinburgh). Price one shilling.

those in the better districts." The Committee, although they are impressed (as who would not be?) by these facts, are not perturbed by them, nor are the members of the important Commission of Educational and Cultural Films who issued a weighty report on the subject through Messrs. Allen and Unwin.*

The following tables show the kinds of pictures liked and disliked by boys and girls in Edinburgh:

Boys

Liked.	%	Disliked.	%
1. War Pictures	20·9	1. Love	76·9
2. Cowboy or Wild West	19·0	2. Society Life	6·0
3. Underworld or Gangster	12·5	3. Underworld or Gangster	3·1
4. Mystery Thriller	10·3	4. Tragedy	2·9
5. Geographical or Travel	6·7	5. Song Pictures	2·0
6. Sea Film	6·3	6. Cowboy or Wild West	1·8
7. Detective	5·8	7. Geographical or Travel	1·3
8. Comic	4·5	8. Mystery Thriller	1·2
9. Nature Film	3·6	9. Nature Film	1·1
10. Song Pictures	3·3	10. War Pictures	3·7
11. Mickey Mouse	2·7	11. Mickey Mouse	
12. Child Characters	1·9	12. Child Characters	
13. Society Life	2·5	13. Sea Film	
14. Love		14. Detective	
15. Tragedy		15. Comic	
Other kinds and no preference		Other kinds and no preference	

* *The Film in National Life.* Published by George Allen and Unwin, Ltd. Price one shilling.

Girls

Liked.	%	Disliked.	%
1. Mystery Thriller	12·1	1. Love	22·4
2. Child Characters	11·7	2. War Pictures	22·1
3. Cowboy or Wild West	11·2	3. Underworld or Gangster	11·5
4. Comic	10·7	4. Tragedy	7·3
5. Mickey Mouse	9·6	5. Mystery Thriller	6·8
6. Song Pictures	8·6	6. Geographical or Travel	4·9
7. Love	6·8	7. Nature Film	4·0
8. Detective	5·0	8. Society Life	3·9
9. Nature Film	4·6	9. Sea Film	3·4
10. Geographical or Travel	4·5	10. Cowboy or Wild West	3·2
11. War Pictures	3·7	11. Detective	2·8
12. Underworld or Gangster	2·6	12. Song Pictures	2·4
13. Sea Film	2·0	13. Mickey Mouse	1·3
14. Society Life	1·7	14. Child Characters	0·6
15. Tragedy	1·3	15. Comic	0·6
Other kind and no preference	3·9	Other kinds and no preference	3·4

The film stars liked and disliked by the Edinburgh boys and girls are equally interesting, as the following tables prove:

Male Film Stars

	Admired by	Disliked by	Net Total. For.	Net Total. Against.
Arranged in order of popularity, according to the Boys.				
1. Laurel and Hardy	222	21	201	
2. Jack Holt	151	26	125	
3. Slim Summerville	84	29	55	
4. Jackie Coogan	63	13	50	

Male Film Stars

	Admired by	Disliked by	Net Total. For.	Net Total. Against.
5. Ronald Colman	87	44	43	
6. Richard Dix	46	23	23	
7. Robert Montgomery	34	30	4	
8. Harold Lloyd	37	38		1
9. Gary Cooper	31	38		7
10. Lon Chaney	94	103		9
11. Ramon Novarro	35	48		13
12. Richard Barthelmess	26	47		21
13. Clive Brook	27	53		26
14. Maurice Chevalier	63	95		32
15. Jack Oakie	20	64		44
16. William Powell	16	68		52
17. George Arliss	36	105		69
18. Noah Beery	7	97		90
19. Adolphe Menjou	9	306		297
Others	213	31		
No preference	9	31		
Arranged in order of popularity, according to the Girls.				
1. Ronald Colman	137	32	105	
2. Laurel and Hardy	128	32	96	
3. Jackie Coogan	110	17	93	
4. Robert Montgomery	108	18	90	
5. Ramon Novarro	78	30	48	
6. Jack Holt	54	21	33	
7. Maurice Chevalier	93	76	17	
8. Gary Cooper	54	38	16	
9. Richard Dix	24	26		2
10. Richard Barthelmess	15	23		8
11. George Arliss	43	54		11
12. Clive Brook	36	61		25
13. Harold Lloyd	35	72		37
14. Slim Summerville	15	73		58
15. Jack Oakie	18	77		59
16. William Powell	13	74		61
17. Noah Beery	4	104		100
18. Lon Chaney	24	164		140
19. Adolphe Menjou	12	159		147
Others	223	31		
No preference	46	88		

Female Film Stars

	Admired by	Disliked by	Net Total. For.	Net Total. Against.
Arranged in order of popularity, according to the Boys.				
1. Janet Gaynor	276	18	258	
2. Marie Dressler	167	51	116	
3. Jeanette MacDonald	89	23	66	
4. Joan Crawford	115	54	61	
5. Constance Bennett	135	80	55	
6. Norma Shearer	87	64	23	
7. Marion Davies	32	33		1
8. Polly Moran	35	46		11
9. Bebe Daniels	53	72		19
10. Dorothy Mackaill	27	46		19
11. Gloria Swanson	24	51		27
12. Ruth Chatterton	13	48		35
13. Mitzi Green	59	96		37
14. Evelyn Laye	11	49		38
15. Lois Wilson	8	56		48
16. Marlene Dietrich	34	86		52
17. Myrna Loy	4	71		67
18. Greta Garbo	66	154		88
19. Anna May Wong	17	170		153
Others	49	17		
No preference	9	25		
Arranged in order of popularity, according to the Girls.				
1. Janet Gaynor	423	17	406	
2. Constance Bennett	139	45	94	
3. Jeanette MacDonald	82	20	62	
4. Norma Shearer	96	44	52	
5. Joan Crawford	86	55	31	
6. Evelyn Laye	27	20	7	
7. Marie Dressler	55	51	4	
8. Mitzi Green	55	60		5
9. Ruth Chatterton	16	34		18
10. Marion Davies	11	39		28
11. Polly Moran	10	39		29
12. Dorothy Mackaill	8	39		31
13. Marlene Dietrich	34	69		35
14. Bebe Daniels	27	62		35
15. Myrna Loy	6	64		58
16. Lois Wilson	6	70		64
17. Gloria Swanson	9	76		67
18. Greta Garbo	60	180		120
19. Anna May Wong	9	176		167
Others	66	27		
No preference	45	83		

No less interesting are the replies made by adolescents to the questions, Which are the best pictures you have seen? and, Which are the pictures you most disliked? The following is a list of the pictures liked, in the order of their preference, together with the votes given for them:

All Quiet on the Western Front	55	*Hell's Angels*	22
Ben Hur	51	*Whoopee*	22
The Desert Song	45	*Beau Geste*	20
Trader Horn	39	*Common Clay*	19
The Dawn Patrol	32	*Sunny Side Up*	17
Africa Speaks	28	*Byrd's Expedition to the Pole*	15
Rookery Nook	25	*Dracula*	14
The King of Kings	25		

The pictures which were disliked, together with the reasons for disliking them, are as follows:

Anna Christie	Could not understand it. It was morbid.
Dracula	Too far-fetched, ugly, apt to give one nightmare.
The Singing Fool	General rottenness, too sentimental.
Up for the Cup	Absurd, silly.
The Cat Creeps	Rubbish.
Bad Sister	Low jokes, very cheap.
War Noise	Divorced from life, unsuitable for children.

XXXIV

THIS dismal tale of alteration is not, I think, for the better. The theatre has to compete with other rivals than the cinema. Mechanical entertainment is everywhere taking the place of personal entertainment. Great crowds of adult men and women gamble on the ability of a greyhound to catch an electric hare. Millions of people gamble on horses they have never seen and would not be able to recognise if they were to see them. The mechanisation of mankind is rapidly being accomplished. We have canned music and canned actors. The cinema, the gramophone and the wireless are not only rivals to, but substitutes for, the theatre; and in all of them we have amusement by mass production. Cinemas are cheaper and more comfortable than theatres, and a picture of Charles Chaplin in, say, *The Gold Rush*, is seen in a village almost as well as it is seen in the Tivoli in the Strand. The same cannot be said of a provincial performance of a play as compared with the West End performance. Mechanisation has undeniably achieved great results and done great good. The labourer in a remote hamlet, who had no expectation of ever hearing Beethoven's *Symphony No. 7* or Offenbach's *The Tales of Hoffman*,

even if he knew that there were such things to be heard, now hears them as easily as if he were an habitué of the Queen's or the Albert Hall. The world has been widened for millions of men and women by the B.B.C., and only a newspaper proprietor, alarmed for his circulation, will deny that the wireless has been of incalculable value. The workmen who refused to allow newspapers to be published during the General Strike of 1926, saved us, if not from revolution, at all events from grave riots and loss of life. Imagine, if you dare, the state of the public mind if, during those nine days, our eyes had been affronted and our thoughts excited by streaming headlines and horrific posters and sensational reports from our own representatives. Were we not instantly reassured when, over the wireless, came the even and unemotional tones of Mr. Hibberd, the chief announcer, informing us that the train which had formerly run from Charing Cross to Elmer's End at five-eleven p.m., would in future run at five-twenty? . . . I shall not disagree with those who claim all that may justly be claimed for the machines, but shall venture only to remind them that while much has been gained, much also has been lost.

It will be sufficient to say that the great spreading of cities has been advantageous to

cinemas, but very disadvantageous to theatres. We cannot have a theatre at every street-corner, but we can almost have a cinema. The town of Sidmouth, which has six thousand inhabitants, has two cinemas, but no theatre. The temptation to drop into the picture-place round the corner, especially as the seats are cheap and comfortable, is greater than the temptation to dress up and take a long journey to the centre of the city to see a play in a theatre, especially as the seats are dear and uncomfortable, and the actors, under the direction of theory-maddened producers, are determined not to let you hear one word they say. Only a people who have an unquenchable love of the theatre would continue to endure the misery of the queue. When, on a cold and wet night, I pass the pit or gallery door of a West-End theatre, and see bleak and forlorn people sitting on camp-stools or standing, first on one cramped leg and then on the other, waiting, perhaps, for an hour to obtain admission to seats which are dear and hard, my drooping spirits are revived. A nation whose inhabitants are so devoted to the drama that they will bear these ills outside the theatre so that they may, inside it, suffer others that they know not of, will not let the drama die. I never see them but I remember Boccaccio's story in the

Decameron of Abraham, the Jew, and his friend, Jehannot de Chevigny, the Roman Catholic. "Now Jehannot, observing Abraham's loyalty and rectitude, began to be sorely vexed in spirit that the soul of one so worthy should perish for want of faith." He pleaded with Abraham to become a convert to Catholicism, but the pious Abraham replied "that he believed there was no faith sound and holy except the Jewish faith, in which he was born, and in which he meant to live and die; nor would anything ever turn him therefrom." At last, Abraham, almost exhausted by Jehannot's pleas, said, "Well, well, Jehannot, thou wouldst have me become a Christian, and I am disposed to do so, provided I first go to Rome and there see him whom thou callest God's vicar on earth, and observe what manner of life he leads and his brother cardinals with him; and if such it be that thereby, in conjunction with thy words, I may understand that thy faith is better than mine, as thou has sought to shew me, I will do as I have said: otherwise, I will remain as I am, a Jew." This assertion instantly filled Jehannot with dismay, "for if he goes to the court of Rome and sees the iniquitous and foul life which the clergy lead there, so far from turning Christian, had he been converted already, he would without doubt have relapsed

into Judaism," and with as much fervour as he had formerly pleaded with the Jew to become a Catholic, he now pleaded with him not to go to Rome. But the Jew went, and Jehannot sorrowfully resigned himself to the prospect of seeing his friend for ever damned, since, he thought, no man that had seen the Pope and the Cardinals of Rome could ever become a Christian. On Abraham's return to Paris, Jehannot was astounded to hear him say that he was in a hurry to be baptised, for the Church which could survive such cardinals and such a Pope must be the true Church! The theatre which can survive the queue must have immortal life. On no other assumption can I account for the fact that adults are willing to pay as much as four and even five shillings to wait in the wet for an inadequate share of a plank from which the stage can sometimes be seen only after the neck has almost been dislocated, from which a faint buzzing noise, made by the actors, can occasionally be heard.

XXXV

THAT brings me to the worst effect of the mechanisation of entertainment. It also brings me to the producer. In England, a producer is not the man who pays for the production of a play: in America, he is.* The producer, in England, is the man who is responsible for putting the play on the stage: he prepares it for performance. Ideally, this work would be done by the author himself, but, in practice, few authors know enough of the technicalities of the stage to be able to produce their plays. Among the more absurd of many ridiculous assertions made by George Moore was his suggestion that Shakespeare, because he was an actor, could not have written the plays attributed to him. Apart from the fact that Shakespeare seems to have been an indifferent actor, a general utility man, taking minor parts in times of emergency, Moore's remark involves an explanation of Molière's success as a dramatist which, apparently, Moore was not able to give. Authors are seldom good actors, although Molière is an

* Producers, in the English sense of the term, are called directors in America, where a producer is what the English might call a director, but generally call a manager or proprietor.

example of an author who was a good actor, but some of the most distinguished of the world's dramatists have had an intimate knowledge of the practical administration of the stage. Shakespeare, Molière, Sheridan, Tom Robertson, Ibsen and, in our own time, Pinero, Pirandello, Sierra, Harley Granville-Barker, Noel Coward, George Kaufman and Lennox Robinson, names chosen at random and from memory, had long and close acquaintance, either as actors or managers and producers of plays, with the technique of the stage. It is equally ridiculous to say, as some critics do, that actor-authors are likely to write mere exercises in technique and to produce conventional pieces with good parts for actors. Omitting Shakespeare from consideration, what was conventional and merely mechanical in the work of Molière and Ibsen? Who are freer from routine than Pirandello and Granville-Barker? The English theatre, after the time of Sheridan, a practical man of the theatre, was plunged into calamity by authors who were innocent of any ability or even desire to act, and showed no signs of emerging from its plight until an actor-author, Tom Robertson, gave it some pride in itself. His life was too brief for him to remove shame from the drama, but what he failed entirely to do, another actor-dramatist,

Arthur Pinero, magnificently achieved. This book will have entirely failed in its purpose if it does not make manifest its author's belief that the revival of the English drama was the work of Arthur Pinero, who made the path straight for the host of authors who came running at his heels. In a properly organised theatre, the author of the play would also be the producer of the play, but in our improperly organised theatre, as in everything else in our badly arranged society, the author and the producer are separate and, often, antagonistic persons.

XXXVI

THE present writer believes that the producer, as we now know him, is an affliction, and desires to see him abolished. If the author and the actor between them cannot produce the play, then the death of the drama is imminent and had better be prompt. A curse of our time is the divorce between the designer and the executant, each of whom knows little or nothing of the other's job. There ought not to be architects *and* builders: there ought only to be architects who *are* builders. We can easily see for ourselves how unfortunate has been the separation of architects from builders when we find gentlemen with a passion for drawing pretty pictures acclaiming themselves as inspired architect-artists, although they cannot design a chimney that will draw, nor a wall that will keep out the damp. Playgoers have ample knowledge of modern theatres, in London and the provinces, whose acoustic properties are appalling. There is a theatre in the West End of London which cannot be used for the production of plays because people who sit in part of the stalls are disturbed by an echo, while people who sit in one part of the dress-circle cannot hear a sound on the stage! A person who occupies a seat in the front row of the stalls of

this theatre has no hope of entering into the illusion of the play because the actors' lines, especially the sibilants in them, rattle round the roof in a hideous rivalry with the Whispering Gallery of St. Paul's; a person sitting in the dress-circle of the same theatre feels that he is watching a dumb show. It is one of a dozen theatres erected since the War in Great Britain and America with appalling acoustics, and is responsible for the legend that bankruptcies in the English theatre have been commonest in connexion with *new* theatres. Some architects acknowledge their ignorance of acoustics, but excuse themselves on the plea that nobody knows anything about it and that the ancients, whom they are expected to admire, were no better informed. But many of the ancients *were* better informed, although their ignorance, if they had been ignorant, would have been pardonable, for they lived in ages when authority in acoustics was not claimed. Acoustics to-day, it is said by some architects, is an exact science, and there is no excuse for ignorance of it by any architect. Lionel Budden, the Roscoe Professor of Architecture in Liverpool University, said, in a letter written to the editor of *The Observer* in November, 1931, "The study of acoustics was definitely established as an exact science by the late Pro-

fessor Sabine," who was Professor of Physics in Harvard University. Mr. Hope Bagenal, the leading acoustic engineer in Great Britain, in collaboration with Mr. Alexander Wood, expounded the theories of Sabine, together with his own, in a substantial and erudite work, entitled *Planning for Good Acoustics*,* and has given a practical demonstration of his ability to provide an architect with an efficient acoustic plan in the Savile Theatre, Shaftesbury Avenue, London. Mr. Charles Reilly, who was Mr. Budden's predecessor in the Roscoe Professorship, informed me that the cause of the acoustic trouble in the modern theatre was partly due to the fact that managers employ as their architects persons who might more profitably be employed in designing gin-palaces. He, too, believes that acoustics is now an exact science. The layman, knowing how many new and exceedingly expensive theatres are acoustically atrocious, is bewildered by these contradictions, especially when he finds Mr. Morley Horder, also in a letter to *The Observer* of February 14, 1932, asserting that "it is more possible, for instance, to live in a house when its form is satisfying, even though the larder window is stupidly mislaid, than in an ill-designed house where everything down to a

* Published by Methuen and Co., Ltd., at 22*s.* 6*d.*

tap is foolproof." This statement will, I suppose, comfort the householder who is almost smoked out of his home or is tortured by rheumatism because the damp steadily percolates through his walls. As he chokes and writhes, he can cry aloud in rapture, "Well, thank God, the form of my house is satisfying!"

The cost of building a theatre in the West End of London at any period since the signing of the Armistice has been, roughly, about £250,000. A man who has incurred that expense in the hope of earning a living as a theatre proprietor may justly feel aggrieved when he finds that his expert, the architect, has given him a house in which the audience either cannot hear or hears too much, and blandly informs him that he is a fool to expect a theatre with good acoustics, although Mr. Lionel Budden is ready to swear that acoustics is now an exact science! It is true that building regulations, such as those on which the London County Council insist, immensely hamper the architect. To demand, for example, a ferro-concrete, rather than a wood, proscenium is to demand a sound-absorber. A stone proscenium is said to have precisely the same effect on an actor's voice that a violin would have on music if it were made of ferro-concrete instead of wood. It is true, likewise, that the

acoustics of a building is often disarranged by subsequent alterations or additions, or because the architect's client demands a style of architecture which is either unsuitable or actually ruinous to the intention of a theatre. But if "the study of acoustics was definitely established as an exact science by the late Professor Sabine," how comes it, one may well enquire, that this exact science is not part of the general knowledge of every architect, especially of every architect who designs public buildings which are intended for auditory purposes? Sabine laid down laws of building which, apparently, are sufficient to enable any architect to cope with any bye-laws that the London County Council can devise. Yet we know the melancholy fact that handsome theatres have been built in the West End in the past ten years which are acoustically inferior to theatres that were built at least fifty years ago. We might expect an architect to warn his client that a well-planned building must not be carelessly altered or enlarged, lest its acoustic properties be ruined, but it seems that an architect rarely considers this question, and will blandly reconstruct or alter a building without the slightest regard to its primary purpose of allowing its audience to hear what is said in it.

XXXVII

THE complaint which is made against the producer of plays is a variation of the complaint made against the architect. The producer has the effect of divorcing the actor from the personal exercise of his craft by compelling him to perform exactly, and sometimes in contradiction of his own feelings, what he is told by the producer to do. There was a period when producers used to make chalk marks on the stage to indicate to an inch the extent to which an actor should move, and the craze for "direction" developed to such a pitch that many actors and actresses, especially if they are young, will not now drink a cup of tea on the stage without being told how to drink it. The actor-manager was supplanted by the producer-manager, who might, but was more likely not to, be an actor. The fact that the producer was also the manager of the theatre gave him exceptional authority, which he sometimes very brutally exercised. As he was largely, if not entirely, responsible for the selection of the plays to be performed, he had a hold on authors no less than his hold on actors, who, of course, were chosen by him, since the play had to be cast according to his ideas of the way in which it was to be "interpreted." The

word "interpretation," indeed, acquired a mystical, or perhaps one had better say a magical, meaning on a producer's lips, and playgoers were invited to see, not Shakespeare's *Hamlet* or an actor's idea of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, but an actor's execution of a producer's interpretation of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. It became common to see advertisements in this fashion:

BASIL GRANVILLE KOMISARJEVSKY
· BRIDGES CRAIG

presents

JOHN HENRY AINLEY GIELGUD

in

THE TRAGEDY OF HAMLET

By William Shakespeare.

"Notions" began to prevail on the stage. Actors, after being robbed of their individuality and initiative, were instructed to behave and speak in ways which established some belief held by the producer, but was not intended to establish any belief held by the author. A theory of impressionistic acting was invented, and actors were told that it did not matter whether the audience heard or failed to hear their lines. It would be

enough if the audience received "an impression" of the lines. A bad actor, it was said, was a man who learnt the author's words and faithfully repeated them; a good actor was a man who gave an impression of the producer's idea of the author's lines. This theory of acting was more easily exploited in prose than in poetry. A displaced or an altered word in a line of prose will not jar on sensitive ears as will a displaced or an altered word in a line of poetry. The producer, alarmed lest the poets might get the better of him, therefore invented the method of rapid delivery of poetic lines by means of which an audience would be saved from all possibility of hearing what the actors were saying. Hamlet would charge into his soliloquies as if he were trying to put them to confusion instead of uttering aloud his thoughts, and the best actor would be the man who could say the greatest number of words in a minute. Accompanying these ideas of impressionistic acting and swift delivery of lines, came another idea—naturalistic acting—which, although it appeared to contradict the theory of impressionistic acting, in fact agreed with it, since it ended in the same result: inaudibility. The theory of naturalistic acting was invented in reaction against the style of acting which is generally called "theatrical." Actors, in the days

when the player was preferred to the author, indulged in bouts of rhodomontade, lung-opening, and would hurl great quantities of words at an audience as if they were stones and were intended to stun. The naturalists, upset by these bursts of eloquence, declared that this way of speaking words was mere ranting, and they demanded a method of delivering lines which would be more life-like. Henry the Fifth was to call his friends to the breach once more as if he were Mr. Sidney Webb exhorting members of the Fabian Society to propagate the principles of the Minority Report on the Reform of the Poor Law. (Mr. Harley Granville-Barker actually demanded that a dramatist should make a play out of the Minority Report!) Gradually the old style of acting disappeared, and was succeeded by the new style, in which actors and actresses behaved on the stage as if they were in their own homes. Acting, indeed, seemed as if it might disappear altogether, and be replaced by behaving. The player was to forget the audience: he was to talk in Drury Lane or His Majesty's as if he were actually in a flat in Stoke Newington! . . . The complaints of playgoers that they had paid large sums of money to hear what the actors were saying were disregarded, or the complainants were told that their ideas of

playgoing were obsolete, and that they had better develop their sense of reality and try to acquire keener powers of perception. It was then that the auditorium began to empty, for playgoers either felt that they had been cheated out of their money or that they were eavesdroppers, attempting to hear the private conversations on the stage. The complaint of the actor, as distinct from the behaver, was as fierce as the complaint of the playgoer. Apart from the fact that the actor incurred the odium that was due to the producer in precisely the same way that the porter or guard receives abuse that is due to the directors of the railway, the actor often found himself thwarted, rather than assisted, by the producer who would compel him to play a part in a way which, instinctively, he felt to be wrong. Reasonable producers, of course, listened to the suggestions or doubts of experienced actors, but unreasonable producers presently began to prevail in the theatre, and actors were drilled, not rehearsed, into their parts. Incompetent actors, unable to earn a living by acting, announced themselves as producers, and actually instructed experienced players in the performance of their parts, although they were themselves incapable of acting these parts. A host of dull-witted people,

having fortified themselves with the works of Mr. Edward Gordon Craig, arose to reform the stage, and there was much spurious metaphysical argument about the four-fold hierarchy of the theatre, in which the author, the actor, the painter and the producer were alleged to be equals, although the producer was obviously betraying the compact. When the electrician began to claim a place in the hierarchy and to say that his lighting system was just as important as the play or the performance, even the most infatuated follower of Mr. Gordon Craig began to doubt the validity of this idea.

XXXVIII

In America, the new theory enjoyed the greatest popularity, and was presented in a pseudo-democratic fashion, although the producer was plainly professing an allegiance to democracy which he really felt for dictatorship. In a singular work, called *The Theatre of To-morrow*, Mr. Kenneth MacGowan, who has dabbled in management, writes in the delirious style which is used by nearly all earnest students of the drama who are disciples of Mr. Gordon Craig. Mr. Craig himself indulges in whimsical-whamsical stuff at great length in expensive books, but there is genius in him, even if it be undisciplined, and much may be forgiven him that cannot be forgiven anyone else. Mr. MacGowan, who acclaimed Mr. Craig as "the greatest force in the theatre since Ibsen" in his book, *The Theatre of To-morrow*, but afterwards, in *Continental Stagecraft*, gave this credit to Max Reinhardt, talks of the theatre "as a place where beauty can be made without a backdrop, actor or playwright. It is a place of consecration that takes all of a man, all of a dozen men in one man." The drama of the future, he rhetorically asserts, will have:

> a loose, free shape with many scenes, less talk and more vitality in its production. It is not so easy to grasp its content. Yet even there we have indications already of broad trends which it seems difficult for the future drama to escape. Perhaps the simplest and surest statement that I should risk is this: it will attempt to transfer to dramatic art the illumination of those deep and vigorous and eternal processes of the human soul which the psychology of Freud and Jung has given us through study of the unconscious, striking to the heart of emotion and linking our commonest life of to-day with emanations of the primitive radical mind.

"There's richness," as Mr. Squeers said when he ladled out the brown concoction called porridge to the pupils at Dotheboys Hall. But not so rich as the stuff which Mr. Gordon Craig uses in describing his two theatres, the Durable and the Perishable. The former is to be built of "gold, silver, copper, bronze and other precious metals; diamonds, emeralds, rubies and other precious stones; lapis-lazuli, crystals, ivory, ebony, malachite, marble, mosaic, glass stained with precious colours, silk finer than we have yet made," while the latter is to have:

> a stage held up by supports as thin as storks' legs, trimmed with the plumage of birds, and here and there a long string of pearls hanging. Powder, beautiful powder all over the floor, perfumes—but here I

> am taking in not only the place, but the scene, costume and all. Little tapers of the finest wax. Not enough tapers?—then bring in a thousand more in silver sticks. No, I think we will have crystal. Each candle perfumed, and perfuming the air as it burns. Such a quantity of beautiful lace, everything spick and span—and perishable.

This flapdoodle is perhaps intended to be taken rhapsodically, but one cannot be sure that Mr. Craig is merely being eloquent, and is not in deadly earnest. The history of his attempt to produce *Hamlet* at the Moscow Art Theatre, as told in Constantin Stanislavsky's *My Life in Art*, is illuminating to read. The story begins with an account of the way in which Craig was clothed from the properties of a piece, most aptly entitled *Trouble from Reason*, so that he might not die of pneumonia. Mr. Craig, while enjoying an icy bath, explained his theories about the theatre to Stanislavsky:

> Further, Craig said that every work of art must be made of dead material, stone, marble, bronze, canvas, paper, paint, and fixed forever in artistic form. According to these fundamentals, the living material of the actor's body, which endlessly changes and is never the same, was not useful for the purposes of creation, and Craig denied actors, especially those of them who had striking or beautiful individuality and who were not of themselves artistic creations—like

Eleonora Duse or Tommaso Salvini, to take two instances. Craig could not bear the usual behaviour of actors and especially actresses.

"Women," he said, "ruin the theatre. They take a bad advantage of the power and influence they exercise over men. They use these evilly, and bring intrigues, favouritism and flirtation into the realm of art."

Craig dreamed of a theatre without men and women, without actors. He wanted, to supplant them with marionettes who had no bad habits or bad gestures, no painted faces, no exaggerated voices, no smallness of soul, no worthless ambitions. The marionettes would have cleansed the atmosphere of the theatre, they would have given a high seriousness to the enterprise, and the dead material from which they were made would have given Craig an opportunity to hint at that Actor who lived in the soul, the imagination, and the dreams of Craig himself.

The upshot of the visit to Moscow was that Craig "agreed to become a stage director in the theatre, and accepted service for a year. He was entrusted with the production of *Hamlet*, and left at once for Florence to prepare his sketches and plans. After a year passed, Craig returned with a complete plan for the production of *Hamlet*." The play was to be produced in a setting "of simple convex screens," such as were subsequently used in a single production at the Abbey Theatre, Dublin. "They hinted at archi-

tectural forms, corners, niches, streets, alleys, halls, towers, and so on." Craig's exposition of his ideas seems to have enchanted Stanislavsky and his colleagues only for as long as Craig was expounding them. The scene in which Hamlet speaks the soliloquy, "To be or not to be," could not be put on the stage:

> In his sketch Craig expressed himself in the following manner. There was a long palace corridor, grey and gloomy, that had lost in the eyes of Hamlet its former royal golden glow. The walls were blackened, and hardly noticeable shadows crept up these walls from beneath. These shadows personified the earthly life that had become hateful to Hamlet, the frozen horror that took hold of Hamlet after the death of his father, and especially after he had for a moment gazed into the next world. It is of his earthly life that he said with horror and disgust, "To be," that is, to continue to live, to exist, to shudder, to suffer and to torture himself. The other side of Hamlet was pictured on the sketch by a bright swath of light, in the sunny rays of which appeared and disappeared the silvery figure of a woman who tempted Hamlet to come to her. This was what Hamlet called "Not to be," that is, not to exist in this unworthy little world, to go out of it, to die. The interplay of darkness and light was to symbolise the struggle in Hamlet between death and life. All this was wonderfully pictured in the sketch, but I, as the stage director, could not bring it to life on the stage.

But before the time for translating Craig's airy, fairy, Sairy Ann sketches into practical stage sets had arrived, Craig, "having told us of all his dreams and plans of production . . . left for Italy, and Sulerjitsky and I began to fulfil the ideas of the chief stage director and initiator of the production. This moment saw the beginning of our tortures."

> Craig dreamed of having the entire performance take place without intermissions or the use of curtains. The public was to come to the theatre and see no stage whatsoever. The screens were to serve as the architectural continuation of the auditorium and were to harmonise with it. But at the beginning of the performance the screens were to move gracefully, and their lines were to take on new combinations. At last they were to grow still. From somewhere there would be light that would give them a new picturesqueness, and all present in the theatre were to be carried away in their dreams to some other world which was only hinted at by the artist, but which became real by virtue of the colours of the imaginations of the spectators. . . .

The attempt to stage the "To Be or Not To Be" scene in accordance with the producer's sketches ignominiously failed:

> But this disappointment was not our last. Another unpleasant surprise was in store for poor Craig. We could not find a natural material for the making of

the screens. We tried everything—iron, copper, and other metals. But it was only necessary to think of the weight of such screens to forget metal forever. To use such screens we would have been forced to rebuild the entire theatre and to instal electric scenery shifts. We tried wooden screens, and showed them to Craig, but neither he nor our stage hands desired to move the terrible and dangerous walls. These threatened to fall at any moment and to crush all who stood on the stage. We tried cork screens, but even these were too heavy. In the end of things we had to make peace with simple theatrical unpainted canvas on light wooden frames. Their light tone was out of harmony with the gloomy mood of the palace. But, nevertheless, Craig decided to use them, for they took on the variegated colours and half-tones of electric lighting which were entirely lost when darker screens were used. The play of light was very necessary for the interpretation of the mood of the play during the realisation of the scenic ideas of Craig.

But here we met another trouble. The great screens could not stand up well and would fall. If a single screen fell, all the others followed it. We invented countless methods for preventing the fall of the screens, but all of them demanded special scenic construction and architectural changes for which we had neither the technical means nor the money.

The shifting of the screens demanded many long rehearsals with the stage hands. For a long time we were unsuccessful; now a workman would unexpectedly jump to the forestage and show himself to

the spectators; now a crack would form between two moving screens and the audience would see the life backstage; now the back of the scenery would show; now a screen would become stuck in one place. And one hour before the first-night performance there was a real catastrophe. I was sitting in the auditorium and rehearsing the manœuvres of shifting the screens for the last time. The rehearsal ended. The scenery was put up for the first scene of the play and the stage hands were allowed to rest and drink tea before the beginning of the performance. The stage grew empty, the auditorium was as quiet as a grave. But suddenly one of the screens began to lean sideways more and more, then fell on the screen next to it, and the entire scenery fell to the floor like a house of cards. There was the crack of breaking wooden frames, the sound of ripping canvas, and then the formless mass of broken and torn screens all over the stage. The audience was already entering the theatre, when nervous work to rebuild the scene began behind the lowered curtain. In order to avoid a catastrophe during the performance itself, we were forced to deny ourselves the joy of shifting the screens in full view of the audience and to accept the help of the traditional theatrical curtain, which coarsely but loyally hid the hard work of the stage hands.

XXXIX

THE real trouble with Mr. Gordon Craig, as with many other idealists, is that fundamentally they are not idealists at all, but complete materialists. Mr. Craig cannot conquer materials because he will not submit to them. He demands of metal more than it can give. He rejects the human face because it will not behave like papier-mâché. He tells us that great drama "takes us beyond reality," and declares that "the human face, the realest of all things," cannot express things which are beyond reality; and yet, what the face of a thinking person cannot do, Mr. Craig declares can be done by the rigid face of an unthinking mask. He is enormously preoccupied by materials, so that he harps continually on the construction of the theatre rather than on the spirit of the drama. He actually goes so far in materialism as almost to suggest that a statue made by da Vinci was of less value than a small head of Buddha in his possession, because the former was made of clay and quickly perished, whereas the latter is made of bronze and is lasting! Is this not to confuse mere persistence with art, to imagine that a thing which endures for a thousand years is more beautiful than a thing which only endures for a century? He is not

definite in anything, but least of all in the meaning of his terms. He refers, in *The Theatre Advancing*, to "the perishable things in Nature —the ugly little insects and the more beautiful insects; in fact, the whole short-lived creation" in a way which indicates that for him artistic durability is a question of mere power to continue in being. But all these short-lived creatures are short-lived only in comparison with long-lived creatures. If length of life is to be the test of artistic durability, how futile seems the life of a man in comparison with that of a tortoise; how insignificant and perishable appears Leonardo da Vinci by the side of Methuselah! The career of a butterfly, judged by that test, is a brief period of hysterical fluttering compared with the placidity and poise of a brachiopod. Attempting to persuade us that the Durable Theatre should be built of the most costly materials, he begs us to consider Notre Dame and Cologne Cathedral, "where they guard gorgeous vestments of gold and silver cloth, jewelled and embroidered with priceless works of art."

> In what we call the Decoration of our theatre . . . all would be just as durable and as precious as the building itself. There would be no attempt to produce what we call "theatrical illusion." For instance,

> we should not paint a tree or put up an imitation tree so as best to copy in colour and texture a real tree. No more than in a cathedral they put up a wooden copy of the original Cross. Doubtless the Cross on which the Saviour was crucified was an ordinary and rough wooden structure, but when it reaches the cathedral it becomes a precious work of art, in no way realistic. Why do they make this transformation? Because it is too good a thing ever to be imitated; because it would be said that they were pretending to put up the real Cross. . . .

It seems to me that in these passages Mr. Craig begins with a whimsy-whamsy which he proceeds to take seriously, and that he ends in utter confusion of thought. The difference between the true Cross and that which is suspended from the roof of Westminster Cathedral is the difference between a fact and a symbol, between a thing intended for immediate, practical purposes and a thing intended for permanent, mystical purposes. The true Cross was not decorated as subsequent crosses were because it had no religious significance for its makers, but was intended to be used as a gibbet on which to execute condemned prisoners. The gorgeous vestments in Notre Dame and Cologne Cathedral are "guarded" because they are too rich and rare for use. I doubt whether they were ever used for other than very ceremonial occasions, for the

fate of a thing which is too beautiful is that those who made it rarely use it, while those who inherit it never use it at all. If a prince or a millionaire were to provide Mr. Craig with his Durable Theatre, decorated with rubies and lapis-lazuli, does anyone imagine he would use it for the performance of plays? Not he. He would turn it into a museum, carefully "guarded" by handsomely-costumed attendants, to which members of the general public would be admitted on appointed days after production of a certificate of good character and a permit from an influential person.

XL

MR. CRAIG is generally regarded as the pioneer of the impractical producers, although his right to that title is disputed by the followers of Adolph Appia. He has had more influence in the United States than in any other country, and has raised a host of disciples, of whom Mr. Robert Edmund Jones and Mr. Norman Bel-Geddes may be said to be the leaders. Luckily, however, a reaction against Mr. Craig has set in with some violence. Mr. Lee Simonson, a distinguished American artist who has designed almost all the sets used by the Theatre Guild of New York, published a book, entitled *The Stage is Set*, in which he trounced Mr. Craig so severely that no English publisher will run the risk of issuing the book in Great Britain, lest he be sued for libel. It is the best book on stage-sets that has yet been written, and it is unfortunate for men and women of the English theatre that they cannot obtain easy access to it.* I have called Mr. Craig a producer, but, in fact, he is not a producer at all: he is a stage-artist, a designer of sets. So are each of the other artists whose names are mentioned in this section. Mr. Lee

* *The Stage is Set.* By Lee Simonson. New York Harcourt, Brace & Co. Five dollars.

Simonson does not produce plays: he decorates them. Mr. Craig may have rehearsed actors in their parts in a play—the state in which he left them may easily be guessed—but he is not a producer in the sense in which that word is generally used. How to define a producer is hard. He may be a person hired to instruct the players in their performance, and with no duties or obligations beyond that job, or he may be the dictator of a playhouse, as Mr. Basil Dean was, as Mr. Max Reinhardt is, settling the policy of the theatre, choosing and casting and rehearsing the plays. Whatever he is, he is an entirely modern invention. Henry Irving knew him not, and would have had him thrown out of the Lyceum if he had dared to put his nose inside it. To say that is not, of course, to say that plays were formerly produced in a hugger-mugger fashion, each actor jogging along as he pleased. Irving was his own director. So was John Hare. So were all the great actors. And they were as arbitrary in their ruling as the most temperamental director in Hollywood. But the difference between these producers and the producers of to-day is this, that the former were themselves great actors, whereas the latter are often men who either cannot act at all or men of mediocre ability. Ellen Terry says of Hare that he "was

one of the best stage managers"—the name which "producers" and "directors" now disdain to use—"that I have met during the whole of my long experience in the theatre. . . . The members of his company were his, body and soul, while they were rehearsing. He gave them fifteen minutes for lunch, and any actor or actress who was foolish or unlucky enough to be a minute later, was sorry afterwards. Mr. Hare was peppery and irascible, and lost his temper easily." Her account of the way in which Irving put a play on the stage is an impressive account of extraordinary patience and industry, but although he drilled his players in their parts, he did not allow them to put their brains to sleep. Ellen Terry *studied* her parts, and by studying them she did not mean that she merely memorised her words: she examined the disposition and nature of the people she had to portray. Wilson Barrett, according to Miss Lillah McCarthy, was a very exacting stage-manager. "He allowed us little peace. When we were not rehearsing there were frequent lessons in fencing and voice production. When we were on tour even our leisure was organised. On Sunday evening we would be summoned to his hotel to hear him read a play or talk to us. His was a school of discipline and authority. Even the

books we read were chosen by 'The Chief.' It was an autocracy of the theatre, and Barrett insisted that we should have little or no life beyond the stage and his vigilance." In spite of the sternness of this direction, actors were not reduced to the state of automata. They still had judgment here, as Macbeth said, and could contradict a director with the force of accomplished craftsmen. "I think this line would do better if I said it up here!" Or down there. Or in this way! . . . To-day, direction is given by an expensive gentleman who flatters himself that he has unique power to interpret an author's meaning, that the intention of the dramatist has been specially, almost divinely, communicated to him, and that this intention will not be perceived by the players without his "interpretation." Old players, secure in their accomplishment, often disregard the instructions of the producer, knowing them to be foolish and fatal to the desired effect, but young players, anxious to please influential people, and ambitious to rise to high places in their profession, abase themselves before producers and allow any individuality they possess to shrivel. The chief result of the producer's intrusion into the theatre is that "types" are common on the stage, while actors and actresses are rare and becoming rarer.

Formerly, when a company was engaged for a season, the players had to deploy themselves over a variety of parts. Miscasting occasionally occurred, but no oftener than it does in these days of casting to type. The actor had to *act*, and he became very skilful in adapting his personality to dissimilar parts. But the producer who disdains individuality in actors is not obliged to produce a play with a standing company, but is allowed to choose his cast according to type.* This, he says in effect, is a So-and-so part. I must engage So-and-so for it! Or if So-and-so is not available, then someone who gives a very good imitation of So-and-so. There are actors and actresses on the West End stage who have performed one part for the whole of their life in the theatre. So long as the part is popular, they obtain employment, but when taste changes or they become too old to play the part, these types vanish from the theatre, having no technique which will enable them to take other parts. The smoothness which is seen in well-produced

* This statement does not apply to provincial repertory theatres, such as the Playhouse, Liverpool, where Mr. William Armstrong has to produce plays with a permanent company. The result of this compulsion is that the Playhouse, like The Old Vic., where a similar practice prevails, has become one of the finest training-grounds for young actors in the kingdom.

plays is spurious. It is not the smoothness of accomplished acting: it is the smoothness of cunning casting to type. Sir Arthur Pinero is said to have begun the practice of type-casting by picking his players instead of making the permanent company at, say, St. James's adapt itself to his requirements. It was an odd thing for an author who began as an actor to do. The practice, by whomsoever it was begun, has had an appalling effect on acting, an effect which would be clear even to the casual observer of our stage were it not for the fact that the supply of actors in the West End is maintained by the repertory theatres. If that source of skilled players dries up, our plight will be terrible.

XLI

It is the mechanisation of actors which is the most alarming feature of the modern theatre. Acting has hitherto been the expression on the stage of individualities. All players, in their degrees, were people of remarkable quality which they could pour into various shapes. A comedian might be so highly individual that he could not be contained within the dimensions of a play at all, and had therefore to go to the music-halls, where he could revel, even riot, in his own exuberance. The extent of the change in the theatre of my own time can, indeed, be most plainly proved by referring the reader to the fact that the music-hall, essentially a place of individualities, has almost ceased to exist, in the sense, that is to say, in which Dan Leno and Marie Lloyd and Chirgwin, the White-Eyed Kaffir, and Eugene Stratton and Little Tich knew it. The London Pavilion, the Oxford and the Tivoli, together with the Middlesex or Old Mo., and the Canterbury and the Bedford and the Paragon, were places where a man could see several superb turns in a programme of, say, a dozen to twenty different items. The music-hall comedian had to make his effects instantly and with the minimum of aid from apparatus

and scenery. He had to project his personality into a vast building, and subdue every person in it. Dan Leno, standing in front of a crudely-painted cloth, unaided by a chorus or magnificent lighting effects or any spectacular devices, could keep fifteen hundred men and women enthralled by his humour. Marie Lloyd, a genius of low comedy, depended on herself for her effects: she did not run to the dressmaker and the lighting expert and the chorus-master and the scene-painter for help. The mechanisation of acting killed the music-hall comedian. All, all are gone, and the halls in which they performed have been diverted to other and base uses. The Tivoli has dropped to the level of a cinema, where pop-eyed illiterates lie about in heaps, gaping at the Garbo! . . . The revue, which is the old music-hall programme, titivated and mechanised, makes its members depend on apparatus and spectacular effects and direction. A comedian in a revue can make scarcely any impression on an audience when he depends on himself. He must have the help of elaborate lighting effects, scenery, clothes, engines, apparatus of all sorts, and a chorus. I once saw, a few years after the War, an eminent revue actress who excites immense enthusiasm in an audience when she is helped by about fifty people,

attempt to stir the same audience as Dan Leno and Marie Lloyd habitually did, by singing alone before a front cloth. The audience did not appear to know that she was there. It would be absurd to suggest that personality is absent from our stage. It can never be absent from it, since acting, even in the most mechanised form, is dependent, in the last resort, on personality. We can even observe personality creeping into the moving-pictures! . . . But personality to-day is over-subordinated to machinery in every form in the modern theatre, and players live less on their own natures than on instructions from producers. If individuality might be most plainly perceived in the music-halls, the lack of it may be most plainly perceived in the cinema, where, the higher film-critics assert, it is an offence for a performer even to try to act: the highest art, according to these Bolshevists' minds, is a photograph of a blacksmith being a blacksmith. Not many film-actors try to act, or are capable of acting, and it is notorious that all the bad actors when they die go to Hollywood. But even in the cinema, personality will conquer machinery, and Mr. Chaplin, who began as a music-hall comedian, and is therefore well-trained in the display of personality, will subdue the two-dimensions of the screen and treat them

as if they were three. I cannot better inform the readers of the extent to which amusement has been mechanised than by inviting them to compare the circus which Mr. Bertram Mills magnificently directs at Olympia, with the circus which was common forty years ago. The performer who depends most upon his own nature and intimacy with his audience is the clown, and it is the clown who suffers most severely at Olympia. The place is too big. Even Dan Leno could not be funny in the Albert Hall. All the circuses of my youth, Lord George Sanger's and Ginnett's among others, were places in which clowns prevailed. They larked about the tan, upsetting ring-masters and cheeking haughty equestriennes and clumsily imitating acrobats, until we held our sides. There were seldom more than three or four clowns in one circus, and never more than two in the arena at one time. At Olympia, we see not less than a score of clowns at a time, but there is not a laugh in the whole twenty. They have been degraded from their ancient and honourable function of rousing laughter to that of briefly occupying attention while the attendants, more important than they, remove or place apparatus or rake the tan. The performers themselves are so bedizened with flashing machines that their courage and skill are

scarcely apparent. The whole circus has been reduced to a great spectacle, and it is perhaps inevitable that the student should have to attribute its degradation to the American, Barnum, who caused a stir in England in my youth by inviting us to see three circuses at once. We were so busy trying to see what was going on in each of the three arenas that we did not see a complete turn. Size began to be admired more than skill, and spectacles more than people, despite the warning of the past that when spectacle is most admired, degeneracy is near at hand.

XLII

WHAT, you are probably now enquiring, is to be the end of all this? Is the theatre a dying institution, as some believe, or is it to renew its life in a slightly different form? It has yet to endure the effects of television, when the villager, at his ease by his fire, will turn a little handle and see a superb performance of a play in London or New York. Will this not kill the provincial theatre? I do not think so. To begin with, the televisioned play will, like the moving-picture, have to be of a character that will enable it to please great crowds of very dissimilar people: that is to say, it will have to be elementary in mental and spiritual quality, although very elaborate in its mechanical parts. Technically, the moving-picture is superb. Its photography, its mechanical apparatus, all that goes to make it a picture, is remarkably well developed and fine; but its intellectual and spiritual content is indescribably silly. The average moving-picture, generally speaking, is written by the half-educated for the half-witted. How many films will bear revival as Shakespeare's plays have borne it? Does anyone want to see a moving-picture more than once? Not any more than he wants to look at a cross-word puzzle

after he has solved it. We have said the final word of condemnation of the moving-picture when we say that it cannot put a poem on the screen, although the theatre, without the film's enormous resources, has put great poems on the stage for centuries. The televisioned play, then, like the moving-picture, will have to be a thing of mass production, aiming at the greatest common denominator. It must be shallow or spectacular, because it will have an audience so various in character that only shallow and spectacular effects will be appreciated. When we go to a theatre in a foreign country of whose language we are ignorant, we nearly always choose one in which a spectacular or musical piece is being performed. We avoid the highest when we see it because we cannot understand it. There is another factor to be considered: the remuneration of the actor and the author. Periodically, someone exclaims at the indifference of actors and authors to the rewards offered to them by the B.B.C. Why do not I, for example, write a play for the wireless? Those who ask the question obviously have simple minds. I do not know what sum is paid by the B.B.C. for broadcast plays, but I shall be surprised if it amounts to a hundred pounds. To write a play for the wireless is just as hard as to write one for

the theatre, and takes no less time. It is impossible to say how many people listen to a broadcast play, but if we suppose that only a tenth of the estimated number of listeners do so, then we may believe that two million men and women hear each broadcast play in one night. But if two million people were to witness the performance of a play in a theatre, the author would be drawing royalties for about five years. If I had written *The First Mrs. Fraser* for the B.B.C., it would have been performed twice at the most, and Sir John Reith would probably have thought he was doing me very handsomely in paying me fifty pounds for each performance. The firm which produced *Journey's End* made a profit of more than £50,000. Mr. Sherriff, the author of the play, probably made as much. That is, I think, a factor in the situation which is likely to have a considerable bearing on it. The actors as well as the authors will go where they can obtain the best reward, and unless television can offer them at least as much money as is offered by the stage, television will have to put up with the second and third and tenth best.

But even if that were not so, I believe that the theatre will continue as a separate institution because the mass-production theatres will not be able to supply the demands of individuals of

taste. Theatres may become smaller, although I doubt if a really successful theatre can be conducted on a capacity of less than a thousand people, and they will certainly become cheaper, but they will also, I think, increasingly become the resort of the intelligent.

If we may suppose, as some say we may, that the development of machinery will result in a working-day for everybody of two or three hours, then we must suppose that a prime problem of the future for every man and woman will be the spending of their leisure. I am less impressed by the utopian claims made for the engineers than the engineers would wish me to be, especially when I read enthusiastic accounts of machines whose purpose will be to watch the other machines to see that they do not idle or fall into disrepair, and I have no wish to have my own labours limited to two hours a day. Indeed, I do not see how skill is to be kept in the world if men may not practise complicated jobs for as long as they please. How is a man to become a doctor or a surgeon, a painter or a pianist, if he is forbidden to tire himself in a long apprenticeship? But these are individual occupations, and we may believe that while those who practise them will demand, and not easily be denied, the right to work at them as long as they like, there

may be an organisation of routine jobs which will enable masses of men and women to spend only an hour or two in labour and the rest of their working time in recreation. What will they do with all this leisure? Many of them, no doubt, will spend it very much as they spend their leisure now, but it is probable that those who work at routine jobs, pulling levers and pushing buttons and wistfully watching machines, will want to fill their leisure with an occupation which makes some demand on their minds or their personal skill, and I foresee a great increase in the revival of handicrafts, a great effort at the development of individual idiosyncrasies, a more widely-spread attempt to enliven and enrich the imagination with art and learning. If that time comes, the theatre will rise from its ashes, a more brilliant bird than that which perished in the flames.

It may have to endure distresses more trying than those it has already endured. The Chancellor's strain on our purses is unlikely to be relaxed for at least a decade, and may never be relaxed. On the contrary, it may be increased, and a time come when we shall have to take what entertainment the Government thinks fit to give us. Unless the theatre can adjust itself to this economic stringency, it will perish, or become so

emaciated that it will drag out a very miserable existence. Multitudes of people have to go to the moving-pictures for their entertainment, because they cannot afford to go to the reserved seats in the theatre and they will not stand in queues for a share of a plank in the gallery or the pit from which they can scarcely see the stage and cannot hear what is said on it. The point will be made plain by a passage from a letter I received from a reader of *The Observer* who had read an article of mine on the rivalry of the cinema and the stage:

> My wife and I would always choose a play before a picture if we could. We thoroughly enjoy the theatre, and are far from being film fans. Yet I find on looking through my diary for this year that we have visited the films twenty-one times and the theatre but four times. In our twenty-one visits to the cinema, we have seen some fifty films at a total cost of £1 15*s.* 5*d.*, or 1*s.* 8*d.* per entertainment. Our four visits to the theatre have cost us £2 2*s.* 7*d.*, or 10*s.* 8*d.* per entertainment. . . . To theatre costs, I have added fares to the West End. Our local cinema is at the end of the road.

That is why many people go to the pictures! But I do not despair of seeing intelligent people again in the theatre. It is true that the circumstances of the time prevail against them, and

that eminent men are too busy to have much leisure for the playhouse, but even the busiest men must have recreation, and the sad thought strikes every lover of the theatre that when civilised and distinguished men and women think of amusing themselves to-day, they seldom think of going to a play. The young who grew up in the War and are now any age between twenty-five and thirty may, I think, be regarded as a lost tribe. Their semi-illiteracy, their shallow minds and their extraordinarily trivial interests astound and sadden their elders. They are part of the penalty we are paying for the War. But Nature, when she loses in one direction, gallantly endeavours to win in another; and anyone who has even a small acquaintance with education, knows that there is emerging from our schools and colleges a great host of boys and girls, who are abler and better-educated and more serious-minded than the generation which preceded them. I am filled with hope when I learn that many of them are bored by moving-pictures and are turning towards the theatre for entertainment. If we can give them a playhouse that is materially as good and financially as cheap as the cinema, we need not fear the rivalry of any other institution; for the theatre is the place of living men and women, and live people are more

interesting than photographs. The history of the drama is the history of a movement from out of doors to indoors. The play came from sunlight to candlelight, and the candlelight gave way to gas, and the gas to electricity. What next? Will it come out again to the sun, or shall we see a new light?

XLIII

In my time, the theatre has moved from personality to machinery, and has become a place of general ability rather than a place of prevailing people. It has ceased to be the chief, almost the exclusive, means of entertainment. And some cheerfully announce its imminent demise. But it lives on, and presently, when adult minds prevail again, it will revive. Its rival, the cinema, has not produced a single author of even small renown, nor are any of its players, even the most popular of them, more widely renowned among discerning men and women than Molière, David Garrick, Sarah Siddons, Edmund Kean, Rachel, Salvini, Bernhardt, Mounet-Sully, Irving, Ellen Terry, Lucien Guitry, Duse, and Stanislavsky. When the moving-picture can be associated, as the drama can, with names so potent with art and imagination as those of Æschylus, Euripides and Sophocles, Shakespeare, Molière, Sheridan, Goethe, Ibsen and Bernard Shaw, its power to prevail over the play may be evident. But that time is not yet, and it appears unlikely to come. Even in these days, when the

theatre sails through the doldrums, a good play will outlast the most popular picture. Can creatures of celluloid prevail over living actors? Not in a world of living men and women!

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