

WELLSPRINGS OF THE DRAMA

Where the Plays Come From and Why They Come.

ART IN STRETCHING TRIFLES

Best Judge of American Plays—The Napoleon of the Foreign Market—Selling Plays to the Stars.

Where do all the plays come from? Is it as interesting a question as it seems to be? It is, at all events, a good deal more easily answered. Where they all go to is not so simply determined, and, indeed, it doesn't matter much what becomes of most of them. One thing is fairly certain: all the plays that amount to anything come sooner or later to America, not to mention a great many that amount to less than nothing. Some of them are greeted with an enthusiasm that does not diminish until they have visited every nook and corner of what is usually described as "our fair land"—all the way, in fact, from the most expensive and pretentious theaters of Broadway to the "ten, twenty and thirty" playhouses of the circuit.

Others are met at the pier by the battle-axe brigades and speedily put out of their misery, while still others are allowed to die lingering, but still early deaths, on the theory, perhaps, that sudden demise is too good for them.

Not all our plays, of course, are immigrants, but a large number of them are, and of these a great majority come, like our language, from England. Like our fashions, come from Paris, and a few are "made in Germany." Little of the Italian output has reached us since Americans got to understand what D'Annunzio really means. Now and then something sneaks in from Russia or Spain. The Scandinavian importations consist, of course, with the passing of the Viking of the drama, Ibsen.

Imported Plays. Nine out of every ten of the imported plays get to America through the hands of just one man, Charles Frohman. The English and French fields are his special care, and he goes over them with a fine-tooth comb and a microscope. Mr. Frohman has been called the Napoleon of the drama, and there's rumor that he doesn't mind it a bit. And, perhaps, if one could forget Waterloo, the characterization would seem more apt. But there isn't the slightest danger of Mr. Frohman ever meeting his Waterloo. Napoleon knew perfectly well before ever he entered that justly popular battle that he was taking chances.

But Mr. Frohman doesn't believe in taking chances. He lets the other fellows do that. At least 90 per cent of the plays that Mr. Frohman produces in America have been already produced by somebody else, either in Paris or London, and liked a good deal there by persons in the habit of spending money in theaters. Mr. Frohman's formula is: "What England or France have liked, America will like, too," and experience has shown that it is in the whole a fairly workable formula. Occasionally it fails. It failed, in the case of J. M. Barrie's gastric comedy, "Little Mary." London liked that immensely. America begged to differ. "It was too subtle for you," said London. "We don't like plays about our stomachs," retorted America.

Few, indeed, are the French or English dramas of consequence upon the American rights of whose plays Mr. Frohman has not a practical option, even before the plays are written. J. M. Barrie, Henry Arthur Jones, Sir Arthur Wing Pinero, Captain Robert Marshall, H. V. Esmond, R. C. Carton, Sir Conan Doyle, W. Somerset Maugham, George Bernard Shaw and many others are virtually under contract to him. And the beauty of it, from the manager's point of view, is that if their plays fail in London it isn't necessary to bring them to America at all. This is highly desirable, but it's a trifle inconsistent with the Napoleonic legend.

Restricted Home Market. Occasionally Mr. Frohman does produce a play by an American dramatist, but it is a rare exception when the result is not a man of proved ability, such as playwright Augustus Thomas, who would like to be a politician, or the late Clyde Fitch, who didn't care to be. It is said that Mr. Frohman has safe and safe crammed to bursting with plays bought of American authors which will in all probability never be produced. One native dramatist boasts that he has received \$500 in "advance royalties" or other payments on plays of his that Mr. Frohman will never produce. However that may be, it is safe to say that if any play of English or French origin gets into this country

Some Things You Want to Know

The Troubles of Spain

The spirit of intolerance is the chief cause of the troubles of Spain. Francisco Ferrer was intolerant when, in advocating the modern school, he declared that "all religions are based on ignorance and imposture and aim at exploitation and oppression." The clerical party in Spain was intolerant when it hounded Ferrer to a martyr's death, despite the pleas of the Vatican. Today is the 12th anniversary of the last public burning of a heretic under the Spanish Inquisition. And yet Spain still finds itself in deeper politico-religious disorder than any other nation in Christendom. From the day when the Moors and the Christians were sworn enemies each of the other, hating with that sincere hatred which is satisfied with nothing less than the absolute extermination of the object of its hate; from the day when the Cross and the Crescent were the emblems of a war to the death, there have been few eras of peace in the Iberian peninsula. Unfortunately the fanatic intolerance of the Moorish Mohammedan so impressed itself upon the Spanish Christian that it never has been eradicated.

There have been a few reigns in which religious liberty has been displayed, but these but serve to emphasize the long story of intolerant oppression of independent thought. From the time when Averroes, the philosopher, was sentenced to do homage at the door of the mosque, while every true Musselman who came before to his face, there has been little regard for the conscience of others. Averroes, infidel that he was, bore his affliction with the spirit of a martyr, saying, as they spat in his face: "Let me die the death of a philosopher." Francisco Ferrer with his last breath, shouted: "Long live the modern school!"

Through all the centuries of woe in Spain the chief authors of cruelty have been men who may not be charged with evil intention. Under the Inquisition many of the inquisitors were actuated by the most conscientious and sincere motives. They held their eyes honest, the most ardent of crimes. It combined all the elements of crime—crime against self, the dooming of an immortal soul; crime against the state, the propagation of a doctrine that would undermine it; crime against God, the misleading of His people. It is related that many humble and charitable men, officers of the Inquisition, performed with tears coursing down their cheeks, acts of cruelty which demons incarnate could not have surpassed. It is only a century and a quarter ago that actual physical cruelty was abandoned in the Spanish effort to regulate the consciences of men. Since that time the effort has been confined to political activity, so closely allied have been church and state that they are nearly one; and no religious movement may be made but that it affects the state, and no political move but that it affects the church.

Thus on one side of every question has been arrayed the clerical influence, absolutely intolerant; and on the other side, through any medium other than Mr. Frohman it is because that manager decided that for some reason he does not want that particular play.

Play brokers have much to do with the foreign field, of course, especially Miss Elizabeth Marbury, certainly a living refutation in these high finance days of the theory that women cannot be successful in large business fields. But the brokers are friends of Mr. Frohman. He makes it worth their while. And this, too, is Napoleonic.

The Frenchmen, it is true, give the importing managers a lot of trouble. They have an idea in the Gallic capital that there is only one really humorous figure in the world—the figure of the betrayed, duped, deceived husband, and only one thing subject of comedy sex. Plays on these themes coin tens of thousands there. But will America stand for them? That is the point. It is usually concluded that America will not. So a translator is sent for and told to "adapt" the piece for the American stage. He picks the thing up subtly with a pair of tongs, sprinkles chloride of lime on the remains. As a rule, what is left is no rose, however inoffensive its odor. It is adapted for the American stage, but not to it.

Judging the American Output. There remains the American output—plays written by native dramatists. Beyond question in this field the pre-eminent managerial position is held by George C. Tyler, a man little known to the great theater-going public because his personality is veiled behind the firm name of Liebler & Co. As a matter of fact, Mr. Liebler's share in the huge theatrical enterprises conducted in his name consists largely in signing checks for expenditures for which Mr. Tyler has contracted. He is recently an old and wise theatrical man was asked who, in his opinion, was the best American judge of the possibilities of an unacted dramatic manuscript. Without hesitation he named Mr. Tyler. Now, this is no slight praise, for if there is a perilous undertaking of an intellectual nature it is prophecy in the field of plays. Compared to it, next week's weather is a simple thing to foretell. Even the whims of an operatic prima donna are easier to forecast than the future of an unacted dramatic manuscript, even though Oscar Hammerstein has contracted for the last five new plays, 50 per cent of which were by American authors. The percentage of success was very high. It was not, however, invariable. Failure was the initial portion of "Cameo Kirby," which success was ultimately dragged out of the defeat. The chief character, a man of an old-time Mississippi river steamboat gambler, was first impersonated by Nat Goodwin. Disaster, prompt and unmistakable, greeted the first performance of the play. In this case Mr. Tyler had failed in visualizing one of the elements of the completed whole. Mr. Goodwin's personality was not adapted to the part. Mr. Tyler quickly recognized the fact, another actor was engaged for the character, the play was altered in some particulars, and its subsequent Chicago production was highly successful.

Plays for the Stars. Even when one knows little of the myriad difficulties and subtle obstacles of the theatrical manager's business, the annual task that confronts a man like Mr. Tyler appears huge. The more one knows about it, the larger looms the task. The thought of a star system, be it for good or for evil, has a certain magic in the acquisition of a number of stars, or principal players. These, from whose successful exploitation most of his profits arise, must be provided every year or, at best, every two years, with new plays which must not only be well made but whose chief characters must also be well adapted to the personal characteristics and peculiarities which constitute the professional equipments of the stars in question. The perplexed manager may not say to any member of his constellation: "You've worked hard for several years and you've made money. Go take a rest—and give me a rest." He goes to some other manager, and his former employer is thus deprived of the profitable personality upon the development and advertising of which he has expended years of labor and all his brains. No, the stars must have plays. How do they get them?

Once in a blue moon the manager's play reader finds a real play among the mass of rubbish that comes unsolicited from unknown and unskilled writers. But if the manager depended upon this source of supply most of his actors would be idle most of the time. And there is little use looking to the foreign field unless you are Mr. Frohman. And if you are Mr. Tyler, there are Miss Viola Allen, Miss Eleanor Robson, Wilton Lackaye and the rest of your stars—all to be fitted, and promptly, with attractive and becoming theatrical garments. There's nothing for it but continual hustling. Eternal vigilance, everlasting watch for plays or ideas that can be

made into plays is the only price of success like Mr. Tyler's.

Of course, the active band of native playwrights are willing to give a deserving manager all the help in their power—at a price. Mr. Frances Hodgson Burnett, or her agent, will say, approaches Mr. Tyler and remarks: "I've got a play that will suit Miss Robson." Mr. Tyler is willing to be shown. He hears all about the plot of "The Dawn of a Tomorrow." It interests him. He calls for the manuscript. He likes it even more after reading it. It will suit Miss Robson. But will she think so? Well, in this case she did, and the play will be good for at least two seasons.

Providing Theatrical Fits. But there's Miss Allen—what's to be done for her now? Somebody tells Mr. Tyler—somebody whose business it is to do so—that F. Marion Crawford's new novel, "The White Sister," has great dramatic possibilities, and that Miss Allen, who made so much money in "The Christian," another dramatization, would make the leading feminine character. Mr. Tyler reads the book and likes it. But there's a troublesome male character that looms too large for a play intended for a feminine star. All right, tell the dramatist to tone it down. He does so, Miss Allen is allowed to dominate the play, and Mr. Tyler has another success.

Turn now to Lee Shubert, head of the biggest theatrical firm that combines the management of a large chain of theaters with play production on a big scale. Mme. Nazimova, the talented Russian, she whom through success as a Russian actress in the lease of Art, a superb star, has had no new play in two years, with the result that she was not seen on Broadway last season at all. (Does she like it? Don't be foolish!) She must have a new play. Where's it coming from? Well, Mr. Shubert appeals to Eugene Walters. Has Mr. Walters in mind any play that would fill the tigress in the leash of Art? Or, if he hasn't, will he give his mind to the subject and see what happens? He will. He does. And a new play for Nazimova is now announced for the present season.

Mr. Walters knows the Russian's methods. He knows how to suit his act to her. He understands his trade and he has signed the contract. Good! Mr. Shubert breathes a sigh of relief. Thank heaven Nazimova is provided for! Who's next? Miss Mary Manning? All right, send for playwrights who have suited her before. Send for syndicate playwrights. This beautiful actress tried six new plays last season before finding one that suited. Consider the total of hope and fear, anxiety and worry and disappointment and labor represented by this statement and then ask yourself, if you like, whether the stage seems an attractive career for a woman.

Actor and Manager. There are on the American stage a few successful stars who have the courage, the artistic intelligence and the business capacity to manage their own careers. To these few come large pecuniary rewards. They, of course, select their own plays. Among the most conspicuous in this class, perhaps, E. H. Sothern and Miss Maxine Elliott may be named. Miss Elliott is a good business woman as Miss Marbury. She is probably a better business woman than she is an actress. But between her acting and her business ability she has made a good deal of money. In each of her seasons since she became her own manager her profits have exceeded \$50,000, and has never had a losing season.

The case of Mr. Sothern, as well as that of Henry Miller, another actor in the same category, seems to indicate that if more stars had the choosing of their own plays it might be a better thing, either for the public or for the stars. Mr. Sothern makes large profits each year, certainly far above the \$50,000 mark, more than double that sum in certain prosperous years, and moreover he stands, since the death of Massfield, at the head of his profession in this country. Mr. Miller's accession to the position of actor-manager has been sufficiently justified by his production of "The Servant in the House"

and "The Great Divide," two of the best plays that Americans have paid fortunes to see in the last quarter of a century, while his production of Percy Maekoy's "Mater" was a brilliant failure.

deny the quality of merit to the ethics of the lowly Nazarene.

Few of Ferrer's followers go so far as he in the denunciation of religion. The vast majority of his sympathizers and of the liberal party, which Ferrer's death brought to power in Spain, are Catholic Christians who are convinced that the best interests of both church and state would be served by a complete separation and by the elimination of the clerical influence in politics.

It is difficult for Americans to understand the issues involved. Perhaps the greatest governmental reform in the history of the world was instituted when Thomas Jefferson persuaded the legislature of the colony of Virginia to adopt the statute for religious freedom. It was the first law guaranteeing to every man the right to think for himself, and it was a decree of absolute divorce of the church from the state. When the United States came into existence the Virginia notion prevailed and this great republic is the only nation in Christendom in which there is no relation whatever between church and state, and yet no nation is more amenable to religious influences.

If the present article in Spain shall end in the separation of church and state, and shall bring about the solution of the religious problem, Spain will be free from religious controversy for the first time in eighteen centuries. The introduction of Christianity into Spain lighted the fires of martyrdom at the beginning of the second century after Christ. Christians were burned at the stake for refusing to worship the Roman gods. Under Constantine, Christianity became the state religion, but it was not long until the great conflict between the Trinitarians and the Arians agitated all Christendom. More blood was shed over the subtle questions raised by hair-splitting Christian theologians than had been spilled by the pagan persecutors of the early Christians.

Then came the invasion of the Mohammedans and the struggle which for seven centuries racked the Spanish people. Finally the Christians triumphed, the Moors were driven from Spain, and the crescent of Islam forever banished from western Europe. The same religious zeal which destroyed the power of the Mohammedan party, and drove the Jews from Spain, lighted the fires of the Spanish Inquisition, sent Columbus on his voyage of missionary discovery, and established negro slavery in America.

The intolerance born of religious contentions, Spain carried into its political administration. The result is that in one world-wide struggle and in the power of the mother country itself is in the throes of what seems a hopeless struggle. Spain presents the spectacle of a nation being strangled to death.

Tomorrow: "The Mousing of Congress," by Frederic J. Haskin.

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GREATEST THE Cosmopolitan MAGAZINE McClure's MAGAZINE Woman's Home Companion THE TWENTIETH CENTURY FARMER

and "The Great Divide," two of the best plays that Americans have paid fortunes to see in the last quarter of a century, while his production of Percy Maekoy's "Mater" was a brilliant failure. out of Harvard university. Witness Mrs. Fiske's production of "Salvation Nell," by Edward Sheldon, the young Harvard playwright. They would dramatize "The Congressional Record" if there was a suggestion in it. Anything or anybody that comes along is eligible. "Take care you don't do anything noticeable. Somebody will write a play about you—probably Booth Tarkington and Harry Leon Wilson—American Magazine. BUILDS BETTER THAN PLANNED Far-Reaching Effect of Pure Food Movement in the United States. It would appear that Uncle Sam made a bigger splash than he anticipated when he tossed his pure food pebble into the world's commercial pond. In the effort to protect his own people against unfit foods he has forced upon a good many other people an unwelcome consideration of the desirability of taking a bath and scrubbing their floors. It is even reported that they are introducing fresh air into date packeries in Mexico and compelling the handlers of Smyrna to wash their hands from time to time. There isn't obviously much gain in cleaning up the South Omaha and Chicago packing houses if we are to let foreign trade dump on our shores the output of filthy, disease-infected, unsanitary, canneries and packing establishments which provide us with food products. So the authorities have bestirred themselves to compel the rest of the world to clean up if it proposes to sell us its goods and the Turkish empire is threatened with a thorough cleaning. Italy, Spain, Greece, Morocco, Asia Minor and Major, all sell us a vast amount of stuff which we have been habituated unquestionably to introduce into our systems without consideration of the unwholesome and unnumbered varieties of bacilli they might contain. We have excited ourselves about sanitation in Philadelphia, but over-

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