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AN OUTLINE OF MODERN AND
CONTEMPORARY EUROPEAN DRAMA

A THESIS

Submitted to

THE FACULTY OF ARTS

of the

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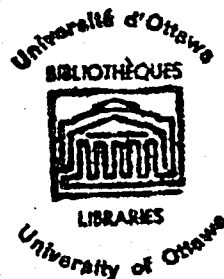
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by

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I.

INTRODUCTION.

In this thesis, no doubt, two qualities in particular will be remarked. These two qualities are the wide scope and inclusiveness of the matter involved and the drastic condensation of its treatment. Perhaps it may seem that there is too great breadth of subject-matter, that by no stretch of meaning can the term "contemporary" be enlarged to cover the movements of a hundred years. To these objections, which at first appear to be valid, it can only be answered that if the term "contemporary" has any critical meaning for our time, this meaning must go beyond the mere accidents of date and inhere in those qualities that make the theatre of our time a different theatre from any that has gone before. If we are to understand the differentiating qualities of the current drama of Europe, we must seek for these in the social, intellectual, and art events of the early nineteenth century. Herein lies the best justification for the broad inclusiveness of this thesis. Perhaps there will be little objection to its quality of condensation. The chief demand will be for the facts of contemporary drama presented fairly in their proper emphasis and relationship.

Any thesis that seeks to outline the history of an art form works under definite limitations. These limitations should be faced and admitted. They arise

2.

from the fact that many of the qualities that give vitality and beauty to a work of imagination are beyond the reach of the historical critic. These are essentially the "art" qualities that spring from the creative genius of the artist. No survey can reproduce them or bring again that rare meeting of creative mind and appropriate moment that distinguishes every significant work of creative imagination. There is left then for the historical critic the evaluation and representation of the primary urgencies and motives, the implied interests and ideas, the changing standards, formulas, and movements underlying or accompanying the art, but not themselves constituting it. Hence, no general outline should ever be depended upon alone for an understanding of the drama. The best value of an outline will come from its use in connection with the study of the plays themselves.

CHAPTER I.

The Drama of the Last Fifty Years has Been
the Drama of Realism.

The above title, when compared with the length of this essay, may appear to be somewhat ambitious— may seem to sit upon the latter "like a giant's robe upon a dwarfish thief". This would be true, I fear, were I attempting a detailed exposition; but, since argument "is the subject of my story," the brevity with which I propose to treat my subject becomes a virtue where prolixity might easily be a fault. This contention is further vindicated by two facts: first, the dominant and significant drama of the past five decades and more has been confined to Northern Europe; secondly, the main tendencies of a movement or a period in literature are always found by posterity to be manifested most clearly in the works of that comparatively small group of leaders who tower above their fellow-writers and both guide and indicate the trend of the times. In attempting to discover, then, the extent to which realism has prevailed in the drama of the last fifty years, I shall direct my attention mostly to the leading men of the North-European theatre.

Throughout this essay there will occur frequently the terms naturalism, realism, and expressionism. Since people as a rule vary considerably in their interpretation of these words

I shall here explain what significance in regard to drama I mean them to convey. The naturalist, the realist, and the expressionist have one thing or purpose in common: they are all striving to hold the mirror up to human life. But each of the three goes about it in his own way. The naturalist considers life as it appears to the senses and strives to give a faithful picture of man in his environment. He is concerned with the surface, the outward manifestations of life. He is a photographer. His purpose may be to entertain or to instruct. The realist is not content to portray only the external features of life, but strives to discover and bring to light the springs of human action. He seeks the real reason for men's conduct, and confirms them as true or brands them as false. His purpose is to make men realize the value of the motives that really actuate people. The expressionist is more profound than either the naturalist or the realist. He probes the subconscious in search of those basic, elemental, myriad impulses, urges, inter-tangled threads of motive which, for him, make up personality, sane or insane. He may wish to warn or to educate. He is often abnormal, neuro-pathological. But, like the other two types of dramatist we have discussed, he tries to deal with human life as it actually is at the present day. It is this fact which distinguishes these writers from the romanticists and the classicists and enables one to say with truth that naturalism and expressionism have much

in common with realism, into which they indistinctly merge, and of which they form, as it were, phases or layers, like the successive clearnesses of water in a partly-settled slough. Hence, all three must be considered together as realistic elements in the modern theatre.

The roots of the drama of the past fifty years lie in the European stage of the first three quarters of the nineteenth century. In the early part of the latter period, revived romanticism had reached its apex and its decline; and, as the middle of the century drew near, the popular theatre became dominant. Almost exclusively in France, and to a great extent in the other countries of Northern Europe, the artificial society-comedy—the "well-made" play of Scribe and Sardou—became the vogue. But, while these plays amused and pleased the audience, they attacked no fundamental issues and failed to reflect life. A new note was sounded when Dumas fils and Augier began to use the form of the well-made play for the exposition of social and moral ideas. Here we see the early stirrings of naturalism. This "drama of ideas" soon became very popular in France and spread throughout Europe. It had the effect of attracting the serious-minded masses to the theatre. And, while it lacked the qualities of great art, it prepared the public for plays based on the same materials as those it employed, yet possessing greater truth to life and often much artistic

beauty and universality. But such a change could come only with a new type of dramatist and a theatre free from commercial control. The former appeared in Sweden and the latter in France.

In the year 1887 a small private theatre called the "Theatre Libre" was established in Paris by André Antoine. The latter had become dissatisfied with the conditions of the French stage and wished to give unknown young authors a chance to have their plays acted. But it soon became clear that the keynote of Antoine's school was "naturalism". The artificialities of the well-made play were largely eliminated: there was a growing tendency to have no "asides", no "confidantes", no "stars", no declamation, no grandiloquence, and no fixed number of acts; the dramatist took the relevances bearing on a certain situation and removed all that was unnecessary. The stage was small, like a room with the "fourth wall" removed, the setting was true to the life of the masses, and the actors were natural, or life-like. The whole purpose was to give a tranche de vie; and the tendency was to cut well down on the loaf, in reaction against the rule of the well-made play to be concerned only with the higher strata of society. One result of Antoine's move was the organization of free theatres in other countries such as Germany, England and Russia; another was the development and the bringing-out of a group of realistic dramatists whose ideas soon spread far and wide through Northern Europe and helped transform modern drama.

Among the French naturalists introduced to the world through Antoine's theatre, two stand out as representative of the group. These are Zola and Becque. In practice the former was a romanticist working with contemporary materials. But he contributed much to naturalism. He was intensely absorbed in the interests of his age—his drama was concerned with living things, with vital processes; and he demanded that truth be exposed ruthlessly—that secret forces, and hidden passions and pathologies be uncovered. But his dramas were not nearly so successful as were those of Becque, who is the father of French naturalism. The latter began the tranche de vie idea; in Les Corbeaux he treats a situation in contemporary society objectively, impassively, without sentiment or romantic glamour, depicting his characters with bitterness and irony. The tranche de vie idea was further developed by the Antoine school; the general plan was to discard exposition, denouements, set conclusions, and plot, and give a single dynamic impression of reality.

One of the greatest dramatists whose works were made known through the Theatre Libre was the Swedish genius, August Strindberg. By many he has been called a mad naturalist, but time has shown him to be rather an abnormal expressionist. He is a great technical artist who paints life realistically, but with great intensity and extreme abnormality. Discarding the

external forms of the well-made play, Strindberg brings his people on the stage and lets them express what is going on in the depth of their souls. He usually pictures a vague character living through a mental or spiritual agony. He does not employ the logical dialogue and the unemphatic ending of the naturalists: his plays close with a catastrophe; his men and women live and talk on many planes of consciousness. Character is not simple, but it is a mazy compound of inherited tendencies and acquired traits; hitherto unsuspected evil or weak qualities suddenly become influential and struggle with the soul for mastery. Like the realists Strindberg shows the human soul heir to great possibilities which may or may not be realized by a struggle. But he deals so largely with the neuro-pathological, with abnormal souls fighting internal evil, that he did not succeed in founding a school. He stands alone, not as a realist, but as an extreme expressionistic naturalist.

The well-made play was ousted by the drama of naturalism, because the latter meant a return to life—a change which was a response to the needs of the age. But it was too superficial and too sordid. Its proponents took their subjects from the lower level of society and usually handled them to produce a drab story of dirt, gloom and horror. Art does not tend to be produced in such an

atmosphere; and while these writers showed problems in life, they made no attempt at a solution, unless it might be pessimistic resignation. They dealt with small, sordid people, and ordinary scenes and conversations, but did not select traits of character and mould them into great creations whose problems are those of every age. This was the task of the realists. The latter were satisfied with neither a photograph of life, nor an acceptance of its futility. They were selective, creative artists, who pictured life as they knew it, and invested their work with qualities which made it universal and of all time. In their productions we find the greatness of modern drama—a feeling that life has vast possibilities which may sometimes be realized by fighting, by tremendous effort.

The greatest of the realists and the creator of the modern stage is Henrik Ibsen. In his early years he wrote historical and romantic plays in verse, but about 1875 turned to social drama in prose. A short time before this another Norwegian, Bjørnstjerne Bjornson had begun to attack the abuses in society through the theatre. In The Editor he assailed corruption in politics. In The Bankrupt he pleaded for honesty and carefulness in leading public men. But although these plays give a fairly true picture of life and never sink to the sordid levels of the naturalists, they contain little creative value; they show that Bjornson was midway between naturalism and realism. He never rises to

the heights later achieved by Ibsen. The latter, however, was not an innovator. He took over the well-made play and gradually moulded it to his purpose, simplifying and perfecting its technique. His drama opens very close to the psychological moment of tragedy; he does away with an introduction and comes directly to the issue of some difficult problem. He also abolished stereotyped characters and created real types. He intellectualized the theatre.

Ibsen's realistic period extended from about 1875 to the end of the century and falls into two phases. At first he is concerned with the relations between men and women in society. Later he studies the individual soul as the fountain-head of all human relations. His first social drama is Pillars of Society. Ibsen has not yet freed himself from the artificialities of the well-made play; but it is equally clear that he is stressing matter more than form. He examines the ideals or pillars upon which society has been resting, finds that they are rotten, and insists that the only safe one is the spirit of truth and liberty. In his next and most famous play, A Doll's House, Ibsen shows an immense advance in technique. The "confidante", the "villain", and the sensational scene of the typical Scribe play are employed until the middle of the third act and then dropped. But A Doll's House is epoch-making in the fact that it gives birth to the modern enfranchised woman. The heroine suddenly becomes completely competent, self-controlled, and endowed with right reason. In Nora, Ibsen

created a lever with which to free woman, humanity and the theatre. In its latter part the play becomes a reasoned vehicle of constructive social criticism. Two years later, in Ghosts, the author answered the attacks which had been made on Nora by showing how the woman who bowed to false conventions ruined her offspring. He tries to prove that not only individual happiness but also the well-being of society depends upon the integrity of the units of humanity. When Ghosts was furiously assailed, Ibsen wrote An Enemy of the People to show that the mob will support a reformer only while he is clearly of benefit to it; that the majority is blind, incapable and selfish. The last play of his first phase of realism, The Wild Duck, is somewhat reactionary; one should have ideals and follow them, but one must be very careful not to make bad situations worse by speaking either at the wrong time or to the wrong person. The author seems to admit himself beaten by the social enigma with which he has been struggling so long.

After he had written The Wild Duck and had clearly realized that the foundations of social integrity lie in human character, Ibsen turned to a study of the sources of action in the soul of man. In Rosmersholm he shows that inherited tendencies crop up through life and influence one's whole career; and also that a person's course of action depends vitally on the training which he has received in childhood. His next play The Lady from the Sea impresses

the lesson that regeneration must come not objectively, but subjectively, that it must not be forced, that "you can't legislate people into heaven". In Hedda Gabler he again stresses the fact that the ultimate strength of society is the purity of the human heart. Here he neglects to probe unerlying ideas, but makes a masterful analysis of character. This is his greatest objective work and the last of his best plays. In the later ones actuality is confused with metaphysical and symbolical elements. But to the last he is a great realist.

Ibsen revolutionized drama and started it off on the track which it has followed, for the most part, since his day. He was concerned with what was in the minds of his characters. In his plays there is usually a falling action; the tragedy has happened and you watch its effects on people. This is the "drama of a ripe condition". And his scenes are intimate — the room with the "fourth wall" removed: you feel that you are one of the family, looking in upon the rest of it. This is the naturalism of the free theatre. Ibsen's people are concerned with themselves, not with the audience, and every person is of real importance.

The problems in which they are involved are vital. This explains the author's ^{revolutionary} force: he made individuals and society look at facts as they are. His work is tense, subjective, psychic, and centres about the human will. He shows the latter affected by environment but possessing the power to work out its own destiny. He stresses

character, honesty, sincerity, purity of heart, singleness of purpose, and the need to escape the crippling influence of mob-rule. He swept away the well-made play and forced the stage to face realities, and become a serious study, a social influence, a reforming movement. He made modern drama a drama of realism.

As the nineteenth century drew to a close, the influence of Ibsen's work, operating through the free theatres, and helped by the experiments of the latter as well as by the work of Sardou, Dumas Fils and the naturalists, brought about a great dramatic revival in Europe. The most significant manifestations of this appeared in Germany and in Austria. Next to Hauptmann and Wedekind, whom I shall consider later, the chief German dramatist who appeared was Sudermann. He was not a real naturalist, but used the problem play of France to express the old "storm and stress" spirit of Germany. His work ranges from realism to extreme romantic fantasy. Next in importance to Sudermann is the Austrian, Arthur Schnitzler. His plays are the analytical study of the inter-relations of men and women. He is a realist who analyzes character with great subtlety; but he handles life and love with an airy, thistledown touch, very lightly. Among the French dramatists of the revival the two most representative are Brieux and De Curel. The former is a naturalist and objectivist, an exponent of the thesis play. He probes into the moral cankers of

society for educational purposes. De Curel finds his material in the hinterland of morbid psychology. His works show intensity and conviction, and reveal unexpected spiritual qualities. He is an expressionistic naturalist. Neither he nor Breux are creative realists.

But the greatest figure of the dramatic revival of the nineties and the epitome of the modern German realistic theatre, is Gerhart Hauptmann. The French employed naturalism for social purposes. Hauptmann used it for artistic aims, creating the new art of "consistent naturalism" or an extreme truthfulness to life. He began where Ibsen left off, removed every artificiality from his plays, and combined idealism with materialism, poetry with external realism, to interpret the life of man by means of great and enduring works of art. He showed living people on the stage. He gave German naturalism its distinctive quality by eliminating all consciously artistic and theatric effects and making his work not a picture of life but life itself. He is concerned with the life of the inner man, tracing a tragic result back through a long struggle maintained by the will against the little attritions of an adverse environment. In The Weavers he re-creates the life lived two generations before his time. In this play life seems eternal and relationships endless; the characters drift across the stage. The dialogue has been unified by careful selection; the scenes follow each other logically; and the details are absolutely accurate—the setting, the characters and the speeches are harmonized ⁱⁿ a creation which is life. This

is Hauptmann's greatest and most typical piece of work. It shows how he takes life and out of it creates an artistic whole which gives a clear impression of unity and which will bear the closest inspection of memory against the light of history and eternity. He is here, as elsewhere, the supreme realist — the "consistent naturalist".

While Western Europe was evolving its Strindbergs, Ibsens, and Hauptmanns, the Russians were developing a group of dramatists and actors of a distinctly ^{different} type and of a very high quality. The organization which accomplished much of this advance was the Moscow Art Theatre, devoted solely to the purpose implied by its name. Its chief product is Anton Chekhov. He is a supreme realist, but is artistic rather than sociological. His plays are concerned with the life of the mind. They reflect the melancholic Russian temper with its sense of the uselessness of things. His life-weary characters speak cryptically and symbolically. His works are treated impassively and objectively with luminosity and simplicity. He is a master of technique, investing his groups with organic unity. He is, like Hauptmann, a great "consistent naturalist". As a supreme realist he is ably seconded by Maxim Gorky. In The Lower Depths the latter effected a masterpiece fit to compare with The Weavers. Unlike Chekhov, he takes his themes from the dregs of humanity. But he does not follow the naturalists in merely picturing social cancers or suggesting a problem; he shows

man in a struggle against an adverse environment; he suggests great possibilities if one will only fight; he marks a turning point in Russian drama and points to the approaching revolution. In general, naturalism implies acceptance of fate, submission and defeat: Gorky is rather a creative realist with a creed—struggle and progress.

We have now come down to the drama of our own generation. Since the beginning of the twentieth century there has been developed that variety of realism called futurist or grotesque. It is expressionistic, owing much to Strindberg. It appears in the plays of such men as Wedekind, Toller, Kaiser, Pirandello, Andreyev, and Evreinov. The formula of the futurists is a new form of art to express the moods, movements, and feelings of the present day. Dispensing with the old conventions they try to make the audience see what people are thinking. Like Strindberg they strive to show that character is not a consistent unit but a kaleidoscopic structure which looks out upon the world from many planes, of which some are evil and others good. The grotesque drama reflects the modern advances in psychological research and in human activities and interests. It is profound, realistic, elemental, a cross-section of the twentieth-century soul.

In discussing most of the great dramatists of the last fifty years we have found that all to whom we have referred are members of realistic schools. But there are

several outstanding playwrights who cannot be included in these groups, and who represent a contemporary tendency opposed to, or distinct from realism. The first of these to be considered is Maurice Maeterlinck, the Belgian. He is known as the leading exponent of the puppet or marionette theatre. His work in this connection was done just before the close of the last century. He embraced and developed the formula of the symbolists. His drama is one of over-tones: the language is flowery, mysterious, repetitive, incomplete, implying much more than it actually expresses. He deals with the movements of the soul, showing the power of Fate and the weakness of humans. His drama is static. He gets rid of the impure medium of the actor and works out his purposes more accurately by the use of puppets. He bends the services of other arts, such as music and painting, to the uses of the dramatist, and thus has created a new art of the theatre. It was largely in his first period that this creative work was accomplished. Maeterlinck is attempting to explain reality, but he employs a new method and may be called an anti-realist.

The romanticists are another group of modern dramatists who, like the symbolists, stand apart from, and opposed to realism. The chief member of the romantic group is Edmond Rostand. He was entirely uninfluenced by the naturalists. He went back to Victor Hugo, his last great predecessor, and put into use the rules which the latter had enunciated but failed to practice. Rostand's work also shows

influences from other dramatists, chiefly Corneille and Shakespeare. His fame rests on his wit, his command of style and his power of drawing individuals in groups. He represents the slight romantic revival in France at, and since, the turn of the century. A similar movement in Italy was led by Gabriele D'Annunzio. The latter is a poet rather than a playwright, having practically none of the creativeness of Hauptmann and Strindberg. In his plays he is distinguished partly by a florid imagination and a genius for words, but chiefly by his immense knowledge of history and legend. As a modern romantic dramatist D'Annunzio may be associated with the German Hofmannsthal, and with the Englishman Stephen Phillips, leaders in their respective countries.

As the twentieth century has moved on towards the end of its third decade, both romanticism and the higher forms of naturalism and realism have suffered a decline. Of all forms of dramatic composition only two are at present really vital—the experimental play and comedy. George Bernard Shaw, the great figure in modern English drama, handles in comedy the same ideas that such realists as Ibsen treated seriously. That is, Shaw, as a comedian differs from the realists in his manner of handling an idea. In the French problem plays of Dumas and Augier the ideas came out of the action. Ibsen made his ideas implicit in the action. With Shaw ideas are the origin of action. He treats two sorts of topics in his plays: those that are implicit in contemporary formulas of life and those that comprise the legend which is for us the

history of the past. In all his work he questions the validity of ideas by means of ridicule and clear sight. He is an intellectual realist working through comedy on topics contemporary and historical.

But the most distinctive note of modern comedy has been struck in the realm of fantasy. The greatest figure in this field is the Scottish dramatist, J.M. Barrie. The latter's most typical work is Peter Pan: in the class of purely imaginative playful fantasy this play holds first place. The genius of the author is extremely individual. He is not concerned with mental science. He seems to aim to dramatize the hinterland of the imagination — that realm of symbolical faces and landscapes in which are loosely embodied those vague wonderings of the present, fears and hopes for the future and haunting emanations from the past, which form the tenuous stuff of the fancies of children and the day-dreams of some others. Barrie builds each play on a supposition which the audience must accept or be disappointed. Few refuse. The author's success in developing the fantastic action so that it is acceptable to the audience marks him as possessing not only skilful craftsmanship but also the mind of an artist of unique calibre. Next to Barrie, Jacinto Benevente is the greatest modern writer of fantastic comedy. He is also Spain's chief contribution to contemporary drama. Before the end of the last century he wrote plays on the principle that people wanted to see serious things handled frivously and nonsense

taken seriously. In his own plays he sums up Spain's advances in drama since the time of Dumas films; but of all his work his drama of fantasy is the greatest.

Having discussed the most outstanding European playwrights of the last half-century we may now recall to what schools or types they belong. With few exceptions the dominant and significant figures among them have been realistic-naturalists, realists, expressionists. To this vast group belong the names of great creative artists like Ibsen, Strindberg, Hauptmann, and Chekhov, as well as lesser giants like Becque, Brieux, Wedekind, Schmitzler, Gorky and others. To these figures may be opposed those of the anti-realists and the un-realists—Maeterlinck, Rostand, D'Annunzio, Barrie and Bevenente, but the works of the latter group, great and important and probably prophetic as they are, stand out thus far only as islets in the stream of realism. The latter, arising with the works of Ibsen and the French naturalists, swept the stage of Europe, climbed to the peaks of a great age-revealing art in the hands of such as Hauptmann and Chekhov and, though since grown weaker, has until the present day continued to be the major factor in the dramatic world.

CHAPTER 2.

The Beginnings of Modern English Drama.

Dramatic movements, like all evolved activities of the human race, have their roots in former times and in previous conditions of society. And as the new order gains in strength and the old falls into decline, it is the inevitable rule of life that the one acquires a large inheritance from the other. There are no sudden transitions in drama. At no time are the ideals of the past rejected entirely in favour of new creations. In what is modern to-day one can always discover much of what was modern only to former generations. Hence, a complete understanding of a contemporary development cannot be secured except through an investigation of the environment in which that development was nurtured. To this rule modern English drama is no exception: its definite sources may be traced back even into the first decades of the nineteenth century.

The statement that the English theatre was in a degraded condition at the close of the eighteenth century has become almost a commonplace. Since Sheridan's School for Scandal no play of the first order had been written. Sheridan, after having destroyed sentimental drama, had sunk to catering to the popular craving for German romanticism. Before many years passed, the intellectual tradition of the theatre was forgotten or destroyed. Indeed, the whole dramatic situation worked in a "vicious circle". When plays deteriorated, so, too, did the audience: The cultured classes were driven away; the theatres became a haunt of disreputable people; the stage decreased

steadily in respectability. This development, in turn, encouraged the work of none but inferior dramatists: Literary models, not life, became their fount of inspiration; plays were written only to amuse; psychology, proportion, and balance, were neglected or distorted; frivolity, insipid sentimentality, and pomposity, reigned supreme. And the condition of the theatres was correspondingly bad: the buildings were poorly constructed and uncomfortable; the management was incompetent and frequently unscrupulous; the vast majority of the actors were shady in reputation and inferior in professional capacity; and stage language was the stereotyped declamation which had devolved from the Elizabethans. Nor was there a saving dramatic criticism. The critics examined plays from a literary, rather than a technical, point of view; and their work was rendered more frustrate by being relegated to an obscure corner of the press. As if all these evils were not sufficiently baneful, drama was subjected to rigorous and absurd regulations: only two "patent" theatres were permitted to produce "legitimate" plays; and the misdirected zeal of the censor banned almost every dramatic innovation except the false and the banal.

English drama was not completely degraded, however, even in the first part of the nineteenth century: And as the years went by, saving features became manifest in increasing degree. The wretched condition of the stage forced great authors of a dramatic bent - Byron, Shelley, Keats, Browning - to write untheatrical plays - "closet-dramas" - which were great in literary qualities at least. On the other hand, while men who wrote for the theatre followed the Shakespearean tradition

or imitated French playwrights, and continued to perpetrate the other dramatic evils of the age, there grew up a succession of great actors who gave to the stage most of the success it did maintain. When, in 1843, protection was withdrawn from the two "patent" theatres, drama was dominated more than ever by the players. As a result, writers of plays resorted more and more completely to borrowing (chiefly from the French); and the already extreme artificiality of the theatre was further accentuated. In the latter part of the century, however, actors contributed greatly to the new developments which brought the theatre into better repute and increased popularity with the public at large.

The first nineteenth century stage dramatist who tried with any measure of success to raise his work above the morass which had engulfed the theatre, was James Sheridan Knowles. In many ways Knowles was typical of his age; his plays lacked balance, proportion, and realistic endings; his characters are painted either black or white; his thought contains a vast amount of the utterly commonplace. He knew all the tricks of the stage and depended on the ability of the actor for much of his success. He understood the desires of his audience and gave them plays fashioned after the Elizabethan mould. But Knowles, as a dramatist, possessed many virtues which were almost entirely lacking in most of his contemporaries: In an impure age he did much to elevate the stage by writing clean dramas; some of his characters are interesting even to-day; and much of his language is pure poetry, truly Elizabethan in its richness. In four of his plays Knowles pointed the way to a revival of poetic drama; above all, he is distinguished among his fellow playwrights for a certain amount

of truth and naturalness. These qualities are most apparent in Virginus (1820). Here the plot is developed logically and clearly, with a strict observance of the natural and the probable. And to that extent Knowles is a follower of the school of common sense and a foreshadower of modern dramatic realism.

A decade after Knowles had done his best work, Douglas Jerrold sounded another note faintly prophetic of a new dramatic life. Jerrold's Black-Eyed Susan (1829), while exhibiting many of the prevailing weaknesses of the contemporary drama, was full of wit, possessed a certain degree of vitality, and gave an interesting picture of a past phase of English life. Three years later Jerrold took a more distinct and important step toward the theatre of to-day by depicting, in The Rent Day, a social problem—the problem of debt. In the first part of the play he draws a fairly realistic picture of the wretched life of the English peasant. But then the clouds of sentimentalism and melodramatic extravagance descend and spoil the fair promises of the beginning. In spite of its weaknesses, however, The Rent Day is significant as indicating a tendency on the part of playwrights to turn for material to the serious and vital interests of English society.

The new dramatic current which was dimly visible in the Rent Day appears more specifically in Tom Taylor's The Ticket-of-Leave Man. Taylor was far from being a great playwright. As an insatiable adaptor of French plays and an indefatigable melodramatist, he was desirous chiefly of pleasing his audience. His works are marred by sentimentalism, unreality, weak structure, and also

psychological analysis. But in a real sense Taylor stands out among his fellow dramatists. In The Ticket-of-Leave Man he tries to express a native English genius in handling a definite and vital social problem. Herein lies his chief importance in our study. In treating of the subject of the justice of our penal system, Taylor is ^a direct forerunner of Galsworthy. It is true, indeed, that Taylor did not write under the stimulus of an acutely-awakened social consciousness ; but it is ^{of} the greatest significance, on the other hand, that he handled, albeit somewhat clumsily and blindly, a subject which was again to be held up to questioning by a great modern English dramatist.

More truly representative than Taylor in respect of Victorian popular drama, is Dion L. Boucicault, who dominated the melodramatic theatre in England for almost fifty years. Beginning his work in the early forties, Boucicault found his chief model in the eighteenth-century comedy of manners (of which School for Scandal is the leading representative) and his sources in the whole dramatic literature of the past. His faults were those of his age and his school. Success was his object; and to be successful he had only to please his audience. With shameless plagiarism, but also with consummate skill, Boucicault spun dramas which held a strong popular appeal in their sentimentalism, humour, wit, and excitement. In these plays character was subordinated to situation: the story was of supreme importance; psychology was overlooked or twisted. On the other hand there is much sanity and real value in many of Boucicault's productions. The author knew his theatre from experience; and if his desire for success drove him along many of the old misleading paths, the same force impelled him in other and happier directions. His drama is not marred by

impurity; and its natural and frequently racy dialogue contrasts favourably with the "high-falutin" strain of his contemporaries. There occurs in many of his plays a refreshing gaiety, a human laughter, a dash of fine spirit. Above all, he is significant for the extremely realistic stage-scenery which he introduced and in which he showed most of his originality. In general, Boucicault's work indicated strongly the tendency, which we have noted in that of other dramatists, towards a return to a native type of play; and in his language and his stage-pictures he plainly indicated the growth of naturalism.

In respect to the beginnings of modern English drama T.W. Robertson occupies a peculiarly middle position. In some important features Robertson looks to the past; in others, equally important, he is the direct ancestor of the modern realists. He was, to be sure, no revolutionary. His dramatic ideal was the well-made play. Many conventions which were artificial, but acceptable to his audience, he retained. Among these are "asides", false psychology, sentimentalism, and the happy ending. But, while working in certain conventional grooves, Robertson strove hard to improve his theatre. Turning away definitely from French influence, he produced plays which were in many respects thoroughly English. Besides striving to express a native genius, he made a determined effort to unite the stage and life. It is mainly for these two efforts that Robertson occupies an important position in the beginnings of Modern English drama.

In 1865 Robertson produced Society. This was an epoch-marking event in English dramatic history. By means of satire the author ridiculed certain phases of Victorian English life —high society, Bohemianism, worship of wealth. Two years later in Caste, Robertson made his greatest contribution to drama and at the same time continued his assault on the foibles of society. The thought underlying these plays was not too difficult for his newly-rich, middle-class audience to grasp; and the ideas which he was presenting were made acceptable by the vehicle of smart repartee and quick wit in which they were conveyed and by the veneer of traditional sentimentalism with which they were smeared. Robertson did not dare, however, to attempt to overturn the structure of society. Neither he nor his public were prepared for such a step. Conventions and circumstances were too strong for him. But in his social plays he pointed out to future dramatists the weapons, the methods, and some of the objects of the attacks which they were to launch.

While such titles for plays as "Caste" and "Society" denoted that he was handling fresh and living subjects, Robertson tried other and more palpable means to bridge the gap between the stage and life. In his hands dialogue became more natural, more life-like, than ever before; the "gagging" system was abolished; and stage-properties attained a new and decided realism. Mannerisms and habits were introduced on the stage as soon as they had become known in life. As in later "consistent naturalism", actors

were instructed about the most minute details. Characters, although still exaggerated, were drawn, more than was customary, true to life. On the whole, then, Robertson was a real pioneer: he displayed more humanity and realism than did any previous nineteenth-century English dramatist, and, in particular, he paved the way for the modern social drama.

Closely associated with the work of Robertson, and largely originated by the activity of that writer, came a new type of actor—the "Cup and Saucer" school. The first and most typical members of this group were the Bancrofts. In strong contrast to the disreputable actors of the old class, the Bancrofts were fashionably dressed and urbane. Their immediate and striking popularity is a clear indication of the changing character of the audience. The popular theatre was becoming more respectable because the public was demanding it; and theatre-going on the part of that public was fostered, in turn, by the response which men like Robertson and the Bancrofts were clear-sighted enough to make. Again, as a more naturalistic type of play was coming into vogue, a different type of acting was needed, and the new school of actors arose to perform it. Not least among the contributions made by Robertson to modern English drama was the part he played in histrionic innovations.

Late in the nineteenth century there occurred a more complete manifestation of those modernizing tendencies which we have seen exemplified specifically in the plays of Robertson and

less plainly in those of his contemporaries and predecessors. Among these later dramatists— the immediate beginners of modern English drama—we shall have occasion to consider the works of such outstanding men as Gilbert, Grundy, Jones and Pinero. Each of these writers contributed largely to the creation of the present-day English theatre.

Occupying a special niche—representing a specific genre—in the history of the later nineteenth-century stage, stands William S. Gilbert. What other men were doing for regular drama, Gilbert did for musical comedy. This type of entertainment had shared the general degradation of the English theatre. Its name had come to belie its real nature: in the best sense of the words it had ceased to be either musical or comedy. Gilbert rapidly improved this condition by writing a series of brilliant operas exposing to delightful satire both literary movements and political conditions and events. He was ably supported in his efforts by the beautiful music of Sullivan. These operas soon attained great popularity. The movement thus started has continued to the present almost unabated either in vigour or in standard. In a real sense Gilbert and Sullivan did yeoman service in helping to improve the English theatre in the last quarter of the century.

In the realm of serious drama Sydney Grundy took a pioneer part during the nineties. At the outset of his career Grundy had turned for material to the French dramatists, Sardou, Labiche and Scribe. In the late seventies, adaptation of foreign plays had replaced translation. Grundy adapted the well-made plays of his models with the greatest care. In 1890 he began his more

significant work by writing A pair of Spectacles on the basis of a piece by Labiche and Delacour. Though displaying lamentable faults — sentimentalism, improbable plot, absurd characterization— A Pair of Spectacles is remarkable for being serious in purpose; and, although an adaptation, it possesses truly English qualities. Two years later Grundy made a more important contribution to the theatre. A Fool's Paradise, while suffering from many melodramatic weaknesses; such as, crudity of plot, gruesomeness of event, and absurdity of psychology, had the unique merits of being serious, original, and tragic. In the following year Grundy wrote another serious play, Sowing the Wind. Here he pleads the cause of the illegitimate child. The qualities which gave Grundy's dramas their great popularity in the nineties—sentimentalism, smart dialogue, and skilful construction—are not now held to be of high value. He is remembered today in the history of the theatre chiefly as having been one of the first writers to popularize serious English drama in modern times.

An important significance of Grundy's interest in serious drama is its indication that the influence of Ibsen was beginning to affect strongly the stage of Europe. More consciously than Grundy, Henry Arthur Jones felt and reacted to this new current. After scoring a great theatrical and financial success in a melodrama, The Silver King (1882), Jones turned to a serious treatment of life in Saints and Sinners (1884). This play is the

greatest and most important foundation stone of modern English drama. Jones here makes a decided attempt to examine seriously the life of the English nation. His predecessors had flirted with the idea; Jones wooed it earnestly.

Saints and Sinners is also epoch-making in that it was printed and prefaced. Jones considered that drama had become over-theatrical largely owing to the fact that the discontinuance of the practice of printing plays had limited their sphere of influence. He held that play-writing would become more of an art if authors worked with a reading public in view. By having Saints and Sinners printed Jones began a vogue which has persisted and which has played a vital part in raising the artistic quality of English dramatic productions. In writing a preface for the play, Jones' aim was to re-establish a valuable means of communication between author and audience. The need for such an avenue of intercourse is greatest, of course, in purpose-plays. Here, again, Jones has been a model for his successors.

Another important aspect of Saints and Sinners is its attack on English middle-class puritanism. In this respect Jones provided a cue for a host of playwrights. In fact, the puritanical complex has been one of the chief points of attack for the English dramatists of the past thirty years. In Saints and Sinners Jones exposed the pharisaical union between commercialism and so-called religion, which had helped make England the economic centre of the world and a stronghold of prudish and false respectability. With subtle irony he showed that, for the middle classes at least, money was the real god, and self-love

and self-deception the real bases of professed religion and morality. This social criticism was sound. Here, too, Jones castigates the repression and dullness to which such a system subjects its victims. In these respects he was blazing new and important trails.

Although of the greatest importance in the development of English drama, Saints and Sinners displays many faults. Much of the characterization is weak, the plot is melodramatic, and the events are over-sensational. The play is further marred by sentimentalism and poetic justice. Nevertheless, Jones had the courage to write a domestic tragedy before any of his fellow-authors dared to do so: the ending of this play is realistic — the heroine dies. There is no doubt that in Saints and Sinners modern English drama was born and the stage and life after a long and dismal separation, one again brought together.

In his conception of the value and the function of the theatre Jones was revolutionary. He contended that drama was, or ought to be, essentially both a great art and a criticism of life. The chief task performed by the stage in his day was to amuse the public. Jones would have made English drama entertaining but free from triviality and frivolity; and serious, but not sombre. He admitted that it was necessary to create certain stage-illusions — that acting was not life itself; but he insisted that the dominant purpose of the theatre should be not the presentation of a phantasmagoria of unrealities and impossibilities, but rather the

dramatic depiction of the life of the people. Jones believed that the chief purpose of a playwright was not to provide the audience with an escape from life, as his predecessors had striven to do; not even to portray faithfully the surface of life, as Robertson and the Bancrofts had tried, somewhat mechanically, to do; but chiefly to make real and tangible to the public the main movements and characteristics of society and to expose unreal and dangerous situations in that society.

Early in his career as a dramatist Jones became a pioneer; before many years had passed he was behind the times. Owing to his early financial independence he could afford to experiment. It was this opportunity, coupled with his definite desires and plans for improvement, as well as his own cleverness, that made possible Saints and Sinners. While borrowing much from the theory and practice of Robertson, he was not satisfied with that dramatist's work. In order to make his plays more completely English and true to life, Jones selected his characters, plots, and language from the provincial, country-town middle class from which he had sprung and which he knew so well. Probably his greatest play constructed on this basis is Michael and His Lost Angel (1896). But domestic tragedy was no longer a novelty: Jones' audience was getting ahead of him. His most significant work was over. He had not in him the stuff of which great writers of tragedy are made: he lacked penetration and breadth of vision. He was a preacher and a moralizer, — always sincere and serious, but always thinking in terms of the comedy of manners. Attacked for his supposedly

irreverent stand in Michael and His Lost Angel, Jones forsook familiar grounds, turned to the upper classes for his themes, and ceased to contribute much to the development of the drama. But his place in the history of the modern theatre is secure, as he was a definite predecessor of Shaw.

Lesser as a dramatist than Jones, but more typical of the age, was Arthur Wing Pinero. Like Jones, Pinero depends for his permanence on the fact that he stands in the vestibule of modern English drama. His contributions in this respect were offered both in tragedies and in comedies. Robertson's influence had done much to direct English comedy along sound lines; but a decade after that writer's death there was need of a fresh stimulus. This was provided partly by Pinero. In the eighties he wrote several comic plays which were truly English in circumstance and atmosphere and which provided humour in character rather than in mere situation. In spite of their artificiality and other theatrical qualities these plays contributed greatly to the development of a native English comedy.

In the nineties, while still writing comic pieces, Pinero turned definitely to serious drama. His first important attempt in this direction was The Profligate, his greatest, The Second Mrs. Tangueray. In these works the author tries to show the error of social laws, especially in respect of the marriage question. He constantly tries to drive home the fact that character is destiny. But as a writer of tragedies Pinero is not great. Like Jones, he is a sincere and serious moralizer; but he lacks the

supreme intellect—the profound conception of life —of a master tragedian. His characters are too mean: their fall cannot arouse pity or terror. Their meanness is further accentuated by the satire to which he subjects other people of the same social level. Then, too, he cannot escape from the comedy of manners: his scenes and people are monotonously plutocratic; and his characters are stereotyped, constantly reappearing with only the names changed. Partly owing to the brilliant dialogue with which he seeks to relieve the tragic tension, there is a strong air of artificiality about even his most serious works. And he has never entirely rid himself of a Victorian melodramatic residue.

The qualities which made Pinero's tragedies popular in the nineties are not those which make him important for our purposes. His technically faultless structure, his scintillating repartee, his Divean scenes and people, have lost much of their appeal. His plays will not endure. But he made important contributions to the advance of English drama along modern lines. His strenuous attempts both to show people that the theatre should not be a mere place of recreation, and to obtain for the dramatist the right to regard his work as a serious art, helped greatly to restore the drama to its true function as a criticism of life.

The efforts of writers like Jones and Pinero to raise the standard of the English stage in the last decades of the nineteenth century were seconded by managers and producers, actors and critics. In 1880 the Bancrofts secured and remodelled the

Haymarket Theatre. The stage was set in an immense gilded picture frame, and the pit was completely abolished. Admission prices were raised and the salaries of actors increased. These changes brought about increased popularity and financial success. As the plays of Robertson were losing their appeal, the "well-made" French play was brought in by the Bancrofts. But theft was becoming almost impossible owing to the increased stringency of international copyright laws; hence, the growth of indigenous English drama was encouraged as never before. While translation of foreign plays gave way to adaptation, frequently only ideas were borrowed. Such a change made possible the creation of a native atmosphere and native characters. Along with these advances came a resuscitation of Shakespeare's work. Sir Henry Irving not only revived and popularized Shakespeare; he simultaneously increased in an immense degree the social standing of the stage profession. And to the general improvement of the theatre dramatic criticism added its quota. Such men as Clement Scott and William Archer criticised drama from both the literary and the technical points of view. The result was that a public taste in things dramatic was developed; and people who went to the theatre began to know what they were looking for and whether or not they received what they sought. This condition, in turn, brought salutary pressure to bear on writers and producers.

By the close of the century the tide of drama was flowing steadily and in increasing volume towards the theatre of today. Great numbers of Victorian plays were still being written;

but their period of dominance was coming rapidly to a close. Although the censorship of the stage was still banefully restrictive, its evil influence had declined with the decay of the puritanical complex. And the other diseases which had afflicted nineteenth-century drama had been, in some cases, cured; in others, relieved. The greatest dramatic writers of the modern English world were beginning to offer to the theatre plays in which the author's interpretation of life—criticism of life—was presented to the public through the medium of dramatic art. Modern English drama—the drama of ideas—was coming into its own.

CHAPTER III.

The Drama of Social Criticism.

The drama of the last fifty years has been a drama of realism, in respect to method, and a drama of social criticism, in respect to purpose. The first half of the nineteenth century was a period of romanticism and artificiality. With the rise of the humanitarian and scientific movements, democratic tendencies in art became manifest in the drama, as they had appeared earlier in poetry and the novel. In the middle of the century such French dramatists as Augier and Dumas fils began to depict on the stage crying social evils. But it was Ibsen who really put social drama "on its feet". In this respect Ibsen was a pioneer and a great foundation-builder; he was also the exponent of a wide-spread and growing dramatic tendency. Since Ibsen's day dramatists have turned more and more completely to social themes. In English drama this movement has manifested itself most clearly and powerfully in the works of such men as T. W. Robertson, George Bernard Shaw, and John Galsworthy.

The social problems treated by modern dramatists are many and varied. Probably the three principal subjects are, problems of sex, antagonisms of race, and the relations between the rich and the poor. The latter type may be divided, roughly, into three classes: society before the laws, philanthropic activities, and industrial situations. But there are many social problems treated on the stage, which would fit exactly

into none of these categories. Ibsen's drama of social criticism was not only social —it was individualistic, and became more so in its later manifestations. The majority of Ibsen's contemporaries and successors in social drama have been concerned more with specific outward causes than with the individual soul. Chief among these subjects are, divorce, race-suicide, corruption in public officials, the war between capital and labour, prostitution, "tainted-money," militarism, religious tyranny, vivisection as cruelty, commercialism as the cause of war, the condition of the released convict.

The pioneer in the English drama of social criticism was T.W. Robertson. In some respects he is the direct ancestor of such a modern social critic as Shaw. Besides striving to express a native genius, he made a determined effort to unite the stage and life. It is mainly for these two efforts that Robertson occupies an important position in the beginnings of the modern English drama of social criticism. The tendency to social criticism in modern English drama, marked and stimulated by the work of Robertson, continued to be manifested in the works of such men as Sydney Grundy, Henry Arthur Jones, and Arthur Wing Pinero.

The work of these English dramatists indicates that trend in modern English drama towards social criticism, which reached its apex in the plays of Shaw and Galsworthy. "Shaw, the greatest figure in modern English drama, handles in comedy the same ideas that such realists as Ibsen and Galsworthy treat seriously. That is, Shaw as a comedian differs from the realists in his manner of handling an idea. In the French problem plays of Dumas fils and Augier the ideas came out of the action. With Shaw ideas

are the origin of the action. He treats two sorts of topics in his plays: those that are implicit in contemporary formulas of life, and those that comprise the legend which is, for us, the history of the past. In all his work Shaw questions the validity of ideas by means of ridicule and clear insight. He is an intellectual realist working through comedy on topics contemporary and historical". And his methods are peculiarly his own. His plays are essentially didactic. Shaw is, however, skilful at finding devices by which to give his sermons the appearance of natural dialogue. This is exemplified in the dream-episode in Man and Superman, where the characters discuss heaven, hell and earth in terms of Shaw's philosophy; also in John Bull's Other Island where the mad priest, Father Keegan, instead of soliloquizing, speaks to a grasshopper. Shaw's ideas are largely borrowed - but in his vast reading he has ransacked almost the whole field of literature. He has a rare talent for seizing on the kernel of another's thought and giving it new clarity and significance. We are first disarmed by brilliant satire, wit and paradox. While in this mood, we imbibe Shaw's ideas, however foreign to us they may be. Afterwards we realize what sober truth there really seems to be in them. Whether or not we agree with Shaw's ideas, he certainly makes us think.

In the past forty years Shaw has delivered, through the drama, a vast amount of trenchant social criticism. We can merely touch on a few of his efforts in this direction. He began with Widowers' Houses (1892). He himself describes it well as "a grotesquely realistic exposure of slum landlordism, municipal

jobbery, and the pecuniary and matrimonial ties between it and the pleasant people of 'independent' incomes who imagine that such sordid matters do not touch their own lives". In The Philanderer (1898) Shaw vents his strong prejudices against vivisection in particular and the medical profession in general. Superficially Mrs. Warren's Profession (1898) is an attack on the evils of prostitution. But the play is impregnated with a broad exposé of the weaknesses of one social and economic organization. Shaw here points out the close relation obtaining between sexual immorality and the conventional dependence of woman on man. He also points the apologue of modern industrialism. Arms and the Man (1898) caricatures militarism and conventional romanticism. In Candida (1895), Shaw embodied a series of interesting and informing views on Christianity, art, love, marriage and socialism. Major Barbara (1905) shows how impossible it is for an idealist to escape from the trammels of the modern economic system. A person with pure intentions may strive to raise the poor and the outcast; but the only possibility of success lies in accepting aid from those members of society who live on the exploitation of the lower classes. Shaw here attacks the evils of poverty. "Poverty blights whole cities; spreads horrible pestilences; strikes dead the very souls of all who come within sight, sound or smell of it. What you call crime is nothing... there are not fifty genuine professional criminals in London. But there are millions of poor people, abject people, dirty people, ill fed, ill clothed people. They poison us morally and physically: they kill the happiness of society" This

play also attacks militarism and war from the economic point of view. The builders of armaments — those who stand to profit most from a war — are among the men most influential in politics and capable of creating a war. They are also among the largest contributors to charitable funds, which they make necessary. In The Doctor's Dilemma (1906) Shaw returns to the attack on the medical profession. Here the conflicting theories of four big specialists are held up to ridicule. But Shaw goes further and states explicitly his objections to a number of modern medical theories. Getting Married (1908) is Shaw's chief commentary on the questions of divorce and marriage. Here he considers the marital relations from various points of view—social, ecclesiastical and legal, and points out the tragedies and absurdities of the modern system of marriage. Shaw seems to feel that marriage is an obsolete institution; that it is out of joint with the modern economic and social status of woman; and that it is ceasing to function efficiently in its apparent purpose of the preservation of the species. Misalliance (1910) is probably Shaw's most complete exposition of the domestic situation. He had already embodied the ideal of freedom, the right of the individual to spontaneous and autonomous self-expression and development, in such plays as You Never Can Tell (1900) and Mrs. Warren's Profession. In Misalliance he expands and completes the same ideas. The key-note of the play is the point that it is impossible for different generations to understand each other completely. The older generation is intensely conservative; the younger is progressive and in revolt, and is stifled painfully by the restrictions to which its predecessor would have it submit.

In Fanny's First Play (1911) Shaw throws a strong light on the bases of our morality. He finds them largely habitual and conventional. Here, as in the majority of his plays, Shaw's chief aim is to shake us out of our humdrum lethargic way of taking things for granted, and make us think for ourselves.

As a social critic Shaw the dramatist is not merely an iconoclast. It is true that most of his plays are destructive of the ideas of society as they are commonly held today. But Shaw pleads that before valuable constructive social criticism can be done, there must be a vast amount of tearing-down of obsolete and effete social creeds and institutions. And Shaw's bark is worse than his bite. He realizes that people are so conservative in their opinions and customs that his most searching and exaggerated attacks will never even go so far as to destroy the dross and the evil in modern society, much less harm or lessen the good. By shouting at the top of his voice Shaw may hope to make people hear him a little; were he to speak quietly and moderately, he might easily be quite overlooked. Then, too, his method is that of satire; and satire, of its very nature, involves caricature and extremity of statement. Behind all his clowning and exaggeration Shaw is a sincere, earnest, and sane critic of men and things as they are today. Shaw's drama is not art. But he does not aim at art. "For art's sake", he says, "I would not write a single line." He is satisfied with his work to the extent to which it makes men examine themselves and their social relations and act accordingly, retaining the wheat, but throwing the chaff into the fire.

Galsworthy's purpose is, fundamentally, similar to that of Shaw; but the two dramatists use different methods and achieve different dramatic results. Shaw is the social reformer, most of whose work is already almost out of date. Galsworthy, with a purpose equally serious, regards drama as an art as well as a vehicle of social criticism. Much of Galsworthy's work will live as great drama. Shaw is the comedian and the satirist; Galsworthy is potently a realist, who has caught his methods from the "consistent naturalists" of the Continent. Galsworthy says, "A Drama must be shaped so as to have a spire of meaning. Every grouping of life and character has its inherent moral; and the business of the dramatist is so to pose the group as to bring that moral poignantly to the light of day". In respect to this moral Galsworthy prefers to offer to his audience "no cut-and-dried codes, but the phenomena of life and character, selected and combined, but not distorted by the dramatist's outlook, set down without fear, favour or prejudice, leaving the public to draw such poor moral as nature may afford." This method depends largely on the interpretation of character. It requires broad vision, sympathy, and impartiality. Incidentally, it is far more conducive to an artistic drama than is Shaw's method.

Like Shaw, Galsworthy is very skilful at finding devices for expressing his social ideas without appearing to be over-didactic. In the frame-work of his plays he creates occasions for speech-making. Such are the meetings of the workers and the capitalists in Strife, the trial scene in Justice and More's speech in The Mob. The mainspring of Galsworthy's chief

plays is didacticism, although realism is, superficially, the most apparent feature. What has driven him to be a reformer is the deep regret and pity which the faults and evils of men and society have inspired in him. He strives to be absolutely impartial in presenting his problems. But one cannot escape the feeling that his sympathy leans to the under-dog, the oppressed.

In his various social dramas Galsworthy has consistently pursued the same ends and employed the same methods. The Silver Box (1906) is an exposition of the fact that though theoretically all persons are equal before the law, in reality there is one law for the rich and another for the poor, and the latter get the worst of it. In Justice (1910) we see how the rigidity of the law makes it impossible to give justice to certain individuals, and how the method of prison correction, enlightened and humanitarian as it may seem to be, rolls like a juggernaut over the souls of its victims. Strife (1909) depicts the horrors of the struggle between labour and capital. Both sides have good intentions; both are blind to their own real interests; and neither wins, while both lose. Poverty, with its twin ghosts, crime and "charity," provides the problem in The Pigeon (1912). Here, too, is embodied the idea of the need of every one, both men and women, for freedom and self-expression. In The Fugitives (1913) is found the same theme (this time restricted to woman)—woman is struggling for the right to freedom, to truth, to life and to herself. The subject is treated also in The Eldest Son (1912) where it takes the form of the revolt of the younger generation against the domination of the older. Galsworthy revived and developed the theme of The Eldest Son in A Family Man (1921). The Skin Game (1920) brings out the struggle between

the old English aristocratic idea and ^{the} business efficiency and energy of the new classes just coming into wealth. In Loyalties (1922) there is a similar struggle — this time between the ideals of the English officer of aristocratic birth and those of the wealthy young Jew. As in Strife Galsworthy betrays intense pity for these social struggles which sap the life and energy of both sides and benefit neither. The Mob (1914) shows us both the smallness and the greatness of the pacifist and the jingoist. We admire both and yet we must pity the weakness of both.

In none of Galsworthy's plays have we the suppression of drama to thesis, as we saw to be the case in most of Shaw's works. The characters in a Galsworthy' play are real, human people, not mouthpieces through which the author megaphones his own ideas to the audience. The chief interest is human. Nevertheless the ideas with which the writer wishes to impress his public are conveyed effectively. Our first impression of human interest in the characters of the play, gives way, on reflection, to the realization that Galsworthy has been giving us a delicate sermon, none the less impressive because hid away behind a thick coating of realism. We also find out that the author feels very keenly what he preaches, but obscures his personal opinions and emotions behind a wall of strict impartiality. This is all part of the Galsworthy method of "a spire of meaning."

The chief essential criticism of an adverse nature to be launched against the drama of social criticism is the aesthetic objection. The true purpose of art is not to instruct

or to warn but "to furnish noble grounds for noble emotions" in a medium " simple, sensuous and impassioned". The more art is didactic, the less it is art. A writer may choose the drama as the most convenient means by which to impress his ideas on the public. This does not make him a great dramatist in the artistic sense of the word, at least. On the other hand, it is possible that a didactic drama may be great art, if art is to be valued as a criticism of life, as a means by which man may attain a greater sympathy for his fellows. If art is to be valued for art's sake, neither Shaw nor Galsworthy (the former less than the latter) can be called great artists. But if art, is, rather, a criticism of life, the best works of both men are real art. From almost every point of view, however, the plays of Galsworthy are greater dramatic productions than are those of George Bernard Shaw.

There are many modern English dramatists, whose works we have not discussed, who have contributed to the drama of social criticism. But the scope of our essay is too limited to admit of their treatment; and by discussing the chief figures who mark the rise and the flowering of modern English dramatic social criticism we feel that we have given as rounded-out a treatment of the subject as is here convenient.

CHAPTER IV.Shaw's Man and Superman: A Typical "Play
of Ideas.

Man and Superman, by George Bernard Shaw, belongs to the drama of ideas. In respect to both type and quality, it stands on the apex of this category. Moreover, it illustrates Shaw's abilities and methods as a writer and a dramatist better than do most of his other plays. The plot is a feeble skeleton, the characters mere mouthpieces, and the ideas extreme and largely borrowed. But the materials are handled with such consummate skill—nay, genius—that those who read the play, if they are not too dull-witted or ignorant, are shocked into new and wide avenues of thought by the brilliant satire, the astonishing caricature, and the lightning-like penetration of intellect. Here, as nowhere else in modern English drama, are we mentally refreshed and stimulated.

Shaw is working on two planes in Man and Superman. On the surface of the plot the romantic, sentimental conception of love as a beautiful, ethereal, immaterial relationship between the sexes, is exposed to pleasant satire. But the author is more concerned with the underlying, fundamental ideas which lurk behind the plot and form the real pith of the play. Here Shaw develops his conception of love as the Life Force which is the principle of life in the Universe and which is driving life onwards and upwards to higher and better things by means of creative evolution.

The story in Man and Superman is simple. John Tanner, young, wealthy, and wise, becomes the guardian of a designing young woman. Tanner (who is Shaw's chief mouthpiece in the play) is painfully conscious of the girl's intentions to marry him and of the real danger of his falling a prey to her designs. In desperation he runs away to Spain. She follows him. They meet again and Tanner's worst fears are realized. Consciously, but against his will, he falls into the net which she has spread for him. In a long dream-episode in the third act Shaw expounds concisely, through his characters, the philosophy of love which is imminent in the rest of the play.

Shaw's philosophy of love is partly iconoclastic, partly constructive. On the one hand, he tries to demolish our romantic conceptions of love and marriage. He declares that "the confusion of marriage with morality has done more to destroy the conscience of the human race than any other single error". Marriage is "a man-trap baited with simulated accomplishments and delusive idealizations. In this situation Shaw sees danger for the welfare of the race. Marriage, as functioning at present, leads to blind and indiscriminate reproduction, which in turn means the failure of humanity to improve itself with surety and speed. Shaw would not discard marriage. But he would lift it out of the morass of false ideas and idealisms by which its true purpose has been obscured, into the cold and practical light of consciousness and reason. Further, he shows, as others from Shakespeare to Schopenhauer have shown, that in courtship it is woman, not man, who is the aggressor. Man's

delusion that he is a master seeking a mate merely makes him softer clay in the hands of his fair huntress.

On the other hand, while trying to correct our views about the facts of courtship and marriage, Shaw goes further and explains what he considers to be the nature and the possibilities of the reproductive activities of the sexes. In this respect he is the evolutionist, looking both before and after. The greatest factor in the human equation is love, which he re-names the Life Force. This Life Force, which is the vital principle in the Universe, has been striving, through innumerable species and countless generations, to create higher forms of life. In the course of time it has produced man, its supreme achievement thus far. Heretofore it has been working largely in the dark and by chance. But it is striving to become conscious so that life may progress upwards more rapidly. Thus, at present, the ultimate aim of the Life Force is a creature which will be all brains—the Superman. Each of us contains a spark, small or large, of the consciousness which the Life Force seeks. Those who possess this quality in an abnormal degree are the philosophers who will consciously direct the race along the best lines of development. But the philosopher cannot hand on his abilities through heredity. He can only work until he dies, when the Life Force will create others to carry on the work. Apparently Shaw thinks that he is one of these philosophers.

In this process of evolution sex plays a vital part. The Life Force is imminent in woman. Man, although woman's

necessary complement, is a secondary instrument. "Sexually Woman is Nature's contrivance for perpetuating its highest achievement. Sexually, Man is Woman's contrivance for fulfilling Nature's behest in the most economical way."

Civilization is the result of man's attempts to free himself from this secondary importance. Incidentally, man has displayed most of his ingenuity in inventing engines for his own destruction. Marriage is a convention; aside from its practical purpose of reproduction, it is of trifling value.

The hero of Man and Superman is one of those individuals who are conscious of the purpose of the Life Force. But while he understands the real nature of love and marriage and strives consciously to avoid matrimony, he falls as do other men. He would prefer to remain free, in order that he might develop himself unchecked. The Life Force, however, operating both in him and in the woman, proves to be too strong for him. This is as it should be. It is well for him to realize what the Life Force is seeking, and to direct his activities accordingly. But it would be fatal for humanity if he were to be entirely the thinker and the director of his destiny. The race must be continued. Progress lies in this compromise between instinctive reproduction and the individual's conscious desire for improvement.

Having discussed only the main thread of the philosophy embodied in Man and Superman we may now notice Shaw's methods. The play is essentially didactic. Shaw, however, is skilful at finding devices by which to give his sermons the appearance of natural

dialogue. This is exemplified in the dream-episode where Don Juan (Tanner), the Devil and others, discuss heaven, hell and earth in terms of Shaw's philosophy. The ideas are largely borrowed: we find fragments from Nietzsche, Stringberg, Schopenhaver, and a host of others. In this connection it is worth while remembering that both Strindberg and Nietzsche were at least a little mad and Schopenhaver diseased and sexually abnormal. But the author of Man and Superman has a rare talent for seizing on the kernel of another's thought and giving it new clarity and significance. We are first disarmed by brilliant satire, wit, and paradox. While in this mood, we imbibe Shaw's ideas, however foreign to us they may be. Afterwards we realize what sober truth there really seems to be in them. Whether or not we agree with Shaw's ideas, he certainly makes us think.

In deciding to publish Man and Superman Shaw took his cue from Henry Arthur Jones. The playwrights of the nineteenth century had neglected to have their plays printed. Jones realized that this failure had done the drama incalculable injury. The writer who depends on the theatre alone as a vehicle by which to reach the public ear, is likely to be influenced unduly by stage conditions. No doubt this explains to a large extent the excessive artificiality which mars Victorian drama. The printed play, moreover, brings the writer into touch with a vast number of people who do not attend the theatre, and increases immeasurably both his influence and his chances of success. The new vogue

instituted by Jones has been followed by other playwrights, including Shaw, and has played an important part in the elevation of modern English drama to the level of an art.