

"THE ROADHOUSE IN ARDEN"

Bacon and Shakespeare are disclosed in conversation. Neither the background nor the furniture is actually Elizabethan; but both are appropriate to the romantic mood of this fantastic play. The setting was designed by Mr. Robert Lawson.

SCENIC SETTINGS IN AMERICA

BY CLAYTON HAMILTON

I
 ANYBODY who has studied Mr. Hiram Kelly Moderwell's instructive treatise on *The Theatre of To-Day* must admit that our American theatre, considered generally, is loitering at least ten years behind the times. This fact is somewhat disappointing to those of us who are habituated to believe that America is naturally the leader of the world in matters of mere enterprise. The phrase, "mere enterprise," is used advisedly; for though the drama is an art, the theatre is a business. Though we might be willing to admit that the backwardness of our drama is necessitated by a native inaptitude for art, it would be much more difficult to admit that the backwardness of our theatre is necessitated by a native inaptitude for business. This latter hypothesis would be a little staggering. America has always been supposed to be

a country of good business men. We have proved that we can run such things as railroads, mines, and steel plants efficiently and well. Is it really possible that, when it comes to running theatres, we are easily outdistanced, not only by the efficient Germans but also by the langourous Russians?

The facts appear to be incontrovertible. The best-conducted theatre in the world—according to the testimony of all investigators who have studied the matter at first hand—is the Art Theatre of Moscow; and, following close upon the heels of this leading institution, are the foremost theatres of Germany and Hungary. France, also, is close up in the running; but the American theatre is a manifest anachronism. What is the reason for our backwardness in this matter of mere enterprise?

The reason is not difficult to define;



"THE RED CLOAK"—SCENE I

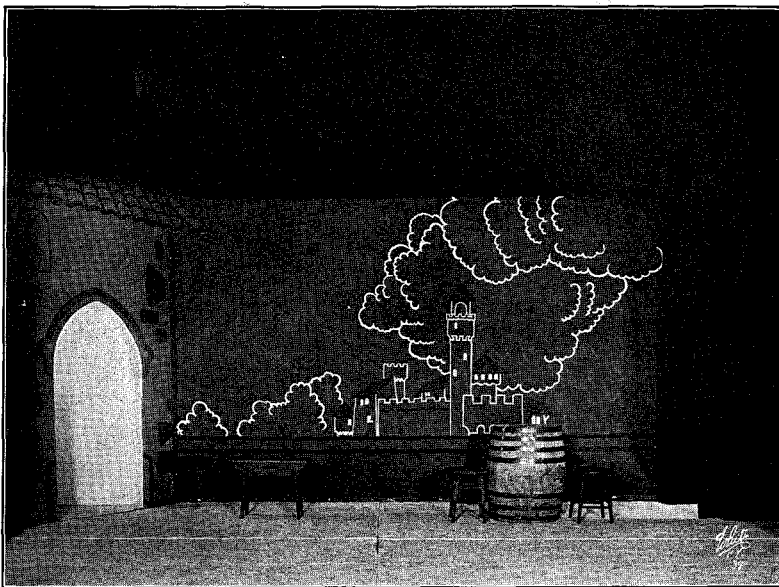
This is a marionette pantomime, produced by the Washington Square Players, with scenery and costumes designed by Mr. Lee Simonson. Note the way in which the fantastic costumes of the puppets are set off by the blank wall behind them. Only a few conventional details of architectural design relieve the monotony of this wall.



"THE RED CLOAK"—SCENE II

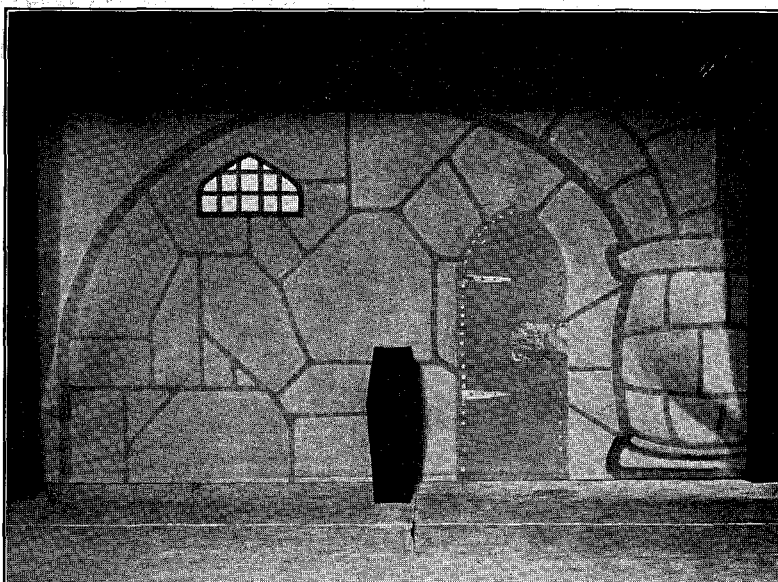
Here we have a crowded scene; yet the puppets are still conceived as mere details of a general decorative scheme. Note the merging of the costumes and the scenery into a composite whole.

Scenic Settings in America



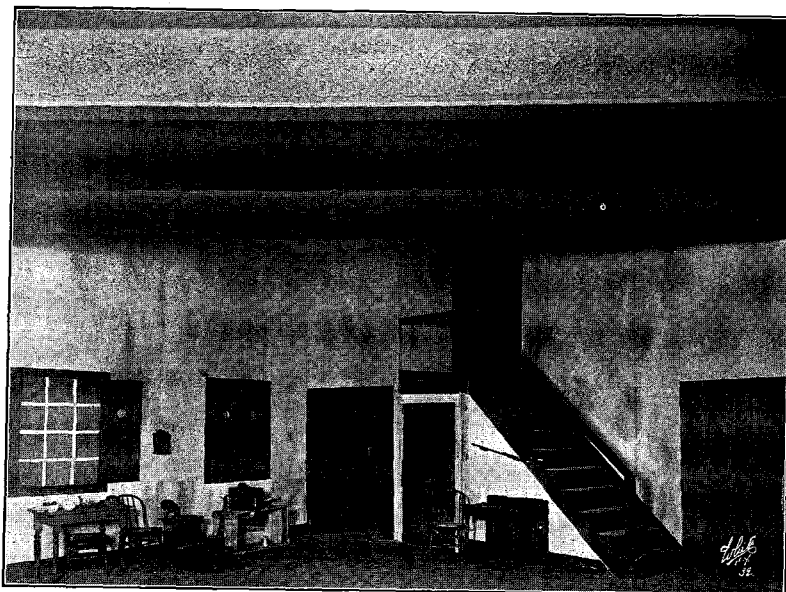
"THE RED CLOAK"—STAGE-SET FOR SCENE III

The back-drop, with its suggestive vista of Italian towers and cumulous clouds, cost less than fifty dollars. There is nothing on the stage except a barrel, two stools, and a small table, all of which are needed for the action. There is a tavern doorway at the spectator's left. This is an admirable design,—fantastic, spirited, and absolutely economical.



"THE RED CLOAK"—STAGE-SET FOR SCENE II

The den of the Camorristi. A few gigantic lines drawn upon the back-drop make the spectators imagine that they are really in a dungeon.



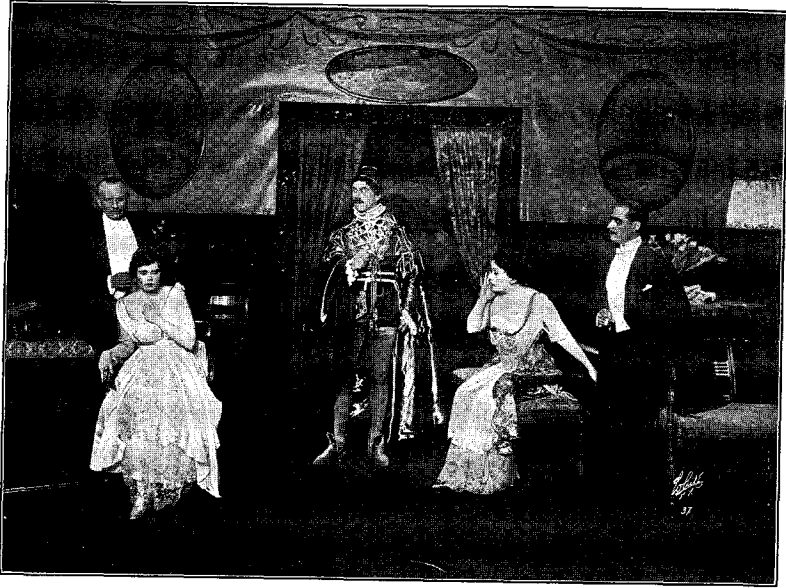
"THE CLOD"—SCENIC SETTING

This is an example of a realistic setting devised by the Washington Square Players. In this case, the appeal is based, not on suggestion, but on imitation; but all superfluous details have been excluded. Every object that is seen upon the stage is absolutely necessary to the action. This setting was designed by Mr. John King.



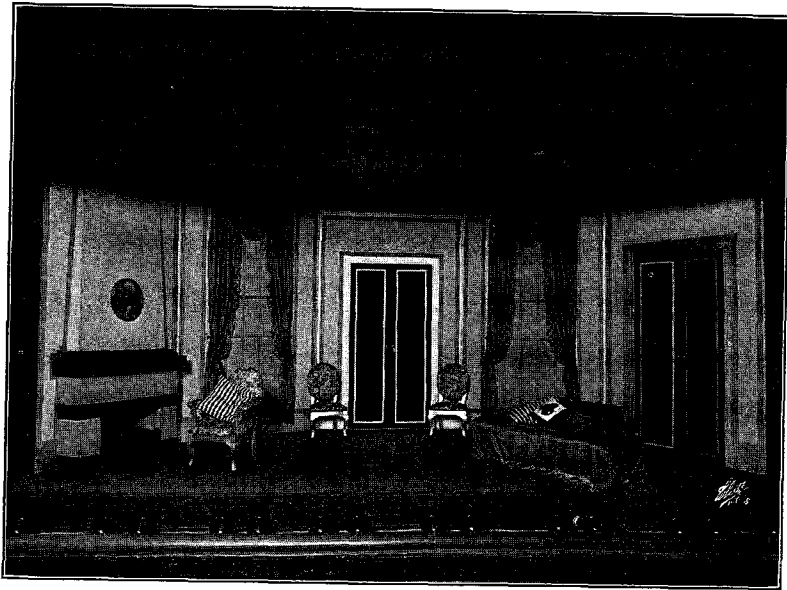
"THE TENOR"—SCENIC SETTING

This tragi-comedy by Frank Wedekind is localised in a hotel room in an Austrian city. Note, however, that Mr. Paul T. Frankl, who designed the setting, has preferred a decorative treatment of the project to the alternative of imitation.



"THE FEAR MARKET"—ACT II

This stage-set was designed by the Princess Troubetzkoy (Amélie Rives), who wrote the play. The scene itself, with its repetition of the peacock motive, is decorative; but the furniture is cumbersomely photographic. This setting represents a transition from the old manner toward the new.



"LITERATURE"—SCENE SETTING

Note how simply Mr. Paul T. Frankl has rendered a room in a Vienna boarding-house. The setting satisfies the eye and is appropriate to the action; yet it does not rely upon the imitation of actuality.

but it is extremely difficult to understand. It is merely that the men who control the theatre in America are not sufficiently interested in their own business to learn enough about it to make their methods up to date. Their conservatism—to dignify this strange inertia by a lofty word—seems curiously un-American. We are not accustomed to seeing our big business men defeated in a matter of mere business.

Suppose, for purposes of illustration, that an American business man has invested half a million dollars in the manufacture of mustard. Suppose, further, that he hears, from a returning traveller, that the Germans have found a way to manufacture better mustard at a smaller cost. What does he do? He immediately goes to Germany himself, or sends an emissary, to learn the new improvement in his business; thereafter, he revises his own methods of manufacture, in order to bring them up to date; and, by this means, he is soon enabled to undersell the world. This is the story of American business, as it is ordinarily recorded and commonly believed. If there was anything new to be learned about running railroads, Mr. Harriman learned it and put it immediately into operation; and, if there is anything new to be learned about the manufacture of steel, it is not likely to escape the eagerly acquisitive mind of Mr. Schwab.

This is the way in which Americans do business in every line—except the one line of the theatre. When word is brought from Europe that a great improvement has been made in the mechanism of the theatre, our American managers are not sufficiently interested to investigate the matter. As business men, they might save thousands of dollars by sending an emissary to Germany or Russia to study the innovation and import it to this country; but they prefer to remain ignorant of all advances that are made in the very business in which they are engaged.

This may seem to be an over-statement; but let us consider for a moment

a single detail of the mere mechanism of the theatre. Everybody knows that it is desirable, for a multitude of reasons, to equip a theatre in such a way as to be able to supplant one stage-set with another in a few seconds. Throughout the last ten years, this purpose has been accomplished in Germany by three different devices,—namely, the revolving stage, or *drehbühne*; the sliding stage, or *schiebebühne*; and the rolling stage, or *wagenbühne*. Any American theatre-manager might study the respective merits of these three devices in a single day. Yet, in this country, we build theatre after theatre without installing any of these appliances for the rapid shifting of scenery. In all America, there are, as yet, only three revolving stages,—one in Oakland, California; and the other two at the Century Theatre and the Little Theatre in New York, both of which were projected by Mr. Winthrop Ames.

Take another matter of mere mechanism,—the matter of stage-lighting. In nearly every modern German theatre, the stage is bounded by a concrete cyclorama, which is used to reflect and to diffuse the light that ultimately irradiates the scene. There is only one theatre in New York which is provided with this new appliance,—namely, the Neighbourhood Theatre in Grand Street, which most of our American managers have never even visited.

During the last ten years, nearly every important producing manager in Europe has discarded the old method of illuminating the stage from a trough of footlights, and has adopted a new method of lighting from the top and from the sides. In New York, the new method of illuminating the stage was clearly exemplified a year ago, by Mr. Granville Barker; but thus far it has been adopted, in our American theatre, only by Mr. David Belasco. When the curtain rose upon the first performance of *The Boomerang*, on August 10, 1915, it was apparent that Mr. Belasco had removed the footlights from his theatre and had arranged to illuminate

his stage from the top and from the sides. *The Boomerang* achieved a success which may be described without hyperbole as record-breaking; the play has been seen by hundreds of thousands of people; and Mr. Belasco has proved, by the sheer enjoyment of the public, that the new method of stage-lighting is more efficacious than the old. Yet, in the six months which have elapsed since the first performance of *The Boomerang*, no other American manager has adopted the new method of stage-lighting which Mr. Belasco has so successfully employed; and it may seriously be doubted that any of our other managers have even taken the trouble to study the devices by which Mr. Belasco has achieved his fine effects.

The theatre-business in America is controlled by less than twenty men; and, with one or two notable exceptions, these men are not interested in the theatre. Neither Mr. Lee Shubert nor Mr. Abraham Lincoln Erlanger—and these names are selected quite impersonally, to indicate merely the sort of men who have invested millions of dollars in our theatre-business—knows as much about the theatre of to-day as Mr. Hiram Kelly Moderwell, —a young man, only a few years out of college, who has no money to invest, but who was sufficiently interested in the theatre-business to devote two years to the study of it. Mr. Moderwell quite obviously knows [the point, at least, is obvious to anybody who has read his book] how plays are staged in Dresden and in Moscow, and how the theatre-managers in those cities contrive to do better things for less money than the theatre-managers of New York; yet Mr. Erlanger and Mr. Shubert, who have millions of dollars invested in the theatre-business, do not even bother to find out what is known about their business by a disinterested investigator like Mr. Moderwell. What is the reason for this enormous lassitude? Are Mr. Erlanger and Mr. Shubert too busy to read Mr. Moderwell's book, which is devoted to the practical details

of the very business in which they have invested so much money? And, even so, are they so very, very busy that they cannot even look at the illustrations to the volume?

It takes about an hour to study very thoughtfully the illustrations which are published in *The Theatre of To-Day*; yet, after a single hour devoted to this study, Mr. Shubert or Mr. Erlanger—and it must always be remembered that these names are chosen quite impersonally, to indicate the type of our most energetic and most influential managers—would perceive that, in the matter of stage settings, our American theatre is loitering many years behind the times. Speaking generally, our theatre is still lingering in the Victorian—or horsehair—period; as yet, it has scarcely felt the impress of that modern movement which is known as the “new stagecraft.”

II

The movement known as the “new stagecraft” has been so long established on the continent of Europe that only in America can it literally be considered “new.” It began, about fifteen years ago, as a protest against the ultra-realism of the preceding period. At the very end of the nineteenth century, the drama—for reasons which need not, in the present context, be explained—was prevailingly a realistic drama; the appliances of the theatre of that period were appropriately suited to the drama of the time; but realism was so thoroughly established in the drama that even those authors who preferred to write romantic or poetic plays were required to have their plays produced in a realistic manner. Inevitably, therefore, the “new stagecraft” began as a revolt against this utterly illogical requirement.

The theatre may appeal to the public in either of two ways,—first, by imitation of the actual, and second, by suggestion of the real. The first method is realistic, for it requires in the public a process of inductive thought; the sec-

ond method is romantic, for it requires in the public a process of deductive thought. The apostles of the "new stagecraft"—while willing to leave to the realistic drama the methods of the realistic theatre—demanded that a new romantic theatre should be devised to cope with the requirements of a new romantic drama.

The subject is, in general, so large that only a single aspect can profitably be discussed in the course of the present paper. Let us choose, for convenience, to examine the attitude of the apostles of the "new stagecraft" toward the one detail of scenic setting. The revolutionists insisted that romantic writers should be aided by an absolute release from the encumbrance of realistic scenery.

They demanded, first, that scenes which were not definitely localised by the dramatist in place and time should not be definitely localised by the superimposition of scenery and properties. In staging Shakespeare, for example, they insisted that scenes which were written to be acted on an empty fore-stage should be acted on an empty apron. But, secondly, they demanded also that, in the scenery itself, the basis of appeal should be, not imitation, but suggestion.

For the detailed, pictorial scenery of the preceding period they substituted scenery which was summary and decorative. Instead of cluttering the stage with actual details, they contrived to suggest the desired scene by an appropriate design composed of lines and lights and colours. It was discovered, for example, that green curtains drooping in tall folds and illuminated with a light that never was on sea or land would suggest a better Forest of Arden than any imitative jumble of cotton rocks and canvas trees. It was discovered, also, that even for the uses of the realistic drama, a simple design of leading lines and elementary colours was more suggestive of the desired illusion of reality than a helter-skelter gathering of actual furniture and actual properties.

In two important particulars, the "new manner" of scenic setting proved itself superior to the old; for, first, it was more imaginative, and, second, it was more economical. The first point was particularly interesting to the audience; the second, to the manager.

People go to the theatre to enjoy *themselves*:—that is to say, their own participation in the play. They cannot really relish a performance until it ceases to seem to happen on the stage and begins to seem to happen in their own imaginations. A play, therefore, is effective in proportion to the extent to which it excites an imaginative contribution from the minds of those who see it. The old realistic scenery left the audience nothing to do, for everything had been already done upon the stage. The new suggestive scenery is more enjoyable, because it permits the spectators to create within their own imaginations an appreciable contribution to the total work of art.

Furthermore, the second great advantage of the decorative type of scenery is that it is considerably less expensive than the detailed, pictorial type of the preceding period. Here is a point which surely should appeal to our American managers, since they pride themselves on being business men. It is assuredly unbusinesslike to perpetuate an old fashion when it costs much more to do so than it would cost to adopt a new fashion which is manifestly better.

III

Despite the inertia of the tired business men who control the great majority of our theatres, it is an interesting fact that, whenever the new type of scenery has been exhibited in America, it has been enthusiastically welcomed by the public. When Mr. Winthrop Ames imported Reinhardt's *Sumurun*, the public was emphatically pleased; and an approval which was even more emphatic was accorded last year to Mr. Granville Barker's production of *The Man Who Married a Dumb Wife* and *Androcles and the Lion*. Our public,

as the phrase is, may not know anything about art, but it knows what it likes; and it likes the scenery designed by Bakst and Golovine for the Russian Ballet that is at present visiting the leading cities of this country. A mere "counting of the house" at every exhibition of the Russian Ballet should be sufficient to interest Mr. Erlanger or Mr. Shubert in the advisability—from the commercial standpoint—of adopting in this country the new type of scenery which was adopted a decade ago in nearly all the countries of the continent of Europe.

But our managers might reply that, in America, we lack the necessary artists to carry the new movement to success. This objection, if it should be made, would merely be a proof of ignorance. We have many fine artists, trained particularly for the work of scenic decoration; they are merely waiting for a chance to be employed. Setting aside Mr. Josef Urban, who, though resident in America, is an Austrian by birth, we have Mr. Livingston Platt, Mr. Sam Hume, Mr. Robert E. Jones, Mr. Robert McQuinn, Mr. William Penhallow Henderson, Mrs. O'Kane Conwell, Miss Helen Dryden, and many others, who have already shown what they can do whenever an opportunity has been accorded to them. Mr. Jones has studied with Reinhardt, Mr. Hume has studied with Gordon Craig, Mr. Platt has studied art in Bruges. All these artists are thoroughly prepared to design the new type of scenic settings: and any commercial manager who wishes to be informed of their addresses need only apply to the office of this magazine.

The work of Mr. Urban is already well known in our theatre, because of the initiative of Mr. George C. Tyler; and he is now employed by managers so diverse in the intent of their productions as Mr. Erlanger, Mr. Ziegfeld, and Mr. Hackett. Mr. Jones was given his first chance by Mr. Granville Barker, and Mr. Platt has been employed by that far-seeing manager, Miss Anglin. Mr. McQuinn was taken up

by Mr. Dillingham and allowed to design the lovely scenery of *Stop! Look! Listen!* But, despite these intimations of an ultimate triumph of the new art in our American theatre, nine-tenths of all our plays are still encumbered with the lumbering investiture of a fashion that is now a decade out of date.

IV

It is owing solely to the chronic lack of interest in all matters vital to the theatre on the part of nearly all of our commercial managers, that the new art of scenic setting has made most rapid strides among us in little theatres not commercially controlled by magnates whose minds are so impervious to innovation as those of Mr. Erlanger and Mr. Shubert. Such non-commercial institutions as Mrs. Lyman Gale's Toy Theatre in Boston and Mr. Maurice Browne's Little Theatre in Chicago have long made use of all the latest improvements in scenic setting, and, in this regard, are several years ahead of the majority of our commercial theatres on Broadway. It was in the Toy Theatre, for instance, that Miss Anglin "discovered" Mr. Livingston Platt. Even the dramatic associations of several of our leading colleges have already shown the way for our loitering commercial managers. The undergraduates of Harvard and of Dartmouth, for example, know more about the new art of scenic setting than Mr. Lee Shubert, who owns many theatres.

It is, therefore, not because of favouritism, but because of sheer necessity, that most of the illustrations for this article have been selected from productions which have recently been made by the Washington Square Players,—a band of amateurs who have only lately been graduated into the degree of professionals. When this organisation began its work a year ago, it gathered into its ranks not only actors and playwrights, but also painters and decorators. Its leaders, from the very outset, recognised the fact that good setting is as necessary to a modern play as good

writing or good acting,—that decoration is an essential detail of modern dramaturgy.

The acting of the Washington Square Players is still a little amateurish. In this detail, their theatre is inferior to the commercial theatres on Broadway. But their scenic settings are, by far, superior to those which may be seen in the vast majority of our commercial theatres. They charge only fifty cents and one dollar for their seats; yet their scenery is much more beautiful than any scenery which may be seen in most of our two dollar theatres. The reason is, of course, that it is designed in the "new manner"; and this new manner—as explained above—is not only better but cheaper than the old.

When the Washington Square Players produce a romantic play, they set it on an almost empty stage, with a decorative back-drop. When they produce a realistic play, they use a box-set, but rigidly exclude from the stage all details which are not actually necessary to the action. All of their designs are simple and nearly symmetrical in line, and bold and elementary in colour. They achieve a maximum of effect with the greatest possible economy of means. Most of their stage-sets cost less than fifty dollars; yet they are more effective—in the sense of being more enjoyable—than most of the Broadway stage-sets which cost at least two thousand dollars. The Washington Square Players were blessed from the beginning by the fact that they had no capital. The hours that are spent by our commercial managers in counting up their money could be spent by these amateurs in imagining means of creating beautiful effects at a very small expenditure.

V

So much has been said in this article in disparagement of our commercial managers that a word must be appended

in praise of Mr. Arthur Hopkins. Here is a producing manager who is really interested in the progress of the theatre, and who is gifted with the great gift of imagination. Mr. Hopkins's latest venture, *The Devil's Garden*, failed,—the reason being that the play was extracted from a novel which could not possibly be dramatised successfully; but the staging of this ill-fated play was worthy of the highest commendation. The scenery was designed by Mr. Robert E. Jones, an artist who had already proved his worth by his beautiful investiture of Mr. Granville Barker's production of *The Man Who Married a Dumb Wife*. In this case, the task imposed on Mr. Jones was much more difficult; for *The Devil's Garden* was a realistic play and lent itself less easily to decorative treatment.

It is a great pity that the play was soon withdrawn, and that many of our very busy managers were thereby denied the privilege of studying the setting of the opening scene. The period was the present; the place, a room in the General Post-Office in London. The set was very shallow. It was backed by a blank wall,—in colour, neutral grey. To the spectator's left, there was a desk, with two chairs; to the spectator's right, there was a single chair. Behind the desk was hung a coloured map of London. Otherwise the stage was empty. The actors played in profile,—silhouetted sharply against the blank background. This simple setting was far more appealing to the imagination than the usual deep set, encumbered with innumerable details of actual office furniture. It represented an artistic triumph for Mr. Jones, a managerial triumph for Mr. Hopkins. Furthermore, it represented a momentary revelation of what our theatre may become when the few men who control it shall ultimately be awakened from their over-sleeping.

THE ADVANCE OF THE ENGLISH NOVEL

BY WILLIAM LYON PHELPS

PART VI

The romantic revival from 1894 to 1904—Zola and Stevenson—two predictions of approaching romance—the remarkable year 1894—Weyman, Doyle, Hope, Churchill, Stockton—Sienkiewicz—passing away of romantic extravagance—survivals of the school, such as McCutcheon and Farnol—the “life” novel of to-day—DeMorgan, Bennett, Wells, White, Rolland—the gain to the novel—the loss.

WHEN George Eliot died in 1880, it appeared as though English fiction would not soon burst the fetters of Realism. Dickens, Thackeray, George Eliot, Trollope, and Reade, despite an occasional holiday in the climate of romance, were all professional realists; Thomas Hardy was attracting a steadily widening circle of readers; in America, Howells and James were busily a-hunting specimens with the camera; Turgenev and Tolstoy were stimulating the British novel in French-translation-dilutions; and in France, this very year saw the publication of Zola's treatise on the Experimental Novel.

Romance seemed anachronistic. Zola, flushed with the new scientific spirit, wholly confident that he belonged to the future and the future to him, announced that Walter Scott was a novelist exclusively for boarding-school girls! that he would never again be read by serious and mature readers.

Zola was merely announcing what seemed to the majority of his listeners, irrefragably true. Two factors, however, were overlooked in his prophecy,—which may be called the negative and the positive element. Realism and romanticism seem bound to alternate; and the realists were so overconfident, so sure of themselves, that they plunged into excesses inevitably certain to lead to reform, or at any rate to something different. It is a great pity that Zola could not have lived to describe his own death; for the manner of his death would not

only have interested him, it would have made a splendid chapter in any one of his experimental novels. It will be remembered that he died of suffocation in his sleep; he was found, in the morning lying half out of bed, his face on the floor buried in his own vomit. The death of this great leader is an excellent illustration of the limits of his art.

The other factor—the positive factor—is not so easy to predict as the negative; but its possibility is always delightful to contemplate, for it makes the history of art to resemble a wonderful game of chance. When the citizens of the French Revolution thought they had established republican equality, Napoleon Bonaparte happened to appear on the scene; and when the giant Realism had got the spirit of English fiction safely locked into the dungeon, the young knightly figure of Stevenson arrived and released her.

Stevenson was thirty years old when George Eliot died. He looked about him on a dreary landscape. At its best, realism was made up of afternoon teas; at its worst, it was garbage. He wanted something that should at once be more stimulating and more agreeable. Not being able to discover it anywhere, he was forced to produce it himself. “For Zola,” said he in a letter, “I have no toleration, though the curious, eminently bourgeois, and eminently French creature has power of a kind. But I would he were deleted. I would not give a