

of the usual back-cloth, is a semicircular cyclorama, which is a solid structure faced with a white surface on which can be projected the varied lighting of the latest installation of the Schwabe system.

Although the opening performance of the "Oresteia" of Æschylus did not permit an exploitation of the full range of the theatre's unique equipment, it was obvious that the method favoured by Mr. Gray is its own justification in heightening the archaic qualities of such an early example of dramatic art. Remembering the primitive nature of that famous trilogy, the presentation had been conceived and carried out not along the realistic or romantic lines usually adopted, but in an abstract, expressionistic spirit. The appeal was to the intelligence by stylistic methods. The translation selected—that by Mr. R. C. Trevelyan (published by Hodder & Stoughton for the University of Liverpool Press)—was favoured because it is an attempt to imitate the metrical phrasing and pattern of the original. The same principle had guided the designing of the masks; the work conjointly of Mr. W. Hampton and the Misses Daphne and Phyllis Jerrold, the great-granddaughters of Douglas Jerrold. There was nothing of the Greek quality about these masks. As the representative examples will show, they were intended to portray the outstanding traits of the characters depicted—the majesty of Agamemnon, the craft of Clytemnestra, the furious wrath of the Furies. And the grouping and movements of the Chorus and the Trojan Bondwomen and the Furies, designed and directed by Miss Ninette de Valois, the gifted dancer of the Russian Ballet and the Beecham and Royal Italian Opera Companies, were dramatically effective in bringing out the changing moods of the trilogy. In its total effect, the performance vividly portrayed how Greek religion was not of the moral emotions only but of the whole gamut of humanity. The three phases of Oresteian legend moved before the audience as a stately processional bas-relief. Memory was busy with the words:

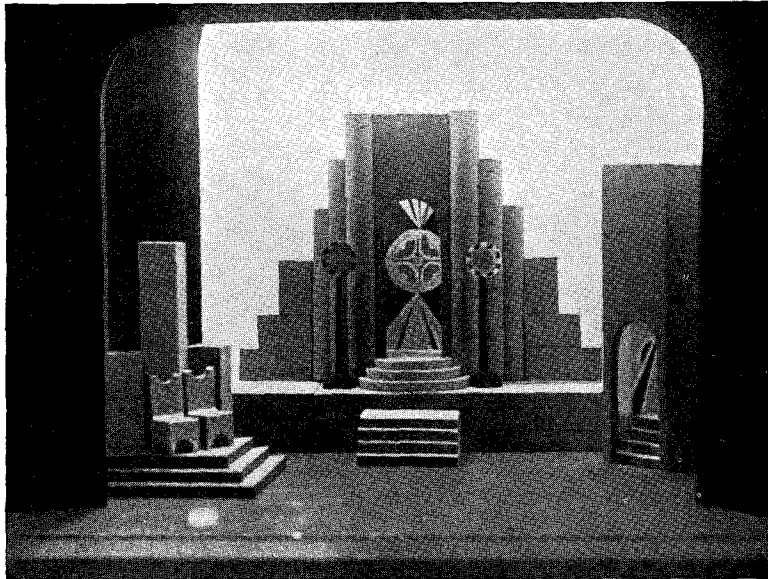
"O Attic shape! Fair attitude! with brede
Of marble men and maidens overwrought."

But it is not merely the dawn of dramatic art which will engage the directors of the Festival Theatre. Such modern parables as Mr. W. J. Turner's "The Man who Ate the Popomack," such historical dramas as the "Heraclius" of T. E. Ellis, such sagas as "The Immortal Hour" are on the list of plays set down for early performance. The policy of the theatre is to "produce the greatest plays of all ages and all countries irrespective of fashions, prejudices and literary preconceptions." Thus as a brave adventure to redress the balance and supply the deficiencies of the commercial theatre, Mr. Terence Gray's experiment will not merely be watched with deep interest, but should command the enthusiastic support of all who are interested in the use of the drama for the enrichment of the nation's intellectual life.

FILMS OF WAR.*

There was a time when the war-film became, to the

* "Mons," at the Shepherd's Bush Pavilion; "Mademoiselle from Armentières," at the Marble Arch Pavilion; "Beau Geste," at the Plaza. And elsewhere.



Festival Theatre Setting for "The Immortal Hour."

the plain tale of Autumn, 1914, of duty simply and greatly done; a tale which stirs the blood by its epic grandeur without meretricious or sentimental aids. As in the Ypres film, many actual events are reconstructed; and although no combination of the historic and the imaginary can ever be quite satisfactory (a point to which we may return by and by) at least the imaginary episodes are generally in key with the rest.

In points of detail, certain criticisms suggest themselves. One or two incidents are badly staged (thus, in the single combat by the mill pool, the men are too near). More generally the film is realistic in patches—e.g. in the "boots" episode, with its suggestion of the bitter weariness of a forced march—while elsewhere it falls short of realism, as it was bound to do: in noise, in smells, in the effect of shell-fire. One critic finds it "ludicrous" that shells should be seen to burst without visible consequences; it is not "ludicrous"—the theme is too big for that: and there is such a thing as imagination, even in the picture house—but it is certainly not realistic. In brief, the story is not always kept to one plane and suffers artistically (though not historically) in consequence.

Artistically indeed, the whole thing falls far short of "Mademoiselle from Armentières." Where all is frankly fictional, the mind is no longer confused by trying to separate the false from the true. And here an old maxim of aesthetics crops up—namely that fiction may be much more like reality than the most faithful record of reality itself. "Truth stranger than fiction" is the conventional expression of this; "truth less convincing than fiction" is what every artist knows. And "Mademoiselle," all bunkum and make-believe, yet gives a remarkably faithful "atmosphere" of the B.E.F.: more so in my opinion, for the reasons suggested above, than the other film. Technically a point worth noting is the use of music in place of captions—old snatches known to everyone, such as "Another little drink," "Old soldiers never die," and so forth; Mr. Maurice Elvey, the director, had a unique chance here, and has used it admirably. And if Mademoiselle's access to the firing line is a little incredible, at least her story is as free from sentimentality and from catchpenny "atrocities" as the Mons film itself.

"Beau Geste," a tale of war and comradeship in the Foreign Legion, is good: though less good than its press notices, and certainly not in the same class with "Mademoiselle." It suffers from a curiously sombre style of photography, and from the usual American policy of tempering narrative-subtlety to the most stupid spectator imaginable. Worth seeing, none the less, if only for its superiority to the average.

GRAHAM SUTTON.