

least show greater zeal for protecting minorities in America before they make us the policemen of Asia Minor.

The New Republic has heretofore opened its columns to a discussion of the church and war. It has allowed churchmen to defend the past. To the past much may be forgiven. But what will thoughtful churchmen say of this new fury which has come upon those who ought to be leaders of men in the establishment of a Great Peace?

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## CORRESPONDENCE

### The Farmer and the Recent Strikes

**S**IR: In your issue of September 6th, you refer indirectly to the railway strikes in these words: "Is the victory worth the cost, in the way of coal shortage and disorganized transportation with all the attendant losses to agriculture and industry? We believe that it is. . . . But as matters now stand the unions are our one solid bulwark against sweating and serfdom. And the public can afford heavy sacrifices for the sake of their preservation."

This remark seems to involve two serious fallacies. If our bulwark against serfdom lies in violence and disorganization of necessities we are surely in a bad way. Moreover, there are four sides to this question, not two or even three. In a strike or lockout in a public utility the people at large have vastly more at stake than the employers or employed. But smaller and far more vitally interested, there is a fourth body which suffers intolerably through the break up in government these spasms involve. If the cost to the public serves to teach the public a needed lesson, *the public should pay for it*. There is no value in instruction, in which the suffering falls on the innocent bystander.

The abortive railroad strike has already cost the orchardists of California and Oregon from fifty to one hundred millions of dollars, a loss spelling bankruptcy to hundreds and partial collapse to thousands more. If the "public," through its lack of provision for justice and courage to carry it out permits this sort of thing it ought to stand the expense, not to throw the whole burden on producers of cantelopes, peaches and summer pears. When the strike was suggested, the price of Bartlett pears in Oregon fell at once from \$75 per ton to \$30. In the Rogue River Valley alone 2,000 carloads of pears were "already sought for shipment to New York, to England and to Cuba." So far as I can learn not one was sent out. The "general public" does not worry much over this but many thousands of orchardists do, and it is not strange that an extra duty of a cent a pound on grape fruit does not appease them. Half our people are agriculturists and the farmer is at the bottom of our political pile. He cannot strike nor profiteer and he is a victim of every form of robbery—strikes, lockouts, tariffs, subsidies, bonuses, whatever politicians can devise. No wonder he leaves the farm for urban labor, when in theory, at least, he is entitled to "a living wage." In the past three years, not one farmer in a hundred, the country through, has made both ends meet.

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[We do not see the fallacies. The recent strikes were costly to the public. But they checked the general offensive against organized labor. They proved that the employers of America were mistaken in their belief that the unions could be disestablished. And that we conceive to be a gain to the public worth the cost. We regret that any means so wasteful as strikes should be necessary to protect us against industrial serfdom. And we regret most of all that the cost must be borne in the main, by the general public, which is not a party to the struggle. If, however, the public had always insisted vigorously that workers employed in essential services should in all circumstances enjoy a reasonable standard of living it would have better ground to cry out against its losses.—THE EDITORS.]

## The Equity Play

*Malvaloca, from the Spanish of Serafin and Joaquin Quintero. Translated by Jacob Fassett, Forty-Eighth Street theatre. October 2, 1922.*

**W**HAT the Equity Players have done for their first production seems to me sincere and straight as far as it goes. The direction of the Quinteros' play lacks now and then speed and sometimes in the ensemble fluidity, but it shows on the whole the able hand of Mr. Augustin Duncan. Mr. Thompson's settings, though somewhat cold and bluish for their Spanish uses, have the necessary gravity and hint of romance. But the choice of a Spanish play for the Equity Players' first production seems to me unfortunate. If they should do the play exactly as it would be done in Spain when well done there, a New York audience could not always follow it. And there would, besides, be something too artificial and perhaps superficial, too merely genre, about it. If they should be wise enough not to try to make a Spanish reproduction out of the occasion, they would still be faced with the problem of how to translate into the terms of the American theatre a thing so foreign as *Malvaloca* is. This problem would be how to get in such a translation the original values of the play and so to enable it to fulfill itself in its new terms. This must be always a dangerous venture. In *Malvaloca* the danger is that a New York audience will drop into the error of thinking the play simpler than it is and of taking too much of it as mere stage device and conventional theatre.

The play opens with Salvador—played by Mr. Frederic Burt—who is being nursed by the sisters after a wound he had got in his foundry. *Malvaloca*—Miss Cowl—his former mistress, comes to see him. She meets Salvador's friend and partner, a serious, passionate man, Leonardo—Mr. Rollo Peters. The sisters talk of their broken convent bell, *La Golondrina*. And Leonardo promises to recast the bell and restore it to its tower. In the next act *Malvaloca* and Salvador are in love. His sister has come to visit him. The struggle turns around *Malvaloca*'s outcast position. But what troubles Salvador is not this, which is seen so clearly by the girl; it is his jealousy of her past life. The recasting of the bell succeeds. *Malvaloca* prays that she be recast and made whole again. In the last act the procession passes. The bell rings again. And the last barrier between Salvador and *Malvaloca* is broken.

A Latin art like this of the Quinteros' moves toward the simple in the sense of the typical. Individuals vary, obviously, but in general we Anglo-Saxons mistrust the typical; we are more stubborn and individual and arbitrary. Our disinclination toward the typical turns partly on that; it seems to us both a limitation and a tyranny. Partly it turns on the fact that we are not apt to respect mere mind very much. The last insult to an Italian is to be called stupid; he will be a liar or an adulterer but will fight about stupidity. We humbly admit being stupid, if need be, so long as our intention and moral virtues are not impugned. We have a sneaking reverence sometimes for mere confusion. There are still people among us who conceive Browning's depth to lie in his bad sentences and loose constructions; or who think there is something in itself subtle in a blur of uncut marble where we might expect an eye or a nose; who do not know that vagueness and confusion have in themselves no depth or meaning, except when used consciously, as a color might be used.

And so we do not take naturally to a direct art, to the clear statement, to general forms, to the simplification that mentality more or less by itself can bring about.

When we think in art we like to go round and round, to bring in details, to loiter, insist, and reflect. Our art in its lesser moments—some of our American realism, Ibsen at his worst, the Manchester School of drama at its best—groans and grunts and talks it over, and twists and preaches and explains and bothers, often without ever hitting on the essential point involved or discovering anything that will convey the point. In its better moments it reveals infinite facts by means of details, of poetic style, of mood and comment. In supreme moments this art finds not only the ultimate idea, but—as when Lady Macbeth enters in her sleep or King Lear raves on the moor—hits on a symbol, a combination of the mind and the eye, that is completely revealing.

This method that aims at the revealing line, at the consummate, the typical, a Latin art like the Quinteros' is very apt—whether deeply or not—to follow. Exactly as the Spaniard's country has large outlines, has beauty of line filled in with nuance, with subtle variation, so his minds and his ways of thought run to the type. He finds large patterns within which there may be infinite variations of nuance. Out of all the mass of contributing elements he seeks some one thing, a symbol, a pattern, a finality, that will carry all, all the lyricism, imagery, analysis, and complexity that may arise. At its worst this method ends in empty generalization and vacant type. At its best it supplies the one inevitable and unescapable line that says the thing forever. In *Malvaloca* the very finality of outline to which each character is distilled, the essential line, that is, set down for each person in the play, is apt to escape our eyes. We were expecting more fuss about the effort. We judge that these people must have lain ready to the author's hand. But what happens is not that at all. It is an instance of what at its best is the glory of the Latin theatre, as seen in Molière sometimes so gloriously, the ability, to portray an individual in such a way that he seems actual and personal but at the same time carries on him the implication of type.

We may blunder in *Malvaloca* by taking for conventional theatre and stage device what are really strictly Spanish elements. The sharply defined characters, for instance, might be stage convention, tricks of contrast to keep things going. But in Spain one sees them hourly, blind singers at the doors of gentlemen's clubs; beggars in rags lying asleep by the gates of the King's palace in Madrid; country carts and oxen following after a state carriage in gilt and damask, eight horses in trappings and plumes, two liveried grooms to the horse. These sharp lines are realities. The contrasts are literal. Nor is the motive of the prostitute and her outcast state so much the same old lost stage sister as it may seem to us. Prostitution with us is hidden. It is a men's secret; a shadow we half deny. And if we have a case sometimes where we wish to keep both our ideal and the acquaintance of a doubtful lady, we have a way of saying that perhaps after all she has been only the friend of certain persons; which saves at once both our ideals and our faces. But in Italy or Spain a prostitute comes into a café sometimes or a theatre, or drives abroad famously. Men may even fall in love with her. But a man does not marry her or introduce her to his family. The bearing of those ladies in the last act of *Malvaloca* is not any more stage business than it is fact. Nor is the fight of the two parishes over the rival belles mere picturesque convention; it is a common occurrence, the recognized source of horse races, festivals and riots. And

the speeches the lovers in this play pour out to each other are not always ranting, but rather the way a vivid folk has of turning to images, nicknames and proverbs.

The main burden, however, of this play's Spanish strangeness and difference and deceiving aspect of being far more simple, ranting, melodramatic than it really is, lay with the actors.

Only one piece of acting was wholly wrong. The rustic girl could never be nasal, vulgar; that is not Spanish, and, what's more to the point, it throws the play off. Mr. Cooper played his part of the uncle well but missed what might have been a real distinction. He was not able to unify and to simplify his details enough. His method remained oddly Anglo-Saxon. He needs to learn from the Quinteros to reduce his details to a single enough pattern, to find the inevitable line. Miss Cowl and Mr. Peters in the most deeply felt and serious moments were convincing and moving. And Mr. Burt had a sort of honest glitter that one liked, especially in his last exit. But the acting in general throughout *Malvaloca* diminished and confused the play. It needed to be keyed up, to be more vivid.

That is not saying the obvious. I do not mean that these characters in the Spanish play should be more violent or noisy, or that they should move about more, or throw off more energy. Not that at all. I mean that each body there should be a more magnetic and intense centre; each character in its own kind should be more penetrated and complete with its own vitality. Without this vitality in the acting, this intense focus, this effect of roots running deep, the play is hopelessly diluted. Without it everything seems too elementary. A play like this of the Quinteros' is built up of outlines, of an abundance of life distilled into patterns in the shape of characters, motives, actions and incidents. All these set in motion together express the whole. Each character therefore must have its own passionate unity, its completeness. If the characters have that when we bring them together, we shall have nuance, subtlety, shading within shading, as we have when the wind blows on the water.

Miss Cowl, then, in that first act ought, before the drama of action begins, to bring on the scene the drama of a thing living. She should carry on her something there are no words to express, a kind of reality, shall we say, that would hold us as we are held by the flight of birds, the depth of water, or fire or silence. To put it technically, Miss Cowl, despite her beautiful delicacy of pain and shame, acts but a fraction of the rôle. She needs to charge her whole body with what this woman is: to put this into her feet, her head as it rises from her shoulders, her hands. She should whiten the top of her voice and darken the bottom of it. She should get a bearing that will translate those Andalusian shawls of hers into their right seduction. Without all this and more, her part is only an elementary stage figure with a few poignant climaxes.

*Malvaloca*, then, is not a great play. But it is not so simple an affair as one might take it to be. The authors know their business and have expressed their idea. But they build entirely on a certain quality in their characters. The point is this: *Malvaloca* cannot really happen until the acting in it exhibits a power and vividness that can create characters who fill up the outlines intended for them; for in terms of these the play speaks. The acting in *Malvaloca* must sustain characters whose actions are like manifestations of nature. We must be able to watch these characters and what they do as we watch the rain, the sun, the air, the fire. The truth we get is not in the comment but in the manifestation.

STARK YOUNG.