

Mounds

BY JAMES G. BERRIEN

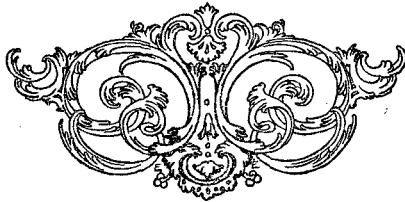
HAVE you ever noticed the beautiful way
God curves things?
The sloping slant of a hill
With the hint of a rock plateau underneath?
The bend of a river around
The sharp point of an island?
A two-year-old-baby's eyelash?
The way a bird dips and soars?

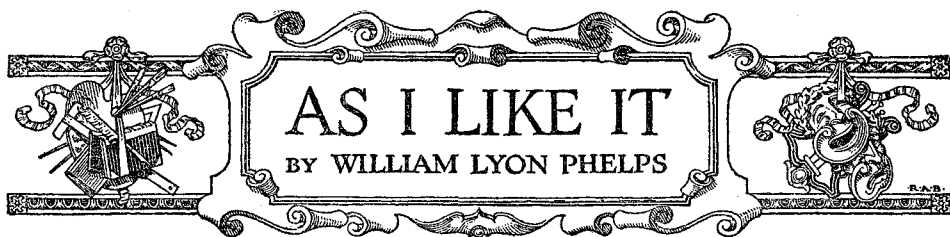
A hill through the heart of a State
Goes for miles, full of saw-toothed walls.
They fight like the devil to show through,
They think that is what they are meant for.
Benignantly they are vignettied below and above
With marvellous billowy verdure
That makes all the tops of the hills
Like waves—gentle, or high, or just slipping.

And the river that flows below—
Flows so smoothly—
Ever so smooth, like oil
Gray-green or bright blue in the sun
Making soft the high lights of the trees
And the too brown earth
And the autumn grass.

The brown road that gets over the hill—
Though so full of quite meaningless miles
Of sheer drag, and momentum, and use—
Has trees every side and long falls of water
Down crescent-shaped stairs of rock;
Has the arc of the moon seen afar.

So explosions that blast life wide open,
Like wars, quick death, sudden hate,
Wear the cerements of time
With the grace of a lightning-shot oak
Turned to mould—a sweet bed for the moss.





AS I LIKE IT

BY WILLIAM LYON PHELPS

OF those who make their living by writing, my unsolicited sympathy flows most freely toward the New York dramatic critics. So far as I can see, they are both honest and shrewd; the commonest accusation against them may easily be explained, if not justified. The accusation is that, instead of writing a criticism, they use the average new play as a target for their own wit, with the endeavor to score as frequently and palpably as possible. But think what they have to endure! To understand is surely to forgive. There are (exclusive of picture-houses) sixty-five theatres in New York, and the dramatic critic must attend, if possible, every first night. Of the sixty-five performances on any given evening, not more than fifteen are worth seeing; the critic would intellectually and physically be better off almost anywhere else. Indeed, the situation is so serious that if one had to choose between seeing every play in New York and never going to the theatre at all, one would be a positive gainer by practising total abstinence. Most of the plays are such an insult to human intelligence that they must in the course of time produce a damaging effect on the mind and character; and if you are tempted to curse the critic, pause a moment and think how long *your* mind and heart would hold out if constantly exposed to such a mass of puerilities.

No one loves the theatre more than I. But if I had to choose between seeing all the plays in New York and seeing none, I would take the latter alternative. It is not possible to see them all and escape unscathed. Even as kings used to have professional tasters who tasted every dish of food before it reached the royal lips, in order to see if it was poisonous, so the professional dramatic critics are the official tasters for the sovereign people, and, unfortunately for them, much that they taste is either unpalatable or injurious. I am amazed at their endurance

and grateful for their dietetic reports.

I am in the free and happy position of never going to the theatre except when I wish to, and of never seeing anything unless I have reason to believe it will repay my time and trouble. Even then I sometimes think—well, I remember a criticism in a Western newspaper: “If the admission were free, at the end of the first act the actors would owe the audience money.”

Whether I receive free tickets or pay for them, I am always glad to recommend those plays that I have found either innocently amusing or intellectually stimulating.

When I first heard that “Hamlet” was to be presented in modern clothes and with modern implements, I had a feeling akin to nausea. I felt it was like jazzing the Bible, turning a tragedy into a travesty, in the hope that it might be lowered enough to reach the level of the intelligence of the modern audience. But on reading the criticisms and hearing tributes from discriminating lovers of Shakespeare, I determined to see for myself, with the result that I found the performance not only intelligent and illuminating, but thrilling. Mr. Basil Sydney acted the greatest of all parts with sympathy and skill, and the other members of the cast looked like real persons. Ophelia was young and slim, Queen Gertrude looked sufficiently alluring to have tempted Claudius or any one else, and Polonius, in cutaway and spats, was just what he ought to be. Although I have seen “Hamlet” many times, I have never seen the funeral of Ophelia and the episodes connected with it presented in so convincing a fashion. Hamlet in tweeds with a golf cap, looking at the skull, made a contrast between life and death that was terribly impressive. Once more it became clear that Shakespeare is not only the greatest of poets but the greatest of playwrights.