A SUPPLEMENT TO "THE NEW AGE."

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The Coming of Coloured Atmosphere.

By Huntly Carter.

JUDGING by the success of "Sumurûn" at the Coliseum beautiful coloured atmosphere has not only entered the theatre, but it has entered for good. This is hopeful, for fine colour, whether expressed in passionate imagery, or warm symbolism, or cold mysticism, is a tonic. I believe the tonic nature of "Sumurûn" has been apparent to everyone. The reason is simple. Professor Reinhardt, of the Deutches Theatre, Berlin, has collaborated with the Coliseum management to set a gay party of beautifully coloured figures in motion in order to tell a London audience an immortal story. He has brilliantly expressed the very imaginative conception of the East by taking an Eastern story-without-words, treating it with great simplicity and refinement and dressing it in splendid Oriental colour which throughout is made to play against a whitened background. It seems as though Professor Reinhardt has sought to wash clean the present offensive scenic background in order that others who come after him may set to work to cover it with luminous and vibrating colour.

The fantasy is divided into seven scenes, and the varieties of colour themes illustrated are in accordance Each scene has its dominant colour theme, which is reached from various standpoints. As in the Chinese theatre, elsewhere referred to by Miss Loie Fuller, there is little or no lowering of tones for the sake of harmony. Rich Oriental colours, not tones, flow in, meet and compose, never failing to achieve a definite unity. In consequence the scenes are saturated with singing coloured atmosphere created by harmonies of contrast. "Pictures" race through the play. One of the most beautiful effects is obtained in the darkened interior of the hunchback's theatre, by the dome focus-light and the coloured mediums on the perches in the prompt corner being concentrated upon a mass of draperies where the slave makes her quick changes of costume. At the same time the footlights of the bijou theatre are diffused softly over the coloured forms and faces of the audience in the darkened pit. Another striking effect with a distinct echo of something big and interesting that has been tried successfully at the Châtelet Theatre, Paris, is noticeable in the composition in the flat, or "silhouette" scene, where the towers and minarets of a palace come together against a poetic night sky, and one simple mass is bosomed high against another simple mass; while joyous figures dressed in warm colour drift across the low grey wall. The merchant's shop, too, adds to the series of unusually effective compositions. Here the rich coloured draperies spread about and hung on reversible shutters, produce, as it were, innumerable love lyrics in a variety of colour compositions, proving that the producer and his German co-operators are amourettists of rare resource, ingenuity and distinction. The courtyard of the Sheik's palace is very simply and effectively treated, being merely an open space surrounded by three empty Eastern white walls, and entered by arched doorways. In the wall facing the audience a latticed window has been introduced in order to bring in warm flesh tones, and the bright colours of the women slaves behind it. The interior that follows, though melodious throughout with vibrating coloured atmosphere, is overdone. The crowning of the faithless wife and her lover with garlands showered from a balcony, and the meaningless scattering of flowers is cheap, and mirrors pantomime. The over-elaboration of this scene is felt when contrasted with the severe simplicity of the succeeding bedroom scene. Here, too, an alteration is desirable. The over-imposing yellow lamp that crowns the bed, looks like a light-house beacon. The light should be reduced to two unobtrusive coloured flames symbolical of Eastern passion and jealousy, the keynote of the scene. Also the composition of the scene should be more together.

There are, besides these minor defects, a number of general defects. The first is that of the clash of conventions. In an endeavour to bring poetry into the theatre Professor Reinhardt has gone to the East for many of his ideas. He has, in fact, helped himself largely to Eastern convention, and seeks to adapt it to the Western stage, just as the East is helping itself to Western convention. The result in some cases is disastrous. The use of the bridge across the Coliseum auditorium is for one thing very confusing. Though it is legitimate in the Chinese theatre, where symbolism is fully accepted and understood, it does not accord with our Western realistic notions; and though to imaginative Orientals it may create the vision of characters coming from a distance or nowhere, to unimaginative Europeans it means nothing more than a free look at made-up professionals at close quarters. In other words, the introduction of this convention only serves to throw the play out of balance and to destroy the desired illusion. If something new is desired, why not let the characters coming from a distance, come on from the prompt or o.p. entrance and make their entrance to the scene through the drop curtains drawn together for the purpose?

Again, many of the entrances and exits of the characters appear badly arranged. If it is purposely done in an attempt to follow another Eastern tradition of characters drifting symbolically on and off the scene, well and good. To be effective, however, it should be done under Eastern conditions. The scenery should not be realistic, an elaborately carpentered affair, or a very careful arrangement of cut cloths; but imaginative and suggested.

And again, here and there the sets seem to be designed to suggest the fourth wall, especially in the hunchback's theatre, where the only entrance to the theatre itself is apparently across the footlights.

All this is bewildering. Better results might be achieved by adapting Eastern ideas to Western methods, until we have theatres constructed to suit symbolism. Thus the fourth wall might very well be suggested by the use of the drop curtains, replacing the ugly convention known to professionals as the "blind." These curtains should be coloured to harmonise with the general colour scheme of the play, and drawn aside by two attendants dressed in colour to symbolise comedy or tragedy as the case may be. The effect of this colour would be to send the scene back.

The second defect is the lack of quite complete harmony, together with touches of amateurish staging and lighting. Apparently Professor Reinhardt travels nothing except his principals and properties. The

Coliseum supplies the rest. It can be plainly seen that he uses some of the Coliseum stock scenery, which has been heavily primed for the purpose, as well as the Coliseum supers, who do their best, but are obviously "out of the scene." It is not difficult to believe that the scenery, costumes and properties of the Berlin production were designed to harmonise with one another; and the supers were rehearsed to harmonise with the principals. The need of proper rehearsal is particularly noticeable in the "silhouette" scene, where the figures want artistically grouping. As the production stands at the Coliseum it is nothing more than a suggestion of something remarkably big. It suggests the first step in the weaving of the amaranthine crown of Thespis. We owe Professor Reinhardt and Mr. Oswald Stoll more than is perhaps generally recognised for this suggestion. Not only have they realised the possibilities of coloured atmosphere, but that London is ready for more. Perhaps Mr. Stoll will honour London by re-engaging Professor Reinhardt and by bringing over the whole of his production, principals, supers, scenery, lighting, properties, even the Deutches Theatre itself if a ship can be found to accommodate it. We have had the suggestion. We like it. Now let us have the real thing. I might add as a further suggestion that either Mr. Stoll or Mr. Alfred Butt at the Palace, or Mr. Walter Gibbons at the Palladium, or the Alhambra or Empire management, give London a taste of the Russian ballets elsewhere mentioned in the Symposium on the art of the theatre.

Interesting colour is also to be seen at the Palace Theatre. In "Anatol," produced by Mr. Granville Barker and decorated by Mr. Norman Wilkinson of Four Oaks, there is a frank use of Western conventions with the introduction of a note or two of the East. In "Sumurûn" it is the reverse, the production being purely imaginative, with unavoidable touches of realism. "Anatol" opens in a very unpromising way, as a purely black and white composition. The scene is a typical Viennese interior very severely and simply treated, and containing one or two bits of "arty" furniture. It is, in fact, a scene almost devoid of character and lacking interest till Miss Lillah McCarthy enters. But the moment she enters bringing on the necessary note of rich colour the scene changes and begins to move. Unfortunately not much use is made of the glowing harmony of the red of her dress and the green of her cloak and hat. She should be kept moving against the yellowish background. But instead, Mr. Barker, bowing to a convention, has seated her at the head of the table facing the audience, and the effect of her colour is lost. It is true that the green of her hat composes very nicely with the blue of the vases and yellow fruit behind her, but this is not sufficient to relieve the monotony of the setting. Miss McCarthy might have been seated at the side of the table with an occasional cross to the couch. It is an excellent idea to throw her green cloak on the empty pedestal at the head of the couch. More advantage might be taken of the opportunities to throw colour about the scene. In order to give value to the yellow atmosphere the green, in which the scene is framed, should be lighted. Otherwise the yellow lamp shades should be changed to let the scene blush pink; while a tender pink flower or two might lean out of the blue vases and talk to the yellow fruit. A delicate coloured tablecloth would make the table glass and silver dance; and the two men dressed in coloured evening dress such as Oscar Wilde once recommended, would serve to cover the prim furniture with glory. To dress realistic scenes in this legitimate sort of romance would make audiences happy. Very commendable is the squaring up of the stage "picture" to half the size of the Palace stage, and the framing of it in a deep border of dark green, of which colour I suggest more use should be made. Commendable, too, is the use of the final light in place of the regular footlights, since it throws the scene back. Mr. Barker has shown himself readily accessible to new and urgently necessary ideas, and I hope therefore he will not run away from colour. Let him saturate his scenes with it.

An International Symposium on the Art of the Theatre.

Conducted by Huntly Carter.

THE following letters, having relation to the general question of the artistic reform of the theatre, have been received from representative persons:—

BELGIUM.

MR. E. KRINKELS, Editor, "De Gazet," Antwerp.

There are in Belgium Flemish and French theatres. The latter stand in every respect higher than the former, and their repertory consists of Parisian plays. For this stage there is no immediate hope of a native revival. In Antwerp, Brussels, Ghent, there are Flemish theatres financially supported by the municipal authorities. Antwerp has two official theatres. First of all the Flemish Opera founded in 1894 by Edward Kuerels and H. Fontain for the purpose of producing Dutch and French operas in the Flemish language; and this object was fulfilled in every respect. A new theatre has been built at a cost of 5,000,000 francs. The town of Antwerp also contributes 60,000 francs annually. For the most part the performances are admirable. Several companies owe their name to the Flemish Opera, but there is no reform movement, and it is not required.

Secondly, the Municipal Theatre, the Stadtheatre, under the direction of the old actor Van Doerelaer, till 1906 produced Flemish dramas and comedies together with English, French and German translations. A so-called revival took place from 1902-1906 of the Zuist Neiderlander Tooneelbond, which performed once or twice a year plays hitherto unknown in Antwerp. In 1906 two members of this society (one a shoemaker, the other a goldsmith) were appointed directors of the Municipal Theatre owing to the resignation of the old director. This did not lead to any improvement of the theatre; on the contrary, the best artists retired from the Municipal Theatre and founded their own theatre, the Volksschonburg. Here, again, no reform movement exists, even among the professionals themselves, who complain of their position, but make no effort to improve it. The Flemish authors have founded a society which is mainly a commercial venture. No other movement is there in Belgium. In Brussels the position of the Flemish theatre is if possible even worse, and in Ghent matters are no better. In Ghent, however, there exists the Vereenigung der Vrienden von der Nederlandische Tooneel, which arranges performances with the aid of Dutch artists and theatrical companies.

As I have already mentioned, in the whole of Belgium there is no reform movement, although it is extremely necessary. Painters and artists are indifferent to the stage. Only one journal, "De Gazet," of Antwerp, under my editorship, fights energetically to improve the position of the theatre. In Holland, where the stage stands far higher than in Belgium, much has been done in this direction. There are in Holland at least three societies which aim at improving the theatre, namely, Het Tooneelverbond, Vereinigung von Nederlandische Tooneelisten, Kunstenaarskring. Whether they have achieved their aim is unknown to me.

CHINA.

MISS LOIE FULLER.

Is the Chinese Theatre more artistic than our own?

The Chinese stage has no scenery, and depends entirely upon the literary merit of the play for its success. The stage is arranged, however, most artistically with embroidered banners and other things, and the Chinese actors enter from the back of the stage and from a long platform coming through the audience, which I suppose represents coming from a distance. Those on the stage, coming on from behind, being the characters belonging to the place where the action is going on. They use accessories, however, which are necessary to the action of the play, just as we do. I once saw a play wherein some of the characters had to represent animals. Some of these animals were men entirely encased in the animal skin, and others only had the heads of the animals on them; and if a man is supposed to come down the stage and rap at a side door he goes through the ceremony of rapping, but there is no door there, only space.

Regarding lighting, costumes, scenery and so forth. The costumes are special theatrical costumes, not like those used in real life, the different plays requiring different costumes according to the epoch, just as our 17th or 18th century fashions would be followed in plays of the period. But of course these costumes are all Chinese, and very extravagant, rich and barbaric. There is no shading of colours,* each colour is vivid by itself; but just as shades of

* [Miss Fuller's meaning is there is no lowering of tones for the sake of harmony. The Orientals put pure colour

different colours harmonise with each other, so do the vivid colours; and this art the Chinese are perfect in. They know better than anyone in the world that all colours go together, if they are equally brilliant. I may say that this custom is becoming of greater importance among ourselves than we are aware. Shades are becoming a thing of the past, and colours are rapidly taking their place. In accessory work for the stage, I think the Chinese are very clever, and they follow Nature closely, but they use suggestion, and are most artistic. If they wish to represent a fête-day in a room, they'll put one very beautiful vase on a pedestal for decoration, and that's all.

There is no reform movement in the Chinese theatre—it is exactly where it has been for hundreds of years. I am endeavouring to bring European plays into China, through Madame Chung, as I brought European plays into Japan through Sada Yacco, who was under my direction in Europe for two years, and through whom Sada Yacco's husband, Mr. Kawar Kami, became acquainted with European plays and their manner of playing. I also got him into the Society of Authors in Paris, which enabled him to arrive at the result which I desired. Until that time Sada Yacco herself had never appeared on the stage in Japan, although in Japan as in China, there are theatres where there are only women actors, the women playing the male characters as well as those of the female. Sada Yacco herself did not appear on the stage until the young man in her husband's company playing the women's parts died; and in order that her husband's company should not go to pieces Sada Yacco, in despair, took his place, with what success we all know.

FRANCE.

M. Jacques Blanche.

I am most keenly interested in the matter of theatre reform. I have, in fact, been writing in "Excelsior" since October, on staging, decoration, scenery, etc.

It is not for me to decide whether the public are panting for a more artistic presentation of plays and operas; yet that seems unlikely from our daily experience of non-educated crowds of playgoers, who seem to have no discrimination whatsoever. The public ought to be educated and trained to feel and understand beauty, and this by real, good artists.

Scenery and staging could by no means be entirely done by distinguished painters. Few among the latter might prove gifted and able in that direction; most of them could not devote the time necessary to the work of the theatre. Nevertheless, painters might inspire and guide professionals. Mr. Charles Ricketts is one painter who has done successful, refined and ingenious work, especially in connection with the original production of Oscar Wilde's "Salome," by the Stage Society, and Bernard Shaw's "Don Juan," produced by Granville Barker.

That painters might be encouraged to serve the theatre is clear when we remember that the modern movement in painting is largely decorative. Unlike realism, it has nothing to do with copying nature; it is in no sense photographic. Unfortunately not only have the public and critics misunderstood the nature and significance of the movement, but the neo-impressionists themselves have asked us to accept as pictures works that are only pieces of pure decoration, though at the same time admirable in many respects, but incomplete decoration.

An application of the principles of Post-Impressionism was made in the wonderful Russian ballet and opera seasons in Paris (1909-1910), which showed what real artists are apt to conceive and achieve in the way of a beautiful picture squared up to the size of "Le Châtelet" or the opera, without mentioning enchanting costumes and lighting effects. They also revealed that the Russians are inspired by the French Neo-Impressionists. They have helped themselves to the new traditions which French painters have been creating in order to come and demonstrate how these might be applied to the theatre. The experiment has taught us that our theatre directors should encourage decorative artists to serve the theatre. By this means ugly compositions would be avoided; and the theatre would make an eloquent appeal through the eye of the spectator. M. Bakst was the leading spirit in these ballets. He is a master who is soon to have many followers.

As a direct outcome of this art movement in the theatre, the Théâtre des Arts is worthy of notice. But it is hardly fair to judge its merits from the few plays produced as yet. The scheme is very fine, but the promoter, M. Jacques Rouché, appears to be handicapped by want of financial support and space, the theatre not being sufficiently large to carry out his scheme to perfection. Yet, in spite of these limitations there was a great deal that was good in the big production "Nabuchodonosor," the latest thing done at the Théâtre des Arts. M. Paul Poiret was responsible for the wonderfully interesting costumes, which he composed and had made in his workshops.

To sum up, I think those who work for the stage should have three qualifications:—

(1) Knowledge of the various styles in architecture (obtained from the best classical and historical examples), and knowledge of the finest pictures in the public galleries.

(2) Taste, a genuine taste, and an understanding of beauty. An appreciation for the most beautiful works of art in existence, together with an understanding of the play or opera which they undertake to interpret, quicken and emphasize plastically.

3. A total and decided neglect of everything done on the stage within the last fifty years.

Mr. J. D. Fergusson, Paris.

The only thing talked about here in Paris for a time was the wonderful setting, decoration and costumes designed for the Russian ballets by Bakst. The productions were marvellous for fullness and variety of colour, and variety in colour, and for scenes held by a tremendous bigness of design, continuity of colour and design. They were a revelation even to painters accustomed to colour and big design, and working along the same lines. Had they been "arty" or æsthetic in the ordinary sense, a cheap music-hall with its frankness would have been preferable to us. But there was no straining, no restraint; all was perfectly easy, and one simply felt that a great thing had happened.

In order that you may have an idea of the theatre movement in Paris, I am sending you some printed matter, namely, two books, one containing a number of original drawings by Paul Iribe*, and the other sketches by De Segonzac, as well as the artistic Bulletin de "L'Œuvre" (Lugné Poe's theatre), illustrated by Iribe, Severini and others, and the prospective programme of the Théâtre des Arts, where, under the direction of M. Rouché, the costumes and decoration are being done entirely by artists, almost all of them members of the Salon d'Automne or Independents, and therefore thoroughly representative of the modern art movement. You will notice in the programme some unusual combinations: for instance, De Segonzac is doing a thing with Paul Poiret (who is our greatest couturier, and the man who starts styles which others modify to suit popular taste).

Bakst, who is a member of the Salon d'Automne, where he arranged a Russian exhibition some years ago, must be regarded as the pioneer and the master-spirit of the art movement as shown in the Russian ballets.

Mme. Yvette Guilbert.

Le théâtre anglais et la théâtre français ne peuvent pas être comparés. Le premier est pour les enfants, le second pour les grandes personnes, et si mon cerveau préfère le théâtre de France, je crois que mon coeur préfère celui d'Angleterre; parceque mon coeur est resté gai, un peu naïf peut-être, mais je suis certaine qu'il est resté jeune, tandis que mon cerveau a des rides. Et pour répondre intelligentment à votre question sur la reforme théâtrical ce faudrait de longs pages. Besides, I am a white slave of my work, as I was when at the Coliseum, where I used to sing twice a day!

Mr. Laurence Jerrold, Paris.

The scenery and costumes of the Russian ballets were as much a revelation in Paris as elsewhere outside Russia. They have two great qualities: (1) Complete harmony. Costumes are designed to harmonise with one another, and costumes and scenery are designed to harmonise together. To aim at this should be the first rule of stage decoration, but it is a rule of which the most lavish builders of stage "spectacular effects" have little conception, either in London or in Paris. The Paris grand opera is one of the worst offenders against it. (2) Real poetry. The scenery presents not a real but an imaginative picture. It does not attempt to show a photograph or a model to scale of what would be seen on the stage if the castle, the palace, the wood, etc., represented there were a real castle, palace, etc. It tries to present to the spectator the picture which an artist sees in his mind's eye when he imagines such a castle, palace, etc. Such imaginative scenery probably fits only an imaginative play. The play must have poetry to fit the scenery. It is difficult to suppose that a play which aims at photographing life (as artistic an aim as any other) could be acted in such simplified

against pure colour, and do not seek to lower the colours for the sake of harmony. An application of their principle may be seen in "Sumurûn." Painters in this country are beginning to realise that it is not necessary to work down the shades or tones to get fine harmonies. In this way they are returning to the primitive sense of colour; going back to the glory of colour as seen in the barbaric love of brilliant masses of vitalising colour. The human race as it becomes civilised appears to tone itself down to the sombre and depressing. The return to glowing colour symbolises a return to life and happiness.]

* Six beautiful designs by Paul Iribe illustrating the verse of Jean Cocteau, and inspired by the Russian dancer, Vaslav Nijinsky.

scenery, the object of which is to convey one whole poetic impression.

The Théâtre des Arts in Paris has successfully taken up the suggestion given by the Russian ballets. The scenery and costumes of "Le Marchand de Passions," "Nabuchodonosor," and especially of Molière's "Le Sicilien," were completely artistic.

M. PIERRE LAPRADE.

The artistic movement which manifested itself in France more than twenty years ago was at first limited to ardent and subtle minds. This movement has gained a certain public and has now a reached a point where it counts in the history of art. Naturally the theatre has been caught in the movement and reflected it; and if in painting there was a return to true classical traditions, living and eternal, and not a formula immutable and lifeless, in theatre decoration there was an evident desire to turn away from stereotyped revivals.

You ask me whether the decoration of plays should be carried out by artists or by artisans? Where does the artist commence? Where does the artisan finish? Watteau painted some signs (which are perhaps his best productions); and there are the artisans who have built cathedrals. What really matters is that the small divine element which we call art, exists; whether it is provided by artist or artisan does not matter.

It seems to me, however, that a sympathetic collaboration between a painter who feels the theatre, and comprehends stage productions, and a professional who can interpret his ideas and adapt them to the requirements of the scene, is the best solution to the present problem of the art of the theatre.

[Mr. Laprade is one of the group of distinguished artists, at present co-operating with M. Rouché at the Théâtre des Arts, Paris.]

M. HENRI MARCEL, L'administrateur général de la Bibliothèque nationale, Paris.

Though I have not the technical knowledge necessary to speak with authority on the subject of the Russian ballets I may nevertheless state my impression. They will certainly serve to stimulate the new form of art now making its appearance.

To me the most noticeable thing in them is the union of extreme simplicity with unequalled refinement. The treatment of artistic contrasts and values has never been surpassed. It is not possible, however, to lay down a formula, for the treatment varies with the scene. Thus here in one set harmony of contrast is sought, and there in another set harmony of analogy is the object. If in "Carnival" value by contrast is obtained in the play of green draperies, and arrangement of columns against the luminosity of the costumes and scintillating jewels, in "L'Oiseau de feu" the unusual combination of colours and the arrangement of the crowds are no longer contrasted, but correspond and are made to match harmoniously with the architecture and the general scheme of decoration of the scene.

As to the dancing, it appears to me to be too mechanical, too acrobatic. I fail to appreciate its monotony even when it is the delightful M. Nijinsky pivoting like a teetotum.

I do not feel that the form of art of the Russian ballets is purely original. Everyone acquainted with the ballets at the Empire or at the Alhambra, London, says that similar effects are obtained there. But the Russian temperament adds a sort of wild spontaneity which makes them of immense value.

GREECE.

PROFESSOR ERNEST A. GARDNER.

I do not know very much about quite recent movements in Athens—I lived there from 1887 to 1895—and I do not know of any important reform movement in the theatre. I should say that the theatre in Greece was mainly dependent upon French models, the only exception being some topical vernacular plays that are extremely simple both in situation and in staging. There have been some instances of designing of scenery, etc., by competent artists and architects, and archæologists have co-operated in revivals of ancient Greek plays, but this work is really not so common or so well done as in England at similar performances.

JAPAN.

PROFESSOR JOSIAH CONDER, Tokio.

By way of reply to your request, I am enclosing you an account of the Japanese Theatre written in "The Builder" over thirty years ago. The changes that have taken place in the arrangement and construction of theatres since that time are mostly in the direction of providing better comfort for the audiences, contracting the auditorium and increasing its height, introducing additional tiers of boxes and galleries. Simultaneously the proscenium opening has been made higher, and top lights introduced. Electric lighting has taken the place of gas. The stage turn-table as described always remains, also the "hanamichi," or raised passage for the entrance of actors through the auditorium to the stage—for certain processional effects.

A Japanese company for the improvement of the theatre are just completing a very large theatre constructed almost entirely in European style, for an audience of 1,500 people. It has a large foyer and refreshment room, and all the luxurious accommodation of an opera house, and is decorated with oil paintings in European style introducing Japanese motives. The stage is of great height, with all the latest mechanism for raising scenery, etc., as in Europe, but with the addition of the turn-table, which is considered essential for the reproduction of Japanese historical plays. There is a device by means of which the "hanamichi" can also be added when such historical plays are enacted.

I do not think that there is anything in the old style of Japanese theatrical representations that can be adapted to the theatrical art in Europe. Scenic effects are decorative and pleasing, but very conventional. Sometimes they are quite "impressionist." Some effects are most realistic—as when an actual conflagration takes place on the stage, and an actor comes out of a burning building with his clothes on fire, in the play called "Chi Daruma." But the realism is fragmentary, and there is no general realism or illusion in the settings as a whole. Conventionalities are curiously mixed with naturalism. The stage will be spread with a cloth painted with conventional water spirals to indicate the sea; a warrior will appear on a horse made of two men with a skin over them; assistance will be given to an actor by a black mute, who places a seat for him, and who is supposed to be non-existent, etc., etc.

Modern plays are being written on the lines of European plays (often translations), and the scenery copied from that used in Europe. It may be said that the Japanese theatre is now in a state of rapid transition.

From "The Builder," April 5, 1879.

"Some very pleasing scenic effects are obtained by the use of the upper passages; sometimes a gaily-dressed procession or an armed suite of attendants approach the stage in a long line, with all the slow ceremonial and etiquette which belong to the customs of old Japan. At other times an exit will be made imposing by a large train of followers; a farewell parting will be lengthened out by lingerings and looking back; or, may be, some favourite low comedian will give full play to his comic strut, action, or grimace, as he makes his entrance or his exit across the long passage. This peculiarity has seemed worth dwelling upon, as, by reason of it, certain representations can be obtained which decidedly improve the effect of the play, and which are more or less impossible in European theatres, where approaches must be sudden, and a slow arrival or far-off action can be suggested only by distant sounds behind the stage from invisible supernumeraries, or by exaggerated expressions of expectation or alarm on the part of the actors upon the stage. To assist this conventionality, and to carry out still further the idea of the all-pervading nature of the scene in a Japanese theatre, strips of painted canvas, continuing the stage scenery, are often hung to the fronts of the upper boxes and galleries running all round the theatre.

"An example of this may be given by reference to a portion of a favourite play, in which is represented the embarkation of a prince from his own castle town.

"When the scene opens a boat lies in the foreground, the floor of the stage being covered with painted canvas representing a sandy beach in front and water touching the prow of the boat, and extending behind to the back of the stage. The prince and his suite having entered the boat, it is moved by means of the turn-tables of the stage, and at the same time the canvas representing the sandy beach disappears, and the whole stage represents sea. Then gradually along the sides of the upper boxes strips of canvas painted as water are drawn by cords, until at length on the further gallery-front facing the stage is seen the representation of the distant shore and castle town. This forms a fitting and expressive accompaniment to a long farewell soliloquy from the boat, the prince addressing his native home which he is leaving behind him. Thus a vivid reality is given to a change in the scene of action. The idea which it seems to suggest to the audience is that they have in reality followed their hero to his next abode, leaving with him the last scene behind; and not that he has left them in the forsaken town to be transported mysteriously to the next scene of action. . . .

"The stage is provided with one or two concentric turntables coming out to the front, and by the revolution of these the scene is sometimes quickly changed. The front scene will hide the scene behind, which is prepared in readiness, and then the whole is moved round. . . .

"The stage-curtain, generally having some simple conventional device in colour upon it, is drawn forward by attendants at the close of the scene. . . .

"With the profession of an actor, as with other professions in this country, the business has hitherto been hereditary, and instruction has been personally given or handed down in manuscripts. . . ."

What is a Producer?

By One of Them.

THAT phrase—"the play produced by"—which has lately become so common at the foot of a playbill, still arouses, it would appear, but the vaguest impression in the minds of the general public. This producer is not apparently the stage manager, for the name of that gentleman (in company with those of his two assistants) appears in smaller type elsewhere on the same sheet. Neither is he, seemingly, on the business side of the theatre, for apart from particulars as to the "sole proprietor," "lessee," and "season under the management of," at the head of the bill, our minds are also set at rest as to the names of the "general manager," the "acting" or "business" manager, the box office keeper, occasionally even of the secretary and the treasurer. Who then is the producer that he is given this prominence, that his name is oft-times printed in bolder type than that of the author of the play?

Well, briefly, the producer is the man who thinks out the play before the first rehearsal, who is responsible for the smooth progress of those rehearsals, who sees to it that those rehearsals are concluded and the play ready in every particular for production by the night that the business side of the theatre has advertised as that of the first performance. It is he who gives instructions to everyone, from scenic artist to super. Before the actors have seen their parts he has read the play many times and practically knows it by heart, has decided what the scenery is to be, and made sketches and designs for the scenic artist to work from, has settled what furniture there shall be on the stage and where it shall be placed; what ornaments, what curtains, carpets, pictures. Now it must be obvious that however beautiful the scenery, however carefully the stage is dressed, the performance of a play does not merely consist in the actors repeating the lines assigned to them as quickly as possible in order to get the whole thing over and done with. The value of each scene must be very carefully estimated in the light of its relative importance or significance with other scenes in the play.

One scene is serious and must be played impressively and slowly, another lightly, brightly, flippantly; a third is dull and will not hold an audience, their attention must therefore be distracted with by-play. Pauses, again, play a large part in conveying an author's meaning. Now, to whom are we to appeal for the settling of these subtleties and niceties?

Obviously the MS. cannot help us. The author, again, a possible arbitrator, is often, unfortunately, not alive. Suppose, too, that a situation in the play turns upon the effect produced upon one of the characters by a startling piece of news; it is palpably essential that the character in question should be placed in such a position on the stage that his face is visible to the entire audience. Who is to decide where the actor shall sit or stand? It may be suggested that the actor himself might select his position, and, indeed, until lately this was the method employed. Actors sorted themselves, all but fought for places on the stage, and forced their parts into undue prominence by sheer strength of personality or mere weight of salary, and kept them there by wilfully "queering," whenever possible, a fellow-player's effects; cared not a button, in short, for the play, the author, or the ensemble, so that they personally made a hit. It was in consequence of this incessant strife between the actor and the author and amongst the actors themselves that a referee was found in the person of an impartial, trained observer known as a "producer."

Not only was he the arbitrator of all points at dispute, but it grew to be his duty to anticipate these points, to have in his mind at the time of the first rehearsal a picture, complete in every detail, of the finished play as it would appear on the night of performance. And so, nowadays, it is he who has entire control over a play from the moment it is decided upon for immediate production until the time when the public see it played upon the stage.

It is he who casts it, that is to say, decides what actors shall impersonate the parts, it is he also who cuts it, i.e., blue-pencils it, eliminates unnecessary passages, condenses it to make it more coherent and effective. By the day fixed for the preliminary run-through of the play by the actors he has formed unalterable convictions as to how each of the parts should be played; how, indeed, each line in the play should be spoken; knows, almost to the exact word, where one character will sit, when another will stand; if the play contains a death scene, he has decided what manner of death it shall be, where the dying man's head shall be, where his feet; if stage lovers have to kiss, how they shall kiss, where his arm shall be, where her head; how scenes shall be broken up to prevent monotony, or to aid the players in long and difficult speeches; whether this character shall wear a beard, that one an eyeglass; what frocks it would be consistent with her station in life for the principal female character to wear, to be discussed anon, tactfully, very tactfully, with the leading lady.

Now it will be palpable, even from this brief survey, that it is vital the producer's word should be law. It is all so much to the good, then, when the producer is also the manager of the theatre. The ideal producer, however, be he manager or no, must not himself participate in the entertainment, for, in such instances, his whole-hearted desire to carry out the intention of the author has a tendency to become allayed by anxiety lest his own part may suffer, and any pains he takes to obviate this contingency will be inevitably to the detriment of the play as a whole. Moreover, no man, even an actor-manager, can do two things at once, efficiently. If he is rehearsing his part on the stage he cannot be judging of the effect from the stalls; if he spends the time of rehearsal in criticism from the auditorium his part will manifestly be under-rehearsed, particularly if it is a long one, as parts selected by actor-managers are apt to be.

A word about the dramatist as his own producer. He, presumably, will know better than anyone else what he intended to suggest. Only very rarely, however, is he sufficiently conversant with the technique of the stage to be able to explain by what method he proposes to obtain the effects desired. And it is little to be wondered at. It is essential that a producer, to be efficient, should have been through the mill as stage-manager and actor. He need not have been markedly successful in either of these metiers (indeed most superlative producers are indifferent stage-managers, and worse actors), but he must have served for years in both capacities and know exactly how the finest effects in each are obtained. To excel in personation would not aid him at all, the merest suggestion is all that is needed at rehearsals.

Enough qualities are demanded of him without a talent for acting being added. He must, for instance, be widely read, observant, of almost superfine sensibility, and possess a sense of humour. He must have an eye for colour, form, pose, some knowledge of costume, an ear for music. He must be versed in the manners and customs of good society. He must know what those people eat, how they eat, what pictures they hang on their walls, how they love, how they hate; just as he must know similar things of the people in Seven Dials, in Arabia, in the Warwickshire and Milan of Shakespeare's time, in Ancient Greece, in the Scotland of to-day. He must appreciate in more or less degree every nuance of feeling, the whole gamut of the emotions, must realise instinctively and instantly what any man or any woman of any type, of any nation, would have done under given circumstances at any period of the world's history. He must be tactful (for will he not often have to tell members of the most conceited class of the community that they are wrong?), worldly wise, wily as the serpent, gentle as the dove, strong (or men older and more experienced than he will not obey him), patient, appreciative, enduring. And for the most part, when his work is done, it is forgotten. The moments of the play on which he has lavished the most zealous care are applauded as the genius of the best known or most highly-paid actor concerned in them; the author finds hitherto unnoticed virtues in his play, and the public says: What is a producer?

Verse.

By Harry Kemp.

THE CATTLEMAN'S BURIAL.

(s.s. "Maori King," South Seas.)

We bore our comrade from his bunk, we kept him overnight,
In a fold of heavy canvas we sewed him good and tight—
With stitch on stitch we sewed him in and hid him from the sight.
We laid him on a tilted plank, and solemn-souled were we.
Behind us whirled the troubled wake, around us spread the sea.
And then each man removed his hat and stood with downsunk head
As the dapper little captain read the service for the dead.

Said the Boss of all the cattlemen, "I'm glad it isn't me
Wot 'as to lie so lonesome at the bottom o' the sea."
And *I* looked out across the waves which ran in crests of foam,
And longed for fields, and running brooks, and all my friends and home.

INSOUCIANCE IN STORM.

(Songs of the Great Lakes.)

Deep in an ore-boat's hold
  Where great-bulked boilers loom
And yawning mouths of fire
  Irradiate the gloom,

I saw half-naked men
  Made thrall to flame and steam,
Whose bodies, dripping sweat,
  Shone with an oily gleam.

There, all the sullen night,
  While waves boomed overhead
And smote the lurching ship,
  The ravenous fires they fed.

They did not think it brave:
  They even dared to joke. . .
I saw them light their pipes
  And puff calm rings of smoke. . .

I saw a passer sprawl
  Over his load of coal. . .
At which a fireman laughed
  Until it shook his soul.

All this in a hollow shell,
  Whose half-submerged form
On Lake Superior tossed
  'Mid rushing hills of storm!

A TRAMP'S CONFESSION.

We huddled in the Mission,
  For it was cold outside,
An' listened to th' preacher
  Tell of the Crucified.

Without, a sleety drizzle
  Cut deep each ragged form,
An' so we stood the talkin'
  For shelter from the storm.

They sang of God an' angels,
  An' heaven's eternal joy,
An' things I stopped believin'
  When I was yet a boy.

They spoke of good and evil,
  An' offered savin' grace—
An' some showed love for mankin'
  A-shinin' in their face.

An' some their graft was workin'
  The same as me an' you;
But most was urgin' on us
  Wot they believed was true.

We sang, an' dozed, an' listened,
  But only feared, us men,
The time when, service over,
  We'd have to mooch again,

An' walk the icy pavements,
  An' breast the snowstorm gray
Till the saloons was opened,
  An' there was hints of day.

So when they called out "Sinners,
  Won't you come?" I came! . . .
But in my face was pallor,
  An' in my heart was shame. . .
An' so forgive me, Jesus,
  For mockin' of thy Name—

For I was cold an' hungry!
  They gave me grub an' bed
After I kneeled there with them,
  An' many prayers was said.

An' so forgive me, Jesus!
  I didn't mean no harm,
An' outside it was zero,
  An' inside it was warm. . .

Yes, I was cold an' hungry,
  An' oh, thou Crucified,
Thou friend of all the lowly,
  Forgive the lie I lied!

WIMMEN.

Wot, you work! An' on a farm, lad—from the daylight till the dark,
An' you hope by application you will some day make your mark! . . .
Well, I guess I kin believe ye, for, a long, long time ago,
W'en I meddled wi' ambition an' the world's allurin' show,
I remember that I slaved away, like you, both soon an' late—
But I'll never work agin as long as I kin slam a gate,
An' why a man like us should work I fail to understand—
For wot's the use of workin' w'en there's wimmen in the land?
Yes, wot's the use of workin' w'en there's wimmen in the land
That gives a tramp his daily bread, an' with a willin' hand?
The men are very obstinate, an' doubt each word you say.
If you tell them that you're hungry, they'll put you makin' hay,
Er remark you look quite husky, wonder if you're any good
At splittin' up their kindlin' or a-choppin' knotty wood. . .
But the wimmen (good Lord bless 'em) all you have to do with them
Is to tell them of your mother with a chokin' sort of hem,
Er praise their littul toddlin' babes, or pitch a weepin' tale,
An' a sprinklin' of religion I have never knowed to fail. . .
Oh, wimmen is the mainstay of our persecuted band,
An' wot's the use of workin' w'en there's wimmen in the land?