

TABS

Published in the interests of the Amateur Theatre
by
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EDITORIAL

The Editor thanks those Societies and Groups who continue to send us copies of their magazines and other publications. We would, however, still like to hear from many more, both at home and overseas.

* * *

Intending entrants for the Charles Henry Foyle New Play Award are reminded that the closing date is June 30th, 1954. Details and entry forms can be obtained on application to the Clerk to the Trust, Miss N. Bunce, Dale Road, Bournbrook, Birmingham 29.

* * *

The Eltham Little Theatre are experiencing great difficulty in finding amateur electricians. Anyone interested should contact Cyril L. Buxton, Hon. Manager, Eltham Little Theatre, Wythfield Road, London, S.E.9.

* * *

We still have available a limited number of TABS binders as described on a slip inserted in our last issue. The price is 6s., post free in the U.K. Once existing stocks are exhausted there may be some delay in supplying as it will be necessary to accumulate orders until the minimum quantity required by the manufacturer has been reached before we can re-order.

* * *

In response to a number of requests for a blue colour medium which would transmit less green than No. 41 Bright Blue, we have introduced No. 43 Light Navy Blue. At present this is available in Cinemoid only.

LINES TO A SMALL-PART PLAYER

Two more pages of the script to play
And then you're "on."
Three short lines for you to say
And then you're gone.
But though you may not play the lead,
Expose no plot; perform no deed;
You help to tell the author's story.
Though no Press mention—yet you share the glory.

GREGORY AMES.

AN OPEN STAGE AT STRATFORD-ON-AVON, ONTARIO

by CECIL CLARKE

We are indebted to The Society for Theatre Research for permission to reprint the following article from the Jan.-March 1954 number of "Theatre Notebook."

When Tyrone Guthrie, as producer, and Tanya Moiseiwitsch, as designer, were invited last year by a group of citizens of Stratford-on-Avon, Ontario, Canada, to suggest a form of presentation for a season of Shakespeare, they recognised an opportunity for seeing their long discussed plans for the production of Shakespeare on an open stage come to fruition. Previously, when a chance to produce on an open stage had come his way, Tyrone Guthrie had made do with a platform stage erected over the Council table of the meeting place of the Church of Scotland in the Assembly Hall, Edinburgh. In Stratford-on-Avon, Ontario, however, nothing existed which necessitated a compromise of ideas. Everything could start right from scratch. The experience of staging *The Three Estates* and *Highland Fair* in the Assembly Hall could be called upon, it was hoped, to good effect.

The stage seen within the Festival Tent Theatre at Stratford, Ontario, with its platform and different levels around it, its balcony with the inner stage beneath, the trap, and the entrances from under the audience, has not been designed and erected with any dogmatic idea in mind that it is the only architectural realisation of the stage upon which the plays of Shakespeare should, or can, be truly and effectively produced. It is an experiment and must be regarded as such. It endeavours to offer practicalities enabling the plays to be staged in the convention for which they were written. There is no scenery. It can be described as an actor's stage, giving him all his dimensions, demanding from him a style of acting where each part of his body must be as expressive as his face and requiring utter concentration and control during every second he is on the stage. Nowhere on the stage is he out of focus, the audience is on three sides of him and the front rows very close. Gone is the barrier of the curtain, footlights and orchestra pit. There is no need to make sky cloths change from day to night, or for the stage carpenter and the scenic artist to help the imagination with their visual conception of night; sufficient is it for the actor to say, "How sweet the moonlight sleeps upon this bank," and, if we listen carefully to what he says, we can know and can accept that it is night. For the audience, listening becomes extremely important.

The entrances from under the audience, and those at the back of the stage and on to the balcony (beside the eight aisles in the auditorium), enable the action to proceed swiftly, without breaks between scenes. The only change for the audience is one of focus,

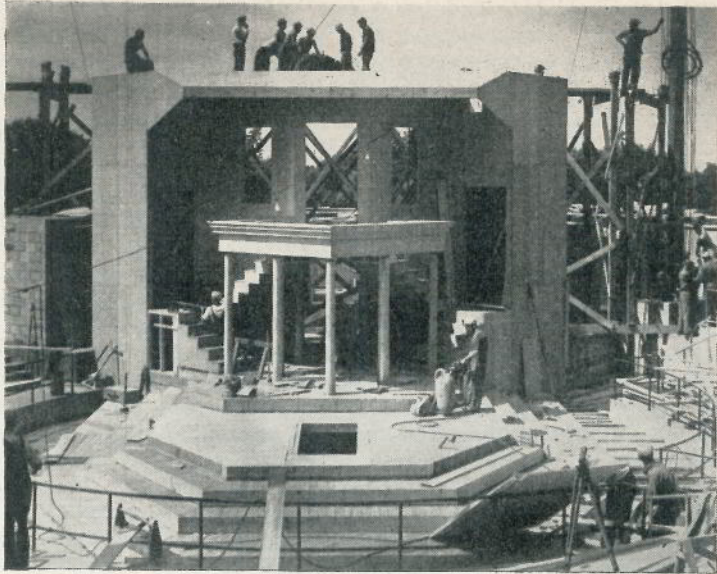
establishing for them at once a new locale and the mood of the ensuing scene. The stage area is brilliantly and evenly illuminated from all sides; no lighting tricks are necessary, only, perhaps an even change of intensity from all sources of light to soften it for romantic, or particularly difficult intimate moments.

It is very difficult to try and describe the look of the Theatre and I suppose the best way is to think of a circle, cut out approximately a quarter segment and regard that as devoted to all backstage facilities. This leaves three-quarters of a circle to be given over to the stage and audience. Place the stage full in the centre of this section, with the back of it against the front of the "facilities" segment, and you have the audience round three sides of it, sitting in comfortable chairs, placed on the fifteen tiers built of concrete and covered with matting; creating in effect a bowl-shaped auditorium. Cover the whole of the circle with an enormous, soft brick-red colour "big top" tent, with outer walls of grey-blue, and then, inside the tent, over the auditorium and stage area, hang a midnight blue coloured inner lining to reduce the height of the ceiling and to help with acoustics and the problem of keeping out the daylight. This inner lining meets a wall, made of rich plum coloured material, 8 ft. in from the tent outer wall, 9 ft. in height, so, in fact, you have a tent within a tent, with a promenade (in the audience segment only) between the two. That briefly describes the Tent Theatre at Stratford, Ontario. Such things as properly equipped dressing rooms, public conveniences, hot and cold showers and other creature comforts, all help to make it something a little more than a tent, as usually visualised.

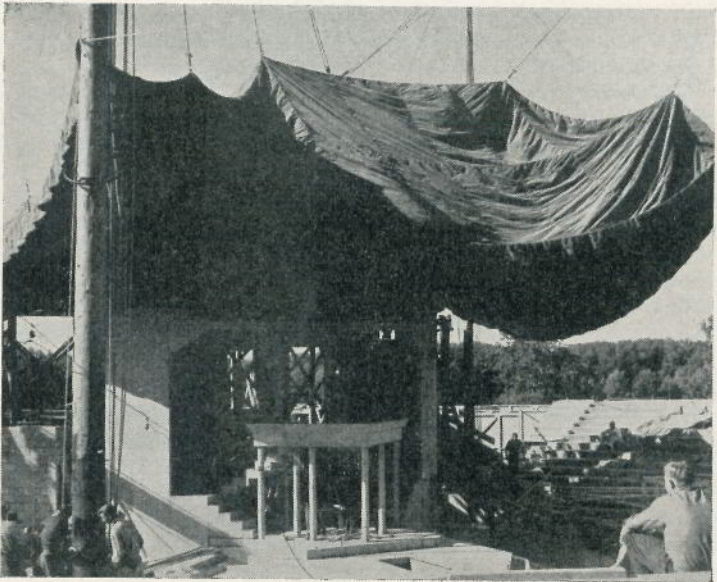
The stage floor is made of oak (6 in. by 2 in. on edge) on a felt lining and is 2 ft. in height from the floor of the auditorium. Around it are three steps or levels, the lower level being 3 ft. wide and the other two 1 ft. 6 in. in width; all having risers of 8 in. The total width of the stage, including the three levels, is 30 ft. The total overall depth for acting is 39 ft. The front row of the audience is, at the nearest point, 4 ft. away, and never more than 6 ft. The space around the stage, between it and the front row of the audience, creates a useful acting "pit," particularly at the sides of the stage.

At a point 1 ft. 6 in. from the front edge of the stage plateau and in the centre is the trap, 6 ft. 6 in. long and 3 ft. wide, with a door hinged on one of its long sides and opening to under the stage, where a set of steps on rubber wheels, guided by a simple track, slides silently and quickly into place for entrances or for exits, as demanded by the text. The whole of the underneath of the stage forms a cellar, 9 ft. from its floor level to the underneath of the stage floor, which forms its ceiling. It is accessible from backstage by steps and from the stage area by two ramped entrances cut through the auditorium tiers.

The balcony of the Elizabethan stage was straight across the back. The balcony of the Stratford theatre comes out from the back of the stage in a V shape, the point being at the front. It is



STAGE AT STRATFORD-ON-AVON, ONTARIO, UNDER CONSTRUCTION.

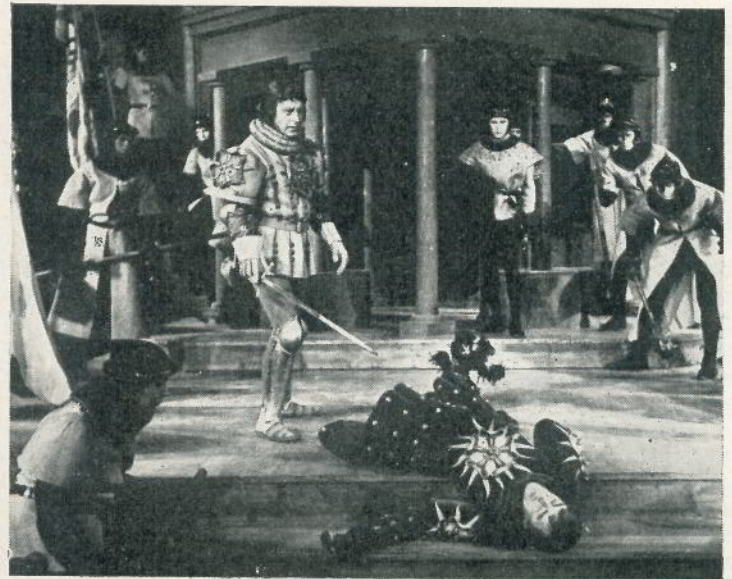


THE ERECTION OF THE TENT.

Illustrations reproduced from "Theatre Notebook" by courtesy of The Society for Theatre Research.

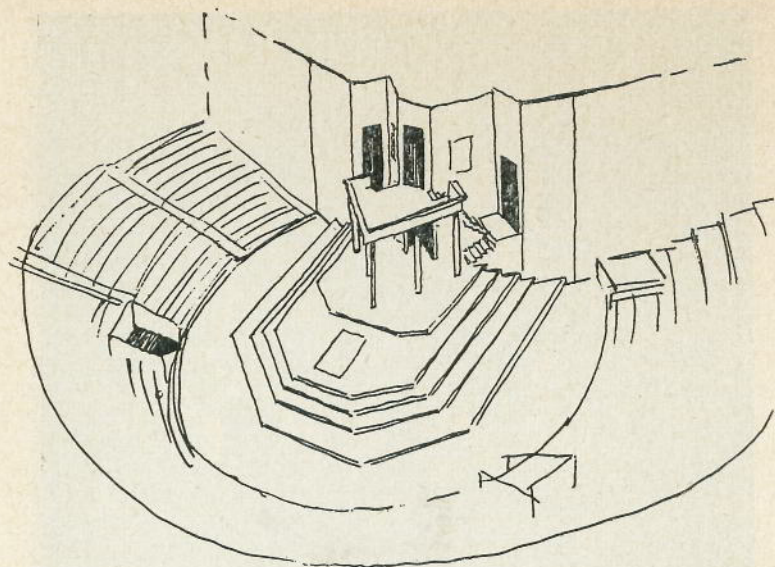


A PERFORMANCE OF *All's Well That Ends Well*, IN MODERN COSTUME.



CLOSE-UP OF A PERFORMANCE OF *Richard III*.

Illustrations reproduced from "Theatre Notebook" by courtesy of The Society for Theatre Research.



Impression of the stage, stage gallery and background at Stratford-on-Avon, Ontario.

erected on another level on the stage proper, 8 in. in height and 11 ft. 9 in. back from the front edge, thus forming underneath the balcony a small inner stage. It is supported by seven pillars which follow the V shape of the balcony; one right at the point, one at either side halfway back and four across the back, with 5 ft. between the two centre ones to provide an entrance from under the back-centre of the balcony. The height under the balcony is 7 ft. 4½ in., and the pillars are 7 in. diam. at the base, tapering to 6 in. diam. at the top. These pillars, under the balcony, create an interesting acting area, suitable for comedy and mystery moments. Immediately in front and below the point of the balcony the actor is provided with a very dominant acting position, one step up and a good solid pillar for support.

The balcony is reached from the stage by stairs on each side. They start towards the back of the V of the balcony, five steps (8-in. risers) up to a small landing where there is an exit to off-stage, then, before the exit, a sharp turn towards centre stage and up seven steps to the balcony level. There is a rail of simple architectural design around the two sides of the balcony, 1 ft. 2 in. in height and 1 ft. wide, providing a seat all along the two sides of the top. Apart

Illustration reproduced from "Theatre Notebook" by courtesy of The Society for Theatre Research.

from the two entrances either side of the balcony on the first landing level, there is an entrance straight from the back of the balcony on to its own floor level. The back of the stage is made of birch plywood, and the partitions at either side of the stage, cutting off the backstage area from the audience, are made of a fibre wood substance.

The auditorium tiers are 2 ft. 8 in. in width, 9 in. high, except the first two steps, which are 1 ft. 6 in. in height. This gives the front rows a comfortable eye-level, avoiding the strain of looking up at the stage and also allowing them to enjoy the usually much-denied pleasure of seeing the pattern of stage movement. The last row of seats is 46 ft. from the nearest point of the stage, but the feeling of intimacy with the stage is quite remarkable, especially when the concentration of light is on the stage and the auditorium is in comparative darkness.

Illumination of the stage is by forty-eight Strand Electric pageant lanterns placed around the auditorium at 40 ft. from stage centre and at a height of not less than 20 ft. They are all controlled by a switchboard in the backstage area, arranged in dimmer banks of four.

Stage-management cueing control is from a box in the auditorium built under the roof of one of the ramped actors' entrances from the cellar. The Stage Manager has an undisturbed view of the whole of the acting area and its entrances and is able to cue any difficult entry or effect and the working of the trap.

The orchestra is in a "pit" to one side of the back of the stage and the conductor takes his own visual cues, except in cases of co-ordination with any happening in the backstage area.

From an acoustics point of view, the tent worked perfectly, the intimate scenes of *All's Well That Ends Well* seemed to reach the audience everywhere with the same impact and clarity as the more violent moments of *Richard III*. Perhaps the only disadvantage from an actor's point of view is that it lacks the "ring" which a building of a more permanent nature gives to the voice.

Although the temptation to keep the natural oak tone of the wood for the stage was great, it was, of course, far too light in colour; actors' faces would have merged in with it and been lost to the audience. The colouring used toned it down to a greyish brown, with a tinge of green in it, letting the grain of the wood still provide a texture. Masking curtains, fixed at the very backstage end of exits from the stage, were almost the same colour as the stage. The stage surface provided a reasonable refraction to the lighting, giving it a throw-up underneath the actors, thereby helping to counteract lack of footlights or other upward lighting. There is still a problem there to be solved; to get real face-level, and below-face-level, lighting on to the open stage, without it streaming straight into the eyes of the audience across on the other side of the stage.

Many lessons were learned, but I feel that the main one was the need to bring the audience yet closer to the stage. I do not mean

the front rows, but to bring the back rows nearer by having two levels, one above the other, and making the lower one not so deep. When that is accomplished—and I hope the Board controlling the theatre at Stratford, Ontario, will consider it when they think of erecting a permanent theatre—then true actor-audience relationship will be well on the way to being established. There are a few other points about the present design of the stage which need studying before it is finally blue-printed for acceptance as a permanent installation for the Stratford or for any theatre like it, but they are comparatively minor ones and mainly concern the director and his problem of staging all the plays of Shakespeare and other such dramas without too much repetition of ideas.

“TELECOURSES” ON THE HISTORY OF THE THEATRE

The History of the Theatre was one of the first of a new series of “Telecourses” to be offered last autumn by the University of Washington. These courses were also presented as a public service by KING-TV on Mondays from 6 to 6.30 p.m. Professor J. A. Conway of the School of Drama, Washington University, was to deliver twelve lectures which ran parallel with an area of study he taught both to resident students and home study students.

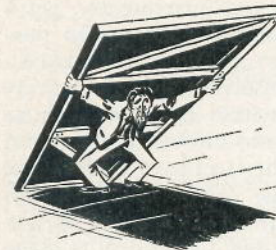
Professor Conway has designed more than nine hundred stage productions, a number of theatres, and is a specialist in achieving unusual stage effects by means of special lighting devices. He also wrote a booklet “Viewers’ Guide to History of the Theatre” for the television audience. It was publicized that appreciation of the programme would be greatly enhanced by the reading of this material before each lecture. The cost of the guide was one dollar.

Those who were interested in further study were encouraged to enrol in any one or all of three home study courses devoted to the same subject. These courses covered The Physical Playhouse, Methods of Production, Great Actors, Stage Machinery, Scenery, Lighting, Costumes and Masks. During each course, the tuition fee for which was twelve dollars, the student had to prepare twelve assignments and send them to the University for correction, grading and return. A final examination was arranged through the Dept. of Correspondence Study. Certain sections of the text book *History of the Theatre*, by Professor Conway, were required for each of the courses, the cost of the text book being 3 dollars 50 cents. It was stated that the Viewers’ Guide was also required.

One can only congratulate those responsible for the making available of these courses to the masses who, for one reason or another, are unable to become resident University students.

THE BACK-STAGE TOILERS

The amateur theatre has its own faithful band of heroes and heroines who are often unhonoured and unsung. Not for them the flattery of thunderous applause! They might even be pressed into service as cheer leaders. They do not share in the distribution of floral tributes after the final curtain. They may not even join the last night jamboree at which the cast consume hot-pot and tell each other how marvellous they are. If the society is addicted to speeches from the stage by the Chairman, there will doubtless be a prompted reference to the anonymous workers behind the scenes and their yeoman service to the cause, what time the workers in question are surreptitiously beginning to strike . . . (“strike,” theatrical; not strike, industrial). They must remain in the deserted theatre to demolish the royal mansion of Monomania and doubtless load it, in the small hours, on to lorries waiting in the rain or snow, to transport it elsewhere to become the palace of Plutonia.



“. . . Demolish the royal mansion of Monomania.”

It is difficult to understand what sustains the enthusiasms of that collection of workers who often make and paint the sets and props; erect and shift them when made; install, maintain and “work” the lights, and perform all the other back-stage mystic rites incidental to any production. On their arduous labours depends more than is fully appreciated. There are constant demands on their time and energy. In a society producing a succession of shows the casts will be varied but the members of the stage staff have little or no respite. For them the cry is: Hamlet is dead! Long live Macbeth!

Some amateur actors consider themselves to be much too important to be concerned with the manual work of the stage. Which is a pity. Amateur producers usually graduate from acting to directing and if they have taken the craftsmanship of setting and lighting a stage for granted, they will be helplessly in the hands of those who know; and the knowing ones are just as liable as anybody else to the corrupting influence of absolute power and can quickly develop a sadistic relish for asserting that something or anything “can’t be done.” All actors, and certainly all embryonic producers, should serve an apprenticeship on the stage staff. The actors would then be less concerned about the parts for which they have not been cast and the producers would gain in authority from

the inside knowledge of what can and what cannot be done. A producer who is not competent to be a stage manager is seriously handicapped. It is not sufficient that he has attended several week-end schools, has read all the books and articles on stagecraft, or that he is blessed with experienced and competent assistants. It is easy to theorise. Lecturing and conferring on every aspect of play-making are popular pastimes but one only really learns by practice. There are no golden rules. Anything is permissible if it comes off, and it is much more likely to come off if it is inspired by experienced artistry and executed with competent craftsmanship.

The visual presentation of a play is just as important as the oral presentation to which it is complementary. The people who are responsible for the design, manufacture and setting of the scenes, for devising and controlling the lighting, for the design, making and correct wearing of costumes, the selection and placing of props and furnishings, all require just as much "theatre sense" as the actors. It is a great advantage, therefore, if that theatre sense is comprehensive and not compartmented and bounded by the respective limits of acting, lighting, scene designing or stage management. The stage-hand or manager is better at his job if he has had experience of acting—and vice versa. There is too great a tendency for each section of the amateur theatre to adopt a "closed shop" attitude to the job. The back stage toilers, not infrequently, get a jaundiced view of life in general and the amateur theatre in particular, when the calls on their energies, time and ability are excessive, as they so often are. But they themselves are not entirely blameless, as they tend to regard as half-witted interlopers those who seek experience. Skill with hammer and chisel, spanner and screwdriver, brush and charcoal, or the ability to throw a cleat line and run a flat, are not the sole requirements. The lighting control demands something more than an expert familiarity with the playful habits of alternating current. The setting and lighting of a stage is a practical process interpreted with imagination and a flair for

the expressive arrangement and emphasis of inanimate objects. There is a need to have not only craftsmanship, but stage artistry. The arrangement of the flowers, the draping of the window curtains, the positioning of a lamp standard, a studied carelessness in placing the cushion on the settee and a hundred other "touches," will at once create for the audience the right or wrong illusion.

The wise organiser of a stage staff will enlist from the actors and actresses those enthusiasts who are willing to learn something



"... the playful habits of alternating current."

of stagecraft. He must not wait for volunteers; he must seek them. If there is an unfortunate respect for the sanctity of democratic election of staff and annual meetings, he must short-circuit the purists by seeking "power to co-opt." He must then make sure that his recruits are given jobs within their capacity and see to it that they are helped and encouraged when necessary. If he is an efficient foreman or manager, he will spend most of his time organising jobs for others to perform, not doing all the work himself, and the result will probably be all the better.

The management of a stage staff is a highly responsible job which calls for special qualities of leadership as well as technical ability, resourcefulness, a gift of improvisation, good humour and an ability to see the work as part of a whole, for which somebody else is really responsible. Sooner or later the manager will be anxious to hand over the management to somebody else. He can do so with ease of mind and conscience if he has spent his time wisely—in training and managing others.

P. C.

* * *

PLAY PRODUCTION*

Clarification required as to positions of Staff

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Confusion sometimes arises as to the duties to be performed and the services to be rendered by the various theatrical experts required to create the production of a play. This is probably caused by the public announcements, sometimes ambiguous, in posters, advertisements and programmes which proclaim that the responsibility is shared by a diverse number of persons occupying apparently strange-sounding appointments. It is often announced that "the play is presented by Messrs. Blank in association with Mr. Somebody-else"; "produced by Mr. So-and-So"; "the stage director is Mr. Jones"; "the stage manager is Mr. Smith"; and then follow the names of other important craftsmen and technicians.

This array of principal officials may be perplexing and convey little to the man-in-the-street, but, nevertheless they deserve to receive credit and public recognition for their team work in helping to achieve a success. Although they are more or less "self-employed" it must be realised that these important back-stage chiefs

* This article was written with the Professional Theatre in mind, but the impact will no doubt be felt by the Amateur Theatre in due course, and for the purposes of avoiding confusion, perhaps the sooner the better.—Ed.

have to carry out the directions of the firm financially responsible for the presentation, to protect the interests of that firm, and secure working harmony and best results from artists and staff. They really act as "Liaison officers" between the workers and the management and by exercising tact, diplomacy and impartial judgment can often settle or avoid differences of opinion developing into acrimonious legal disputes.

The subject came under consideration at a recent meeting of The Society of West End Theatre Managers when it was decided to endeavour to regulate the confusing position of the various advertising "credits." It was therefore recommended that, in future, announcements should be so worded as to clarify that an entertainment is:

- (i) "**Produced**" by the actual responsible management which provides the money and exercises complete control.
- (ii) "**Directed**" by the actual individual who is physically responsible for the correct and appropriate interpretation of the playwright's intentions. He will also deal with details of scenic and costume designs and conduct rehearsals. It can then be stated "the production is directed by Mr. . . ."
- (iii) The "**Stage Manager**" who may be listed as the official representative of the producing firm and will be in charge of the stage work under the orders of the person who directs the production.
- (iv) "**Assistant Stage Manager**" would have the meaning the expression conveys and as usually understood. The term "stage director" is considered redundant and should be eliminated.

It is hoped that this policy will be generally adopted. It should go far to acquaint the public with the high technical qualifications of the selected few attached to a production and give some idea of the back-stage expert knowledge required for the delectation of playgoers.

It must not be overlooked, however, that the Producer (i.e. producing firm) is the prime mover in the enterprise in which he invests his money. The artistic taste of the Producer combined with business acumen and creative ability results in an author's work being publicly presented. Sometimes his efforts gain a substantial reward, but very often in spite of hard work and determination a failure results. He cannot be infallible or anticipate the fickleness of an audience or foresee contingencies such as National disasters, inclement weather, etc. It can be truly said that it is the Producer who "suffers the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune."

THE BARD GOES ABROAD

Recently the Stratford Memorial Theatre Company planned a Continental tour of Antony and Cleopatra, and in order to gather information about the electrical installations and general methods of operation in various countries, we asked whether a member of our Export Department could join the tour. Permission was readily granted and the following account gives some idea of the difficulties involved.

It was a lovely Spring day on Saturday, January 2nd, when the advance technical party left Liverpool Street *en route* for The Hague. The two stage carpenters had actually left twenty-four hours earlier and were already on board when we arrived, having attended to the loading of the scenery and the railway container of electrical equipment. The latter was lashed to the deck and we were dismayed to see the shaft coupling of one of the portable boards protruding through the side. Fortunately only the container was damaged and not the equipment. Due to pressure of work before Christmas I had been unable to study the programme and so the voyage was spent in finding out details of what might be called "THE PLAN." The production was to be a replica of that given at Stratford last season, except that the cyc. at Stratford being a permanent one, it had to be replaced by a touring type. Moreover, as those who saw the production will already know, the cyc. and its lighting played a very important part as it was used to give the indication of country and time. Although some of the theatres to be visited had very good cyclorama equipments of their own, it was impossible to use these as the whole set had been built around the Stratford measurements and these fixed cycloramas would not be in the correct positions. The extremely intricate cyc. lighting would also have caused a problem at rehearsals and therefore we carried two cycloramas and two sets of cyc. top lighting, one to go ahead to the next date. The cyc. lighting, top and bottom, was to be worked from portable boards and so no rehearsal would be needed for this important section of the lighting. Another snag was that of the many different voltages to be encountered, and to overcome this we took a 24 kva. auto-transformer so that we could always find 220 volts for the portable boards.

The stage staff consisted, on the electrical side, of John Bruce, the Chief Electrician from Stratford, his assistant John Bradley, and myself. On the stage side, we had Eddie the carpenter from Stratford, and Wilf, who had just returned from the Stratford Australian tour in the same capacity. In such a happy family surnames were non-existent and frequently unknown. Peter Streuli as Production Manager was directly responsible to Glyn Byam Shaw, the Producer. Jean Roberts was Stage Director and there was a very stouthearted quartet of A.S.M.'s.

Generally, after the opening at The Hague, the scheme was that Peter Streuli, Jean Roberts, John Bradley, Wilf and myself would arrive at the next date during the performance at the previous one so that the spare cyc., etc., could be erected immediately the stage was clear. After the performance, John Bruce, Eddie, and the A.S.M.'s would see the "get out" and despatch lorries in the *correct* order to keep the night staff at the next port of call supplied with material. In this way it was expected that by 10 or 11 a.m. everything would be ready for lighting rehearsals under the direction of Peter Streuli and John Bruce, who would by then have arrived. Six to eight hours had been allowed for this rehearsal and we will see later how this worked in practice.

The actual opening at The Hague went very much according to plan. The theatre equipment though old, was in excellent condition. There was a very bad hold up because the three battens forming the cyc. lighting proved too heavy for the counterweight system. This necessitated the use of pulley blocks from the grid and these took a long time to rig up.

The main drawback was shortage of front-of-house spots and finding circuits from which to feed our additional ones. Here we found six footlight circuits which helped enormously. A great help, too, was the fact that these theatres are used to a daily change of play and accordingly trained to make a note of something and *do* it. At the lighting rehearsal, the Chief gave instructions to his two assistants, giving time of operation of the cue and time for preparation. This was methodically written out on a large cue sheet approximately 20 in. by 12 in., one sheet for each cue, and from these the cueing was worked. The staff was most efficient and helpful. The Chief spoke English, but on our side Jean Roberts spoke very good Flemish, so that language was no problem.

We had in the meantime further discussed the move from The Hague via Amsterdam to Antwerp in view of the experience at The Hague. It was arranged that I should sleep at Amsterdam, going into the theatre at 6 a.m. when Bradley would be tiring and there would be a lot to do. Bradley, Wilf and I were then to travel to Antwerp in the morning, when they would go to sleep whilst I went to see that all was well in the theatre.

In the evening I called at the theatre to see how to "get in," etc., and really this was almost my only sight of it. It has a very modern Belgian switchboard of some 150 circuits, plenty of dips, and although short of front of house spots there was no shortage of circuits. The electrical team consisted of four and the Chief, and the whole staff were split into two, the changeover to take effect at 8 a.m. When I arrived at 6 p.m. it was to find everything set except the on-stage booms which were awaiting the building of the rostrums.

Apparently the lorries had been sent off in the right order, but they had leapfrogged on the way across and this had delayed matters. In addition the "get in" was awkward due to a slow lift.

Progress was rather slow but at 8 a.m. the new crew came in and the progress was so rapid that we left at 10.15 a.m. for Antwerp with the knowledge that everything was going according to THE PLAN.

I am afraid my two companions didn't see much on the trip. It was the coldest day of the tour and many of the canals were frozen solid. We arrived at Antwerp at 2 p.m. and after a good meal I despatched the others to bed with strict instructions to the switchboard not to disturb them. This I discovered later was more than necessary, because on retiring to my room later on for a quiet hour I was rung up four times by fans wanting to know where their favourite stars would be staying.

I went to the theatre, a charming old building which is being completely restored. Unfortunately for us the restoration had been confined to the auditorium and although a new Electronic Control was delivered, it was not installed and no counterweight sets existed. We arranged to start work at 11 p.m. and the duplicate equipment had already arrived. There was, however, still the question of icy roads, customs formalities and so forth.

At 10.30 p.m. we went to the theatre to find the stage almost clear, *but* Peter Streuli was still *en route* and we had no stage measurements. However, he arrived with the necessary information and by half-past one we had our cyc. lighting up and tested out. Incidentally our hearts missed a beat when 30 ft. battens were pulled up on two 3 in. by 3 in. wooden spars. The chief machinist merely saw that the strain was equal on all lines and then took the batten up with a speed that would put a lot of counterweight sets to shame.

As, according to plan, the first lorry was not due till 6 a.m., we all went back to bed. Bradley and I planned to be back at 7.30 a.m., but on meeting at breakfast we heard of a telephone call from Amsterdam that the Customs had been awkward and no lorries had left until 3.30 a.m. with an expected arrival time of 9 a.m. At 8 a.m. we were all at the theatre and we proceeded to plan the installation with the electrician. It then appeared that no spots could be used in the auditorium without approval of Authority. Fortunately I had previously met Mr. Authority and although we had to walk all over the town, being sent from him to the Fire Chief, all difficulties were overcome. The Chief Electrician offered us circuits everywhere and it was some time before the penny dropped and we realised that although we were being offered circuits everywhere, we could only have 30 dimmers. We had, therefore, to make a minimum scheme to cope with this very small number of dimmers. The loads were very much delayed and the first arrived at mid-day (curtain up 8 p.m.). However, the electrical staff, when once everything had been sorted out, really got on with the job, but as the reader will realise, time was very short. I foolishly fell down a trap during the fit-up and damaged my knee. By 6 p.m. I was very much slowed down but everything was up and the spots set. Whilst all this was going on Peter Streuli had completely re-lit the show on paper, having arranged four main settings and four variations of

each giving, in effect, 16 settings. These four cues were checked and converted to local settings, and an hour with the electrician produced a working plot. Some of the usual cues were omitted, but the numbering was kept to that of the book so that the A.S.M. carried on as usual.

It must be recorded that the staff at Antwerp fitted up the show in excellent time and although I did not see the performance, I gather that it went through without a hitch. Whilst we were having our troubles, the wardrobe were having some of their own. Miss Ashcroft's costume was taken up to be pressed and got splashed with bleach. This, of course, took out the dye. Fortunately the correct shade of Dylon was included in the spare parts and the damage was repaired. The props too were always in trouble with the throne. You may remember reading how Miss Ashcroft collided with it at the Princes Theatre, London, and cracked her ribs. On the Continent it took its revenge by cracking itself on every possible occasion.

We actually left the theatre just after curtain up and arrived at the Hotel in Brussels shortly after 9.30 p.m. By this time my knee was being very troublesome and I retired straight to bed. Wilf and John Bradley went out to find some food before starting work at 11 p.m. No particular difficulty was to be expected as the dates were only one hour apart driving time.

I had breakfast at a reasonable hour and after taking a taxi to the Airways Office to pick up some 110 volt lamps for the Patt. 23 which had been forgotten in London, I bought a stick and limped on to the stage at about 9.30 a.m. Here chaos reigned. For some reason which has never been solved the lorries had failed to arrive in Brussels, although they had been cleared from Antwerp. The familiar battle raged over the front of the house spots which were "in" and "out" every other minute until finally someone seemed to agree and they were "in" for good. None of our Continental plugs were any use and I sat on the inevitable beer crate changing plugs for the greater part of the day. Smoking was definitely prohibited in all parts of the building with patrolling firemen on constant duty and the whole time strains of *Peter Grimes* came from any odd corner where opera singers could foregather. Jean Roberts tried her Flemish on the Theatre Carpenter to be told in perfect English (he had spent the war in England) that he didn't understand good Flemish, only the Brussels version! Everything got slower and slower and for our part we had great difficulty in getting the spots set by 6 p.m. Everything possible went wrong and all sorts of silly things caused trouble. For example, when we gave them a piece of Cinemoid to put in one of their spots, we were shown a colour frame constructed in such a way that it was impossible to change the colours. We had long since decided on the "Antwerp Plot" but by seven o'clock when we discovered that the electrical staff was breaking for a meal we realised that the situation was desperate. Mr. Byam Shaw asked me whether I would be



Glen Byam Shaw's production of Antony and Cleopatra, the tour of which is described in the accompanying article. Above: Egypt. Below: Rome. Both photographs by Angus McBean and reproduced by kind permission of the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon.



prepared to work the Theatre Switchboard for the show with Mr. Streuli. I declined on two counts, firstly I did not know the show or the board really well and to risk both was too much. Secondly, I couldn't get up the ladder to the board. I pointed out that John Bradley had worked all night and was sleeping where he stood and that the only solution would be to put John Bruce on the main board as he knew the show backwards, whilst I took over the portables operating the cyc. This was agreed, the sole proviso being that someone was to examine my knee. The theatre doctor pronounced it clear, and rather late the performance started. The first two acts went smoothly and I must pay tribute to the very concise cueing given by the A.S.M. We were, however, rather startled by the appearance of an aristocratic gentleman in white tie and tails in the prompt corner whose sole job was to go on stage just before the rise of the curtain and "sh-Sh-Sh" the cast and staff. I believe strangers are equally startled by the bewigged "curtain catchers" at our own Covent Garden.



An aristocratic gentleman whose sole job was to "sh-Sh-Sh" the cast and staff.

In the third act we were not so fortunate in that a cloth fouled in view and we had to ring down the curtain. A pilot lamp protruding from the second bridge had caused the damage, which was quickly remedied. So a rather memorable performance came to an end to receive marvellous notices, except from Harold, the conductor, whose comment was that it looked rather peculiar. It was not far short of one o'clock when we retired to the Stage Management dressing room for some welcome whisky and, throwing all caution to the winds, a smoke. All our friends kept entering with alarms of "Fireman" until eventually this gentleman came to ask us to go home. One

good thing about Brussels (and later Paris) was that we just crossed the road and had a good meal before retiring to bed at 3 a.m. without receiving black looks all round.

We agreed to meet at 11.30 a.m. to discuss the next move in all senses. In the morning my knee was much better and everyone was the better for a good night's rest. We decided that there was no point in letting the theatre electricians work the show for the next two performances and as the only linguist electrician I should proceed to Paris with the advance party, leaving the two Johns to work the shows.

We left for Paris at 2 p.m. with rather a feeling, like Shell, "That's Belgium—That Was." I must mention how terribly good tempered everyone was during these trials. It must have been an awful blow to the producer and lighting adviser to have to cut the effects which they had spent so long in perfecting, and this was all done with extremely good grace. The Plan had been considerably modified for Paris to suit the transport situation. The six loads were due to arrive at 5 p.m. and it was proposed to work right through the night and have a technical rehearsal at 2 p.m. the next day. We met at the theatre at 9 a.m. and here found a staff that were really terrific. We had a talk with the electricians who calmly stated that they expected to leave the theatre after the opening performance the next night. The sole demand was regular breaks of two hours' duration. These breaks appeared to be for the purpose of eating "metres" of bread and cheese washed down with red wine, but as the troops always returned fresh and ready for the fray we could hardly complain. Neither could we complain of the attitude of the cafe "over the road." This operated until 3 a.m., reopening at 7 a.m.

All went pretty smoothly at this date except that there were some hitches in the hanging which caused much delay in the early hours of the morning. We had sent Jean Roberts and John Bruce home until 6 a.m., I, John Bradley and the others staying. By 4 a.m. my sanity was preserved only by draughts of black coffee laced with cognac. I was seated at a table on the stage trying to cut colours whilst Eddie was asking for translation of the most complicated stage terms on one side and John Bradley sought electrical translations on the other.

We found the electrical staff excellent. The Chief was one of these people who liked to be told exactly what was wanted and just to be left to **get on with it**. Having collected his plot he went to instruct his **board men on** what to do and then ran right through the 60 cues without mistake.

Thus, with the end of this performance, the hard work was over. I had to take farewell of very many friends with whom I had passed through many trials. We learnt a great deal from this trip both in what could be done in very little time and also what should not have been attempted.

I must say that when confronted with the original plan I never expected that the curtain would ever rise in some dates, but somehow it always did. I chanced to meet one of the cast the other day and he remarked that he wouldn't have had a technical job on that tour for all the tea in China. Anyhow it was great fun while it lasted and we had the satisfaction of knowing that the efforts were well appreciated by the packed houses.

J. T. W.

CORRESPONDENCE

The Editor,
"Tabs."

SIR.—In his criticism of Miss Lambourne's book *Dressing the Play*, Mr. Nathan sadly misses the point when he suggests that amateur societies should not be encouraged to have their own wardrobes. It is true that professionally made costumes will be better than those from an amateur wardrobe, but it is also true that professionally acted plays would be better than those acted by amateurs. Amateur actors act and amateur costumiers design and make costumes because they enjoy doing it.

There are some societies, the members of which like to be seen, and even heard, on the stage, and for this purpose they hire scenery, costumes and producers. Good enough. But there are others who are passionately interested in the Theatre and everything connected with it. They will learn to act, encourage their members to produce and, to the fullest extent that their resources will allow, design and make their own scenery and costumes. Perhaps they do find their wardrobes an embarrassment but their productions are very much less likely to be an embarrassment to their audience, for they will have the kind of enthusiasm, sincerity and interest in the Theatre which is the chief justification for the existence of the amateur.

Yours faithfully,

H. V. BUCKRIDGE, *Director.*
Toynbee Hall Theatre.

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The Editor,
"Tabs."

DEAR SIR.—I thank you for the facility of viewing Mr. Buckridge's letter of recent date, and can assure you I feel most flattered to gather that with his vast experience of the amateur theatrical movement Mr. Buckridge is, with the exception of one point, in total agreement with me in the matter of my review in your last number of Miss Norah Lambourne's most interesting book, *Dressing the Play*.

Mr. Buckridge's point is that it is a great shame to discourage "amateur costumiers from designing and making costumes," as he says, "because they enjoy doing it." I couldn't agree more with him—it is a terrible shame to deprive and discourage any enthusiasm of this nature. But may we for a moment just glance at the other side of the picture by considering four points.

Firstly, "professionally made costumes are better" generously says Mr. Buckridge. In spite of this fact it is suggested that our most esteemed friend, the amateur actor, out of his generosity of heart is asked to put up with and be handicapped by, shall we say, inferior garments. This, it must be agreed, is a bad thing as we all know that it will in no way help him—or her—to feel at home and confident on the stage.

Secondly, the expense (assuming the dresses are made in fair materials) will put the average amateur dramatic society considerably "in the red" for very many years to come.

Thirdly, assuming for the sake of argument that the unfortunate dramatic society under discussion has made—shall we say—a Shakespearean production, a Georgian production or a Victorian production, have it which way you will, for economical reasons our good friends are curtailed in their play selection for many years to come.

Fourthly, who is to house and care for these costumes and accessories year by year; keep out our old enemy the moth and pay insurance?

No, Mr. Buckridge. I feel confident that you and all those readers who have been kind enough to read our correspondence will agree with you and I that it is indeed a great shame to sacrifice these enthusiastic wardrobe ladies, but sacrificed they must be if the amateur dramatic movement is to live. AS LIVE IT MUST.

I am, Sir,

Yours faithfully,

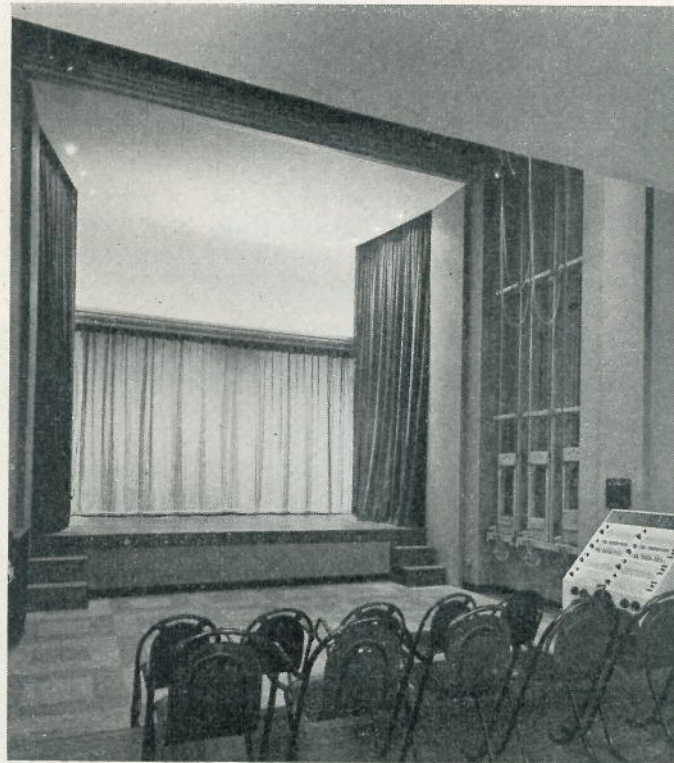
A. J. NATHAN.

STAGE LIGHTING DEMONSTRATED

Demonstration facilities at
Strand Electric, London offices

The easing of building difficulties has enabled us to rebuild our demonstration theatre more or less on the lines of the one demolished in the blitz of 1941. The stage is laid out with a cyclorama of the flat wall type at the back, and the primary and secondary colour mixing systems can be demonstrated thereon. Optical cloud and wave effects are permanently set up to assist the range of sky effects.

The acting area of the stage although lacking wing space can be set with drapes or simple scenery to give an interior effect. The



The Demonstration Theatre at 29 King Street, London, W.C.2.

overhead lighting equipment hangs on counterweight bars so that it can be raised or lowered easily for adjustment or re-arrangement. The floor is liberally provided with traps to conceal special lighting gear.

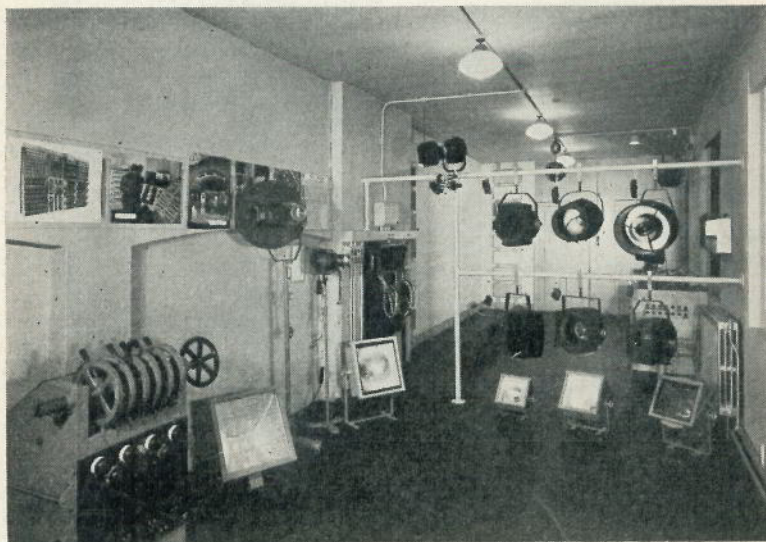
There is a large forestage flanked by red plush curtains which afford concealment for the scenery and properties, otherwise impossible to hide due to the absence of wing space. The forestage can be used for practical demonstration of the open stage lighting problem.

Hanging in the auditorium are three counterweight bars for the quick rigging and trial of lanterns requiring height. The floor at this point is broken up in a yard square pattern so that the spread of lantern beams can be quickly assessed. The rest of the auditorium floor is stepped and some sixty persons can be seated comfortably for lectures and demonstrations.

At the rear of the theatre is a balcony on which the larger lanterns and effects projectors are mounted so as to be easy to operate and examine.

On the control side the theatre is richly equipped because in this field it combines demonstration with testing. The Junior board, the Reactor System, Preset System and ultimately the Console System all will be on view. Automatic dimmers are also represented in the Chromolux colour preset for dance halls and cinemas, auto colour mixing drums of various kinds; and up, down and stop dimmers.

Fluorescent lighting is restricted to the type of work we recommend it for—auditorium cove lighting. The cove over the proscenium is lit from the top by cold cathode and from the bottom by hot cathode fluorescent lighting, both operated from a remote



The Lantern Demonstration Room at 29 King Street, London, W.C.2.

controlled automatic dimmer giving a complete dim from full on to blackout.

Use of the theatre is by appointment only and application may be made through the department handling the particulars (Hire, Sales, etc.), or direct to the Manager of the theatre.

Lantern Room. For less formal and unpre-arranged demonstration a room has been fitted up in such a way that all except the largest lanterns can be examined and their results compared. White wall surfaces marked out in feet give visual indication of the comparative distribution and intensity of the classes of lamp and lantern available. Particular attention has been paid to colour. Filter colours from our range of fifty-four can be selected using an illuminated colour box. The colours may then be projected as patches side by side on the white wall or thrown on to a series of coloured surfaces to show the effect of colour on colour. Fluorescent colours can also be shown both under visible and invisible (ultra violet) light.

All the lanterns are under control from a Junior board and may be dimmed or switched as in regular theatre practice.

The lantern room is available for use during working hours, 9 a.m. to 5.30 p.m. daily (Sats., 12.30 p.m.), without appointment.

BOOK REVIEWS

The Musical Productions. *By Cossor Turfery and King Palmer.* (226 pages, Octavo, cloth boards, 69 illustrations. 30s. Pitman, London.)

The authors are probably correct in their belief, expressed in the Preface, that this is the first book to be written with the prime object of assisting in the production of Light Opera, Musical Comedy, Pantomime and Review. It is a good bet that the job has never been tackled so thoroughly before. Commenting very correctly that specialised books already exist dealing with such things as scenic design and construction, stage lighting and so on, they set themselves the task of dealing particularly fully with production and the musical side. No one could take exception to these admirable intentions but in one or two respects one may get the impression that the authors' enthusiasm has run away with them. I cannot, for example, believe that a Musical Director will be "made" or "found" simply by reading this book, and for that reason alone the devotion of several pages to the use (or not) of a conductor's baton, the choice of baton, its length, the method of holding it, diagrams of its travel, and so on, seem to me to detract from the main issue. Again, one might be spared "the triangle is a metal bar bent into a triangular shape. It must be struck with a metal beater. . . ."

Elsewhere, I must take exception to "the electrician can be of considerable assistance at the lighting rehearsal, provided he has had an opportunity of studying the lighting plot in advance." One thing is certain—if he has not, the lighting rehearsal will not be the "tranquil affair of considered experiment" that the authors hope, and the result will probably show it. The necessary equipment will not be at hand, or if it is, it will be in the wrong place, wrongly focused and coloured, and almost certainly wrongly plugged up for simplified group and master operation.

When this book is reprinted shortly, as I hope and expect its sales will justify, I would like to see the chapter headed "The Lighting Rehearsal" brought forward so that it comes in front of the one entitled "The Dress Rehearsal." That is the logical order of things, though one must face the fact that where hired halls are concerned this may not always be possible. It is,

AMATEUR ADVICE SECTION

Weird and wonderful are some of the problems which are brought to the Amateur Advice Section attached to our Hire Dept. That is, of course, as it should be, for if it were otherwise the existence of the section would not be justified. Our purpose therefore in reproducing the following notes about a recent amateur production is in no way to record a complaint but to point a moral—"God helps them who help themselves," or if we may reword it for our own purposes, "We can best help those who help us by providing us with certain basic information." Otherwise it largely becomes a matter of the blind leading the blind.

In this particular instance we were asked to send a representative out of London to advise a Society on lighting. Our representative arrived during the weekend—just a part of the service—the appointment actually being for 8 p.m. on a Friday evening. He met a fairly large committee to discuss what was required and the questions and answers went something like this:

Representative: "What are you producing, and when?"

Committee: "A musical" (name not given for obvious reasons) "four weeks from now."

Rep.: "Where?"

Comm.: "At the local cinema."

Rep.: "Can I see a ground plan or photograph of the sets you will be using?"

This is where we come to the point of this article. Neither the Society nor the producer, who incidentally was a guest producer, knew or even had the slightest idea of the type of scenery they had in fact ordered. It had been left entirely to the scenic contractors to supply "the usual scenery" for this particular show. (Surely if they had been asked they would willingly have provided at least a rough sketch of what they were proposing to send.)

As it happened our representative did not know the musical in question, and the only information available was that the script stated "Act I exterior, Act II interior." Unfortunately the book of the play did not include any photographs of what had been used in the original production. Even this would have been a great help in making suggestions as to the lighting equipment which would be required to cope with these two sets.

Having worked out a possible lighting layout our representative then asked what equipment was already available at the cinema and what number of amperes could be had for additional gear. This information was not available. Most of the people at the meeting had jobs to go to the following day, which was a Saturday, so at midnight it was decided that certain members of the committee who were free would meet our representative at the cinema the following morning to clear up these last two points. The cinema had a show at 10 a.m. for children, so little time was available, and the electrician/projectionist had only just joined the cinema and could be of little help. However, after a visit to the local Electricity Supply

however, an ideal to be aimed at and the authors are obviously idealists. Otherwise they would never have collected and recorded such a wealth of detail relating to so many departments, and presented their findings in such readable form. This book is worth every penny of its price and is a "must" for the bookshelves of any Amateur Society contemplating a musical production, in spite of my earlier quibbles.

M.

Theatrecraft—The A to Z of Show Business. By Harald Melvill. (Octavo, cloth board, 220 pages, 24 plates and numerous diagrams. 21s. Rockliff, London.)

Having myself worked in the theatre for thirty years I found this book the most interesting and informative on such matters which has yet come my way. It not only describes in considerable detail the work of all the various departments—both front and rear of house—but it also deals at length with "The Players" themselves.

The author writes with many years of practical experience of the Theatre and has an intimate knowledge of his subject. He has no need to apologise for the frequent use of the first person singular because without both his experience and experiences this book and its readers would be that much the poorer. Many aspects of the Theatre depend on an expression of personal opinion and comparatively few can be categorically expressed in terms of facts and figures. Where it is possible to be factual the author is factual, whilst at the same time remaining both readable and interesting. When discussing a subject which might be considered controversial his arguments are sound and I would only occasionally venture to disagree with him. I confess that I am not altogether in agreement with all he writes under the heading "Lights up . . . Lights down . . ." but I must forgive him for relating elsewhere the following story, attributed to Mr. Basil Dean, with whom I worked for a number of years.

"He was trying to get a good 'thunderstorm' in one of his productions, and the stage management had tried storm effects from distant rolls to Wagnerian thunderbolts. But he wasn't satisfied. By a strange coincidence, a genuine storm was in progress outside the theatre, and in one of the pauses a veritable thunder clap shook the building. 'Not a bit like it!' he shouted. 'Try again.'"

This to me is most nostalgic. So often do I remember Mr. Dean searching for perfection and how often he achieved it.

The highest compliment I can pay the author is to suggest that this book should be in the possession of every Amateur Dramatic Society or Group. For myself, I will also recommend it to a number of my professional associates.

W. L.

Practical Stage Handbooks (Crown octavo, stiff board covers, 90 pages. 5s. each. Herbert Jenkins.)

These handbooks were intended mainly for the guidance of amateurs working on small stages with limited facilities. The first four of the series are: *Play Production*, by Conrad Carter; *Acting*, by Edwin C. White; *Stagecraft*, by A. J. Bradbury and W. R. B. Howard; and *Stage Make-up*, by Horace Sequeira.

They are well produced books and at a very modest price give excellent value for money. Another four books are to be published in April, including one on *Stage Lighting*, by Geoffrey Ost. Any amateur group would be well advised to add this collection of handbooks to its library. They will be invaluable, not only to its members of little experience, but the more experienced and ambitious will find much that is stimulating and interesting.

There is no attempt to "talk down" to the reader. The book on Stagecraft deals particularly with the problems of the small stage, but the rest of the first four books could be applied to almost any grade of play production, either amateur or professional.

P. C.

Authority it was ascertained that the necessary additional current could be made available provided the company were advised when it would be required so that they could fix the additional meters. (Supply Authorities are usually very helpful in this respect so long as they are approached in good time.)

If only information regarding the scenery, existing lighting equipment and facilities for additional gear had been forthcoming, the whole matter could have been settled in a fraction of the time and possibly even by post.

As a guide we set out below some of the information we like to have with a general lighting enquiry of this nature.

The name of the production. (We may know it or have a copy in our library.)

A ground plan of the set or sets to scale, with photographs if possible. (These will be returned.)

Some idea of the colouring of the sets.

The voltage of the electric supply, and whether AC or DC.

Details of any existing equipment and the current in amperes available for additional apparatus.

A rough sketch of the stage, giving dimensions and some idea of the hanging facilities available.

The scale usually used for drawing stage settings is half an inch to the foot and the drawings must show the width of the proscenium opening. So that cable lengths, etc., may be calculated, the position of the source of extra current should also be indicated. If a scale drawing is not available a rough sketch with a few dimensions on it is a great deal better than nothing.

Now for a word about finance. Advice on lighting (as distinct from actually attending lighting rehearsals and lighting the show itself) is free. If much of a journey or a night away are necessary, actual out of pocket expenses, including railway fares and hotel bills, are charged at cost. Unless more than average time is required no charge is made for our representatives' services. Conducting and attending lighting rehearsals usually do, however, take a considerable amount of time and a charge is therefore sometimes made in such cases.

Any quotations which are submitted in line with the suggestions made are always itemised so that the cost of individual items may be checked with the printed list of Hire charges, which is available on request, and so that the total expenditure can be adjusted upwards or downwards to suit the Society's finances. In this connection it is of course always a help if we can be told approximately how much money is available. In the absence of such information we can only put forward equipment on a scale which we feel will give the most satisfactory results. We are fully aware of the fact that the success of a production is not to be measured in terms of the amount of lighting equipment used, or vice versa. And we are no more amused that anyone else in hearing of unsuccessful productions.

W.L.