

TABS

Published in the interests of the Amateur Theatre
by

The Strand Electric and Engineering Co., Ltd.

HEAD OFFICE	P.O. Box 267 29, King Street,
SOUTHERN OFFICES, SHOWROOMS	London, W.C.2
TABS EDITORIAL OFFICE	Phone: Temple Bar 4444 (16 lines)
Southern Hire Stores	271, Kennington Lane, London, S.E.11
Northern Branch	313/7, Oldham Road, Manchester Phone: Collyhurst 2736
Eire Branch	62, Dawson Street, Dublin Phone: Dublin 74030
Australian Branch	481, Malvern Road, Melbourne Phone: BJ 4503
Scottish Agents	Stage Furnishings Ltd., 346, Sauchiehall Street, Glasgow Phone: Glasgow, Douglas 6431

TABS is published in April, September and December. All correspondence relating thereto should be addressed to The Editor at Head Office. Ordinary business communications should in all cases be addressed to the office of the Area in which the correspondent is situated.

CONTENTS

	Page		Page
Editorial — Reduced Hire Charges, Pattern 45 Spot, New Colour Filters, Choosing Electric Light Fittings for the Stage Setting, The Blind leading the Blind, Meum et Teum	3	Dimmers for the Destitute—Reviewing a new Strand Electric Publication	17
The York Mystery Plays—A description of outdoor performances at the York Festival of Arts this summer ...	7	Saturable Reactor (Choke) Dimmer Boards—Announcing a new and improved version by Strand Electric ...	18
Author! Author! by Gregory Ames	9	Is there a Scene-Painter in the House?—by Collie Hirst Some Notes on scene painters ancient and modern	21
The Century Theatre—A Repertory Theatre on Wheels	10	Who Lights the Set?—by K. G. Wrench—A plea for giving more scope to the designer ...	23
Effects—A record of the sale of some early 18th century stage properties	15	Soliloquy à la mode by Martin Hall	27
		Book Reviews—Four new Stage Handbooks	28

CUES FROM P. and O.P.

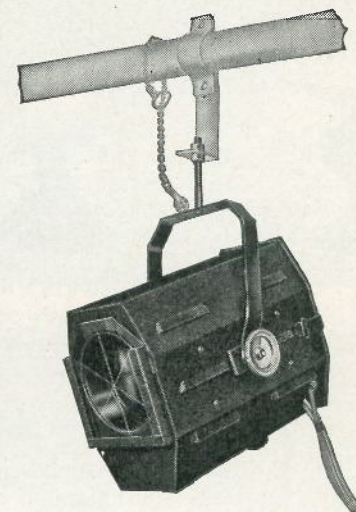
Reduced Hire Charges

To minimise breakages certain pieces of equipment, such as Floodlights, Battsens and Floods, will in future be fitted with metal reflectors. This will also help to reduce the weight of the lanterns and consequently the freight charges. In addition, we have reviewed our Hire Charges and in a number of cases have found it possible to reduce our rates.

Potential hirers are strongly recommended to apply for a revised list of Hire Charges.

Pattern 45 Spotlight

These spotlights have been redesigned to take a medium pre-focus lampholder in place of the earlier E.S. type. This means that relamping or replacement of the original lamp after cleaning can be effected in a matter of seconds, there being no necessity to re-focus or re-adjust. More important, however, is the fact that this change will now permit the use of the Class "T" 500 watt projector lamp, as an alternative to the 250 watt Class B projector lamp for which the spotlight was originally designed. It should be noted, however, that existing spotlights cannot be altered to accommodate the medium pre-focus type lampholder and the changeover therefore only affects lanterns purchased from this date. Any Pattern 45's obtained on hire will, as in the past, only accommodate the 250 watt lamp.



Additions to the Colour Filter Range

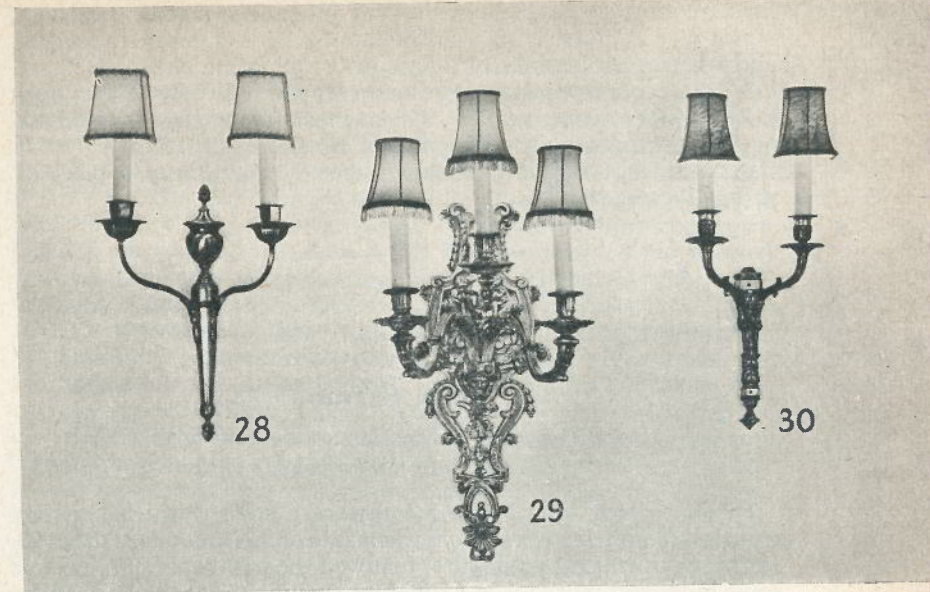
No. 43 Pale Navy Blue is now available in both Gelatine and Cinemoid.

Also available is a new Deep Golden Amber (No. 35) which will take the place of the double thickness of No. 34 Golden Amber hitherto recommended along with No. 16 Blue Green and No. 20 Blue for the production of realistic sky effects.

Choosing Electric Light Fittings for the Stage Setting

Strand Electric have recently reprinted their illustrated booklet of Decorative Fittings available for hire. This reference book is intended only to give an indication of the range available—in no sense can it claim to be a complete and comprehensive catalogue.

Choosing fittings is difficult at any time, and for the majority of people becomes doubly so as it has to be done by correspondence rather than by personal inspection. The purpose of this publication is not only to make the customer's task easier, but also to help us to ensure that he gets what he wants, or at any rate something so nearly approaching it as makes no difference.



All the illustrations are reproduced to a scale of 1 in. representing 1 ft., and an index gives information regarding the finish, available quantity and hire charges of the various types.

Every item illustrated, including oil and candle lamps, gas and coal fires (but excluding telephones) is "practical" i.e. wired for mains voltage except where it is specifically stated as being "self contained" when it is complete with a dry battery and switch.

Above and opposite are three typical illustrations from the booklet to give some idea of its usefulness. Over 100 different types of fitting, etc., are shown. Booklet free on request.

The Blind leading the Blind

The following is an extract from a customer's order.

"3 sheets—Outside Afternoon Lighting (mid-September)

3 sheets—Thundery Sky

3 sheets—Bright Moonlight."

Much as we like to try and help those with problems, whether concerned with colour or not, we must impress on enquirers the importance of giving us the whole story, as far as it goes, if our advice is to be anything more than a shot in the dark. In the case of the order quoted above, the mediums required for "thundery sky" are presumably for lighting a backcloth, but there is no indication as to whether the latter is white or not. One is also left to guess whether the first and third items are for lighting a backcloth or

for throwing shafts of sunlight and moonlight across the stage. Not a clue is given as to whether the setting is interior or exterior and what general colour of lighting is proposed in either case.

In the present instance we had to guess all these things, possibly with disastrous results. Given more information our advice might have been quite different and far more satisfactory. As it stands the enquiry really belongs to the "How long is a piece of string?" category.

* * *

Meum et Teum

A brief homily (to Hire Department customers only) on the way to treat other people's property

Not so very long ago a member of a society which shall be nameless (*but we know which one*) dismantled the front of a Pattern 93 Mirror Spot which was on hire, removed the iris diaphragm, drilled some holes and refixed it in a different position. This had the effect of making it possible to force the iris to close smaller than was ever intended, and it simultaneously had the effect of preventing the aperture from opening to anything like its full extent. It also incidentally meant that the leaves of the iris were damaged.

The offender did not take the trouble to replace the iris in its proper position when he had finished with it and, as his handiwork could not be seen without taking the spotlight to pieces, it was only by chance that the matter was discovered in our Hire Stores before the spotlight was sent out again to another and innocent unsuspecting customer.

Unfortunately the above is not an isolated case. It is just an example of what goes on from time to time. We have been designing and redesigning lanterns of one kind or another for nearly 40 years now, and as a result we flatter ourselves that most of our equipment is second to none. We are, however, always glad to hear from users of any points which they think might be altered, but, if you don't mind, we will do the "improving," having first satisfied ourselves that the alteration will in fact be an improvement from every point of view. Otherwise, in no time at all, we shall have no two lanterns alike. Furthermore, the equipment *is* our property and it is *we* not *you* who have to keep it up to scratch.

If this rebuke should catch the eye of any guilty parties we suggest that, as a penance, they write out ten times in ink our "Conditions of Business, Part 3—Hire of Apparatus," which now appears on the back of quotations and correspondence. That should give them time to think over their misdemeanours.

THE YORK MYSTERY PLAYS

Of the many and varied outdoor performances that defied the rigours of this English summer, one of the most interesting was Martin Browne's production of the modern version of the York Cycle of Mystery Plays, performed during the period of the York Festival of Arts, from June 13th to July 9th. The plays were first performed in the fourteenth century. Their authorship is unknown but it is the opinion of Dr. J. S. Purvis, who adapted the selected episodes for modern production, that the original 48 plays were probably written by the same man. Dr. Purvis states that at one time there were more than 48 plays, but the number was reduced by combining two plays into one and by dropping others as changes took place in the number of the York Craft Gilds by whom they were performed. Each "Gild" or group of small Gilds had its own particular play and was ordered by the Corporation to provide "good players, well arrayed and well speaking," as well as the stages on wheels. These latter were known as "Pageants" and each was pushed through the streets of York by six or eight men. The performances began at 4.30 a.m. on Corpus Christi Day each year, and ended late in the evening. The Pageants moved in procession to selected open spaces in the city where crowds could gather to see the plays performed in succession.

The stories of the plays are essentially religious in character, but the dialogue has the authentic robustness of Yorkshire dialect, with liberal use of quaintly rhythmic alliteration. A salty humour of boisterous slapstick is often succeeded by tender simplicity or intensely dramatic poignancy. The plays, which in the modern adaptation become episodes in a continuous performance, begin with the Creation and the banishment of Lucifer from Heaven. Dr. Purvis has made only a limited selection of the episodes based on the Old Testament stories, and the action moves from the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden, directly to the Nativity and the flight of Mary and Joseph with the infant Jesus to Egypt. The rest of the play is concerned with the adult Jesus . . . the Baptism, the Miracles, the Entry into Jerusalem, the Passion, Arrest, Trial and Crucifixion; the Resurrection, Revelation and Ascension follow, with an apocryphal Harrowing in Hell scene in which Satan and his devils fight a losing battle with Jesus and the Archangel Michael. The final impressive scene presents the Last Judgment, when the "cursed caitiffs" are rounded up by a gloating band of athletic devils and are cast into a gaping Hell's Mouth; the chosen ones ascend the heavenly heights, melodiously accompanied by celestial choirs.

An ideal setting was provided by an arena within the ruins of St. Mary's Abbey, which is conveniently near the centre of the city and but a stone's throw from York Minster itself. A platform erected behind the Gothic arches that once had formed the windows

of the Abbey, provided an appropriate eminence for the seat of majesty of God the Father and for his attendant angels.

Most of the action took place in the arena, being localised, when necessary, to areas in which scenery had been erected. A large platform in one corner served equally well for the Garden of Eden or point of vantage for Zaccheus, as for Gethsemane or Calvary; the stairway to heaven was incorporated in the structure and beneath the platform was the Tomb. This structure blended perfectly with the weathered stone of the ruins. The houses of Pontius Pilate and Caiaphas, the Stable and Hell's Mouth were individual stages based on the quaint designs of the fourteenth century "Pageants," not at all realistic but entirely appropriate.



The evening performances began at 8 p.m. and ended about 11.30 p.m. with one short interval. During the three weeks of the festival, sunset was never earlier than 9.15 p.m., and prior to the interval the artificial lighting was necessary only to combat the deepening twilight. Afterwards, the lighting took on a growing importance and significance. Almost imperceptibly, cross-fading transferred the interest from one focal point to another as one scene merged into the next; as darkness grew, the emphasis of the lighting was heightened and contrasts became more dramatically significant, without ever becoming obtrusive. At the end, as the lighting of the heavenly host gradually faded away in a most impressive

silence, the fading-in of floodlights above the stands appeared to surprise the audience, who seemed not to have been conscious that the darkness of approaching midnight was all around them.

Lighting an open air production in midsummer has its own peculiar problems and difficulties. It is useless to attempt final adjustment of the apparatus until after nightfall and because the York arena was constantly required for cast rehearsals, the lighting rehearsals could never begin until after midnight. At one rehearsal, lighting changes for the final scene were competing with broad daylight at 4.30 a.m., long after the first bird-songs had greeted the dawn.

The arena lighting was necessarily from front-of-house positions. About forty lanterns (mostly Pageant Lanterns and 2-kw. Soft-Edged Spots) were mounted on two 30-ft. high towers of tubular steel. In addition, twenty-four Baby Mirror Spots were used, mainly for lighting behind the "heavenly arches"; and many other individual units were required for localised light in strategic positions, both on and off stage. All the lighting was connected to portable interlocking dimmer boards, operated in a control tower from which the operators could see the acting area.

The task of lighting such a production must always be a joy to anyone who thinks of light in terms of design and tries to use it as a means of expression. In the lighting of the York Mystery Plays, the opportunity to match the changing moods of the action was a challenge that was stimulating and rewarding.

P. C.

AUTHOR ! AUTHOR !

Author, Author, you can't mean
There's a meal in *every* scene?
Without "masking," we're not able
To sit *six* around the table.
Do you think we're in a mood
Suitable to face that food?

Author, Author, what are we
Going to do about Act III?
Stella enters, stamps and rages,
Then doesn't speak for fourteen pages !
Must we leave the poor girl standing
In her nightie on the landing?

Author, Author, can you, bareface,
Justify that central staircase?
With the hallmark "been up West,"
We hoped your play would end our quest.
You'll no doubt enjoy our royalties,
Must you then impair our loyalties?

GREGORY AMES.

THE CENTURY THEATRE

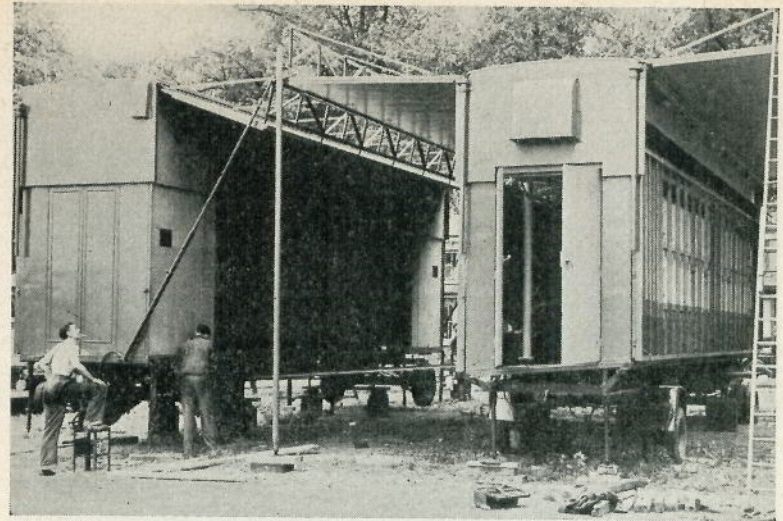
A Repertory Theatre on Wheels

The Century Theatre was founded as a project in 1947 by John Ridley (engineer), R. H. Ward (an author) and Wilfred Harrison (an actor). It did not, however, begin touring until 1952, the theatre being under construction meanwhile.

Its *raison d'être* is to take good plays to the people who might otherwise not see them. The company has its origins in the imagination and skill of an engineer and in the work of touring plays. Some of the theatre's founders have had over ten years' experience presenting plays in all kinds of halls throughout Great Britain—in schools, churches, hospitals, prisons, town and village halls. The many hazards of the work and the severe limitations of performing on widely differing stages, often before audiences far from comfortably housed, are met by the engineer's invention of a theatre-on-wheels in which a play can be well mounted, an audience seated in comfort and the same production taken to audiences in other towns or villages.



As well as a theatre on wheels there are living quarters with dining-car, kitchen, etc., for the whole company (seventeen persons). The total number of vehicles is 32. (Photograph by courtesy of Panelec (Great Britain) Ltd.)



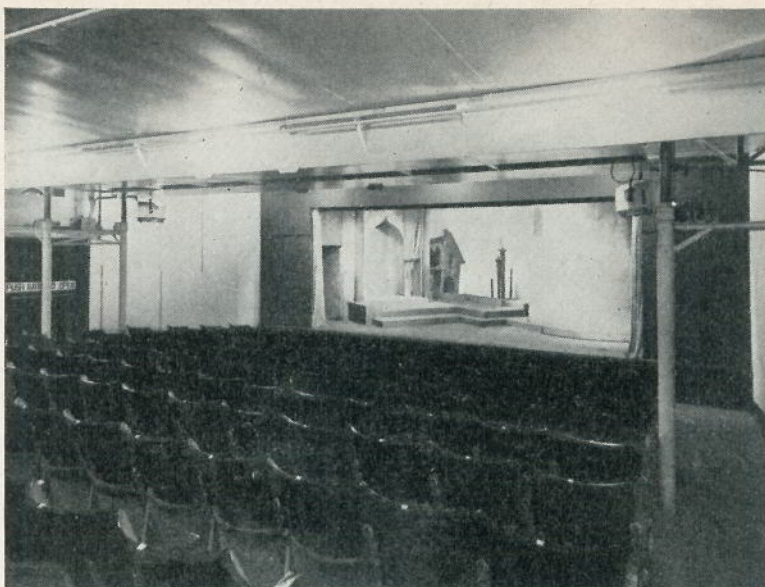
Four trailers, each 32½ ft. long, make up the theatre. They are first lined up side by side and jacked off the ground. Each trailer opens as shown to form the theatre's roof and floor. (Photograph by courtesy of Reid & Sigrist Ltd., Leicester.)

The venture consists, however, of more than a playhouse and its plays; it is a mobile theatrical community. Domestic quarters for the company of players are also taken on wheels from site to site. The unit is self-contained and only needs space, water supply and audience wherever it goes.

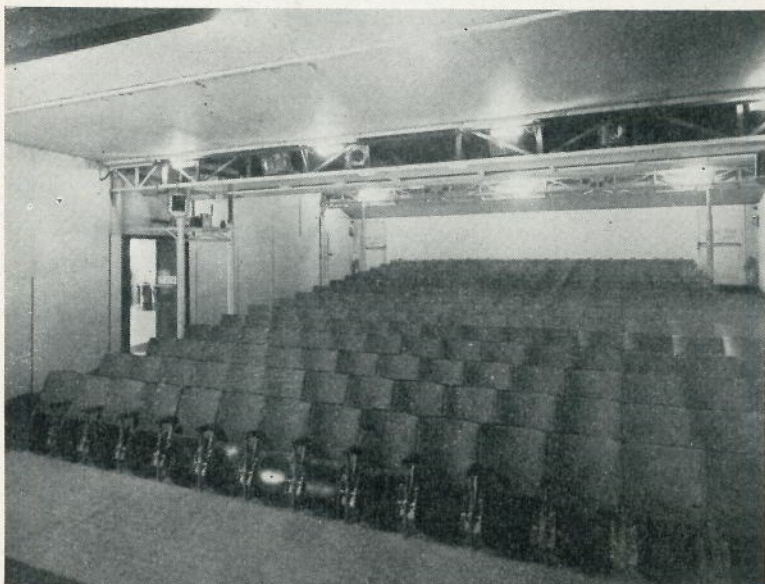
The playhouse and its supplementary vehicles and equipment were four years in the making and were built by the theatre's own craftsmen, working for mere subsistence wages. The necessary capital was publicly subscribed in pennies and pounds, in cash and in kind, from thousands of well-wishers. The first performance in the theatre-on-wheels was in Hinckley, Leicestershire, on September 29th, 1952, and in the following eighteen months the theatre has visited the counties of Warwickshire, Oxfordshire, Gloucestershire, Worcestershire, Shropshire, Staffordshire, Cheshire and Northamptonshire, making firm friends *en route* and creating eager requests for return visits.

In more than one place visited, the theatre has stimulated local theatre-goers in their efforts to establish a permanent theatre in the town. The repertory has included Shakespeare's *Othello* and *Twelfth Night*, Miles Malleeson's version of Molière's *The Miser*, and a first production in this country of Gabriel Marcel's *A Man of God*.

The company is independent, non-profit-distributing and limited by guarantee. Its council of management consists of two



Two views of the theatre as a whole. There are 225 upholstered tip-up seats and the raked floor gives each one an uninterrupted view of the stage. The auditorium is electrically heated. (Photographs by courtesy of Birmetals Ltd., Birmingham.)



active directors, on tour with the theatre, and a majority of financially disinterested persons, elected by the theatre's workers from amongst the theatre's supporters.

The Century Theatre is a completely self-contained mobile unit. It can be moved from place to place, dismantled one day in one town, erected the next day in another. Nevertheless it is solid, comfortable, practical and pleasant to sit in. There are 225 upholstered tip-up seats, and a sloping floor that ensures a good view from each one. There is electrical heating and ventilation. In fact, the only difference between this theatre and many permanent ones is that there are wheels—unseen—underneath. The invention is patented. The assembled theatre is fully roofed, floored and walled. It is weatherproof, dry and warm. Heating panels fill in between the ends of the vehicles, and small trailers make the entrance and exit.

The overall dimensions of the stage are 19 ft. deep by 33½ ft. wide (from wall to wall). The proscenium opening is 23 ft. Switch-board and turntables are on raised "bridges" at each side of the stage. Lighting fixtures are built into the roof above the stage and also "front of house." The dressing-rooms, immediately behind the stage, are the full length and width of one large trailer. There is space for twelve people and for the storage of stage properties and for the hanging of costumes. There are wash-basins and a shower with hot and cold water.

As well as a theatre on wheels, there are living quarters for the whole company (seventeen persons). The total number of vehicles—theatre and domestic quarters—is thirty-two.

The success of the theatre's work is the direct concern of every member of the company. Whilst each has his or her particular responsibility—acting, stage directing, wardrobe, tours management, publicity, transport, cooking, box office, etc.—everyone shares in more general duties. Actors help in erecting and dismantling the theatre and in driving, and everyone shares in washing up. All company members receive the same pay, and day-to-day affairs are guided by frequent meetings of all the members. Each person has his or her own private bed-sitting-room, and the dining-room is common to all.

Eric Keown, writing in *Punch* at the time of the theatre's first tour, said: "The story of the birth of The Century Theatre is one of the most fascinating in stage annals. Its designer, John Ridley, threw up his job as consulting engineer to build it. He began with one assistant (Dick Bull) in a backyard in Hinckley. As the present team came together it laboured under his direction, learning to . . . master all manner of difficult trades. The main obstacle was money; sometimes the outfit was so broke that the week's subsistence wages were in peril. But while Ridley was making the theatre his conspirator, Wilfred Harrison, was out with the hat. In three years he raised £20,000, which included £4,000 from the Treasury but came chiefly from a long list of subscribers, and . . . donations in kind



A remarkable feeling of depth is given by these two photographs (above, Shakespeare's *Othello*, and below, Marcel's *A Man of God*). The stage actually measures overall 19 ft. deep by 33½ ft. wide with a proscenium opening of 23 ft. The dressing-rooms, immediately behind the stage, have accommodation for twelve people with wash-basins and shower with hot and cold water. (Photographs by courtesy of John Dodds, Macclesfield, and Reid & Sigrist Ltd., Leicester, respectively.)



ranging from 2,600 yards of electric cable to twelve bottles of ink and one blowlamp."

In conclusion one can hardly do better than echo the words of the *Birmingham Post*: "The Century Theatre is a demonstration of what can be done by faith, enthusiasm and hard work."

* * *

EFFECTS

No. 42 of Steele's *The Tatler* included the following:

"This is to give notice, that a magnificent palace, with great variety of gardens, statues, and water-works, may be bought cheap in Drury Lane; where there are likewise several castles to be disposed of, very delightfully situated; as also groves, woods, forests, fountains, and country-seats, with very pleasant prospects on all sides of them; being the movables of Christopher Rich, Esquire,* who is breaking up housekeeping, and has many curious pieces of furniture to dispose of, which may be seen between the hours of six and ten in the evening:

Spirits of right Nantz brandy, for lambent flames and apparitions.

Three bottles and a half of lightning.

One shower of snow in the whitest French paper.

Two showers of a browner sort.

A sea, consisting of a dozen large waves; the tenth bigger than ordinary, and a little damaged.

A dozen and half of clouds, trimmed with black, and well conditioned.

A rainbow, a little faded.

A set of clouds after the French mode, streaked with lightning and furbelowed.

A new moon, something decayed.

A pint of the finest Spanish wash, being all that is left of two hogsheads sent over last winter.

A coach very finely gilt, and little used, with a pair of dragons, to be sold cheap.

A setting-sun, a pennyworth."

A kindly reader states that he is afraid the foregoing extracts magnify the decadence of modern lighting equipment and that he is sure our back-room boys are working on the wrong lines. Indeed he maintains that one can still see "a rainbow—a little faded," and "a new moon, something decayed." Obviously he cannot have seen our latest moving optical effects such as clouds, smoke, snow and the like because, instead of being hand-painted on mica, these are now photographed on to glass, and even we must confess that the results are vastly improved.

* In 1709 Rich lost his patent, and Drury Lane was closed. The licence was granted later to William Collier, M.P., by Queen Anne.

DIMMERS FOR THE DESTITUTE

*Introducing a new Strand Electric publication "Stage Lighting on a Shoestring" **

A recent Strand Electric booklet *Planning the Small Stage* dealt not only with electrical requirements but also with such things as scenery, suspensions, fire curtains, sight lines and the like. It was aimed to guide the school, society or the fairy godmother with several hundred pounds to spend. The fact that it has had to be reprinted twice in a matter of a few months indicates that it fulfils a useful service; but we are conscious of the fact that fairies are few and far between and even bank managers have their jobs to look after. The latest Strand publication, *Stage Lighting on a Shoestring* is, therefore, directed to the more unfortunate section of the community who cannot look forward to spending more than £20 to £30 a year towards a new lighting installation and would not feel justified in embarking on any scheme which would cost much more than £100 by the time it was completed.

In making the recommendations contained in the booklet it has been assumed that the stage in question is already fitted with an inadequate quantity of equipment, of doubtful antiquity and even more doubtful usefulness. Suggestions are made for the modification of such equipment with a view to increasing its efficiency and **also for its gradual replacement in five separate and distinct steps.** Finances, or lack of them, will no doubt dictate whether these steps are taken annually or at shorter or longer intervals of time.

The whole process of changeover has been planned with **considerable care** so that **at no time** is the installation rendered unworkable through the premature scrapping of anything which is **due to be condemned in the long run.** **Not until the fourth instalment** is it proposed that home-made biscuit tin floodlights should be finally relegated to the dustbin. The fifth instalment completes a small but workmanlike and **very workable little** installation. With a consumption of only 3,400 watts, this includes front of house spots, footlights, two floodlight battens and portable floods, with dimmers for both stage and auditorium lighting. And all this for a little over £100, taking as long as convenient over the process.

Finally, as though the above were not enough, suggestions are made on a *faute de mieux* basis on the best way of spending £50 and even £25 in those cases of such extreme hardship that nothing better can be contemplated.

* *Stage Lighting on a Shoestring*, published by and available from The Strand Electric and Engineering Co. Ltd., and branches free and post free on request.



STAGE LIGHTING ON A SHOESTRING

SATURABLE REACTOR (CHOKE) DIMMER BOARDS

The term Dimmer has been used for so long in the British Theatre to denote an electrical resistance that one almost tends to forget that it can equally be used to cover electronic, transformer, and reactor types. The last have not so far found a general use in the theatre, partly, perhaps, because until recently they have suffered from certain inherent disadvantages. What these are and how they have been overcome in the Strand Reactor Board is dealt with below.

A reactor control consists essentially of a magnetic element or choke which is connected to a miniature (resistance) dimmer.

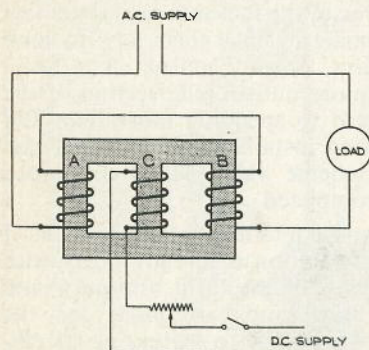


Fig. 1

Owing to its small dimensions the latter may be placed where the operator has a view of the stage, while the former may be placed under the stage or at any other convenient point. The choke requires an A.C. supply, whilst the miniature dimmer operates on D.C. There is no necessity for this D.C. to be separately available in the building as a suitable rectifier may be used to provide it from the usual A.C. supply.

Fig. 1 shows a wiring diagram for a Choke Dimmer in its simplest form and incorporating certain of the defects referred to above. (For the purposes of simplicity the refinements used on the Strand Board have been omitted.) The magnetic element has three paths, A, B and C as shown. The coils on paths A and B are connected together in series with one another and through the lighting load to the A.C. supply. Path C is connected to a D.C. supply through the miniature circuit dimmer and switch. By varying the D.C. in coil C, a variation in the load current flowing through coils A and B is produced. When the D.C. flowing through the coil at C is at a maximum, this coil produces its maximum magnetic saturation effect on the iron core which prevents the A.C. in coils A and B from inducing any appreciable "backward" voltage, and the lighting load is therefore at maximum brilliance. When, on the other hand the D.C. is at a minimum, coil C has no saturation effect and the A.C. passing through coils A and B induces sufficient voltage to choke back the current to a minimum, and the lamp load does not light.

The D.C. need only be of small proportions relative to the A.C. it controls. Fig. 2 shows a 36-way Strand Reactor Control Panel. The space occupied by each moulding carrying miniature dimmer and switch is only $6\frac{1}{2}$ in. \times 1 in. wide, but each way can control up to 2 kilowatts.

Among the disadvantages which have been experienced with most types of this control in the past have been:—

- (a) An inherent drop in the voltage supplied to the lighting. If left uncorrected this could reduce the light output by from 15 to 50 per cent. of its proper value. Some means, e.g. a transformer must, therefore, be provided to correct this.
- (b) When lights are full up, in addition to the A.C. passing through the lamps D.C. is also being used.
- (c) With the ordinary (i.e. non-Strand) circuit as shown in Fig. 1, when the lights are out some A.C. is still flowing. Further, as can also be seen from Fig. 1, a lighting point which is apparently "off" is still connected to the mains and can give an unpleasant shock to the unwary. Both these defects are, however, obviated in the Strand Board.
- (d) There is a certain time lag when a dimmer is moved rapidly from one setting to another. A similar lag occurs on most chokes when blacking out or switching on, but this has been avoided in the Strand system.

Against these drawbacks must be placed the following advantages:—

- (1) Flickerless dimming.
- (2) Variable load facilities on all dimmers.
- (3) Remote control.
- (4) Compact control panel.
- (5) Few moving parts to require attention and replacement.
- (6) Only small gauge connections between control point and reactors.

On the Strand Control Panel (Fig. 3) dimmer control units are moulded in cream plastic with clearly legible dimmer scales and

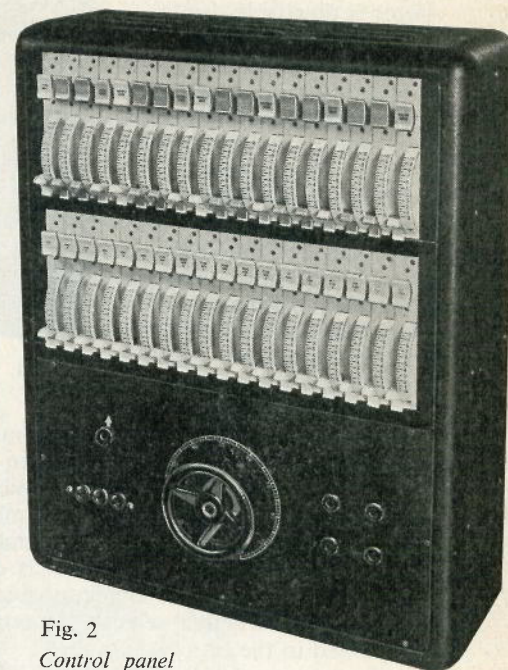


Fig. 2
Control panel
for 36 ways

engraved switch knobs. Switches are of two-way and off type. In the down position the circuit dimmer is fed through the Master Dimmer and Master Blackout Switch. With the switch in the up position the circuit is independent of everything except the Dead Blackout Switch. In the centre position of the switch, not only is the lighting extinguished but the reactor is switched out of circuit so that the latter is positively dead.

The Master Dimmer (bottom Fig. 2) is a constantly rated auto-transformer which does not dissipate any heat. It is fitted with a dial and pointer giving nearly 360° of rotary motion and consequently a wide time range of smooth dimming. Circuits may be connected to or disconnected from the Master Dimmer when it is at any position without altering the intensity of any circuits already connected. A special switch enables the Master Dimmer to be transferred from all those circuits connected to it to those which have previously been left independent of it. It can, therefore, be used to control two separate groups of circuits in turn.

Master Switches are four in number: (A) the fade-out Master Switch, equivalent to a very rapid dimmer movement up or down, (B) the fast Master Switch which is direct switching of any or all circuits selected, (C) the Blackout Switch which is direct switching of all circuits whether selected or not and (D) the transfer switch mentioned in the last paragraph.

In the interests of economy the Strand Reactor Board has been standardized as follows:—

Control panels are of three sizes, viz. for up to 18, 36 or 54-ways. They measure about 2 ft. 1 in. wide by 11 in. deep with the following heights:—

- 1 Row of dimmers (for up to 18-ways) 1 ft. 8 in.,
- 2 Rows of dimmers (for up to 36-ways) 2 ft. 3 in.,
- 3 Rows of dimmers (for up to 54-ways) 3 ft.

Reactors are housed in racks measuring approx. 5 ft. 6 in. high by 3 ft. 9 in. wide and 1 ft. 5 in. deep. Each rack will accommodate up to 18 reactors. The reactors themselves are of three sizes and will take from 250 to 500 watts, from 500 to 1,000 watts, and from 1,000 to 2,000 watts respectively.

Leaflet H.51 gives further details and useful advice on effective economies when the number of ways required is not exactly 18, 36 or 54.

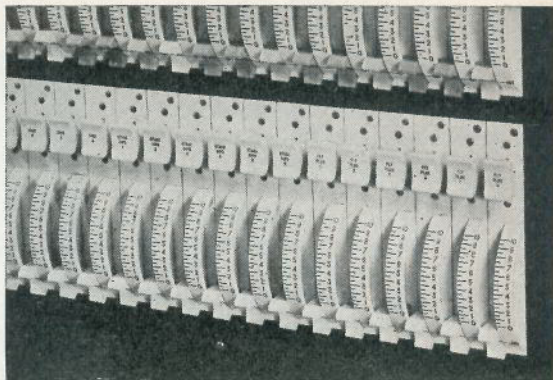


Fig. 3. Close up view of control panel

IS THERE A SCENE-PAINTER IN THE HOUSE?

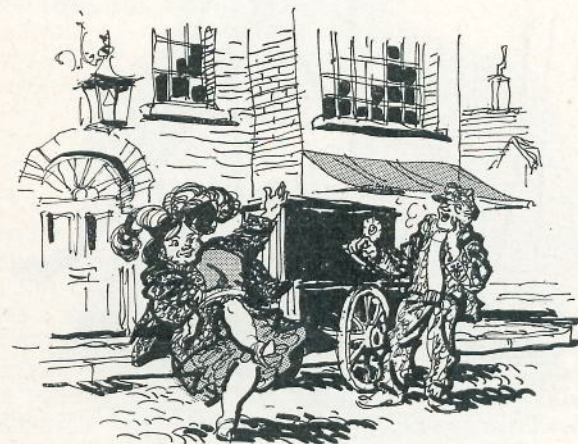
By COLLIE HIRST

A scene-painter of the old-fashioned sort, of course; one who still perpetrates "representational" stuff with painted shadows and pseudo everything!

There is? Good! Let us chat awhile of the decline of the theatre and lament together for the passing of the days when actors were audible and played before scenery that resembled what it claimed to represent; scenery in exaggerated colour; exaggerated, like the actor's make-up, to stand up to searching stage lighting.

We were Scenic Artists then. Remember? A Scenic Artist, if he was competent (and I am sure, Sir, you were and *are* competent), not only painted the stuff but had also designed it; and the reverse of his model showed constructional detail of the joinery work. Pseudo, of course, but practical!

But we were speaking of decay. What caused the rot? Talkies? Television? Decline of public taste? Decline of my sainted Uncle Garrick!! Public taste is what it always was, full-blooded! A deplorable desire for entertainment in preference to uplift.



"... public taste is full blooded"

You and I, my old-fashioned friend, must shoulder some share of responsibility. Cast your mind back, not so very many years, to the time when Respectability, like some enervating blight, insinuated its roots into the fabric of the robust old phoney playhouse. What happened? From being something vaguely reprehensible, to be connected with "The Theatre" came to carry almost

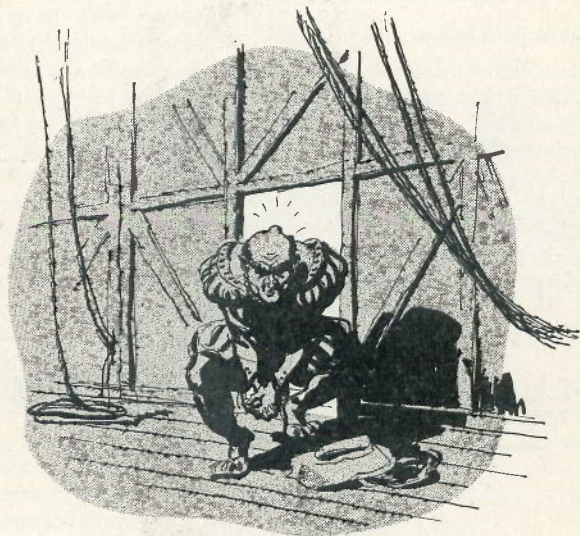
the cachet of a curacy, and if the backer of your enterprise had a nephew who was a flop in business, but "did a little painting", what more natural than to make him a scene-designer?

So into the ancient institution came the nephew (or niece, Heaven help us!) together with the camp-followers of "arty-crafty" contemporaries, cunningly classified as Art Directors, Stage Directors, Assistants to Stage Directors, Assistants to Assistant Stage Directors, and so on, *ad nauseam*! All fighting to share jobs previously done by one stubbly-chinned individual in shirt-sleeves.



"a nephew who did a little painting"

You and I, my friend, stood by and watched it happen; blissfully continuing to paint stuff as it was painted in the seventeenth century (still doing it, for that matter!), blindly and blandly ignoring modern trends. As a result we now find ourselves taking the time from some wilting Willy who never in his life lifted anything heavier than a water-colour brush.



"... openings through which only a 3-ft. high pygmy could walk"

We honour those designers who are practical exponents, with full knowledge and experience of their craft; but the others——! ("You've met 'em") and their designs! Designs with openings through which only a 3-ft. high pygmy could walk; walls, that if

executed to scale would be about 14 in. high!—you've sweated over them. Somehow you have always made their crazy ideas into something transport can cope with and a human stage-staff handle; and then, being merely the man who puts the paint on, you have retired to the touch line to read the raves about the wonderful settings designed by ——!

And our share in the responsibility? Too late now, but if, 30 years ago we had acted a little stubbornly, if we had let them make their pygmy doors and their silly little walls, somebody might have respected experience and used it properly. Perhaps the rot might have been staved off a little longer, and an indiscriminating public might still be crowding in to applaud players they could hear in settings they could understand.

But the cinema and television continue to catch the hopeless and stupid fellow who only goes to see what he likes, and only likes what he can understand; you and I can die off, and the long-haired fraternity will eventually have the theatre to themselves, sitting in the lonely splendour of mutual congratulation before some profound performance which only they (and maybe an all-forgiving and understanding Deity) can appreciate, while in the gloomy void behind them, wistful shadows flit fretfully from seat to seat, waiting for some reactionary miracle to infuse some life and colour into the melancholy proceedings.

Good-night, old has-been. Sleep well!

* * *

WHO LIGHTS THE SET ?

By K. G. WRENCH

Every good stage production is, or should be, the result of close co-operation on the part of all concerned and any marked break in this co-ordination would mar, however slightly the production as a whole. It is therefore surprising that the least unity between producer and designer occurs in the lighting of a production which in mood, setting and movement, is influenced completely by lighting. Too often a producer who knows little enough about lighting is left entirely in control of the light rehearsal by a designer who knows even less, and herein lies a problem. When each has mastered at least the elements of lighting practice, to what extent should the latter be able to influence the former upon whom, after all, depends the final and complete integration of all units.

What then are the relative interests of these two in lighting as connected with their own particular branch of the theatre? A producer must consider all sides of a play's presentation. Lines must be interpreted correctly by the actors in order to convey the writer's meaning, each character must be played against other

characters in order to obtain correct balance, settings and costumes must be designed to fit his scheme of action, and the whole must be brought together. To the producer, therefore, lighting is one more important instrument in his hands which can be used in numerous ways to enhance the visual aspect of the conception of the play; but one must bear in mind that his craft combines both visual and *oral* considerations both of which are equally important.

On the other hand the designer's work is entirely at the mercy of the lighting since it is wholly visual. From the beginning he must decide, in conjunction with the producer upon the style of his set, period, etc., but whether it is to be built or painted the lighting is going to dominate the final form when on the stage. Therefore to him the lighting is even more important.

Accepting then, that lighting is very important to both producer and designer, to what extent is either one of these more qualified to plan the light for any production?

On the one hand is a very limited number of producers of the Meierhold category who possess a vast command of the theatre and its several facets, whilst on the other stands the harassed one week repertory theatre producer who has little time to light and less time to study lighting, yet whose show has somehow still to go on. Between these two extremes lies the average producer with whom I am concerned.

As a general rule producers receive training as actors and eventually graduate to production, during which course it is doubtful if lighting has been seriously studied. Ability to light the stage adequately may be gained eventually by hit-and-miss methods and observing the treatment of other productions, but to reach a high standard considerable technical as well as artistic knowledge, if only theoretical, should be commanded. Our young producer *still* is not getting that essential knowledge early enough if, in fact, he ever gets it! No one in his right mind would attempt production without a sound understanding of acting and a good insight into the interpretation and transcription of written drama to the spoken word; but as a stage presentation relies upon additional factors of colour and composition, a knowledge of these also would appear to be essential. Apparently, however, this is all too often lacking and yet the producer is allowed almost complete control over lighting a carefully planned set.

Turning to designers, there are those who consider every detail, including lighting, from the very outset, but there are more who are obliged to rely on others to light their work for them. When a designer is commissioned to plan the décor for a particular play it is usually understood that he is willing to co-operate with the producer and to supply a visual interpretation of the latter's conception. That is the branch to which he has been trained, and it is understood that he will be able to satisfy these requirements. In addition he is expected to be sufficient a draughtsman, and have enough command of the many and varied technicalities of

scenic and costume construction, to supply directions to the workshops, wardrobe and property master. He should be able to plan both sets and costumes with an eye to movement and grouping.

One factor is more important than any other in linking the work of producer and designer together and that is lighting, which will affect the whole appearance of what has been designed as well as the meaning of movements and grouping. Yet amazingly enough, although the designer is usually present at the lighting rehearsal it is definitely not expected, apart from exceptional cases, that he will have any wish to take a very active part in its conduct. It may therefore happen that the visual scene that he has carefully composed and coloured to suit the particular production can be ruined by a producer whose training has never embraced any knowledge of fine art or who does not know what one colour superimposed on another will do: and this may happen without the designer having any real power to prevent it. The argument arises, of course, that the producer should be left to plan dramatic effects by lighting in the course of a production, which is reasonable, but at the same time he should endeavour not to jeopardise an original conception of a scene which has been designed and painted for a particular atmosphere and treatment.

Lighting is really a fine art in that it can both paint and model, and it is only reasonable to expect that it should be handled by someone who knows what it can do for a painted cloth or a three dimensional structure. Otherwise why ask the designer to design in colour at all? He has to keep in touch with all the producer's ideas to facilitate a common conception of the setting, so it is only feasible that he should understand the producer's needs in lighting the set generally. Closer co-operation could be much to the producer's advantage for already his designer has probably been responsible for giving him ideas on production.

Lighting is often said to be too technical a subject to be broached by an artist and I admit that here the fault lies almost exclusively with the designer himself. As a matter of fact I think that this problem is one of the main roots of the trouble. Designers, for a variety of reasons, are all too often rather interested in, but very afraid of lighting. Lack of opportunity under the present system is one cause and, particularly in repertory, lack of time is another important factor when all the available time must be allotted to the painting of sets, costume fittings, etc. Unfortunately, however, I believe that a third reason is very prominent and that is lack of inclination, usually due to a belief that anything technical is out of the artist's realm. This has led to them voluntarily neglecting lighting and has given the producer his chance to control and seal the whole production as his own when really he is seldom more knowledgeable on this point than the artist, as can be ascertained by some of his requests at lighting rehearsals. What is needed on both sides is recognition of what can be handled on the modern

type of installation—and what cannot—plus a sound knowledge of the results that will be obtained when any plot is carried through.

This last point is most important, yet all but a few designers neglect to gain any exact idea of the effects of light upon pigment, even though training in colour theory gives him a superficial knowledge. This is a very grave omission considering that every object and plane on the stage must be affected in some way by artificial illumination. I argue that if a designer has the ability to master all the technical problems attached to the rest of his work then his mind can, with a certain degree of application, absorb the principles of lighting technicalities necessary for complete understanding of the art.

Eventually, when he is granted more influence, to what extent should the designer then be allowed to rule the lighting rehearsal? I think that he should be in a position to exert his influence where he feels that the stage picture has been weakened by poor use of lighting, such as altering colour carelessly for no apparent reason, destroying the balance of composition, changing the appearance of any shape or form, obscuring any essential part of the setting, etc. He should not, though, be able to cause the set to be advantageously lit at the expense of the actor, or of the mood and movement required by the producer.

In the modern theatre yet another specialist has arisen. The lighting expert is at times employed, usually in spectacle such as opera and ballet, to assist with the lighting. Under existing conditions I feel that he could well be employed a good deal more, though only as a technician with little influence on the artistic side. However, if designer and producer were both proficient in all branches of their work, then he would swiftly become redundant. Two are quite enough to handle that side of the presentation without a wedge in the shape of a technician being driven between them.

When all arguments for and against have been thrashed out the fact still remains that there is only one true solution; Gordon Craig's ideal combining the abilities of producer, designer and lighting expert. Very occasionally he appears in the shape of a Saxe-Meiningen or a Meierhold, but these appearances are too rare to warrant any hopes that he will become a permanent blessing. Therefore the best must be made of the present routine and in that case the designer must most definitely be given far more scope in lighting his designs than is at present afforded in this country. In this direction a number of proficient artists with ability to use stage lighting are needed more than in any other.

In "The Oxford Companion to the Theatre" Professor Stanley McCandless wrote: "In the U.S.A., with few exceptions, the designer assumes complete responsibility for the ultimate visual effect on the stage (and) works closely with the electrician or, in a few cases, with the so-called lighting specialist". Ed.

SOLILOQUY À LA MODE

by MARTIN HALL

Reprinted by kind permission from The Prompter, magazine of the Southampton Theatre Guild.

To dress, but how to dress: that is the question
Whether 'tis nobler to present Othello
Immaculate in top hat, white tie and tails,
Or, taking arms against a sea of critics,
Do Sheridan in sacking? To sew, to hire
No more. To wear the odds and ends we have,
The gard'ning trousers, boots and ancient coats
Within our wardrobes. 'Tis a loss of trouble
Devoutly to be wished. To dare be New;
To strive, perchance to fail; aye, there's the rub:
For if we please but the enlightened few
Who, too, would shuffle off the clogging coil
Of custom, then the Box Office
May make calamity of innovation.
With *Charley's Aunt* in togas, who will brave
The indignant Kay, proud A.B.'s contumely,
The wrath of wives, o'er their unsheeted beds
Bemoaning, careless of our saved expense,
Their vanished curtains, table-cloths and towels
Rifled to drape *The Tempest* in sarongs,
Or beach-wrap Beatrice. Who would ruffles wear,
And sweat and grunt under a velvet cloak
When Romeo might tread the boards in shorts
And sportive shirt; his Juliet in jeans.
And one could bring *St. Joan* bang up to date,
By introducing her, in land girl's breeches,
To a gum-chewing, be-medalled Captain of G.I.'s.
Except that nowadays
One knows only too well what to think
About the sort of girl who is always
Talking to Soldiers.
You will by now have observed
That I have had Just About Enough of
Shakespeare.
Whose style is
A great deal more difficult to write
Than modern
(I beg pardon, contemporary)
Blank verse.
In the same way that Period Costume is harder to make
And Tougher on the Treasury
To hire
Than mod—pardon me, contemporary
Dress.

BOOK REVIEWS

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

The first four books in these series were noticed in our last issue. In the interval the following have appeared:

Stage Speech, by L. Charteris Coffin.

Stage Movement, by M. Battye.

Stage Costume, by Margo Lister.

Stage Lighting, by Geoffrey Ost.

With a team of expert authors such as the publishers have found so far, the reader may take it that he is really getting something straight from the horse's mouth which is both interesting and easily digestible and has not the tastelessness of anything watered down for the unprofessional or uninitiated. As Miss Diana Churchill points out, for example, in her preface to *Stage Speech*, the author's work at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama and elsewhere is a guarantee of the adequacy of his qualifications to perform the task that he set himself. Provided the reader has the necessary sincerity and enthusiasm, the technique which this book should help him to acquire will put him on the road to being "a good amateur actor." *Stage Movement* owes much to the author's style and arrangement, but most of all to the excellent line drawings of figures in various postures and movements. *Stage Costume* consists of a most comprehensive record of costumes from Biblical times up to 1900, accompanied by beautifully detailed and executed drawings. Designers will find a book such as this invaluable in their work, and it is to be hoped that the publishers will make available another volume in the same series which will set out to assist the wardrobe mistress, with the usually limited means at her disposal to put into effect on the stage, the costume which the designer has envisaged. One is inclined to feel that the present book would have been more accurately entitled *A History of Costume*, and that the inclusion of any reference to the stage may be misleading. In *Stage Lighting* the author deals not only with a description of equipment but also with the lighting of the stage setting, the achievement of certain specific effects, the conduct of lighting rehearsals, the preparation of a lighting plot and so on. In other words this is a book on Stage Lighting for the producer, and as such it is a most welcome addition to the literature already available. I must however, differ with Mr. Ost over the question of the wattage of the lanterns he recommends for certain purposes. Adequate, and indeed very satisfactory results can usually be obtained on small stages with wattages of 150, 250 or 500 as an absolute maximum; 1,000 watts is rarely a necessity on a small stage. The author's experience as a producer of repertory is most usefully reflected in this book, but it is unfortunate that he has not always scaled down his detail to the size of stage which may be expected to be used by his readers.