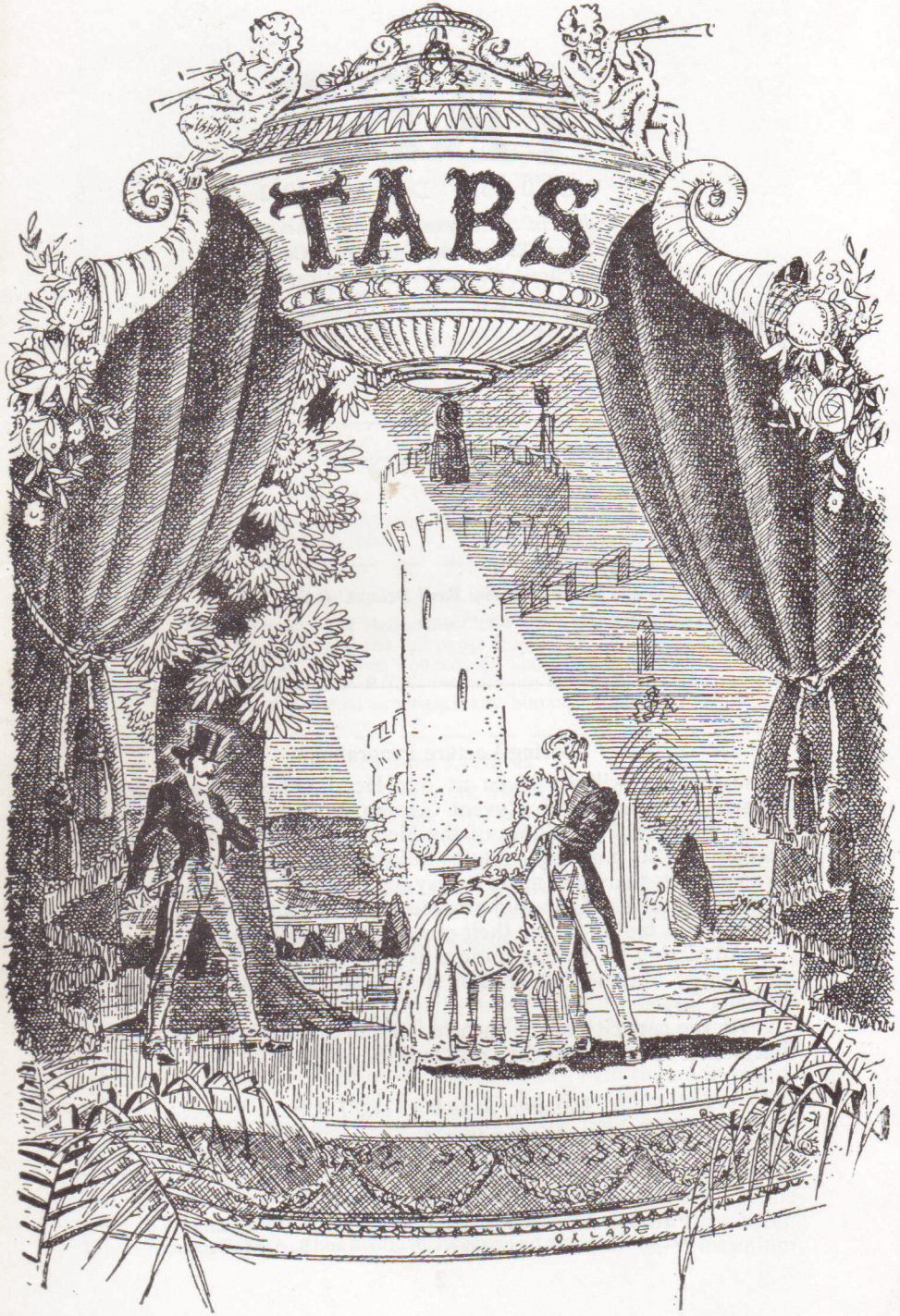

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TABS

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Spring Lecture Programme

These lectures will be given at our Head Office Demonstration Theatre, 29 King Street, Covent Garden, W.C.2, and will begin at 7 p.m. precisely. The doors of the Head Office showrooms will be opened at 6.30 p.m. (30 minutes before each demonstration). The arrangements there will make it easy for members of the audience to try for themselves all the common pieces of equipment, " Cinemoid " colours, etc., before taking their place in the theatre.

Admission to demonstrations is free, but tickets are necessary and can be obtained by sending a stamped addressed envelope to 29 King Street.

As the capacity of the theatre is limited to 100, it is important that tickets are returned for re-issue if they cannot be used.

Thursday January 31st, 7 p.m.

" Basic Stage Lighting 1963 "
Talk by Frederick Bentham with demonstrations.

Thursday February 14th, 7 p.m.

" The Development of Lighting Equipment in the Theatre "
Technical lecture by Frederick Bentham and R. A. McKenzie

Saturday February 23rd, 2.30 p.m.

" Light on Stages "
Abridged version of Recorded Lecture No. 3, Stephen Joseph, Percy Corry and Frederick Bentham **followed by a demonstration and talk on lighting** given by Frederick Bentham. This is intended for those who are unable to attend the evening lectures.

Wednesday March 6th, 7 p.m.

" Lighting the Scene "
Revised and re-recorded version of Recorded Lecture No. 1 by William Lorraine and Frederick Bentham. Discussion afterwards to be conducted by Brian Legge.

Thursday March 21st and *Wednesday March 27th, 7 p.m.*

" Colour Music "
Demonstration by Frederick Bentham and Paul Weston. This demonstration provides the opportunity for the first public, full scale work-out in this country for the new control desk (system CD/AE) devised for silicon controlled rectifier dimmers.

Wednesday April 17th, 7 p.m.

" Basic Stage Lighting 1963 "
Repeat of January 31st.

Wednesday April 24th, 7 p.m.

" Recollections and Reflections ", by Basil Dean, C.B.E. Mr. Dean will read the full paper from which the article in this issue has been condensed. The paper originally presented to the A.B.T.T. last autumn is an absorbing mixture of personal experience and humorous anecdote.

Recorded Lectures

The new version of No. 2, "Planning and Lighting the Stage" and Recorded Lecture No. 3, "Light on Stages", have shown up the poor recorded quality of our original lecture No. 1, "Lighting the Scene". Messrs. Lorraine and Bentham will be re-recording this lecture early in the New Year and opportunity will be taken to bring it up to date at the same time. Full particulars of the loan of these lectures may be had on application to Head Office.

New Look at the Old Vic

Our pictures show the new stage and proscenium arch at the Old Vic designed by Richard Negri and Michael Elliott. The steeply raked stage (1 in 9) runs forward at both sides into a curved apron which seems to link the stage very successfully with the auditorium. Over the forward part of the main stage the three unusually shaped arches, which appear rather dominating in full light, have the effect of lightly framing what is almost an open-stage. As can be seen, the under surface of the middle arch, which is finished in aluminium, can pick up light from the stage and thus form a delicate echo of the tone of the stage picture which tends to hold the eye on the action. However, it remains to be seen whether this curved proscenium

which so suits *Peer Gynt* will not conflict with a use of verticals in other productions; there is a hint of this in the photographs.

From the technician's point of view these arches give a very good lighting position in front of the main traverse curtain. A lighting bridge is built into the forward arch so that easy access is also possible to the lanterns in this position.

An interesting feature of the new season is the use of a Strand remote controlled 10 preset patching system to extend the number of lighting circuits from 123 (the number of dimmers on the existing Strand thyratron board) to 183. Under this system 20 dimmers each can be switched to any of 4 circuits instead of the usual one. This system is particularly applicable to the Old Vic where several productions are kept in the repertory. It also suits Richard Pilbrow, who is lighting this season, as it helps him to allocate lanterns to effects required in particular scenes. At the touch of a single switch the operator can discard one pre-arranged selection for another. The same method is in use for *Blitz!* at the Adelphi Theatre.

RECOLLECTIONS AND REFLECTIONS

by Basil Dean, C.B.E.

This autumn Mr. Dean read an important paper to the A.B.T.T. in which he described the remarkable developments, particularly in lighting and staging, for which he was responsible during his distinguished career in the theatre. We are privileged to publish this paper in a version condensed to cover the technical aspects but Mr. ***Dean will again be reading the full paper with its many amusing*** *anecdotes* ***on April 24th (see page 3) and*** *the full material will also form part of a book which he is preparing.*

When I drifted on to the stage in 1906—drift is the operative word in view of the theatrical conditions of that time—the stock company system in which Henry Irving and his contemporaries had received their early training had virtually disappeared, save for a few fit-up companies. The touring system which had taken its place consisted mainly of carbon copies of London successes, conveniently labelled as No. 1, 2 or 3 Touring Companies of such-and-such a theatre's latest success.

All the old provincial theatres had a certain amount of scenery left over from the stock company days. This was rigidly stereotyped, just as the stage-management of the plays in the company's repertoire was, so that the visiting stars could take up their parts after one or two days' rehearsal, much as visiting prima donnas take up their rôles in the opera repertoires of today. The scenery thus classified was easily recognisable by the names given to it, such as " the oak set ", or " the grey chamber ". The oak set was used for baronial halls, libraries, court rooms, etc.; in the first company I joined we doubled it for Charles Surface's picture gallery and brother Joseph's library. On subsequent nights it did duty for Jack Absolute's lodging at Bath and the inn in *She Stoops to Conquer*. Then there was " the dense wood ", and the " castle battlements ". These were in frequent use by touring Shakespearean companies. Oftentimes, as a youngster, I heard the local carpenter call up into the flys, " Bill, lower out the dense wood," or " give us the castle cut-cloth," whereupon faded backcloths and set pieces would descend with a thump, doing duty equally well for *As You Like It* as for *Red Riding Hood* the following Christmas. Such scenery showed varying degrees of dilapidation according to whether it belonged to a No. 1, 2 or 3 theatre.

Changes were gradual to begin with and passed almost unnoticed by the general public. At the turn of the century three-dimensional scenery was virtually unknown, save for occasional built properties such as trees modelled by the property masters in half-round with chicken wire and old canvas. The cornices, mouldings and architraves of interior sets were painted and highlighted on the canvas with great skill. Doors were made of framed canvas, the only concession to solidity being that sometimes they were double-

canvassed. With constant use this soon sagged and solidity became a mere pretence. Often the doors were not even double-canvassed, the styles at the back being roughly painted in.

By the end of the 19th century, scene painting—as apart from design—reached its highest achievement under the influence of men such as Stanford, Telbin, Hawes Craven, and later, Joseph Harker and Stafford Hall in Liverpool. Such painters could fairly claim to be artists in their chosen field. They were masters of perspective and illusion, and achieved wonderful results despite the primitive lighting, or perhaps because of it. But when Adolphe Appia inspired Gordon Craig to the use of space on the stage—those simple masses of light and shade which even now have lost none of their effectiveness—the decline in the scene painter's art began. Design no longer called for the same painting expertise; it began to turn towards three-dimensional treatment. This development was greatly helped by the fantastic improvement in lighting equipment that began between the two world wars and has continued to this day. Take one item alone: the progress towards simple and more efficient methods of controlling the flow of current to the lamp is a rewarding study for anyone interested in theatre technology. Certainly, it is a far cry from those old-fashioned liquid dimmers to the modern push-button control of complicated lighting plots by one man, viewing the proceedings from a box in the front of the house. As I think back on the apparatus with which I began to experiment, the developments in such matters as lamp manufacture, lenses and reflectors seem equally fantastic. Here, as in methods of control, Strand Electric have been way out in front.

In some theatres the old gas footlights had only recently been disconnected, and replaced by a row of low-powered carbon filament lamps, mounted on strips of oak batten, planted in front of the disused jets. The lamps were dipped in spirit lacquers to give different colours. Spot lighting was provided by jets projected from gas cylinders on to small cubes of lime raising them to white heat. Hence rose the terms lime and limelight. They required constant attention, one man to each lamp. Coloured glasses in iron frames provided changes of colour. Limes were usually placed upstage on either side of the backcloth to provide sunlight, or moonlight as the case might be; sometimes simultaneously from opposite sides. Limes were also installed on perches on either side of the proscenium. Later, when electricity became general in the provincial theatre, the limes were replaced by arcs. They were not of the self-feeding type, but had to be carefully tended by hand. Both the limes and the arcs were noisy if they were not kept trimmed, emitting strange hisses and whistles, rather like the sound of approaching aircraft at London Airport. It was not unusual for the leading man during dress rehearsals to shout out, " Keep those limes quiet ", and sometimes in a stage whisper during performances.

With such primitive lighting it was inevitable that the actors should use a great deal of make-up. I well remember being initiated

by an old actor into the mysteries of turning my face into a sort of Clapham Junction with shadowed lines carefully high-lighted to simulate age. The touring actor, of course, provided his own wigs and made his beards and moustaches out of crepe hair. The wigs were unbelievably rough and made little pretence of simulating nature. Some were even called scratch wigs, presumably because of what was to be found inside them.

My introduction to the business of staging plays came about under duress. I had been one of a number of assistant stage-managers with the Horniman Company for about a year, during which time I had the temerity to write a one-act play. To my astonishment Miss Horniman accepted it and decided to put it on as the curtain raiser when the rebuilt Gaiety Theatre, Manchester, opened its doors in September 1908. The little play was written in the Dorsetshire dialect, which Iden Payne, the director of the theatre didn't understand. So he insisted I must produce it myself. I was petrified. However, with the help of Sybil Thorndike and Lewis Casson—it was the first time those two had acted together—I managed to survive the rehearsals. When it came to the staging everyone was too busy with the opening of the theatre to bother about me, so I was left pretty much to my own devices. At first I tried merely to reproduce what I had observed during other rehearsals, except that I did at least see to it that the sunlight didn't compete with moonlight through the cottage window. I spent much time making crude lighting experiments, mixing up different coloured lacquers and making reflectors out of painted cardboard, etc., until the management put a stop to it. I was learning about production the hard way. Anyway, my "one-acter" won a continuing place in the company's repertoire. Thereafter, I was allowed to produce the various plays I wrote for Miss Horniman during the next three years.

I did not think seriously about production until I opened the experimental season at Kelly's Theatre, Liverpool, in the spring of 1911. This was planned as a trial run and led to the foundation of the Liverpool Repertory Theatre, now the Playhouse. The plays we did were what might be called classics of the repertory movement of that time: Galsworthy, Hankin, Masefield. In those apprentice productions I was not conscious of any particular approach to technical problems, but concerned myself with trying to achieve a standard of ensemble such as had been reached by the Horniman Company during the previous four years of its existence. Towards the end of the season we announced the production of Hankin's *The Cassilis Engagement*. At the dress rehearsal I found myself short of some flower beds, so I rang up Robinson, a famous property maker in Liverpool, whose premises were appropriately named The Ark. He promised to see what he could do. Later, some dilapidated property flower beds arrived, followed by a quiet young man with a birthmark under one eye and a sardonic smile. Our meeting that afternoon was fraught with consequences for both of us, for this was George Harris, the artist and designer with whom I was destined to work in loving

association for the next 18 years. He stood on the stage and watched me trying to assemble the wretched scenery and properties into some semblance of an English garden, enlivening the proceedings with a type of salty comment for which he afterwards became noted. Presently we fell to talking about the silly scenic conventions which cluttered the stage of those days, the ridiculous foliage borders, arching conveniently over the top of the manor house, the flapping canvas backcloths illuminated by totally inadequate batten lighting from above, etc., etc. My remarks raised an immediate response in Harris, only in more colourful language. For the rest of the season and for months and years afterwards we theorised and argued and worked out plans together. We sought ways to open up the stage and get rid of those same backcloths and borders—what we used to call " the washing on the line ". Then in the summer of that year, 1911—the task of opening the Liverpool Repertory Theatre just in front of me—I set out to view the German Theatre, at the head of which stood Professor Max Reinhardt, then at the zenith of his reputation. He was about to present his arena production of *Oedipus Rex* in the Circus Schumann at Frankfurt, so I made my way there.

I arrived in time for the first performance. The excitement was immense. It is of little interest to describe the production except perhaps to point out that it was an arena performance in the full sense of the word, and the year was 1911, so that modern experiments in this type of staging were ante-dated some 50 years by Max Reinhardt. The open stage performance by a company of 100 or more, with bold imaginative lighting, made a tremendous impact. The vast Circus Schumann held 5,000 spectators. After it was over I sat in the garden of the Frankfurter Hof Hotel, listening to the conversation of Reinhardt, Felix Hollaender, Hofmannsthal and others, or as much of it as I could take in with my scanty knowledge of German.

Reinhardt must have been amused by the impecunious young Englishman, trying very inadequately to express his admiration. He gave me his autograph on an hotel postcard, which I still have, and promised to see me in Berlin. He departed the next day and I followed him there, where I watched him rehearsing a revival of *Sumürun* on the stage of the Deutsches Theater. I lingered in Berlin for as long as my money lasted to see his Shakespearean productions, as well as the more intimate ones in the Kammerspiel next door.

I was permitted to wander all over the Deutsches Theater and to examine the permanent cyclorama, accounts of which had reached us in England. This was a dome made of plaster over expanded metal; it extended for two-thirds of the way down the stage, entrances and exits through it at the curves being concealed by grey curtains. Tiny lamps were let into the plaster to produce the effect of stars at night. To light the dome Reinhardt was using a single lantern, hexagonal in shape, and fed by a number of automatic arcs in several tiers. Mechanically changed sheets of coloured glass and a system of blackout screens made it possible to illuminate

the cyclorama in any desired combination of colours and with varying intensity. Today the contraption would appear very old-fashioned and clumsy, but in those days it represented a new departure, for illumination came from one central point and from a considerable distance. The effect of space and light which this created came as a revelation to me, accustomed to the claustrophobic backcloths and borders of our own stage. It was confirmation of what Harris and I had dreamed of and argued about in Liverpool.

The basic ideas were Reinhardt's, but he depended of course upon his technicians to work them out. The specialised equipment was designed and made by a small firm of theatrical specialists, Schwabe & Co. The head of the firm, Hans Schwabe, was an able and experienced electrical engineer who had been a theatre electrician, thus Reinhardt was assured of an informed approach to his ideas. It was under similar favourable auspices that the efficient business of our Strand Electric Company came into existence.

The Deutsches Theater also possessed one of the first revolving stages on the Continent. Professor Ernst Stern, who was then chief designer for the theatre, developed the flexibility of its use by skilfully constructed sets so that when the action called for it, actors could go from one room to another, or from an interior into the street while the scenery was still in motion, a commonplace today but quite novel then.

On my return home I persuaded Professor Adshead, the architect who was reconstructing the old Star Theatre for us, to plaster the back wall of the Liverpool Theatre as I wanted to achieve some of the quality of lighting that I had seen abroad. Two years later, in 1913, Barry Jackson commissioned me to plan the technical layout of the stage of his new theatre in Birmingham. In this case we went further. The grid was carried to a height of 60 ft. and the plaster dome was curved at the sides and domed under the grid, thus masking the rear portion of it from the front row of the stalls. Meanwhile, an Italian electrical engineer, Fortuny by name, had brought out a system of cyclorama lighting which consisted in the main of batteries of automatic arcs, the light being projected through coloured silks travelling on rollers controlled by tracker wires.

The effects obtained by these means were extraordinarily soft and beautiful, but under the exigencies of repertory production both the equipment and the plaster dome proved too cumbersome for such a shallow stage. Reluctantly after a year or two Barry Jackson abandoned the system in favour of more conventional methods.

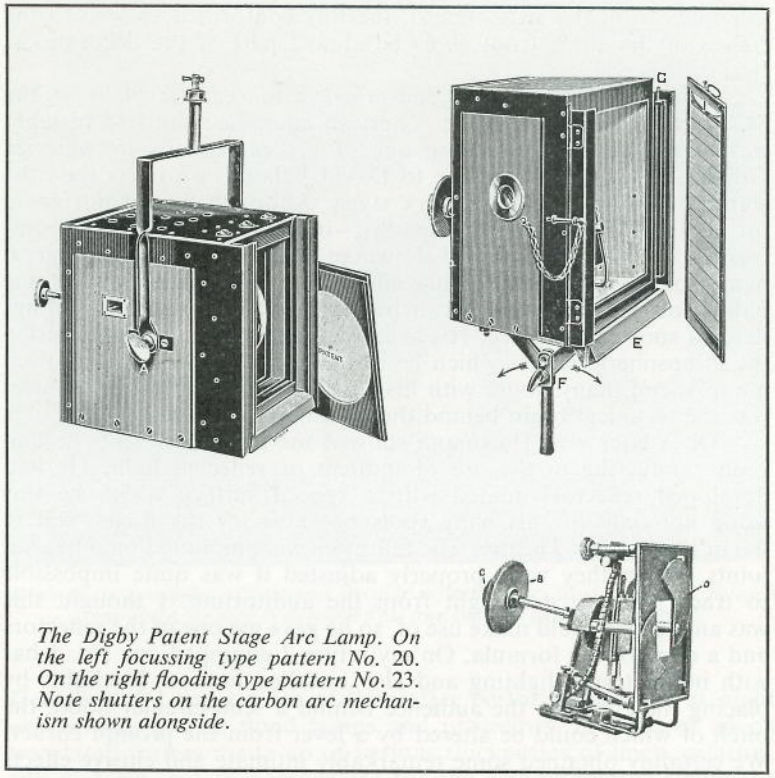
My Liverpool directors looked askance at what the Chairman called " all this lighting nonsense ", but they became, shall we say, acquiescent when they received proof of its value at the box office. Early in 1912 we made a production of Ibsen's *Pillars of Society*, using William Archer's rather prosaic translation, and scenery designed from information supplied by the Norwegian National Theatre. We were warned that to play Ibsen in Liverpool was tantamount to box office death, but for the big storm at sea around

which the plot revolved, and which we took care to make visible through huge windows at the back, we used our plaster background to obtain such swiftly changing sky effects, complete with thunder, lightning and rain, that everybody in Liverpool came to see it, and we did good business for a fortnight!

After two years in Liverpool I joined Tree at His Majesty's Theatre as assistant producer. One of the productions in which I assisted was the original *Pygmalion* with Tree, Mrs. Patrick Campbell, Philip Merivale, Edmund Gurney and others. His Majesty's Theatre was regarded as a sort of Royal Academy of presentation so it was not surprising to find its production methods extremely conventional. For every production, T. J. Digby, an engineer with offices in Shaftesbury Avenue, was called in to arrange the lighting. He was the sole manufacturer of what came to be known as the Digby arc, which was then in almost universal use in the West End. As each of these lamps called for an operator and as there seemed to be dozens of them, in the wings, on the perches and so forth, you can imagine the size of the staff that had to be employed. The 1914–1918 war put a stop to such expensive methods.

When I formed ReandeaN with Alec Rea in 1919 the London stage was suffering from a war-time run-down. The St. Martin's Theatre where we established ourselves was the newest. Apart from the St. Martin's, the London stage was shabby so far as its furnishings were concerned, and extremely old-fashioned in its equipment. We were still using liquid dimmers, arcs on perches either side of the proscenium, and rows of lamps lacquered in different colours, usually red, amber and blue, in the battens and footlights.

I went to America in the autumn of 1920 to produce the first ReandeaN success, *The Skin Game* by John Galsworthy. American lighting engineers had made tremendous strides during the war, particularly in the sphere of lamp manufacture, far outstripping our own people. By the use of grid filaments they had developed lamps of 1,000 and 500 watts, much smaller than the unwieldy lamps then being made at home. They were helped by the fact that they worked on a voltage of 120 D.C., whereas at home the customary voltage was 200 D.C. In particular, they were first in the field with a small lamp of 250 watts. These were fitted into small housings and became known as baby spots and were generally used in the New York theatres. I bought a large case of them, including a supply of lamps and the special slider type dimmers which had been developed for them, and shipped them as passenger freight on the *Olympic* on my return home. I was excited to be the first to introduce this novel equipment into the London theatre. You can imagine how I felt as I watched them unloading my crates of baby spots on the quay at Southampton to see precisely similar crates being unloaded in the name of Gilbert Miller. These were wanted for his St. James's Theatre, while mine were, of course, destined for the St. Martin's. Thereafter, whenever I went to New York I brought more of this American equipment back with me. I got into touch with the



The Digby Patent Stage Arc Lamp. On the left focussing type pattern No. 20. *On the right flooding type pattern No.* 23. *Note shutters on the carbon arc mechanism shown alongside.*

General Electrical Company here at home; but when I showed them the stereopticon lamps from America and asked them to duplicate them, they refused point blank because they said there would not be enough demand. So for a number of years we had to import lamps. This situation changed eventually of course. I should mention that in addition to the spots of various denominations and the dimmers that I brought back there were also what the Americans called X-ray reflectors, made of ribbed glass which enormously increased the brilliance of the conventional batten lighting still in use then. These also were new to this country.

The sequel to the use of incandescent lamps for spot lighting in place of arcs on the stage was their use in the auditorium. I am not sure whether I first saw this in America or in Germany, but certainly not here at home, where front lighting was confined to arcs placed at the back of the gallery or in the dome of the theatre.

The first theatre actually to use spot-lighting from the front of the house was the St. Martin's, where we had a special box constructed in the front of the dress circle, with four apertures for the baby spots. When the apertures were closed by the operation of

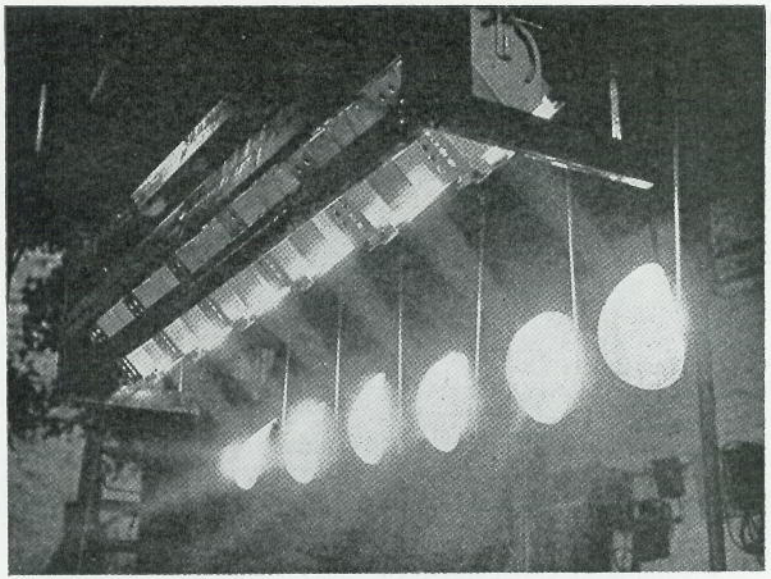
solenoids from the switchboard, the box conformed so well to the curves of the circle front as to be almost part of the decorations. It is still there.

ReandeaN was mainly concerned with realistic plays at the St. Martin's and for this the American equipment we had brought was extremely useful. During one of my early visits to America Gilbert Miller introduced me to David Belasco, who was then the star producer of the New York stage. Although he did not go in for plays of a high literary quality—indeed he was frankly commercial—he was a wonderful showman, and had established a great name for his intimate lighting effects. He was the apostle of the baby-spot. His was what I can best describe as " natty " lighting; never a spot out of place. His usually underlit stage greatly assisted the atmospheric effects which he delighted to produce. He allowed me to spend many hours with his chief electrician, Hartmann, who was the technical brain behind the Belasco reputation.

On a later visit Hartmann showed me the experiments he had been conducting in the use of indirect or reflected light. He had developed reflectors coated with a special surface which he was using not only for his baby spots but also for the floats, still in use at the Belasco Theatre. The reflectors were mounted on universal joints. When they were properly adjusted it was quite impossible to trace the source of light from the auditorium. I thought this was an idea we could make use of, so he gave me one of the reflectors and a copy of the formula. On my return I equipped our No. 1 bar with indirect spot lighting and also installed indirect footlights by placing these to face the audience behind a semi-circular hood, the pitch of which could be altered by a lever from the prompt corner. We certainly obtained some remarkably intimate and elusive effects by these means.

George Harris brought back with him from the States a great interest in the new technique of stippling which scene painters had developed over there. In addition to experiments in actual painting, Harris began to use natural undyed hessian. This will take on wonderfully soft gradation of colour when adequately lighted, due to the open weave which provides an infinity of reflecting surfaces. We first tried this in the production of Noel Coward's *The Queen Was in the Parlour*. In *The Forest* by John Galsworthy, in which Hermione Baddeley, as a savage African child, leapt into West End fame on the back of Leslie Banks, playing the explorer, we used velvet throughout, some of it over-painted in various colours, and some treated with size and colour to give the effect of lichens. Even the lianas and orchids that hung from the trees were made of velvet, much of it back lighted in pale green and yellow. This created such an effect of density and vastness that it made the shallow St. Martin's stage look as deep as Drury Lane.

In *R.U.R.*, the play by the Czech writer, Karel Kapek, which incidentally introduced the word " robot " into the English language, we carried out our first tentative experiments in scene projection.



Bank of six spotlights with bowed circular reflector discs used by David Belasco from which the author developed his own indirect lighting techniques.

George and I spent a lot of time after performances late at night experimenting with flood lamps and projectors, in front of which we placed frames made up of various thicknesses of linen, gelatine, silk and net, cut to compensate for the acute angle at which the abstract shape which George had designed was to be projected. We had everything to find out about this new business of scene projection; although we had only the crudest equipment, we managed to obtain sufficient result to use it in the production.

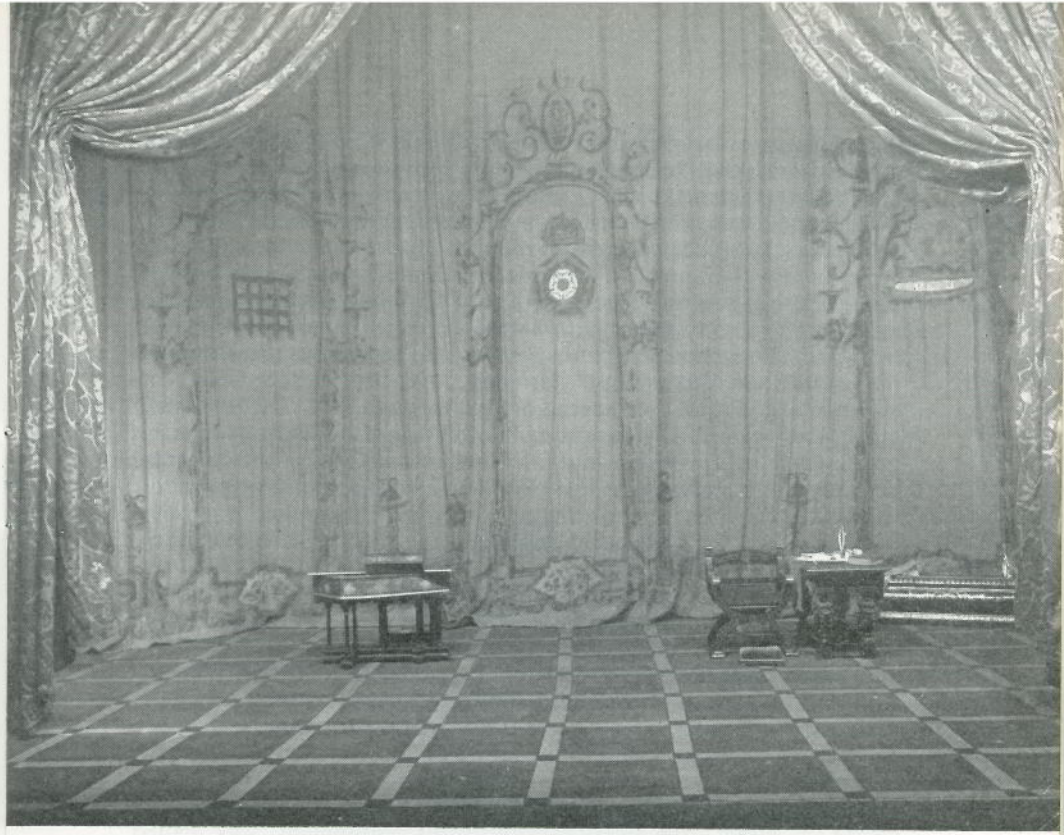
The shallow stage of the St. Martin's gave us little opportunity for experimenting with the open type of staging which we had so often talked about and which I had seen in practice in Germany. When we became successful and I was able to make productions in some of the larger theatres we could not afford any German equipment to begin with, and were forced to improvise and make do. One of our first successes in this form of presentation was an adaptation of *The Blue Lagoon*, staged at the old Prince of Wales' Theatre. Harris designed the scenery in terms of what I can only describe as romantic realism; simple but highly coloured. We removed all the top hamper and set the scenery off stage to the extremest limit. There was a blue lagoon, a coral reef and open sea beyond; just a mound and a few palm trees for the island. When the typhoon struck the island, the palm trees were lashed to fury by fixing them to eccentric rockers underneath the stage. The sea surged over the coral

reef at the back of the stage in billows of green silk, sewn up into long airtight bags inflated by a pulsating blower, with green lamps inside to give luminosity. One scene took place on the open sea with a ship afire on the horizon, and a rowboat manfully rowed from it by the old sailor. For this set we devised a machine to toss the yards of painted canvas up and down—thus taking the place of the boys who used to perform this service for *Robinson Crusoe* in the old days.

To convey the atmosphere of light and air, the open sea, etc., we had an enormous cyclorama which it was impossible to light adequately with the equipment then available. Bearing in mind what I had seen in Germany, I got my electricians to make up some large semi-circular housings with grooved fronts to take the colours. We used automatic arcs to begin with, but in later productions 1,000-watt incandescent lamps were substituted. The back of the housing was aluminium-painted to provide a reflecting surface. The first time they were slung aloft Harris rudely nicknamed them the " ash-cans ", by which name they were known to the staff for ever after. They were a heavy, clumsy equipment and the very devil to handle if they failed after the scenery had been set, but they did the job all right.

The following year I staged Clemence Dane's *Will Shakespeare* at the now destroyed Shaftesbury Theatre, which fortunately for my purpose had a very high grid. So we planned the production inside draperies which I insisted should be 50 ft. high. They were made of hessian, dyed a deep purple and stencilled in black and dull gold with Tudor crowns and roses. This was one of Harris' finest early works. In that wonderful last set in Queen Elizabeth's Palace there was nothing on the stage but the throne chair on a dais and a small desk and chair. Through the high-looped curtains at the back a flagstaff on the balcony was flying Elizabeth's personal standard. Below was a vista of old London.

In Somerset Maugham's *East of Suez*, staged at His Majesty's Theatre in 1922, we removed the proscenium valance in order to give full value to the spectacular street scene with which the author had opened the play. At the back of the stage close up against the cyclorama the Great Gate of Pekin was built in low relief to a height of 45 ft. This gave the right proportion to the shops and booths huddled at its foot. Once more my " ash-cans " were put to good use. The underside of the grid up-stage was concealed by a canvas velarium. The street was lighted by full-scale light standards carrying automatic arcs; telephone wires and cables crisscrossed between the crowded shops. One of the early Ford taxis, rickshaws, a Chinese orchestra performing on the flat roof of a house, and a crowd of shopkeepers and street vendors, all of whom were Chinese, by the way, and extremely watchful to see that I did not introduce any business which they considered derogatory to their race. Well, with all that it was a pretty crowded scene; the sensational effect could not, of course, be repeated in these days of television, cinerama



Clemence Dane's Will Shakespeare *at the now destroyed Shaftesbury Theatre in November* 1921.

and what not. In fact, no one would be so foolish as to attempt it, but one must remember the year was 1922.

I made rather an amusing experiment in the production of *Hassan* the following year. In those days, owing to poor ventilation, lenses used in the 1,000-watt spots often cracked. One day it occured to me that I could put these broken lenses to good use. I had extension pieces placed in front of about a dozen lamps which set the lenses at an angle of 45° to the lamp. In the street scene there was a high white wall running diagonally across the stage. This had been carefully prepared by George Harris for the experiment we had in mind by coating the canvas unevenly with a mixture of size, whitening and ground mica and, of course, weather-stained. We trained our broken spots on to this wall, bringing them up very slowly on resistance as dawn broke over the city of Baghdad. The effect of this prismatic light on the broken surface was quite wonderful. I shall always remember the gasp of astonishment from the first-night audience as the Caliph entered the street to the sound of the Delius music. That was one experiment that came off.

As soon as possible after the First World War I had renewed my contacts with the German technicians, going several times to Berlin and taking Harris with me. Hans Schwabe was no longer active. The business was now being run by his son and a nephew. They were not technicians, but fortunately his No. 1, Reiche, was still there. It is to him that most of their later research and development is due. The big central lanterns at the Deutsches Theater had been replaced by a battery of 1,000-watt lanterns developed by Hans Schwabe. These horizon lamps, now made in various sizes, remain in general use throughout Germany, and are most efficient instruments, giving an even spread of light through 180°. The Bohemian glass gives great brilliance and by skilful use of the various circuits, particularly in the wide range of blues and greens, effects of great delicacy can be obtained. The glass is expensive; it is not available in this country. But the excellent " Cinemoid ", supplied nowadays by Strand Electric, is an efficient substitute. Although I prefer these lamps to the ordinary flood boxes with which we still light our cycloramas in this country, they represented a departure from the original Reinhardt principle of a single source of light for cyclorama lighting which had made such an impression on me in 1911 and 1912 and which has affected all my subsequent thinking on the subject.

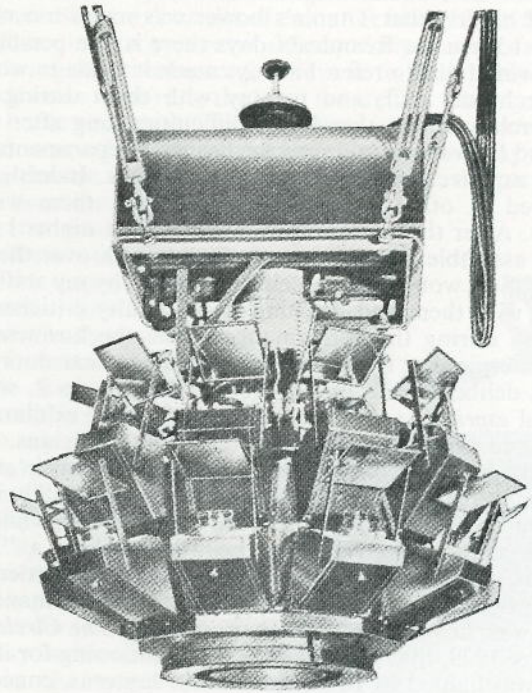
For this type of open staging the conventional battens, originally designed for borders, were useless for lighting the middle distance because of the impossibility of avoiding dilution of the colour on the cyclorama. The Germans solved the problem by developing circular housings for individual lamps of 1,000 or 500 watts with reflectors giving a direct downward throw. This equipment was called Spielflächen-Beleuchtungskörper, which I translated as Acting Area Lamp, a description of the equipment well known to you which has now passed into common use.

Reiche had also developed a remarkable cloud apparatus consisting of a cloud machine fitted with a 3,000-watt lamp. By means of a silent motor the machine could be revolved at all reasonable speeds down almost to the point of imperceptibility. By a series of lenses and mirrors arranged in two tiers round the circular housing it was possible to project either photographic plates of actual clouds or the scenic artist's formal designs. The projections individually controlled could be faded out or drifted in any direction at the will of the operator. Beneath the cloud machine and forming part of the system there were also three 3,000-watt projectors capable of covering the whole cyclorama with static projections.

Meanwhile Max Hasait, the *inspitzient* of the Residenz Theater, Munich, had overcome the problem of obstruction which the plaster dome had created for small theatres. He had developed a cyclorama made of specially woven canvas. This he hung from the grid, but with switch control in the prompt corner. The canvas was cut on the bias —as the sempstresses say—in accordance with measurements worked out with German precision on the drawing board beforehand, the sweep varying, of course, with each theatre. The surface of the canvas

was painted with a greyish-blue paint of Hasait's own specification —I believe the formula included a proportion of glycerine. The Hasait " cyc " could be set and struck from either side of the stage in 20 seconds. Alternatively, it could be made to drift away at almost imperceptible speed. However quickly it was set, the cyclorama always hung without creases or folds of any kind.

This was the system I introduced into this country at the St. Martin's Theatre in 1923–24. Parts of the system were later installed at the Coliseum, where it was used for the production of *White*



Reiche's 3,000-watt cloud machine with two tiers of lenses and mirrors.

Horse Inn. The effects that could be got with it were so beautiful and, so far as storms, lightning, rain, etc., were concerned, so realistic that at the end of a private demonstration which we gave before an invited audience of authors and managers, Bernard Shaw turned to me and, instead of congratulating me, said " I'll take good care you don't use any of these contraptions in my plays, young man. The audience would be so busy staring at the clouds, they wouldn't listen to my words." Of course, he was right.

However, when I went to Drury Lane in 1924 we installed part of the Schwabe Hasait system there. At Christmas time when I produced *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the system really came into its own. Although I produced it frankly as a pantomime—the only one, I think, in which Dame Edith Evans has appeared!—we retained our prejudice against the trees and foliage borders of the old-fashioned painters. Harris designed very beautiful draperies to take their place and introduced as much modernism into the decor as we dared. People have written disparagingly of this historical production—but one had to tread warily in those conservative days in order not to—as it were—frighten the horses! Even so the press complained bitterly that Titania's bower was much too modern!

Before I leave the ReandeaN days there is one personal matter to which I would like to refer. I always made it a rule to work closely with the technical staff, and to stay with them during the most protracted rehearsals to thrash out difficulties long after the actors had left; and I always encouraged the heads of departments to regard themselves as direct contributors to our success. Indeed, whenever we produced in other theatres I always took them with me as supervisors. After those exciting ReandeaN first nights I made it a practice to assemble the staff in my office to talk over the events of the evening. So I would find myself surrounded by my staff, laughing and joking with them and listening to their salty criticisms of each other's work during the performance, while the business manager would be interviewing the libraries in his office next door. By these means, not deliberate but just because I liked to do it, we built up a wonderful *esprit de corps*. I know nothing more exhilarating than to capture and hold the enthusiasm of one's technicians.

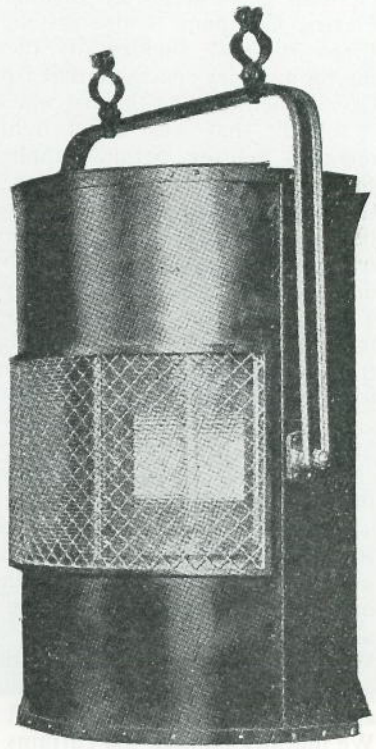
After the break-up of ReandeaN, my experiments in staging and lighting came to an end, for the time being. It is virtually impossible for a producer to carry out technical experiments while he is in contractual relationship with the theatre lessee on a "play-at-a-time" basis. These matters have to be fostered patiently in an atmosphere of mutual interest and with a sense of permanence.

There was, however, one other production, *The Circle of Chalk*, New Theatre 1929, that is perhaps worth mentioning for its lighting. The scene was lighted by two large chinese lanterns, concealing two lamps specially made for me by Schwabe, which later played a big part in what proved to be my last experiment in stage lighting before the outbreak of the Second World War. The equipment had been developed by Reiche from my own rough specifications. It came about like this: when he was over here installing the equipment at the St. Martin's in 1923, I took him down one day to see my ash-cans at His Majesty's where *East of Suez* was running. He could hardly keep a straight face, but as I explained in detail what I wanted he became more thoughtful. Although I still clung to the Reinhardt principle for cyclorama lighting, I realised by this time that it had to be considerably modified in practice. Finally, Reiche came up with a piece of equipment that was proof of his genius as an engineer-designer.

It consisted of three 1,000-watt old type tubular lamps placed in a row in a semi-circular housing with a flat back and having a vitreous enamel reflector. Four colour frames were placed in curved metal grooves, each groove having a shorter radius than the one in front of it. There was also a metal blackout screen with serrated edges top and bottom, and what the Germans call a milk-glass clamped to the outside of the housing for diffusion. The colour screens were made of strips of glass about 2 in. wide, having chamfered edges for close fitting to avoid light leakage. Operation of the glasses was by tracker wire, movement of the screens past the lamps being either from above or below. By these means different parts of the cyclorama could be given different densities of colour or blacked out from above or below. This piece of apparatus subsequently made its appearance in the firm's regular catalogue. I believe it to be capable of further development so as to obviate the need for tracker wires.

After I allowed myself to be drawn into the vortex of film-making and went off to build the Ealing Studios, my days of experiment in the theatre were over for the time being; the plays which I produced occasionally as a relief from the frustrations of pioneering British talkies, gave me neither the time nor opportunity; plays like *Autumn Crocus*, *Call it a Day*, *Autumn*, and so on. Eventually I tired of the struggle for markets for British pictures in America and returned to my old home, the St. Martin's, to produce, among other plays, Priestley's *When We Are Married*, as good a comedy of its type as any in the language. And then one fine day Priestley brought me his *Johnson Over Jordan*.

The play is based on the idea that in the moment of passing over from life to death a man may see all the outstanding moments of his life flit like shadows across the screen of his mind. It was one of



Reiche's 3,000-watt cyclorama flood, with built-in colour screens and shutters.

Priestley's most evocative plays, and provided a magnificent opportunity for experiment; so, backed up by the author, I decided to have a go. I had in mind a development of the reflected light I had used at the St. Martin's years before. An overall luminosity that came from no specific direction, and amid which all the characters, many of them masked, would move with formal gestures, would create just the right atmosphere for this eerie play.

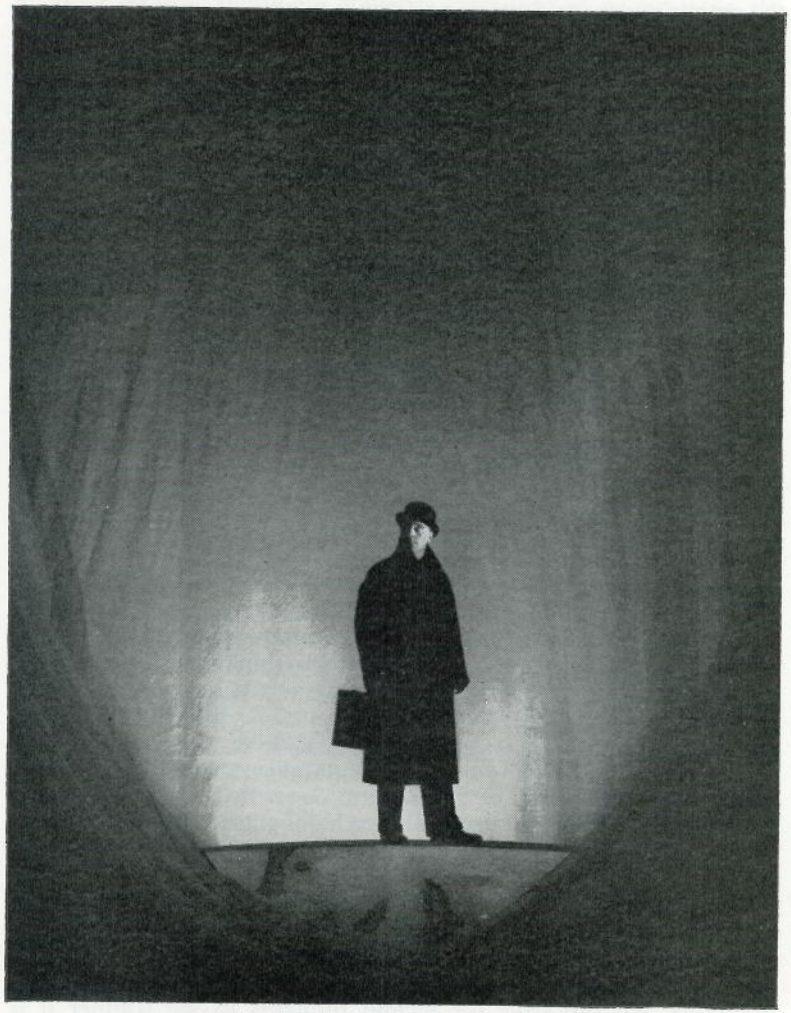
I chose as designer Gordon Craig's son, Edward Carrick, whom I brought with me from Ealing Studios where he had already done some inspiring work in the limited field then available to the art director of a film studio. We used an extremely simple open setting, made up out of hessian draperies, undyed. Special tracks were made to hang them from the grid in curves. At the back we had two cycloramas, one behind the other. The rear cyclorama was of the normal Hasait material and the one in front was made of fine blue silk and made to part at the centre. Each was lighted as though the other did not exist. For this purpose I used three of the special lanterns I have already described. They were slightly larger than the original pattern, 4 kW. instead of 3 kW., but in all other respects they were facsimiles. They were made up for me by Strand Electric, with specially cut German glass, imported through the good offices of the General Electric Company. I also installed the smaller 3 kW's used in *The Circle of Chalk*. Incidentally, these lanterns served well for lighting the big military spectacle that I produced at the Albert Hall for the Government during the last war.

Well, that was direct lighting for the cyclorama. For the reflected lighting, Strand supplied eight 2 kW. special projectors, subsequently increased to twelve, with special colour change apparatus controlled by tracker wire. We conducted exhaustive experiments before deciding upon the type of reflectors. Finally, we chose an ovoid shape, roughly 2 ft. wide by 4 ft. long, flat at the bottom, not unlike an infant's hip bath, only shallower, the sides varying from 6 in. to 9 in. deep. These reflectors were coated with reflecting paint made up from Hartmann's original formula, and provided with trunnion irons and universal joints so that the angle of reflection and, to a certain extent, its area, could be adjusted.

My original intention was to install this equipment in the centre of the stage, the direct lighting for the cyclorama being upstage of a circular frame carrying both the projectors and the reflectors, so that the whole of the stage would be pervaded with light whose source would be indeterminable from the front. This was a partial return to Reinhardt's basic idea. But when we began the work of installation my chief electrician, Mr. Lorraine, called me up late at night to tell me the grid of the New Theatre would not take the weight of my, as it were, central lighthouse; it had begun to sag dangerously. We had hurriedly to re-design the layout, placing some of the projectors upstage of No. 1 bar and some on booms down the side; all reflectors were of course set with their backs to the audience. We literally painted the curtains with lights. In the night-club scene

they took on a deep ruby red against which the masks, beautifully made by Elizabeth Haffenden, created an eerie effect. In other scenes the curtains were coloured olive green or blue or straw according to the mood of the dream which Johnson, the principal character, was experiencing. There was very little direct spot-lighting except in the foreground.

The play ends as Johnson (Ralph Richardson) in his dream—all the struggles and hopes and fears of his past life over—turns to say



Priestley's Johnson Over Jordan, *New Theatre, February* 1939.

farewell to the porter. Taking from him his attache case, his rolled umbrella and his bowler hat, he mounts a steep ramp between the two cycloramas, the one in front being drifted apart a few feet to make this possible. As he does so to the inspiring music specially composed by Benjamin Britten, a 5,000-kW. German projector beams his ascent. The light in the front fades as the sun lamp picks him up between the cycloramas, the silk one being lighted an iridescent bluish-green and the rear one a deep blue. The effect was indescribably beautiful and was so referred to by the press. Indeed, the author has made flattering reference to this effect in his book of reminiscences just published.

With *Johnson Over Jordan* I came to the end of my experiments. The modern practice of employing specialists to light productions is all to the good, seeing that the director nowadays seems to have neither time nor inclination to go deeply into such matters. But the lighting artist must never be treated as a sort of outside contractor, like the tradesman who provides the costumes or the wigs. He should be drawn into consultation with the director and the designer from the very first hour at the drawing board. I know this is sometimes the case, but it should be the invariable rule. The responsibility for further experiments now rests with the lighting artist. Unfortunately, he is never free of the gnawing doubt as to whether his director, even though he be one operating with a large subsidy, will allow him the necessary time and means for experiment. As I look around at what is going on, I find the results a little disappointing; increased efficiency, yes, but not a great deal of original thinking. Since the war we appear to have surrendered to the domination of the spotlight. Surely our efforts should not be directed solely to piercing the darkness? Too many people are hanging up too many spotlights to too little effect. I am not satisfied that the way of advance lies in multiplying the number of spots hanging from every corner of the stage and auditorium.

If the fundamental purpose of the modern theatre is to take people out of themselves—and to set them thinking is only part of that process—then stage lighting has its part to play in evoking a sense of magic and other-worldness. It is difficult to create this effect if the eye is counting the number of exposed spots popping in and out according to the requirements of the plot; and so far as dramatic accents of lighting are concerned, their effect must be minimised if the spectator can trace highlights to their source, and watch them come and go. Gimmickry in play production is now a commonplace, such as the habit of dropping scenery in and out of the flys during performance, and the abandonment of any attempt at masking how we do things—what the old carpenters used vulgarly to call " seeing right up the lady's dress "—this and the exposure of spotlights on stage is really only a sort of child's working model technique. All this calls for second thoughts to see whither it is leading us. Exposure is harmless enough when it is unavoidable,

but when it is deliberately insisted upon it becomes indecent, an offence to the onlooker. It is a mistake to suppose that this sort of thing brings the audience nearer to the heart of the matter; only the actor can do that.

Perhaps if I had been able to continue my experiments to free the stage of all obstruction and to bring light and air into the proceedings I might have reached similar conclusions to those reached by the actors and directors who seek salvation by way of the arena stage. Yet I am not sure. We can understand the actor's desire to be at close quarters with his audience, accustomed as he is to the magnification of his image and his mechanised vocal intimacy of screen and television. But from the point of view of the technician, it is not so much the advantages that we have to consider. For the most part they speak for themselves. It is the limitations that call for examination.

So far as the designer is concerned he must be handicapped, since the settings must all be set against a solid background, either the outer wall of the building or some architectural feature in front of it. This gives a quality of thickness to the settings and would rob much design of its evocative quality. Admittedly, there is the increased freedom, added emphasis, if you prefer, to foreground and middle distance, but of horizon there can be none. I personally should regret the loss of vistas from our stage, the evocative quality of the distant view. I know that some modern directors and actors reject theatre magic in the pictorial sense, but it has lasted a very long time; it will last a still longer time despite all efforts to destroy it.

For the lighting artists the arena stage presents formidable difficulties. To avoid either irritating or blinding the spectators, lighting must always be by overhead spots, or at least spots so placed as to give a downward directional throw, but this is very limiting and, after a time, likely to become drab. We need to relieve the spectator from the tyranny of the overhead spotlight. Perhaps some adaptation or development of a reflected light system might be the answer, providing a general luminosity against which the dramatic accent of the spotlight would no longer be lost through constant repetition. Certainly, our ideal stage of the future should be large and free, and full of boundless light, matching the soaring of our minds towards the magic of outer space.

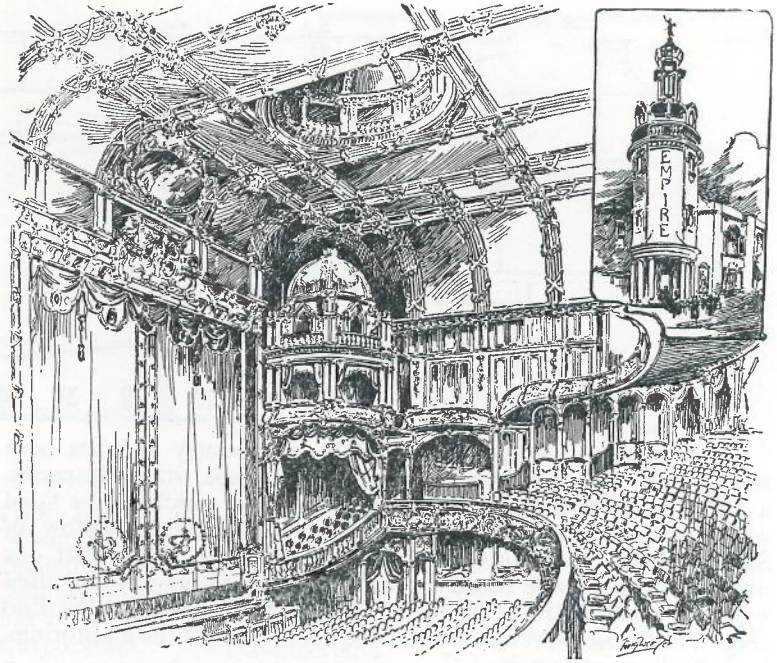
NEW THEATRES FOR OLD

by Percy Corry

As a nation we are often rather slow in getting off the mark; fortunately, we get going ultimately. While other countries were building new theatres, we talked a lot about theatre planning, but we didn't build theatres. For over 40 years the old commercial theatres have been getting swamped by competition in the market for mass entertainment, and many yielded up their valuable sites for super-cinemas, super-markets and super office blocks. There have been numerous plans for subsidised civic theatres, but local authorities were slow to spend the sixpenny rate they were nationally authorised to levy for the purpose. The Belgrade Theatre in Coventry, opened in 1958, the first new professional theatre to be built in Britain for 20 years, helped break the barrier. Now the tempo is increasing; 1962 has been quite a year, theatrically speaking. The National Theatre, after a century of frustration, acquired an eminent director and the assurance that its movable foundation stone, royally laid on the South Bank, will soon have a superstructure which may contain two theatres. Chichester's arena theatre became a reality with extraordinary speed. Nottingham resolved its political battle about its Civic Theatre building which is making definite progress. Two new theatres in the greater London area, the Prince Charles in the West End and the Ashcroft, Croydon, have just been opened. Ealing should soon begin to see the Questors' versatile theatre rise from its foundation, and so on and so on.

There are many provincial achievements and projects, less publicised, perhaps, but no less significant. There has been substantial practical progress in the North-East, for example. After Richmond's restored Georgian Theatre was opened for public inspection in August, there followed, in quick succession in September, the opening for public entertainment of the rejuvenated Empire, Sunderland, the Flora Robson Playhouse in Newcastle and the People's Theatre, also in Newcastle. The other Newcastle, the one which is not on Tyne but under Lyme, might have staked a claim for the Midlands; it was forestalled by its near neighbour, the Stoke which is on Trent, whose new theatre opened in October. There are other projects in varying stages of progress in a dozen or more towns and cities.

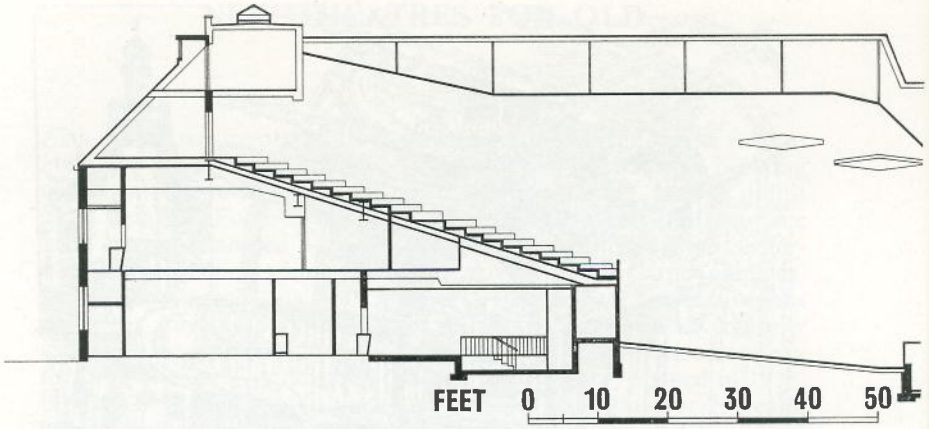
The theatres now reviewed are adaptations of old buildings, some involving quite considerable reconstruction. All are ambitious assertions of faith in the future of the living theatre. They are significant of a general pattern of development. Theatres, both professional and amateur, subsidised and independent, are striving to become social centres, with emphasis on the Arts and the Eats, attempts to broaden the appeal to customers and to satisfy both aesthetic and physical appetites.



Sunderland's Empire Theatre

It will be no surprise to learn, after seeing this delightful illustration, that this theatre was opened in 1907. For many years it was a No. 1 variety house, with fluctuating fortune in accord with national experience. In 1959 it was in danger of demolition in the cause of " site development ", but was purchased by the local council.

A definite policy has now been agreed and, under the direction of Reginald Birks, it is intended that the theatre shall become a comprehensive Arts Centre. In addition to the main theatre, it will ultimately have a smaller one for intimate drama, recitals, concerts, etc. There will also be rehearsal rooms, an exhibition hall, ballroom, club rooms and restaurant. The first phase of development has involved a complete re-equipment of the stage, re-decoration of the theatre, and the creation of a restaurant where members of the newly-formed theatre society and other patrons may have morning coffee, lunch, tea or supper, with morning and lunch-time concerts included. The autumn programme includes top class drama, opera, ballet, musical comedy, orchestras and modern Pop. Frankie Vaughan is preceded by Sadler's Wells Opera and followed by the Royal Philharmonic. In addition to playing host to No. 1 Tours, the Empire is to present its own pantomime " Cinderella ", a Festival of Drama, and other shows.



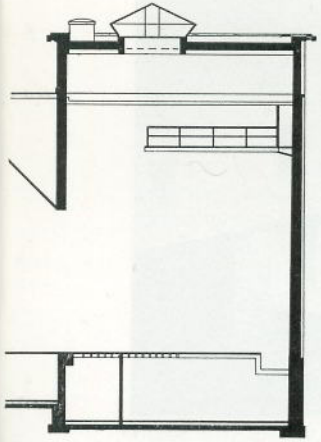
The stage is one of the largest in the country and has been re-equipped with new safety curtain, main tabs, stage draperies, a curved cyclorama, and a sectional apron stage which can be fitted when required. On the recommendation of Charles Bristow of Sadlers Wells Opera the new lighting installation is the first one outside London to be based on the new standard lay-out now used by Strand and approved by A.B.T.T. for theatres in the West End class. The Console Preset Control, sited at the rear of the auditorium, has 120 dimmer circuits.

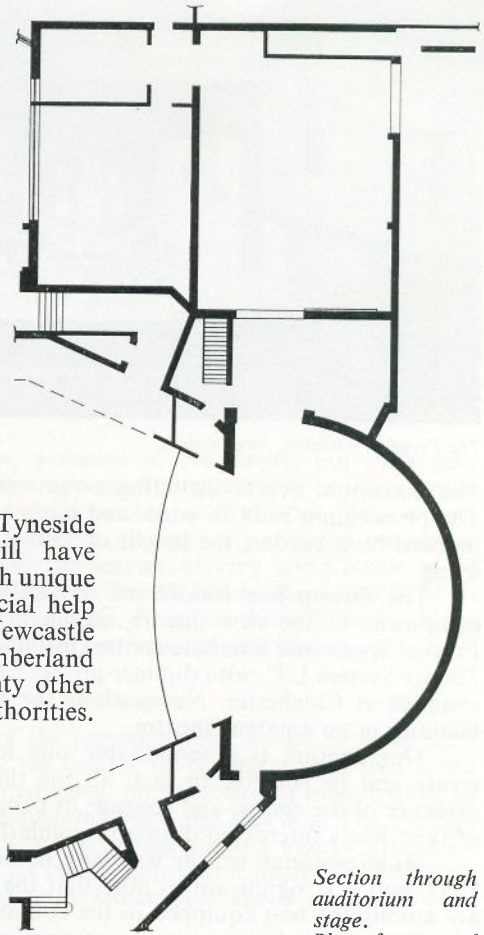
Sunderland is to be congratulated. It has provided the facilities and the organisation needed to give its citizens the opportunity of seeing theatrical entertainment of the highest standards. May one hope that performers and producing companies, including the National Theatre, will seize the opportunity. This could be the beginning of a lively civic circuit and a needed stimulus to the provincial theatre generally.

The People's Theatre

This is one of the most impressive projects undertaken by any amateur group in this country. The People's Theatre Arts Group began in 1911 as a modest amateur dramatic society, but 10 years later they were able to include G. B. S. in an audience for their production of *Man and Superman* in their own small theatre. That Shaw should visit them again in 1935 is eloquent tribute. Not surprisingly this new theatre opened in September last with a revival of *Man and Superman*.

The list of plays produced by the People's Theatre since 1911 is a remarkable one; it was described by Thornton Wilder as " like a living Library of the Theatre ". For many years the theatre has been a converted chapel, but in 1959 the Group bought the Lyric Cinema for £28,000 and embarked on a project which will have cost £100,000 by the time it is complete. In association with the Tyneside





Section through auditorium and stage.
Plan of stage and workshop area. People's Theatre, Newcastle.

Film Society and the Tyneside Music Society, they will have created an Arts Centre with unique facilities. Generous financial help has been given by the Newcastle Corporation, Northumberland County Council and twenty other neighbouring local authorities. Exceptionally generous contributions were made by charitable trusts, by local industrialists and by private individuals.

There will be spacious foyers, an exhibition hall, refreshment lounge and club room; the theatre has rehearsal rooms, dressing rooms and workshops. Originally the seating capacity was 1,600. The capacity of the stalls is reduced from 1,000 to 300. The new maximum capacity of 900 will be used for musical and film shows, but the balcony can be screened about halfway, reducing the total capacity to 600, sufficient for most productions.

Although there is still much work to be done, some of which must depend on the raising of further funds, the theatre itself is operating. The stage tower has been added to the original building. Its rear wall is curved, owing to site conditions, which reduces wing space on stage left. There is, however, generous space on stage right.

The People's Theatre, Newcastle.

The maximum depth, including a removable apron, is over 40 ft. The proscenium is 34 ft. wide, and has a structural height of 20 ft., reduced by a border; the height of 35 ft. to the grid will allow full-flying.

The Group has transferred its fairly extensive stage lighting equipment to the new theatre, supplemented by new Profile and Fresnel Spots, and a remote control installation. The latter is the new 72-way System L.C. with dimmer pre-set facilities, the type of control installed at Chichester. Newcastle is the first to have such control facilities in an amateur theatre.

This venture is a remarkable one for any amateur body to create and to control. In fact, all the three theatres reviewed are evidence of the energy and courage of people in the North-East, and of their lively interest in drama particularly, and the arts generally.

Middlesbrough led the way with its new Little Theatre, built in 1957, and it is significant to note that the school stages in the area are among the best equipped in the country.

Those who disapprove of picture-frames in theatres will regret that each of the theatres has a proscenium. Let them take heart; if they read on they may be mollified.

The Flora Robson Playhouse

This is a redesigned and reconstructed theatre which, in the past, had a period of very successful repertory. In recent years, like so many others, this theatre suffered decline and defeat. In 1961 Julian Herington began purchase negotiations with the owners and planned alterations which would transform the building into an attractive modern theatre. With the aid of local people who were willing to risk their own money in this attempt to revive theatre in the area, a private limited company was formed to carry out the alterations and to reopen the theatre. The preliminary plans were prepared by a

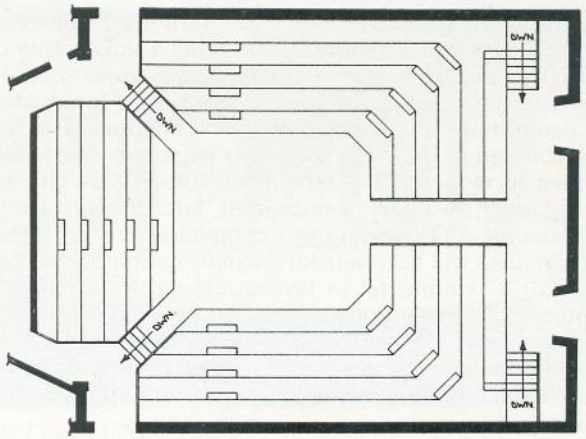
local architect and passed by the local authority, but after many frustrations, delays and difficulty in arranging a satisfactory contract Mr. Herington engaged local craftsmen and supervised building operations himself. These involved the removal of hundreds of tons of earth, demolitions and considerable new building. The result is a credit to them and to him. The work was begun on April 16th, 1962, and the theatre reopened on September 10th, 1962. There was an entirely new foyer, two bars, a restaurant, kitchen and various other audience amenities. The seating was completely reorganised and the seats recovered. As will be seen from the photograph below, the seating (capacity 620) is continental in lay-out. The rows are now at 3 ft. 4 ins. centres and are continuous. New carpets have been fitted, the lighting revised and the theatre has been redecorated throughout. Further additions and improvements are planned and, if the Newcastle citizens take full advantage of the opportunity now provided, these will follow.

Dame Flora Robson, a native of Newcastle, not only gave her name to the theatre but appeared as guest star in *The Corn is Green*, the second production in the reopened theatre. With a first-class resident company, excellent staging, a policy of presenting fortnightly productions and the service of very good meals in an attractive restaurant, this theatre should justify the courage of its sponsors with assistance, if needed, from the Arts Council. Of the first eight productions four were premieres of new plays.

A New Vic

This is also an example of the reversed trend in the entertainment industry. It is evidence of the decline of cinema appeal that a few cinemas are now being transformed into theatres; a mere trickle, of course, compared with the gush of Bingo and Bowling. The Victoria Cinema, Stoke-on-Trent, was first changed into a night club, which failed to make the grade. Its conversion into a professional theatre in the round was effected with remarkable speed and little fuss,

The Flora Robson Playhouse, Newcastle.



Schematic plan showing stepping for seats at the Victoria Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent.

which may perhaps account for the curious neglect of its opening by the national press.

For several years Stephen Joseph's company has regularly erected its touring fit-up in the Municipal Hall, Newcastle-under-Lyme, and has presented a season of theatre in the round. Local enthusiasts, supported by the Arts Council, had reasonable hope that the Council would erect a Civic Theatre which could present this form of theatre, but after long negotiations the scheme has been rejected by Newcastle. The conversion of the Victoria into Britain's only professional theatre in the round is a private venture by the Studio Theatre Company.

Negotiations for the lease began in August last and, in spite of pessimistic forecasts, quite extensive alterations and improvements made it possible for the theatre to open on October 9th. That it did so, notwithstanding shortage of time and money, was due to the vigour and courage of Stephen Joseph and his colleagues, and to some generous help from A.B.C. Television, Granada Theatres Ltd., the Gulbenkian Foundation and many private supporters. As further funds become available there will be more improvements, but the theatre is operating and very attractive; it has the quality of permanence, and its excellent resident company must welcome the relief from the handicaps of fit-up conditions. Its plays are presented in repertoire.

The 345 seats are evenly distributed round an acting area 24 ft. by 22 ft. All the seats are above the level of the acting area. The whole auditorium is steeply tiered, the risers being 1 ft. 4 ins., providing excellent sight lines. There is a feeling of spaciousness as well as of intimacy. It has not been possible, in this first phase, to redecorate the theatre. Until this is done the walls and the old proscenium arch must remain too reflective of light.

The Victoria Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent, with control room in background.

Lighting of any central acting area has its own peculiar problems, a fact often overlooked by the inexperienced. They could, with profit, study this lay-out based on years of this company's experience. The installation consists of 22 × Patt. 23 Profile Spots and 12 × Patt. 123 Fresnel Spots, all with 250-watt lamps. There are actually 78 circuits with socket outlets, and a " patching " system to permit selection of the lighting positions required.

Two slots have been constructed in the ceiling, approximately over the edge of the acting area at each side, with cat-walk access above. In each slot there are 18 sockets; in addition, there are four box apertures over the centre, each having two sockets. A fifth aperture, in the centre, is provided for the sound effects speaker. On each of two opposite walls there is a lighting barrel and 17 socket outlets. In due course, it is hoped to have the full complement of lanterns for all the lighting positions, in order to reduce to a minimum the readjustments necessary to suit each play in the repertoire. A commodious control room has been erected at one end, above the level of the seating, giving the stage manager and the lighting and sound operators a clear view of the acting area.

The creation of this excellent theatre is a gallant venture, as significant as was the creation of the Mermaid and of Chichester, deserving as much attention and success. It must have the good wishes of all who are concerned for the development of contemporary theatre, whether they are pro- or anti-proscenium. There is, in fact, a need for all forms of theatre.

BOOK REVIEWS

Producing Pantomime and Revue, by Ivan Butler. **Foyles Hand-Books, 4/–.**

This recent edition of Foyles Hand-Books should not be missed by the numerous amateur producers who turn to pantomime and revue around the off-season. This is a *multum in parvo* edition of some 90 pages giving information on methods of production and describing the varied experiences of the author. He gives guidance on choice of subject and methods of casting as well as suggestions on appropriate stage lighting. The book is divided into two parts. The first, very fully treated, gives the historical backgrounds of pantomime with many good references to reliable sources. In terms terse and lucid the author offers a great deal of help to producers and to the management committees of every amateur society attempting pantomime. The author's understanding of the relationship between the producer and those with whom he works is shown by some concise and cryptic comments on the type of person usually met with in the amateur theatre world.

On such matters as script and music copyright, the Lord Chamberlain's permission, and permission for children's groups in performances, the author is accurate, informative and cautionary. The reviewer, being a Scot, noticed however that the Scottish Education decree which almost strictly, but not exclusively, forbids the performance of juveniles under 15 was not dealt with. The second part of the book devoted to revue is not treated so fully but nevertheless contains quite a good deal of advice. Those who are experienced in these matters are seldom laudatory, but this book is highly recommended.

JOHN E. MARTIN

Planning for New Forms of Theatre, by Stephen Joseph. **Published by Strand Electric,** available on request **free of charge.**

" Drama is widening its frontiers." These are the opening words of Stephen Joseph's booklet, and if it does not help to do just that, its readers must be unimaginative clots indeed! This guide should be studied by every amateur drama group that suffers from an inadequate and ill-equipped hall as well as by every young professional who dreams of establishing his own theatre but lacks the means. Not only does Mr. Joseph give exciting hints of the theatrical possibilities of many forms of open stage—a territory still but little explored by professional and amateur theatre alike—but he gives very precise and clear information as to how to set about creating an open theatre. Moreover, he demonstrates how easy it is, and how inexpensive, to set up a theatre of this kind.

Easy, yes, but the essential requirements are ignored at peril. There is no longer any excuse for serious mistakes to be made for the necessary " know how " is here and available for all.

The present reviewer has few quibbles. The 21-in. centres for seating are distinctly on the generous side, though it may be a convenient module; the same may be said of the recommended distance of 3 ft. 6 in. between rows. Some licensing authorities would be unwilling to accept more than 14 seats in a row. More seriously, the schematic plans for theatre in the round, by placing the entrances 10 ft. 6 in. in from the corners of the square room, result in barely satisfactory sight lines for members of the audience sitting in or near the corner. A step of 1 ft. 4 in. to the row in front is quite satisfactory when looking past the chap immediately ahead, but it gives a bad sight line if what you want to see is diagonally over the heads of people sitting some way along the row.

ALFRED EMMET

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