Guides to the Contemporary Drama.*

What with the publication of plays in book form, the "readings" innumerable from stage successes of present and earlier seasons, the tabloid reproductions of the "movies," the dramatic gossip and digests and criticisms of the newspapers and magazines, and the critical and appreciative works on the drama, the dweller of to-day in village or hamlet may know as much of the theatre as his metropolitan cousin. The books by Mr. Andrews and Professor Burton belong to an ever-increasing list of works on things dramatic, and provide guides, one to the modern British and American drama, the other to the American only. Both are admirably adapted for those who read more often than they see plays. Quite pertinently, therefore, Mr. Andrews warns his readers that "modern plays should be read as plays, with the eye of the imagination fixed upon their actual performance, and not measured by old-fashioned literary standards." The student of the drama will not find in either volume any very fresh material. Indeed, Mr. Andrews frankly admits that "little effort has been made to shed any new light upon the topics discussed; the attempt has been rather to present in small compass accurate general information as to the leaders of the modern stage and their work, and to offer, in passing, some opinions as to the prospects and tendencies of dramatic art in our day." Mr. Burton's somewhat more pretentious aim is "to put before the reader in synthetic fashion the native movement of our time in drama, placing emphasis upon what seem significant tendencies and illustrative personalities." Not only has each author lived up to his professions, but each has produced a well ordered and highly readable book.

Both writers preface their main treatment by chapters on the general matter of the drama, with discussion more or less familiar even to the bucolic lover of the theatre,—as, for instance, the eternal subject of giving the people what they want, the matter of morals, the spread of interest in the theatre, the "tired business man," and the Syndicate, in Mr. Burton's book; and a set of definitions covering dramatic types, plot, characterization, and stage conventions, in Mr. Andrews's work. Mr. Burton gives a hasty sketch of the earlier American drama, merely to lead up to the present. Mr. Andrews has a chapter on realism and the literary drama, corresponding to Mr. Burton's on the poetic drama, which latter is one of the sub-topics of his main treatment.

The discussion as to whether there is or should be such a thing to-day as the literary drama, seems to be largely due to a confusion of terms. There is a tendency to regard "literary" and "poetic" as synonymous expressions, and to conceive of literary drama only as that which is decked out in the flowing robes of blank verse. There is surely no need of falling back upon Mr. Andrews's comfortable doctrine: "The best way out of the difficulty is to acknowledge what grows more obvious day by day, that drama, perhaps beginning in, or at least early combining with, literature, has evolved into a separate art, still relying on literary elements, doubtless, but by no means exclusively, or even principally." Mr. Henry Arthur Jones's statement seems much more reasonable:

> "If you have faithfully and searchingly studied your fellow-citizens; if you have selected from amongst them those characters that are interesting in themselves, and that also possess an enduring human interest; if, in studying these interesting personalities, you have severely selected, from the mass of their sayings and doings and impulses, those words and deeds and tendencies which mark them at once as individuals and as types; if you have then recast and reimagined all the materials; if you have cunningly shaped them into a story of progressive and accumulative action; if you have done all this, though you may not have used a single word but what is spoken in ordinary American intercourse to-day, I will venture to say that you have written a piece of live American literature, — that is, you have written something that will not only be interesting on the boards of the theatre, but that can be read with pleasure in your library; can be discussed, argued about, tested, and digested as literature."

As Mr. Andrews epitomizes all this, "truly literary drama is essentially neither poetical nor rhetorical, but simply good drama—drama raised to the *n*th power." It is not a matter of verse form; dialogue wanting the accomplishment of verse may be as fully charged with poetic spirit as some dialogue not in that form,—as anyone can illustrate at his pleasure from Shakespeare or any other really literary dramatist. Indeed, Lear's faltering cry,

> "Do not laugh at me,
> For as I am a man, I think this lady
> To be my child Cordelia,"

is as simple as anything in prose dialogue, and as far removed from the exalted blank verse which in the popular mind is associated with the poetic drama as is the veriest prose of a modern play, and yet it is the quintessence of poetry. The real difference between such dialogue and

*The Drama of To-Day. By Charlton Andrews. Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co.

The New American Drama. By Richard Burton. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co.

that of the poetic play of to-day is in the degree to which common speech has been raised, — in the one case to the *n*th power, in the other to the square. Goldsmith and Sheridan wrote literary dramas, as did Congreve and Farquhar; but they did not use blank verse or any other poetic form. That poetic drama, strictly so called, is not always dramatic — or, for that matter, always poetic — does not argue against the essential verity of the type. Mr. MacKaye, Miss Peabody (whom Mr. Burton triply designates as "Peabody," "Miss Peabody," and "Mrs. Marks," to the confusion of the unsophisticated reader), and Mr. Stephen Phillips have made brave beginnings, which it is reasonable enough to suppose will lead to even greater accomplishment. There is nothing inherently impossible in Wall Street's finding voice in a poetic drama; already we are hearing of the "romance of Wall Street." After Mr. MacKaye's "To-morrow," a fairly successful drama, throughout suggestive of the poetic, on the subject of eugenics, nothing is impossible to a dramatist with the gift of poetic expression. Of course, the poetic drama cannot be written by a playwright whose genius runs only to scissors and paste. Mr. Burton has faith in the future of the poetic drama,—he says he "must disagree with those who hold that verse is no longer acceptable in our modern theatre and particularly *de trop* in 'practical America.'" The whole discussion parallels the dispute as to whether Pope is a poet or not.

Mr. Andrews's criticisms of plays and playwrights are, on the whole, discerning and just. Occasionally in his desire to say as much as possible in the fewest words he appears superficial and even unfair. Thus he remarks of Mr. Mackaye's "To-morrow" that "the central situation wherein the hero, to save the heroine from her infatuation for the unwholesome lover she has selected, hurls him over a cliff into the sea . . . does not grow at all logically out of the characters." Why not? This act is but the explosion of the volcano in the hero's breast, which was mentioned earlier, and surely the motive for this explosion was furnished in the events. Likewise when Mr. Andrews says of Mr. Galsworthy's "The Pigeon" that it shows "the futility of charity for the submerged tenth," he ignores what is really back of the resultant fact, that social conditions have reduced the submerged tenth to a state where such lenitive measures as charity fail to remedy the disease; the depth to which the evil has sunk into the social state is the subject of the play. So again, Mr. Andrews does not do justice to Synge's "In the Shadow of the Glen" when he says, in briefly outlining the plot of the play: "Luckily there is a tramp at hand, who carries her [the wife] away with him." The tramp is the actual embodiment of the liberty that the woman has all her life longed for and that her husband has denied her; now it comes to her, and in a sweep of feeling she sees in the tramp a messenger from a better and a brighter world. Nor does "Riders to the Sea" merely depict "the quiet sorrow of a mother whose six sons have one by one become the victims of the remorseless sea." It portrays the utter desolation which overtakes a woman when all hope and all fear are gone together. Curiously in this treatment of Synge there is no mention of "Deirdre of the Sorrows," that most poignant of all his plays, the one which gives him his greatest claim to immortality.

Both Mr. Burton and Mr. Andrews have fine hopes for the future of the American drama now in its infancy, and a constant faith born of knowledge. The significant fact emphasized by both men is the constant endeavor of American dramatists to be true to American conditions, — no longer to forage afield for plots but to get them at home, where they exist so abundantly. And Mr. Burton admirably shows how well the young dramatist is exploring these fertile regions, — the fields of American business life, of social conditions, of humor, of romance, of sheer idealism. There is a search for an idea, not a mere patching together of a set of scenes that will make out an evening's entertainment for a jaded intellect. Mr. Burton, with splendid confidence in the future, declares that "the higher instinct is astir, as never before; that more intelligent activity has begun; that the well-wishers of the theatre are everywhere fast consolidating for effective work of many kinds."

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