



## EXIT OF THE NEW THEATER

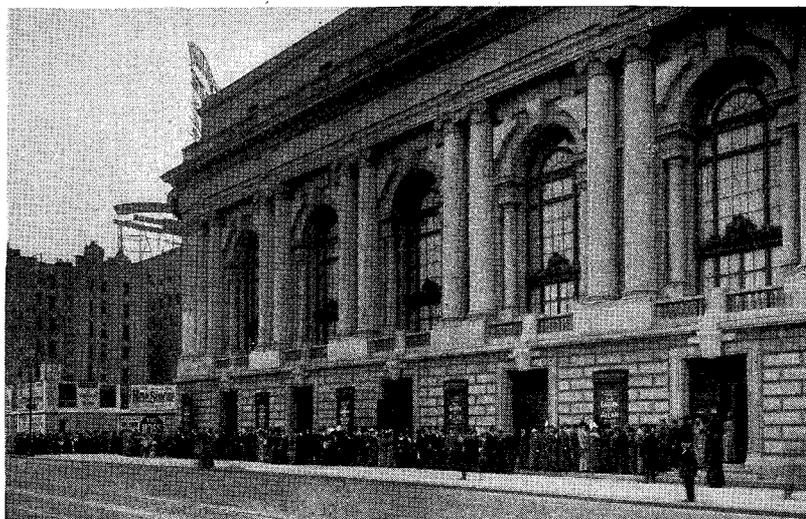
THE LOSS OF \$400,000 may not have been the reason why the "Founders" of the New Theater that was to be for "art, not profits," have given up the idea. But many can not rid their minds of the thought that this has something to do with it, and they are sorry it has had this melancholy outcome. Regret is heard on every hand over the announcement made by the "Founders" that "owing to conditions unfavorable to the project of a building to take the place of the abandoned New Theater," they have "decided to discontinue the idea, at least for the present." The final clause may merely be a rhetorical expression for sugaring the bitter pill the Founders are determined to administer. The statement is clutched, however, as a straw by the drowning, by those who hope that by gaining time the idea may be revived and carried into execution after sufficient preparation. The obstacles that are mentioned as seeming insuperable to the present projectors are the difficulty of getting an adequate manager, the unavailability of competent actors, and the scarcity of suitable plays. The first difficulty could be disposed of, says the *New York Times*, "if the Founders were willing to bestow absolute authority on the director and refrain personally from meddling with the details of management." The second point is dealt with by the *New York Evening Post*, which hints that the Founders' "too implicit faith in the magic of the check-book" helps to account for their failure up to the present. We read:

"The wonder is not that they failed, but that they did not perceive the reason why until something like half a million dollars had been lost in the experiment. They are to be congratulated very heartily upon the resolution to consider further before they adventure more. And, as has been hinted, they have furnished an object-lesson of immense value. They have proved that money can not do the work of brains, and that a theater without actors is a futility. Others have shown that money is not even a prime essential to the establishment of such an institution as the Founders dreamed of. But the beginning has to be made from the bottom, with becoming humility, and not from the top. Phelps—one of the most sterling actors and managers that ever lived—showed how to make a stock company when he converted the disreputable and ruined Sadler's Wells Theater, in one of the shabbiest districts of London, into the great center of the poetic drama in England. F. R. Benson not only maintains the best Shakespearian company in Great Britain, but a school to which the metropolitan managers are indebted for nearly all their best players. The Chicago Drama Players have demonstrated that it is still possible to assemble an excellent company for all purposes of good modern drama from the capable players banished to the provinces by the manufacturers of modern stars. Not only this, but they proved once more how impossible it is for even capable actors to interpret artificial comedy acceptably without previous instruction. The Irish Players, with not much besides their cooperative zeal to help them, are exhibiting in a remarkable way the capabilities

of a stock company and the undeniable feasibility of a true and inexpensive National Theater."

As to plays, it would seem that no man knoweth whence they come, and the future, doubtless, is prepared with its surprizes. So along with speculative objections partaking of the unknown there is the tangible one that the experiment already has lost for its sponsors \$400,000. They were in the position of men, says the *Brooklyn Eagle*, "standing on the edge of a well and asked to throw their money in to fill it up." They conceivably may not regret the step now to be taken, but certainly the public will:

"Two seasons at the New Theater, seasons which were not successful financially, and whose productions were sharply criticized on artistic grounds, gave New York a new idea of what the theater might be. Its revivals of the classics were no more successful than would have been those of a commercial manager working with actors few of whom knew the classic traditions. But it produced modern plays which no commercial manager would have thought of, and it has left as a legacy 'The Blue Bird' and 'The Piper,' which are still touring the country with the scenery which the New Theater provided and with copies of the New Theater acting. Those who saw the original company remember 'Sister Beatrice' as a dream of



"DEDICATED TO THE DRAMA AND THE CITIZENS OF NEW YORK."

In these words Mr. Morgan opened the splendid building that has now changed to a "commercial theater," able to attract crowds to "The Garden of Allah."

art and poetry which would never have been realized elsewhere. Hampered as it was with an auditorium designed for spectacle, the New Theater did those things beautifully, and it did other plays well enough to be remembered with gratitude."

*The American* looks upon the step now taken as "regrettable not only because of the private disappointment of the lovers of good plays, but because it puts the artistic character of the American public in a false light." It seems to imply, so this writer thinks, that Americans do not care much for what is high and fine in drama, and this he believes untrue:

"The truth is that the dramatic idealism of the American people is private and individualistic. It lacks social organization. It needs kindling. What is settled by this failure is not that the dramatic art passion can not be kindled in this country, but merely that the process requires more wisdom or patience or public spirit than the promoters of the New Theater were prepared to invest.

"A great man," says Emerson, "must create the appetite by which he is to be appreciated." The like is true of any first-rate enterprise involving a new use of the imagination.

"The commercial theaters have their place, and are filling it. They would be able to do better if dramatic standards could be toned up by some institution of dramatic art free from the dead weight of the box-office.

"Managers of theaters—like managers of newspapers and all other public purveyors of mental goods—are tempted to pitch their key below, rather than above, the average demand for excellence and reform, if their financial resources are limited. They must get the crowd quickly or die. Those who furnish the public with stage plays or political ideas must have great capital, great patience, or some other greatness—if they are determined

to ride the top waves of the actual demand, or to herald new tastes and new enthusiasms.

"The New Theater did not lack capital in its beginning. A great fortune was sunk. It lacked capital to persist and amend its mistakes. It failed because it was planned not as a public institution but as the esthetic luxury of a class. Its policy was guided not for the democratizing of art but to provide a quick succession of superb performances for the few that cared for them.

"The great deficit was due to a rapid alternation between classic plays and the last cry in modern drama—the insistence upon a constantly changing repertory, in the fashion of grand opera. This arrangement was professionally impossible. The waste and friction were enormous."

In something of a swan song the New York *Evening Mail* speaks of the New Theater as "a beautiful dream"—a "dream so refreshing in its nature that the drama in America is better for it to-day." There is more than one way of estimating "losses":

"Has it 'lost money'? A great deal, certainly, according to the ledger in the box-office. But its losses remind us of Thoreau's idea about his time. 'The time that people say I lost,' said the sage of Walden, 'is the only time that I have ever saved.'

"Not lost was the money which the New Theater expended on the production of beautiful and significant plays which educated the public taste and answered the demands of the people's hearts, even tho all the dollars spent on the stage did not come back at the door.

"But it was a hard row to hoe—this bucking against all the theatrical customs, and against a popular indifference which is the saddest feature of the failure. For it is not the 'Founders' who have occasion to feel regretful to-day. They have done their duty. The public should have been 'Founders' too. The enterprise was a thing for all of us to participate in founding. Mistakes? There have been some. The wonder is that there were so few. More should have been anticipated in so great a work.

"The idea of the New Theater lives on. Its seed will bear noble fruit."

Nobody familiar with theatrical history, says the New York *Times*, believed that the best way to improve the art of acting and dramatic literature in this country was to begin by building a splendid playhouse. Further:

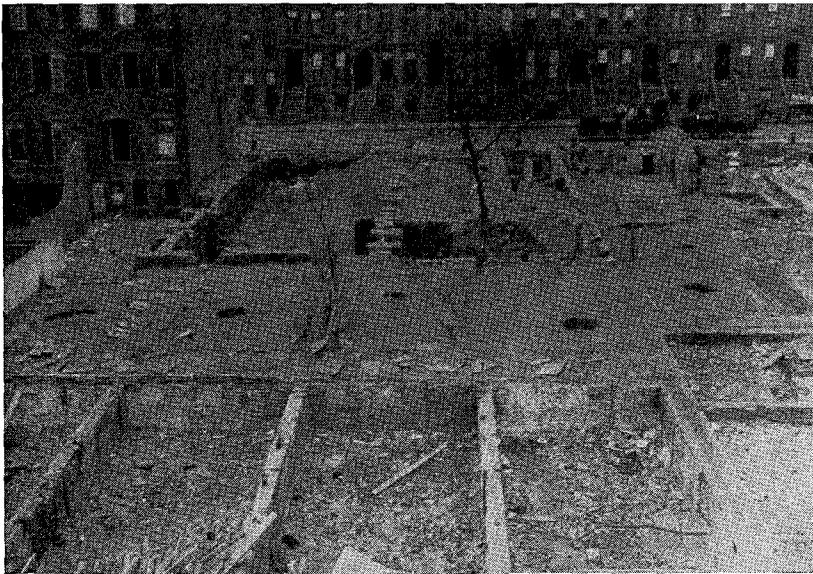
"But it was one way, the one which obviously lay most clearly open to the Founders, and, on the whole, the two experimental terms turned out much better than might have been expected. There were many large audiences. Three out of a dozen plays or so were pecuniarily successful, and that is a fair proportion as theatricals go. . . . .

"When the institution was dedicated it was formally presented to the people, a gift to the city from generous and high-minded citizens. It seems now that the gift was attached to a string. But we strongly hope that the Founders will reconsider their idea of abandoning the enterprise. There is room for it, there is need for it. If they start anew they will do well to keep clear of all entanglements with the commercial theater, to invest their director with sole authority, and let him go forward. If they can not speedily develop a dramatic literature, they can at least establish a school of acting, and reawaken the public comprehension of histrionism."

## THE YELLOW PRESS AS AN INFANTILE DISORDER

IS THE WORST OVER? Are the most reckless days of yellow journalism past? Doubtless many Americans who would gladly believe it will welcome such a profession of faith from so careful a foreign observer as Mr. Sidney Brooks. We have had to pay for this precious product of American inventiveness, but he thinks that we shall be called upon to pay less and less as the years go on. What he sees now as the price we give is "the volatility and empiricism, the hysterical restlessness and superficiality, and the incapacity for deep and serious thinking that have been noted in the American people." One thing, he tells the clientele of *The Fortnightly Review* (December), that would "have to be borne in mind if one were to attempt the interesting but very serious task of estimating the influence of the yellow press on the American mind and character," would be such scenes as the one he depicts so vividly here:

"There is no stranger or more instructive experience than to get on a subway train in New York during the hours of the evening homeward rush and watch the laborer in his overalls, the tired shop-girl, and the pallid clerk reading and re-reading Mr. Brisbane's 'leader' for the day. He has, I suppose, a wider audience than any writer or preacher has had before. Always fresh and pyrotechnical, master of the telling phrase and the captivating argument, and veiling the dexterous half-truth behind a drapery of buoyant and 'popular' philosophy and sentiment, Mr. Brisbane has every qualification that an insinuating preacher of discontent should have. He, at any rate, has made the masses think—no man more so; the leading article in his hands has lost all its stodginess and restrictions, and become a vital and all-embracing instrument."



BUT TO THIS MELANCHOLY CONSUMMATION THE IDEA COMES.

This space was cleared in the city's high-priced district for a new New Theater; but the Founders have grown weary in well-doing.

This to Mr. Brooks is one phase—the most astounding one—of a modern phenomenon that "still awaits its philosopher." Journalism, he declares, is waiting for "some one who will work out the action and reaction of the new and tremendous power of organized, ubiquitous publicity upon human life." Journalism, tho a giant, is still a very young one. "In its present form it is the product of a quick succession of astounding inventions. The railway, the cable, the telegraph, the telephone, the rotary press, the linotype, the manufacture of paper from wood-pulp, and color-printing—these are the discoveries of yesterday that have made the journal of to-day possible." Mr. Brooks sees it in this light:

"It has already, to all appearances, taken its place among the permanent social forces; we see it visibly affecting pretty nearly all we do and say and think, competing with the churches, superseding parliaments, elbowing out literature, rivaling the schools and universities, furnishing the world with a new set of nerves; yet nobody that I am aware of has yet attempted to trace out its consequences, to define its nature, functions, and principles, or to establish its place and prerogatives by the side of those other forces, religion, law, art, commerce, and so on, that, unlike journalism, infused the ancient as well as the