

"It can be taught by rational methods. The process will be this: The attention of the child is drawn to the sounds he uses in speaking. His organs of speech as well as his ears are trained. Then he learns to represent the sounds by letters. He does not learn the spelling of individual words, which call for excessive memorizing. (There are other and far better ways of practising the memory.)

"The training of the ear and of the vocal organs which is an essential part of learning the simplified spelling is of great value. It is useful in leading to clearer speech, and forms the basis of all good work in elocution and singing. It is the best preparation for learning shorthand. It affords great help in mastering the pronunciation of foreign languages. There is no doubt that the simplification of spelling would very soon lead to a great improvement in pronunciation. Slovenliness and vulgarity are fostered by the lack of a clear and constant relation between the written symbol and the spoken sound.

"One who has learned the simplified spelling will be able to read books in the 'old spelling' with little trouble. Many words are the same. In devising the simplified spelling care has been taken to make the least possible change that is consistent with efficiency. After a little practise, it would be quite easy to read the 'old spelling'; but no one would be expected to write it, and it is this which requires so much effort.

"It is easy to print. As it contains no new letters and no diacritics, existing fonts of type will serve perfectly. There is no need to effect any change in typewriters, linotype machines, etc. The alphabet used in telegraphy and in signaling will remain the same.

"It makes English the most serviceable language for intercourse within the empire and between nations. No other language offers the same combination of advantages as ours. It has a very simple grammar and a very rich vocabulary; it is the key to a grand literature. Its only serious drawback is—the spelling."

HOW TO FOUND A NATIONAL THEATER

LADY GREGORY, before leaving these shores, told a Boston audience how to start a national theater in America. She should be an expert on this subject, for she lived through the fiery ordeals of establishing the national theater of Ireland, and during her tour with the Irish players here it is said that her experiences included "two visits to a police-station, one trial in court, and one threatening letter illustrated with a black coffin." From such experiences she might perhaps earn the right to be dogmatic, but Lady Gregory offers her suggestions modestly enough, leaving, of course, the hardest problems to be thought out by the people who are courageous enough to try to start national theaters. She takes her text, so to speak, from a Detroit woman who pointed out a little square—a few trees, a few benches—and called it "a place for the people to breathe in and the birds to sing." That, she says, according to the report of her address in the Boston *Transcript*, is what a national theater should be. "It is what the Abbey Theater has become in Dublin. The poor people at the fairs come into the cheapest seats just to sit and breathe in enjoyment and new life. And there the actors and the playwrights have their chance to sing their sweetest notes." *The Transcript* does not pretend to give us Lady Gregory's words precisely as spoken, but reports them more or less conversationally. She believes in small beginnings, and doesn't point the moral of the history of the New Theater. Thus:

"It is easy to draw some rules for your national theater from the success of the little venture in Dublin. In the first place, begin in a small way. There is more chance of success in guiding the life of a baby in the cradle than of a Minerva, sprung full-armed. America might start a theater in a small way in each of many of the lesser cities. Some seem already prepared. There should be one center for each district: Chicago for the Middle West, Boston for New England, Richmond for the South Atlantic Coast. The plays to be acted should be limited to products of that district. In New York there should be a small theater to which each of these companies would come once a year for a season of eight weeks. Then a foreigner landing in

New York at any time would find representations of the latent drama of America.

"The success of the whole venture must depend on its limitations. For limitations have fostered, not hindered, the Abbey Theater. Limit your theater to find its plays and playwrights and actors in a single district and it will have to develop that district in order to prosper. That is exactly what made the success of the Irish movement. The jealousy of the other theaters of Dublin forced the company to take out a license for Irish plays only or for plays by Irishmen. Thus it was forced to develop and teach every dramatist who came to it with his plays, and thus it built up the writers that have made its fame.

"One rule of your theater should be to take plays not for the moment, but with a view to a permanent place in your repertory. By this you will not only raise your standard and the standards of your playwrights, but you will lay a firm foundation for the future. Another rule—adopted unconsciously perhaps in Dublin—is to act a few plays of a very high religious and artistic standard! such plays as Synge's and Mr. Yeats's and Mr. Hyde's 'Nativity.' They are a constant check on your choice of other plays. For you can not put beside them in the same repertory, not to mention the same bill, anything that is common or vulgar.

"Another limitation that will benefit you is the limitation of resources; for that means limitation of expense. So often nowadays it is the extreme cost that is supposed to be necessary in the commercial theater when a poetic play is put on that prevents the production of many such pieces. The Abbey Theater has been forced to keep its expenses so low that there has never been a question of whether mounting a particular play was impossible from a financial point of view. Each had to take what it could get. The cost of the scenery for 'The Well of the Saints,' for instance, was thirty-five dollars. One of Mr. Yeats's pieces cost as much as forty. And from such limitations, such forced simplicity, it seems possible to draw quite as satisfactory results.

"Finally, you need tremendous patience in building up an audience for your plays. Lady Gregory tells how in the early days of the Abbey Theater she used to leave the stage-door and go round by the front to reach the auditorium so that the meager little audience would think another lady in evening dress had arrived.

"All this means self-sacrifice. You can't take up the theater as an amusement. Every one in it—and that is one of its beauties—is working for some one else, the actor for the playwright, the scene-painter for the actor. In the old days a human life was buried under the foundation-stone of every great temple, every momentous undertaking. The vitality of that soul was thought to leap up into the material structure. And sometimes it is that way nowadays. To every enterprise some one gives his life."

It was not unnatural that Puritan New England should ask whether it is worth while to give one's life to the theater. The question surprised the Irish visitors, who in Dublin "have taken their part in the battle for ideas." By this battle "Ireland is able to claim kin with the intellectual nations of the world." We read further:

"Of course you will say that Ireland had a great storehouse of legend, of nationalism, of emotion, to draw upon, that you do not have here. But America has the time that is to come. Here there is something calling in the future—the welding of the nations into one great nation. Natural selection may do it, or a great war. Or it may be literature, perhaps drama. The natural expression of America should be drama just as it was Ireland's. For, like Ireland, America is a land of talkers, and drama is only conversation chopped up.

"There is one serious question that must confront you in starting a national theater in America, continued Lady Gregory, and that the question of censorship. In England we have only one censor and generally a bad one. There is at any rate one advantage in this. You can always tell just what he will throw out. It may be from personal reasons, as with 'Blanco' and Mr. Shaw, or it may be from a natural suspicion of ideas. But at any rate he is that far dependable. Our playwrights can 'size him up.' And Lady Gregory laughed; for she has acquired an intimacy with slang in her months in America. The American censor seems more hydra-headed. Whether this is good or not, whether a censor is needed at all, is not clear; but it is something which you must consider, something that you will surely encounter if you start a national theater."



GOLGOTHA DRAMATIZED

A PLAY WHICH is said to have been sent in its printed form to every king and ruler in Christendom was produced a few days ago on the stage of the Little Theater, New York, and found to be a document in the interests of universal peace. It is called "The Terrible Meek," and it closes with a tableau of the crucifixion which, the press report, left the audience "stunned and dazed" at the end of the performance. Mr. Charles Rann Kennedy, who wrote "The Servant in the House," is the author of this play, but the dramatic reviewer for the *New York Times* asserts that "not what the author wrote was responsible for the effect produced so much as an idea, a reverence, a feeling of awe which has been centuries a-growing." The "sudden disclosure of the three gibbeted figures, stark against an expansive blue, with the mother bowed and weeping at the foot of the cross, came as a terrible shock." Women put on their hats and wraps without a word, it is further reported, and the men in the audience, if they talked at all, did so in whispers and muffled tones. There was no applause.

The effect, for the first audience at least, was a double shock, for the piece—a one-act play—had been played in darkness so that the exact character and identity of the people concerned were not obvious. Their speech was the speech of to-day; and their ideas, if not also of to-day, had but little reference to definite time. *The Times'* review of "The Terrible Meek" discloses this:

"Mr. Kennedy seeks, in a sense, to bring the story of Gethsemane [Golgotha?] down to the present day. His three characters, seen only in occasional streams of light dripping on an inky stage, are British moderns, with Bow Bells trimmings to their speech. One is a peasant woman, the other an army captain, and the third a common soldier. Only when the fog is lifted do you see them as the people of the ancient story, the *Woman* in Eastern garb, the *Captain* a centurion, and the *Soldier* a Roman legionary. In the mean time each has harped upon the deed of blood in gloomy gruesome tones, for even the soldiers regret it, tho they have at least the excuse of a duty to be done. But fresh ideas have begun to quicken into life in the *Captain's* mind, and even the *Woman* begins to understand. From mourning for her dead boy up there on the cross she is made to turn her thoughts to the meaning of his life and death—if death it may be called. Only the common *Soldier* can not comprehend. When he comes with orders for another execution and the *Captain* refuses to obey, his dull mind will not readily grasp the meaning of it.

"In the mean time there has been much talk of empires built on blood and hints of universal peace. That much of this reads well in the printed page there can be no doubt. That it has the inspired fervor which will make it moving to the rulers of the earth, to whom, it is said, bound copies have been sent, may

well be doubted. That it is long drawn out and not always clear, as delivered on the stage, is certain.

"But pictorially it is quite effective. The curtain rises on utter darkness. The wailing of a woman is heard, the wind howls, there is a confused clamor of voices. And then the *Captain* and the *Soldier* begin to talk.

"The play contains some very modern language, a grotesque means to the end Mr. Kennedy is seeking. He does, indeed, bridge the years, make it all seem so near and familiar as to be doubly sad and terrifying.

"And now the *Soldier*, who does not like his part in the execution, seeks to absolve himself from blame by speaking of his orders and the duty to obey them.

The *Captain* confesses that he is beginning to wonder just what duty is. And now, rather late in the day, they are asking what had the man done to warrant such an awful fate. The *Soldier* knows only that 'some log-faced old jossers' hadn't liked what he said, had always kept after him until the magistrate had found him guilty. All these, too, had done their duty.

"Now the gloom is pierced by a ray of light and the *Woman's* face—'one pale agony'—is seen. She tells how she had borne him, nursed him, fended him, and brought him up. That was thirty-three years ago. And now he's dead—'hung up in the air like a slaughtered beast.' The *Captain* begs the *Woman* to forgive him for his part in the tragedy, and comforts her with the thought that this dead son of hers, 'disfigured, shamed, spat upon, has built a kingdom that can never die. . . . The earth is his. The meek, the terrible meek, the fierce agonizing meek are about



Photograph by Alice Boughton,

THE MOTHER,

As played by Edith Wynne Matthison in Charles Rann Kennedy's "The Terrible Meek," which voices "the common battle-cry of thousands of social reformers in and out of the Church."

to enter upon their inheritance."

Mr. Warren of *The Tribune* (New York) avers that the play can not escape criticism, but "probably its author and its manager never expected to escape criticism." *The Sun's* reviewer finds it "difficult to speak temperately of the impertinent banality" of the piece, which, he declares, "was enrolled to rout taste and beauty; and judgment had no chance to assert itself except on the part of the spectators." Mr. Warren "takes exception" on dramatic and not on religious grounds, saying:

"Grant that 'The Terrible Meek' is successful, it succeeds not alone by the superb work of Sidney Valentine, the exquisitely beautiful work of Edith Wynne Matthison, and the admirably realistic Tommy-Atkins-Ortheris-like work of Reginald Barlow, but by the theatrical trick of keeping the auditorium and the stage in darkness, and the theatrical trick of making the three characters twentieth-century Britons until the stage is lighted in the final instant. The *Captain* appealed to God. But to what God did the Roman centurion appeal? There has been twentieth-century talk, and a presentation of twentieth-century thought. The lights are up. You see you have been tricked. These persons are two Romans and an Eastern woman of the year 33 A.D. The thing would not have borne the light. Viewed by the light it is not a play, but a preaching packed with anachronisms. Heard in the darkness it is an eloquent disserta-