ENGLISH AND AMERICAN NEW COMEDY...

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THE ENGLISH AND AMERICAN NEW COMEDY:
ITS ANCESTORY, AIMS, AND TENDENCIES

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Before we can come on any common ground of understanding to an analysis of the new comedy, there are certain terms that we must define and agree upon. First we must formulate a definition of the word "comedy", and of the various manifestations of it which come under the general head. Also, we must limit in time the new comedy which is to receive our special attention. The term "comedy" has been used, as we shall see later, to cover a multitude of forms, from slap-stick to tragi-comedy, and it will be necessary for our purposes to exclude some of the extreme cases, in order to keep our discussion within the scope of so brief a treatment as is to be undertaken in this paper.

It will be well to investigate some of the theories which have been advanced regarding the field and purposes of comic-drama. Almost inevitably, it seems, any discussion of literature goes back to the dicta of Aristotle as a point of departure. In our case there is little of fundamental criticism in Aristotle, but there are certain scattered statements that throw light on the ancient conception of the comic.

Miss Mary A. Grant, in her work, The Ancient Rhetorical Theories of the Laughable, says of Aristotle's writings: "A theory of the laughable is not definitely formulated, but
there are suggestions which later find an important place in the theory, such as the necessity of relaxation and laughter as a preparation for various pursuits, avoidance of excess in laughter, condemnation of laughter directed at the unfortunate, necessity for the reformer to be free from serious faults himself.\(^1\)

In the fifth chapter of The Poetics Aristotle gives the following definition: "Comedy is an imitation of characters of a lower type, --not, however, in the full sense of the word bad, the Ludicrous being merely a subdivision of the ugly. It consists in some defect or ugliness which is not painful or destructive."\(^2\) By this it will be seen that the sense of pleasure connected with comedy was for Aristotle based upon the idea of disproportion. But pleasure was not always to be confined to the laughable. Quoting Dr. Lane Cooper:

At the beginning of the chapter [Rhetoric, i; ii.] Aristotle defines pleasure as "a certain motion of the soul, and a settling, sudden and perceptible, into one's normal and natural state." Further on he says: "Wonder and learning, too, are generally pleasant; wonder, because it involves the desire to learn, and hence the wonderful is an object of desire; and learning, because it involves a settling into one's natural state."\(^3\)

So learning and wonder, as well as laughter, went to make up the pleasure of comedy.

With Aristotle the idea of catharsis was involved in

\(^{1}\) Lane Cooper, An Aristotelian Theory of Comedy, p. 99.


\(^{3}\) Cooper, op. cit., p. 62.
any literary form. This catharsis, or purging of the emotions, found its place in comedy in "the use ... of dramatic suspense, and from the arousal and defeat of our expectations in various ways." But the suspense and the surprise in comedy differed from that in tragedy in "the seriousness or triviality of the incidents, and ... the misery or joy of the event." In the eyes of Aristotle, comedy, like all poetry, owed its being to two causes: man's natural habit of imitation, and the fact that men derive pleasure from witnessing imitation.

Dr. Cooper, in a careful and exhaustive study of the Aristotelian idea of comedy, gives this statement by way of generalization:

Whether simple or compound, the effect of comedy for Aristotle would be the pleasure aroused by the right means in the right sort of spectator. His ideal spectator is the mature man of sound reason and correct sentiment; not necessarily an expert, but at all events a man of taste and culture.

The spectator beholds in comedy an imitation of men in action. He perceives a resemblance between the comedy and real life ... His inference gives him pleasure, for all learning is pleasant, since it is a satisfaction of the universal desire of man to know.

Accepting this interpretation, the Aristotelian theory of the comic drama was, then, something which gave pleasure by the imitation of men in action. Naturally this generality

was bound up by restrictions of form, regarding the chorus, parabasis, and the unity of action, which are not of special interest to us; but the main idea of the comic is well worth remembering, keeping in mind that pleasure, as used here, means not only that manifested in laughter, but also that caused by learning or wonder.

In the fourth century A.D., Aelius Donatus in his De Comoedia et Tragoedia gave this interpretation of comedy: "a story treating of various habits and customs of public and private affairs from which one may learn what is of use in life on the one hand, and what must be avoided on the other." And further on: "Comedy, indeed, comprises action and speech, since it is verse based upon a representation of life and an imitation of customs." It will be readily seen that this is much the same idea as that of Aristotle, with a little more stress upon the aspect of learning in connection with the comic, and a neglect of the element of laughter.

The reverse is true in the statement of John Tzetzes, a Byzantine critic of the twelfth century, who is quoted by Cooper as saying:

Comedy is an imitation of an action [that is ridiculous] . . . purgative of emotions, constructive of life, moulded by laughter and pleasure. Tragedy differs from comedy in that tragedy has a story, and a report of things [or deeds] that are past, although it represents them as taking place in the present, but comedy embraces fictions

8 B.H. Clark, European Theories of the Drama, P. 43.
9 Loc. cit.
of the affairs of everyday life; and in that the aim of tragedy is to move the hearers to lamentation, while the aim of comedy is to move them to laughter.  

Here we see the purpose of causing laughter to be the prime aim of comedy; the elements of learning and wonder are disregarded. The statement that comedy "embraces fictions of the affairs of everyday life" is a further departure from the Aristotelian concept, for, while Aristotle maintained that comedy was an imitation of men in action, he did not limit the action to the common occurrences of contemporary time. He could not have done so with examples like The Frogs, by Aristophanes, before him. 

Dante, in the early years of the fourteenth century, set forth in his Epistle to Can Grande the distinction that is so frequently given between comedy and tragedy: "It [comedy] differeth from tragedy in its subject matter,--in this way, that tragedy in its beginning is admirable and quiet, in its ending or catastrophe foul and horrible. . . . Comedy, indeed, beginneth with some adverse circumstances, but its theme hath a happy termination,"  

About the middle of the sixteenth century appeared Lodivico Castelvetro's Opere Varie Critiche, in which he

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10 Cooper, op. cit., p. 278
11 Clark, op. cit., p. 47
in which he makes the following comments upon the parts and functions of comedy:

The function of comedy is the being moved by pleasing things appealing to the sentiments or the imagination. Comedy has to do with human turpitude, either of mind or of body; but if of the mind, arising from folly, not from vice; if of the body, a turpitude neither painful nor harmful.

The greatest source of the comic is deception, either through folly, drunkenness, a dream, or delirium; or through ignorance of the arts, the sciences, and one's own powers; or through the novelty of the good being turned in a wrong direction or of the engineer hoist with his own petard; or through deceits fashioned by man or by fortune.

Its plot comprises only actions possible to happen, those which have actually happened having no place in it at all.

The private action of a private citizen is the subject of comedy, as the actions of kings are the subject of tragedy.\textsuperscript{12}

Much of this is, of course, Aristotle again, but the statement that action which has actually happened has no place in comedy, for which Castelvetro is indebted to Tzetzes, is worth special note for its definiteness in the restating of the older formula.

It is not till Tirso de Molina's \textit{Cigarrales de Toledo} (1624) that we get the first critical break from the unities of time, place, and action which had governed all dramatic forms virtually from the beginning, because of misinterpretation of Aristotle. Tirso points out the difficulties of conforming to the twenty-four hour space of time allotted for the working of a dramatic plot, and shows how the

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., p. 66
following of it can, on occasions, lead to absurdity:

What if these Masters [the classic scholars] did maintain that a play must represent an action which could logically take place within twenty-four hours? What greater inconvenience can there be than that within that short a time a discreet gallant should fall in love with a prudent lady, court her, make love to her, woo her -- all within a single day, if you please, and after claiming her for the morrow, must needs marry her that very night? What opportunity is there to rouse jealousy, engender despair, bring hope to the lover, and depict all the other uncertainties and accidents without which love is a matter of no importance?

Here we get the advocacy of greater liberty for the playwright in the working out of his plot, and a sign of the dawning of a freer comedy. Shakespeare, of course, among others, had already disregarded the unities in the actual writing of plays, but criticism had not recognized the practice.

With Ben Jonson a new theory of the purpose of comedy is brought out: that of reform. Reform had been practiced before, in the satire of Menander and Terence, but Jonson seems to be the first to maintain that comedy in its true sense should satirize and correct. Jonson also marked the reaction to romanticism and supported the strict adherence to classic rules. Realism and the affairs of everyday constituted for Jonson the subject matter of comedy, as it had done for Menander and Terence.14

Molière held somewhat the same views as regards the purpose of comedy, but with less strict conformity to

13 Ibid., p. 94.
14 Ashley H. Thorndike, English Comedy, p. 168-172.
classicism. In the preface to Tartuffe he defines comedy as "nothing more than an agreeable poem which, by agreeable lessons, takes man to task for his defects." He further states in the same preface:

... we have seen that the stage possesses a great virtue as a corrective medium. The most beautiful passages in a serious moral are most frequently less powerful than those of a satire; and nothing admonishes the majority of people better than the portrayal of their faults. To expose vices to the ridicule of all the world is a severe blow to them. Reprehensions are easily suffered, but not so ridicule. People do not mind being wicked; but they object to being made ridiculous.

Comedy, then, as Molière saw it, was an ironic method of education and a scourging of humanity for man's defects as an individual. This conception marks a new departure from that of Aristotle and the other ancients, who, while they recognized the element of learning in connection with the comic, stressed the purpose of amusement. The basic elements as seen by Molière and Aristotle are the same, but their order is reversed.

As we come again to the English writers who are our chief concern in this paper, a few of the opinions of John Dryden must merit some consideration. In his essay, On Comedy, Farce, and Tragedy, he distinguishes between comedy and farce in this manner:

Comedy consists, though of low persons, yet of natural

16 Clark, op. cit., p. 152.
17 Henderson, op. cit., p. 15.
actions and characters; I mean such humors, adventures, and designs, as are to be found and met with in the world. Farce, on the other side, consists of forced humors and unnatural events. Comedy presents us with the imperfections of human nature: Farce entertains us with what is monstrous and chimerical. The one causes laughter in those who can judge of men and manners, by the lively representation of their folly or corruption; the other produces the same effect in those who can judge of neither, and that only by its extravagancies.

And he further states: "...the first end of Comedy is delight, and instruction only the second." Thus it is seen that he goes back to the ancients and reverses the principles of Molière. In other words, the stress with Dryden is laid upon the emotional aspect, while with Molière it is upon the intellectual. This attention to the emotion rather than to the intellect has been noted by Palmer and Meredith as the primal point of departure of English comedy from the French.

In the Restoration period we get this definition from George Farquhar in his *Discourse upon Comedy*: "Comedy is no more at present than a well framed tale handsomely told as an agreeable vehicle for counsel or reproof." Farquhar has, of course, merely restated Molière's theory, but it is rather questionable if much of the Restoration comedy really devoted its time or effort to "counsel or reproof." In Archer’s expression of the aims of the Restoration comedy we get, I

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19 Ibid., p. 83.
21 Clark, *op. cit.*, p. 221.
believe, a very fair view of the theories involved:

Continuous merriment, ranging from the giggle to the guffaw, was the one thing aimed at -- the effect, in a word, which we of today demand, not from comedy, but from farce. The smile of intellectual recognition was systematically postponed to the laughter evoked by gross absurdity. There was, no doubt, a certain appeal to nature, but it was to nature deliberately and systematically denaturalized.  

Samuel Johnson, in The Rambler Papers, number 125, turns in his idea of comedy to the object of pure amusement, or the invoking of laughter, but he raises the standards of comic subject matter a little:

... any man's reflection will inform him, that every dramatic composition which raises mirth, is comic; and that, to raise mirth, it is by no means universally necessary that the personages should be either mean or corrupt, nor always requisite that the action should be trivial, nor ever that it should be fictitious.  

Hereetofore we have noted nothing that did not suppose the necessity of a fictitious plot, nor even a theory which implied the treatment of characters not of a low order, though the practice of several playwrights, Molière, Shakespeare, and the Restoration comedians in particular, had ignored the ideas of the ancients in this respect.

The advent, with Steele and others, of the dramatic form known as sentimental comedy, necessitated either a revision of the laws of comedy or the exclusion of that particular type from the realm of the comic. Quite often the latter practice has been followed, especially in the cases of the more pronounced manifestations of sentimentality.

22 William Archer, The Old Drama and the New, p. 201.
23 Clark, op. cit., p. 231.
Whether we accept comedy as purely intellectual, as with Molière, or as playing upon the emotions or humors, as with Jonson and the Restoration school, there has been always the object of presenting the follies of man. This the sentimental comedy did not do. Goldsmith, in his *Essay on the Theatre*, gives this analysis of sentimental comedy, after pointing to the past practice of "rendering folly and vice ridiculous:"

Yet notwithstanding this weight of authority, and the universal practice of former ages, a new species of dramatic composition has been introduced, under the name of sentimental comedy, in which the virtues of private life are exhibited, rather than the faults exposed; and the distresses rather than the faults of mankind make our interest in the piece. These comedies have had of late great success, perhaps from their novelty, and also from their flattering every man in his favorite foible. In these plays almost all the characters are good, and exceedingly generous; they are lavish enough of their tin money on the stage; and though they want humor, have an abundance of sentiment and feeling. If they happen to have faults or foibles, the spectator is taught, not only to pardon, but to applaud them, in consideration of the goodness of their hearts; so that folly, instead of being ridiculed, is commended, and the comedy aims at touching our passions without the power of being truly pathetic.24

The picture is indeed unfavorable, but it does show the tendency of the form, that of instilling pity for the characters in the hearts of the audience. Goldsmith's verdict met with some approval, and many critics have agreed to look upon the sentimental comedy with the eyes of Goldsmith, as a "species of bastard tragedy" rather than as comedy.

In the modern age critics have devoted, apparently, less time to a definition of comedy or of drama than to

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The tracing of differences between the new and the old. They seem to be either satisfied with the definitions previously advanced or to have recognized the difficulty of fitting the examples of any species of drama to a strict definition. Archer, however, has set down what he considers the two basic and essential elements of all drama: imitation and passion. By the term passion, he says, he means "the exaggerated, intensified ... expression of feeling." The modern drama, including comedy, he calls a purely imitative form; imitative, that is, of modern life, and excluding rhetorical and lyrical bursts of emotion. But, while helpful in an understanding of the foundation of comedy, this criticism gives us virtually no light on what comedy really is.

Dickinson has made a little different distinction between comedy and serious drama than that which is usually made:

In serious plays some course of action is presumed to have a binding effect upon the fortunes of the characters, an effect they cannot escape on account of a fusing of external circumstance with internal character. In comedy this course of action is shown to have only a temporary effect. The relationship between the internal and the external is flexible and subject to adjustment without pain.

There is a hint here of the Aristotelian idea of the triviality of comic incidents as opposed to the vitality of the events of tragedy, but the conception of an action as having

\[25\text{Archer, op. cit., p. 4-5-}\]
either a permanent or temporary effect is a little different matter. It leaves, however, just as wide a possibility of disagreement on whether the incidents do or do not create a permanent effect.

Closely bound up with the purpose of comedy is the question of what constitutes humor, or what is laughable, and why. Hobbes, in his Discourse on Human Nature, defines laughter as: "nothing else but a sudden glory arising from a sudden conception of some eminency in ourselves, by comparison with the infirmity of others, or with our own formerly." Kant gives this definition in the Critique of Judgment: "Laughter is an affectation arising from the sudden transformation of a strained expectation into nothing." Perry states that "these two theories in variation make up the history of comic philosophy."

In his essay, Laughter, Henri Bergson gives three points which he considers essential to the creation of laughter: "The comic does not exist outside the pale of what is strictly human;" laughter denotes "the absence of feeling; laughter is a characteristic of a group, not of an isolated individual." He also says that the comic is accidental: that is, laughter is produced by external circumstances, not

27 H. T. E. Perry, The Comic Spirit in Restoration Drama, p. 28
28 Loc. cit.
29 Loc. cit.
30 Henri Bergson, Laughter, p. 3-8.
by any integral quality of the individual. In his conclusion Bergson looks upon laughter as "above all, a corrective. Being intended to humiliate, it must make a painful impression on the person against whom it is directed. By laughter, society avenges itself for the liberties taken with it. It would fail in its object if it bore the stamp of sympathy or kindness." He further elucidates this point:

To be certain of always hitting the mark, it would have to proceed from an act of reflection. Now laughter is simply the result of a mechanism set up in us by nature or, what is almost the same thing, by our long acquaintance with social life. It goes off spontaneously and returns tit for tat. It has no time to look where it hits. ... In this sense laughter cannot be absolutely just, nor should it be kind-hearted either. Its function is to intimidate by humiliating.

It will be seen at once that Bergson's conception of the laughable is purely intellectual. The emotion has no place in it. It might almost be said to be a statement of Molière's view of the comic, for the same idea, that of the corrective power of laughter, enters into both. If Perry is right in asserting that the two definitions of laughter previously given -- those of Hobbes and Kant -- "make up the history of comic philosophy," Bergson's theory would have to come under that of Hobbes, or the "sudden glory" idea. The conception, of necessity, includes an element of scorn, a placing of the laughers on a higher plane (in his own mind) than the person laughed at.

31 Ibid., p. 10.
32 Ibid., p. 197.
33 Ibid., p. 197-198.
Quite different is the view taken by Max Eastman in his work, *The Sense of Humor*. He dismisses all such manifestations as scorn, sneering, cynicism, derision, sarcasm, and the like, from his discussion of laughter. He says:

> To unleash an eye-tooth and emit short breaths or ha-ha's against a man's presence, is as far from laughter as the fangs of a canine animal are from his tail. It is therefore upon good biological and bodily grounds, as well as upon grounds of feeling, that we dismiss from the topic of laughter at the outset the topic of scorn.34

He makes the sense of humor "a distinct hereditary emotional endowment,"35 and by so doing again puts himself at odds with Bergson, who stated that laughter presupposes an "absence of feeling." But Eastman's definition fits in with the theory of Kant even more than Bergson's does with that of Hobbes. Note this passage from Eastman:

> ... in every case in which a man laughs humorously there is an element which, if his sensitivity were sufficiently exaggerated, would contain the possibility of tears. He is a man who has suffered or failed of something. And although in the humor of art he usually arrives at something else, and that often better than he expected, in the humor of every-day life he often arrives nowhere at all. And the true agility of his comic sense is proven, not in the cleverness with which he detects the point of pleasure in the jocular confection, but in the alert twinkle of welcome with which he greets any genuine and definite void appearing where a pleasure was expected.36

Defeated expectation, then, is the keynote of humor for Eastman as for Kant, and we come back to Perry's classification of the theories of laughter under two heads, which

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35 Ibid., p. 236.
36 Ibid., p. 21.
for clearness may be stated in this way: first, laughter is caused by a sense of intellectual superiority; second, laughter is caused by the defeat of an expectation. Which of these theories is more nearly correct is not our particular concern; both, undoubtedly possess points of merit, and the matter actually hinges on whether or not one considers laughter an emotional manifestation. As the solution of the problem is a matter for the psychologist, not for the student of the drama, we cannot consider it except in its relation to the comic in dramatic art.

John B. Moore says: "There are comic plays in which the purpose of chastening certain individuals out of their disagreeable peculiarities, of making fun of them, is clearly the first consideration of the author. There are comic plays in which the sudden laughter as clearly rises from nothing more purposeful than high spirits." In the first instance the theory of laughter governing the play is that of intellectual superiority. To the class of such comedies belong the comedy of manners, or that form which satirizes social groups, and the comedy of ideas, which through the use of satire drives home an opinion or a theory. Any laughter which arises from satire must necessarily belong to the first class, for it is intellectual, not emotional. Among the writers of plays utilizing this form of laughter, as we shall see later, are Menander, Terence, Molière, Jonson,

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the Restoration comedians, and the writers of the present day.

In the second instance cited by Moore -- comedies in which laughter "rises from nothing more purposeful than high spirits" -- the theory of laughter is that of the defeated expectation, or the emotional conception. As the primary examples of this class we have the romantic comedy, which appeals to the emotion of joy and the spirit of adventure, and the sentimental comedy, which appeals to the emotion of pity. Shakespeare is, of course, the chief representative of the romantic variety, while the writers of the eighteenth and the first half of the nineteenth centuries, ruling out Goldsmith and Sheridan, show the principal manifestations of the sentimental. We shall see, however, that in the modern period Sir James Barrie shows a return to both the romantic and sentimental conceptions.

We have now examined some of the most important opinions of the comic, and of laughter, that go to make up the comic art. It remains to formulate a definition of comedy from the material we have. If we accept the idea of Palmer and Meredith, that the only pure comedy is the comedy of manners, or criticism, and that the test of true comedy is that it awakens "thoughtful laughter," we must rule out the romantic and the sentimental comedies, leaving only the comedies of manners or of ideas; in fact, if we followed the

38 Palmer, op. cit., p. 59-64; Meredith, op. cit., p. 141.
precepts of these men we should have only the comedy of
Molière remaining, for their contention is that the English-
man, because he is emotional and cannot think of any subject
in a detached manner, cannot write pure comedy.39

Such a dictum is obviously one-sided. These men have
taken the definitions of laughter given by Hobbes and Berg­
son to be the only correct definitions, holding to the abso­
lute exclusion of the emotion from laughter, and so from
comic drama. They have seized upon the universally accepted
fact that Molière wrote the best comedy the world has seen,
and inferred that he wrote the only comedy. They do concede
that Englishmen, like Congreve, have "accidentally" produced
some pure comedy on rare occasions, but even Palmer says
that it was not understood by the English.40

We cannot be held here to any such hard rule as that of
Palmer or Meredith, nor can we merely say that comedy is an
imitation of actual life. To be sure it is an imitation of
actual life, and at one time in the history of the drama that
definition would have been enough; but with the advent of the
realistic tragedy like that of Ibsen, Brieux, Hauptmann,
Gorky, O'Neil, and others, tragedy has also become an imi­
tation of actual life instead of the elevated and majestic
thing it was formerly. However, the truth of the statement
that comedy, as well as the realistic modern tragedy, does

39 Palmer, op. cit., p. 17-18; 58-64; Meredith, op. cit.,
p. 86-87.
imitate incidents in the life of actual characters is pretty well founded, and it serves to eliminate from the field of comedy another form of humorous drama, farce; for farce is unnatural. It depends upon unnatural characters in natural situations, or natural characters in unnatural situations, or a combination of both characters and situations which are not normal. As Dickinson says: "... farce deals with the incongruity between logic and life," and in so dealing it cannot represent life.

But we still do not have a definition of comedy, though we have one of its essentials. We shall have to recognize two types of comedy, the intellectual and the emotional, and in order to include both forms let us say, as an arbitrary definition, that a comedy is any drama which presents an imitation of a phase of actual life, and which does not create in the mind of the audience a sense of sorrow or grief. We cannot merely say that it creates a sensation of pleasure, for we know that temporary sorrow very frequently brings about a sense of pleasure through release. By far the majority of tragedies cause pleasure in this way, but the pleasure derived from them comes by means of a catharsis, or purging of the emotions, through sorrow, or even horror.

On the surface this definition appears to be a disguise of the "happy ending" idea, but it is not. It includes the happy ending, as a comic device, but by no means requires it.

41 Dickinson, op. cit., p. 13
Whether or not the ending is of the "and-so-they-lived-happily-ever-after" variety, if the general effect of the play is such that the spectator does not feel grief, the play is a comedy. Take the example of Shaw's *Candida*. The ending is far from being cheerful: the character in whom the audience is most interested, Marchbanks, has failed to realize his desires, but does the audience feel grief at his failure? If so the play is not a comedy, but those who understand the motive of the play know that the poet is destined for greater happiness than the realization of his immediate desires would have brought him, and in such knowledge there can be no sorrow. Again, look at Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World*. Here the play ends with the breaking off of the promised marriage of Christy and Pegeen, though the affair was never the chief concern of the play, so there most certainly cannot be the conventionalized happy conclusion, but no sorrow accompanies the knowledge that Pegeen has lost her "playboy".

So the definition which we have set up is even more inclusive than that of the "happy ending". But how does it fit the various classes that are looked upon as comedy? Some will say that it excludes the sentimental comedy, for that form uses pity as an important reagent in its compound, and pity is conducive to sorrow. As a matter of fact the definition does exclude some of the more drastic examples of the sentimental comedy, but pity does not always lead to sorrow. It leads to sympathy, and a kindly attitude toward the object
pities, but not necessarily to a welling up of the emotion of grief. One need only reflect a moment to be aware that the thought of some object of his pity does not of necessity cause him to feel any surge of sorrow, or a desire to put his handkerchief to his eyes. But sometimes pity is attended by grief, and when it is, it is not a subject of comedy. The test, then, of any sentimental play, in determining whether or not it is comedy, is to decide if the pity stirred up in the mind of the spectator is sufficient to produce sorrow. If not, the play is comedy. An examination of The Conscious Lovers by Steele; The West Indian by Cumberland, or False Delicacy by Kelly, should serve to show that sentimental comedy is not ruled out by our definition.

Again, some may wonder whether Shakespeare has not been eliminated by the requirement that comedy must imitate life. There is a feeling that Shakespeare's comedy characters are above the plane of the ordinary, more or less demi-gods and goddesses, as it were. Where the idea arises I am unable to say, unless it is because his characters speak in verse. Poetry does have the effect of throwing the reader off the scent and giving him the impression that he is dealing with a superior being. But what is there in the characters of Orlando, Rosalind, Claudio, Viola, and hosts of others of their like, that is beyond or below the common level of humanity? A much more plausible reason for excluding the comedies of Shakespeare is that they frequently border on farce, not because of the characters, but because of the
action. The Comedy of Errors, indeed, does require to be relegated to farce, and A Midsummer Night's Dream is unquestionably a fantasy, and by the use of the supernatural puts itself out of the field covered by the definition we are examining. But what of Twelfth Night, As You Like It, Much Ado About Nothing, and Merry Wives of Windsor? If you think the situations are too strained to be called scenes from life, accepting, of course, the less exacting taste of the audiences of the day, you may exclude them from comedy under our criterion; if you do not consider them so, as I do not, they are comedy. One signal weakness of our definition is readily seen: it is not rigid, but admits of varied interpretations in the hands of different persons, depending upon the individual's conception of what actual life is, and his idea of the depth and force of the emotion of sorrow or grief.

This fault is more noticeable still when we consider such a form as the tragi-comedy, in which pathos and humor are blended, and set off one another. If the individual is emotional he will experience, from witnessing most of such plays, a feeling of sorrow; if he is unemotional he probably will not. Tragi-comedy is at best a form extremely difficult of classification; and because pathos plays a prominent part in all of it -- more than in any comedy, so called -- we will devote no time to it in this paper. We are dealing with comedy and we will have quite enough to occupy our attention if we confine ourselves to what is rather generally accepted as comedy. We should have considerable difficulty in finding
an example of the tragi-comedy which would not involve a protest on the part of someone if we referred to it as comic drama. Irving played *The Merchant of Venice* as a tragedy; Shaw calls *Coriolanus* Shakespeare's greatest comedy. Reflect upon those views of plays which are usually recognized as the opposite of what these men consider them; then try to classify *A Doll's House*, and you will agree that we are wise to omit tragi-comedy from our discussion.

When we come to the comedy of criticism, which includes the comedy of manners and the comedy of ideas -- both involve criticism of a social group or practice -- there is little question that our definition fits. If one criticizes any aspect of life, he of necessity deals with people and situations which are natural, and a part of the scheme of things. The second clause of our definition serves to separate the plays of that type into the two major classifications of comedy or tragedy.

On the whole I know of no formula which will suit our ends better than the one stated. It will at least answer the purpose for which definitions are usually given: that of placing us on a plane of agreement when we tackle the aspects of contemporary drama.

Comedy, then, for the course of this paper, at any rate, presents an imitation of life without stirring the emotions of sorrow or grief. Romantic comedy is that comedy which

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plays upon the emotion of joy, and the spirit of adventure -- in a word, that which presents an idealistic conception of life. Sentimental comedy is that form which appeals to pity and sympathy. The comedy of manners criticizes some social group or practice, with the purpose of reform. The comedy of ideas introduces a theory or principle of life, and presents a problem.

Accepting these definitions, let us get, with as much dispatch as possible, to the object of our discussion -- the new comedy.

The question of what we mean by the new comedy must, however, first be answered, and we must trace a little of the history of the forms preceding it, so that we may have some basis for our judgments. Reserving the analysis of the peculiar properties of what we call the new comedy for a later chapter, suffice it to say now that it is the comedy which has flourished since the rebirth of the drama with Ibsen, and that, roughly speaking, it had its origin in the last fifteen years of the nineteenth century. The reasons for so dating it should be sufficiently clear when we have observed the very brief, and in many respects insufficient, history of comic drama which is the purpose of the following chapter. It must be brief to conform with the scope of this discussion, and so inadequate in many respects, but I hope, it will suffice to show the main principles influencing the leading writers of comedy, and prepare us for a consideration of the work of the moderns -- the new comedy.
A HISTORY OF COMIC PRINCIPLES AND
THE RISE OF THE NEW COMEDY

Having endeavored by definition to make a dignified thing of comedy, we find as we look back upon the principles, or at least practices, that have marked the comic author in past ages that only in comparatively rare instances has the product graced by the appellation "comedy" achieved the qualities ascribed to it by classical minds. While we may say that comedy embraces character development and the portraiture of true humanity in human circumstances, excluding the artificially ridiculous, we are confronted with whole periods of literature in which the dramatic work conveniently labeled "comedy" depended for its appeal upon the use of the cheapest clap-trap of farce and vaudeville. Examples may be seen in the comedy of Greece, Rome, or medieval Europe. In fact, we may be safe in saying that before the time of Sheridan and Goldsmith, only a few isolated figures in the field of drama had produced what we are pleased to call by classic example true comedy. Molière was among these with his Le Tartuffe, Les Femmes Savantes, and Le Misanthrope, as was Shakespeare, to a degree, some thirty years earlier; both, it will be noted, doing their writing after the middle of the sixteenth century.
By this we must reason that comedy in its ultimate sphere developed only after considerable struggle and experimentation from the crude buffoonery of its infancy. But we cannot ignore the parentage if we are to understand the offspring. Whence, then, comedy? And what are the principles that have governed it in its variegated manifestations?

Of the primitive origins of occidental comic drama we may be fairly certain: it came as a natural modification of Grecian Bacchanalian festivals, much in the same way as tragedy took form, and only a little later.\(^1\) The name itself comes from \textit{κόμος} (komos), indicating a band of revelers, or, in a secondary sense, a song, particularly a song sung at a festival, to pay honor to a god or to ridicule some person or persons.\(^2\) Of the intermediary steps between the rustic dances and revels and the definite comedy form with its chorus little is known. Aristotle mentions in the fifth chapter of the \textit{Poetics} that the transitions in tragedy are known, but those of comedy are not, because they were not a subject of attention (attention, no doubt, meaning that of the educated classes) as official recognition was not given to comedy for some time after tragedy was an accepted institution.\(^3\)

\(^{1}\) J.W. Donaldson, \textit{The Theatre of the Greeks}, p. 76-77.
\(^{2}\) \textit{Ibid.}, p. 77-78.
The official recognition of comedy (about 485 B.C.) changed it very little except to transfer its field of attack to politics. A professional chorus took the place of voluntary singers and dancers, but the purposes and practices remained scarcely altered. As in the days when the crude and indecent dances were interspersed with spontaneous lewd jokes and abusive invectives directed against characters known to the audiences, so in the early days of the old Greek comedy two principles were involved, at first unconsciously, later deliberately: the affording of amusement of a low sort for the lower classes, and the launching of coarse political and social satire in keeping with the mentality and desires of the intended audience. So we find that, in his early plays, the first of the great comic writers of Greece, Aristophanes, was little above the comus, or primitive festival entertainment. He showed more of a proclivity for satire than was shown before his time, but was, as regards the observance of any unity or connection of plot, virtually innocent.

Of the Old Comedy of Athens a few characteristics stand out: the phallic dance of the early revels was continued by the chorus, and a parabasis, or address to the audience, was inserted toward the middle of the play. This last had no connection with the plot, and could be said to

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5 Matthews, op. cit., p. 80-81.
serve the purpose of a prologue in later plays. In form these two characteristics marked the Old Comedy as a distinct type from the Middle Comedy, as both chorus and parabasis were dropped in the latter as unnecessary instruments, but it was in spirit that the greatest change took place. 

The Old Comedy was based upon a personal abuse of public characters, political or literary satire, and coarse jests. As Matthews says: "The comedy of Aristophanes was a medley of boisterous comic-opera and of lofty lyric poetry, of vulgar ballet and of patriotic oratory, of indecent farce and of pungent political satire, of acrobatic pantomime and of brilliant literary criticism, of cheap burlesque and of daringly imaginative fantasy." For the most part lacking in plot and character development, preferring to lampoon and ridicule characters known to the audience, the Old Comedy carried a tone at once low morally, and high, or at least brilliant, critically. It was caricature rather than portraiture; farce rather than comedy, but, withal, showing, in the hands of Aristophanes, at any rate, a certain literary skill, more lyric and satiric than dramatic.

In the change from the Old to the Middle Greek comedy we find external forces tending to modify the practices and traditions of the stage. At about the time of the close of the Peloponnesian Wars (404 B.C.) an Athenian law prohibited the mentioning of public characters by name in

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6 Ibid., p. 87.
7 Ibid., p. 90.
the theatres. The result of this ordinance was to turn the object of comedy from personal abuse to general criticism, and to literature rather than politics. At the same time the destruction of the Athenian democratic empire produced a state of unrest, and its attendant economic depression, making the financing of the chorus difficult, so that tradition was abandoned. By this last move the parabasis, always an undramatic feature of the Old Comedy, was automatically removed, and also the dance and music were eliminated from drama, leaving it more nearly a unified art. Moreover, the general tone was elevated to a higher standard, though still clinging to the farcical buffoonery of its ancestry. Deprived of the freedom of personal abuse the comic writers turned to the more wholesome practice of general criticism. Donaldson, in The Theatre of the Greeks, states: "If ... we were called upon to give to the Old and Middle Comedy their distinctive appellations, we should call one Caricature and the other Criticism; and if we wished to illustrate the difference by modern instances, we should compare the former to the Lampoon, the latter to the Review." And Mrs. Bellinger, in her Short History of the Drama, says: "Instead of criticism by direct attack, we find in the Middle Comedy insinuation, polished insolence,
and the wit of innuendo.

11 Another indirect result of the legislation against the abuse of living figures was the development for the first time in drama of stock characters, or types, since dramatists found themselves without actual individuals to thrust forth, and of necessity created parts which typified certain classes or practices which it was their immediate interest to defile. To quote Mrs. Bellinger again: "With Middle Comedy began the creation of stock types -- the fawning servant, the conceited cook, the stupid sensual old man, the bragging soldier. Under different names these characters, in succeeding epochs, have appeared and reappeared on the stages of the world with a kind of shameless immortality." 12

It will be readily seen that the principles involved in Middle Comedy were little, if any, different from those influencing the Old. In both there was the same effort to appease the desires of the Athenian lower classes for ribaldry and clowning, and at the same time set forth the author's particular views and prejudices in philosophy, religion, literature, or politics. In Old Comedy politics came in for the most attention; in the Middle, literature and philosophy.

It was in the Greek New Comedy that the "ancients" came the nearest to the best critical judgment of what a

11 Bellinger, op. cit., p. 57.
12 Loc. cit.
comedy should be. As an arbitrary date for the beginnings of the New Comedy, the conquest of Greece by Philip of Macedon is usually given.13 What we know of the Greek comedy of this period (approximately 340 to 260 B.C.) is unfortunately limited to a few fragments of the originals, and the many Latin adaptations and translations, mostly by Terence, but a higher note in comedy is undoubtedly struck by Menander and his contemporaries than anything hitherto produced.

The comedy of Menander, and other comic writers of the age of New Comedy, endeavored to draw upon the actual life of Athens -- to catch a little of it and hold it up for the examination of the public. Much of the caricature and exaggeration was dispensed with; new stock-types came in to add to the growing list begun in the Middle period; above all, a new element, that of love, was added to the idea of comedy: not the ideal or romantic love, to be sure, but clandestine and lewd intrigue, much as is found in the comedy of the Restoration period in England. One author, indeed, compares Menander with Congreve and Farquhar.14

The tendency of critics to class the New Comedy of Greece as comedy of manners15 seems to indicate that here for the first time we are arriving at something approaching

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13 Donaldson, op. cit., p. 88; Bellinger, op. cit. p. 57.
14 Donaldson, loc. cit.
15 Donaldson, loc. cit; Bellinger, op. cit., p. 58; Matthews, op. cit., p. 93.
true comedy. In the words of Brander Matthews:

We are at liberty to guess that Menander found compensation for his sinking from the lyric heights of Aristophanes by not descending to the depths of base vulgarity in which the earlier poet reveled. We may surmise that his plays were often genuine comedies rather than mere farces, in that he sought the truth of life itself rather than the boisterous laughter evoked by exaggeration. Certainly his contemporaries continually testify to the veracity of his scenes.

In other words, the plays of Menander seem to have been an anticipation of the modern comedy-of-intrigue and the modern comedy-of-manners. The plots were ingenious and plausible, and they were peopled with characters common in Athens at that time; -- the miserly father, the spendthrift son, the intriguing servant, the bragging soldier, the obsequious parasite, the woman of pleasure. . . . His prevailing tone, as Professor Jebb notes, is "That of polite conversation, not without passages of tender sentiment, grave thought, or almost tragic pathos."

The incidents of New Comedy plot, however, hinged usually upon the idea of mistaken identity and last minute recognition, a usage not well adapted to artistic drama, and, while there was a conscious effort to reproduce life as it was, the constant use and reuse of stock characters indicates that the highest hopes were not perfectly realized. The principles governing comic drama in the time of Menander, nevertheless, had suffered, or rather profited by, profound alterations. The chief aim, to be sure, was still criticism, but the means used to gain the end were foreign to those of the earlier periods. No longer was the business of the comedian to clown and to draw a preposterous scarecrow, calling it a man; he turned to the work of

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17 Donaldson, op. cit., p. 89.
presenting a cross-section of life, and by so doing illustrating the foibles and follies he wished to condemn. Though the writers of the period of New Comedy may not have accomplished all that the modern critic might expect from them, they did work with practically the same purpose and method that has governed writers of social comedy to the present time.

Aside from the one principle that affects all comedy, the intent to amuse, Greek drama, then, has shown us two of the principles which have left their marks in the annals of comedy: caricature, embodying the use of personal attack, the lampoon, and pure "slap-stick", to lapse into slang, and the more elevated principle of portraiture, the attempt to represent real life.

The last named principle, that of portraiture, should be easily understood; it is merely the drawing of characters from actual life, and showing them in actual, or at least natural, situations. Caricature is a little more difficult of definition, but in general it consists in the use of unnatural characters -- characters overdrawn and not lifelike -- and the use of situations not to be found in life, and not in accord with the sense of congruity.

When Aristophanes brings in the character of Bacchus in *The Frogs* with a lion's skin and a club, in imitation of Hercules, but still wearing his usual effeminate costume, a note of the ridiculous is struck by the contrast. That is caricature. When Bacchus explains to Hercules that he
desires to go to Hades to bring back Euripides, we get this piece of verbal incongruity, an inseparable attribute of caricature, as Bacchus describes his "passion" for Euripides:

BACCHUS (meaning to be very serious and interesting). No, friend, you must not laugh; it's past a joke; it's quite a serious feeling -- quite distressing; I suffer from it --

HERCULES (bluntly). Well, explain. What was it?

BACCHUS. I can't declare it at once; but I'll explain it theatrically and enigmatically:

(With a buffoonish assumption of tragic gesture and emphasis).

Were you ever seized with a sudden passionate longing for a mess of porridge?

And ridiculous situation is shown a bit later, as Bacchus tries to get a dead man, who is being borne on his bier to the burial ground, to carry his bundles to Hades:

BACCHUS. ... Hollo! you, there -- you Deadman -- can't you hear? Would you take any bundles to hell with you, my good fellow?

DEADMAN. What are they?

BACCHUS. These.

DEADMAN. Then I must have two drachmas.

BACCHUS. I can't -- you must take less.

DEADMAN (peremptorily). Bearers, move on.

BACCHUS. No, stop! we shall settle between us -- you're so hasty.

DEADMAN. It's no use arguing; I must have two drachmas.

BACCHUS (emphatically and significantly). Ninepence! [Exit.

By the means of such practices as those mentioned -- incongruity in costume, speech, and situation -- characters are made to appear absurd and laughable through their lack of normality. Such is the function of the principle of caricature.

Aristotle, as we have said, gave the following defi-
nition of comedy: "an imitation of characters of a lower type, -- not, however, in the full sense of the word bad, the Ludicrous being merely a subdivision of the ugly. It consists in some defect or ugliness which is not painful or destructive."\textsuperscript{18} It is evident he had in mind the comedy of the first two periods -- the work of the writers in the age of New Comedy had only just well begun at the time of his death. But the definition shows that in the days of the greatest of the Greek critics comedy was looked upon by the scholarly mind as something grotesque -- "ludicrous" -- far below the tragedy of the time, which Aristotle so warmly praised, and far short of what modern critics hold out as comedy in its true sense. The surface had been scratched, little more, but a new art had been given its impetus.

We might expect the Romans to carry further what their subjects, the Greeks, had so nobly begun, but we find that with their customary negligence of things artistic they contented themselves with borrowing. In the whole glorious period of Roman history not one new comic principle found expression; indeed, were it not for one man, Terence, the work that the Greeks had accomplished would have been lost. Terence was a literary man, but not a dramatist in the sense that he was creative. He appreciated the art of the New Greek Comedy, and this art he appropriated wholesale in his modifications and translations of Menander and

\textsuperscript{18} Supra, p. 2.
others of the last age of Greece. 19

In Roman comedy two names stand out: Terence and Plautus; these might be compared roughly with Menander and Aristophanes, respectively, in their aims if not in their practices. Plautus, the most successful of the two from the standpoint of his ability to please the audiences with which he had to deal, was, as Matthews says, a "born dramatist", in that he knew what the public wanted and gave it what it wanted. 20 and as the audience he appealed to "was the roughest and most stubborn of any known to the history of the theater," 21 the product of Plautus' art was scarcely of a high level. His scenes were invariably laid in Athens, and his plots, though he added clever intrigue of a vulgar variety, were taken from Athenian originals, but the characters he introduced were, more often than not, Roman; for Plautus was wise enough to see that, as he himself knew very little about Athenian customs and life, the mobs frequenting his theatre knew "still less and cared nothing at all." So, obviously, the sensible thing for a man to do who was trying to amuse such a group was to stock his plays with figures of a type known to the Roman plebeians, and by using them as the butts of his coarse jests and buffoonery appease the demand for the ludicrous and vulgar.

19 Matthews, op. cit., p. 104.
20 Ibid., p. 103.
21 Ibid., p. 98.
This is what Plautus did, and with considerable success. To again quote Matthews: "He had a hearty gaiety as well as a broad humor; indeed, in comic force, in \textit{viv comica}, in the sheer power of compelling laughter, he can withstand a comparison even with Molière, the greatest of all comic dramatists." 

But, although we said Plautus might be compared with Aristophanes in spirit and aims, there was one of the practices of the latter that he did not descend to: personal abuse of public figures. This the Roman law would not permit, and a burlesque of the Greek comedy of manners might more nearly characterize his work. As Mrs. Bellinger says, the problem of the Latin playwright "was to use the Greek dish, fill it with enough spice and ribaldry to make it acceptable to the Roman palate and at the same time escape the censor." 

The attitude of Terence differed decidedly from that of Plautus. His subject matter was similar, as he drew from the same sources, but there the similarity ends, for Terence wrote with a conscious effort to show literary taste and elegance, whereas Plautus was concerned only with affording amusement. An excellent contrast of the two has been given by Mrs. Bellinger: "Comparatively speaking,

\begin{itemize}
\item [22] Ibid., p. 102-103.
\item [23] Ibid., p. 103.
\item [24] Bellinger, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 81.
\end{itemize}
Plautus was the untutored genius, Terence the conscious artist; Plautus the practical playwright, Terence the elegant literary craftsman. Plautus wrote for the crowd, Terence for the aristocracy.\textsuperscript{25}

Inasmuch as the work of Terence was principally translation or modification of the Greek New Comedy, we cannot expect to find anything new in the way of principle; he was at best an elegant adapter. But though we cannot attribute to him any special creative genius, we must acknowledge that it is through him alone that what the Greeks of the age of Menander had done in the way of the comedy of manners was preserved for the dramatists and critics of later ages.

Though we may say that comedy took on no new form, and was affected by no new principles during the Roman period, two quotations may serve to show the changed attitude toward the function of comic drama. Cicero made the statement that comedy is "a copy of life, a mirror of custom, a reflection of truth,"\textsuperscript{26} and Livius Andronicus, commonly supposed to have been the first of the Latin comedy writers, said, "Comedy is the mirror of everyday life."\textsuperscript{27} Quite different indeed are these views from the dictum of Aristotle that comedy "consists in some defect or ugliness

\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., p. 85.
\textsuperscript{26} Aelius Donatus, "De comedia et Tragoedia", in B. H. Clark, \textit{European Theories of the Drama}, p. 43.
\textsuperscript{27} Loc. cit.
which is not painful or destructive. Comedy had come to mean in the eyes of the Latins something real and vital, not a monstrosity.

After about the middle of the first century A. D. drama began to decline; the writing of it stopped almost altogether, and the acting of it was confined to obscure and crude performances. The Roman public had grown to favor the more exciting and virile forms of entertainment, such as the chariot-race or the gladiatorial combat. Pageants were still occasionally given by the emperors, and mimes and pantomimes continued an uncertain existence, but drama, as such, was a thing almost forgotten. With the conversion of Constantine and the rise of the Christian Church to a place of political importance what vestiges of the dramatic that had managed to survive were stamped out, so that for over a thousand years there is nothing that can be called an attempt at dramatization in the western world.

When attention began again to be paid to the theatre in the middle ages the traditions which had governed the ancient dramatists had been lost, and thus it was that drama had to begin anew. In the words of Matthews:

28 Supra, p. 2.
29 Bellinger, op. cit., p. 115; Matthews, op. cit., p. 107-108.
... dramatic literature, which had flourished so gloriously in Greece, and which had tried to establish itself in Italy, was dead at last; and even the memory of it seems to have departed, for, in so far as the works of the Attic tragedians and of the Roman comedians were known at all, they were thought of rather as poetry to be read than as plays that had been acted. The art of acting was a lost art, and the theaters themselves fell into ruin. So it was that when the prejudice against the drama wore itself out in time, and when the inherent demand for the pleasure which only the theater can give became at last insistent, there was to be seen the spontaneous evolution of a new form, fitted specially to satisfy the needs of the people under the new circumstances. This new drama of the middle ages sprang into being wholly uninfluenced by the drama of the Greeks; it was, indeed, as free a growth as the Attic drama itself had been.31

It is interesting to note that when drama again began to take root it should be in the hands of the Church which had suppressed it when, in its crude and vulgar manifestations during the Roman Empire, it had seemed a demoralizing influence. Also it is noteworthy that in this new birth of the drama, the same as in its first ill-starred existence, the origin should be as an accessory to a religious ceremony.32 Taking its origin in such casual accompaniments of the Church services as the ceremony of the Mass, and the reading of literature pertaining to the Passion Week, the dramatic element grew gradually more dominant, and at last took the form of actual drama in the mystery, morality and miracle play, at first within the Church itself, and later as an independent institution.

31 Matthews, op. cit., p. 110.

This religious drama developed in much the same way throughout all the European countries, due to the double bond of a common religion and a common inheritance of the customs of Rome; so we find that the medieval miracle plays were much the same, whether in England, France, Italy, or Spain; and the same may be said of the other forms of the drama extant between the decline of the Roman Empire and the Renaissance.

Of the three types of the distinctly religious drama: the mystery, the miracle, and the morality, the latter, being not so closely attached to the actual traditions of the Church, naturally lent itself more readily to the comic strain, but even in the mysteries, portraying scenes from the life of Christ, comedy, or farce, had crept in even before the plays left the Church in the thirteenth century. All these manifestations of the comic element in religious drama, while in the hands of the Church and for a time after the secularization, were in the nature of interludes, or scenes thrown in to lighten the tone of the entertainment, and the character of the religious plays remained distinctly and pedantically moral; but with the passage of time the desire became manifest on the part of writers and actors to entertain, or thrill, at any price. Serious

33 Chambers, loc. cit.

34 Matthews, op. cit., p. 111-112.
scenes were made ridiculous, and ribaldry and vulgarity became rampant. Once more the principle of caricature, seen in the early Greek comedy, and in that of Plautus, dominated the stage; this time, however, it was at first limited to the evil characters, though finally turning to the clergy or anything that seemed worthy the attention of the writer.35

During the late middle ages secular plays grew up alongside the biblical and morality plays, and for the most part showed a similarity of treatment, while turning to non-religious material for their subjects. Of such a type were the Shrovetide, or carnival plays, making a specialty of the ludicrous and lewd aspects of medieval life. The interludes, short pieces for two, three, or four characters, were a similar form, but shorter, being intended to be interspersed between the acts of longer plays, or to be used as features of programs similar to the vaudeville, at which were also displayed wrestling contests, juggling feats, magic exhibitions, and the like. The interlude concerned itself more with wit than with broad humor, and enjoyed considerable court favor. It was in England that the interlude form took its greatest strides; in the sixteenth century Nicholas Udall, John Bale, and John Heywood were among the writers of that type of play, and it is in the work of the latter, based upon the tales of Chaucer and

the French fables, that the medieval play made the transition into the comedy of realism of the Elizabethan period. 36

During the sixteenth century in nearly every country of Europe the forces of change were at work to produce national drama, or drama imbued with the spirit, ideals, and customs of the particular locality which formed its home. This followed as a natural result of the substitution of the vernacular for Latin as the Church gradually lost control of the art it had begun. 37 After the bond of common language was lost to the playwrights of the several countries, they began to drift apart and to follow diverse inclinations. The Renaissance, though added an element which tended to limit the divergence. It brought back to the attention of scholars the lost art of the Greek and Roman drama, and, simultaneously a contempt for the crudity of the medieval product. However, it was with the medieval product that dramatists still had to work, for the secular plays of the middle ages were firmly rooted, and they suited the theatres of the day, so we find that in Spain, France and England the result of the classical revival was that writers took the existing drama, and tried to "give it something of the unity, the propriety, and the dignity which they had admired in the classics of Greece

36 Bellinger, _op. cit._, p. 140-144.
37 Matthews, _op. cit._, p. 138-140.
and Rome. In Italy, where the force of the Renaissance was stronger, dramatists attempted to do away entirely with the medieval forms and substitute imitations of the ancient, with the result that Italy developed practically no dramatic literature during the period.

With the rise of national drama in Spain we find the great name of Lope de Vega (1562-1635) riding the crest. The types of plays which he produced were as varied as the drama itself, and the impetus he gave the theatre, both in his own country and abroad, singles him out as one of the distinctive landmarks in the history of play writing.

In the words of Mrs. Bellinger:

It was Lope de Vega who, above all others, gave the shape and stamp to modern European drama. . . . if we do not today read or see Lope's plays in their original dress, we nevertheless have seen their descendants; for the European world has for four centuries enjoyed many an entertainment based upon situations that came from his brain. The Italians of the seventeenth century, the French writers preceding and including Voltaire, the early Elizabethans, and that great pair, Shakespeare and Molière—all borrowed and learned from him.

Not unexpectedly do we find in this type of dramatic mind the first element in comedy that we can call new since Menander. This element is romance. It might almost be said that in his "comedy-of-cloak-and-sword", as Mathews calls it, Lope de Vega gave the plot to comedy. Of course

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38 Matthews, op. cit., p. 150.
39 Ibid., p. 150-151.
40 Ibid., p. 172.
41 Bellinger, op. cit., p. 162.
the Greek and Roman comedy had a plot of a fashion, but it was secondary to the interest of the story. The audience of Menander's time may have been conscious of a certain amount of action, but it was interested more in the dialogue and the satire. Greek and Roman writers sacrificed plot to criticism or to jesting; those of the middle ages sacrificed it to moralizing or simply didn't worry about it. At any rate, in Lope de Vega we see for the first time comedy in which action has become dominant. The plots of Lope are not of situation, they are plots of romantic intrigue, based on the old ballads in which the early literature of Spain was rich, or written after their manner. It is intrigue of a different type entirely from that of Plautus, Terence, and the medieval writers, and is based upon the wholesome spirit of romantic gallantry and lively adventure. Gallantry, adventurous intrigue, pure love: these are the compounds from which Lope moulded his plots — pure love, it is worthy of mention, appeared for virtually the first time on the stage in the plays of Lope de Vega — and we have a new principle in the art of comedy: the principle of the romantic plot.42

To be clear as to what is meant by the romantic plot let us deviate from the account a little to look at a play with which nearly everyone is familiar: As You Like It. The play is too well known to make a synopsis of it

necessary here, but it serves to illustrate the use of the element of romance in comedy.

The leading figures in the play are normal human beings, but they are placed in situations which bring out their finer qualities. In other words idealism of humanity governs the play. The virtues of Orlando -- his courage, his kindness, his dignity -- are brought out in his relations with his brother and with Adam, while the sojourn in the forest, not a very normal condition, again emphasizes his fineness in the meeting with the exiled Duke's party and in the rescue of his brother. The strong character of Celia is shown in her devotion to Rosalind, who, in turn, is elevated by circumstances bringing out her fortitude. The situations are just far enough removed from everyday life to emphasize the ideal qualities of the characters. The best medium for such emphasis, as was stated before, is a plot dealing with gallantry, adventurous intrigue, and pure love, such as Shakespeare has used in As You Like It. But, coming back to Lope de Vega, great as was his contribution to comic principle and to the future and contemporary writers of Spain, England, and France, he can scarcely be said to have produced real comedy. His best work of that nature was rather farce than comedy, and farce pervaded all his comic attempts.43

The same may be said, to a lesser degree, of Shakespeare,

who was bringing English drama to its heights at the same time that Lope was doing his work for Spain. But there is one respect in which Shakespeare stands superior, in treatment if not in principle; that is that in the better manifestations of Shakespeare's comic genius, say in *As You Like It*, *Much Ado*, or *Twelfth Night*, the characters are characters, not types, as was predominately true of Lope. Shakespeare combined the romantic plot of Lope with the humanity striven for in Menander and Terence, with the result that he contributed a finished product superior to any of these.

To Shakespeare can be attributed the realization of that perfect naturalness of character which makes for the best comedy, as for the best tragedy, and which had been sought by the writers of drama as early as the "Golden Age of Greece." In consequence of this, and also as a result of the indisputable fact that, though Shakespeare did borrow his plots, he usually used excellent taste in his borrowing, he has in his best scenes given us true comedy.

But there is an element continually brought into the dramas of Shakespeare, both comedy and tragedy, which departs from the genuine comic aim: burlesque, a reminder of the days of Grecian early comedy, which Shakespeare used, either to appease the desires of the audiences for such scenes -- a desire common to all audiences since time immemorial -- or because he himself admired such things. And we must admit that in the hands of a Shakespeare characters such as
Silvius, Corin, and Dogberry, ridiculous though they may be, have a fascination perhaps as strong as if they were more naturally done.

While the times of Shakespeare would have lent themselves admirably to the comedy of manners, it seems not to have been his interest to take that field, so we find him a master of that branch of comic drama conveniently termed "romantic-comedy", and romantic comedy has, as a pre-supposed basis, a plot that can not be accounted realistic or natural; it is fantastic in its principle, gloriously so, perhaps, but the finest delineation of character cannot put it on a footing of real life; therefore, if we are to consider life as a basis of the purest comedy, Shakespeare has attained it only in a few cases. For life we must go to the comedy of manners, and in the words of Matthews:

Because Shakespeare neglected the comedy-of-manners, his fellow-playwrights could not climb unaided to the lofty level of high comedy. For romantic-comedy, as for tragedy and for history, he had set a pattern, and the others were unable to work in accordance therewith. But for the modern comedy-of-manners men had to wait for Molière to supply a model which should endure for centuries.44

There was however a tendency, during the Elizabethan age, to break away from the romantic comedy of Shakespeare and turn to the comedy of manners. The tendency is noted chiefly in Ben Jonson and in some of the plays of Philip Massinger. Jonson, being of the classic school, was much opposed to Shakespeare's practice of mixing comedy and

44 Ibid., p. 218-219.
tragedy, and he had little use for the romantic plot, preferring contemporary life and realism. He is famous for a theory of comedy which he called the "comedy of humours." Quoting Thorndike:

Instead of a haphazard selection of story, scene and persons, he proposed to base his carefully constructed plots on an analysis of society into humours, or dominant characteristics. In so far as these humours represented follies and absurdities, the duty of comedy was to satirize and reform. His Every Man in His Humour embodied these aims, and remained for almost two hundred years "a model for the English comedy of manners."46

The same ideas were carried on in Every Man Out of His Humour, Volpone, and The Alchemist. Jonson is a landmark in English drama, in that he is the first writer of social comedy, and his influence on the writers of the Restoration has been noted by several critics.47

Fletcher and Beaumont contributed nothing new to the drama, writing mostly plays based upon situation, and for entertainment solely. They did show some creative genius in the construction of plots, and a certain buoyancy of humor, "good natured and friendly rather than penetrating or uplifting, but . . . capable of making youth tolerant and age merry."48

Massinger was essentially a follower of Fletcher, but

46 Ibid., p. 172.
47 Infra, p. 53-55.
48 Thorndike, op. cit., p. 217.
more painstaking and not so likely to sacrifice character to situation. He had a tendency to return to the romantic ideas of plot on occasion, but at the same time showed the influence of Jonson's "comedy of humours." 49

This "comedy of humours" was the special contribution of the Elizabethan age; not in itself anything essentially new, for it harked back to Menander and Terence, it was none the less new for England. While its exponents never gained the reputation of Shakespeare, they were destined to have a more profound influence on the drama which was to follow.

Molière has been held up by critics as the perfect example of the comic dramatist. What was his special genius that he has gained so great a reputation? To quote George Meredith:

Molière followed the Horatian precept, to observe the manners of his age, and give his characters the color be-fitting them at the time. He did not paint in raw realism. He seized his characters firmly for the central purpose of the play, stamped them in the idea, and, by slightly raising and softening the object of study ... generalized upon it so as to make it permanently human." 50

And Matthews, in describing the growth of Molière's genius, says:

Timidly at first, and tentatively, he began to put something more into his plays than mere amusement. He began to impart a serious meaning to the comic drama ....

49 Ibid., p. 224-226.

He recognized that as a comic dramatist it was his duty, first of all, to make the spectators laugh; but he was able skilfully to enlarge his manner so that he could also make them think even while they were laughing. 51

Thus far we have noted nothing of comic principle that goes much, if at all, beyond that which governed Menander and Terence, or, to a lesser degree, Aristophanes and Plautus. There is, indeed, a perfection of these principles, and by merit of the perfection a brand of comedy of a superior quality. Many and varied were the types of comedy which Molière produced; Matthews has mentioned twelve definite classes, ranging from farce to pure comedy, according to his definition, 52 and among them we find, in addition to the comedy of manners, or social comedy, which was Molière's special field of merit, types as widely divergent as the comedy of character and the comedy-ballet; the comedy of intrigue and the tragi-comedy.

Under the social comedy we might list L'École des Femmes, Le Misanthrope, Les Femmes Savantes, and possibly Le Tartuffe, though the latter borders dangerously upon melodrama. 53 These, with Les Précieuses Ridicules, certainly constitute the five major plays, and through them all runs that same spirit of contemporary social criticism through portraiture which was noted in Menander and Terence, 54

51 Matthews, op. cit., p. 254.
52 Ibid., p. 255-256.
53 Ibid., p. 256-258.
but with two essential differences, and upon these two differences one can almost say the distinction between elevated farce and true comedy rests. They are: a love of mankind, as well as an understanding, and a sense of decency. While Molière may have been stinging in his sarcasm, he was not abusive; there is a difference between insulting a person by the revelation of his follies, and making him laugh at those same follies, and it was the latter practice that Molière adopted. As Mrs. Bellinger remarks, "there was in his mind a positive belief in the goodness of human nature and in the saving power of common sense. . . . He loved youth and all things that are hearty and wholesome; and he was never bigoted, malicious or mean." 54

In regard to that rare quality, the sense of decency, which sets Molière above all his predecessors in the comedy of manners, and unfortunately, above only too many of those who have followed in his footsteps, it has been a much noted fact that Molière kept his dramas, both in situation and dialogue, free from any vulgarity of implication or word. As Meredith has said, Molière's comedy is, in the first place, "deeply conceived. . . and, therefore it cannot be impure." 55 That statement may seem to be unsound at first glance, but as one tries to pick it to pieces he finds that it holds up quite well; with depth of understanding comes

55 Meredith, op. cit., p. 96.
an attendant elevation of moral sense. It was Brander Matthews who pointed out that of all the classic dramatists Molière is virtually the solitary example of one whose plays can be presented today without the suppression of many indecent passages. And it was Meredith who made the rather pertinent observation: "If life is likened to the comedy of Molière, there is no scandal in the comparison." In these three outstanding sixteenth century dramatists, Lope de Vega, Shakespeare, and Molière, it is clear that there is used only one new principle, strictly speaking. That principle was, as we have seen contributed by Lope de Vega, and consisted in the use of the romantic plot, with action dominant. In the other two writers a blending of principles has been noted. In Shakespeare it was the blending of Lope's romantic plot with the humanness, or portraiture sought by Menander; with Molière it was a perfection of that element of humanness, with a plot, realistic, but tempered just enough with the wholesome spirit of romanticism to give it vitality and vigor.

Just where that travesty on the comedy of manners known as Restoration comedy had its origin is a problem that has caused white hairs in the heads of many critics and scholars. Some have set it down as a corruption of Molière; others have held it to be a natural outgrowth of

56 Matthews, op. cit., p. 262.
57 Meredith, op. cit., p. 97.
the comedies of Jonson, Beaumont, and Fletcher, modified to suit the peculiar age for which it was written. There is probably an element of truth in both theories, and William Archer is probably a little too engrossed by the vigor of his invective when he comments upon John Richard Green's statement that "the comedy of the Restoration borrowed everything from the comedy of France save the poetry, the delicacy and the good taste which veiled its grossness."

"Where," asks Mr. Archer, did Mr. Green find grossness in the seventeenth century comedy of France? It uses a few expressions, no doubt, which have become obsolete in modern speech; and it refers to certain subjects which are to this day more freely spoken of in France than in England. But if there is anything that can fairly be called "gross" in French comedy of the age of Molière, it must occur in the works of obscure playwrights who have escaped my observation. But Green was only repeating an accepted commonplace. Thackeray had stated it more vivaciously, but even less justly, when he said: "She was a disreputable, daring, laughing, painted French baggage, that Comic use. She came over from the Continent with Charles at the Restoration -- a wild, dishevelled Lais, with eyes bright with wit and wine." I think it is high time that this off-hand theory were set down as what it is -- a libel on France. The truth is that the comedy of the Restoration borrowed nothing from the comedy of France, except a few plots which it clumsily vulgarised and distorted.58

Of course the few plots were something in the way of a borrowing, and it is safe to say that much of the same general intent is manifested in Congreve or Wycherly as in Molière; in fact, Mr. Archer himself bashfully admits that "our dramatists [those of the Restoration] did lip-homage, no doubt, to the notion [Molière's] that it was the busi-

ness of comedy to scourge the vices and follies of the age."59

But, whatever the origin, Restoration comedy, with its vice, and in most instances its insipidity, is a factor, perhaps a lamentable one, which must find its way into all discussions of the art of comedy. We shall devote little time to it here, as its principles were, whether they came from Molière or not, the same in basic essentials: it attempted to portray the life of the time and it devoted considerable attention to plot; some of the authors, notable among them, Congreve, running to a complexity of action which is at once confusing and inartistic, as in his *Love for Love*. It differed from the French seventeenth century comedy chiefly in conception -- in its low moral tone and its malignant abuse of everything not of the court circle and London high society. *The Way of the World*, by Congreve, is commonly accepted as the best example of Restoration comedy, and it makes a rather pitiful showing when compared with one of Molière's better plays, such as *Le Misanthrope*.60 Molière portrayed a cross section of life; the Restoration dramatists a piece of life,61 so, obviously, the Restoration comedy lacked the universality necessary to great drama.

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59 Ibid., p. 31.
60 Meredith, *op. cit.*, p. 97-106.
During the eighteenth century the inevitable reaction to the vulgarity of the Restoration period took place, partly due to the criticism of men like Jeremy Collier, and partly, no doubt, through public demand. Colley Cibber, manager of the Drury Lane theatre for a time, and actor and playwright -- later poet-laureate -- started the practical application of the revolt with his Love's Last Shift, or The Fool in Fashion, and followed with such plays as The Careless Husband, and The Non-Juror, but, as Nettleton says, his plays were rather "expurgated Restoration comedy than a new comedy type."

Shortly after Mr. Cibber's attempts Richard Steele brought forth a manifestation of the dramatic urge which presently gave birth to what we know as sentimental comedy. Nettleton says that in a sense Steel was the founder of that type, but also holds Otway and Southerne, with their "sentimentalized tragedy", partly responsible. The first note of the sentimental comedy was struck in Steele's The Funeral, and to a much greater degree the idea permeated his The Lying Lover, and The Conscious Lovers. These last two plays especially show a deep moral consciousness, amounting almost to moralizing, and displaying definitely

62 G. H. Nettleton, English Drama of the Restoration and Eighteenth Century, p. 141-144.
63 Ibid., p. 150.
64 Ibid., p. 155.
the sentimental aim of appealing to "pity instead of laughter." And through the era of the sentimental comedy that followed, exemplified by such writers as Cumberland and Kelly, the aim remained "pity instead of laughter." Intermingled with it was the idea of the "return to nature," and such similar terms as the "perfect savage," and a disregard of such hypocritical social conventions as flattery, and "false delicacy," as in Kelly's play of that name -- the same movement, in fact that produced novels of the type of Oroonoko. Of this variety of comedy Nettleton says:

The appeal of Steele's sentimental comedy to the emotion of pity became with inferior playwrights a false emotional motive. The doctrine that "laughter's a distorted passion" led comedy to substitute tears for mirth. The moral reform of English drama was won at the expense of almost half a century during which Comedy bowed her head in the presence of Sentimentality. Restoration comedy has long worn the title of "artificial," but in another sense, it was an equally artificial comedy that in the first half of the eighteenth century offered its sacrifices to "The Goddess of the woeful countenance -- the Sentimental Muse." Poor as the showing of comedy under its influence may have been, here is nevertheless an entirely new conception of the meaning and purpose of comic drama. For the first time in the history of the stage comic writers placed laughter, or amusement, secondary in the principles governing their work, and we can set down another comic principle: that of evoking sympathy, or pity, rather than laughter; we may call it the appeal to pity.

65 Ibid., p. 160.
66 Ibid., p. 165.
The character of Belcour in Richard Cumberland's *The West Indian* is a typical example showing the use of such appeal. Belcour has been brought up in the eighteenth century Cuba, away from the civilization of England, and comes in his early twenties to London where his natural "fine qualities" are made to stand out against the artificialities of his more cultured surroundings. He gives a very good account of his character in this speech:

... I am the offspring of distress, and every child of sorrow is my brother; while I have hands to hold, therefore, I will hold them open to mankind: but, sir, my passions are my masters; they take me where they will; and oftentimes they leave to reason and to virtue nothing but my wishes and my sighs.

He is attracted by a girl whom he is led to believe is a courtesan, and to win her favor gives to a go-between some jewels which have been entrusted to him by another woman. He is challenged to a duel by the girl's brother when he asks her to become his mistress, still not realizing her actual station, which is quite above reproach. Of course the ruse which has been perpetrated by the go-between is discovered in time, and affairs are settled to everyone's satisfaction, Belcour, needless to say, securing the girl by honorable marriage.

Belcour's faults, derived from uncontrollable passion, are not only condoned, but are made a source of his attraction, being held up to the audience as a subject of pity because of the man's basic nobility and tenderness.

We cannot leave off any discussion of comedy without
mention of two names which, although they did not contribute anything new in principle, brought the English comedy of manners to its peak. Goldsmith and Sheridan, in the last forty years of the eighteenth century, succeeded in for a time bringing to an end the sentimental comedy which had dominated the stage for half a century, and in so doing gave us three plays that stand as the only rivals of Molière in his special field. The plays, of course, are *She Stoops to Conquer*, by Goldsmith, and *The Rivals* and *The School for Scandal*, by Sheridan. It has been frequently mentioned that Sheridan and Goldsmith owe much to the Restoration dramatists, both in plot and conception, which is to a great extent true, but, in the words of Cecil Armstrong, while they may be indebted to Congreve and Wycherly, they "toned down their extravagances, curtailed their fopperies, fripperies and indeciencies," which was about all that was necessary to make the comedies of the Restoration quite acceptable examples of the comedy of manners.

The revival of the drama promised by the Goldsmith and Sheridan period failed to materialize, and in the early years of the nineteenth century the dramatic art dropped to the lowest ebb since the Restoration period began.

The profession of the dramatist had fallen to a low ebb in the early decades of the century [the nineteenth]. . . . The interest of audiences and managers seems to have focused on almost anything rather than words and ideas. The making of plays was given over to the mechanics of the

theater and to translators from the French. The vogue of melodrama continued, of plays telling sensational stories by the aid of elaborate scenery and machines. Comedy as well as tragedy gave place to it, or to something very close to it, ambiguously named a drama, or play (drame, schauspiel), also with strong situations and some comic relief. No man thought of reading one of these pieces, few were printed except for use in the theater, full of technical stage directions.68

These are the words of Dr. Ashley Thorndike in discussing the degeneration of the theatre during the early part of the nineteenth century, and the incursion of melodrama, comedy-ballet, and vaudeville to take the place of comedy and tragedy. In the field of comedy during this period a few names must be mentioned because of their relative importance in the era, though not for any special merit in writing, or contribution to comic literature or principle. George Colman, in addition to much comic opera and melodrama, produced a few comedies, notably Ways and Means, and more especially The Heir at Law, The Poor Gentleman, John Bull, and Who Wants a Guinea. The last three were written in the eighteen hundreds, and used the conventional plots of the comedy of sentiment: "an improbable story of suffering and distress, in which virtue aided by benevolence triumphs, the sentimental appeal being relieved by comic scenes and eccentric persons."69 Colman enjoyed considerable favor for nearly a century, and was easily the most popular playwright of his time.

68 Thorndike, op. cit., p. 510.
69 Ibid., p. 487.
Thomas Morton during the first decade of the century contributed a few pieces such as *Speed the Plough*, *The School of Reform*, and *Town and Country*. His work was of much the same general brand as Colman's but with more melodrama and less comic characterization.\(^70\)

After twenty years of neglect something approaching comedy was reinstated by Douglas Jerrold with his *Black-eyed Susan*, and later *The Wedding Gown*, *Doves in a Cage*, and others, all in a sentimental vein. Others had had a little influence before the Victorian period: Sheridan Knowles and John Tobin had experimented with poetic and romantic comedy, and J. R. Planché with burlesque.\(^71\)

During what is known as the Victorian era, from about 1840 to 1890, came probably the most vital changes in the drama since the Renaissance. Much of the alteration was due to developments in the mechanics of the stage itself. The box set appeared during that period; electric lighting was made possible, and the immense aprons, which in the Elizabethan age had projected far out into the audience, had gradually shrunk until by the close of the Victorian era they had practically disappeared.\(^72\) The result of all this was a tendency on the part of playwrights to produce something intended to be seen as well as heard; action, or

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"stage-business" became a more vital factor, and, because of the increased possibilities in acting technique and the staging of a colorful performance, a new interest was created in things dramatic.

It was toward the very end of the Victorian period that the full effect of changing ideas was felt, or at least that there arrived a dramatist capable of making the best of the opportunities at hand. Jones, Grundy, Wilde, and Pinero belong to the closing years of the reign, and they are the men to whom we can best attribute the beginnings of the new comedy. During the fifty years preceding 1890 Tom Robertson, H. J. Byron, and Dion Bouicault had contributed somewhat to the comic muse, and Bulwer Lytton wrote one comedy, Money. But the period produced no comedies that are acted today. In the words of Thorndike:

At the close of the reign of Victoria, Henry Jones, Pinero, Grundy, and Oscar Wilde had written brilliant plays, and the stage was set for Shaw, Barrie, Synge, and Galsworthy. But this impressive renaissance of the drama came only in the last decade of the nineteenth century and links itself to the twentieth. The fifty years from 1840 to 1890 were singularly lacking in dramas of high merit or in promising experiments. Not in comedy proper but rather in the operas of Gilbert and Sullivan in the seventies and eighties do we find the chief Victorian tribute to the Comic Muse. 73

Gilbert and Sullivan, indeed, probably did more than any other figures of the Victorian age to increase the interest and merit of the theatre; as Archer says: "The Gilbert and Sullivan extravaganzas formed the one break in

73 Ibid., p. 509.
the clouds. They were at all events driving from the stage the infamous perversions of opéra-bouffe.\textsuperscript{74} Again, it was during this period that the influence of France was most definitely felt on the English stage. For the first twenty-five years of Victoria's reign there was almost nothing in the way of drama which did not find its origin in borrowing or adapting French plays from the school of Scribe, Sardou, and the Dumas, père et fils.\textsuperscript{75} Even Gilbert and Sullivan, or for that matter Pinero, were not entirely free from this indebtedness, but with the difference that English plays of the time were the last word in respectability, contrary to the example set by France,\textsuperscript{76} upon and, because of lack of originality attendant on wholesale borrowing, the English drama was less significant and less artistic.

The renaissance of the theatre, after a promising but short-lived hint by Robertson and a subsequent period of degeneration, spoke its actor's prologue with the presentation of Henry Arthur Jones' and Henry Herman's \textit{The Silver King} in 1882. The play made a step toward naturalness, though retaining some sentimentality and romance, and had force. Matthew Arnold, in a contribution to the \textit{Pall Mall Gazette}, said of it:

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{74} Archer, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 281.
  \item \textsuperscript{75} Ibid., p. 253-255.
  \item \textsuperscript{76} Thorndike, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 512-514.
\end{itemize}
In general, throughout the piece, the diction and sentiments are natural, they have sobriety and propriety, they are literature. It is an excellent and hopeful sign to find playwrights capable of writing in this style, actors capable of rendering it, a public capable of enjoying it.77

Following up Jones' success came Sydney Grundy, not so original as Jones, and bearing a heavy indebtedness to Scribe, but vital in his creation and holding of public interest in the theatre. Most important among his comedies are: Slaves of the Ring, The Glass of Fashion, and The Degenerates. His situations were artificial, and his criticism not particularly profound, but he did make an attempt to bring drama back to real life, and he had considerable vigor of dialogue.78

Meanwhile Jones had not been idle, and we find an improvement in his The Crusaders (1891) and The Masqueraders (1894). This last is said by Thomas Dickinson to be the one of Jones' comedies which "most challenges comparison with the great comedies of the language."79 Other comedies followed: The Case of Rebellious Susan, The Liars, The Manoeuvres of Jane, and several others. None of these plays are so very noteworthy in themselves, but they advance a new form of an old tendency, as well as the opening of the new theatre movement. The old tendency which is set forth

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77 Archer, op. cit., p. 282.
in a modified conception is social reform. In the words of Dickinson:

He [Jones] saw the social obligation of the dramatist, the social possibilities of the play, and he saw too that these obligations and opportunities were violated by the condition of the theatre in his time. He proceeded to make appeal on behalf of the theatre to the only powers that could bring forth a new theatre, the minds and the hearts of the people themselves.80

This aim, though it was negligible in Jones as compared to Shaw or Barker, was in itself a hindrance to the technical merits of his drama, for his action was subordinated to the social background, and his characters tended to become mouthpieces of the author, or of some group which they typified. But Jones was a pioneer and a worker for the ennoblement of the stage, and all in all he was, as a comedian, "the strongest hand since the Restoration comedians and by no means the least subtle."81

Doing his best work at the same time that Jones reached his highest level (the last fifteen years of the century) Arthur Wing Pinero probably illustrates the realization of what Jones was striving for. He devoted much of his time, especially in his early days, to the serious drama, and to adaptation, and with no signal success.82 But with The Great Divorce Case (1877) and The Rocket (1883) he stepped into the field of farce, where his ability first manifested

80 Ibid., p. 91.
81 Ibid., p. 93; 106-107.
82 Ibid., p. 110-112.
itself. The *Magistrate* (1885) was probably his best contribution to farce, and in the next two years, with The *Schoolmistress* and *Dandy Dick*, he began to add true and human characterization.83 There followed a period of the sentimental comedy seen in *Sweet Lavender*, and then a shifting of the attention back to serious drama and domestic tragedy, of which *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*, *Iris*, and *Mid-Channel* are perhaps the most outstanding examples. Along with these heavier dramas Pinero produced plays of a lighter sort, as *Trelawney of the Wells*, *The Princess and the Butterfly*, and *The Gay Lord Quex*, but in them his attention to character had caused a deepening of interest, with the result that his light drama was no longer farce, but comedy.84

Mr. Pinero has at times been criticised for stilted dialogue, and some justification there is for such criticism, but he nevertheless accomplished the first real character portrayal of the new era, and he was a master of situation. Armstrong speaks of Pinero's "humour, his keen insight, his extraordinary ability to present a telling situation, and wonderful knowledge of the feminine mind."85 Dickinson has drawn this contrast between Jones and Pinero:

Where Jones is the outside worker in the theatre,

83 See, p. 114.
84 Archer, op. cit., p. 315-316.
85 Armstrong, op. cit., p. 244.
Pinero is the inside worker. As time passes Jones's literary position may come to depend largely on the work he has done in the reform of the theatre as a social institution. The position of Pinero must always depend alone upon his work as a playwright.86

And the same author sets down three characteristics of Pinero's works: a "technical conscience," an ability to create "men and women excellently, but thoughts only indifferently," and a tendency to "apply to the theatre the standards of literature."87 It is safe to say that Pinero, in his Gay Lord Quex and his Princess and the Butterfly, furnished the best examples of the comedy of manners that had been written since Sheridan, if not since Molière.

To the same period also belong the plays of Oscar Wilde, as well as the first good work of Shaw and Barrie. Of the four comedies by Wilde we will say little here, in spite of the writer's weakness for Wilde's irrepressible wit. The same criticism must doubly apply to Oscar Wilde that is so often made of Shaw: his plays are rather arguments than dramas. Shaw we can often take seriously, but Wilde never. In Lady Windermere's Fan, A Woman of No Importance, and An Ideal Husband, Wilde took plots time-honored and a little run down at the heels, bolstered them up mechanically, and turned the characters loose to pun and to startle the audience with the author's unlimited paradoxes and witticisms. No one could refrain from laughing at them;

86 Dickinson, op. cit., p. 108.
87 Ibid., p. 109.
no one could but call them affected and unnatural. In The Importance of Being Earnest he retains much of the artificiality of the older plays, such as stock characters, and misplaced clever lines, apparently set in for their intrinsic brilliance rather than for their fitness in the circumstance, but, as Montague says: "Wilde's other comedies were made of such failings; they are mere specks on the excellence of this one." But there is no denying that Wilde was a clever cynic who turned finally to the drama to vent his cynicism, not a dramatist who had a taste for paradoxes.

To a degree the same fault lies in G. B. Shaw. Seldom does he stop laughing at society and give us comedy. Perhaps he came as near to true comic drama in Candida as in anything, but we do not feel that Candida or her youthful worshiper are speaking for themselves; we know that Shaw is dictating some more of his delightful satire. Arms and the Man, Candida, and Man and Superman will stand as the special contributions of Shaw to comedy, and they are important in the history of the drama for one principal reason: they, with the rest of Shaw's plays marked a breaking away from the mechanics of the theatre, and from the limitations of the "well-made play" of Pinero and Jones.

89 Ibid., p. 187.
90 Thorndike, op. cit., p. 578.
Though to a very great extent the plays of Shaw are lectures set to dialogue there is still a mastery of that dialogue which makes them vital and stirring. To quote Thorndike:

The action in each play is enveloped in talk. Or rather, the talk is the action, merely punctuated by a dance, a kiss, a shot, or what not. It is most extraordinary talk on all sorts of subjects and by all sorts of persons. Shaw has a power of realizing personalities and making them talk, and he knows all the means of bringing variety and contrast and surprise into his drama of conversation.91

In Sir James Barrie we find a radically different note from the biting sarcasm of Wilde and Shaw. Shaw himself admits that his purpose is to make people uncomfortable.92 There is none of that attitude in Barrie. Perhaps, in his kindly humanness, he more nearly approaches Molière, than any other writer of the modern age, but in his whimsical and quaint turns of speech, and in his love of the fanciful, he is like no other dramatist that ever lived, unless it be the Quintero brothers or Martínez Sierra.

But Barrie's kindliness does not mean that he neglects the issues of reality and reform. In only one play, Peter Pan, does he let the fantastic run free of society and contemporary England.93 Barrie won his start in the field of drama with the adaption of his novel The Little Minister to the theatre in 1897. He had tried his hand at plays earlier, but with less success, in Becky Sharp, Ibsen's

91 Ibid., p. 187.
93 Thorndike, op. cit., p. 581.
Ghost, and others. In many of his plays, such as The Professor's Love Story, and Quality Street, he turned his attention to the sentimental comedy, but came back to the comedy of manners in 1902 with The Admirable Crichton, and Dear Brutus, in 1917, to mention but two which seem outstanding.

There is no question but that Barrie stands as one of the greatest, if not the greatest, of the writers of pure social comedy since the beginnings of the new drama. Of his manner Thorndike says:

A little shy, though not ineffective at reform and propaganda, a bit tenuous and unsteady in his mocking and satire, always delicate and whimsical rather than robust in his humour... he has perhaps excelled all his contemporaries in the revelation of human nature with fresh truth and humour. 94

Contemporary with the rising drama of England came a movement in the Irish theatre which is best illustrated in the comedy of John M. Synge and Lady Gregory. "Farce and satire are the dominant moods and modes of Irish comedy," says Chandler in his Aspects of the Modern Drama, and he points to Synge as the master of these forms.

Perhaps a passage from the preface of Synge's Playboy of the Western World, which may be taken as the most representative Irish comedy, will best show the ideals of the Irish comedians:

94 Ibid., p. 582.

95 Frank W. Chandler, Aspects of the Modern Drama, p. 269.
In the modern literature... richness is found only in sonnets or prose poems, or in one or two elaborate books that are far away from the profound and common interests of life. One has, on one side, Mallarmé and Huysmans producing this literature; and on the other, Ibsen and Zola dealing with the reality of life in joyless and pallid words. On the stage one must have reality, and one must have joy; and that is why the intellectual modern drama has failed, and people have grown sick of the false joy of the musical comedy, that has been given them in place of the rich joy found only in what is superb and wild in reality. In a good play every speech should be as fully flavoured as a nut or apple, and such speeches cannot be written by anyone who works among people who have shut their lips on poetry.

In Ireland, for a few years more, we have a popular imagination that is fiery and magnificent, and tender; so that those of us who wish to write start with a chance that is not given to writers in places where the springtime of the local life has been forgotten, and the harvest is a memory only, and the straw has been turned into bricks.

Here, in the musical prose which characterizes his plays, Synge has revealed the ideal of the Irish playwright to treat of the common people, with their real joys, and their real sorrows, in the language of the Irish peasantry, with its unconscious poetry and whimsicality.

Two other English writers, in particular, must be mentioned briefly before we turn to America: Granville Barker and Somerset Maugham. Of the former Dickinson says:

As moral as Galsworthy, Barker excels the latter in a searching artistry, in making excursions into new zones of the spirit... Barker is like Shaw in liking discussion, in feeling that ideas are among the most important things in the world. But he is unlike Shaw in being an artist.96

However, he is an artist in the writing of dialogue, not in the technique of the drama.97 His plays show a

96 Dickinson, op. cit., p. 220.
97 Ibid., p. 223.
decided lack of plot, though some excellent delineation of character. The Madras House (1910) is his outstanding comedy -- a didactic character study, based upon the weaknesses of the social order, and with just sufficient plot to hold the speeches together.

A dramatist with different ideas is Somerset Maugham. As Barrett Clark remarks:

Somerset Maugham is of the classic line. In none of his plays does he depart very far from the beaten path; he is not a thesis playwright, he is not interested in politics or "ideas"; he is content to write about the upper middle class, to satirize their weaknesses and vanities, observing them in the rôle of a casual bystander. His best work is therefore his characterization, though his technique is almost faultless. "Our Betters" and "The Circle," though they are neither revolutionary nor novel, are bitter satires of modern life.98

The Circle (1921) is probably the best example of his work; Clark calls it one of the most distinguished specimens of the modern comedy of manners.99

John Galsworthy, in spite of his excellent realistic work in plays like Strife and Justice, has been omitted in this survey because of the fact that his field lies in tragedy rather than comedy, though he did attempt some social satire, as in The Silver Box. But the dominant tone in all the Galsworthy plays is heavier than the ideals of comedy permit.

America has been for the most part behind the times in

98 Barrett Clark, A Study of the Modern Drama, p. 320.

99 Loc. cit.
the social comedy. Two names are all that stand out in any
prominence: Augustus Thomas and Clyde Fitch. Both can be
called followers of Pinero, and Thomas stands as the "chief
American exponent of the 'well-made' play."100 In most of
his work he runs to melodrama, and there is probably but
one play that is destined to live long in the annals of the
drama: that is The Witching Hour (1907). Thomas differs
from most of the modern writers of high comedy in that he
attempts to give the public "what it wants, instead of what
it should want." The aim of reform in the drama has had
little effect upon him as it has had upon his contempo­
raries, including Clyde Fitch. The Witching Hour will be
examined later, and the peculiarities of Thomas noted at
that time. He was not a writer on social "ideas," but he
was an excellent craftsman.

Clyde Fitch got down to the play of "ideas" more ef­
ficiently than any other American writer of comedy pre­vious
to him. Beginning with Beau Brummell in 1890, he has since
that time been consistently producing comedies and dramas,
more like those of Maugham than like any other of the
English writers. His characters are mostly chosen from the
upper and middle classes of New York. There was one handi­
cap under which Fitch labored; that of writing for actors,
managers, and audiences that did not want the satire that
he was most interested and efficient in. Consequently,

100 Ibid., p. 369.
though he himself held the purpose of the drama to be a realistic portrayal of contemporary life, his plays tended to be merely brilliant and amusing. *The Truth* (1906) is undoubtedly the most representative of Fitch's comedies, and in fact one of the very few genuine American comedies of manners.\(^{101}\)

Of late America has contributed something toward comedy that promises to follow the lead of the later English writers. In 1914 appeared Jesse Lynch Williams' *And So They Were Married* (afterwards known as *Why Marry?*), which is one of the most powerful attacks on the marriage system to be found in modern drama. It is to be regretted that Mr. Williams has done nothing else of such magnitude as this satiric comedy, appropriately subtitled: "A Comedy of The New Woman." But the play shows what can be hoped for in the American comic output once the new principles become firmly rooted.

Susan Glaspell has done some creditable work in the "sophisticated" comedy, dealing with thought and satire. In her comedy she runs principally to one-act plays like *Suppressed Desires* and *Tickless Time*. Her greatest success has been in tragedy: *The Verge and Inheritors*,\(^{102}\) but she shows an intellectual attitude — "an acute consciousness of . . . emotions, a standing outside them even as


\(^{102}\) Isaac Golderg, *The Drama of Transition*, p. 472-481.
they are being experienced -- which makes for the best in the comedy of criticism.

In the modern period there is a new tendency which has lifted its head in the field of comic principles. This may be briefly stated as the principle of reform, but if so defined it needs careful explanation. It is closely allied with portraiture as used by Molière in the interest of satire, and with the idea of reform in Jonson's "comedy of humours," but there is a distinctly new note in the modern use of satire. With Molière and Jonson it was directed against individuals, and society as a whole was supported. Now the satirist lets fly his shafts at society itself. 104 This subject will be taken up more fully in a later chapter, and suffice it to say now for our purpose here that the principle of reform by the use of realism and satire has gained a firm grip on the modern comedy of manners.

Strictly speaking, then, we have noted from the beginnings of comedy in Athens down to the modern English comedy five basic principles. Briefly stated they are, in order of their appearance: caricature, portraiture, the use of the romantic plot, the appeal to pity, and the aim to reform. The first two of these as we have seen were contributed by the Greeks, the third by Spain, the fourth by England, and

103 Ibid., p. 472.
104 Henderson, op. cit., p. 11-16.
the fifth, though actually getting its impetus not so much in comedy as in the tragedy, or tragicomedy, of Ibsen, was handed down to the writers of comedy through the medium of Jones and Pinero, again of England.

The statement of five principles of comedy does not mean a restricted field. We have observed the overlapping of the ideas, and the wide range of practice allowed by each. For example: Molière and Congreve were motivated by virtually the same principles, but no one would think of calling their work on a par, or even claim a similarity of tone. No more would one claim a mutuality of attitude in Dear Brutus, by Barrie, and Man and Superman, by Shaw, though both aim at social satire.

After this somewhat tedious history of the comic movement, we shall turn to a more detailed study of representative types of the new comedy in an effort to determine just what it is that enables us to designate it as a definitely novel form of the comic drama. Why is it the new comedy instead of merely the modern comedy? To the preliminary work in such an analysis the following chapter is devoted.
CHAPTER III
TYPES OF THE NEW COMEDY

There are various manifestations of the comic spirit in the modern age, and they only too often defy classification. In many instances even the line between comedy and tragedy is difficult to draw. Who, for instance, is willing to rise and state without qualifications that Pinero's *The Thunderbolt* is comedy or that it is tragedy? Who can assert with finality that O'Neill's *Anna Christie* is a good tragedy ruined by a happy ending, an everyday love story clouded by sordid circumstances, or purely and simply a penetrating social drama? The last qualification probably fits it more exactly, but the play does, nevertheless, contain elements of high comedy and of deep tragedy. There is a name which authors and critics arbitrarily assign to plays of this nature that fit no more definite category: drama. It covers a multitude of sins, sounds well, and is delightfully indefinite. We shall continue to call such plays dramas until someone thinks of a more fitting term, and shall in the meantime turn to plays of less dubious denomination, but which come under the also spacious head of comedy.

In the modern period, which we have set as beginning with the last decade of the nineteenth century, there are in reality three types of comedy, excluding farce. One of these is so utterly different from anything else in the period that it requires to be set definitely apart from the other
types. It is the Irish comedy, dealing not with society, satire, or propaganda, as the comedy of England and America, but with the common people, and with no desire to reform or ridicule anything. In its subject matter it approaches realism; in its language it approaches romanticism. We shall observe this more fully when we examine Synge's The Playboy of the Western World later in the chapter.

The two types of comedy that dominate English and American comic drama are the comedy of ideas and the comedy of manners. The first of these, the comedy of ideas, is distinguished by its primary aim to set forth some social, or political, or economic, or religious view. In the words of Henderson:

... the new dramaturgic iconoclast demands the stage as a medium for the dissemination of the most advanced views—upon standards of morality, rules of conduct, codes of ethics, and philosophies of life. His primal distinction arises from the discovery of the ever-charming and heretical doctrine that life is greater than art. He has done away with the impotent conception of art for art's sake. He has ushered in the new era of art for life's sake.2

But the same author points out that the play of ideas and the thesis play are not to be confused, as the thesis play, in setting out avowedly to prove something, arranges its characters with that end in view, whereas the play of ideas proposes to take a cross section, or at least a piece, of contemporary life, and by letting the characters talk and act as they might normally do in real life, set forth the

1 A.H. Thorndike, English Comedy, p. 583-584.
writer's ideas by means of an unsolved problem. The audience should not be conscious until the play is ended that a lesson is contained in it—a lesson taught by the spectator's own solution of the problem raised by the writer. As an example of the comedy of ideas, probably as good a one as we can find is Jesse Williams' *And So They Were Married*, which we will go into in some detail later.

The comedy of manners resembles the comedy of ideas in that it deals with contemporary life and aims at reform; it differs in that it presents no special problem, other than that society as a whole is a problem—no special view other than the view, cynically, as in Wilde, or kindly, as in Barrie, that society is in need of a change. And even these problems and views are not actually raised but implied. To represent the comedy of manners we will take Maugham's *The Circle*.

But, unfortunately for an exact classification, we find it impossible definitely to put all plays into one group or the other. In fact there are relatively few that do fit either group unquestionably. It is safe to say that in virtually every English or American comedy one or both of these forms is manifested; but more often than not it is both, and consequently, we must treat most of the plays here without classifying them as one or the other type, merely noting the evidences of the influence of manners and ideas. We can, however, give the two plays mentioned

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special treatment as instances in which the two forms stand out in a comparatively clear manner.

It is probably necessary to examine also a comedy which is representative of a structural form, the "well-made" play, which gained some popularity, especially with Pinero and Thomas. Superficially, the "well-made" play is that type of drama which during the first two acts builds up to a delicate situation that crystallizes in the third act, with the curtain falling at the crisis; the denouement coming in the fourth and last act. Actually it is more than that; it proposes to create in the first two acts a situation which can have one, and only one solution—-that which is revealed in the third and fourth acts. It should carry a note of the inevitable, and every incident should point to that inevitable solution to which the dramatist fixes his attention. The audience or reader should feel at the conclusion of the play that, given the incidents of the first two acts, the events of the last two could have happened in no other way. This form was used rather extensively in the writing of both comedies of ideas and comedies of manners.

Taking The Liars by Henry Arthur Jones as an example of the "well-made" comedy, let us see how this structural form works in application.

The first act acquaints us with the fact that Edward Falkner, an army officer who has made himself famous by his successful campaigns against slave dealers in Africa, is very much in love with Lady Jessica Nepean, wife of Gilbert
The situation is fraught with possibilities, to say the least, and is made even more acute since Lady Jessica returns Falkner's love, to a degree, and also because of Gilbert's extremely jealous nature. We also learn that Colonel Sir Christopher Deering, Falkner's friend and companion during the African campaigns, is doing his best to prevent a scandal, by giving Falkner his most weighty advice against keeping up a love affair with another man's wife. All of this counsel is wasted on Falkner, who is able to realize nothing more vital than that he loves Jessica. Deering himself is in love with Beatrice Ebernoe, the widow of a Colonel Ebernoe, one of Deering's closest friends, who has been killed in Africa. Gilbert Nepean is leaving on a business trip to Devonshire. Here we are given the preliminary situation; not, incidentally, without some interesting dialogue, such as that between Jessica and Gilbert, as the latter is about to depart. Gilbert is demanding to know just what has been going on between Jessica and Falkner, and after considerable haggling gets this statement:

LADY J. Mr. Falkner is very deeply attached to me, I believe.
GILBERT. He has told you so?
LADY J. No.
GILBERT. No?
LADY J. No; but that's only because I keep on stopping him.
GILBERT. You keep on stopping him?
LADY J. Yes; it's so much more pleasant to have him dangling for a little while, and then--
GILBERT. And then what?
LADY J. Well it is pleasant to be admired.
GILBERT. And you accept his admiration?
LADY J. Of course I do. Why shouldn't I? If Mr. Falkner admires me, isn't that the greatest compliment he can pay to
your taste? And if he spares you the drudgery of being polite to me, flattering me, complimenting me, and paying me the hundred delicate attentions which win a woman's heart, I'm sure you ought to be very much obliged to him for taking all that trouble off your hands.

GILBERT (looks furious.) Now understand me. This nonsense has gone far enough. I forbid you to have anything further to say to the man.

LADY. Ah, you forbid me!

GILBERT. I forbid you. And understand, if you do---

LADY. Ah, take care! Don't threaten me!

GILBERT. Do you mean to respect my wishes?

LADY. Of course I shall respect your wishes. I may not obey them, but I will respect them.

This situation is allowed to disport itself in a way that seems quite logical, according to the code of plays, if not of life. The second act opens at Falkner's private sitting room at the Star and Garter. Falkner is ordering dinner for himself and for a friend whom he expects. Enter Jessica. She has been visiting a cousin, and while on her way to the station seems to have taken the wrong turning---she did the same thing once before---and arrived instead at the Star and Garter, so she decided to drop in and ask Falkner to give her a bite of dinner. It might be well to add that he had asked her to do that very thing, but had declined. As the dinner is about to be served, Falkner goes out to silence a hand-organ that has begun to play under the window, and George Nepean, brother of Gilbert, enters, having seen Jessica through the window. While she is explaining that she is giving a dinner for a small party of friends, Falkner returns, and George, taking in the situation, leaves to tell Gilbert of the affair. Jessica's sister, Lady Rosamund, and her husband are seen passing. Jessica tries to make
them stay to dinner, so that she can tell Gilbert that she
and Falkner were not alone; but Rosamund has another en-
gagement. Jessica leaves for home in a fright, but she has
got Rosamund to promise to write to George and tell him that
she and Jessica can explain it if he will call at her home
the next day. Deering calls on Falkner, and while there dis-
covers Jessica's pen in the room. He takes it, but says nothing.
Here is created the situation which is to have the inevi-
table solution.

Comes the solution. Act three: Rosamund and Jessica a-
wait in Rosamund's drawing room the arrival of George Nepean.
Deering enters to return Jessica her pen and to assure her
that he will reveal nothing. He, with Rosamund's husband, is
reluctantly persuaded to remain and confirm the lie which
the two ladies have concocted: Jessica and Rosamund were
dining together at the Star and Garter; Jessica arrived first
and George, seeing her, went to the room. At that moment
Falkner happened to step in and George put the wrong con-
struction on the whole matter. The ladies are confident
that the lie will work, when the lady with whom Rosamund
dined decides to call, and in the course of the conver-
sation mentions that she has told George that Rosamund dined with
her. A new lie must be invented. Happily, Dolly Coke, cous-
in of Jessica and Rosamund, arrives and agrees to substi-
tute for Rosamund as the sharer of the dinner with Jessica.
George enters, is told the lie, does not believe it, and
goes for Gilbert. When Gilbert arrives, Deering tries to
persuade him to take his wife home and induce her to tell him the truth. Gilbert refuses and the lie is brought to bear upon him with little success. Falkner enters. Lady Jessica asks him to tell Gilbert the truth. He does. The curtain falls. Whether or not you consider it inevitable, the climax has been arrived at with neatness and considerable dramatic effect.

At the beginning of the fourth act, we are occupied for a time with the affairs of Sir Christopher Deering. He is packing to return to Africa. Falkner has been ordered back, but as yet Deering has been unable to persuade him to go. Beatrice Ebernoe comes to him, and in a very short scene, throughout which Deering continues to pack, he secures her promise to marry him in the morning and to accompany him to Africa. These two disposed of so happily, enter Gilbert to ask Deering’s advice concerning Jessica. The advice that he is given is to go home to his wife and to give her some of the attention that a wife deserves—that it is because of his neglect and mistrust of her that she has got into all the difficulty. Gilbert, for a wonder, is impressed, and leaves to follow his counsel. But it seems he is to be too late. Falkner, and later Jessica, come to Deering’s apartment, and despite all the sound advice of Sir Christopher, remain firm for a considerable time in their intention to elope. Gradually won over by the force of logic, however, they consent to part. At this moment Gilbert returns dejected. Gilbert hides the pair, and they
hear Gilbert's genuine distress. Jessica comes forth and a mutual reconciliation is made. Here is the conclusion after Jessica is properly restored to her husband:

SIR C. Good-night, Lady Jessica, and good-bye! LADY J. Good-night, Sir Christopher, and (at FALKNER) one last good-bye! (She looks toward curtains as if about to break away from GILBERT and go to FALKNER.)

SIR C. Good-night, Nepean. GILBERT. Good-night, Deering. SIR C. Try and keep her. She's worth the keeping. GILBERT. I'll try.

(Exeunt JESSICA and GILBERT. FALKNER comes forward in great despair from curtains, throws himself into chair against table, and buries his face in his hands.)

SIR C. (Goes to him very affectionately.) Come! Come! My dear old Ned! This will never do! And all for a woman! They're not worth it. (aside, softly) except one! They're not worth it. Come, buckle on your courage! There's work in front of you, and fame, and honour! And I must take you out and bring you back with flying colours! Come! Come! My dear old fellow.

FALKNER. Let me be for a minute, Kit. Let me be!

(Enter BEATRICE. SIR CHRISTOPHER goes to her.)

BEA. What's the matter?

SIR C. Hush! Poor old chap! He's hard hit! Everybody else seems to be making a great mess of their love affairs. We won't make a mess of ours?

BEA. No. You'll get over this, Ned? We'll help you.

You'll get over it?

FALKNER. (Rising with great determination.) Yes, I shall pull round. I'll try! I'll try! To-morrow, Kit? We start to each?

SIR C. (Putting one arm about affectionately.) To-morrow. My wife! My friend! My two comrades!.

CURTAIN.

It will have been noticed that nothing unessential to the development of the central theme has been included in the plot of the play. Everything aids either in bringing on the crisis or in the denouement. The outcome, it is true, might have been other than that revealed in the last act—-in fact, that is the criticism of most "well-made"
plays: they do not carry the element of inevitability which they claim—but, at least, the conclusion is logical, and I am sure that no one could foresee a more likely solution.

As can readily be seen, this is much more the comedy of manners than the comedy of ideas, but even so, it carries a lesson: "that society in order to exist must adhere to a set of regulations, and that any infringement of its laws inevitably brings social ruin." But, more than it sets forth any new or radical idea, it is a satire on contemporary manners. As Thorndike says: "it is an excellent dramatic and humorous exposure of the pretences and falsehoods with which late Victorian society was half-heartedly guarding the institution of matrimony."

Turning to a typical example of the comedy of manners, The Circle, by William Somerset Maugham, we find we do not have to spend so much time on plot; indeed in most modern comedies the plot is a more or less subordinate unit. Clark even states that in the best comedies plot is unnecessary, except as a thread just sufficient to hold the characters together. In The Circle, certainly the story is a mere

6 Thorndike, op. cit., p. 567-568.
7 Clark, op. cit., p. 139-140.
item of third consequence. The main plot can be summed up as that of a wife who leaves her husband, after three years of married life, for a virtually penniless young man, and goes with him to the East Indies. There are other interests, however, brought out more in the light of episodes than parts of the story: the fact that the husband's father has been left by his wife in almost the same manner, that the elopement of the husband's mother had not proved very happy, that both the husband's mother and father try to point out to the girl the folly of her action, and, most interesting of all, that the father's advice to the son to leave the wife free to go, not set up any barriers in the way of her flight, if he wants her to stay, is followed, with the result that the wife immediately takes advantage of the liberty and bolts, after a discussion of the matter with her young lover.

But it is not plot we are interested in; it is character and dialogue, and that we get in the utmost artistry. Lady Kitty, the husband's mother, is handed over to us in a neatly tied package almost as soon as she comes on the stage:

LADY KITTY. '... I think it's a beautiful chair. Hepplewhite?
ARNOLD. [the son] No. Sheraton.
LADY KITTY. Oh, I know. "The School for Scandal."

Lord Porteous, the man whom Kitty had eloped with in her earlier days, seems to tell us all about his decay, and his irritableness, in the line: "These new teeth of mine
A conversation between Lady Kitty and her former husband, may serve to show the excellent dialogue which is manifested, not only in that case, but throughout the play:

LADY KITTY. . . . I was so touched when I learned that you never lived in this house again after I left it.

CHAMPION-CHENY. (the former husband) The cuckoos have always been very plentiful. Their note has a personal application which I must say, I have found very offensive.

LADY KITTY. When I saw that you didn't marry again, I couldn't help thinking that you still loved me.

C-C. I am one of the few men that I know who is able to profit from experience.

LADY KITTY. In the eyes of the Church, I am still your wife. The Church is so wise. It knows that in the end, a woman always comes back to her first love. Clive, I am willing to return to you.

C-C. My dear Kitty, I couldn't take advantage of your momentary vexation with Hughie to let you take a step which I know you would bitterly regret.

LADY KITTY. You've waited for me a long time. For Arnold's sake.

C-C. Do you think we really need bother about Arnold? In the last thirty years he's had time to grow used to the situation.

LADY KITTY. (with a little smile) I think I've sown my wild oats clive.

C-C. I haven't. I was a good young man, Kitty.

LADY KITTY. I know.

C-C. And I'm very glad. It has enabled me to be a very wicked old one.

LADY KITTY. You've waited for me a long time. For Arnold's sake.

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C-C. I haven't. I was a good young man, Kitty.

LADY KITTY. I know.

C-C. And I'm very glad. It has enabled me to be a very wicked old one.

For some years I was notoriously the prey of a secret sorrow. But I found so many charming creatures who were so anxious to console that in the end it grew rather fatiguing. Out of regard to my health, I ceased to frequent the drawing rooms of Mayfair.

LADY KITTY. And since then?

C-C. Since then I have allowed myself the luxury of assisting financially a succession of dear little things, in a somewhat humble sphere, between the ages of twenty and twenty-five.

LADY KITTY. I cannot understand the infatuation of men for young girls. I think they're so dull.

C-C. It's a matter of taste. I love old wine, old friends, and old books. but I like young women. On their twenty-fifth birthday, I give them a diamond ring and tell them they must no longer waste their youth and beauty on an old fogey like me. We have a most affecting scene, my
technique on these occasions is perfect, and then I start all over again.

LADY KITTY. You're a wicked old man, Clive.
C.-C. That's what I told you. But, by George, I'm a happy one.
LADY KITTY. There's only one course open to me now.
C.-C. What is that?
LADY KITTY. (with a flashing smile) To go and dress for dinner.

If Maugham is working to put over an idea at all in the play, it is the idea that people do not profit by the experiences of others, or, as some have held, that it does not necessarily mean a life of unhappiness if a woman leaves her husband for another man. But are these important enough, or original enough, to merit three acts of a drama to pound them home? It would hardly seem so, and as Clark states: "...Somerset Maugham is an artist, and only incidentally a sociologist. The subject possesses a certain interest but the treatment of the characters is what holds us."

It does seem for a moment in the third act that the play is going to develop into a comedy of ideas, or even a thesis play, when Lady Kitty is pointing out to Elizabeth, the wife, the disadvantages of such a life as hers has been:

LADY KITTY. . . The first two years were wonderful. People cut me, you know, but I didn't mind. I thought love was everything. It is a little uncomfortable when you come

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8 Clark, op. cit., p. 322.
9 Loc. cit.
upon an old friend, and go towards her eagerly, so glad to see her and are met with an icy stare.

ELIZABETH. Do you think friends like that are worth having?
LADY KITTY. Perhaps they are not very sure of themselves. Perhaps they're honestly shocked. It's a test one had better not put one's friends to if one can help it. It's rather bitter to find how few one has.

ELIZABETH. But one has some.
LADY KITTY. Yes, they ask you to come and see them when they are quite sure no one will be there who would object to meeting you. Or else they say: "My dear, you know I'm devoted to you and I wouldn't mind at all, but my girl's growing up--- I'm sure you understand; you wouldn't think it unkind of me if I didn't ask you to the house?"

ELIZABETH. (Smiling) That doesn't seem to me very serious.
LADY KITTY. At first I thought it rather a relief, for it threw Hughie and me together more. But you know men are funny. Even when they're in love, they're not in love all day long. They want change and recreation.

Night after night I sobbed my heart out when Hughie told me he was going to the club and I knew he was out with that odious woman. Of course, it wasn't as if there weren't plenty of men who were only too anxious to console me. Men have always been attracted by me you know.

ELIZABETH. Oh, of course. I can quite understand it.
LADY KITTY. But I had my self-respect to think of, and I felt that whatever Hughie should do I would do nothing that I should regret.

ELIZABETH. You must be very glad now.
LADY KITTY. Oh yes, notwithstanding all my temptations I've been absolutely faithful to Hughie in spirit.

ELIZABETH. I don't think I quite understand what you mean.
LADY KITTY. Well there was a poor Italian boy, young Count Castel Giovanni, who was so desperately in love with me that his mother begged me not to be too cruel. She was afraid he'd go into a consumption. What could I do. And then, oh years later, Antonio Melita. He said he'd shoot himself unless I-----well you understand I couldn't let the poor boy shoot himself.

(ELIZABETH looks at her for a long time, and a certain horror seizes her of this old woman, painted and dissolute.)

ELIZABETH. (Hoarsely) Oh, but I think that's dreadful.
LADY KITTY. Are you shocked? One sacrifices one's life for love, and then one finds that love doesn't last. The tragedy of love isn't death or separation. One gets over them. The tragedy of love is indifference.
Had Elizabeth profited by this picture and remained with her husband, or had her going been treated in a tragic light, the play would, indeed, have been a problem play, but neither of these conclusions came to pass and the ending is turned into a huge joke on Champion-Cheny, whose subtle little scheme has failed to produce results. In the light of such facts, it is difficult to look upon the play as more than a hearty laugh at society, which is really all that modern pure comedy of manners professes to be.

The distinction between the comedy of manners and the comedy of ideas should be fairly clear when we put alongside the play we have just discussed a play like And So They Were Married, by Jesse Lynch Williams. In it the central idea, the thing the author is trying to impress upon the audience or reader, is contained in this excerpt from the speech by the Judge—really the author's spokesman—in discussing the action of Helen, the heroine, and "new woman" in this play dedicated to the "new woman", in her proposal to become the mistress of the man she loves, because, in their efforts to keep her from marrying the man, her family has turned her against marriage entirely:

... She is the New Woman. Society can no longer force females into wedlock—so it is forcing them out....by the thousands. Approve of it? Of course not! What good will our disapproval do? They will only laugh at you. The strike is on. Few of the strikers will let you see it. Few of the strikers have Helen's courage. But believe it or not, the strike will spread. It cannot be crushed by law or force. Unless society wakes up and reforms its rules and regulations of marriage, marriage is doomed. ... What are you going to do about it? (Silence) I thought so—nothing. Call them bad women and let it go at that. Blame it all on human na-
ture made by God; you leave untouched our human institutions made by man. You poor little pessimists! human nature today is better than it ever was, but our most important institution is worse—the most sacred relationship in life has become a jest in the market-place. . . You funny little cowards, you're afraid of life, afraid of love, afraid of truth. You worship lies and call it God.

It may be argued that such a bald statement belongs in a thesis drama, rather than in a play of ideas, and the argument may be correct. I have chosen a play, to typify the comedy of ideas, which seems to stand out distinctly as having a point to put across, and I may have overstepped the mark and picked one which has marshalled its characters for the purpose of preaching. But let us look at the important incidents in the plot, and I believe we shall see the play has not got beyond the bounds of a comedy of ideas.

Jean, a girl of about twenty-five, is being forced by her brother John to marry Rex, a good for nothing fellow, who, however, has plenty of money. As a matter of fact she loves another man, but he is poor. Helen, her sister is in love with Dr. Ernest Hamilton, a rather famous young chemist, who is making but three thousand a year, and this fact is held out strongly to Helen by her brother as an argument that Ernest cannot support her. Further, it is shown by John that Helen would only be a handicap to Ernest in his career. Finally she announces that she will live with him without marrying him—that they need each other and she would rather be a blot than a blight to his future. He declines, but later returns and takes her, when he discov-
ers that her family is intent upon hurling the shame of her proposal in her face. The family is in a panic, but the uncle of the young people, the Judge, saves the day by bringing them back home and getting them to attend a dinner at which are all the relatives. At the dinner, John announces the engagement of Jean and Rex, and also that of Ernest and Helen. Ernest immediately states that he and Helen are not to be married. John—he has a pull at the plant where Ernest is employed—says that Ernest’s salary is to be doubled, thinking thereby to eliminate the principal obstacle to the marriage which he has now come to desire; and Theodore, a minister and cousin to the girls, offers to conduct the ceremonies. As a matter of fact, he is opposed to the marriage of Jean and Rex, but he owes his position to Rex’s father, and has an invalid mother and several children to support. As he is about to begin on the wedding ceremony for Helen and Ernest, the final storm breaks:

HELEN. (suddenly loud and clear) Theodore! are you going to marry Rex and Jean?
JOHN. (impatiently) Of course! Of course! Mr. Baker’s chaplain.
ERNEST. (recoiling) Theodore! You! Are you going to stand up and tell the world that God has joined these two together—God?
(THEODORE looks at JOHN but does not deny it and says nothing.)
HELEN. Then you will be blaspheming love—and God who made it. No, you shall not marry us.
ERNEST. (agreeing with HELEN) Some things are too sacred to be profaned.
THEODORE. (overwhelmed) Profaned? By the Church?
JOHN. Your love too sacred for the Church? The Church has a name for such love, the world a name for such women!
ERNEST. (about to strike JOHN, then shrugs.) A rotten world! A kept church! Come. let’s go away from it all!
HELEN offers her hand in farewell to LUCY, but JOHN shields her from HELEN'S touch, then to JEAN. KEW shields JEAN from contamination, but JEAN weeps.)

JUDGE. (barring the way. To ERNEST) Stop! You cannot! The very tie that binds you to this woman binds you to us and to the whole world with hooks of steel! (The lovers are still going. JUDGE ascends steps facing them. For the last time before too late! ERNEST! You know that in eyes of God you are taking this woman to be your wife.

ERNEST. In the eyes of God, I do take Helen to be my wife—but--

JUDGE. You, Helen! Speak, woman, speak!

HELEN. I take Ernest to be my husband in the eyes of God, but--

JUDGE. (raises his hand augustly and with a voice of authority.) Then since you, Ernest, and you Helen, have made this solemn declaration before God and in the presence of witnesses, I, by the authority vested in me by this state, do now pronounce you man and wife.

The day is again saved, and "the women who had before snubbed Helen, cover her with kisses, for now she is fit for their embraces." But the Judge gets in a last remark: "Yes, Respectability has triumphed this time, but let Society take warning and beware: Beware!"

It is largely a matter of opinion whether this is actual preaching or merely demonstration of a danger by instances that might be found in real life. At any rate, it shows a play developed with the intent to impress the audience with an idea. Had Ernest and Helen carried out their plans, the break with society would have been complete and we would have had an actual thesis play. As it is, the theories advanced by Helen have not been proved and the audience is left to judge for itself their worth in application. But the idea that marriage is antiquated in its present form, has been definitely impressed. A comparison of this play with The Circle must show clearly a
difference of purpose. In Williams' play there is no denying that there is an actual attempt to go beyond any general satire of society, and to point out a specific ill which needs to be remedied.

Utterly removed from any attempt to satirize society, or impress any moral, is the three act comedy, The Play-Boy of the Western World, by J.M. Synge. It is concerned solely with the telling of a story, in the simple language of the Irish peasantry. Synge says in his preface: "I have used one or two words only which I have not heard among the country people of Ireland, or spoken in my own nursery before I could read the newspapers."

The story is that of a young man, Christy Mahon, who comes to a little Irish coast town with the news that he has killed his father with one blow of a spade. The news impresses the people mightily, and Christy becomes the hero of the village, with all the women clamoring to gain his attention. One of them succeeds. She is Pegeen, the daughter of the inn keeper. Everything goes well until Christy's father appears. He has been only stunned by the blow, and has followed his erring son to bring him home. The glamor that surrounded Christy is immediately dissolved, and all, even Pegeen, turn against him. But he rises to his sense of honor and again strikes down his father; the villagers are sure that he has killed him this time indeed. An actual murder proves less romantic than the telling of it, and the people are about to bundle Christy off to the po-
lice, when old Mahon again returns, much humbled this time, and he and Christy go off again with Christy now the master. As he goes, Christy call out to the village people; "Ten Thousand blessings on all that's here, for you've turned me a likely gaffer in the end of all, the way I'll go romancing through a romping lifetime from this hour to the dawning of the judgment day.

As Thorndike mentions, there is an element of pathos in this play as in everything that Synge wrote; it should be expected from the master of stark tragedy who could write Riders to the Sea; but there's a quiet humor much like Lamb's--the smiles mingled with tears, which is perhaps the crowning achievement of true comedy.

The material that Synge has dealt with is unquestionably realistic, but in his dialogue, which is the peculiar strangeness and charm of the play, he has touched the romantic. Look, for example, at this passage where Christy has almost decided to go away from the town for fear of being discovered by the police:

CHRISTY... .And is it not a poor thing to be starting again, and I, a lonesome fellow will be looking on women and girls, the way they look upon the Lord?

PEG ZEN. What call have you to be that lonesome, when there's poor girls walking Mayo now by the thousands.

CHRISTY.-- Grimly--It's well you know what call I have. It's well you know it's a lonesome thing to be passing small towns with the lights shining sideways when the night is down, or going in strange places with a dog noising before you and a dog noising behind, or drawn to the city where you'd hear a voice talking deep love in every shadow of the ditch, and you passing on with an empty, hungry stomach failing from your heart.

PEG ZEN. I'm thinking you're a funny man, Christy Mahon. The oddest walking fellow I've set my eyes on to this

Thorndike, op. cit. p. 583
hour to-day.
CHRISTY. What would any be but odd men and they living lonesome in the world?
PEGEEN. I'm not odd and I'm my whole life with my father only.
CHRISTY.--with infinite admiration--How would a lovely handsome woman the like of you be lonesome when all men should be thronging around to hear the sweetness of your voice, and the little infant children should be pestering your steps I'm thinking and you walking the roads.
PEGEEN. I'm hard set to know what way a coaxing fellow the like of yourself should be lonesome either.
CHRISTY. Coaxing?
PEGEEN. Would you have me think a man never talked with the girls would have the words you've spoken today? It's only letting on you are to be lonesome, the way you'd get around me now.
CHRISTY. I wish to God I was letting on; but I was lonesome all times, and born lonesome I'm thinking, as the moon of dawn... and I going off stretching out the earth between us, the way I'll not be walking near you another dawn of the year till the two of us do arise to hope or judgment with the saints of God...

This is like nothing else in modern drama except the other Irish writers--Mrs. Gregory, and W.B. Yeats--or perhaps the fantasies of Percy MacKaye, who has done for the American rural people something of what the Irish writers have done for the Irish peasantry.

A passage from Thorndike's English comedy must be quoted here, in which he says, speaking of The Playboy of the Western World:

Only from a remote nook like the Aran Islands could come its simplicity, its freshness of phrase, its freedom from all modernities, but only from genius, the art of its design, and the lasting appeal of its humour. It has no hint of satire and no hint of allegory. Who is this Playboy? Is he each and all of us, or is he Poetry, or Romance, or the Imagination, or Literature, or what? Synge does not say. Let us call him the Spirit of the Drama, swaying the fancies of the women, swelling in its own soul, masking reality in romancing words and passions. It is a true comic view of drama or of human nature, however we may apply it. The imagination mocks and cheers, deludes and exalts, that is the humour of it for the Aran Islanders or for the sophisticated Londoners. There could be no excuse for writ-
ing a history of the comedy of four centuries if we did not love our playboys. II.

In The Circle we have seen the comedy of manners, and in And So They Were Married, the comedy of ideas. Let us now look at some others of the English and American comedies, to note the uses to which these two forms have been put. We shall not be able to find anything resembling The Playboy of the Western World, and shall have to let it stand, with the rest of the Irish comedies, as an art in itself, one distinct from the trend of the modern drama.

The Gay Lord Quex, By Arthur Wing Pinero, probably succeeds as well as any English play since the beginning of the new period, in getting away from satire or the idea of reform. The Marquis of Quex has been in his earlier days a rather notorious libertine, but now, in his forty-eighth year, he has fallen genuinely in love with a young lady, Miss Muriel Eden, who has finally consented to marry him if he can stay reformed for six months. Quex, naturally, is quite immaculate in his affairs. But SophyFullgarney, a manicurist, and protegee of Muriel, is quite determined that Muriel shall not marry the old reprobate, but a Captain Bastling, whom she meets at Sophy's establishment.

Sophy is invited to Fauncy Court, where Muriel lives with her sister-in-law, and where for the time Quex is staying, also the Duchess of Strood, a former mistress of Quex. Sophy tries to get Quex to kiss her, expecting to tell Muriel and so break up the engagement, but Quex is aware of her intent and cannot be duped. Sophy, however, overhears

II Ibid. p. 564.
the Duchess of Strood getting a promise from Quex to come to her room that night for a last good bye. Quex is reluctant but finally consents. Sophy manages to act as a maid to the Duchess, planning to eavesdrop and carry the news to Muriel. Of course, everything in the play is arranged for the scene in the Duchess' chamber, for this is a typical example of the "well-made" play. Quex and the Duchess discover Sophy listening at the key-hole, and Quex gets the Duchess to go to the room of Mrs. Eden for the rest of the night. He then calls Sophy in and locks the doors. Sophy, be it remarked is engaged, and Quex tells her that she will stay in the room with him till morning, and be found there, unless she gives him her promise not to reveal any of the situation. She writes a confession to the effect that she has had an affair with Quex, which he will hold over her until his marriage with Muriel, but she finally rebels against him and rings the bell to call the servants. Quex is impressed by her courage, and returns her confession, hiding himself until she can tell them that the Duchess is staying with Mrs. Eden. In the end Sophy prevents the possible elopement of Muriel with Captain Bastling by inducing him to kiss her, and Muriel is left to Quex.

I have taken up such valuable time in the telling of the story of the play, because it is essentially a play of plot. There is obviously no stressing of ideas in this comedy, and, indeed, there is very little social satire. The latter does creep in a little in the treatment of such
characters as Mrs. Eden, who with the Duchess of Strood, ad-
mires French novels because of the "polished style" though
the subject matter is quite beyond them, but even so the
satire is directed, as in Molière, against individuals, not
against society itself.

The play lives for, and because of, the third act,
which Archer calls "one of the strongest pieces of drama on
our own or any other stage."

Character development is given some attention, and with
considerable success, in the figures of Quex, Sophy, and the
Duchess, and when we take into consideration the plot and
the character, we have about concluded the merits of the play.
There is little room left for satire or morals. The play
stands almost unique in the modern comedy in its subordin-
ation of the purpose of reform. Much of this subordination
is perhaps due to the fact that Pinero invariably reserved
his treatment of manners, and his propounding of ideas for
use in tragedies, such as Mid-Channel.

When we turn from The Gay Lord Quex to The Importance of
Being Ernest by Oscar Wilde, we find an entirely new realm.
Plot, and even character, are almost forgotten in the in-
terest of witty dialogue. The society of the time, not in-
dividuals now, is laughed at from the first page to the
last. Here is a sample of dialogue picked at random—- it
is all in much the same tone:

ALGERNON. How are you my dear Ernest? What brings
you up to town?

---

William Archer, The Old Drama and The New p. 316.
JACK. Oh, pleasure, pleasure. What else should bring one anywhere? Eating as usual, I see, Alg? Algernon. (stiffly) I believe it is customary in polite society to take some refreshment at five o'clock. Where have you been since last Thursday?

JACK. (sitting down on the sofa) In the country.

ALGERNON. What on earth did you do there?

JACK. (pulling off his gloves) When one is in town, one amuses oneself. When one is in the country, one amuses other people. It is excessively boring.

ALGERNON. And who are the people you amuse?

JACK. (airily) Oh, neighbors, neighbors!

ALGERNON. Got nice neighbors in your part of Shropshire?

JACK. Perfectly horrid! Never speak to one of them!

ALGERNON. How immensely you must amuse them!

And a little later, when Algernon brings up the question of an inscription in a cigarette case of Jack's which he has found:

JACK. It is a very ungentlemanly thing to read a private cigarette case.

ALGERNON. Oh, it is absurd to have a hard-and-fast rule about what one should read and what one shouldn't. More than half of modern culture depends on what one shouldn't read.

Or, still later, when Lady Bracknell questions Jack about his position, before giving her consent to allow him to marry Guendolen, her daughter:

LADY BRACKNELL. (pencil and note book in hand) I feel bound to tell you that you are not down on my list of eligible young men, although I have the same list that the dear Duchess of Bolten has. We work together, in fact. However, I am quite ready to enter your name, should your answers be what a really affectionate mother requires. Do you smoke?

Jack. Well, yes, I must admit I smoke.

LADY B. I am glad to hear it. A man should always have an occupation of some kind. There are far too many idle men in London as it is. How old are you?

JACK. Twenty-nine.

LADY B. A very good age to be married at. I have always been of opinion that a man who desires to get married, should know either everything or nothing. Which do you know?

JACK. (after some hesitation) I know nothing, Lady Bracknell.
LADY B. I am pleased to hear it. I do not approve of anything that tampers with natural ignorance. Ignorance is like a delicate exotic fruit; touch it and the bloom is gone. The whole theory of modern education is radically unsound. Fortunately in England, at least, education produces no result whatever. If it did, it would prove a serious danger to the upper classes, and probably lead to acts of violence in Grosvenor Square. What is your income?

JACK. Between seven and eight thousand a year.

LADY B. (makes a note in her book) In land or in investments?

JACK. In investments chiefly.

LADY B. That is satisfactory. What between the duties expected of one during one's life-time, and the duties exacted from one after one's death, land has ceased to be either a profit or a pleasure. It gives one position and prevents one from keeping it up. That's all that can be said of land.

JACK. I have a country house with some land, of course, attached to it, about fifteen hundred acres, I believe. But I don't depend on that for my real income. In fact, as far as I can make out, the poachers are the only people who make anything out of it.

LADY B. A country house? How many bedrooms? Well, that point can be cleared up afterwards. You have a town house, I hope? A girl with a simple unspoiled nature like Gwendolen could hardly be expected to reside in the country.

JACK. Well. I own a house at Belgrave Square, but it is let by the year to Lady Bloxham. Of course, I can get back any time I want at six months notice.

LADY B. Lady Bloxham? I don't know her.

JACK. Oh, she goes about very little. She is a lady considerably advanced in years.

LADY B. Ah, now-a-days that is no guarantee of respectability in character. What number in Belgrave Square?

JACK. 149.

LADY B.(shaking her head) The unfashionable side. I thought there was something. However, that could be easily altered.

JACK. Do you mean the fashion or the side?

LADY B. Both if necessary, I presume.

The dialogue and the satire are the play's raison d'être, and, fortunately by their very excellence, are quite sufficient reason. But many deficiencies in structure are to be found, notably the lack of delineation of character. All the members of the cast speak in the same witty, satirical way, and proudly roll out their paradoxes. One,
or even two, such characters in a play are quite in reason, but when even the butler, who says "tea is served" follows it with a perverted epigram, we no longer look for anything to be taken seriously, and nothing is.

Of course, the play is decidedly a comedy of manners, there being not enough centralization of idea for it to have any more definite purpose than a cynical laugh at the whole world in general. Even that is lost most of the time in the brilliant interchange of verbal buffoonery, but it is there, nevertheless. It is safe to say that no one else writing in the English language has shown the ability in dialogue that Oscar Wilde has shown; however, he shows little else in the dramatic sense. To quote Thorndike: "If Pinero and Jones showed what could be done with plot and situation in a comedy of manners, Wilde had shown how much entertainment could be derived from mere talk, if one let his wit loose."

Though Candida, by George Bernard Shaw, is referred to as a comedy of ideas by nearly everyone but Shaw, who calls it a mystery, of the eight critics whose works I have consulted on the subject, not one has said what the central idea is; no doubt they thought that the reader would consider they thought it too obvious to need attention, so I, perhaps, might be forgiven if I adopted the same attitude, but I am going to lay myself open to criticism by saying

13 Thorndike, op. cit., p. 574.
that, in my opinion, the idea that motivated the play is that genuine happiness comes, not from the practicalities, and the petty, fleeting joys of life, but from the spirit of idealism and the poetic soul. There is good ground for disagreement on the matter, but I have reasons for interpreting the play in that way, and I will state them in good time. But let us first look at the plot.

There is a Reverend James Mavor Morell, a conscientious Christian Socialist, who has gained a wide following in the eastern London districts; his sermons are popular and he has a long waiting list of organizations eager to have him speak before them. He is extremely happy with his wife Candida. But into his happiness comes a young poet, Eugene Marchbanks, befriended and taken into his home. This young fellow comes forth with the information that he loves Candida and he cannot see her married to a fellow like Morell, who does not understand her. He is filled with the romanticism and idealism of youths and poets, and he is determined to take Candida away from her husband. The husband, at first jarred, but confident of his superiority, leaves his wife and Eugene together while he goes to deliver one of his lectures. He returns to find that nothing has passed between them, but he meets the demand of Eugene that Candida must choose between them once and for all. When Candida realizes fully the situation, there comes a moment of shock, then amusement, and finally, for probably the first time in her life, she nearly abandons herself to anger, but
CANDIDA. ... Oh! I am to choose, am I? I suppose it is quite settled that I must belong to one or the other?

MORELL. (firmly) Quite. You must choose definitely.

MARCHBANKS. (anxiously) Morell you don't understand. She means that she belongs to herself.

CANDIDA (turning on him). I mean that and a good deal more, Master Eugene, as you will both find out presently. And pray, my lords and masters, what have you to offer for my choice? I am up for auction, it seems. What do you bid, James?

MORELL (with proud humility). I have nothing to offer you but my strength for your defence, my honesty of purpose for your security, my ability and industry for your livelihood, and my authority and position for your dignity. That is all it becomes a man to offer to a woman.

CANDIDA (quite quietly). And you, Eugene, what do you offer?

MARCHBANKS. My weakness, my desolation, my heart's need!

CANDIDA (impressed). That's a good bid, Eugene. Now I have to make my choice.

I give myself to the weaker of the two.

And she gives herself to Morell.

So far, it would seem, that the man with the poetic soul and the spirit of idealism had lost. The woman he loved had given herself to another man, but shall we go a little farther? Candida has explained that Eugene has learned to live without happiness, while Morell can not live his life as he has planned it without the love and help of his wife——he has taken them for granted so long.

MARCHBANKS. I no longer desire happiness: life is nobler than that. Parson James: I give you my happiness with both hands; I love you because you have filled the heart of the woman I loved. Good-bye. (He goes toward the door.)

CANDIDA. One last word. (He stops, but without turning to her.) How old are you, Eugene?

MARCHBANKS. As old as the world now. This morning I was eighteen.

CANDIDA (going to him, and standing behind with one hand caressingly on his shoulder)
Eighteen! Will you for my sake make a little poem out of two sentences I am going to say to you? And will you promise to say it to yourself whenever you think of me?

MARCHBANKS. Say the sentences.

CANDIDA. When I am thirty, she will be forty-five; when I am sixty, she will be seventy-five.

MARCHBANKS (turning to her). In a hundred years we shall be the same age. But I have a better secret than that in my heart. Let me go now. The night outside grows impatient.

CANDIDA. Good-bye. (She takes his face in her hands; and as he divines her intention and bends his knees, she kisses his forehead. Then he flies out into the night. She turns to Morell, holding out her arms to him.) Ah, James! (They embrace. But they do not know the secret in the poet's heart.)

CURTAIN.

The secret in the poet's heart is also the secret of the theme of the play. Is it not that he knows that Candida's true love goes to him; and that only her duty and the consideration of the future, hold her to her husband? He has before him a lifetime of dreams and poetry; in those dreams and that poetry, Candida is his, their hearts are one, and he lives in dreams and poetry. He never desired the physical Candida--probably was scarcely aware of her as a physical being---he loved the dreams he himself created around her. But one thing, the uncertainty of what she thought of him, shattered the fragile tissue of the dreams and left him miserable. At the end that doubt was gone, and the idealist, with his dream world at last complete, went out into the night and into the only happy world man ever knew, the world of fancy, poetry, and dreams.

To be sure, that is not the only idea the play contains: every page brings a thought deeper than the mere
surface of life. Economics, politics, religion, and love; all these are subjected to the lens of the microscope, and an intellectual 
the play is truly a masterpiece, one that stimulates the mind, as few other dramas have done, to think through the meaning of life. There is none of the comedy of manners here—the subject is deeper than society; it struggles with the problem facing every man and woman who lives, and which faced every man or woman who ever lived: how can I find happiness? And the author has shown us, if we only can see it, what to his mind is the only solution to that problem.

In turning to *Man and Superman*, by the same author, we note a radical change of treatment. Still the comedy of ideas, it is no longer marked by any artistry of technical management, but becomes the expression in dialogue of the author's lesson. The writer has enlisted the services of a spokesman, John Tanner (Don Juan, in the third act) whereby his judgments may be pronounced, and the plot serves merely to show that the opinions he has stated do work in application. The play hinges on the theory that the actions of men are dominated by what is termed the "Life Force." The romantic conception of love is shattered and it becomes a cosmic purpose; with the individual, thinking himself to be taking the initiative in his love affair, in reality, only obeying the Life Force, which is Nature, "intent upon her own ends." She is engaged in developing from the lower orders a creature of a higher order—a Superman. Man as we know him is
but an experiment, a link in the chain between beast and Superman, and love is Nature's means for carrying out the purposes of the Life Force." Three theories have, in reality, been moulded together, as Chandler points out: that of the woman as the leader in the love affair; that of a force which uses woman as a lure for man in the fulfilment of the destiny of the race (Schopenhauer); and that of the Superman (Nietzsche). None are new, but the fusing of them into the idea of the Life Force as a new treatment.

John Tanner, the radical, with new ideas of society and the world at large, is quite convinced of the vitality of the Life Force. He points it out to his friend Octavius, explaining that while Octavius thinks he is courting Ann Whitefield, it is really Ann and the Life Force that are courting him:

TANNER. . . Vitality in a woman is a blind fury of creation. She sacrifices herself to it. Do you think she will hesitate to sacrifice you?

OCTAVIUS. Why, it is just because she is self-sacrificing that she will not sacrifice those she loves.

TANNER. That is the profoundest of mistakes, Tayy. It is the self-sacrificing woman that sacrifices others most recklessly. Because they are unselfish, they are kind in little things. Because they have a purpose which is not their own but that of the whole universe, a man is to them an instrument of that purpose.

But with all his knowledge of the world and of women, Tanner could not see that it was not Octavius, but himself, that Ann had set her mind on. In the end he yields to the Life Force.

The third of the four acts of this play is not present-

15 Loc. cit.
ed, except by itself. It concerns a dream in which Tanner imagines himself to be Don Juan, and the other characters of the play take the other parts of the Don Juan legend. In it Don Juan, the Devil, a girl with whom Juan has had one of his early affairs, and her father, whom he has killed in a duel, discuss religion, literature, politics, and what not, finally getting down to marriage and the Life Force, with its aim of the Superman. This excerpt from a speech by Don Juan should give the general conclusions to be drawn from the discussion:

... . . I, my friends, am as much a part of Nature as my own finger is a part of me. If my finger is the organ by which I grasp the sword and the mandoline, my brain is the organ by which Nature strives to understand itself. My dog's brain serves only my dog's purposes; but my brain labors at a knowledge which does nothing for me personally but make my body bitter to me and my decay and death a calamity. Were I not possessed with a purpose beyond my own, I would better be a ploughman than a philosopher; for the ploughman lives as long as the philosopher, eats more, sleeps more, and rejoices in the wife of his bosom with no misgivings. This is because the philosopher is in the grip of the Life Force. This Life Force says to him, "I have done a thousand wonderful things unconsciously by merely being willing to live and following the line of least resistance: Now I want to know myself and my destination, and choose my path; so I have made a special brain---a philosopher's brain---to grasp this knowledge for me as the husbandman's hand grasps the plow for me. And this," says the Life Force to the philosopher, "must thou strive to do for me till thou diest, when I will make another brain and another philosopher to carry on the work."

The ultimate end of the work, of course, is the evolution of the Superman, and the girl of the dream who happens, oddly enough to be called Ann, inquires of the Devil where the Superman is to be found. Upon learning that he has not yet been created, she exclaims:

ANN. Not yet created! Then my work is not yet done. (crossing herself devoutly)
I believe in the life to come. (Crying to the universe) A father—a father for the Superman!

Ideas again, not only one, but many, bordering on all phases of life, with one, that of the Life Force, dominant. The difference between the handling of the play and the handling of Candida, is the difference between telling the reader what he should learn from the drama, and letting him find it out for himself; also the difference between a dramatized lecture, and a drama of structural unity.

Shaw's two methods of dealing with the comedy of ideas are shown in the two plays considered, and Man and Superman represents the usual treatment.

We turn from Shaw to Sir James M. Barrie as one would turn from Schopenhauer to Shakespeare. Indeed, I believe there is much of Shakespeare's love of mankind, and human understanding, in Barrie, just as there is much of Schopenhauer's philosophy in Shaw. One would know from the opening passages of The Admirable Crichton and Dear Brutus that they were from the same hand, but what a difference there is in the ideas presented! The Admirable Crichton points out in a gentle but unmistakable way the absurdity of the caste system: Dear Brutus is woven around the philosophy contained in the speech of Cassius to Brutus in Julius Caesar i,ii:

The fault dear Brutus is not in our stars,
But in ourselves, that we are underlings.

The Admirable Crichton, by taking the family of an English peer, and two servants, and placing it on a desert island by means of a convenient shipwreck, shows how, if they
had had different chances in life, the members of the
party might have been quite the opposite of what their ranks
in England designated. Crichton, the butler, becomes the
master of the group, and is about to marry Lady Mary, the
eldest daughter of his former lord, when the castaways are
rescued, and with difficulty resume their former positions.

Dear Brutus, also by means of a situation which will alter
the status of the characters; this time, a magic wood where
all may have a chance to remodel their lives, shows that,
had they made the alterations they think they would like to
have made, they would have remained much the same sort of
people they are. It must be noted, however, that they re-
mained the same in character and temperament only, and in
most cases their social position was radically altered;
Matty, the butler, for instance, becoming a prosperous fin-
ancier, but with the same dishonest tendencies, which he
had maintained he would not have acquired had he taken a
different turn in his younger days. The force of the argu-
ment is marred a little by the case of Will Dearth, whose
entire character would have been vitally changed, had he not
married the woman he did.

So, while on the surface the two plays seem to pre-
sent opposing views, in reality they are concerned with two
different things: social position in the first, and char-
acter in the second. Both are comedies of ideas; Dear Brutus
more exclusively so, than the Admirable Crichton, which
contains much of the simple satire of society in general.
A notable difference of attitude may be seen, in that The Admira\-ble Crichton strikes at society itself, while Dear Brutus is mainly concerned with individuals.

It will be readily admitted that much of the charm of a Barrie play lies, not in the dialogue but in the interpolated comments of the author. Witness this passage from The Admirable Crichton, when Lord Loam is delivering a speech at the monthly dinner he gives for his servants. Crichton, it must be remarked, does not favor such action on the part of his master; he thinks it unnatural.

LORD LOAM. . . For the time being the artificial and unnatural—I say unnatural (glaring at CRICHTON who bows slightly)—barriers of society are swept away. Would that they could be swept away for ever.

(The PAGEBOY cheers, and has the one moment of prominence in his life. He grows up, marries, and has children, but is never really heard from again in his life.)

But that is entirely and utterly out of the question. And now for a few months we are to be separated. As you know, my daughters and Mr. Ernest and Mr. Terherne are to accompany me on my yacht, on a voyage to distant parts of the earth. In less than forty-eight hours we shall be under weigh.

(But for CRICHTON'S eye, the reckless page-boy would repeat his success.)

Or this from Dear Brutus, during Jack Purdie's scene with Joanna Trout, while Mabel, Jack's wife, is conveniently out of the way (so they think).

PURDIE. . . . I think she [Mabel] has some sort of idea now, that whenever I give her anything nice it means that you have been nice to me. She has rather a suspicious nature; Mabel; she never used to have it but which seems to be growing on her. I wonder why, I wonder why?

(In this wonder which is shared by Joanna, their lips meet, and MABEL, who has been about to enter from the garden retires.)

JOANNA. Was that anyone in the garden?

PURDIE (returning from a quest). There is no one there now.
JOANNA. I am sure I heard some one. If it was Mabel!
(with a perspicacity that comes of knowledge of her sex)
Jack, if she saw us, she will think you were kissing me.
(These fears are confirmed by the rather odd bearing of
MABEL, who now joins their select party.)
MABEL (apologetically). I am so sorry to interrupt you,
but please wait a moment before you kiss her again. Excuse
me, Joanna. (She quietly draws the curtains, thus shutting off
the garden and any possible onlookers.) I did not want the
others to see you. They might not understand how noble you are,
Jack. You can go on now.
(Having thus passed the time of day with them, she
withdraws by the door, leaving JACK bewildered, and
JOANNA knowing all about it.)

Allied to the interpolations, are the author's discus­
sions of his characters. Note particularly these two from

The Admirable Crichton:

A moment before the curtain rises, THE HON. ERNEST WOOLEY
drives up to the door of the loam house in Mayfair. There
is a happy smile on his pleasant, insignificant face, and
this presumably means that he is thinking of himself. He
is too busy over nothing, this man about town, to be al­
ways thinking of himself, but on the other hand, he almost
never thinks of any other person. Probably ERNEST'S great
moment is when he wakes up in the morning and realizes that
he really is ERNEST, for we must all wish to be that which
is our ideal.

(Young LORD BROCKLEHURST is nothing save for his rank.
You could pick him up by the handful any day in Picadil­
ly or Holborn, buying socks or selling them.)

And this concerning Lady Caroline Laney, from Dear Brutus:

She is lately from the enormously select school where they
are taught to pronounce their r's as w's; nothing else seems
to be taught, but for matrimonial success, nothing else
is necessary. Every woman who pronounces r like w will
find a mate; it appeals to all that is chivalrous in man.

Another author who has made much use of stage direc­
tions as a means for personal comment on the characters and
situations is Granville Barker. In his The Madras House, we
get such descriptions as these:

The difference between one Miss Muxtable and another
is, to the casual eye, the difference between one lead pencil and another, as they lie on one's table, after some weeks' use; a matter of length, of sharpening, of wear.

And, of Mr. Windlesham:

He is a tailor-made man; and the tailor only left off for the wax modeler and the wigmaker to begin.

The play is devoted to the study of the question of sex. The author offers no solution to the problem, but he does give a variety of views. There is that of the head of the Huxtable family, who has let his six daughters go unmarried, because the young man with sufficient income did not present himself for the hand of any one of them; there is that of E.P. State, with a romantic view of the situation, and capitalizing on his romantic ideas by arranging for women to wait on men customers and men on women customers in his stores; there is that of Tommy, constantly suspicious of all women, because he thinks they are trying to flirt with him; there is that of Constantine Madras, who has become a Moslem, because that religion recognizes the importance of sex, and keeps it in its place, not attempting to mask it and mix it with business; and there is that of Phillip Madras, who from his managing of a fashion shop, has come to hate the whole idea of sex, and wants to leave it out of his thoughts, preferring more intellectual matters. As he says: "I do so hate that farm-yard world of sex."

Of women, there is a variety: the Huxtable sisters, who in disappointment after disappointment in their efforts to find men whom their parents will approve as husbands, have become resigned to a life of inactivity; Mrs. Con-
stantine Madras, whose unfortunate marriage has left her a discontented and grumbling old woman; Miss Yates, whose advanced ideas on sex have led her to an irregularity of which she has become defiantly proud; Mrs. Brigstock, who has made the mistake of marrying when she and her husband cannot make enough to support themselves; Miss Chancellor, so respectable that it becomes painful; and Jessica, Philip Madras's wife, just the perfect woman -- the kind we always want to see, but never do.

Perhaps as much of the moral dictum as we can set down with surety is contained in a speech by Philip. He has asked his wife if women are willing to pay the price of free womanhood -- "come out and be common women among us common men?" and upon her saying that she hates to think of such things, he states:

Then there's precious little hope for the Kingdom of Heaven on earth. I know it sounds mere nonsense, but I am sure it's true. If we can't love the bad as well as the beautiful . . . if we won't share it all out now . . . fresh air and art . . . and dirt and sin . . . then we good and clever people are costing the world too much. Our brains cost too much if we don't use them freely. Your beauty costs too much if I only admire it because of the ugly women I see. Even your virtue may cost too much, my dear. Rags pay for finery, ugliness for beauty, and sin for virtue. Why can nothing keep for long more beauty in a good man's eyes than the ugliest thing on earth? Why does it profit neither man nor woman to be more righteous than the greatest sinner on earth? Why need no man be wiser than the biggest fool on earth? (He clenches his hands.) These are the riddles this Sphinx of a world is asking me. Your artists and scholars and preachers don't answer them . . . so I must turn my back for a bit on artist and scholar and preacher . . . all three.

Of plot, the play is as innocent as anything in modern drama, but some excellent character work has been done in the parts of Mrs. Huxtable, Mr. Huxtable, Mr. State, and
and Constantine Madras; and the other characters are clear cut and strong. Dialogue is either clever or intellectual, depending upon the situation, and uniformly good. Here is a brief passage which may serve as a sample:

CONSTANTINE. . . . If we could replant the laurel bushes thick enough, we might rediscover the fine manly world we are losing. . . .

THOMAS. Are you advocating polygamy in England?

CONSTANTINE. That is what it should come to.

THOMAS. Well, I call that rather shocking. (then with some hopeful interest) And is it practical?

CONSTANTINE. I did not anticipate the reform in my lifetime. . . so I left for the East.

PHILLIP. (finely) You did quite right, father. I wish everyone of your way of thinking would do the same.

(CONSTANTINE is ready for him)

CONSTANTINE. Are you prepared for so much depopulation? Think of the women who'd be off tomorrow.

Quite the reverse of The Madras House, in treatment, but just as decidedly a comedy of ideas, is The Truth by Clyde Fitch, a play with the typical "well-made" plot. It is the story of a woman who has inherited a love of lying from her father, and, though her husband is a religious believer in truth and insists upon it in his wife, she persists in continually lying even in matters where the truth would be much better. She becomes involved with a man who has left his wife, and whose reputation as a rake is widespread, and, although she has been entirely innocent in the matter, her deliberate lying when faced with the facts makes it impossible for her husband to believe in her, and he turns her out. A meeting between the two is finally brought about by the wife's father by means of another lie—he tells the husband that she is dying—but when the husband arrives the woman, at last cured of her love of prevarication, tells him the truth.
begs for another chance, and is finally forgiven.

I can see nothing particularly novel in the subject, a defense of the truth, and in the dialogue, nothing of charm, though there are high spots of interest. Two good characters are shown: Becky Warder, the lying woman, and Stephan Roland, her father.

The ending cannot but seem uncertain. The audience, after listening to such a succession of lies as Becky has been guilty of throughout the play, must feel no small amount of wonder at her ability to give it up. To say the least, the situation at the end is far too doubtful to give any feeling of security as far as the future happiness of Becky and her husband is concerned. But it does firmly impress the disadvantages of the lying habit, which was the primary purpose of the play.

Like The Liars, and The Gay Lord Quex, this play makes no attack upon society, as do most of the modern comedies; on the contrary, the contemporary order of things is strictly adhered to, and defended.

Like The Truth, in this last respect, The Witching Hour, by Augustus Thomas, differs in presenting a new theme. A play of ideas, again, and also a "well-made" play, it is concerned not so much with any social problem, but with a psychological one: mental telepathy, and the inheritance of mental traits. The plot centers around the case of a young man, Clay Whipple, who has inherited from his mother, and grandmother, an insane fear of cat's-eye jewels, and
and kills a man, who has persisted in forcing one of them upon his attention. He is prosecuted by Frank Hardmuth, his rival for the hand of Viola Campbell. Hardmuth is a thoroughly contemptible character, and it is finally revealed that he procured the assassination of the governor-elect of the state, a crime for which he has convicted the man he hired to do the work. This revelation comes during the second trial of Clay Whipple, and, while the jury gets no word of it, the popular sentiment of the community is supposed to influence the jury by mental telepathy, and a verdict of not guilty is returned.

Mingled with this central story, is the love affair of Clay and Viola, and that of Jack Brookfield and Helen Whipple, Clay's mother. Many quite logical proofs of the actuality of mental telepathy are introduced, particularly by Justice Prentice, who convinces Jack of the theory. The effects of the science, if it can be called that, during the play, are:

- the curing of the gambling habit in Jack, who feels that because of his ability to read the minds of the other players, it is unfair for him to play; the influence of the minds of the people on the jury during Clay's trial; the curing of Clay's fear of cat's-eye stones; and the resolution of Jack to aid Hardmuth's escape because he had himself thought that the assassination of the governor-elect could be done in just the way Hardmuth did it, and consequently, he holds himself responsible for giving the idea to Hardmuth.

The inheritance of mental characteristics is brought out in a number of cases, especially when Helen comes to
Justice Prentice to secure his aid in influencing the supreme court to grant a second trial for Clay. She brings a letter by the justice to her mother, Margaret Price, a former sweetheart of Prentice, in which he speaks of a duel he had fought because a man had frightened Margaret with a cat's-eye stone:

HELEN. You remember this letter--you have recalled the duel. You remember--thank God--it's cause?

PRENTICE. I do.

HELEN. You know that my mother's aversion to that jewel amounted almost to an insanity?

PRENTICE. I remember.

HELEN. I inherited that aversion. When a child, the sight of one of them would throw me almost into convulsions.

PRENTICE. Is it possible?

HELEN. It is true. The physician said I would outgrow the susceptibility, and in a measure I did so. But I discovered that Clay had inherited the fatal dislike from me.

JACK. You can understand that, Mr. Justice?

PRENTICE. Medical jurisprudence is full of such cases. Why should we deny them? Is nature faithful only in physical matters? You are like this portrait. Your voice is like that of Margaret Price. Nature's behest should have also embraced some of the less apparent possessions, I think.

JACK. We urged all that at the trial, but they called it invention.

PRENTICE. Nothing seems more probable to me.

HELEN. Clay, my boy, had that dreadful and unreasonable fear of the jewel. I protected him as far as possible, but one night over a year ago, some men--companions--finding that the sight of the stone annoyed him, pressed it upon his attention. He did not know, Justice Prentice, he was not responsible. It was insanity, but he struck his tormentor and the blow resulted in the young man's death.

PRENTICE. Terrible--terrible!

HELEN. My poor boy is crushed with the awful deed. He is not a murderer. He was never that, but they have sentenced him Justice Prentice --he--is to die.

And after Helen is gone, and the Justice remains alone, we get this hint of the belief of him in the psychic:

PRENTICE. Margaret Price. People will say that she has been in her grave thirty years, but I'll swear her spirit was in this room to-night and directed a decision of the Supreme Court of the United States.
The Witching Hour seems to be better handled than The Truth, for the reason that it takes a theme which is much less universally accepted, and builds a more plausible story upon it. For the time one is reading it, at least, the illusion is complete and the theories accepted, however much one may question them in retrospection.

In the plays we have considered, we have seen a variety of treatments, and purposes. There is the realistic play with no ulterior motive whatever, as seen in The Playboy of the Western World. There is the "well-made" play, running from the drama of pure plot, like The Gay Lord Quex, through the comedy of manners, in The Liars, to the comedy of ideas, as in The Truth and The Witching Hour. There is the play of virtually no plot, represented by The Madras House, a comedy of ideas, and The Importance of Being Earnest, a comedy of manners. There is the play in which the plot is subordinated to other purposes, but still remains rather strong, as in The Circle, a comedy of manners; Dear Brutus, Man and Superman, and And So They Were Married, comedies of ideas; and in The Admirable Crichton, a play mingling satire of manners, with the presenting of an idea. And we have seen Candida, as a comedy of ideas with a strong plot, but not technically the "well-made" play.

Many degrees of manners and ideas are seen: the pure comedy of ideas, as And So They Were Married, The Truth, The Witching Hour, and Candida; the pure comedy of manners, as The Liars, and The Importance Of Being Earnest; and the
CHAPTER IV
CONCLUSION

The interpreter of contemporary life has discovered that an emotion is as thrilling a dramatic theme as an action; and that passion is as deep and vital in its repression as in its exhibition. Today the protagonist is profoundly concerned with the importance of the trivial; and his language--sometimes even his thought--barely suffices to elevate him above the mean level of the commonplace. The difference between the old epic poets and the modern realists is the whole difference "between an age that fought with dragons and an age that fights with microbes." 1

These are the words of Archibald Henderson in touching upon the realistic element in modern drama. Comedy has certainly felt the influence in plays like Candida, The Madras House, The Truth, and The Playboy of the Western World; in fact, most of the modern writers show signs of the effect of the realistic doctrine, except, perhaps, the always exceptional Barrie. Such a theory of the dramatic is closely allied to one of the unquestionably dominant aims of the new comedy, that of reform. Ibsen's theories, including the drama of ideas, and the drama of immediate actuality--people of today; time, the present--beyond a doubt find their most complete expression in themes dealing with real life, and it is a commonplace of criticism that, although Ibsen's own dramas gained no conspicuous success upon the stages of the English speaking nations, "the plays of his followers in all

1 Archibald Henderson, The Changing Drama, p.277
blending of manners and ideas, in *The Admirable Crichton*, and to a degree in *Dear Brutus*, *The Madras House*, *Man and Superman*, and *The Circle*, though the first three properly belong to the comedy of ideas, and the latter, still more properly to that of manners.

Two views of society are to be noticed, or, we may say three, if we include *The Playboy of the Western World*, which presents no view of it at all. The two views needing mention are: that of society as essentially correct, as in *The Liars*, *The Gay Lord Quex*, *Dear Brutus*, *The Truth*, and *The Witching Hour*; and the view of the necessity of change in some form of society, or our attitude toward it, in the rest of the plays.

The problem now remaining before us is to harmonize these diverging, and even conflicting methods and views into a formula which will apply to the new comedy in general, and to define its tendencies and characteristics.
civilized countries constitute the dramatic output of our

time."

In England and America the play of ideas was almost
invariably bound up with realism. Dramatists have not been
content with giving a "slice of life", but have taken
characters of life, and have placed them in situations of
life which will carry a meaning or lesson to make the
audience think.

There are certain streams of tendency in the modern
view of the world, and in the modern philosophy of life,
that have produced their effect upon the drama. One of
these is cosmopolitanism. Not so much because of any
change in human nature, but because of the rise of science,
and the accompanying facilities for transportation and
communication, people of one nation now know much more
about those of remote communities, and come more and more
to understand them, and to profit by the interchange of
customs and ideas. The public is coming, very gradually,
to be sure, but still perceptibly, to look upon the world
with an international, rather than a national, mind. As
yet, this view is confined pretty largely to the educated
classes, and to an intellectual minority within those
classes; but it is from that intellectual minority that
literature, for the most part, comes, and on literature in

\[\text{Ibid.}, \ p.31.\]

\[\text{Ibid.}, \ p.96\]
general the influence of cosmopolitanism is profoundly felt.

As is stated by Henderson:

..... We feel in the air that "epoch of world literature" which Goethe heralded and summoned. . . . Science has taught the artist that a consciousness of the feelings common to the civilized nations is more potent in winning the widest hearing and in attaining the most lasting repute than a consciousness simply of the feelings peculiar to his fellow-countrymen. Slowly precipitating everywhere, in the resort of contemporary life, is a basic substance of cosmopolitan culture, ideas, and inclinations. 4

Throughout the civilized world the practice of playwrights has turned to producing plays not just for England, for America, for France, for Germany, Italy, Spain, or Russia, but for the world, with the result that it is becoming increasingly difficult to point to English drama as a thing distinct from that of any other nationality. One can scarcely ask for more convincing proof of the cosmopolitan movement in the theatre than the successes of plays by Strindberg, Maeterlinck, Echegaray, Tolstoy, Brieux, and others on the stage of England and America. A few years ago Martinez Sierra brought his Cancion de Cuna, fresh from El Teatro de Lara, and made a success of it on the New York stage. No less significant has been the success of French plays in Germany, Russia, and the Scandinavian countries, Russian and German plays in France, or English plays on the Continent.

As far as the drama is concerned, the barriers of nationality which grew up soon after the Renaissance are being

4 Ibid., p. 6.
5 Loc. cit.
broken down, providing a wider scope for the dramatist, and a greater choice of dramatic entertainment for the theatre-going public.

A glance at plays like Candida, Dear Brutus, The Truth, The Madras House, or The Circle, convinces us that they would fit the stage and people of almost any civilized nation as well as they fit that of England or America. This is clearly a departure from the English comedy of the Restoration, or the drama of the Elizabethan age. Shakespeare, called one of the universal poets, was indeed so in the soul of humanity with which his genius saturated his characters, but he was in another sense purely an English writer. His Venice, and Ephesus, and Athens, or his Bohemia and Denmark, were described as in the terms of his own London and England. They were so couched necessarily, for the audience of the Globe presentations knew no other scenes and no other customs. Shakespeare was universal in the sense that Virgil was universal, but he was no more cosmopolitan than the Latin poet, nor than his contemporary England.

A second tendency may be called the desire for social reform. We have noted hitherto that the element of reform has entered into the make-up of certain comic manifestations, and we have set the modern tendency of social reform down as one of the principles of comic writing which have arisen in the history of the drama; but we must repeat here, to make it doubly clear, that the new element of reform is not the
same as that which motivated Jonson and Molière. While Jonson wrote unquestionably with the desire to change certain conditions, and to do away with certain abuses, never once did he question society. His quarrel was with individuals in society, or with certain groups which threatened the foundations of conventionality. The same was true of Molière. But with the later English writers it is no longer the individual but society that is the culprit. This tendency, of course, found its beginnings with Ibsen, in tragedy, or, as Dickinson and Henderson persist in calling great it, tragi-comedy. In England its first exponent in the field of comedy was George Bernard Shaw, and since his time the principle has been a vital force in English and American comedy, as well as tragedy. Shaw, Barker, and Williams, among those mentioned in the last chapter, undeniably attack the social institutions of the modern order, or at least the popular conception of right and wrong in matters of sex, justice, religion, or whatever may be the author's greatest concern at the time of writing. Even Barrie, who for the most part remained as the only important exception to the rule, launched forth in his The Admirable Crichton into a powerful, if genial, condemnation of the caste system. If Molière's Tartuffe condemned a churchman, or even a group of churchmen, the Church itself was held inviolate, and the hypocrisy of certain individuals was the casus belli. Shaw, and other moderns, do not hesitate to
score the institution itself upon provocation.

We have noted previously the statement by Dickinson that Pinero tried to apply the standards of literature to the theatre. This was no individual peculiarity in Pinero; the profuse stage directions and character analyses of Shaw, Barrie, and Barker are manifestations of the same tendency, one which has been gaining ground rapidly during the twentieth century. More and more, plays are being written with the idea of putting them before the public in printed form as well as on the stage. To what this new practice is due is a matter of speculation. It may be because of an increased interest on the part of the public toward the drama; it may be due to the fact that a great part of the best literature of the modern age is in the field of the drama; and it may be partly due to a desire on the part of the dramatists to make their work live as literature when its execution on the stage has passed its period of prosperity. Probably the first is one of the most important, for the public interest in the written drama does not stop with the modern output, but extends to that of past ages as well. Drama of all kinds is being read now as it was in no other period in the history of literature, and the modern dramatist, recognizing the fact, endeavors to produce work which will meet the public desire for literature as well as satisfy the theatre-going crowds, and tries, among other of his methods, to

*Supra*, p. 67.
make his plays more easily grasped through the medium of interpolations in the form of stage directions. Shaw, in the preface to the first volume of his *Plays, Pleasant and Unpleasant*, makes this comment on the use of stage directions by Ibsen, who took the lead in the use of a certain amount of character delineation, but did not make the use of it that later writers have:

It is astonishing to me that Ibsen, who devotes two years to the production of a three-act play, the extraordinary quality of which depends on a mastery of characterization and situation which can only be achieved by working out a good deal of the family and personal history of the individuals represented, should nevertheless give the reading public very little more than the technical memorandum required by the carpenter, the gasman, and the prompter. Who will deny that the resultant occasional mysteriousness of effect, enchanting though it may be, is produced at the cost of intellectual obscurity? Ibsen, interrogated as to his meaning, replies, "What I have said I have said." Precisely, but the point is that what he hasn't said he hasn't said.

Clark gives, as one of the reasons for the profuse stage directions in Shaw's works, that Shaw refused to rely upon the actors to realize the possibilities in his plays; whereas Barrie felt that the reader could not create for himself the atmosphere of a play from the dialogue alone. But whatever the motive back of it all, the modern drama is increasingly a literary product for the library as well as for the theatre. In the hands of a good dramatist this practice leads to a superior drama, but it has its dangers when followed by a second rate writer, for it can easily

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B.H. Clark, *A Study of the Modern Drama*, p. 283
cause dialogue which is unnatural through its attempt to be artistic. Some of the results of this danger are seen in the case of The Gay Lord Quex, though Pinero can scarcely be called a second-rate dramatist. I have no intention, however, of intimating that dialogue cannot be natural if it is literary; a glance at Candida, or The Admirable Crichton, is lasting proof that it can be and frequently is.

We have observed that the wave of cosmopolitanism has been due more to science than to any other one factor. Science has had another indirect influence on the writers of drama, in its radical increase of the possibilities of effects on the stage itself. Electric foot and border lights in amber, red, blue, and green, as well as white; flood and spot lights, with their colored gelatins; constant improvements in the strengthening and lightening of the box set; the discovery of new methods and possibilities in the use of drop curtains; and lately the invention of the revolving stage, allowing all the sets used in a production to be had in readiness when the curtain rises and merely swung into place as occasion demands; these and other scientific achievements have added to the possibilities of artistic effect in a play, and the diminishing of waits between scenes. The writers for the stage take these possibilities into consideration. The scene in The Madras House, where we see the models displaying new creations in ladies' gowns, would never have been written had Barker not known the
effects that can be produced by properly colored lights upon certain colors of cloth. He brings in a model wearing "the most elaborate evening gown that ever was," but the cold glare of the ordinary stage "daylight" "seems to separate from the glittering pink affair the poor, pretty, smiling creature exhibiting it, until, indeed, she seems half naked." However she is placed against a black velvet background; a battery of colored lights is brought into play upon her; and "the vision of female loveliness is now complete." At the end of the exhibition the light is switched off and "the vision becomes once more a ridiculously expensive dress, with a rather thin and shivering young person half inside it." Such a scene was obviously impossible before the days of electric lighting, and no author would have attempted to portray it.

It is now possible, also, to make more use of expression and action on the stage for the simple reason that expression and action can now be seen better. The actor treading the boards in the gas-light era had to depend upon his voice to convey the desired emotion to the audience. Aside speeches, now considered inartistic, were then almost a necessity, while now the purpose of an aside can more often than not be served by a change of facial expression or an expressive gesture. All this has led to a new principle of technique: "no speech if action will do; no action if silence will do," and we see, as a result, a tendency

to get away from passages involving the portrayal of emotion in rhetorical flights of passionate speech. Much of it is still necessary, and much of it is natural, for there are occasional exhibitions of such character in life, but the prevalent practice is simpler speech and more complex stage business.

The truth of Archer's statement that "the two elements of the old drama, imitation and lyrical passion, have at last consummated their divorce," may be as much due to modern improvement in stage effects as to any change in the basic elements of dramatic literature. Archer goes on to say: "For lyrical passion we go to the opera and music drama, for interpretation through imitation we go to the modern realistic play." The soundness of Mr. Archer's contention that this is a beneficial symptom is not our concern here—we are not considering the respective excellencies of the various dramatic forms—but their points of divergence are important, and the increased attention to stage action is unquestionably one of the most conspicuous of these points.

Closely allied to the spirit of cosmopolitanism, which we have previously noted, is the spirit of democracy that is tending to put the drama on the level of the common man.

9 William Archer, The Old Drama and the New, p. 387
10 Loc. cit.
Heretofore in English drama the main characters of a play have been more often than not of a high social caste, but now we get comedies with a modest minister of the slums and a penniless poet, or with a butler, or a struggling young scientist, among the leading roles. Why this spirit, which invaded other branches of literature with so much success in earlier times, gained no particular favor in the drama until quite recently is a moot question, but the practice stands as one of the characteristics of the modern period— not so prominent as the other tendencies, but one which demands some consideration.

It would be manifestly absurd to contend that all these varied streams of tendency are seen in all the dramas, or even all the authors of drama, in the modern period. Synge, to take a drastic example, seems to have been influenced by virtually none of them. He certainly makes no attempt to reform; he is clearly not cosmopolitan; there seems no conscious attempt in his plays to give the public something for the library, though he undoubtedly has done so; he does not appear to have been motivated by any reliance upon the new science of play production. The other Irish playwrights present a similar problem. However, we have already shown that the Irish plays are a thing apart from the common run of modern drama.

Henderson, op. cit., p. 96
Noting exceptions to the tendency toward cosmopolitanism in English and American comedy, Oscar Wilde’s plays clearly make little claim to an international spirit. If his works belong to any setting at all, they belong to the London of his day. Pinero’s comedy, The Gay Lord Quex, contains little that would be out of place on most foreign stages, but it is still English in conception. The same may be said of Jones’ The Liars; and Thomas’ The Witching Hour is beyond doubt written from the American viewpoint—ever more, from the Kentuckian. It appears doubtful if Barrie’s comedies are much influenced by any cosmopolitan sentiment, so, all in all, a rather good case may be made out against the cosmopolitan trend; but it does come to the front in Shaw and Barker, and to a degree in Maugham and Williams, as seen in the plays discussed in the preceding chapter.

The element of social reform is lost in Pinero and Jones, Fitch and Thomas, and in Barrie’s Dear Brutus; and it may be seriously questioned if it is a factor to be considered in Wilde. In the first five instances the theory is positively reversed, and society defended. But again in Shaw, Barker, and Williams, reform becomes of the utmost importance, and it is seen as an element in Barrie’s The Admirable Crichton.

The practice of writing plays for reading as well as acting is hard to single out. Most of the modern plays, particularly those of Barrie and Shaw, read quite as well...
as they adapt themselves to the stage; Barker's are better when read than when acted. The plays we have observed of Thomas, Wilde, and Maugham are also well fitted for the library, but how much of this is due to conscious effort in the last three cases is a matter of opinion largely. Barrie, Shaw, and Barker acknowledged the definite aim to produce literature as well as theatre-pieces, however, and of their purposes we may be sure. But we have the cases of Jones, Fitch, and Pinero, whose plays are much better when acted, the last in spite of his effort to apply the principles of literature to the theatre.

Likewise the effect of modern staging facilities is difficult of detection. The Madras House, The Witching Hour, The Admirable Crichton, Dear Brutus, and Man and Superman undeniably show a consciousness of the stage manager's increased effectiveness; but the other plays we have considered do not, to any perceptible degree. Much of the reliance upon science is of course due to the particular requirements of the situations with which the author deals at the moment. There is always a natural tendency to make the production of a play as simple as possible without detracting from the artistry of the whole, and an author who would avail himself of his opportunities in the line of mechanical effects should occasion arise, may utterly disregard them if the immediate circumstances do not demand them. For example: Shaw, who goes to the length
of bringing an automobile on the stage in *Man and Superman*, utterly disregards scientific aids in *Candida*.

The democratic spirit is again found to be a factor in certain plays, and in others absent. We find its mark on *Candida, Man and Superman, The Admirable Crichton, The Madras House, And So They Were Married, and The Witching Hour*; but we can see no particular manifestation of it in *The Liars, The Gay Lord Quex, The Importance of Being Earnest, The Circle, Dear Brutus, or The Truth*.

A glance back over the list of exceptions to what we have set down as the modern tendencies, will reveal that the chief consistent offenders are Jones, Pinero, and Wilde in England, and Fitch in America, with Barrie and Thomas a close fifth and sixth. Jones and Pinero came in a transition period, before the reactionary movement became powerful. True, they wrote after the change had its start, but they had their schooling in the old form. It will be remembered that their earlier work was in French adaptation, and they carried over into the new period the ideas of the old. This, in a large measure, will account for their disregard of the more modern theories of Shaw, Barker, *et al*. The same may be said to apply to Fitch and Thomas. They ushered in the revival of the American drama, which, up to their time, was in vassalage to England, and any first step is of necessity conservative. But when we
come to Wilde and Barrie we can scarcely advance this as a reason. To a degree we may apply it to Wilde, who was earlier than the strictly modern period, but we most certainly cannot make it fit the case of Barrie. A measure of Wilde's nonconformity may be attributed to the fact that he was not, in the true sense, a dramatist, but more, probably, to the equally manifest fact that he was one of those free lances that never conformed to anything. Barrie, on the other hand, is an example of the reactionary or conservative element that is found in conjunction with every movement in history. He borders upon sentimentality at times, and so is in that respect in direct contrast with the modern tendency. As Dickinson says:

He [Barrie] has steadfastly refused to indulge in -isms and petrifed ideas. He puts forth no formulated disquisitions on human problems. His chief interest is in character, but in his understanding of character he is even profound. He has made it his business to open up new nooks, to probe the whimsical pockets of the natures of men and women. He refuses to look upon men and women as mere thought-machines. His themes are those of sentiment and mood and intuition. Barrie must frankly be looked upon as an exception to the common run of modern dramatic tendency. But his case does not disprove the actuality of the general trend. Just as the romantic age of Shakespeare had its Jonson, or the Restoration period its Otway, the modern era has its Barrie.

12 Supra, p. 68.
13 Dickenson, op. cit., p. 232
No literary principle has ever controlled all the writers in the periods of its dominance, and there is no reason to suppose that this present age of cosmopolitanism, democracy, and social reform should be unlike the rest.

Now considering the application of the general comic principles of previous ages to the comedy of today: how do the principles of caricature, portraiture, the romantic plot, and the appeal to pity find expression in the plays of modern writers? Taking them in order, Caricature: do we find evidence of it in the plays we have observed? There are indeed a few cases, refined though they have become. Windlesham in The Madras House, Lady Kitty and Lord Porteous in The Circle, Lexy in Candida, the elder Malone in Man and Superman, and Chasuble in The Importance of Being Earnest, may properly be looked upon as caricatures. But they are a far cry from the crude buffoons of Greek and Roman comedy, or from the country figures of the Restoration stage. The line is hard to draw in modern comedy between the caricatures and the true characters, so refined has the element of ridicule become; and this first principle of the comic has all but lost its significance, and is now almost exclusively a property of Farce.

Not so with portraiture. The realistic conception of the majority of modern plays necessitates the use of a high quality of characterization, and, consequently, we find
portraiture the back-bone of both the comedy of ideas and the comedy of manners. Candida, Crichton, Champion-Cheney, Becky Warder, Huxtable, and Sophy, to say nothing of a host of others are characters picked from the rank and file of humanity. Portraiture, it may be said, is the one principle to which all the modern comedy writers pay a common obeisance; and the ghosts of Menander, Terence, Molière, and their followers march through the ages to clasp hands with Shaw and Barrie.

It must be at once obvious that in the drama which deals with ideas and social reform, the romantic plot has little place, and realism takes over the reins. The modern age owes little allegiance to Lope de Vega or Shakespeare in this respect, but, withal, there still remains Barrie, the ever-present exception, whose enchanted wood in Dear Brutus calls us back through the centuries to Midsummer Night's Dream and the realm of the fantastic. The second and third acts of The Admirable Crichton are again faintly reminiscent of the Athenian wood and the Forest of Arden; and Peter Pan, which we did not discuss, is a venture into the domain of pure fancy, and the heights of romanticism. Synge, too, has caught something of the romantic spirit in his poetic dialogue and his idealism. But however much Barrie may carry on the tradition of the romantic, he is therein deviating from the principles of his contemporaries.

14 T.H. Dickinson, An Outline of Contemporary Drama, p.15-16
The appeal to sentiment, or pity, has had about the same fate as the romantic plot; it has no place in the intellectual play of ideas, and is looked upon as a thing "taboo" by the sponsors of the new movement. Once more Barrie, as we have already stated, plays somewhat upon the strings of sentiment, and as a result gets himself denounced by many critics of the age, such as Nathan and Lewishohn, as a "purveyor of maudlin sentimentality."

Indebted to the past mainly in the principle of portraiture, and imbued with the ideals of cosmopolitanism, social reform, and democracy, the new comedy is, then, indeed worthy the name "new". There has not been a time previous to the present which would have permitted the treatment now being given by the comic dramatists. The basis of all the newness is not in the drama itself, but in the peculiar characteristics of the age which is producing it— an age of free thinking and changing conceptions of society. The age finds representation on the stage in a comedy which sets itself up as a social institution, and a self-appointed minister to the ills of the social order. Its appeal is intellectual (Mr. Palmer to the contrary notwithstanding).

Oscar Wilde made the radical statement that "life

15 Clark, op. cit., p. 310.
16 John Palmer, Comedy, p. 17; An Englishman "is incapable of seeing things critically, as a being of simple intelligence, for five minutes together."
imitates art. The theory gained prominence, and was given new impetus in the early years of the century. The rising dramatists are attempting to give a democratic art that, if imitated by civilization, will promote a change in the social order which seems to most of them to be in need of reconstruction. Henderson says: "The prime function of the dramatist of today is to bring man to a consciousness of his responsibility and to incite him to constructive measures for social reform." And again: "The contemporary dramatist considers the drama an instrumentality for showing man, whether by pleasant or unpleasant means, his fault as a moral being, as a social creature, as a guilty partner in the defective business of modern social organization."

I am well aware that many isolated cases can be pointed out which conflict with this summary of the modern comedy, but the general trend is what I am speaking of when I say that the new comedy is a social institution, launching an intellectual appeal to mankind for the humanization of society. It is a new comedy because it discards the principles of the past, except the essential element of character portrayal, and even in that, changes its purpose from the criticism of individuals to the criticism of society. It is

17 Henderson, op. cit., p. 17.
18 Loc. cit.
20 Ibid., p. 16.
a new comedy because it is the product of a new age—an age that differs from any previous age in its ideals and aspirations and culture.

What this new comedy, and the new drama as a whole, will come to in the future is a matter of considerable speculation. The general outlook of the critics is optimistic. Archer, with his customary impetuosity, all but denounces the drama of the past in his enthusiasm for the present and the future. Thorndike is more moderately hopeful:

... From Lyly and Greene to Shaw and Barrie, a great tradition has been created and maintained, including many masterpieces that continue to serve as spurs and examples for further artistic endeavor. In our own generation brilliant writers in both England and the United States have given new vigour to the old form, so that comedy now faces the brightest prospects.

But with Dickinson we get a pessimistic note, and a little logic that may be well heeded:

In spite of the good work that has been done for a generation in the minority playhouses, the English theatre of to-day presents a face of doubt. The activities of the drama of experiment have limited themselves to a narrow road. Outside this the great field of popular amusement has grown broader. Never has the theatre expanded as during these years. The number of music halls, cinematograph halls, variety halls and popular theatres has risen enormously. And never has the current of ordinary English drama been less distinguished. If we except the movements represented by the printed play, the drama of London and the provinces seems to have deteriorated rather than improved in quality in the first fifteen years of the

21 Archer, op. cit., p. 387-388.
twentieth century.

Henderson goes more into the aims of the new movement, and comes to a favorable conclusion regarding the prospects for the future:

The drama of today embodies the social fervor of the epoch. The humanizing influences of fraternal sympathy, of social pity and social justice, are everywhere beginning to replace the pressure of more personal and selfish interests. . . . The drama of the future promises to be, in the creative and constructive sense, a synthesis of all the arts. The dramatist of the future bids fair to be the Admirable Crichton in the Romance of Esthetics. 24

The preservation of the new drama is in the hands of the coming generation. What that generation will make of it is uncertain. The rise of the Little Theatre promises to give to the drama a more popular and widespread appeal than it has ever enjoyed before, and we await with interest the outcome of the titanic clash of old and new ideas in which the new comedy is playing such a brilliant and conspicuous role.

24 Henderson, op. cit., p. 310-311.
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