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The theatre and drama as reflected in the development of the informal essay

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Thesis

THE THEATRE AND DRAMA AS REFLECTED IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF
THE INFORMAL ESSAY

Submitted by

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THE INFORMAL ESSAY.

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THE THEATRE AND DRAMA AS REFLECTED IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF
THE INFORMAL ESSAY.

That most modern of literary art-forms, the essay, seems difficult of definition, because the name essay has been applied to so many kinds of composition. Ordinarily it is called a "short dissertation," or "brief treatise," and this is accurate if we consider the popular nineteenth century type. But this definition will not at all fit the informal, familiar essay which has preserved its tradition unbroken from the time of Montaigne. Rather does this latter type tally with Doctor Johnson's well-known definition-^{*} "A loose sally of the mind, an irregular indigested piece; not a regular and orderly composition: or again, with the dictum of Percy Van Dyke Shelly, who would call the familiar essay^{*} " a short prose composition in which the author, writing of himself, or of something that is near his heart, discloses his personality to the reader in an intimate and familiar way."

Some understanding of Michel Eyquem de Montaigne and his time is necessary as a prelude to our main subject. When this French skeptic at the age of thirty-seven wearily turned from the strife and turmoil of life at Paris to seek quiet and the philosophic mind at his chateau of Montaigne, he did an important thing. He men-

* Dictionary, second edition.

* The Familiar Essay, by Percy Van Dyke Shelly. Univ. of Pennsylvania. 1917.

2.

tally put behind him mediaevalism and faced life with the scientific spirit. He placed his library in the great tower overlooking the court of the chateau. Over its central rafter he inscribed in large letters the device,- I DO NOT UNDERSTAND; I PAUSE. I EXAMINE.

*
"A melancholy humor... bred of carking care" put "the conceit of writing" into his head. He wrote by way of essay to preserve his memories and "to clarify his reflections." His first attempts, however dating from 1574-1578, are not his famed and original contributions. They are after the manner of the leçon morale, maxims and examples of the Renaissance in which were collected wise sayings under such heads as "education," "youth and age," "riches."

Gradually he introduced his own observations and deductions and finally portrayed himself.

His introductory essay in the edition of 1580, called The Author to the Reader, begins, "Reader, lo here a well-meaning book....I desire therein to be delineated in mine own genuine, simple and ordinary fashion, without contention, art or study; for it is myself I portray...Thus, gentle reader, myself am the groundwork of my book. It is then no reason thou shouldst employ thy time about so frivolous and vain a subject. Therefore farewell."

The raison d'être of Montaigne's essay is admirably summed up in a recent study of the essay in the following paragraph:-

Not until the later years of the Renaissance did there emerge such a temper of mind as would allow for the

* Of the Affection of Fathers to their Children. Montaigne's Essays.

development of the essay. In the storms of its early political and religious struggles, the individual had made good his claim to live his own life and had embodied his ideal of that life in the world of Renaissance art; but only when he had entered into his full heritage of freedom, and held high discourse with himself on the meaning of human experience, could the essentially rational spirit find expression in the art-form that was its natural embodiment." *

John Florio, the Oxford tutor, published his famous translation of Montaigne in 1603. It was not very faithful to the original, but was picturesque. A large public read it and a copy in the British Museum bears the authentic autograph of Ben Jonson; another has the signature of Shakespeare, but is thought to be spurious. It is reasonably certain that Shakespeare was familiar with the work and many believe that Gonzalo's description of his commonwealth in the Tempest is an adaptation of a part of Montaigne's essay Of the Cannibals.

We date the beginnings of the essay in England from about 1597, when Sir Francis Bacon, borrowing the word essai from Montaigne, published a volume of ten short essays which he spoke of as "dispersed meditations." They were the result of keen observation and careful note-taking. Euphuistic in style, condensed and formal, never do they approach the personal, informal note of Montaigne. They are, however, an important landmark in our literature.

* The English Essay, a Study in Literary Development. By Laura Johnson Wylie. Houghton Mifflin Company. 1916.

We may now consider the essay as well transplanted upon English soil. Its range of subject is so great that it is futile to follow it thru all, or many of its avenues, so we shall content ourselves with selecting one line of pursuit only. We shall ask ourselves how the English drama has been reflected in essays that are informal and familiar.

For a picture of customs in the theatre of Shakespeare's day, we take an essay by Thomas Dekker, a London playwright of Dutch extraction who wrote in a journalistic style full of vigor and gusto. In his Gull's Hornbook, 1609, which depicts racyly the life of a town-gallant is a satirical essay on How a Gallant Should Behave Himself in a Playhouse.

* Let our gallant", he says, "presently advance himselfe up to the Throne of the Stage...on the very Rushes where the Comedy is to daunce..For do but cast up a reckoning what large cummings-in are pursd up by sitting on the Stage. First, a conspicuous Eminence is gotten; by which means, the best and most essencial parts of a Gallant (good cloathes, a proportionable legge, white hand, the Persian lock, and a tolerable beard) are perfectly revealed. Present not yourself on the Stage (esp ecially at a new play) until the quaking prologue hath(by rubbing) got color into his cheekes, and is ready to give the trumpets their Cue that hees upon point to enter: for then is

* The Gull's Hornbook. By Thomas Dekker. London 1609.

the time...to creepe from behind the Arras, with your Tripes or three-footed stoole in one hand and a teston* mounted betweene a forefinger and a thumbe in the other ... It shall crown you with rich commendation, to laugh alowde in the middest of the saddest and most serious scene of the terriblest Tragedy: and to let that clapper (your tongue) be tost so high, that all the house may ring of it.

Before the play begins, fall to cardes..Marry, if either the company, or indisposition of the weather bind you to sit it out, my counsell is then that you turne plain Ape, take up a Rush, and tickle the earnest eares of your fellow gallants, to make other fooles falla laughing."

These were the untoward conditions under which the drama was acted in the seventeenth century on the platform stage. Dekker was but one of many writers who objected to having the beaux on the stage. It was one of the most ancient of theatrical nuisances. The sale of stage seats was prohibited by royal order before 1636, but the gallants came back in full force after the Restoration. The general audience used for admission, crude brass checks which bore no seat number, as seats were not reserved in the theatres until the beginning of the nineteenth century.

In 1674 one Samuel Vincent wrote a modernized version of the Gull's Hornbook. We learn by it that groundlings no longer stood in the pit, for he suggests that "our gallant (having paid his half-crown and given the

* teston: sixpence.

Doorkeeper his Ticket) presently advance himself to his seat in the middle of the Pit. Democracy was progressing in the theatre audience and prices were rising. Was the second fact the concomitant of the first, one wonders.

Thirty-five years elapsed from the time of Bacon's last published essays to the return of Charles II from France in 1660. During this time the popularity of the essay was eclipsed for several reasons, the principal one being that the best minds were absorbed in the controversies which preceded the Civil war and continued into the Cromwellian period. All theatres were closed when the Protector took the reins of government.

With the Restoration came a greatly increased interest in French literature. Charles Cotton, one of the wits and poets of the court translated Montaigne in 1685. Three editions were exhausted by 1700 and Florio's work was completely superseded. Abraham Cowley and Sir William Temple successfully imitated Montaigne. Sir William wrote as a country gentleman from his estate. Sometimes he made a study of a literary subject. He thought the drama was the best modern form of poetry and says of it, "I am deceived if our English (drama) has not in some kind excelled both the modern and the Antient, which has been by Force of a vein natural perhaps to our country, and which with us is called Humour, a Word peculiar to our Language, too, and hard to be expressed in any other;

* On Poetry. Sir William Temple.

nor is it that I know of, found in any Foreign Writers, unless it be Molière, and yet his it self has too much of the Farce to pass for the same with ours. Shakespeare was the first that opened this vein upon our Stage, which has run so freely and so pleasantly ever since, that I have often wondered to find it appear so little upon any others being a subject so proper for them, since Humour is but a Picture of particular Life, as Comedy is of General..."

Samuel Pepys, the remarkable diarist of the period, had the essay habit of mind. He prefigures the dramatic critic of our day, only he gives us a line usually, instead of a paragraph, of comment. His opinions of Shakespeare's plays are often amusing. "To the King's play-house," he notes, and there saw a silly play and an old one, "The Taming of the Shrew." Again, "...saw Henry the IV: and contrary to expectation, was pleased in nothing more than in Cartwright's speaking of Falstaffe's speech about "What is Honour?" The house full of Parliament-men, it being holyday with them: and it was observable how a gentleman of good habit, sitting just before us, eating of some fruit in the midst of the play, did drop down as dead, being choked; but without much ado Orange Moll did thrust her finger down his throat, and brought him to life again." Again he writes, "After dinner went to the New Theatre and there I saw "The Merry Wives of Windsor" acted, the humours of the country gentleman and the French doctor very well done, but the rest but very poor-

* Diary of Samuel Pepys.

ly and Sir John Falstaffe as bad as any." Betterton was a favorite actor with Pepys, evidently, for we find this comment, " I was vexed to see Young, who is but a bad actor at best, act Macbeth, in the room of Betterton, who poor man! is sick: but Lord! what a prejudice it wrought in me against the whole play."

We may say that the first stage of the informal essay in England is marked by experiment on narrow lines. There is not a large amount of material . In Temple and a few minor essayists of the time, the ice began to thaw, the barrier which had kept authors from naturalness and common-sense broke thru.

The development of literary periodicals largely shaped the essay of the eighteenth century. After the Revolution of 1688 the censorship was greatly relaxed so that newspapers in the strict sense as well as miscellaneous journals began to spring up. John Dunton, in 1690, established The Athenian Gazette, later called The Athenian Mercury and Defoe in 1704, founded his Review, in which the famous Scandal Club censured manners and morals. Finally, in the Tatler started in 1709, and the Spectator, established two years later, Steele and Addison, outstanding literary critics and artists, published in the periodical, single-sheet journal, short informal essays on general topics, thru which they set out to interest a wider circle of readers than had ever before been reached by the essay. Women were addressed for the first time, for the two writers felt that they had been supplied hitherto with

poor literary material.

Voltaire's three years' visit to England had influenced the thought of many English writers, among them Addison. While Steele was essentially religious in temperament, Addison was the Deist, the common-sense philosopher. The aroused Puritan conscience of England voiced itself thru these two men. The public was now disgusted with the immoral Restoration comedy. * Colley Cibber observed that "Indecencies were no longer Wit and by degrees the Fair Sex came again to fill the Boxes on the first Day of a new Comedy without Fear or Censure."

Broadmindedness was shown by Steele, who in the third number of the Tatler expressed himself as "not of the same opinion with my friends and fellow-labourers, the Reformers of manners, in their severity towards plays." Instead, he considered that a good play, acted before a well-bred audience, "must raise very proper incitements to good behaviour and be the most quick and most prevailing method of giving young people a turn of sense and breeding!" The position thus taken, Steele held consistently and generously. Time and again he summoned "all his disciples, whether dead or living, mad or tame, Toasts, Smarts, Dappers, Pretty-Fellows, Musicians or Scrapers, to make their appearance at the Playhouse." He particularly defended Betterton; in fact there were few actors who did not profit by his praises when benefit time drew near, and few the plays and playwrights that were not in his debt.

* Apology for the Life of Colley Cibber, Comedian. London 1740...

Cibber gladly admitted his indebtedness long after his friendship with Steele had ceased. "There was," he said, "scarce a Comedian of Merit in our whole Company, whom his Tatlers had not made better by his publick Recommendation of them. And many Days had our House been particularly fill'd by the Influence and Credit of his Pen." *

An interesting type of essay popular at this time, was the "character". They were descriptive sketches of typical personages or classes, by which the writer could illustrate character, conversation, good-breeding. The borelabel names such as Ned Softly, Will Nice, Tom Folio. Sir Roger De Coverley was a particularly successful "character". Johnson's Dick Minim and Goldsmith's Beau Tibbs and The Man in Black belong to this class. The "character" may be traced back to Theophrastus, pupil of Aristotle, who under that title gave realistic pictures of the life in Athens in the time of Alexander.

In the second Spectator, Steele introduces us to a "character", the "Batchelor who is a Member of the Inner Temple... He is an excellent Critick, and the time of the Play is his Hour of Business; exactly at five he passes thro' New-Imm, crosses thro' Russel-Court, and takes a turn at Will's Coffee-House till the play begins; he has his shoes rubbed and his Perriwig powdered at the Barber's as you go into the Rose. It is for the good of the Audience when he is at the Play, for the Actors have an ambition to please him."

* Shakespeare to Sheridan. By Alwin Thaler. Harvard Univ. Press 1922.

* "It is a curious thing", remarks William Archer, "that though Addison and Steele must often have been hard up for "copy", it unfortunately did not occur to them to go to the theatre and take critical notes of what they saw there... There are some entertaining essays by both Addison and Steele on the license of comedy, and two or three delightfully humorous papers, by Addison, on the barbarisms of romantic tragedy and tragi-comedy; but they are illustrated by general rather than particular examples, and never by reference to any individual production or performance."

Addison condemned English tragedy because it was not moral enough, in the 40th Spectator, and held that an equal distribution of rewards and punishments in a play was ridiculous. Tragedy writers felt that when they represented a virtuous or innocent person in distress, they ought not to leave him until they had delivered him out of his troubles, or made him triumph over his enemies. Addison felt that if that were the only way of writing a tragedy it would very much cramp the range of play-writing. To show what was his idea of a good tragedy, Addison wrote Cato. It was very dull, Dr. Johnson thought. Of it he said, "Cato is a being above our solicitude: a man of whom the gods take care, and whom we leave to their care with heedless confidence. To the rest, neither gods nor men can have much attention, for there is not one among them that strongly attracts either affection or esteem."

* Introduction. Dramatic Essays by Leigh Hunt. Wm. Archer and R. W. Lowe.

Johnson and Goldsmith carried on the traditions of Addison and Steele in the last part of the century. Johnson stressed the serious side of life in the Rambler and the Idler. The essay became rather heavy and by the end of the seventeenth-hundreds his type was outgrown.

Goldsmith developed the side of humor and social satire. There could not have been more of a contrast to the weighty Doctor. Goldsmith is, of all the essayists we have mentioned, the most autobiographic. With his Irish charm and wit, he had too, the inherited tendency to shiftlessness. Poverty was usually his companion. If she stepped aside, extravagance immediately took her place. A restless Bohemian in his youth, Goldsmith travelled much on the continent before he settled at London at the age of twenty-seven. This helped to free him from national prejudices. * In an early essay he declared that if it were necessary to hate other countries in order to love one's own he would prefer the title of the ancient philosopher, viz. a citizen of the world, to that of an Englishman, a Frenchman, or European, or to any other appellation whatever. Thus he chose A Citizen of the World as the title for the series of essays published in the Ledger, and made his Spectator and censor a Chinese philosopher already familiar with the life of Europe. * Austin Dobson says in this connection, "What, perhaps is a more interesting feature of the Chinese philosopher's pages than even his ethical disquisitions, is the evidence they afford of the coming creator of Tony Lumpkin and Dr. Primrose. In the admirable portrait of the Man in Black, with his reluctant goodness and his Gold-

* Essay on National Prejudices. Misc. Works. O. Goldsmith.

* Austin Dobson.

smith family traits, there is a foretaste of some of the most charming characteristics of the Vicar of Wakefield; while in the picture of the pinched and tarnished little Beau, with his mechanical chatter about the Countess of All-Night and the Duke of Piccadilly, set to the forlorn burden of "lend me half-a-crown," he added a character-sketch however lightly touched, to that immortal gallery which contains the finished full-lengths of Parson Adams and Squire Western, of Matthew Bramble and "my Uncle Toby."

Goldsmith was economical of his literary material and used it in many makeovers. Goldsmith's self-portrait in the Man in Black, remodelled for the stage in a version of The Vicar, called "Olivia", was responsible for the discovery of Miss Ellen Terry as a leading theatrical star, for it was her success as Olivia, which won her the opportunity to join Sir Henry Irving's company at the Lyceum Theatre in London. She always played the part during her association with that company. Thrice-used material we see here, in essay, novel, play.

Goldsmith complained that the comic muse had been banished from the English stage in favor of genteel, or sentimental comedy. He fought to reinstate it, first with the comedy of The Good-Natured Man and next with She Stoops to Conquer, a highly successful play. Dr. Johnson could make or mar a play, so great was his influence. The night of the performance of She Stoops to Conquer he sat in a front row in a side box. "All eyes were upon him," wrote Cumberland, "and when he laughed, everybody thought himself warranted to roar." He laughed a great deal and the play has justified his judgment for it is a classic which we all admire today.

Five years after the death of Johnson the French Revolution began. Then Napoleon set Europe ablaze. Englishmen again had to face military necessities. But the result of the upheaval brought a certain degree of liberation. It would seem that this expressed itself in the physical expansion of the essay. Magazines took the place of the news-sheets and they could give from six to twelve pages to an essay. Hazlitt's were three or four times as long as the Spectator type, while De Quincey wrote at tremendous length. Lamb's were between the old and the new and Leigh Hunt's were the briefest of all.

The new essay differed from the old in other ways than in length. There was a new freedom and directness of style gained by discarding old conventions like the clubs and the correspondents and the characters with classical names. The Romantic movement was at flood voicing the individual's interest in himself. His mood and his temperament were emphasized to such an extent that the writer became frankly egotistical. But he relied more upon his own personal experience than his predecessors had done and with good artistic results. The satiric and didactic note was no longer heard. The new essayist had no propaganda and no one to reform, so he no longer felt the need of hiding himself behind an invented Mr. Bickerstaff, or Mr. Spectator, or Chinese Traveller, but wrote in his own person. He dared to be himself.

There was at the same time a shifting of interest among readers, who now wanted popular critical essays, formal, or informal, instead of the old-time essay of

manners. The feeling was general that the average reader should have the knowledge that had up to now been the exclusive possession of the scholar.

Hazlitt in a short sketch of Charles Lamb says what he might equally well have affirmed about himself.

"Mr. Lamb would probably never have made his way by detached and independent efforts; but, fortunately for himself and others, he has taken advantage of the Periodical Press, where he has been stuck into notice, and the texture of his compositions is assuredly fine enough to bear the broadest glare of popularity that has hitherto shone upon them." The magazines such as the Edinburgh Review, founded in 1802, the London and Blackwood's a little later, to say nothing of Leigh Hunt's Reflector greatly helped ^{to} establish the founders of the new essay. Editors and owners vied with each other to obtain writers of originality. They paid them exceedingly well and left them free from all dictation.

The informal essay of this age is best represented by Charles Lamb, who in his studies of men and things revealed himself as well, with a charm and naiveté closely akin to that of Montaigne. Lamb's chief characteristics are humor, his love of the stage in general, and of Shakespeare in particular.

As to his humor, Hazlitt puts his finger unerringly upon its main features. "He is as little of a proser as possible; but he blurts out the finest wit and sense in the world. He keeps a good deal in the background at first, till some excellent conceit pushes him forward and then he abounds in whim and pleasantry."

An instance of Lamb's whimsicality is evident in the essay On the Artificial Comedy of the Last Century. He never meant seriously that the Restoration Comedies are sound and clean works, though a simple-minded reader might think so. He maintained that the Fainalls and the Mirabells, in their own sphere, did not offend his moral sense, that in fact, they did not appeal to it at all. Whereas, if one put one of these characters in a modern play, he protested that his virtuous indignation "would rise against the profligate wretch as warmly as the Catos of the pit could desire." He mourned that the comedy of manners was extinct on the stage of his day and credited the fact to a squeamish anxiety about morality, which led to ridiculous precautions.

This statement brought out from Macaulay, who was never whimsical, a scandalized protest. Brander Matthews says of it, "I have an idea that if Lamb could have read this posthumous refutation, he would have longed to get his hands on Macaulay's bumps to examine his phrenological development."*

The paragraph in question was this:-

"It is not the fact that the world of these dramatists is a world into which no moral enters. The heroes and heroines, too, have a moral code of their own, an exceedingly bad one, but not, as Mr. Charles Lamb seems to think, a code existing only in the imagination of the dramatists... The morality of the Country Wife and the Old Bachelor is the

* The Dramatic Essays of Charles Lamb. Introd. p.10. By Brander Matthews.

morality, not as Mr. Charles Lamb maintains, of an unreal world, but of a world which is a good deal too real...And the question is simply this, whether a man of genius who constantly and systematically endeavors to make this sort of character attractive, by uniting with it beauty, grace, dignity, spirit, a high social position, popularity, literature, wit, taste, knowledge of the world, brilliant success in every undertaking, does or does not make an ill use of his powers. We own that we are unable to understand how this question can be answered in any way but one."*

The fact seems to be that being a wit himself, the wit of Wycherley and Farquhar delighted him, the rest did not offend him and he thought critics too pharisaical about it. Lamb's antiquarian enthusiasm would also incline him to favor the old plays. It is his habit to exaggerate the merits of what he is criticizing. He treated his books as he treated his friends-enjoyed whatever in them was true or original and overlooked their faults.

We have said that another trait of Lamb was his love of the stage and especially Shakespeare.

At the time Lamb wrote, the great body of Elizabethan and Jacobean drama was practically unknown to the intelligent public. Although lyric poetry seemed to be the expression of the romantic, post-revolutionary writers, there began to be symptoms of a reviving interest in the drama. It was Lamb who first interested the average Englishman to read Beaumont and Fletcher, Ford, Massinger, Heywood and Webster.

* Collected Works. T. B. Macaulay.

Though Lamb was an inveterate playgoer, he felt it a danger to have only the stage acquaintance with Shakespeare's men and women. This is his theme in the essay, "On the Tragedies of Shakespeare." He held it a disadvantage to have Hamlet, for instance, forever associated with the person of John Philip Kemble. Having studied Shakespeare from boyhood up, Lamb could see more with the mind's eye, but the mass of humanity has no mind's eye. The theatre serves to stir their sluggish imagination. The scholar may enjoy Shakespeare in the closet, the man in the street is benefited by seeing the figures of the great poet live and move and have their being in the theatre.

Of Lamb's essays dealing with acting in an informal way are, "My First Play," "Stage Illusion," "The Religion of Actors," and "On the Custom of Hissing at the Theatres;" and there are five criticisms in the *Elia*. The ever-delightful "Tales From Shakespeare" written in collaboration with Mary Lamb are almost possible of inclusion in a list of essays on the drama.

One lovingly lingers over this picture of the brother and sister taken from the paper Old China, in which Bridget (Mary) asks Charles, "Do you remember where it was we used to sit when we saw 'The Battle of Hexham' and the 'Surrender of Calais,' and Bannister and Mrs. Bland in the 'Children in the Woods;' when we squeezed out our shilling apiece to sit three or four times in a season in the one-shilling gallery, - where you felt all the time you ought not to have brought me, and more strongly I felt obligation to you for having brought me, and the pleasure was the better for a little shame, - and when the curtain drew

up, what cared we for our place in the house, or what mattered it where we were sitting, when our thoughts were with Rosalind in Arden, or with Viola at the Court of Illyria?"

In his "Some of the Old Actors," the description of Dodd stands out. "In expressing slowness of apprehension this actor surpassed all others. You could see the first dawn of an idea stealing slowly over his face, climbing up by little and little, with a painful process, till it cleared up at last to the fulness of a twilight conception, -its highest meridian. He seemed to keep back his intellect, as some have the power to retard the pulsation. The balloon takes less time in filling than it took to cover the expansion of his broad, moony face over all its quarters with expression. A glimmer of understanding would appear in a corner of his eye, and for lack of fuel go out again. A part of his forehead would catch a little intelligence, and be a long time in communicating it to the remainder." Dickey Suett played the Clown to Dodd's Sir Andrew. "He was the Robin Goodfellow of the stage," says Lamb. "Care, that troubles all the world, was forgotten in his composition. Had he had but two grains (nay, half a grain) of it, he could never have supported himself upon those two spider's strings which served him (in the latter part of his unmixed existence) as legs. A doubt or a scruple must have made him totter, a sigh have puffed him down; the weight of a frown had staggered him, a wrinkle made him lose his balance. But on he went, scrambling upon those airy stilts of his, with Robin Goodfellow, 'thorough brake thorough brier,' reckless of a scratched face or a torn doublet."

Lamb was used to being chaffed by his friends about his own immaterial legs!

But we must not quote Lamb forever! It is fair to say of him that he depicted the drama reminiscently, in the spirit of the antiquarian who loves a bygone century and searches it for his material.

We can mention another name here, that of De Quincey, only because of his wonderful eery bit of imagination in The Knocking at the Gate in Macbeth.* His essays are not especially concerned with the drama, with this exception.

Hazlitt and Leigh Hunt are concerned, in their familiar essays, with sketches of contemporary plays and players. Hunt, nine years younger than Lamb, had in 1807, begun his career as an essayist by contributing to the Traveller and the Globe discussions of the acting and actors of the day, modelled after the Spectator. This consideration of the actor's art was new, - a creative innovation in criticism. It gave the familiar essay a new field and dignified the theatrical calling.

Leigh Hunt was but a secondary luminary as compared with Hazlitt or Lamb, but he was a most useful one. It was in periodicals of Hunt's that Hazlitt and Lamb found opportunity to publish some of their best work. Of his personality Hazlitt has left this record. "His natural gayety and sprightliness of manner, his high animal spirits and the vinous quality of his mind produce an immediate fascination and intoxication in those who come in contact with him." *

His two campaigns as a dramatic critic were separat-
* Hazlitt, The Spirit of the Age, 1825.

ed by a space of nearly twenty years. He was on the News from 1805 until the end of 1807; from January 1808 until he went to prison in 1813, he filled the office of critic on his own paper, The Examiner; and he was the whole staff of a daily, The Tatler, from 1830 to 1832.

Leigh Hunt was a critic by nature rather than by art. Almost always when he says a thing is good it is good. Give him a taste of a play and he will characterize it well. He did not care much for tragedies, Hamlet meant little to him, but he was happy in the comedy or the romance.

When Hunt began playgoing the Kembles were at the zenith, John Philip and his sister Mrs. Siddons. Kemble offered a great contrast to Kean the other great actor of the time. The former was classical and inclined to be the pedant, while the latter had the passionate romantic temperament.

Hunt discourses upon Kemble, whom at the time it was a critical religion to admire, as follows:- *

"His figure, though not elegant, is manly and dignified, his features are strongly marked with what is called the Roman character, his head altogether is the head of the antiquary and the artist. This tragic form assumes excellently well the gait of royalty, the vigorous majesty of the warrior and the profound gravity of the sage: but its seriousness is unbending; his countenance seems to despise the gaiety it labours to assume, and its comic expression is comic because it is singularly wretched. Of the passion

* Critical Essays. By Leigh Hunt. John Hunt, London, 1807.

of love he can express nothing." In a further reference to Kemble he is "amazed that the audience do not contrive some means of noticing Mr. Kemble's vicious orthoepy." He had the affected way of pronouncing words, the love of singularity. Airth, etairnally, vartue, hijjus, sentimint, furful, and bird for beard, were some of his offences in the eyes of of Hunt.

There is nothing but praise for him, though, in the Tempest. "The character of Prospero could not have been sustained by anyone actor on the stage with so much effect as by Mr. Kemble. The majestic presence and dignity of the princely enchanter, conscious of his virtue,- were displayed with an undeviating spirit, with that proud composure which seems a peculiar property of this actor."

In the prospectus of The Examiner, the critic assures his readers that "he will still admire Mr. Kemble when dignified, but by no means when he is pedantic."

He made, in The News a list of requirements for the actor. "He must divest himself of his audience. Principal errors in local propriety may be divided into:-

Glancing at the boxes.
Adjusting the dress.
Telling the audience their soliloquys.
Wearing their hats in rooms and not wearing them in the open air. "

Of Mrs. Siddons Hazlitt has written the most graciously, but Hunt said with felicity, "to write a criticism of her is to write a panegyric, and a panegyric of a very peculiar sort, for the praise will be true."

After the decease of the Tatler, Hunt ceased to write of the theatre, but he continued to be interested in the stage and his play, A Legend of Florence, was a success

at Covent Garden in 1840.

William Hazlitt, not so brilliant as Lamb, nor so lovable, had an unrivalled sanity and acuteness of judgment. His love of painting and practice of the art gave him a sure touch in visualising his subject, while his enthusiasm and relish of life were infectious. Coleridge declared of Hazlitt, "He says things of his own in a way of his own." Like Matthew Arnold, he intuitively enjoyed what is best in literature and could convey that enjoyment to his reader. He is our first impressionistic critic, but though he paints in broad outline, he does not fail to say the essential things about his subject.

De Quincey criticized Hazlitt's style as non-sequacious! Perhaps he did lack continuity and was guilty of too many exclamations, but he remains the most stimulating of essay writers, nevertheless.

Hazlitt was a lover of the theatre, but unlike Lamb, he must see the play acted. He could do a paper better if he had just seen Kean play Iago. Lady Macbeth he ~~could not have written~~, unless he had seen Mrs. Siddons act it again and again.

Most of Hazlitt's informal essays, including those upon stage subjects are found in "A Review of the English Stage", "Table Talk," and in miscellaneous essays. Formal essays of his comprise "Characters of Shakespeare's Plays", "Dramatic Literature of the Reign of Queen Elizabeth," and "On The English Comic Writers."

The Free Admission, a delightfully playful caprice, begins, "A Free Admission is the lotus of the mind; the leaf in which your name is inscribed as having the pri-

vileges of the entrée for the season is of an oblivious quality-an antidote for half the ills of life....Here, (by the help of that Open Sesame! a Free Admission,) ensconced in his favorite niche,(the critic) views the pageant of the world played before him; melts down the years to moments; sees human life like a gaudy shadow, glance across the stage; and here tastes of all earth's bliss, the sweet without the bitter, the honey without its sting...Oh! leave me to my repose in my beloved corner at Covent Garden Theatre! "

Whether Actors ought to sit in the Boxes, is another example, half humorous, half serious, but quite in the familiar strain, It begins, - "I think not;...Actors belong to the public; their persons are not their own property. ..Let him go into the pit, if he pleases, to see, - not into the first circle, to be seen. He represents the majesty of successive kings; he takes the responsibility of heroes and lovers on himself; the mantle of genius and nature fall on his shoulders; we 'pile millions' of associations upon him, under which he should be 'buried quick', and not perk out an inauspicious face upon us, with a plain-cut coat, to say, - 'What fools you all were! - I am not Hamlet the Dane!' The motto of a great actor should be 'Aut Caesar, aut nihil!'

Oh! while I live, let me not be admitted to an actor's dressing-room. Let me not see how Cato painted, or how Caesar combed. Let me not meet the prompt-boys in the passage, nor see the half-lighted candles stuck against the bare walls...nor see a Columbine practising a pirouette in sober sadness. ... The private boxes should be reserved for

the officers of state and great diplomatic characters, who wish to avoid, rather than court popular notice!"

Of Kean, whom Hazlitt greatly admired, he said, "Mr. Kean is all effort, all violence, all extreme passion: he is possessed with a fury, a demon that leaves him no repose, no time for thought, or room for imagination. In the character of Iago, his exhibition of acting was extraordinary. "

His delineation of Mrs. Siddons is a classic.

"She raised tragedy to the skies , or brought it down from thence. It was something above nature. We can conceive of nothing grander. She embodied to our imagination the fables of mythology, of the heroic and deified mortals of elder time. She was no less than a goddess, or than a prophetess inspired by the gods. Power was seated on her brow, passion emanated from her breast as from a shrine. She was tragedy personified. She was the state-liest ornament of the public mind....As Lady Macbeth, coming on in the sleep-walking scene, her eyes were open, but their sense was shut. She was like a person bewildered and unconscious of what she did. Her lips moved involuntarily- all her gestures were involuntary and mechanical. She glided on and off the stage like an apparition."

It is related of Sir Joshua Reynolds that when Mrs. Siddons , upon looking at his painting of her as The Tragic Muse, stooped to see his initials painted darkly upon the hem of her gown, he said to her, "I hope to go down to posterity on the hem of your garment." Hazlitt comes down to us in the same way thru the power of his pen-portrait of her acting.

With these three great informal essayists, Lamb, Hazlitt and Leigh Hunt, the type practically ends unless we extend it to Stevenson. With the latter, whose main success in the type was his out-of-doors essay, we have not much to do in the way of the drama. Stevenson tried his hand at a few plays, but they were not of particular note.

We never think of Matthew Arnold as an informal writer but now and again he wrote about the plays of the day in the Pall Mall Gazette, signing himself as 'An Old Playgoer.'

He went to see Mr. Irving's revival of Much Ado about Nothing at the Lyceum Theatre, and gave his impression of the play, incidentally declaring himself to be on the side of Charles Lamb: "So salutary is it to be carried into a world of fantasy, that I doubt whether even the comedy of Congreve and Wycherley, presented to us at the present day by good artists, would do us harm....I feel sure of its doing us less harm than pieces such as 'Heartsease' and 'Impulse.'..Such a world's appeal is to our imagination; it calls into play our imagination rather than our senses."

No really important modification of the character of the familiar essay has occurred since Stevenson, but he is by no means the last of the English essayists.

George Bernard Shaw in his periodical essays in the Saturday Review busied himself with destroying current notions about the well-made play and absurd ideas about romance. He has a Puritan bent, in that he holds that it is the function of the drama to teach. The most widely read of his many as yet uncollected essays is Dramatic Opinions and Essays. Shaw is like the comic masque itself, one cannot tell whether it is laughing with us or

at us. Chesterton, Benson and Galsworthy are modern names in this genre, but they are too close to us for an impartial assay of their value.

We have traced the development of the informal, familiar essay from its source in France down to the England of today. Like a river it has expanded broadly from its first bubbling-forth and great impulse it has always received from the periodical press. The theatre and the drama have inspired many of the best informal essays, sometimes in the portrayal of the customs of an audience, that miniature forum of a nation; again, in the analysis of the deep and basic criticism of life which the observation of the drama affords; and more concretely, in character drawing, wherein the essay breathes forth the same aroma of nobility and truth that the drama expresses by action.

Thru the centuries we have been studying, we see the drama and the essay based upon the drama always responding to the democratic spirit. Not many kings and queens nowadays have entrance and exit upon the boards. But how often we see our citizen-neighbor there! In each large city newspaper office sits an essayist who has the theatre and drama near to his heart and in writing of it, "discloses his personality to the reader in an intimate and familiar way." Thus potential Montaignes exist in every metropolis endeavoring to satisfy our human impulse to find thru mimicry of human nature, the image of ourselves.

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