THE MODERN DRAMA AS A SOCIAL FORCE*

By Norman Hapgood

ACROSS the ocean they have a real censor, and it is not necessary to depend upon the mayor or the police to tell us if it is recent for more enlightened members of the community to see a play like “Damaged Goods.” In England the censor is a man who never goes to the theatre, but to whom all plays must be sent before they can be produced. Miss Morgan in her poem compared Mr. Bennett to John the Baptist. In England John the Baptist can’t appear on the stage — except in a dress-suit, singing in an oratorio. But in England there is a growing sentiment in favor of a drama free to express itself as a social force.

In talking about the drama as a social force, I don’t want to narrow it to the one moral question which is agitating this city today. The drama is the greatest general social agent of any of the arts. It is the one art which in a short space of time is capable of expressing the highest flights of the human imagination and bringing all kinds of people together, just as religion does. I was startled at first by Mr. Coleman’s prayer, but then I remembered that the drama started in religion and that even today it finds its highest expression at Oberammergau. No play of that time was either sentimental without sense, like this one, or pretty stories of a girl and a boy, with the responsibility of the father to his illegitimate child. It is extraordinarily important that we should win this fight, and win it good and hard. Democracy is an exciting thing, but allowed to go in the wrong direction it can be made comfortable and commonplace instead. Let us go in the right direction, realize all our possibilities, and we shall have great geniuses and great art. And the drama will do this for us if we see that it treats of the real. Do this for the drama, and you will find that it is an enriching and valuable and proud a possession as the nation has.

THE MESSAGE OF “DAMAGED GOODS.”

By Richard Bennett.

THERE is a great big clamor going on around this country by a lot of prudes, hypocrites and criminally ignorant people, against the teaching of sex hygiene. I wonder why? Sex hygiene: morally clean, isn’t it terrible that anyone should object to being morally physically clean, and should object to his children being taught, or should object to taking the teaching himself or allowing it to be introduced by our medical men or our men of the church?

The teaching is going on — it is going on if I have to start it myself in every town I go into where they haven’t it. (The speaker then announced a plan by which he and Mrs. Bennett will instruct the men of the audience necessarily.)
land and in this country that have made this one of the notable dramatic eras of all time. (The speaker illustrated this by speaking of the work of Shaw and Galsworthy and the new one-act plays of Barrie.)

We can’t have a great stage unless it represents the genius of its time. It may be a comic genius, as with Molière in France; but our people are serious. We are the first great real democracy that has ever existed, and we have many problems. One of them is that over which all Boston is now stirred up. We have been compelled to realize that even in America the drama is the expression of the ideas of grown people, not a toy for children.

A singular thing is that this complaint against frank speaking is always aimed at serious plays. (The speaker then said that Mr. Bennett’s fight was already won, but that another play, “The Guilty Man,” was going through the same struggle in New York and probably would have to elsewhere also. He gave the plot, hinging on

THE PRAYER.

With thankful hearts, we acknowledge, O God, the satisfaction given by the drama, the helpfulness afforded by the stage, as the speaker has rendered by the players who entertain, inform and uplift the multitude. We have received much from these sources and are given in return. Grant us, we pray, a serious mind and a sense of personal responsibility in our attitude toward the theatre. May we shun the evil in it and support the good. Do Thou uphold every playwright, manager and player who is striving to uplift his fellow man and give them the backing of all those who love righteousness and who work for the coming of the Kingdom.

Amen.

(Continued on Page 4.)
THE QUESTIONS

Q: Will you kindly give your opinion of Shakespeare's "The Merchant of Venice"?
A: All I can say in a short space is that I think it is one of his best plays from two points of view—plot and acting parts.
Q (Mr. Brown): The churches teach good and evil in an abstract way, but in such plays as "Damaged Goods" we get action and reaction and result; and in such cases does not the drama go beyond the church?
A: Personally, I like to confine myself to what I am sure of. I am sure both have done a great deal of good and are going to do more.
Q (Mr. Brown): Do not scenes of violent crime act as a stimulant to young minds?
A: It depends on how it is done. The murder of Banquo and Duncan by Macbeth never inspired anyone to murder.
Q: What is your opinion of William Winter's criticism of the present day stage?
A: I think it is piffle. (Applause.)
Q: Since you have criticised the dramatic critic, why do you not criticise the editor who is responsible for him?
A: I am perfectly willing to divide the responsibility between them and the public, which I hope soon will demand some responsibility between them and the public.
Q: Are there any plays depicting the unjust economic system between labor and capital?
A: There has been a stream of them, from Hauptmann's "The Weavers" to Charles Rann Kennedy. But the best playwrights make such discussions a part of a genuine presentation of life.
Q: Has the modern problem play, like "The Second Mrs. Tanqueray," an uplifting influence on the community?
A: I think the problem play has a very uplifting influence, and that particular play was a pioneer in the field.
Q: Will you say you haven't any scruples for weighing the church against the drama?
A: Because it is true.
Q: What will be the effect of the enfranchisement of women on the social evil?
A: The enfranchisement of women—the setting free of their ideals so that they can work effectively in the community—will have many great advantages, none greater than the raising of the sexual standard.
Q: Don't the economic conditions of today prevent a poor man from seeing plays like "Damaged Goods," playing in a high class theatre at high prices?
A: Yes, but the whole thing will be moving pictures soon. (Mr. Bennett): Is it pride that keeps you out of a 50 cent seat in my theatre?
Q: Do you know any play that will object to plays like "Damaged Goods"?
A: I am afraid that is true of a large part of the male half of the human race. The men complain where the women applaud, because people always object to having a privilege taken away from them, and because they have been accustomed from boyhood to think of sex in a smutty way.
Q: Why, when all the people are thinking of this thing, are we so afraid to face the truth and the facts?
A: We are less and less afraid every year.
Q: Do you think that the moral effect of such a play as "Damaged Goods" is lasting?
A: I certainly do. I believe that such plays are helping the feminist movement to stamp out prostitution as a business.
(Applause.)
Q (Mr. Hogan): I should like to know if under a state where Socialism would exist and profit be wiped out, prostitution would not be wiped out also?
A: Socialism or any other method which puts woman on a footing of equality with man will reduce prostitution. (Applause.)
Q: If it is true that a majority of the men and women of America have little knowledge of the drama as a great art, why would it not be wise to teach it in the high schools?
A: It is being taught, more and more, and in a way they can understand, and the children are being grouped together and put to acting fine plays.
Q: Hasn't the theatre done more for the abolition of slavery, by playing "Uncle Tom's Cabin" than the Church?
A: I can't deal in these comparisons; I am afraid of them.
Q: Will you give the name of a play that deals with white slavery?
Q (Mr. Ballo): If "Damaged Goods" is to have such a wonderful effect on the young mind, don't you think it should be produced in a lower priced theatre, where it will reach the people who need the information? (Applause.)
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A: It depends on how it is done. The murder of Banquo and Duncan by Macbeth never inspired anyone; girls'll be girls.

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A: I think it is pitiful. (Applause.)
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A: I am perfectly willing to provide the responsibility between them and the public, which I hope soon will demand something better.

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A: I think the problem play has a very uplifting influence, and that particular play was a pioneer in the field.

Q: Do you think that of Tolstoi's "The Kreutzer Sonata"?
A: My opinion, given with the utmost humility, is that it is the expression of a great mind become morbid.

Q: Will the drama transform or eliminate from human nature the innate quality of selfishness?
A: I think that is a pretty large order on the other hand they are reaching millions who never before had anything to feed their minds.

Q: What do you think of Ibsen's Nora?
A: I think that play thinks can go ahead of the best intelligence of the community, and that problem has not yet been solved.

Q: Mrs. Hoffman: What effect have the modern plays on our children who go to see them so much?
A: The only bad effect I have seen is the lack of continued attention. On the other hand, they are reaching millions who never before had anything to feed their minds.

Q: What do you think of Ibsen's Nora?
A: That is the only bad effect I have seen is the lack of continued attention. On the other hand, they are reaching millions who never before had anything to feed their minds.

Q: What do you think of Shaw's criticism of Shakespeare?
A: As usually.

Q: "Damaged Goods," which would you prefer your daughter to see?
A: If there is anyone in the audience who would prefer his daughter to see the "Foibles," let him speak up.

Q: Is "Belladonna" a moral play?
A: I haven't seen it.
Q: Isn't "The Fight" likely to have a bad effect on young girls' heads?
A: I can't judge as to that particular play, as I haven't seen it, but for the plays we have been considering I should answer in the affirmative.

Q: Why do you say you haven't any scale for weighing the church against the drama?
A: Because it is true.

Q: What will be the effect of the enfranchisement of women on the social evil?
A: The enfranchisement of women—the setting free of their ideals so that they can work effectively in the community—will have many great advantages, none greater than the raising of the sexual standard.

Q: Don't the economic conditions of today prevent a poor man from seeing plays like "Damaged Goods," playing in a high class theatre, as they should be played?
A: Yes, but the whole thing will be in moving pictures soon. (Mr. Bennett.) Is it pride that keeps you out of a 50 cent seat in my theatre?

Q: Do you know any play that will teach the working people to keep what they create?
A: I think plays can go ahead of the best intelligence of the community, and that problem has not yet been solved.

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EVEN those who know our work best do not estimate it at its full power. Last Sunday evening there was a very heavy rain and the going was nasty. We thought that this time surely the hall would not be full. Instead of that, the place was crowded so early that we were able to begin the meeting nearly fifteen minutes ahead of time. Mr. Dreier thought it was the greatest night we ever had. Certainly the reaction between the speaker and the audience was unusual, even for Ford Hall.

Miss Edith R. May, who so generously and effectively assists Mr. London every Sunday evening in the sale of the magazine, takes a deep interest in every phase of our work. There are not many who voluntarily would take up a task like that and stick to it just for the sake of helping along a good cause.

Mr. Ballou certainly made a winning fight in his earnest plea in behalf of the young man who wanted to know why "Damaged Goods" could not be played in a theatre with more popular prices. And Mr. Bennett finally gave an answer that satisfied everyone. It was a fine display of wholesome indignation completely answered.

Conundrum: What is it that makes Mr. Hogan want to raise a row every time he asks a question? Doesn't he get a fair shake, or does he just love to be obstreperous, or can't he help it anyway?

Most of us thought that Mr. Bennett was unnecessarily hard on the young man who asked a question involving the general moral reputation of actors. The questioner stood his ground bravely, however, and came out of the encounter with banners flying by adroitly transferring the question to Mr. Hapgood, who gave a satisfactory answer.

It is great fun when all of a sudden from some unexpected quarter of the house a business man, the Lancaster Advertiser Club, an organization less than a year old, made itself responsible for all the arrangements for both these meetings, and did it so thoroughly and completely as to leave nothing to be desired.

In my mail this morning is a letter from Lewiston, Me., telling of the formation of a committee to investigate the possibilities of an open forum for that city, and asking for more information. There is a movement in Braintree, Mass., to unite all the churches in an open forum movement. A similar movement, already in operation in Newton, Mass., is making splendid progress.

THE GOOD GRAY POET. OUR TOPIC. NEXT SUNDAY.

There was a time when Walt Whitman wandered about the streets of Boston in the flesh and attended concerts and lectures and the theatre just as any journalist does now. I can fancy his being sent by some "cover" a Ford Hall meeting and presenting himself in the world, in the paper next morning, with an unforgettable picture of the great human spectacle up here on the hill with its urgent thrall of life and its indomitable passion for the ideal. Of all the men who might come to us to talk about Whitman Prof. Zueblin can probably tell us most of this wonderful old man who loved men and women and little children, and, who looking on a thousand manifestations of life, pronounced them all good. "Walt Whitman, Prophet and Democrat," is to be Mr. Zueblin's topic.

Other Meetings

Wells Memorial Institute, Tuesday, December 16, at 8 p.m. Better Houses for Working People by Henry Sterling.

Sunday Commons, at Huntington Chambers Hall, Sunday, December 21, at 3:30 p.m. Dr. Charles Fleischer, leader.

Public Library, Thursday, December 18, at 8 p.m. The Temple of Peace; Art and Scenery in Piedmont, by Cav. L. Melano Rossi. Sunday, December 21, at 3:30 p.m. How to Listen to Music, by Arthur M. Curry.

School of Social Science, at Lorimer Hall, Monday, December 15, at 8 p.m. The Campaign for Pure Food; The Story of An Investigation in Boston, by H. P. Cassiday.

What Went Right Did It Do What
1. Comparisons; I, y playing "Uncle..." I think it should be "Lure." Any thoughts on the name of a play

2. Most of us thought that Mr. Bennett was unnecessarily hard on the young man who asked a question involving the general moral reputation of actors. The questioner stood his ground bravely, however, and came out of the encounter with banners flying by adroitly transferring the question to Mr. Hapgood, who gave a satisfactory answer.

3. It is great fun when all of a sudden from some unexpected quarter of the house a ringing voice calls our attention to someone who has arisen to make a little speech all on his own account, quite oblivious of all discipline or order. I suppose these people get so absorbed in what is going on that they do not observe at all the method under which we conduct the question period. And have you noticed lately, the last two times, at least, it was a woman who thus broke loose? Perhaps this is a little eruption of that new freedom we are hearing about so much.

4. I have been glad to note additional colored men in various parts of the audience of late. I have noted both their intelligence and their thorough-going complexions, indicating that the finest type of colored man is not at all dependent for its progress and development upon an infusion of white blood. Without claiming any special attention, they enter into everything with great zest, and show themselves as worthy of consideration and respect as anyone in the hall.

5. Mr. Richard Bennett's characterization of the Ford Hall Meetings as a Twenty-first Century Club was a rather clever bon mot. He told me he hadn't had so good a vacation for a month as that had with us on our platform last Sunday night.

6. Conundrum: What is it that makes Mr. Hogan want to raise a row every time he asks a question? Doesn't he get a fair show, or does he just love to be obstreperous, or can't he help it anyway?

7. The seeds of our Ford Hall idea are sprouting up in the most surprising places all over the country. At Lancaster, Penn., I was amazed at the audience that turned out to hear the story of our work. The meeting was held in the Court House, seating nearly a thousand, and every seat was taken and many stood all through a program that lasted two hours. In the audience were business men, college professors and working men with their wives and daughters. It was declared to be the most representative audience that had ever gathered in the city. The following noon I was given a luncheon by the advertising and business men of the city, or which the Mayor of the city presided. And here again was preached the Ford Hall gospel as applied to

8. Ford Hall Folks

PUBLISHED weekly by the Ford Hall Associates, whose work is to create, assemble, and distribute ideas that will help men and institutions grow more useful in serving society, and which will promote "peace on earth, good will toward men." It is the official publication of the Ford Hall Meetings, which are held under the direction of George W. Coleman, every Sunday evening during the months of October to May, in Ford Hall, Ashburton Place, Boston, Massachusetts. All business communications should be sent to Miss Mary C. Crawford, Treasurer Ford Hall Building, Boston, and all communications intended for the editor to The Thomas Dreier Service, University Press, Cambridge, Mass. Subscription Price: $1.00 for 26 numbers.
THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF H. S. VICTORSON.

Part I.

My birthplace was Mitau, Courland, one of the Baltic provinces of the Russian Empire. I spent there the first nine and a half years of my life. During that time I acquired a considerable amount of Biblical information, as well as some knowledge of German. My grandfather, who was a teacher by profession, had begun to instruct me in both. When he had left for the country I was 7 years old. Before his departure he entrusted my further education to a lifelong friend of his—a grand, noble, old patriarchal Jew, whose inspiring way of teaching and whose wonderful personality I'll never, never forget. To him more than to anybody else, excepting my father and mother, I attribute most of what is good in me. In my later life, after sad experiences, his image kept alive the last spark of hope that was in extreme danger of being extinguished.

When we came to this country we settled in Brooklyn, N. Y. I started to go to public school, and continued my religious studies with grandfather. A year and a half after our arrival the terrible crisis of 1893 occurred. Father could find no work and had to shovel snow for 50c a day. We were altogether six children, and four of them younger than I was. So I had to give up my studies and go to work in a tailoring shop under very unsatisfactory conditions—18 hours a day at $1.50 per week. You can well understand the bitter sadness of my soul at that time, owing to such unbearably hard work and to the deplorable conditions at home. It was then, young as I was, that I became a Socialist, and have been one ever since. Well do I remember how, in my childish innocence and ignorance, I often thought, while distributing circulars for Socialist mass meetings and similar gatherings, that the Social Revolution would mean but a day or two of struggle. I've learned better since; I know now that substantial and intrinsic change is a matter of slow and continuous growth.

All trades have their slack periods, but the tailoring trade more so than any other—at least five months in the year, and this at different intervals—so that they would stealthily allow me to take home certain books that were not generally permitted to be taken out. These I often would study till the early morning hours. (To be concluded.)

WHAT RICHARD BENNETT THINKS OF US.

After the exhilarating experience of last Sunday night Mr. Bennett said:

"After seeing and feeling the responsive-ness of a Ford Hall audience tonight, I feel that here at last is a 'forum' of the people, by the people, and for the people—a forum in its true and biggest sense, a forum which comes nearer to the original Roman idea than any other institution in America of which I am cognizant.

"I wish that every community in America had a Ford Hall, and enjoyed the benefit of weekly Ford Hall meetings. It would mean finer standards of citizenship and finer citizens."

THE HUNGER OF FORD HALL FOLKS.

"Two things commanded my attention at Ford Hall," said Mr. Edwin H. Wolf, general manager for more than a quarter of a century of one of New York's most successful retail clothing stores, who was at last Sunday's meeting. "The first was the hunger for knowledge displayed by those who asked questions, and the second was the wonderful executive ability of Mr. Coleman."

"The eagerness with which the people looked forward to new knowledge, the keenness of mind manifested in the quality of the questions asked, the alliveness of both speakers and listeners impressed me greatly. And Mr. Coleman's wonderful executive ability, his power of cutting through to the essentials, and his very evident wish to give everybody the squarest kind of a square deal compelled me to pay him the tribute one business man wishes to pay to a master of an art.

"So long as such wonderful melting pots as Ford Hall exist—mental melting pots, I should call them—America is safe. I found in Ford Hall the highest type of religious expression, and with it I found nourishing food for the intellect. If a foreigner were to ask for an expression of the true American spirit, I should refer him to Ford Hall experiences.

THE MESSAGE OF "DAMAGED GOODS."

(Continued from Page 1.)

of life. We have destroyed in them their first ideal of life, until they think we must be right and there is something wrong in sex and in speaking of sex; and so we go on, generation after generation, a nation of liars!

All that Brieux asks in this play is a cleaner, higher, broader life for mankind. He asks that we make it by convention, not by law, impossible for the fit to mate with the unfit, the well with the sickly, and produce further sickness. Syphilis and gonorrhoea have actually raised our tax rate, and cost millions of dollars every year, but show me a politician who has ever proposed spending a single dollar to prevent these conditions! That is the kind of truth "Damaged Goods" wants to bring before the country.

Hatred expressed in words and sent into the mind of another sows hatred there. And always that which we invest comes back to us with interest.

A good man is one who is fit mentally and physically to perform efficiently the work demanded of him by the position he holds.

Friends Who Are Coming

Dec. 21—Prof. Charles Zueblin, “Wait Whitman, Prophet and Democrat.”


Jan. 4—Dr. Stanton Coit of London, “The Ethics of Marriage and Divorce.”
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