THE MODERN DRAMA

Emma Goldman

Table of Contents

THE MODERN DRAMA

Emma Goldman

A POWERFUL DISSEMINATOR OF RADICAL THOUGHT

SO LONG as discontent and unrest make themselves but dumbly felt within a limited social class, the powers of reaction may often succeed in suppressing such manifestations. But when the dumb unrest grows into conscious expression and becomes almost universal, it necessarily affects all phases of human thought and action, and seeks its individual and social expression in the gradual transvaluation of existing values.

An adequate appreciation of the tremendous spread of the modern, conscious social unrest cannot be gained from merely propagandistic literature. Rather must we become conversant with the larger phases of human expression manifest in art, literature, and, above all, the modern drama—the strongest and most far−reaching interpreter of our deep−felt dissatisfaction.

What a tremendous factor for the awakening of conscious discontent are the simple canvasses of a Millet! The figures of his peasants—what terrific indictment against our social wrongs; wrongs that condemn the Man With the Hoe to hopeless drudgery, himself excluded from Nature's bounty.

The vision of a Meunier conceives the growing solidarity and defiance of labor in the group of miners carrying their maimed brother to safety. His genius thus powerfully portrays the interrelation of the seething unrest among those slaving in the bowels of the earth, and the spiritual revolt that seeks artistic expression.

No less important is the factor for rebellious awakening in modern literature—Turgeniev, Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy, Andreiev, Gorki, Whitman, Emerson, and scores of others embodying the spirit of universal ferment and the longing for social change.

Still more far−reaching is the modern drama, as the leaven of radical thought and the disseminator of new values.

It might seem an exaggeration to ascribe to the modern drama such an important role. But a study of the development of modern ideas in most countries will prove that the drama has succeeded in driving home great social truths, truths generally ignored when presented in other forms. No doubt there are exceptions, as Russia and France.

Russia, with its terrible political pressure, has made people think and has awakened their social sympathies, because of the tremendous contrast which exists between the intellectual life of the people and the despotic regime that is trying to crush that life. Yet while the great dramatic works of Tolstoy, Tchechov, Gorki, and Andreiev closely mirror the life and the struggle, the hopes and aspirations of the Russian people, they did not influence radical thought to the extent the drama has done in other countries.

Who can deny, however, the tremendous influence exerted by The Power of Darkness or Night Lodging. Tolstoy, the real, true Christian, is yet the greatest enemy of organized Christianity. With a master hand he portrays the destructive effects upon the human mind of the power of darkness, the superstitions of the Christian Church.

What other medium could express, with such dramatic force, the responsibility of the Church for crimes committed by its deluded victims; what other medium could, in consequence, rouse the indignation of man's conscience?

Similarly direct and powerful is the indictment contained in Gorki's Night Lodging. The social pariahs, forced into poverty and crime, yet desperately clutch at the last vestiges of hope and aspiration. Lost existences these, blighted and crushed by cruel, unsocial environment.

France, on the other hand, with her continuous struggle for liberty, is indeed the cradle of radical thought; as

such she, too, did not need the drama as a means of awakening. And yet the works of Brieux —as Robe Rouge, portraying the terrible corruption of the judiciary—and Mirbeau's Les Affaires sont les Affaires—picturing the destructive influence of wealth on the human soul—have undoubtedly reached wider circles than most of the articles and books which have been written in France on the social question.

In countries like Germany, Scandinavia, England, and even in America—though in a lesser degree—the drama is the vehicle which is really making history, disseminating radical thought in ranks not otherwise to be reached.

Let us take Germany, for instance. For nearly a quarter of a century men of brains, of ideas, and of the greatest integrity, made it their life−work to spread the truth of human brotherhood, of justice, among the oppressed and downtrodden. Socialism, that tremendous revolutionary wave, was to the victims of a merciless and inhumane system like water to the parched lips of the desert traveler. Alas! The cultured people remained absolutely indifferent; to them that revolutionary tide was but the murmur of dissatisfied, discontented men, dangerous, illiterate trouble−makers, whose proper place was behind prison bars.

Self−satisfied as the "cultured" usually are, they could not understand why one should fuss about the fact that thousands of people were starving, though they contributed towards the wealth of the world. Surrounded by beauty and luxury, they could not believe that side by side with them lived human beings degraded to a position lower than a beast's, shelterless and ragged, without hope or ambition.

This condition of affairs was particularly pronounced in Germany after the Franco−German war. Full to the bursting point with its victory, Germany thrived on a sentimental, patriotic literature, thereby poisoning the minds of the country's youth by the glory of conquest and bloodshed.

Intellectual Germany had to take refuge in the literature of other countries, in the works of Ibsen, Zola, Dalldet, Maupassant, and especially in the great works of Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy, and Turgeniev. But as no country can long maintain a standard of culture without a literature and drama related to its own soil, so Germany gradually began to develop a drama reflecting the life and the struggles of its own people.

Arno Holz, one of the youngest dramatists of that period, startled the Philistines out of their ease and comfort with his Familie Selicke. The play deals with society's refuse, men and women of the alleys, whose only subsistence consists of what they can pick out of the garbage barrels. A gruesome subject, is it not? And yet what other method is there to break through the hard shell of the minds and souls of people who have never known want, and who therefore assume that all is well in the world?

Needless to say, the play aroused tremendous indignation. The truth is bitter, and the people living on the Fifth Avenue of Berlin hated to be confronted with the truth.

Not that Familie Selicke represented anything that had not been written about for years without any seeming result. But the dramatic genius of Holz, together with the powerful interpretation of the play, necessarily made inroads into the widest circles, and forced people to think about the terrible inequalities around them.

Sudermann's Ehre and Heimat deal with vital subjects. I have already referred to the sentimental patriotism so completely turning the head of the average German as to create a perverted conception of honor. Duelling became an every−day affair, costing innumerable lives. A great cry was raised against the fad by a number of leading writers. But nothing acted as such a clarifier and exposer of that national A disease as the Ehre.

Not that the play merely deals with duelling; it analyzes the real meaning of honor, proving that it is not a fixed, inborn feeling, but that it varies with every people and every epoch, depending particularly on one's economic and social station in life. We realize from this play that the man in the brownstone mansion will necessarily define honor differently from his victims.

The family Heinecke enjoys the charity of the millionaire Muhling, being permitted to occupy a dilapidated shanty on his premises in the absence of their son, Robert. The latter, as Muhling's representative, is making a vast fortune for his employer in India. On his return Robert discovers that his sister had been seduced by young Muhling, whose father graciously offers to straighten matters with a check for 40,000 marks. Robert, outraged and indignant, resents the insult to his family's honor, and is forthwith dismissed from his position for impudence. Robert finally throws this accusation into the face of the philanthropist millionaire:

"We slave for you, we sacrifice our heart's blood for you, while you seduce our daughters and sisters and kindly pay for their disgrace with the gold we have earned for you. That is what you call honor."

An incidental side−light upon the conception of honor is given by Count Trast, the principal character in the

Ehre, a man widely conversant with the customs of various climes, who relates that in his many travels he chanced across a savage tribe whose honor he mortally offended by refusing the hospitality which offered him the charms of the chieftain's wife.

The theme of Heimat treates of the struggle between the old and the young generations. It holds a permanent and important place in dramatic literature.

Magda, the daughter of Lieutenant−Colonel Schwartz, has committed an unpardonable sin: she refused the suitor selected by her father. For daring to disobey the parental commands she is driven from home. Magda, full of life and the spirit of liberty, goes out into the world to return to her native town, twelve years later, a celebrated singer. She consents to visit her parents on condition that they respect the privacy of her past. But her martinet father immediately begins to question her, insisting on his "paternal rights." Magda is indignant, but gradually his persistence brings to light the tragedy of her life. He learns that the respected Councillor von Keller had in his student days been Magda's lover, while she was battling for her economic and social independence. The consequence of the fleeting romance was a child, deserted by the man even before birth. The rigid military father of Magda demands as retribution from Councillor von Keller that he legalize the love affair. In view of Magda's social and professional success, Keller willingly consents, but on condition that she forsake the stage, and place the child in an institution. The struggle between the Old and the New culminates in Magda's defiant words of the woman grown to conscious independence of thought and action: ". . . I'll say what I think of you—of you and your respectable society. Why should I be worse than you that I must prolong my existence among you by a lie! Why should this gold upon my body, and the lustre which surrounds my name, only increase my infamy? Have I not worked early and late for ten long years? Have I not woven this dress with sleepless nights? Have I not built up my career step by step, like thousands of my kind ? Why should I blush before anyone? I am myself, and through myself I have become what I am."

The general theme of Heimat—the struggle between the old and young generations—was not original. It had been previously treated by a master hand in Fathers and Sons, portraying the awakening of an age. But though artistically far inferior to Turgeniev's work, Heimat—depicting the awakening of a sex—proved a powerful revolutionizing factor, mainly because of its dramatic expression.

The dramatist who not only disseminated radicalism, but literally revolutionized the thoughtful Germans, is Gerhardt Hauptmann. His first play, Vor Sonnenaufgang, refused by every leading German threatre, but finally performed in the independent Lessing Theatre, acted like a stroke of lightning, illuminating the entire social horizon. Its subject matter deals with the life of an extensive land−owner, ignorant, illiterate, and brutalized, and his economic slaves of the same mental calibre. The influence of wealth, both on the victims who created it and the possessor thereof, is shown in the most vivid colors, as resulting in drunkenness, idiocy, and decay. But the most striking feature of Vor Sonftenaufgang, the one which brought a shower of abuse on Hauptmann's head, was the question as to the indiscriminate breeding of children by unfit parents.

During the second performance of the play a leading Berlin surgeon almost caused a panic in the theatre by swinging a pair of forceps over his head and screaming at the top of his voice: "The decency and morality of Germany are at stake if childbirth is to be discussed openly from the stage." The surgeon is forgotten, and Hauptmann stands a colossal figure before the world:

When Die Weber first saw the light, pandemonium broke out in the land of thinkers and poets. "What," cried the moralists, "workingmen, dirty, filthy slaves, to be put on the stage! Poverty in all its horrors and ugliness to be dished out as an after dinner amusement? That is too much!"

Indeed, it was too much for the fat and greasy bourgeoisie to be brought face to face with the horrors of the weaver's existence. It was too much because of the truth and reality that rang like thunder in the deaf ears of self−satisfied society, J'accuse!

Of course, it was generally known even before the appearance of this drama that capital can not get fat unless it devours labor, that wealth can not be hoarded except through the channels of poverty, hunger, and cold; but such things are better kept in the dark, lest the victims awaken to a realization of their position. But it is the purpose of the modern drama to rouse the consciousness of the oppressed; and that, indeed, was the purpose of Gerhardt Hauptmann in depicting to the world the conditions of the weavers in Silesia. Human beings working eighteen hours daily, yet not earning enough for bread and fuel; human beings living in broken, wretched huts half covered with snow, and nothing but tatters to protect them from the cold; infants covered with scurvy from

hunger and exposure; pregnant women in the last stages of consumption. Victims of a benevolent Christian era, without life, without hope, without warmth. Ah, yes, it was too much!

Hauptmann's dramatic versatility deals with every stratum of social life. Besides portraying the grinding effect of economic conditions, he also treats of the struggle of the individual for his mental and spiritual liberation from the slavery of convention and tradition. Thus Heinrich, the bell−forger, in the dramatic prose−poem Die Versunkene Glocke, fails to reach the mountain peaks of liberty because, as Rautendelein said, he had lived in the valley too long. Similarly Dr. Vockerath and Anna Maar remain lonely souls because they, too, lack the strength to defy venerated traditions. Yet their very failure must awaken the rebellious spirit against a world forever hindering individual and social emancipation.

Max Halbe's Jugend and Wedekind's Fruhling's Erwachen are dramas which have disseminated radical thought in an altogether different direction. They treat of the child and the dense ignorance and narrow Puritanism that meet the awakening of nature. Particularly is this true of Fruhling's Erwachen. Young girls and boys sacrificed on the altar of false education and of our sickening morality that prohibits the enlightenment of youth as to questions so imperative to the health and well−being of society,—the origin of life, and its functions. It shows how a mother—and a truly good mother, at that—keeps her fourteen−year−old daughter in absolute ignorance as to all matters of sex, and when finally the young girl falls a victim to her ignorance, the same mother sees her child killed by quack medicines. The inscription on her grave states that she died of anaemia, and morality is satisfied.

The fatality of our Puritanic hypocrisy in these matters is especially illumined by Wedekind in so far as our most promising children fall victims to sex ignorance and the utter lack of appreciation on the part of the teachers of the child's awakening.

Wendla, unusually developed and alert for her age, pleads with her mother to explain the mystery of life:

"I have a sister who has been married for two and a half years. I myself have been made an aunt for the third time, and I haven't the least idea how it all comes about.... Don't be cross, Mother, dear! Whom in the world should I ask but you? Don't scold me for asking about it. Give me an answer.— How does it happen.?—You cannot really deceive yourself that I, who am fourteen years old, still believe in the stork."

Were her mother herself not a victim of false notions of morality, an affectionate and sensible explanation might have saved her daughter. But the conventional mother seeks to hide her "moral" shame and embarrassment in this evasive reply:

"In order to have a child—one must love the man—to whom one is married.... One must love him, Wendla, as you at your age are still unable to love.—Now you know it!"

How much Wendla "knew" the mother realized too late. The pregnant girl imagines herself ill with dropsy. And when her mother cries in desperation, "You haven't the dropsy, you have a child, girl," the agonized Wendla exclaims in bewilderment: "But it's not possible, Mother, I am not married yet.... Oh, Mother, why didn't you tell me everything?"

With equal stupidity the boy Morris is driven to suicide because he fails in his school examinations And Melchior, the youthful father of Wendla's unborn child, is sent to the House of Correction, his early sexual awakening stamping him a degenerate in the eyes of teachers and parents.

For years thoughtful men and women in Germany had advocated the compelling necessity of sex enlightenment. Mutterschutz, a publication specially devoted to frank and intelligent discussion of the sex problem, has been carrying on its agitation for a considerable time. But it remained for the dramatic genius of Wedekind to influence radical thought to the extent of forcing the introduction of sex physiology in many schools of Germany.

Scandinavia, like Germany, was advanced through the drama much more than through any other channel. Long before Ibsen appeared on the scene, Bjšrnson, the great essayist, thundered against the inequalities and injustice prevalent in those countries. But his was a voice in the wilderness, reaching but the few. Not so with Ibsen. His Brand, Doll's House, Pillars of Society, Ghosts, and An Enemy of the People have considerably undermined the old conceptions, and replaced them by a modern and real view of life. One has but to read Brand to realize the modern conception, let us say, of religion,—religion, as an ideal to be achieved on earth; religion as a principle of human brotherhood, of solidarity, and kindness.

Ibsen, the supreme hater of all social shams, has torn the veil of hypocrisy from their faces. His greatest

onslaught, however, is on the four cardinal points supporting the flimsy network of society. First, the lie upon which rests the life of today; second, the futility of sacrifice as preached by our moral codes; third, petty material consideration, which is the only god the majority worships; and fourth, the deadening influence of provincialism. These four recur as the Leitmotiv in most of Ibsen's plays, but particularly in Pillars of Society, Doll's House, Ghosts, and An Enemy of the People.

Pillars of Society! What a tremendous indictment against the social structure that rests on rotten and decayed pillars,—pillars nicely gilded and apparently intact, yet merely hiding their true condition. And what are these pillars?

Consul Bernick, at the very height of his social and financial career, the benefactor of his town and the strongest pillar of the community, has reached the summit through the channel of lies, deception, and fraud. He has robbed his bosom friend Johann of his good name, and has betrayed Lona Hessel, the woman he loved, to marry her stepsister for the sake of her money. He has enriched himself by shady transactions, under cover of "the community's good," and finally even goes to the extent of endangering human life by preparing the Indian Girl, a rotten and dangerous vessel, to go to sea.

But the return of Lona brings him the realization of the emptiness and meanness of his narrow life. He seeks to placate the waking conscience by the hope that he has cleared the ground for the better life of his son, of the new generation. But even this last hope soon falls to the ground, as he realizes that truth cannot be built on a lie. At the very moment when the whole town is prepared to celebrate the great benefactor of the community with banquet praise, he himself, now grown to full spiritual manhood, confesses to the assembled townspeople:

"I have no right to this homage—. . . My fellow citizens must know me to the core. Then let every one examine himself, and let us realize the prediction that from this event we begin a new time. The old, with its tinsel, its hypocrisy, its hollowness, its Iying propriety, and its pitiful cowardice, shall lie behind us like a museum, open for instruction."

With a Doll's House Ibsen has paved the way for woman's emancipation. Nora awakens from her doll's role to the realization of the injustice done her by her father and her husband, Helmer Torvald.

"While I was at home with father, he used to tell me all his opinions, and I held the same opinions. If I had others I concealed them, because he would not have approved. He used to call me his doll child, and play with me as I played with my dolls. Then I came to live in your house. You settled everything according to your taste, and I got the same taste as you, or I pretended to. When I look back on it now, I seem to have been living like a beggar, from hand to mouth. I lived by performing tricks for you, Torvald, but you would, have it so. You and father have done me a great wrong."

In vain Helmer uses the old philistine arguments of wifely duty and social obligations. Nora has grown out of her doll's dress into full stature of conscious womanhood. She is determined to think and judge for herself. She has realized that, before all else, she is a human being, owing the first duty to herself. She is undaunted even by the possibility of social ostracism. She has become sceptical of the justice of the law, the wisdom of the constituted. Her rebelling soul rises in protest against the existing. In her own words: "I must make up my mind which is right, society or I."

In her childlike faith in her husband she had hoped for the great miracle. But it was not the disappointed hope that opened her vision to the falsehoods of marriage. It was rather the smug contentment of Helmer with a safe lie—one that would remain hidden and not endanger his social standing.

When Nora closed behind her the door of her gilded cage and went out into the world a new, regenerated personality, she opened the gate of freedom and truth for her own sex and the race to come.

More than any other play, Ghosts has acted like a bomb explosion, shaking the social structure to its very foundations.

In Doll's House the justification of the union between Nora and Helmer rested at least on the husband's conception of integrity and rigid adherence to our social morality. Indeed, he was the conventional ideal husband and devoted father. Not so in Ghosts. Mrs. Alving married Captain Alving only to find that he was a physical and mental wreck, and that life with him would mean utter degradation and be fatal to possible offspring. In her despair she turned to her youth's companion, young Pastor Manders who, as the true savior of souls for heaven, must needs be indifferent to earthly necessities. He sent her back to shame and degradation,—to her duties to husband and home. Indeed, happiness—to him—was but the unholy manifestation of a rebellious spirit, and a

wife's duty was not to judge, but "to bear with humility the cross which a higher power had for your own good laid upon you."

Mrs. Alving bore the cross for twenty−six long years. Not for the sake of the higher power, but for her little son Oswald, whom she longed to save from the poisonous atmosphere of her husband's home.

It was also for the sake of the beloved son that she supported the lie of his father's goodness, in superstitious awe of "duty and decency." She learned— alas, too late that the sacrifice of her entire life had been in vain, and that her son Oswald was visited by the sins of his father, that he was irrevocably doomed. This, too, she learned, that "we are all of us ghosts. It is not only what we have inherited from our father and mother that walks in us. It is all sorts of dead ideas and lifeless old beliefs. They have no vitality, but they cling to us all the same and we can't get rid of them.... And then we are, one and all, so pitifully afraid of light. When you forced me under the yoke you called Duty and Obligation; when you praised as right and proper what my whole soul rebelled against as something loathsome, it was then that I began to look into the seams of your doctrine. I only wished to pick at a single knot, but when I had got that undone, the whole thing ravelled out. And then I understood that it was all machine−sewn."

How could a society machine−sewn, fathom the seething depths whence issued the great masterpiece of Henrik Ibsen? It could not understand, and therefore it poured the vials of abuse and venom upon its greatest benefactor. That Ibsen was not daunted he has proved by his reply in An Enemy of the People.

In that great drama Ibsen performs the last funeral rites over a decaying and dying social system. Out of its ashes rises the regenerated individual, the bold and daring rebel. Dr. Stockman, an idealist, full of social sympathy and solidarity, is called to his native town as the physician of the baths. He soon discovers that the latter are built on a swamp, and that instead of finding relief the patients, who flock to the place, are being poisoned.

An honest man, of strong convictions, the doctor considers it his duty to make his discovery known. But he soon learns that dividends and profits are concerned neither with health nor priniciples. Even the reformers of the town, represented in the People's Messenger, always ready to prate of their devotion to the people, withdraw their support from the "reckless" idealist, the moment they learn that the doctor's discovery may bring the town into disrepute, and thus injure their pockets.

But Doctor Stockman continues in the faith he entertains for his townsmen. They would hear him. But here, too, he soon finds himself alone. He cannot even secure a place to proclaim his great truth. And when he finally succeeds, he is overwhelmed by abuse and ridicule as the enemy of the people. The doctor, so enthusiastic of his townspeople's assistance to eradicate the evil, is soon driven to a solitary position. The announcement of his discovery would result in a pecuniary loss to the town, and that consideration induces the officials, the good citizens, and soul reformers, to stifle the voice of truth. He finds them all a compact majority, unscrupulous enough to be willing to build up the prosperity of the town on a quagmire of lies and fraud. He is accused of trying to ruin the community. But to his mind "it does not matter if a lying community is ruined. It must be levelled to the ground. All men who live upon lies must be exterminated like vermin. You'll bring it to such a pass that the whole country will deserve to perish."

Doctor Stockman is not a practical politician. A free man, he thinks, must not behave like a black guard. "He must not so act that he would spit in his own face." For only cowards permit "considerations" of pretended general welfare or of party to override truth and ideals. "Party programmes wring the necks of all young, living truths; and considerations of expediency turn morality and righteousness upside down, until life is simply hideous."

These plays of Ibsen—The Pillars of Society, A Doll's House, Ghosts, and An Enemy of the People —constitute a dynamic force which is gradually dissipating the ghosts walking the social burying ground called civilization. Nay, more; Ibsen's destructive effects are at the same time supremely constructive, for he not merely undermines existing pillars; indeed, he builds with sure strokes the foundation of a healthier, ideal future, based on the sovereignty of the individual within a sympathetic social environment.

England with her great pioneers of radical thought, the intellectual pilgrims like Godwin, Robert Owen, Darwin, Spencer, William Morris, and scores of others; with her wonderful larks of liberty—Shelley, Byron, Keats—is another example of the influence of dramatic art. Within comparatively a few years the dramatic works of Shaw, Pinero, Galsworthy, Rann Kennedy, have carried radical thought to the ears formerly deaf even to Great Britain's wondrous poets. Thus a public which will remain indifferent reading an essay by Robert Owen on

poverty, or ignore Bernard Shaw's Socialistic tracts, was made to think by Major Barbara, wherein poverty is described as the greatest crime of Christian civilization. "Poverty makes people weak, slavish, puny; poverty creates disease, crime, prostitution; in fine, poverty is responsible for all the ills and evils of the world." Poverty also necessitates dependency, charitable organizations, institutions that thrive off the very thing they are trying to destroy. The Salvation Army, for instance, as shown in Major Barbara, fights drunkenness; yet one of its greatest contributors is Badger, a whiskey distiller, who furnishes yearly thousands of pounds to do away with the very source of his wealth. Bernard Shaw therefore concludes that the only real benefactor of society is a man like Undershaft, Barbara's father, a cannon manufacturer, whose theory of life is that powder is stronger than words.

"The worst of crimes," says Undershaft, "is poverty. All the other crimes are virtues beside it; all the other dishonors are chivalry itself by comparison. Poverty blights whole cities; spreads horrible pestilences; strikes dead the very soul of all who come within sight, sound, or smell of it. What you call crime is nothing; a murder here, a theft there, a blow now and a curse there: what do they matter? They are only the accidents and illnesses of life; there are not fifty genuine professional criminals in London. But there are millions of poor people, abject people, dirty people, ill−fed, ill−clothed people. They poison us morally and physically; they kill the happiness of society; they force us to do away with our own liberties and to organize unnatural cruelties for fear they should rise against us and drag us down into their abyss.... Poverty and slavery have stood up for centuries to your sermons and leading articles; they will not stand up to my machine guns. Don't preach at them; don't reason with them. Kill them.... It is the final test of conviction, the only lever strong enough to overturn a social system.... Vote! Bah! When you vote, you only change the name of the cabinet. When you shoot, you pull down governments, inaugurate new epochs, abolish old orders, and set up new."

No wonder people cared little to read Mr. Shaw's Socialistic tracts. In no other way but in the drama could he deliver such forcible, historic truths. And therefore it is only through the drama that Mr. Shaw is a revolutionary factor in the dissemination of radical ideas.

After Hauptmann's Die Weber, Strife, by Galsworthy, is the most important labor drama.

The theme of Strife is a strike with two dominant factors: Anthony, the president of the company, rigid, uncompromising, unwilling to make the slightest concession, although the men held out for months and are in a condition of semi−starvation; and David Roberts, an uncompromising revolutionist, whose devotion to the workingmen and the cause of freedom is at white heat. Between them the strikers are worn and weary with the terrible struggle, and are harassed and driven by the awful sight of poverty and want in their families.

The most marvelous and brilliant piece of work in Strife is Galsworthy's portrayal of the mob in its fickleness and lack of backbone. One moment they applaud old Thomas, who speaks of the power of God and religion and admonishes the men against rebellion; the next instant they are carried away by a walking delegate, who pleads the cause of the union,—the union that always stands for compromise, and which forsakes the workingmen whenever they dare to strike for independent demands; again they are aglow with the earnestness, the spirit, and the intensity of David Roberts—all these people willing to go in whatever direction the wind blows. It is the curse of the working class that they always follow like sheep led to slaughter.

Consistency is the greatest crime of our commercial age. No matter how intense the spirit or how important the man, the moment he will not allow himself to be used or sell his principles, he is thrown on the dustheap. Such was the fate of the president of the company, Anthony, and of David Roberts. To be sure they represented opposite poles—poles antagonistic to each other, poles divided by a terrible gap that can never be bridged over. Yet they shared a common fate. Anthony is the embodiment of conservatism, of old ideas, of iron methods:

"I have been chairman of this company thirty−two years. I have fought the men four times. I have never been defeated. It has been said that times have changed. If they have, I have not changed with them. It has been said that masters and men are equal. Cant. There can be only one master in a house. It has been said that Capital and Labor have the same interests. Cant. Their interests are as wide asunder as the poles. There is only one way of treating men—with the iron rod. Masters are masters. Men are men."

We may not like this adherence to old, reactionary notions, and yet there is something admirable in the courage and consistency of this man, nor is he half as dangerous to the interests of the oppressed, as our sentimental and soft reformers who rob with nine fingers, and give libraries with the tenth; who grind human beings like Russell Sage, and then spend millions of dollars in social research work; who turn beautiful young plants into faded old women, and then give them a few paltry dollars or found a Home for Working Girls.

Anthony is a worthy foe; and to fight such a foe, one must learn to meet him in open battle.

David Roberts has all the mental and moral attributes of his adversary, coupled with the spirit of revolt and the depth of modern ideas. He, too, is consistent, and wants nothing for his class short of complete victory.

"It is not for this little moment of time we are fighting, not for our own little bodies and their warmth: it is for all those who come after, for all times. Oh, men, for the love of them don't turn up another stone on their heads, don't help to blacken the sky. If we can shake that white−faced monster with the bloody lips that has sucked the lives out of ourselves, our wives, and children, since the world began, if we have not the hearts of men to stand against it, breast to breast and eye to eye, and force it backward till it cry for mercy, it will go on sucking life, and we shall stay forever where we are, less than the very dogs."

It is inevitable that compromise and petty interest should pass on and leave two such giants behind. Inevitable, until the mass will reach the stature of a David Roberts. Will it ever? Prophecy is not the vocation of the dramatist, yet the moral lesson is evident. One cannot help realizing that the workingmen will have to use methods hitherto unfamiliar to them; that they will have to discard all those elements in their midst that are forever ready to reconcile the irreconcilable, namely Capital and Labor. They will have to learn that characters like David Roberts are the very forces that have revolutionized the world and thus paved the way for emancipation out of the clutches of that "white−faced monster with bloody lips," towards a brighter horizon, a freer life, and a deeper recognition of human values.

No subject of equal social import has received such extensive consideration within the last few years as the question of prison and punishment.

Hardly any magazine of consequence that has not devoted its columns to the discussion of this vital theme. A number of books by able writers, both in America and abroad, have discussed this topic from the historic, psychologic, and social standpoint, all agreeing that present penal institutions and our mode of coping with crime have in every respect proved inadequate as well as wasteful. One would expect that something very radical should result from the cumulative literary indictment of the social crimes perpetrated upon the prisoner. Yet with the exception of a few minor and comparatively insignificant reforms in some of our prisons, absolutely nothing has been accomplished. But at last this grave social wrong has found dramatic interpretation in Galsworthy's Justice.

The play opens in the office of James How and Sons, Solicitors. The senior clerk, Robert Cokeson, discovers that a check he had issued for nine pounds has been forged to ninety. By elimination, suspicion falls upon William Falder, the junior office clerk. The latter is in love with a married woman, the abused, ill−treated wife of a brutal drunkard. Pressed by his employer, a severe yet not unkindly man, Falder confesses the forgery, pleading the dire necessity of his sweetheart, Ruth Honeywill, with whom he had planned to escape to save her from the unbearable brutality of her husband. Notwithstanding the entreaties of young Walter, who is touched by modern ideas, his father, a moral and law−respecting citizen, turns Falder over to the police.

The second act, in the court−room, shows Justice in the very process of manufacture. The scene equals in dramatic power and psychologic verity the great court scene in Resurrection. Young Falder, a nervous and rather weakly youth of twenty−three, stands before the bar. Ruth, his married sweetheart, full of love and devotion, burns with anxiety to save the youth whose affection brought about his present predicament. The young man is defended by Lawyer Frome, whose speech to the jury is a masterpiece of deep social philosophy wreathed with the tendrils of human understanding and sympathy. He does not attempt to dispute the mere fact of Falder having altered the check; and though he pleads temporary aberration in defense of his client, that plea is based upon a social consciousness as deep and all−embracing as the roots of our social ills—"the background of life, that palpitating life which always lies behind the commission of a crime." He shows Falder to have faced the alternative of seeing the beloved woman murdered by her brutal husband, whom she cannot divorce; or of taking the law into his own hands. The defence pleads with the jury not to turn the weak young man into a criminal by condemning him to prison, for "justice is a machine that, when someone has given it a starting push, rolls on of itself.... Is this young man to be ground to pieces under this machine for an act which, at the worst, was one of weakness? Is he to become a member of the luckless crews that man those dark, ill−starred ships called prisons? . . . I urge you, gentlemen, do not ruin this young man. For as a result of those four minutes, ruin, utter and irretrievable, stares him in the face.... The rolling of the chariot wheels of Justice over this boy began when it was decided to prosecute him."

But the chariot of Justice rolls mercilessly on, for—as the learned Judge says—"the law is what it is—a

majestic edifice, sheltering all of us, each stone of which rests on another."

Falder is sentenced to three years' penal servitude.

In prison, the young, inexperienced convict soon finds himself the victim of the terrible "system." The authorities admit that young Falder is mentally and physically "in bad shape," but nothing can be done in the matter: many others are in a similar position, and "the quarters are inadequate."

The third scene of the third act is heart−gripping in its silent force. The whole scene is a pantomime, taking place in Falder's prison cell.

"In fast−falling daylight, Falder, in his stockings, is seen standing motionless, with his head inclined towards the door, listening. He moves a little closer to the door, his stockinged feet making no noise. He stops at the door. He is trying harder and harder to hear something, any little thing that is going on out side. He springs suddenly upright—as if at a sound—and remains perfectly motionless. Then, with a heavy sigh, he moves to his work, and stands looking at it, with his head down; he does a stitch or two, having the air of a man so lost in sadness that each stitch is, as it were, a coming to life. Then, turning abruptly, he begins pacing his cell, moving his head, like an animal pacing its cage. He stops again at the door, listens, and, placing the palms of his hands against it with his fingers spread out, leans his forehead against the iron. Turning from it, presently, he moves slowly back towards the window, holding his head, as if he felt that it were going to burst, and stops under the window. But since he cannot see out of it he leaves off looking, and, picking up the lid of one of the tins, peers into it, as if trying to make a companion of his own face. It has grown very nearly dark. Suddenly the lid falls out of his hand with a clatter—the only sound that has broken the silence—and he stands staring intently at the wall where the stuff of the shirt is hanging rather white in the darkness—he seems to be seeing somebody or something there. There is a sharp tap and click; the cell light behind the glass screen has been turned up. The cell is brightly lighted. Falder is seen gasping for breath.

"A sound from far away, as of distant, dull beating on thick metal, is suddenly audible. Falder shrinks back, not able to bear this sudden clamor. But the sound grows, as though some great tumbril were rolling towards the cell. And gradually it seems to hypnotize him. He begins creeping inch by inch nearer to the door. The banging sound, traveling from cell to cell, draws closer and closer; Falder's hands are seen moving as if his spirit had already joined in this beating, and the sound swells till it seems to have entered the very cell. He suddenly raises his clenched fists. Panting violently, he flings himself at his door, and beats on it."

Finally Falder leaves the prison, a broken ticket−of−leave man, the stamp of the convict upon his brow, the iron of misery in his soul. Thanks to Ruth's pleading, the firm of James How and Son is willing to take Falder back in their employ, on condition that he give up Ruth. It is then that Falder learns the awful news that the woman he loves had been driven by the merciless economic Moloch to sell herself. She "tried making skirts . . . cheap things. . . . I never made more than ten shillings a week, buying my own cotton, and working all day. I hardly ever got to bed till past twelve.... And then . . . my employer happened—he's happened ever since." At this terrible psychologic moment the police appear to drag him back to prison for failing to report himself as ticket−of−leave man. Completely overcome by the inexorability of his environment, young Falder seeks and finds peace, greater than human justice, by throwing himself down to death, as the detectives are taking him back to prison.

It would be impossible to estimate the effect produced by this play. Perhaps some conception can be gained from the very unusual circumstance that it had proved so powerful as to induce the Home Secretary of Great Britain to undertake extensive prison reforms in England. A very encouraging sign this, of the influence exerted by the modern drama. It is to be hoped that the thundering indictment of Mr. Galsworthy will not remain without similar effect upon the public sentiment and prison conditions of America. At any rate it is certain that no other modern play has borne such direct and immediate fruit in wakening the social conscience.

Another modern play, The Servant in the House, strikes a vital key in our social life. The hero of Mr. Kennedy's masterpiece is Robert, a coarse, filthy drunkard, whom respectable society has repudiated. Robert, the sewer cleaner, is the real hero of the play; nay, its true and only savior. It is he who volunteers to go down into the dangerous sewer, so that his comrades "can 'ave light and air." After all, has he not sacrificed his life always, so that others may have light and air?

The thought that labor is the redeemer of social well−being has been cried from the housetops in every tongue and every clime. Yet the simple words of Robert express the significance of labor and its mission with far greater

potency.

America is still in its dramatic infancy. Most of the attempts along this line to mirror life, have been wretched failures. Still, there are hopeful signs in the attitude of the intelligent public toward modern plays, even if they be from foreign soil.

The only real drama America has so far produced is The Easiest Way, by Eugene Walter.

It is supposed to represent a "peculiar phase" of New York life. If that were all, it would be of minor significance. That which gives the play its real importance and value lies much deeper. It lies, first, in the fundamental current of our social fabric which drives us all, even stronger characters than Laura, into the easiest way—a way so very destructive of integrity, truth, and justice. Secondly, the cruel, senseless fatalism conditioned in Laura's sex. These two features put the universal stamp upon the play, and characterize it as one of the strongest dramatic indictments against society.

The criminal waste of human energy, in economic and social conditions, drives Laura as it drives the average girl to marry any man for a "home"; or as it drives men to endure the worst indignities for a miserable pittance.

Then there is that other respectable institution, the fatalism of Laura's sex. The inevitability of that force is summed up in the following words: "Don't you know that we count no more in the life of these men than tamed animals? It's a game, and if we don't play our cards well, we lose." Woman in the battle with life has but one weapon, one commodity—sex. That alone serves as a trump card in the game of life.

This blind fatalism has made of woman a parasite, an inert thing. Why then expect perseverance or energy of Laura? The easiest way is the path mapped out for her from time immemorial. She could follow no other.

A number of other plays could be quoted as characteristic of the growing role of the drama as a disseminator of radical thought. Suffice it to mention The Third Degree, by Charles Klein; The Fourth Estate, by Medill Patterson; A Man's World, by Ida Croutchers,—all pointing to the dawn of dramatic art in America, an art which is discovering to the people the terrible diseases of our social body.

It has been said of old, all roads lead to Rome. In paraphrased application to the tendencies of our day, it may truly be said that all roads lead to the great social reconstruction. The economic awakening of the workingman, and his realization of the necessity for concerted industrial action; the tendencies of modern education, especially in their application to the free development of the child; the spirit of growing unrest expressed through, and cultivated by, art and literature, all pave the way to the Open Road. Above all, the modern drama, operating through the double channel of dramatist and interpreter, affecting as it does both mind and heart, is the strongest force in developing social discontent, swelling the powerful tide of unrest that sweeps onward and over the dam of ignorance, prejudice, and superstition.