

HOW TO SEE A PLAY

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How to see a play by Richard Burton

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RICHARD BURTON

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BY
RICHARD BURTON

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Now here are twenty criticks and yet every one is a critick after his own way; that is, such a play is best because I like it. A very familiar argument, methinks, to prove the excellence of a play, and to which an author would be very unwilling to appeal for his success.

—From *Farguhar's A Discourse Upon Comedy*.

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PREFACE

THIS book is aimed squarely at the theater-goer. It hopes to offer a concise general treatment upon the use of the theater, so that the person in the seat may get the most for his money; may choose his entertainment wisely, avoid that which is not worth while, and appreciate the values artistic and intellectual of what he is seeing and hearing.

This purpose should be borne in mind, in reading the book, for while I trust the critic and the playwright may find the discussion not without interest and sane in principle, the desire is primarily to put into the hands of the many who attend the playhouse a manual that will prove helpful and, so far as it goes, be an influence toward creating in this country that body of alert theater auditors without which good drama will not flourish. The obligation of the theater-goer to insist on sound plays is

P R E F A C E

one too long overlooked; and just in so far as he does insist in ever-growing numbers upon drama that has technical skill, literary quality and interpretive insight into life, will that better theater come which must be the hope of all who realize the great social and educative powers of the playhouse. The words of that veteran actor-manager and playwright of the past, Colley Cibber, are apposite here: "It is not to the actor therefore, but to the vitiated and low taste of the spectator, that the corruptions of the stage (of what kind soever) have been owing. If the publick, by whom they must live, had spirit enough to discountenance and declare against all the trash and fopperies they have been so frequently fond of, both the actors and the authors, to the best of their power, must naturally have served their daily table with sound and wholesome diet." And again he remarks: "For as their hearers are, so will actors be; worse or better, as the false or true taste applauds or discommends them. Hence only can our theaters improve, or must degenerate." Not for a moment is