

**THE JOY OF
THE THEATRE**

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THE highest moral purpose aimed at in the highest species of the drama is the teaching of the human heart, through its sympathies & antipathies, the knowledge of itself, in proportion to which knowledge every human being is wise, just, sincere, tolerant & kind. If dogmas can do more it is well, but a drama is no fit place for the enforcement of them.

I

IN writing of the theatre of our time he who would choose such a title might fairly be suspected of irony, for in what theatre in England or the English-speaking world shall joy be found? Yet a sturdy hope weaves the two words into one sentence on the threshold of a book, that they may meet again in men's minds and, in due course, bring the things themselves together. Men create everything in their own image and always get exactly what they deserve, neither more nor less. The sins of the fathers are visited upon the children in art as in everything else, and the English nation deserves the English

theatre. That, however, is no reason why such a theatre should be endured, and there are signs that it will not much longer be suffered to continue unchanged. All over the world it is being discovered that what was good enough for the fathers is not good enough for the children, and a generation is springing into manhood which demands the right to examine its heritage and to discard everything that it finds to be worthless, useless and injurious. This generation is discovering that it is possible to rebel against the sins of its forbears and it is rebelling with all its might. If in the delighted excitement of the struggle it rebels also against their virtues, experience will bring wisdom and keener perception, and the very violence of the revolt will clear the air and leave the next generation and the next and the next more free for constructive action. Meanwhile there has been and is perception enough to see that the life of men cannot be changed until a change has been wrought in their minds, and to bring this about

there is no other instrument than art. Religion without art is like a ship without sails. Education is the preparation of the human mind for the understanding of art and, through art, of life. Art is devised for the correction of those errors into which a man's senses lead him, errors which, uncorrected, gather into a crust upon his soul and prevent his entering into communication with his fellow-men. Good art dissolves such errors; bad art multiplies them. Bad art has always been used as an escape from life; good art admits of no escape and forces a man to see himself in a glass clearly. A bad man likes bad art, for good art shows him to himself as grotesque, and he flies from the reflection and does his best to procure the suppression of the artist, and fees unscrupulous men to show him a lying and flattering reflection. Fortunately there are no absolutely bad men, and the great secret society of the artists, the most powerful secret society in the world, because it is open and the master of time and death, has been

able wisely and surely to organize so that good art survives, while bad art is borne away on the backward movement of time. There is a constant succession of men bad enough—snobs, arrivists, speculators, egoists—to hold up the lying mirror of bad art, but ever the true mirror of good art wins more to turn to it and to see, as they gaze, all that they thought hash and pitiless and cruel melt away to leave an image of pure beauty. This change is not in the mirror but in the minds of those who look, and once it has been brought about, they can no more fall back into those errors of the senses, towards deliverance from which the whole activity of mankind has from the very beginning been directed, and they move into the vanguard of the march towards the immortality of the free spirit of man. The constructive work of the world is directed by the artists. Scientists, inventors, engineers, manufacturers, organizers, even wholesale grocers, do their bidding, though they have no taste for poetry or painting or music or sculpture

and believe that the laws which govern their success or failure are purely economic. The business is always the outcome of the dream.

¶ There was bound to come a point in human progress when the dream and the business should of moral necessity begin to approach each other more nearly, when such a degree of material liberty should be reached as would be intolerably empty without its complement of spiritual liberty, without, that is, the joy which is the outcome of those two liberties. It is of small immediate consequence to the man who is the slave of the business whether the dream be true or no. He had liefer be drugged with lies than made to see and feel his slavery, be it in poverty or in wealth. So long as a man is the victim of the tyranny of the necessary material work of the world, he cannot have the energy to desire the truth, and to appease the restricted and small appetite of his mind the sweetmeats of untruth will seem to suffice, though such debauchery must bring its inevitable consequence of atrophy

and spiritual death. On the other hand it is rarely that the diseased appetite is so far gone as to be beyond cure, and, outside the deliberate exploiters of humanity, there can be very few men who are impervious to the truth of art and the truth of life.

¶ Now, for the organization of the forces of truth there is one machine to hand, the theatre, in which, properly controlled, all the arts can find the freedom and the strength of co-operation. There is no other machine. The Churches long ago adopted the methods of the theatre in the performance of a series of symbolic plays, in which audience and actors, or congregation and priests, collaborate in worship of the Universal Presence. These performances, these symbolic plays, however, have become poisoned with dogma mechanically and unintelligently repeated, politics crystallized and formulated, and fixed ethical ideas. They have been debased, and not the Universal Presence but the symbol is worshipped, and, for long enough, there has