

**PLAYS OF THE ITALIAN
THEATRE VERGA,
GOLDBERG, PIRANDELLO,
MORSELLI, LOPES.**

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Plays of the Italian theatre Verga, Goldberg, Pirandello, Morselli, Lopes. by Isaac Goldberg

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ISAAC GOLDBERG

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PLAYS
of the
ITALIAN THEATRE

VERGA, MORSELLI, LOPEZ,
PIRANDELLO

Translated by
ISAAC GOLDBERG, PH.D.

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MCMXXI

To
CHARLES HALL GRANDGENT
PROFESSOR OF ROMANCE LANGUAGES
IN HARVARD UNIVERSITY

INTRODUCTION

Among the features that make the study of Italian drama so interesting are the diversity of the types, the numerous differences that divide the critics and the more or less diffuse state in which the institution still finds itself. We are prepared for the cry of decadence that has filled half of the nineteenth century and not a little of the twentieth; to be a dramatic critic is almost synonymous, in all tongues, with bewailing the low state into which the drama has fallen. In Italy the matter has gone much farther; there have not been lacking scholars who deny the existence of a genuinely national stage, and since Tullio Fornioni, in 1885, started the ball a-rolling it has been given powerful shoves by such writers as Mario Pilo, Salvatore Barzilai and V. Morello. Only this year Signor Guido Ruberti, in his closely packed two-volume book upon "Il Teatro Contemporaneo in Europa," renews the discussion and in his section upon the realistic Italian drama (I,211) declares bluntly, "The truth is that Italy has never had a truly national theatre." He goes on to state, in the ensuing commentary, that there is, in the very nature of the Italian people, a certain quality that is anti-dramatic in effect; the spiritual and material difficulties experienced by the nation while other countries were conquering a greater or less degree of liberty caused it to turn in

upon itself, accustoming it perforce to a "singular mental habit of adaptation and conciliation; a remarkable equilibrium that succeeds in fusing within itself the most diverse tendencies, harmonizing them in a supreme ideal which is neither skepticism nor austere faith, neither absolute indifferentism nor unreflecting passion, yet feeds upon and communicates all these." The Italian conscience, moreover, unlike the Anglo-Saxon and the Slav, finds its great problems settled in advance by its creed, thus removing, or at least greatly modifying, one of the mainsprings of dramatic action. In the powerful scenes of passionate crime the critic sees but added proof of the primitiveness of his people; upon them, he tells us, the currents of modern thought make little impression.

For much of the delay in the achieving of a national theatre the influence of France is blamed, the same France in whom Spanish-American critics fear a similar denationalizing influence and who, according to Brazilian writers, is Gallicizing the immense Portuguese-speaking republic to our south. Again, the presence of so many well defined regions, each with its own psychology, its own pride, its own determination to preserve its spiritual autonomy, acts as a hindrance to the formation of a distinctly recognizable national drama. The Italian dialect stage is an important institution; Rome, Sicily, Milan, Bologna, Venice, Naples — these are, from the dramatic standpoint, fairly nations within a nation, and even the better known Italian dramatists

are proud to write for them. Of the writers represented in this collection, for example, Verga and Pirandello are intimately related to their native Sicily, as is Sabatino Lopez to his Tuscan birth-place.

If, then, it is yet a problem whether Italy's drama be truly national as an institution, there is far less doubt as to whether good plays have been written by Italians; the stage flourishes, even if at times the native product is strangely absent. And in this activity the part of the one-act play is singularly important, as the Italian audience is used to witnessing more than one play a night, and has a fondness for the curtain-raiser. Of late there has arisen the custom of devoting an entire evening to a program of one-act plays, so that the native playwrights consider the short form a legitimate and worthy object of their endeavor, approaching it with conscience and interest. They have imparted to the concentrated drama all the various novelties that have come out of France and the North; now it is a bit of unacclimated Ibsenism, as in Giacosa's "Diritti dell' anima," again, the latest type of cerebralized thriller as in F. Maria Martini's "Ridi, Pagliaccio"; Marinetti, indeed, in his futuristic orgasms, has evolved a type of drama that requires but a page or two of print.

The plays included in this collection have been chosen primarily for readableness and accessibility to the taste and resources of the small theatre audience and producer.

