

hanging over them, rustling ghostlike in the deep silence of a Parisian evening in war time.

In London, also, particularly at such houses as the Alhambra, and the Palace and the Coliseum, there is much more informality, much less stiffness than in Canada. Our system must be more pleasing to the actors, but much less comfortable for the patrons. Actors really have too easy a time here; the audience seems afraid of them; they never talk out loud or take a walk to rest their legs, or do anything but gaze in open-mouthed awe at the wonderful creatures on the stage. In London and Paris, people are more at home in the theatre; they feel it is their institution, not the actors' or the singers'.

In Canada, also, the patrons of the theatre lose their independence to such an extent that they rarely think of talking to the players during the progress of the piece. Not so in Europe! At the London Hippodrome one evening, for example, there were several young men in the front box, who, when they felt like it, talked to anyone they knew in the audience, and directed numerous remarks to the stage.

Make the Play Fit the Town

MAKE the Play Fit the Town has already begun to bear fruit. We have received a letter from a lady in Clinton, Ont., where they are considering the problem of how to produce plays by local actors, written by anybody whose plays are a practical proposition to put on stage. The letter has been answered advising the town of Clinton, Ont., to try, for one thing, Sheridan's *School for Scandal*, for another Lord Dunsany's *Golden Doom*.

Now, as every one knows, it is one play in a thousand that could possibly fill the bill in such cases. It need not be a short play, but it must be simple. Any play that needs elaborate staging or expensive gowns would not do. Our recollection of *School for Scandal*, as presented in this country by Ada Rehan, about twenty years ago, is that the company wore rather elaborate gowns. Suitable gowns for the purpose can be rented for about thirty dollars. Or imagination will go a long way in making locally-produced gowns carry the idea. And the setting, of course, must not be involved; a very simple interior will do—always making it clear to the audience that it is not scenery and costumes they have come to see, but a play.

The kind of play that can't possibly be produced by local actors in any average Canadian town is represented by the picture at the top of this page. The kind of play that might be produced under such circumstances is suggested by the photograph at the bottom; one of the Little Theatre plays that have begun to work a sort of revolution in New York, and have extended to many other cities and have even begun to become a hobby in Ottawa, Toronto and other larger Canadian centres.

In fact the Little Theatre play as a type goes far to meet the needs of any town desiring to produce plays, because it calls for a kind of amateur actor, has a simple setting, and for the most part very inexpensive accessories.

In New York they have various names for those little playhouses, Portmanteau, Bandbox, and the like. Some wit has dubbed the little theatre "The Pill-Box Theatre," and in the February issue of the *Theatre Magazine*, Ranceholt Warsden describes very lucidly how the thing works.

"Will there, out of the 'pill-box theatre,' he asks, 'come the tonic that will restore our decrepit drama?'"

The one thing which the little theatre must accomplish to become a dangerous rival is—to pay. This it did not do at first; but in recent months it has demonstrated that it can produce what the commercial theatre would call uncommercial plays, and profit by them.

Perhaps the most noteworthy example is that of the Washington Square Players, which began as a group of amateurs, but now commands not only public interest, but the public purse. This most interesting of organizations is almost a community one. Everybody connected with it either writes plays or stages them or paints scenery for them or ushers—or does several of these things.

It was on February 19, 1915, that they gave their



Scene in "Merry Wives of Windsor." The kind of play that fits no town but a big one.

first performance, at the Bandbox Theatre. At the end of the season they had played forty-three times and always to sold-out houses. The next year was an honest-to-goodness theatrical season, and in the fall of 1916 they found they could do with no less than the Comedy Theatre, in the midst of the theatrical district.

Of course the wisecracks of the drama even then looked dubious; but as usual, they were consistently wrong. For after a slowish start the new season burst forth gloriously with a bill of four one-acts; and across the street the management has leased an office building for a work-shop theatre and for the headquarters of the Washington Square Players' School of the theatre.

To quote from *The Theatre*:

The Washington Squarers have demonstrated that there is a place in America for the one-act play which is not merely a hackneyed vaudeville sketch crammed full of ancient if not honourable "kokum." But not vaudeville alone has felt, or is going to feel, the rejuvenating power of the theatrical pill-box. Little playhouses have also broached the three and four-act drama, with significant results. Mr. Ames, with his Little Theatre, has done more for the stage than did Mr. Ames with his mammoth New Theatre. One need only recall among his productions the charming "Prunella."

And then in New York alone, there is the Bramhall, quaint and captivating; the Band-box; the Neighbourhood, whose productions of Shaw plays, short and long, have made it so powerful a competitor of Broadway that the Great Trite Way has had to invite Miss Kingston all the distance up from Grand Street; the Provincetown Players, who set no limits to their audacity in perform-

ing what they feel is worth while; and the Portmanteau Players of Mr. Stuart Walker.

During the first half of this season the conspicuous names have undoubtedly been Dunsany and Shaw. It is the Portmanteau Theatre that has given us most of our Dunsany. "The Gods of the Mountain" and two other plays thus far stand to Mr. Walker's credit. Nothing else in town has been given so much free and deserved publicity.

Well, the commercial theatre has had six or eight years in which to discover and produce Dunsany. His "King Argimenes" was actually performed here in New York some six years ago by a group of revolutionary amateurs. Now it is making money for Mr. Walker and his backers, while "Our Little Wife" and "Under Sentence" and "The Flame" and several others have had managerial money spent on them in floods and to no avail. Meanwhile, our most talented producer, Mr. David Belasco, can lift his eyes no higher lately than "The Boomerang," "Seven Chances" and "Little Lady in Blue."

Mr. Stuart Walker packs not only big plays, but Hope for the Drama in his Portmanteau. May Heaven prosper him! The Portmanteau, by the way, is "the theatre that comes to you"—provided you are a millionaire and own a villa. Nevertheless, we can all go to it while its miniature stage is set up on one of our public platforms—as it is likely to be for some time. Dunsany, it is to be remembered, is only one of its gifted authors.

The Neighbourhood Playhouse, in Grand Street, is thus far responsible for two more Dunsany pieces, "The Queen's Enemies," in which a gifted amateur, Miss Lewisjohn, distinguished herself before yielding her role to a professional actress; and the enthralling playlet, "A Night at an Inn." In addition, this dramatic pill-box has offered us Shaw's "Great Catherine" and "The Inca of Jerusalem." Later they put on "The Married Woman," which is one of the brightest as well as the most thought-provoking comedy New York has seen in several seasons.



Scene in "Gammer Gurton's Needle," a Portmanteau Theatre play in New York, showing the extreme simplicity of the stage setting.