

Some Random Notes on *The Tempest*.

By HERBERT FARJEON.

The Tempest is the loveliest of Shakespeare's plays—like so many of them! It is generally believed to have been the last he wrote, the Epilogue being his Farewell to Drama. Its quality is unearthly. Shakespeare, although he did not die until some years after he wrote it, may well have had one foot in the grave. He certainly had one hand in heaven. But the date of *The Tempest* (1611) is, like almost everything else about Shakespeare, purely conjectural. If you want to prove that *The Tempest* must have been an early play, you may point to the cumbrous explanatory opening after the storm has passed and assert that here is clearly the work of an inexperienced craftsman. If you want to prove that *The Tempest* must have been a late play, you may point to the same opening and assert that here is clearly the work of a playwright so advanced that he could no longer trouble his head over the pettifogging niceties of dramatic construction.

Of this, however, we may be pretty sure: that Shakespeare knew his audience might be bored by the opening, and that Prospero's "Dost thou attend me?" "Thou attend'st not!" and "Dost thou hear?" are breaks introduced to recapture the audience's possibly wandering attention quite as much as Miranda's. For what daughter, hearing the truth about her father for the first time, would not be all ears? Editors suggest that Miranda is really still so deeply concerned with the fate of the poor shipwrecked mariners that her attention wanders to the sea. Here, they say, is another fine Shakespearean stroke in which the tenderness of his heroine's character is masterfully revealed. But editors will be editors. I would rather leave the preparation of an Authorised Version of Shakespeare to playwrights and actors.

Shakespeare is full of slips, and the commentators of three centuries have spotted most of them. But there is one in *The Tempest* which seems to have escaped notice. In the second scene of the first act Prospero desires that Ferdinand shall be lured into the presence of Miranda, and this he contrives

Ballet and The Choreographer.

By FREDERICK ASHTON.

Lilian Baylis has asked me to tell you some of the difficulties of a choreographer. Believe me, there are no obstacles which any of my profession are called upon to surmount, which can be compared with the accidents and set-backs with which she daily copes in directing her two theatres and three companies!

However—the principal demon which dogs the steps of the British choreographer—or the British dancer for that matter—is the mistrust of his own people. Curiously enough, the British public as a whole is not chary to accord recognition to a "native" painter or actor; but it has an unaccountable prejudice against believing that a "native" singer or dancer can excel in his branch of art.

This is not easy to account for; because English people have been, for a great many years, second only to the Russians in supporting the cause of ballet as a whole; and are at the moment, I believe, more

by means of Ariel, who sings

Come unto these yellow sands

and so draws Ferdinand along. In giving Ariel his instructions, Prospero says:

Go make thyself like a nymph o' the sea, be subject

To no sight but thine and mine; invisible

To every eyeball else: go take this shape

And hither come in't: go: hence with diligence.

This task Ariel performs, for the stage direction a few lines further down reads:

Enter Ferdinand, and Ariel invisible, playing and singing.

Ferdinand makes it plain that he cannot see Ariel, for he remarks:

Where should this music be? 'T the air or the earth? It sounds no more.

But why, if Ariel is to be invisible to every eyeball but Prospero's, should there be this business of dressing up like a sea-nymph at all? An invisible sprite in disguise sounds like a by-word in fairy-land! One can only conclude Prospero to have been such a consummate artist that he made Ariel dress up for his own æsthetic delight.

Fanny Burney well said that *The Tempest* is "at the head of beautiful improbabilities." How impalpable it is, how subtle, how elemental! and how it smells of the salt sea-shore—an oyster-shell smell, recalling one to the astringent sanity of beauty. The smell of a play! Is it not a kind of test? Might one not postulate that any play of no account betrays their weakness by smelling of nothing at all? Ibsen, the greatest playwright the world has produced since Shakespeare, smells—he smells of must. Even on the mountain-tops he seems to be brushing the must from his great coat-sleeve. Synge smells—he smells of peat—a most heavenly and most earthly smell. Shaw smells of anæsthetic. Barrie smells of pot-pourri. Noel Coward smells of rather good pomade. Pinero smells of cooking-greens. But this, I begin to see, is a fireside game for winter evenings, so for the fireside let it be preserved.

knowledgeable about the technicalities of dancing than any other nation. The French (who have kept alive their opera, and as a consequence their ballet) have perhaps a better understanding of the æsthetics of dancing and a quicker grasp of a work as a whole; but with the years they have developed their own style and are perhaps not as pliable in assimilating other manifestations of the same art.

This attitude of suspicion which confronts the British choreographer in his own country does not obtain abroad, where English girls have long been sought after for their excellent dancing; and I myself have received my greatest recognition from Russian artists. One of the biggest moments of my life was when Karsavina asked me to partner her in the choreographic poem "Sylphides"; and my ballet "Mercury" was created for her during her season at the Lyric, Hammersmith. Lopokova too, trusted

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me to build "Facade" and "Rio Grande" round her enchanting personality.

But the British choreographer who does not wish to spend his life in exile must after all, exist; he must find a plane where he is able to exercise his talents; and too often he can only discover this in the commercial theatre. Here he must, of course abandon technique and originality in favour of broad general effects. His working material too, is often not of the best quality for his purpose. Lovely chorus ladies have, it is true, enlarged their scope to a marvellous extent lately and the standard grows constantly higher; but ballet-dancing is a whole-time job. Therefore the choreographer can never really give them anything difficult to do, and choreography is reduced to its lowest denomination.

This is where the value of the Vic-Wells movement is most apparent; it does allow people like myself a certain amount of scope, although of course funds are limited and the organisation young as yet. In the artistic theatre there is the promising material, but no money to back it up; in the commercial theatre, there is the money but not the material. Perhaps there will come a happy time when we shall have both—only when that ideal is realised, perhaps there will be no need for choreographers, for Mick Mouse will have superseded them all! Does he not outrival us in the movement and pattern of his symphonies—and has he not the most malleable of material? For he knows no laws of gravity; even Nijinsky had to come down sometime after his leaps; but there is no reason why Micky Mouse ever should. All is material for movement to him, native dances animate and inanimate, static or immobile.

Nevertheless, I would like to stress the fact the three uncommercial institutions, the Ballet Club, the Camargo Society and the Vic and the Wells did keep alive the interest in ballet during those lean years after the passing of Diaghileff and Pavlova; and contributed no doubt to the phenomenal success of the Monte Carlo ballets in London this summer. Britain to the fore as usual, but alas unconfident and ever ready to welcome the foreign artists.

The necessary qualifications for a choreographer, are perhaps, first and foremost, that he should be a trained dancer; secondly that he should also be a musician, so that he may feel the underlying spirit of the music he is called upon to interpret. He must also have a working knowledge of all the arts—painting, costume, sculpture—and even geometry for working out plans and patterns which have all the infallibility and clarity of a completed theorem. He must personally be responsive and alert—like a thoroughbred—to all moods and impressions in life and art, for everything digested is valuable and can be transmuted into the choreographic pattern of the theatre. I myself am a modern, and naturally, although I realise a thorough classical training is essential before one tries to express anything else, the more modern type of ballet such as "Les Masques," has for me the strongest appeal. But I do feel sometimes that in reaction from the light-hearted sophistication of the later Diaghileff ballet new movements may go too far in their present vogue for dance symphonies with a deep significance. Of course, ballet can express the weighty matters of life

and death, but a trifle of heaviness creeps in when it is asked to do this too often. So, as a corrective, the new ballet we shall give in December comes from a forgotten opera by Auber; has no serious portent at all; and is simply a vehicle for the exquisite dancing of Idzikowsky and Markova.

And what a perfect example of the British dancer we have in Markova! English girls are technically as good as Russian dancers; but they must be allowed to express their own characteristics. All the English dancer wants to perfect her art and develop her reticent personality is confidence; and that you, the audience, can alone give to her.

PARCELS! PARCELS! DONATIONS! DONATIONS!

There are only 9 more days before the date of the CHRISTMAS FAIR, and although many parcels and donations have already been received there is still plenty of room for gifts to roll in at the last moment. To ensure complete success will YOU lend a helping hand? The Stalls are home-made cakes and sweets, fancy goods of all kinds and descriptions, and present and past artists of all three companies have been most generous in the matter of autographed photos.

It is not too late to send a specimen of handwriting (together with 1/- (the usual fee is 2/6—so what a bargain!) to have your character read. Two "Gypsies" will be hidden behind screens for you to consult after you have crossed their palms with silver.

Miss Adele Dixon (who has kindly stepped into Miss Ney's place at a moment's notice), Miss Peggy Ashcroft and Madame Lydia Lopokova are our Openers. Come and give them a good Vic-Wells welcome and do BUY, BUY, BUY. Joan Wheldon, Hon. Organiser. The Old Vic, Waterloo Road, S.E.1.

SADLER'S WELLS CIRCLE.

All members who intend going to the Vic-Wells Dance on February 13th are asked please to communicate with the Secretary, as the Circle wants, if possible, to make up a party of Circle-ites and reserve a box at Covent Garden.

VIC-WELLS COSTUME BALL IN AID OF VIC-WELLS FUNDS.

ON
ST. VALENTINE'S EVE, FEBRUARY 13th, 1934

AT THE ROYAL OPERA HOUSE, COVENT GARDEN

The tickets as usual will be 5/-, but owing to the great demands made for them during the last few weeks before each Dance, and the consequent disappointment to many regular patrons, we are charging 7/6 for all tickets sold after January 20th, 1934, in the hope that the regulars will buy early. We advise everyone to buy their tickets in good time as many have already been booked, and we are asking all our friends who regularly take books of tickets for their parties to send the money for those already sold and return all unsold tickets for checking purposes by first post on January 20th. Applications for Boxes as always (many by which have already gone), must be made direct to the Organisers, at the Old Vic.

In addition to the usual Costume Classes for Fancy Dress we have a Professional Class for members of the theatrical profession.

Mr. Charles Laughton has kindly consented to present the Prizes and members of both Companies will help during the evening. Our M.C. is to be Mr. Roger Livesey, and we are sure he will perform this office to perfection. Among the attractions during the evening will be a Cabaret, and a Fishing Pond, with Prizes for successful anglers, presided over by Miss Edith Evans, Mr. John Gielgud and many other distinguished members of past Companies.

Transports to all parts of London and the Suburbs will be bookable on the night of the Dance at Covent Garden.

We want this Dance to be another record, so please make your parties larger than ever and buy your tickets as soon as possible.

DOROTHY DANIELS.
AMY MARSH.

Hon. Dance Organisers.

ASSOCIATION NOTES.

Sumner Austin's illuminating lecture on Gluck's "Orpheus" drew a large audience of Associates and friends on Monday, November 20th at the Old Vic. Hearty thanks are due to Mr. Austin and to those members of the company who illustrated his points.

A Concert will be given in the rehearsal room at the Old Vic by Mr. Crowe and his Gleemen on Tuesday, December 19th. Entrance at Stage Door.