

Therefore, O frequenters of The Vic and Wells, do not hold up your hands in horror and cry aloud, if in any of our forthcoming new productions you do not see Mephistopheles in his well-known (and well-worn) scarlet tights and remarkable headgear, or Michaela in the blue frock and high-heeled shoes in which she is accustomed (so uncomfortably, one must think) to scale the mountain heights, if Lohengrin's swan should appear in an unwonted part of the stage, or if Martha, arm in arm with Mephisto-

phes, should fail to indulge in the fantastically impossible form of exercise in the garden so beloved of Marthas, from time immemorial! Give yourselves time to think over and assimilate anything that may strike you as strange and new, and it is probable that you may find something fresh, something valuable in the presentation which adds zest to your appreciation and understanding of the opera, and in time you may even find that you much prefer the new to the old!

Tradition.

By HARCOURT WILLIAMS.

I read somewhere recently of an Archbishop who was reproved for taking pains in finding the best stone with which to build his Cathedral. His answer was, "We must build for the future." On reading this pregnant phrase I immediately thought of the Old Vic and Sadler's Wells. Few theatre directors have the faith to build for the future, and Lilian Baylis is one of the exceptions. She has provenly done it with courage and foresight. It is a waste of energy to dwell on a past that can never be recalled. To attempt to live in it is a denial of vital force. Any form of tradition should be rigorously challenged before adopted. As a background tradition is important, as a servant useful, but as a master disastrous. A school, whether it be scholastic or institutional, that relies on its traditions instead of creating new ones is a dead thing. We grow out of traditions as we grow out of truths. When Ellen Terry first played Portia at the Old Prince of Wales's Theatre the "Daily Telegraph" said that she had blown all the traditions to the winds, and yet now it is almost impossible to think of playing Portia any other way. But there must be other ways, because only Ellen Terry herself could infuse real life into the "tradition" she created. Recently I saw a performance of *The Merchant of Venice* produced by Komisarjevsky. It is not in my province to offer criticism, but as a paying member of the public I was a little disappointed. I imagine that players and producer were not accustomed to working together, though doubtably the production has proved a popular success, and it certainly is a blow at tradition. I should like to believe that the first is the result of the second, but I am puzzled by the fact that the new theatre building at Stratford-upon-Avon which is certainly not traditional, is almost as generally unpopular. Here at least the architect has built for the future, and it is difficult yet to form an unbiased judgment of the building. It is almost impossible

to get a good view of it except from the further end of Clopton Bridge, and it seems in some queer way too big for the place. Perhaps one day Public Opinion will insist on Stratford-upon-Avon living up to the spirit of its master instead of making money out of its traditions, and clearing away the vulgar grubbiness that surrounds the approaches to the river. Until then the theatre will not come into its own. The actual working stage is thoroughly up-to-date in its planning, and I should imagine is immense fun to handle, but if the apron stage were used it would not be visible from the seat I occupied in the Circle, and for Shakespeare I am not sure that I should not prefer a company that had worked together for three years to any amount of lifts and rolling stages.

It must be expensive to close the doors of this fine new theatre, and it would be a delight if a sister company could be formed to keep them open with the best plays by British and Foreign playwrights while the Shakespeare Company rests or goes a'touring.

Another "theatre" that I visited in the vacation was the Malvern Festival, so admirably conceived and executed by Sir Barry Jackson. There I saw what might be termed a Tradition Revue through the ages concluding with the latest play by one, who at the age of seventy-six, is the youngest of the moderns, and can walk over the Malvern Hills for two hours at a good pace, talking all the time like the clergyman-burglar that brings down the final curtain on *Too True to be Good*. No man has contrived to shatter so many traditions as George Bernard Shaw, and here he is opening the season at the Old Vic, the "home of Shakespeare!"

Well, few could inspire us to approach Shakespeare with greater honesty and mental clarity, and none has the true interest of the theatre nearer at heart.

My First Repertory Season.

By PEGGY ASHCROFT.

I find it very difficult to begin to write this. I wish I were as much an old friend of yours as I feel you are old friends of mine. For I have sat with you during the last two years watching nearly every production. But I must confess that much as I enjoyed myself I often longed to be "on the other side," doing what I love most in the world—learning to act. Because we all come to the Old Vic to learn and to experience that zest which comes from knowing that for months ahead you will study one wonderful part after another; that your work will be as varied as the different costumes you wear. You metaphoric-

ally roll up your sleeves and spit on your hands as you enter the stage door!

This is the first time I have ever been a member of a repertory company. For although I have played for Sir Barry Jackson at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre it was only for two isolated plays. So all that lies ahead of me is very thrilling; after all, the life of a repertory company is the natural and best one for an actor or actress; and one therefore to rejoice in when attained.

There ought, of course to be a National Theatre in London—better still, two theatres, one for

Sept-Oct 1932

modern work and one for classical, with two interchangeable companies. Meanwhile the Old Vic and Sadler's Wells are the nearest approach to that ideal, so I am tremendously happy to be here and to have my chance of helping other people to realise what these two theatres stand for, not only to the audiences but to young members of my profession.

This will not be my first introduction to Shakespeare, as I have already played Desdemona and Juliet. I have been lucky; for many of my profession never get the chance of playing Shakespeare. But my debut at the Old Vic *will* be my debut in Shaw. (When I say I have never appeared in Shaw, I mean professionally; for I have a vivid recollection of producing "Candida" at school when I was fifteen—and playing Marchbanks!). It is lovely to be playing Cleopatra—Shaw's child Cleopatra—for Shakespeare's lady I feel is "past the size of dreaming"—my dreaming!—although perhaps, *one day* . . .

And then I have Imogen, Portia, Rosalind (all new parts) ahead of me—and you in front of me; so who could help longing to come to the Old Vic? Though I am more than a little frightened of such a critical and experienced audience.

Cymbeline.

By REGINALD P. MANDER (an Association Member).

During the last season or two, the Repertoire of the Shakespeare Company has been restricted, of necessity, to the better known plays. It is, therefore, very pleasing to see a revival of *Cymbeline* promised for the coming season.

There has been only one previous production of this play at the Old Vic, under the present regime. Ben Greet staged it in March, 1918, with a cast that included Sybil Thorndike as Imogen, Russell Thorndike as Iachimo, and Florence Saunders as the Queen. The last year of the war was a particularly harassing time in this theatre, and the producer, labouring under great difficulties, was only able to present a very curtailed version of the play. The principal omissions were the incidents attending the gaoling of Leonatus, the latter portion of the Queen's part, the long scene in which the death of Imogen is plotted, the metamorphosis of Cloten, the battle scenes, and the assumption, by Leonatus, of peasant's costume and character.

London, as a whole, has not been any more fortunate in having opportunities of seeing this play. Up to 1896 revivals were fairly frequent, but since that date, excluding the production at this theatre in 1918, only once has the play been put on for a run. This was by Sybil Thorndike at the New Theatre in 1923. It is hoped that the members of the audience will note the significance of these facts, and realise that if they do not take the opportunity of seeing the forthcoming production, they may have to wait many years before another occasion presents itself. Also the revival of the other lesser known plays of Shakespeare depends mainly on whether audiences can be found to come and see them.

The play has been called a tragedy with a happy ending. It is soon realised by anyone reading the text, that, whereas most of the leading characters are replicas in miniature of previous Shakespearean creations, in the case of Imogen, although she is first cousin to that long list of "doublet and hose" heroines, which started with Julia in "The Two Gentlemen of Verona," she is the perfect and crown-

"*Cymbeline*" interests me very much; I have never seen it, and Imogen, I think, is one of the best of Shakespeare's women, and she says such lovely things!

I hope there are not many in the audience who share the popular feeling that Portia is rather a bore. I find her so interesting, and I want to show her to you as a very young person—a sort of fairytale princess, shut up in her castle away from the world, but brave enough to set out on the trial adventure, and with brains enough to carry it off with honours.

Rosalind!—I confess I am already apprehensive of Rosalind; she is so gay but so very very voluble!—and I have not been used to making long speeches on the stage. That is one of the reasons why this season is going to be good for me! I shall have to learn to hold your attention when I shall probably be tired of the sound of my own voice myself. But I do hope that by the time we reach "As You Like It" you will be learning to like me, if not as much as some of the people I have joined with you in appreciating, enough to give me the support of the goodwill and interest you so freely show. And after that? That is on the knees of the gods—or Miss Baylis!

ing glory evolved by the master hand after years of experimenting.

This may be thought superlative praise, but Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, in his "Shakespeare's Workmanship," says:—"Imogen is the be-all and end-all of the play. She has all the wrongs of Desdemona, plus the serene courage to conquer them and forgive. She has all the fond trust of Desdemona, with all the steel and wit, which Desdemona so fatally lacks."

Thirty-six years is a long time, nevertheless, some of the audience may remember Irving's revival at the Lyceum in 1896, when he, himself, played Iachimo, Genevieve Ward, the Queen, Ellen Terry, Imogen, and Norman Forbes, the Sir Andrew of the recent New Theatre revival of *Twelfth Night*, Cloten.

This revival was the most magnificent production of the play, that has been seen, at least on this side of the Atlantic. The scenery and costumes were designed by Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema and Ellen Terry maintained that her dress for Imogen was the loveliest that she had ever worn. Her own interpretation was praised on all sides, and some critics even went so far as to say that it was her finest Shakespearean interpretation, whilst she herself thought that Imogen was her only inspired performance of these later years of her active stage life. Another famous Imogen was Julia Marlowe, who, although born in Cumberland, was taken to America when very young, and became one of the foremost Shakespearean actresses on the American stage. By the beauty of her performance as Imogen, she was able to produce *Cymbeline* with success, more than once, between the years 1893 and 1923. This talented actress brought her company to London in April, 1907, and won high praise for her Juliet, Viola and Ophelia.

As the forthcoming revival will eventually move on to Sadler's Wells, it is interesting to note that Samuel Phelps opened his fourth season there on August 23rd, 1847, with *Cymbeline*, making a personal appearance in the rôle of Leonatus Posthumus. This

Sept - Oct 32