

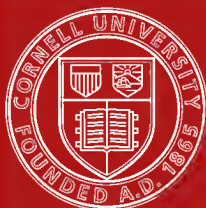


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# THE OPEN-AIR THEATRE

**BOOKS BY SHELDON CHENEY**

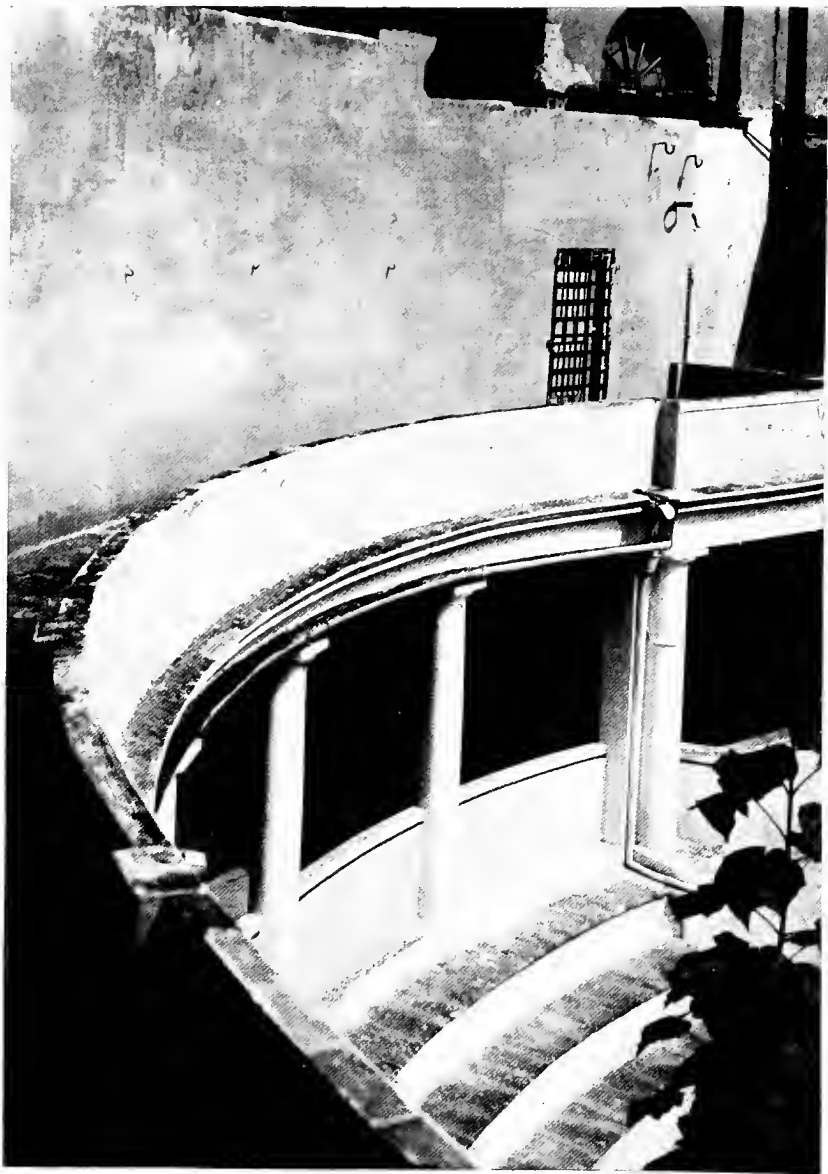
**THE NEW MOVEMENT IN THE THEATRE**

**THE ART THEATRE**

**THE OPEN-AIR THEATRE**







A CORNER OF THE ARENA GOLDONI, AT FLORENCE, ITALY.

THE  
OPEN-AIR THEATRE

BY  
SHELDON CHENEY



NEW YORK  
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## PREFACE

**M**Y object in writing this volume has been three-fold: first, to offer, for that increasingly large public which is interested in every significant development of the drama, a comprehensive view of the open-air theatre movement with relation to both the historical background and the remarkable current revival; second, to provide the architect with a first-aid compendium of information about old and modern open-air theatres, bringing together material which, if it has existed at all in print, has been scattered through a hundred books and magazine articles; and third, to give those concerned with open-air production a birdseye view of the drama of the open in all ages and all lands, and by comparison, to help them to an understanding of the peculiar characteristics and particular problems of production out-of-doors.

The scope of the volume is limited. No attempt is made to treat of theatres of the half-enclosed type, which are in effect the ordinary architectural theatre with the auditorium roof lifted. There is no intention, moreover, to put forth the volume as

## PREFACE

an exhaustive treatise. Doubtless there are many open-air theatres that have not come to the writer's notice, and certain others offer so little of interest that descriptions would merely be tedious. But it is thought that every playhouse which is really important, either for its productions or for its unique structural form, has been described. I have worked with full realization that this first book on the subject must be hardly more than a sketch. It is offered as a preliminary essay in a field which I hope will attract new students, and which doubtless will find its exhaustive historian in due time.

If I continually refer to the artificialities of the indoor stage, it is not because I disbelieve in the indoor theatre. Indeed, my faith in the ultimate regeneration of that over-commercialized institution is very strong. But I believe that there has been much following of false gods among the so-called "artists" of the regular playhouse; and in the open-air theatre I see one of the finest correctives for its oversophistication and artificiality.

So many people have given generous aid in the compilation of this book, that it is impossible to make detailed acknowledgment. To the many who have provided information about their private theatres, or about the theatres of institutions with which they are affiliated, I extend again my cordial thanks.

## PREFACE

A special debt is owing to Professor Thomas H. Dickinson of the University of Wisconsin, not only for information about the playhouse at Madison but for material gleaned from his admirable essay on open-air theatres in *The Playbook* of June, 1913. To Mr. Leroy Truman Goble and to Mr. Sam Hume I am grateful for material about open-air production in Europe, which otherwise would have escaped me. To Miss Mabel Lincoln Edwards I owe thanks for similar aid in connection with certain American theatres. The chapters on historic theatres are based on material drawn from a multitude of sources; but special acknowledgment must be made to A. E. Haigh's exhaustive volume, *The Attic Theatre*. For information about the Italian villa theatres I am especially indebted to Professor Henry Vincent Hubbard, whose descriptions and plans in the January, 1914, number of *Landscape Architecture* have been freely drawn upon. For photographs of the Italian theatres special thanks are due to H. Inigo Triggs and to Mrs. Aubrey LeBlond; and for pictures of the classic theatres, to Professor Allen Marquand. The introductory chapter was published in part in *Craftsman Magazine*, and the chapter on garden theatres originally appeared in *Country Life in America*. The editors have kindly given permission to reprint.

## PREFACE

The book was written almost entirely during the year 1915, and was announced for publication in the following year. But difficulties in the way of obtaining photographs, and other delays, have prevented earlier appearance. I have taken advantage of this circumstance to add descriptions of several theatres which were completed after the main portion of the text had been written.

S. C.



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# THE OPEN-AIR THEATRE

## CHAPTER I

### THE OPEN-AIR THEATRE MOVEMENT

**I**N the whole history of dramatic art there is no more illuminating truth than this: always when the drama has been simplest, most genuine, and lit up most brightly by the joy of living, and always when the drama has been closest to the life of the people, it has had its setting in the open. The two great periods of literary drama came at times when men naturally took their dramatic productions out-of-doors, as they always have taken their games there. The Greek masters lived and died before the indoor theatre was thought of, and the glories of the age of Shakespeare in England came when the drama again had left the roofed-in places, developing and flowering on stages open to the sky. In these days when the world is talking vaguely of another great

renaissance of the art of the theatre, and is waiting expectantly for the new artists who will express their age as characteristically as the Greeks have expressed theirs and Shakespeare his, one may read a new meaning into the recent revival of interest in the *al fresco* drama. For not since the theatre of the late Elizabethan decadence was roofed over have there been so many productions in the open and so many outdoor theatres as there are to-day.

For the average theatregoer, who thinks of the outdoor dramatic production as an extra-normal affair, it comes as a surprise to find that the open-air theatre has existed more than two thousand years, whereas the history of the indoor playhouse is a matter of a mere three or four centuries. Indeed, the story of the birth of dramatic art, and of that art's growth through its greatest eras, is exclusively the story of the open-air theatre.

In Greece the drama was born in the dances about an altar, during the festivals in honor of the god Dionysus; it grew on the platforms erected at the side of the "orchestra," or dancing-circle, at first in the market-place perhaps, and later at the foot of a hillside that formed a natural auditorium; and finally the art of Æschylus and Sophocles and Euripides flowered in the beautiful architectural theatres of Athens, at first of wood, and then de-

veloping into stone bowls, immense in size and beautiful in proportion and in decoration. The Romans, stumbling on the heels of the Greeks in all matters of art, solidified the classic theatre building, gaining a certain sense of intimacy, perhaps, but losing something of the open beauty and natural grace of the Greek structures; and they took the first step toward the indoor playhouse when they roofed the stage. As the darkness of the Middle Ages settled over Europe, dramatic art became merely the degraded plaything of travelling bands of actors; and perhaps because their vulgar and often obscene performances could not stand the clear light of day, the great open-air theatres lapsed into decay—and the classic type of playhouse fell into a disuse which lasted to the present renaissance.

The drama was reborn in the tenth and eleventh centuries within the church, but as soon as it became more than a mere incident of religious service it again sought the out-of-doors. At first the Mystery Plays were acted on the church steps, and then on platforms in the churchyard. Then the guilds developed the pageant-cars, on which they had been wont to present tableaux in the religious processions, into elaborate platform stages on which the more elaborate Miracle Plays were acted, with realistic representations of Hell, Paradise, and other Biblical

localities. Finally the platform in an inn courtyard and the popular "bear-ring" established the type of playhouse for the early Elizabethan period, and when the genius of Marlowe and Shakespeare blossomed, the theatre stage and pit still were open to the sky, though the galleries were roofed. In the later Elizabethan decadence the house was completely covered over and the drama entered upon that period in which it became most polished but most artificial and farthest removed from the people.

For nearly three centuries following there was only one notable revival of the open-air playhouse. On the estates of the Italian nobles of the late Renaissance period, there came into being the garden theatres, exquisite little bits of formal design, in perfect accord with the noble villa gardens, and forming ideal settings for the lovely pastoral drama of that time; and from these certain copies were made in the gardens of France and Holland and Germany. But interesting as the Italian "teatro di verdura" may be, it was far less significant than is the present world-wide revival of the drama of the open; for the men and women who to-day are taking the drama out-of-doors are inspired with something of the spirit that brought forth the classic open-air theatre and the pre-Elizabethan religious theatre; and the present age must inevitably take

its place as one of the world's three great periods of outdoor dramatic production.

The current revival is a spontaneous growth, arising on the one hand from a rediscovery of the value of the out-of-doors as a corrective to an over-citified and artificial life, and on the other, from a new spirit of dramatic experiment, and protest against the over-sophisticated indoor stage. This movement has brought into being countless dramatic festivals and pageants, and a remarkable increase in the number of *al fresco* theatres of every type. So to-day one finds the old Roman theatre at Orange, France, cleared of ruins, that a famous Parisian company may annually revive classic plays there; and in faraway California a new and beautiful Greek theatre has been built, not as an archæological curiosity, but to satisfy a very pressing need for such an open-air structure. In that same California a unique forest theatre has developed a new drama form in the Grove Plays of the Bohemian Club, while on the other side of the continent the Peterborough Pageant Theatre and the Meriden Pageant Stage promise to create equally vital original forms. In Europe, too, unique phases of dramatic art are being created at the "nature" theatres at Thale, at Hertenstein, and in the Klampenborg Woods near Copenhagen. And in many parts of the world the

garden theatre is again bringing the poetic drama to its proper setting of green trees and open sky. It is a poor month now that does not bring to the devotee of open-air drama news of another theatre either planned or actually built, or word of the establishment of another annual outdoor play-festival.

The significance and value of all this activity may be found in two directions. In the first place there are important dramatic or artistic aspects. In general there is a distinct value in anything that acts as an antidote to the artificial narrowing and stereotyping of dramatic art as seen in the "regular" theatres. Because the open-air production is more often an experiment in new forms, or a revival of a classic, than a play that conforms to the set indoor stage conventions, it has a broadening effect on both the actors and the audience. In the open-air theatres of America there have been presented dramas from the Sanskrit, from the French, from the German, from the Norwegian, and even from the Japanese; and there have been revivals of Mystery Plays and Miracle Plays and of plays by every notable English dramatist from Shakespeare and Jonson to Bernard Shaw and Stephen Phillips. As an educative force, and as a corrective of the crystallizing influence of the commercial theatre, these productions can hardly be overvalued. But



THE CRANBROOK GREEK THEATRE. AN EXAMPLE OF THE FIRST,  
OR ARCHITECTURAL, TYPE OF OPEN-AIR THEATRE.

[MARCUS R. BURROWES, ARCHITECT]





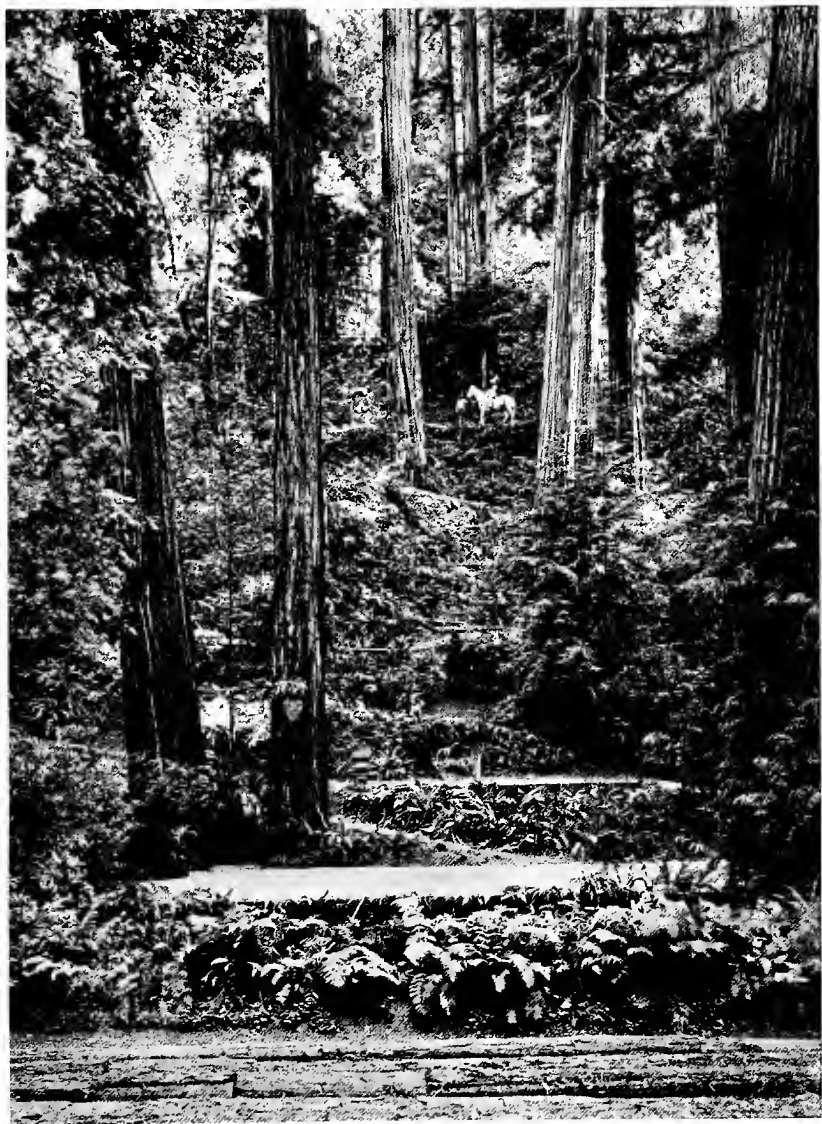
even more important artistically are the new forms of drama that are being developed by such theatres as those at Peterborough and Madison and in the Bohemian Grove.

The MacDowell musical pageant-drama, the masques created and presented by the Wisconsin players and by community groups, the Grove Plays of the Bohemian Club artists, and certain of the dance-festivals at the co-educational and women's universities, seem to foreshadow the coming of a national form of spectacular drama. While one cannot say that this outdoor art will be the most important development of American drama during the coming decade or two, one cannot but see that it will be the most genuine and most spontaneous dramatic expression of the life of the people. In the matter of sheer visual beauty and in the matter of communal expressiveness, the drama of the open will far surpass that of the indoor playhouse. On the other hand one must recognize that emotional drama must develop in the more intimate atmosphere of the roofed-in theatre. In other words, the outdoor theatre movement is one of the most wholesome phases of current dramatic development, and is building a new, clean and beautiful form of art expression more rapidly than any other; but it cannot and should not displace the legitimate activities

of the indoor theatre. As a matter of fact it is, by force of example, and by training dramatic artists to the simplicity and directness of the open, helping the indoor drama to rid itself of those deadening conventions and those artificial trappings that have so long burdened dramatic art.

Eleanora Duse has said: "To save the theatre, the theatre must be destroyed; the actors and actresses must all die of the plague. They poison the air, they make art impossible. . . . We should return to the Greeks, play in the open air; the drama dies of stalls and boxes and evening dress, and people who come to digest their dinner." Madame Duse probably had no idea of banishing all drama to the open. Perhaps she did see that a very vital and lovely sort of drama might be developed out-of-doors. But what she very certainly felt was this: that no current form of dramatic activity can be vital until the playwrights, the actors, the stage artists and the audiences, leaving behind all the trickeries and artificialities of the modern stage, go out into the open and learn the simplicity, the directness, and the joyousness of dramatic production under the sun and stars.

The growth of the open-air theatre movement is quite as remarkable in its social as in its dramatic aspects. In the first place there are what may be



THE BOHEMIAN GROVE THEATRE. AN EXAMPLE OF THE "NATURE  
THEATRE" TYPE.

[PHOTOGRAPH BY GABRIEL MOULIN]



called the hygienic and economic effects of any great movement to the out-of-doors. Nature is the great revivifier, and the mere calling of masses of people away from the roofed-in places has its salutary effect. Men always have taken their sports into the open; and the outdoor dramatic production, like a game, sends men and women back to their cities refreshed in mind and body. Then there is the social solidifying of the community that comes, first from association in a common artistic purpose, and only slightly less so from the mere fact of recreation in crowds. The outdoor production usually brings great numbers of people to the stage, and the constant association in rehearsal creates a very real bond of interest; there is moreover no such gulf between players and audience as exists in the indoor theatre. Indeed, the present outdoor production achieves something of that pervading communal spirit which existed in Greece when the actors were simply the leaders in the revels, speaking for their followers; and which existed again in the Middle Ages when the churchmen were the players and their audience the congregation, actor and spectator feeling in the production a common sense of worship and reverence. Looking back at the long series of pageants and masques produced by American communities in the last decade, sometimes in open-air

theatres and sometimes in improvised woodland settings, one wonders if they have not done more to create a healthy civic sense than all the books ever written about the duties of the citizen. Another social aspect of the open-air theatre is to be found in the perfect equality of the seating arrangements. Here 'if anywhere is the purely democratic playhouse, for there are no boxes from which to exhibit jewels and costly gowns, and there is no division into orchestra, balcony and gallery.

And above all these others there is the intangible spiritual aspect, a subtle, almost religious effect on each individual, which collectively must make for social betterment. For man is never else so near God as when certain sorts of dramatic beauty are revealed to him under the open sky.

For convenience of discussion, all open-air theatres, ancient and modern, may be divided roughly into three classes, according to their structural characteristics. First there are the purely architectural theatres, usually of classic type, large stone or concrete structures, with massive stage backgrounds. In this group are all the old Greek and Roman theatres, and of modern buildings such notable examples as the Arena Goldoni at Florence and the Hearst Greek Theatre at Berkeley. Closely allied to this type is



THE THEATRE AT VILLA GORI, ITALY. AN EXAMPLE OF THE  
THIRD, OR GARDEN THEATRE, TYPE.





the other purely architectural sort, the mediæval religious theatre, with its platform stage and background of built-up "localities," of which the only important contemporary survival is the Passion Play Theatre at Ober-Ammergau.

In the second place there is the so-called "nature theatre" or "forest theatre," which is the exact opposite of the architectural type. Usually its stage is merely an open place in the woods or on a mountainside, with an idyllic natural background, while the auditorium often is nothing more than an open hillside or sloping meadow, without even the artificial touch of built-in seats. Of the nature theatres, the best-known of those in Europe are the Harz Mountain Theatre at Thale in Germany, and the open-air theatre at Hertenstein, near Lucerne. The most important examples in America are probably the pageant theatre at Peterborough, New Hampshire, and the Bohemian Grove Theatre in California.

The third type of open-air playhouse is the garden theatre, a type that stands between the other two, utilizing the trees and shrubs of nature for background, but often adding incidental architectural features, such as pergolas, treillage-work, and stone walls and stairways. The theatres of the Italian villa gardens are the most notable historic examples,

while the theatres at Mannheim, Germany, and Mt. Kisco, New York, may be considered as typical modern adaptations.

Each type has its distinctive virtues and its distinctive limitations, which really determine the forms of outdoor production. As these are matters of prime importance to theatre-designer and producer alike, the type, rather than historic sequence, is made the basis of this book's division into chapters. Thus the chapter on the old Greek and Roman theatres is followed not by that on the mediæval religious theatre, but by "Modern Greek Theatres." The average reader, less interested in the history of theatre-building than in what can be done and is being done in a certain sort of playhouse, will thus find all the theatres of one type treated in one group, with a discussion of each playhouse from the viewpoint of structural characteristics, and from that of actual achievement in dramatic production.

## CHAPTER II

### THE OLD GREEK AND ROMAN THEATRES

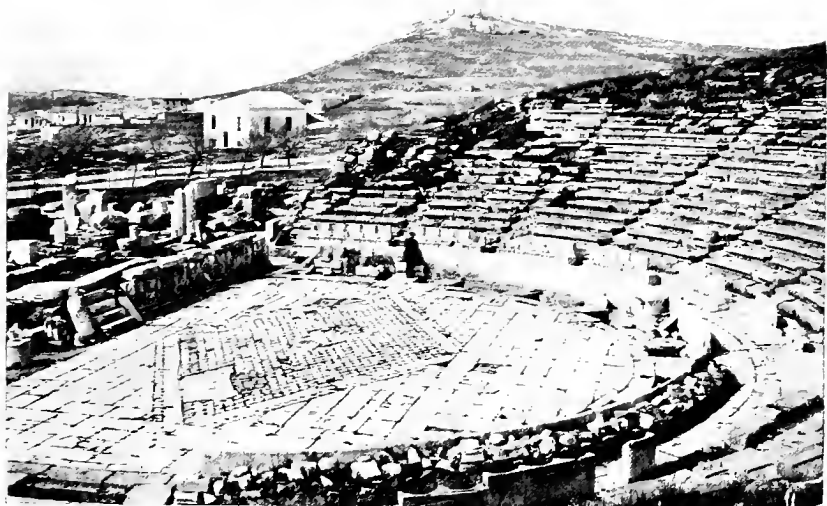
**T**HE Greeks did not designedly take their drama out-of-doors; it was born there and grew there naturally. The drama was intimately interbound with religious celebration, and it would have seemed little short of sacrilege to take such a communal expression into the artificial and artificializing atmosphere of indoors. From beginning to end, from the time when it was merely a rude circle surrounded by temporary wooden benches to the time when it was a magnificent stone structure, the classic theatre was open to the sky.

When the revellers at the festivals of Dionysus permitted one of their fellow-participants in the songs and dances to be singled out as leader, and allowed him to take the chief part in their improvised dialogues, the Greek drama became a living thing. At first this leader mounted upon the sacrificial table, beside the altar around which the revellers had danced, and from that vantage-point banded with those who now became his "chorus"; and

the mere onlookers brought up benches all round the dancing-circle. As the parts to be played by the actor multiplied, a tent, or "skene," was built for him at one side of the circle, where he could retire to make the necessary changes of costume; and then his platform was moved to the side of the tent, and while the chorus continued to dance about the central altar, the audience was pushed away from one side, occupying now only three-fourths, or less, of the territory about the dancing-place.

In this arrangement may be seen the rough mould into which every later typically Greek theatre was cast. First, and most typical, was the "orchestra" forming a full circle, with the altar of Dionysus in the centre, about which the chorus danced; second, the auditorium with its rows of seats surrounding perhaps two-thirds of the outer circumference of the orchestra; and third, the tent and platform on the third side, prototype of all the stage buildings for many centuries to follow. Not until the glory of Greece faded before the grandeur of Rome did the orchestra become the half-circle of the later classic and the modern theatre; and only then was the auditorium cut down so that it also was semi-circular in shape, so that all the spectators faced the stage rather than the orchestra.

In Athens, always the true home of Greek drama,



THE THEATRE OF DIONYSUS AT ATHENS. THIS IS THE MOST IMPORTANT OF ALL THEATRES IN HISTORY. ON THIS SITE DRAMATIC ART WAS FIRST DEVELOPED OUT OF THE GREEK RELIGIOUS FESTIVALS, AND HERE THE GENIUS OF ÆSCHYLUS, SOPHOCLES AND EURIPIDES FLOWERED. THE PRESENT RUINS DATE FROM ONE OF THE ROMAN RECONSTRUCTIONS, WHEN THE THEATRE HAD LOST MANY OF THE ORIGINAL GREEK CHARACTERISTICS.



the temporary structures built annually at the time of the Dionysia sufficed for the productions for a number of years. Perhaps it was in 499 B.C., when the temporary wooden benches collapsed, bringing death and injury to many of the audience, that the first substantial theatre was begun. Even then the seats and stage buildings were only of wood; but earthen foundations underlay the benches, and the "skene" was probably of more solid construction and greater beauty than the yearly temporary erections had been.

Although there still is some controversy among archæologists over the matter, it seems fairly well established that the Athenian theatre in which the genius of Æschylus, Sophocles and Euripides flowered in the fifth century B.C. was of wooden construction. Passing over the gradual modifications which the wooden theatres doubtless underwent, in this century which witnessed so many changes in the drama, one may more profitably turn to the stone structures, of which sufficient ruins remain to afford the basis of a reconstruction—even though the tragic drama had already perceptibly declined at the time they were built.

The first stone theatre in Athens—and the most famous of all classic theatres—was constructed on the site of its wooden predecessors, in the enclosure

dedicated to the god Dionysus, on the south side of the Acropolis. The orchestra was a perfect circle with an altar in the centre. During the purely Greek period the orchestra floor was formed of earth tamped hard and smooth, the marble pavement which exists to-day being a Roman addition. It was here that the chorus danced and sang, and therefore the interest of the spectators centred here rather than on the stage.

The Athenian auditorium, as usual throughout Greece, was shaped in a hollow of a hillside, in this case violating the well-recognized rule that a theatre should never face the south. This auditorium was formed of seventy-eight tiers of seats, of Peiraic limestone except where carved from the solid rock of the Acropolis. The lower tiers were in the shape of a semi-circle with its ends prolonged in straight lines, like an inverted U; but as the outline of the theatre was irregular, the upper tiers were not symmetrical. At Athens, as generally elsewhere, the front row of seats consisted of marble chairs for priests and other dignitaries, the elaborately-carved central one being reserved for the Priest of Dionysus. The main body of the auditorium was divided by fourteen passage-ways up and down, making thirteen wedge-shaped blocks of seats; and laterally, about half way up, by a wide passage-way, or "di-



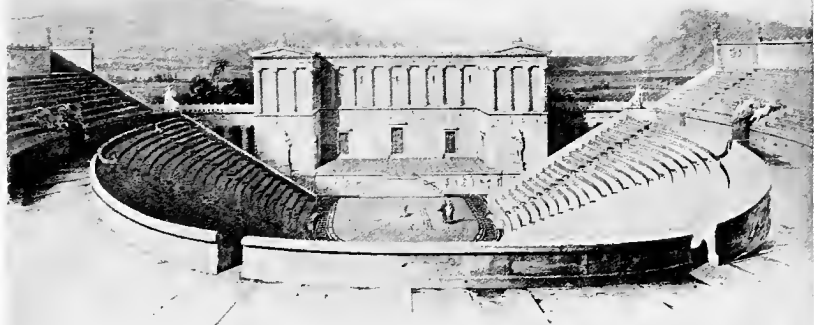
azoma," which formed part of a through road when the theatre was not in use.

According to the latest and most authoritative estimates the Theatre of Dionysus seated about 17,000 people, although it was formerly believed that almost 30,000 could be accommodated. The great size of the Greek theatres is explained by the fact that they were designed to hold the entire theatre-going population of a city at one performance. Throughout the most splendid period of Attic drama the performance of tragic plays was limited to the few days in each year that were given up to the Dionysia, and no play was presented more than once. The seating capacity of the theatre at Megalopolis, the largest in Greece, has been estimated at figures varying from 20,000 to 44,000, while 50,000 has been suggested as the possible number of the audience at the theatre in Ephesus. These larger figures are doubtless over-estimates.

The form of the stage-buildings, or skene, of the theatre at Athens, has been a matter of vigorous controversy among archæologists. It is generally agreed, however, that the skene was in shape a long rectangle, with walls extending forward toward the auditorium at each end. Wilhelm Dorpfeld, excavator of the theatre, and one of the most learned of modern archæologists, maintains that the skene

was merely a high wall, forming a background for the action of chorus and players, all which he believes took place in the circular orchestra. His view is gradually finding wide acceptance among scholars. The opposite theory is that a stage platform was constructed between the wall and the orchestra, terminated at each side by the projecting side walls, or "paraskenia." This platform, called the "logeion," or speaking-place, is supposed to have been occupied by the actors, who thus were lifted above the chorus in the orchestra. If this theory is correct, doubtless temporary flights of stairs were built from the logeion to the orchestra to permit the necessary action between players and chorus. It has been suggested that the front wall of this platform was panelled, with doors giving access to the stage-building from the orchestra.

In the typically Greek theatres the high wall behind the stage and at the ends, was ornamented with a single set of columns, a feature which later was developed by the Romans into an elaborate two- or three-storied system of columns, entablatures and pediments. In both the Greek and the Roman types the rear stage wall usually was pierced by three or five doorways; and by a generally-understood convention, entrance from each particular door indicated that the actor was to be imagined as coming



A CONJECTURAL RESTORATION OF THE GREEK THEATRE AT EGESTA.  
THE FORM OF THE AUDITORIUM IS PROBABLY CORRECT, BUT  
THERE IS LITTLE EVIDENCE TO INDICATE THAT THE STAGE BUILD-  
INGS ARE AUTHENTIC.

[FROM J. H. STRACK'S "DAS ALTGRIECHISCHE THEATERGEBAUDE"]



from a certain place: when a figure came on the stage through the door at the right, it was known that he came from the immediate neighborhood, whereas one coming through the door at the left was clearly a traveller from a distance, and so on. These conventions arose from the situation of the theatre of Dionysus with relation to the city, the country roads, the harbor, and other topographic features.

The proper height of the stage platform in a Greek theatre is given by the Roman architect Vitruvius \* as from ten to twelve feet, and the depth as ten feet. But there is no exact evidence in regard to that at Athens, and the stages of other Greek and Greek-Roman theatres vary from eight to thirteen feet in height and similarly in depth. The existing remains of the stage at Athens, with the sculptured front-wall, throw no light on the subject, as they date from the time of one of the Roman reconstructions.

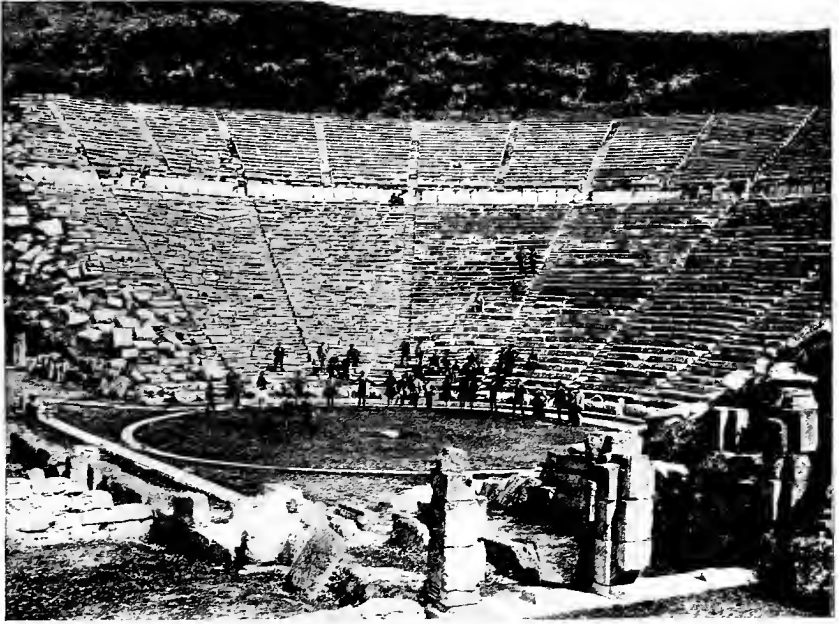
In the Greek theatre the auditorium and skene were in effect two separate buildings, and the space between was used as a gateway, giving entrance to the orchestra and auditorium. In the later Greek period, and especially as the Roman influence was

\* Vitruvius' rules for the construction of Greek and Roman theatres are quoted in translation in an appendix of this volume.

felt, the stage was brought nearer to the auditorium, and the gateways became doors. Then finally, in Roman times, the auditorium wall and the stage wall merged into each other, and the entrance became a vaulted passage-way.

The ruins of the theatre at Epidaurus in some particulars are more interesting than those of the Athenian structure. The auditorium is almost intact, and the orchestra ring is perfectly indicated, as are the foundations of the stage-buildings. The auditorium, unlike that of the Theatre of Dionysus, is perfectly symmetrical, resulting in a more graceful general appearance. The topmost circle of seats has a diameter of four hundred and fifteen feet, the total seating capacity about equalling that of the auditorium at Athens. In addition to the row of seats of honor at the bottom of the auditorium, there are two rows on the level of the diazoma, two-thirds of the distance to the top.

While the other known theatres followed closely the type already described, there are certain notable variations. At Priene the row of seats of honor is formed as a continuous bench, with five thrones set in at various points; and similar thrones are found at the theatre of Oropus. At Priene the altar, which elsewhere almost invariably stands at the exact centre of the orchestra, is instead on the



THE THEATRE AT EPIDAUROS. THIS IS THE BEST PRESERVED OF THE GREEK THEATRES. IT SHOWS THE COMPLETE ORCHESTRA CIRCLE, AND THE STAGE SET BACK FROM THE AUDITORIUM IN TYPICAL GREEK STYLE.





circumference of the orchestra circle, at the middle of the row of seats of honor. At Megalopolis (the largest theatre in Greece, with a diameter of 474 feet) a council chamber, the "Thersilion," faced the auditorium, taking the place of the usual stage-buildings. The steps and portico of the structure could be used when an architectural background was appropriate, as was nearly always the case with Greek drama; and at other times a temporary wooden stage may have been erected against the building. The stone skene, of which the ruins remain, probably was not built until the Thersilion fell into decay. In a few of the theatres, as at Eretria, an underground passage connected the centre of the orchestra with the interior of the stage buildings, a feature for which no adequate explanation has been given.

Greek theatres were built not alone in Greece, but wherever permanent Greek colonies were developed along the shores of the Mediterranean Sea. Some of the finest examples were in Asia Minor. Besides those already mentioned, some of the most notable ruins are at Delphi, Delos, Eretria, Aizari, Passinus, and Pergamon.

The dramatic productions in the Greek theatres were always connected with religious celebrations, and certain religious rites accompanied every per-

formance. But after the first separation of the actor-leader from the worshipping chorus, the drama speedily developed along less ceremonial and more human lines. In 535 B.C., shortly after tragedy had been officially recognized and put under state authority, the first dramatic contest was instituted at Athens. Soon came Æschylus, winning the victory in 472, and after him Sophocles and Euripides. By the middle of the following century the drama had declined again, and the golden period had gone. The plays of this time were simple, straightforward, emotion-compelling dramas, which needed little or no background to help them hold the interest of the audience. We are told that as early as the time of Sophocles scenery was used to cover up the bare architectural stage-wall. But if painted scenery was used at all, it was very simple, and the only aim was to suggest the proper setting; in other words there was no attempt at realism. There was never any change of scene in the Greek theatre, and the setting of the action always was understood to be out-of-doors. Until the Roman period there never was a stage curtain, entrances and exits all being made in full sight of the audience.

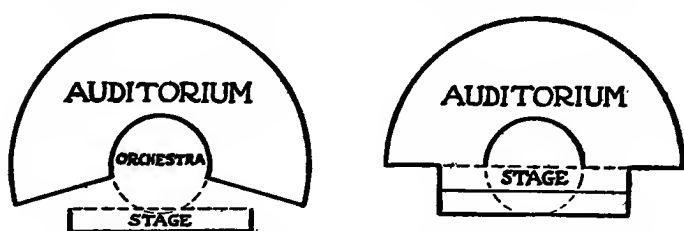
In addition to dramatic productions the Greek theatres were used for religious exercises at the Dionysian festivals, for political meetings, for the



RUINS OF THE GREEK-ROMAN THEATRE AT SYRACUSE. NOTABLE  
FOR ITS IMMENSE SIZE.



dithyrambic choral contests, and by the rhapsodists and harp-players. The annual cock-fight was held here, and all sorts of vaudeville performers appeared at times. In the Roman period the Athenian theatre was even desecrated by gladiatorial contests, which were hotly protested by certain of the Greeks; and there is evidence indicating that at one



*Comparative sketch plans of Greek and Roman theatres, showing change in relation between auditorium and stage.*

time the lower part of the theatre was made water-tight, in order that the orchestra might be converted into a lake for mimic sea-fights.

The Roman theatre differed from the Greek mainly in two particulars. As the chorus no longer was of greater importance than the actors, the orchestra was cut down from a full circle to a semi-circle, and the stage buildings were pushed up against the auditorium, forming a single building of the whole composition. These changes were neces-

sary because the spectators, who in the Greek theatres often faced away from, rather than toward, the stage, and still were content if they could see the orchestra clearly, now must face the stage, to which all the action hereafter was to be confined. The second great change was in the wall behind the stage, which was greatly heightened and elaborately decorated with rows of columns, one above the other. The stage platform was at first made high, in order to give the spectators on the uppermost tiers of seats as good a view of the action as possible, and it was narrow so that those looking up at it might always see the actors in full; but later the desire to stage gorgeous spectacles made greater depth necessary, with a consequent lessening of the height. Vitruvius recommends that the height of the platform in a Roman theatre be not over five feet. The invention of vaulting allowed the Roman theatres to be built on level spaces, the auditorium bowl being held up by series of walls and arches, instead of being shaped in the hollow of a hillside.

The only surviving classic theatre in Rome, the Theatre of Marcellus, has been so changed in later times that it does not illustrate the characteristics of the type as well as several others. Those at Orange, in Southern France, and at Aspendus, in Asia Minor, are the best-preserved of the typically



RUINS OF THE ROMAN THEATRE AT TAORMINA





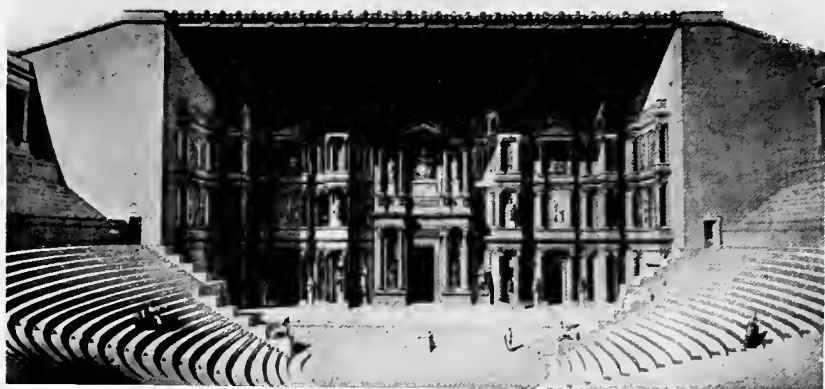
Roman structures. In both, the auditorium and stage-wall meet, forming one building, and in both the stage-front is approximately on the diameter of the orchestra circle. In both, too, the stage was evidently roofed with wood. At Aspendus another typical feature is the portico that surrounds the top of the auditorium. Here, too, is the best preserved stage-wall, with the elaborate architectural decoration formed by rows of niches flanked by columns and entablatures.

In most of the Roman structures the arrangement of seats and aisles followed the Greek plan very closely. The Roman theatres, like the Greek, were very large. That at Orange measures nearly three hundred and fifty feet in width, with a stage wall one hundred and eighteen feet high; and the stage floor is over two hundred feet long and over forty feet deep. The widest diameter of the structure at Amman, in Syria, was four hundred and twenty-eight feet. The three stone theatres in Rome (all built during the first century before Christ) are estimated to have accommodated audiences as follows: Pompey's Theatre, 17,580; Theatre of Balbus, 11,510; Theatre of Marcellus, 20,500. Larger temporary theatres were built of wood on special occasions, and it is chronicled that the extravagance of decoration of certain of these ephemeral structures was almost

beyond belief. The Romans invented means of stretching huge awnings over certain of their theatres, to protect the audiences from the hot southern sun; and the smaller theatre at Pompeii was permanently roofed at some time in its history, as is proved by a tablet recently found, which commemorates the giving of the roof by a wealthy citizen.

Throughout the development of the Roman theatre there is a noticeable tendency away from the Greek openness and simplicity, toward enclosure and toward elaboration of detail. The change corresponds very closely to the transformation of the dramatic production itself. The Latin dramatists at best were successful imitators of the Greeks. Then as time went on, more stress was put on the scenery and less on the play, and finally spectacle displaced drama almost entirely. Then when the people were not drawn away from the theatre to the circus or arena, gladiatorial contests and sensational vaudeville performances were brought to the theatre stage—making its degradation complete.

Closely related to the theatre of the Greeks and Romans was the "Odeon" or "Odeum," a smaller structure which usually was near the theatre, or even connected with it by a portico. The Odeons are referred to by classic writers as places for concerts and for rehearsals of plays, and doubtless dramatic



ABOVE IS A MEASURED RECONSTRUCTION OF THE ROMAN THEATRE AT ORANGE, FRANCE, SHOWING THE TYPICAL ROOFED STAGE, WITH ITS ELABORATE BACKGROUND OF ARCHITECTURAL ORNAMENT. BELOW, THE THEATRE AT ORANGE AS IT EXISTS TODAY.



productions were occasionally staged in them. Some authorities insist that the Odeon of Herodes Atticus, adjoining the Theatre of Dionysus at Athens, was roofed, thus affording a place of shelter in case the production at the theatre itself was interrupted by rain; but others point out the impossibility of roofing such a structure before Roman times, suggesting that the cedar roof mentioned by a contemporary writer refers to the *stage*-roof common in all Roman theatres. However that may be, the Odeon and allied forms of assembly-place offer many suggestions for the modern builder of open-air theatres. Thus the form of the little Odeon at the Imperial Villa at Pausilypon is more suited to the modern drama of the open than is that of the nearby theatre. The tiers of seats are in shape considerably less than a half-circle, and the stage shows very interesting variations from the traditional arrangement. This Odeon also has a notable feature in the large imperial box at the top of the auditorium. The little "Ekklesiasterion" at Priene, although having little to do with dramatic matters, is of interest to the student of the ancient theatre, as the auditorium is not circular, each tier of seats forming three sides of a square.

Other buildings common to Greek or Roman cities, which are in some measure allied to the the-

atre in form, are the stadion, the amphitheatre or arena, and the circus. Such notable examples as the Panathenaic Stadion at Athens, the Olympian Stadion, and the Colosseum and Circus Maximus at Rome, are interesting architecturally and as a reflection of the life and tastes of the peoples; but they had little influence on the form of the theatre or dramatic art. The Panathenaic Stadion recently was magnificently rebuilt, and at least one revival of a classic play has been given there. Similarly there have been modern productions in the half-ruined amphitheatres at Nîmes and Arles, in France.

After the drama and the theatre alike had been abandoned to the vulgar, in the years of the Roman decadence, it seems not to have occurred to any one that the great structures might again be utilized legitimately, until in 1869 Félix Ripert and Antony Réal planned classical productions in the Roman Theatre at Orange. The stage had been cleared of ruins some years before by French archæologists, and enough of the original tiers of seats remained to accommodate an average modern audience. The first productions were so successful that others followed at intervals of a few years until 1899, due in part to the efforts of the poet, Frédéric Mistral, leader among the exponents of open-air drama in France. Since the latter date the Comédie Fran-



THE SMALLER THEATRE AT POMPEII. THIS IS ONE OF THE MOST GRACEFULLY DESIGNED AND MOST INTIMATE OF ANCIENT THEATRES.





çaise has given an annual series of classical productions in the theatre, and more recently the Opera has given regular performances. Thus the walls that once echoed to the dialogue of the Latin poets and to the revived lines of the immortal Greeks, after fifteen centuries or more of silence have reverberated again to the voices of the greatest contemporary players—to Sarah Bernhardt in "Phedre," to Coquelin in "Amphitrion," and to a hundred others whose names are written large in modern dramatic history.

In Greece and in Italy there has been little attempt to revive interest in the theatres of the past. With the exception of a few playhouses of the type of the famous Arena Goldoni, the open-air theatres of the Greeks and Italians of to-day are chiefly of the summer amusement-park type. It remained for the French to bring back to one of the classic theatres some measure of its traditional dignity and splendor of production. And it remained for a far-away people of another continent to awake to the need of a theatre of the classic type, a people who were to build to suit the demands of their own art, but with all the old Greek beauty of architecture and with the Greek love of the out-of-doors.

## CHAPTER III

### THE MODERN GREEK THEATRES

OF modern open-air theatres, all that are characterized by rising semi-circular tiers of seats, with raised stages and high rear stage-walls, are indiscriminately termed "Greek" theatres, whether modelled on Greek or on Roman forms. It is easy to differentiate this classic type of structure from both the nature theatre and the garden theatre; for the latter two are built of nature's materials, of trees and shrubs and hedges, whereas the Greek theatre is architectural in every sense.

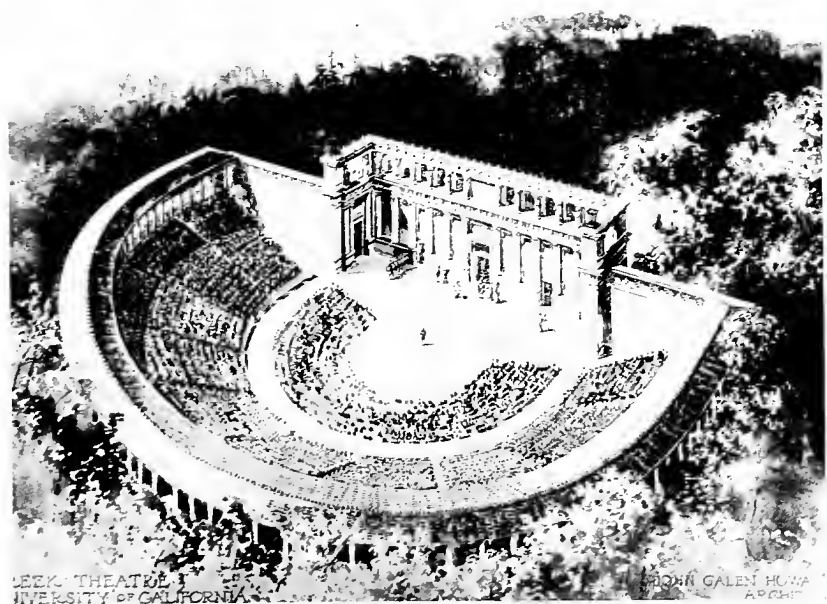
It is curious that the majority of modern Greek theatres are to be found grouped in a single state that is on the opposite side of the world from Greece. In California there are four so-called Greek theatres, and others are building. In the rest of the United States there are only two structures that approach the type, and in Europe practically all of the modern open-air playhouses are of the nature-theatre type. The reason is not far to seek. In

California the climate is such that an open-air structure affords the maximum of usefulness, so that a roofless playhouse is not considered merely a temporary or experimental matter, but rather a permanent and very practical bit of artistic equipment. In most parts of California there is a rainless season of at least four months, and four or five months more of each year are so generally fair that the outdoor producer is practically assured of perfect weather conditions. So the state has bred a race of outdoor people, lovers of nature and all that the open offers, and it is not surprising that they have taken their drama, like so many of their other activities, out under the sun and stars.

The most notable of the purely architectural playhouses is the Hearst Greek Theatre at the University of California, in Berkeley. This structure is not, as has so often been said, an example of perfect fidelity to ancient type. On the contrary, it is a curious mingling of Greek and Roman forms. It is also very wisely modified to conform to the best traditions of modern dramatic art, although there is no provision for modern realistic scenery or other ephemeral and inartistic phases of contemporary staging. The general form of the building is Roman in that the auditorium outline forms only slightly more than a semi-circle, and the orchestra

circle is cut down to very small dimensions; and the low, wide steps of the lower auditorium are typical of such purely Roman structures as the little theatre at Pompeii. But the absolute separation of the "skene," or stage-building, from the auditorium, is purely Greek; and the stage-wall is decorated in the Greek fashion with a single series of columns instead of the over-elaborate Roman system of double or triple rows.

The orchestra circle is six feet below the stage level; and above it on the auditorium side are twelve broad steps, each six inches above the other, on which sixteen hundred chairs are placed at times of performance. Above them, and on the level of the stage floor, is the diazoma, a wide aisle with a wall at the back, which separates the "pit" of the theatre from the upper auditorium. There are nineteen tiers of seats in the upper portion, rising at a sharp angle almost to the height of the top of the stage-wall. The upper section is divided into ten "wedges" by eleven aisles up-and-down. It has a seating capacity of more than four thousand, so that with the chairs on the steps below the diazoma and those which are often placed in the orchestra circle, a total of six thousand or more people can be accommodated. At university assemblies and lectures nearly ten thousand people occasionally



THE HEARST GREEK THEATRE AT BERKELEY. ABOVE, THE THEATRE IS SEEN IN ITS PRESENT CONDITION. BELOW IS THE ARCHITECT'S DRAWING OF THE STRUCTURE AS IT WILL APPEAR WHEN COMPLETED.

[JOHN GALEN HOWARD, ARCHITECT]



gather, some being allowed to stand at the entrances and above the highest tier of seats, and additional chairs being placed on the immense stage.

The stage building has a cement floor one hundred and thirty-three feet long by twenty-eight feet deep. At the back and at each end there rises a massive wall, more than forty feet high, ornamented with a beautiful design of Doric columns and classic cornice. This wall is broken only by five doorways, for the actors' entrances and exits, three at the back and one at each side. The total effect of the "skene," with its spaciousness and almost severe beauty, is singularly impressive.

At present the theatre is built entirely of concrete and cement. In time, however, the donor plans to finish the structure in marble. The architect's sketch of the finished building shows a further decoration of the stage-wall with bas-relief statues, the addition of walls at the sides of the stage building, and the addition of a portico at the top of the auditorium—a feature common in the finer Roman theatres. The theatre is so beautiful at present, and seems so complete, that one who has not seen the ultimate plan never guesses that the structure is not finished. And yet the plan indicates a subtler architectural beauty and a pervading sense of grandeur that will be notable additions.

The Hearst Greek Theatre was not built as an archæological curiosity. It was the outgrowth of a very definite need. For a decade before its construction an annual student play had been produced in the natural amphitheatre which the classic structure now fills, and all the student activities had outgrown the facilities at hand. The theatre was opened in 1903, when a three-days' dramatic festival was held, with the dedicatory exercises and the production in Greek of Aristophanes' "The Birds" on the first day, a production of "Twelfth Night" under the direction of Ben Greet on the second, and a production of Racine's "Phedre" in French on the third. Since that time there has been a notable series of professional and amateur productions, every season adding to the list of masterpieces that have been presented and to the list of noted actors who have appeared.

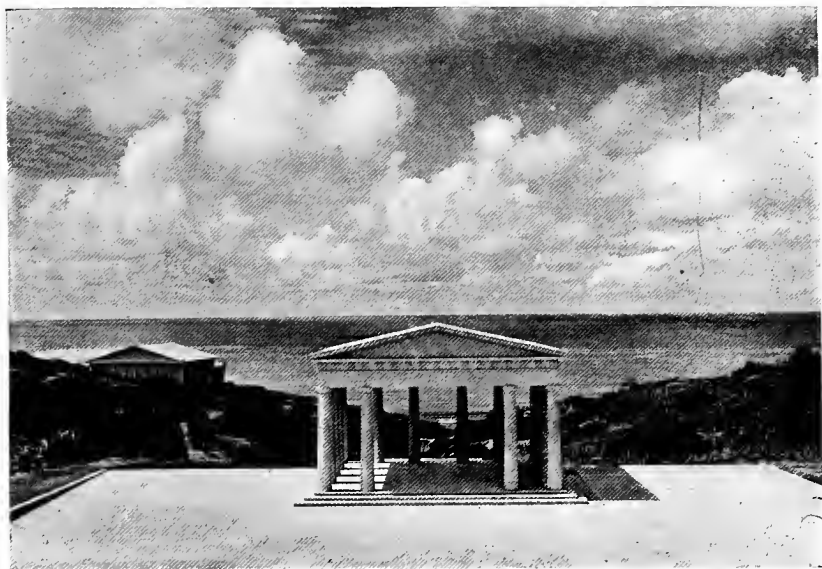
Perhaps the most nearly perfect productions have been the revivals by Margaret Anglin of Sophocles' "Antigone" and "Electra." Miss Anglin accepted frankly the conventions which the immensity of the stage and the lack of a curtain imposed; she triumphed by fitting the play to the stage, instead of attempting futilely to bring the setting into conformity with what is commonly considered modern stage art. When Maude Adams produced "As You



Like It," she had the entire stage hidden by a transplanted forest and thousands of yards of blue cheesecloth, the action taking place in the orchestra pit before the stage. The performance under the night sky with Miss Adams in the stellar rôle was necessarily charming, but of course it gained nothing from the hidden beauty of the theatre itself. Of other professional productions, Maude Adams' "L'Aiglon" and Sarah Bernhardt's "Phedre" deserve special mention. The English Club of the University has successfully revived a number of old plays: translations of Schiller's "Maria Stuart," and Ibsen's "The Vikings at Helgeland," and a spectacular production of "The Little Clay Cart," from the Sanskrit; and of English drama, among others, "Abraham and Isaac," "Thersytes," Dekker's "Shoemaker's Holiday," Shakespeare's "Merry Wives of Windsor" and "The Winter's Tale," Henry Van Dyke's "The House of Rimmon," Shaw's "Cæsar and Cleopatra," and Stephen Phillips' "Nero" and "Paolo and Francesca." Naturally the Greek department at the University has taken advantage of the unique opportunity to produce Greek drama adequately and has brought forth Sophocles' "Ajax," Æschylus' "Eumenides," and Aristophanes' "The Birds," in Greek; and in English Sophocles' "Œdipus Tyrannus." There have

been also a number of French and German plays, dramatic festivals, students' class plays, and productions by outside amateur and semi-professional companies. Altogether the range of material presented has been remarkably wide, and the theatre proportionately valuable in teaching the university community and the public how much more there is to dramatic art than the types of play seen in the commercial theatres.

The first of the California theatres of the Greek or architectural type was built under the direction of Madame Katherine Tingley in the grounds of the International Theosophical Headquarters at Point Loma, in 1901. Following, perhaps, an old tradition that the ancient Greek theatres were purposely built with an outlook over the sea, the auditorium was hollowed out of a hillside facing the open ocean. There are eleven semi-circular tiers of seats, accommodating twenty-five hundred people, and from these the spectators look across the stage, with its floor of tessellated pavement, to a chaste little temple in pure Greek architecture, and beyond that to the deep blue sky and the deep blue waters of the Pacific. The stage stands at the head of a precipitous canyon, through which a path winds up, allowing the players to reach the temple unseen by the audience. Although the theatre does not conform



THE GREEK THEATRE AT POINT LOMA, CALIFORNIA. THE LOWER VIEW SUGGESTS THE BEAUTY OF THE OUTLOOK OVER THE PACIFIC.

[PHOTOGRAPHS COPYRIGHT BY KATHERINE TINGLEY]



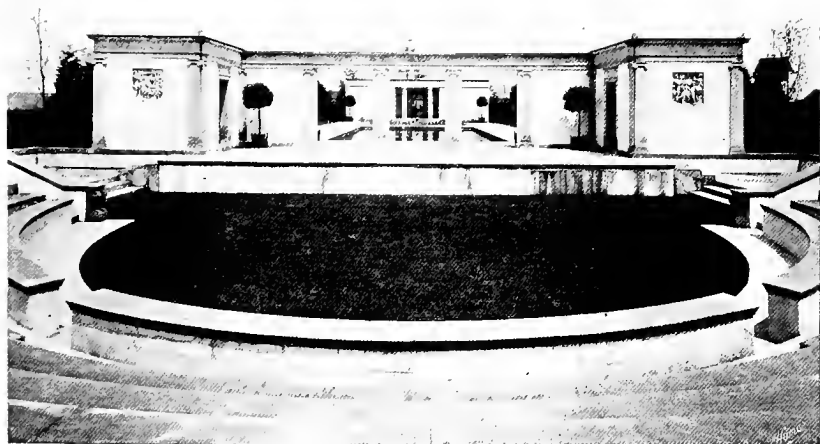
to Greek ideas of theatre-building, it achieves to a remarkable degree the beauty that is customarily considered Greek. Certainly no theatre in ancient Greece ever had a greater loveliness, or a more idyllic background. As one comes to it on its precipice above the sea, it seems to nestle like some gleaming white jewel in a setting fashioned with perfect artistry.

The plays at the theatre, too, have been permeated by the Greek spirit. One of the earliest dramas presented was the "Eumenides" of Æschylus, which Madame Tingley had earlier revived in New York. Recently the productions have been less dependent upon the texts of the Greek authors, being in effect modern compositions informed with the antique spirit. Indeed, there has grown up here what is in some sense a new art form, a sort of decorative drama that is more dependent upon the visual beauty of costumes, natural setting, grouping and dancing, and upon incidental poetry, than upon sustained emotional appeal. Madame Tingley personally directs the productions in the theatre; and she is carrying out her ideal of dramatic art by clothing the action in physical beauty, and at the same time shaping the development of the story so that the whole will prove in some measure a spiritual revelation. Several critics have testified

to the symbolic effectiveness and unique decorative quality of "The Aroma of Athens," the first production at which the general public was admitted. And every one who has been in the theatre has remarked on the idyllic beauty of the stage and background.

At Cranbrook, the country estate of Mr. George G. Booth, near Detroit, Michigan, one of the most beautiful of modern Greek theatres has been built. The structure is unique in several ways. The low auditorium is set well back from the stage, leaving an unusually large orchestra. The raised stage is flanked by two temple-like structures, which may be used for dressing-rooms or for the musicians. At the rear of the stage the wall joining the two buildings is pierced by three wide entrances. At times of performances, if the play demands an intimate atmosphere, the openings are curtained and the producer can then obtain those subtler effects which are characteristic of the small garden theatre stage. At will, however, the curtains can be removed, and the audience then looks through the openings, across a long formal pool, to a second stage building at the rear. On this larger stage the director can produce the more extensive, pageant-like scenes, which depend for their effectiveness upon moving masses of actors, changing colors, and distant processions.

When the Cranbrook Theatre was dedicated, in



THE GREEK THEATRE AT CRANBROOK, MICHIGAN. THIS VIEW SHOWS THE UNIQUE INNER STAGE, WITH ITS POOL AND LOGGIA.





the early summer of 1916, with a masque specially written for the occasion by Sidney Coe Howard, every possibility of the structure was tested by the producer, Sam Hume. Some episodes were played on the fore-stage, with the openings curtained; again the processions were seen through the doorways, approaching along the two sides of the pool; and at other times the actors utilized the wide dancing-space of the orchestra. Mr. Hume planned and installed a special lighting system, and he added to the effects it made possible, by beginning the masque in early twilight.

The architecture of the Cranbrook Theatre follows in its fundamental forms the early Greek theatres. But the raised stage is Roman, and the use of the pilasters suggests Renaissance influence. The pilasters and cornices, together with the two relief panels set in the walls of the stage buildings, give an effect of richness foreign to the true Greek theatre, and avoid its usual appearance of austerity. The whole effect has a loveliness without parallel in the existing theatres of ancient or modern times. The structure was designed by Mr. Booth in collaboration with Marcus R. Burrowes, an architect of Detroit.

The so-called "Greek Theatre" at Bakersfield, California, follows the Roman type in almost every

structural detail. In the first place, it is built on the flat, instead of being hollowed out of a hillside, as was the Greek fashion; and the "skene" and auditorium are joined in a single building. The auditorium, too, forms only a semi-circle, and is set close to the stage, as was the custom in the Roman theatres. The three tiers of seats and the terrace above accommodate only a few hundred spectators, although an upper auditorium could easily be added. The structure is in effect a miniature Roman theatre, occupying an almost unique position among modern open-air structures. What it loses in the sense of majesty, through its smallness, it gains in the sense of intimacy. One can hardly imagine a more charming setting for poetic drama, and especially for those amateur performances that so often are too slight to dominate the large Greek theatre or indoor theatre stages, and yet are very effective in their proper atmosphere on a miniature stage and before a miniature auditorium. The openings in the stage-wall at the back, designed by the architect to be filled by shrubs and hedges, form the only drawback of the theatre, interfering seriously with the acoustics. The mistake is corrected to some extent by hanging heavy curtains during the times of performance. This little theatre is owned by

the city, and is used by schools, musical organizations, and amateur dramatic societies.

The open-air theatre at Pomona College, Claremont, California, is an interesting hybrid form in which the auditorium is of the classic architectural type, but with a stage background of the nature theatre type. The auditorium is modelled after that of the Hearst Greek Theatre at Berkeley, having the same arrangement of sunken orchestra-circle, low steps for chairs, diazoma on the level of the stage floor, and more sharply rising tiers of seats above. The one noticeable difference is that tunnel entrances are brought through under the seats, after the manner of the old Roman arenas. The stage front is a concrete wall, but for the floor the ground has simply been levelled, and there is no rear stage-wall. The background is simply a park-like landscape with lawn, trees and shrubs. For pageants and masques the advantages of this natural background over the architectural one at the Hearst Greek Theatre are evident; but for the more dramatic sorts of play, that demand concentration of attention, and for the various lectures, academic exercises, concerts, and similar activities for which a college theatre is continually utilized, the structure at Berkeley is incomparably better.

The Pomona theatre would seem to be perfectly

fitted to that sort of dramatic masque which Americans like Thomas Wood Stevens, Kenneth Sawyer Goodman and Joseph Lindon Smith have done so much to develop, a form that demands a flexible background of great natural beauty, to which the rigid architectural wall of the Greek "skene" is totally unsuited. But anything approaching intensive drama, and anything demanding close attention to the spoken word and sequence of incident, would lose half its effectiveness on the Pomona stage, because there is no sense of intimacy, and the eye is continually invited to wander from the fore-stage to the beautiful bits of landscape at the back. A study of this theatre greatly strengthens the impression that no open-air playhouse can adequately house both the very dramatic play and the pageant, both Greek tragedy and American masque; the builders must choose the general kind of production to be given, and then build for that.\*

For Garfield Park, Chicago, a theatre has been planned specifically for pageant-like productions,

\* Since this book was written I have visited Forest Park Theatre at St. Louis, which also combines a nature stage with an architectural auditorium. The stage seems well-equipped for pageant production and other spectacular entertainment. But as I looked at the playhouse, the truth that struck me most forcibly was this: if a theatre is to be in any degree architectural, a real architect should prepare the design. The auditorium at Forest Park appears to have been laid out by an engineer—or perhaps by a plumber. It is a thing of concrete steps and iron piping—utterly devoid of architectural beauty, and altogether disillusioning. Photographs



ABOVE, THE STAGE OF THE GREEK THEATRE AT POMONA, CALIFORNIA. HERE AN AUDITORIUM OF THE CLASSIC ARCHITECTURAL TYPE IS COMBINED WITH A NATURE-THEATRE STAGE. BELOW, THE GREEK THEATRE AT BAKERSFIELD, CALIFORNIA. THIS IS A FREE ADAPTATION OF ROMAN RATHER THAN GREEK FORMS.

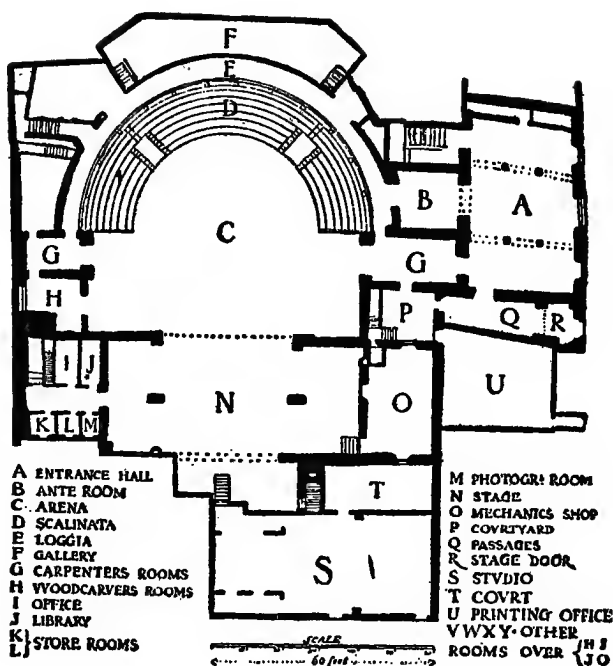
[LEWIS P. HOBART, ARCHITECT]



and like the Pomona theatre it is to have no rear stage-wall. But here the stage is framed by high pillars, two on each side, giving a formal touch and serving to concentrate sight lines on the centre of the stage. These pillars, too, shield lights to be used during performances at night.

Another theatre of great size, but in pure classic style, is to be built in one of the parks at Los Angeles, California. The plans call for the immediate building of an auditorium seating ten thousand spectators, with provision for an eventual addition to seat thirty thousand more. The "skené" will be similar to that of the Hearst Greek Theatre and will be decorated with Ionic columns, but the stage floor will be two hundred feet long and fifty feet deep.

Of the modern open-air theatres of purely architectural design in Europe, by far the most interesting is the Arena Goldoni at Florence, Italy. This is a curious combination of the Roman theatre and the arena types. It is like half of an arena with a raised stage opposite the seats. The stage is open at the front, but is roofed. The level floor below the stage, the arena itself in a narrower sense, is of the open-air theatre at Anoka, Minnesota, indicate a similar lack of decorative values. If a theatre is to depart at all from the pure nature-theatre type, the designer should be competent to add that legitimate attractiveness with which the architect is supposed to endow all his creations.



*Plan of the Arena Goldoni, showing the unique arrangement of stage, "arena," and auditorium. This is one of the few buildings in which an open-air theatre is combined with studios, workshops and offices—a type that American "experimental theatre" groups can study to advantage.*

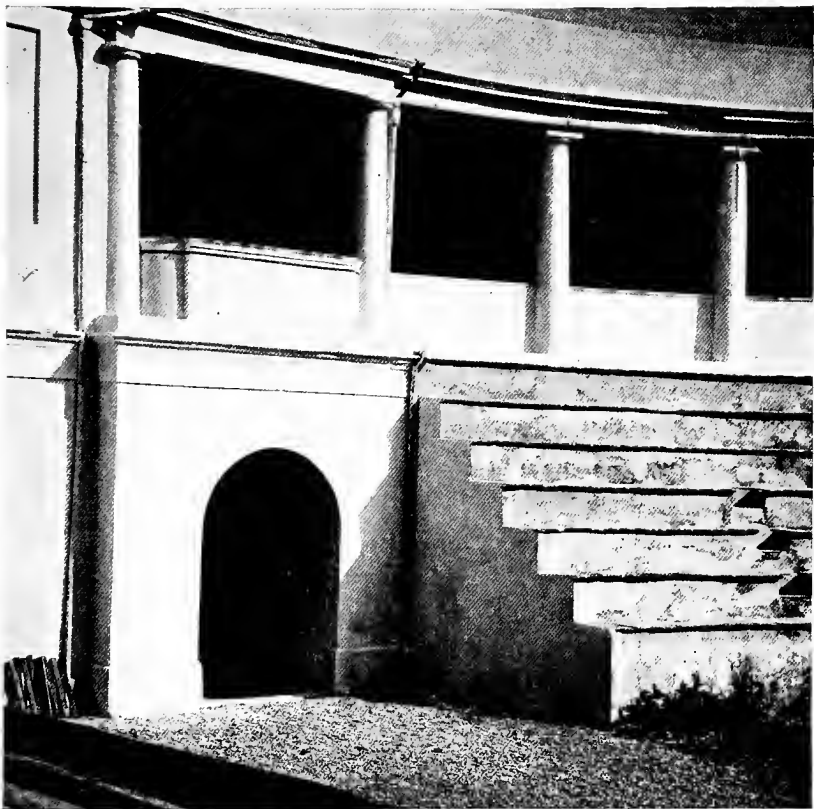


larger than the stage, and may be used by the actors if desired, or may be added to the seating space. The auditorium proper is comparatively small, consisting of seven rising tiers of stone seats. Back of these there is a portico or loggia, and above that a small gallery where a number of chairs can be placed. Fifteen hundred spectators can easily be accommodated. A certain quiet charm is remarked by all visitors to the theatre. A recent writer has said: "The two immediate impressions which one receives on entering the building are its unexpectedness and its beauty. On coming in from the narrow Florentine street the first impression created is one of exquisite surprise, of having discovered some beautiful secret thing. The next impression is of a profound peace, due partly to a certain quietness and dignity in the architecture, partly to the silence, which, for all the keen and varied activities of the many workers, reigns over the whole."

The Arena Goldoni stands on the site of an ancient convent and is rich in historic associations. It was built in 1818, as part of an elaborate group of buildings, including ball-rooms, a closed theatre and billiard halls, designed by an ambitious Florentine to offer "decent diversions for every season of the year." The diversions in the open-air theatre at this time, however, seem to have been more riot-

ous than dignified, for there are well-founded stories of official intervention at certain of the gatherings. Recently the Arena has passed into the hands of Gordon Craig and his associates, and it is here that the School for the Art of the Theatre, of which Craig dreamed so lovingly and which he planned so long, has finally been established. Nowhere could there be found an atmosphere more inspiring for the work of dramatic experimenters than in this charming open-air structure that still retains something of the cloistered silence of convent days. Similar theatres built during the nineteenth century exist elsewhere in Italy, but whatever may have been the development of dramatic art that called them into being, none of them except the Arena Goldoni is now notable for its activities.

The only modern European theatre that follows closely the Greek traditions is that at Bradfield in England. Here the auditorium forms considerably more than a half-circle, and the orchestra pit is a complete circle with an altar in the centre, after the Greek fashion. The stage building is an ingenious arrangement of Greek motives, but in a form that has no parallel in the classic theatres. The stage is in effect a covered porch, with the conventional five doorways for entrances and exits. While the building loses much of the dignity and spacious-



A CORNER OF THE ARENA GOLDONI, AT FLORENCE, ITALY, AS SEEN  
FROM THE STAGE.



ness of the classic theatres, this recessed porch would doubtless serve to frame the action and to concentrate the interest of the audience better than the more open Greek stage. The whole theatre is surrounded by masses of foliage, which not only increase the sense of shelter but add greatly to the beauty of the place.

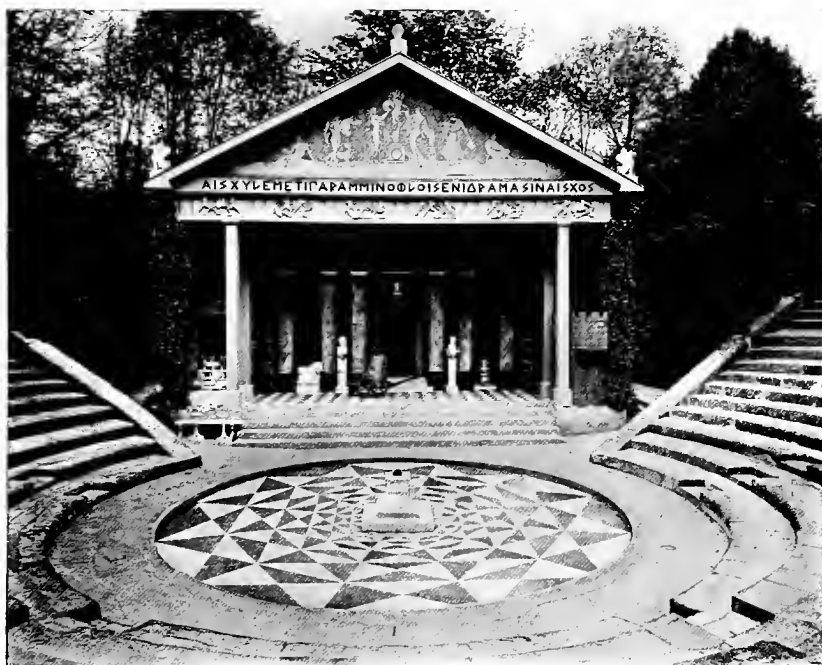
The finest productions at the theatre have been the classic revivals by Granville Barker, who has pointed the way to so many innovations in the English theatre. Each year the students of Bradfield College produce in the original tongue one of the masterpieces of Greek drama; and the five performances of each, given during a week in June, are attended by people from all parts of England. The auditorium, which is of concrete, seats two thousand, but only about fourteen hundred spectators have a clear view of the stage. Tickets are not sold for the poorer seats—a fact that may be commended to the usual commercial managers for thoughtful consideration. The Bradfield theatre is sometimes known as the “Chalk-cliff Theatre,” because it was hollowed out of an old chalk-pit.

At Béziers, in France, there is a so-called “arena-theatre,” built in imitation partly of the Greek theatre and partly of the Roman amphitheatre, which is larger than any other modern out-door playhouse

(barring such temporary arrangements as the St. Louis pageant theatre). But the structure is only of wood, and it has been given up chiefly to spectacle and opera, with elaborate and atrocious imitations of indoor-stage settings.

Of modern structures modelled after the ancient stadion, circus and amphitheatre (or arena), there are many, such as the bull-rings of Spain and the athletic stadia throughout the world; but these buildings have very little to do with dramatic art. At the Harvard Stadium in Cambridge notable productions have been staged, as well as in the Yale Bowl and at the stadion of the College of the City of New York. But while the spectacular effects were fine, the acoustic properties of the structures are so poor that a great deal of the true dramatic element was lost. In the stadion at Tacoma, Washington, an annual dramatic festival is held, but very wisely the production is made rather a pageant than a play.

Of the contemporary Italian outdoor theatres, or "arenas" as they are often termed, practically all are negligible both architecturally and as contributing to dramatic art. Many are simply indoor theatres with the auditorium roofs lifted, with stages that are given over to every sophisticated device that modern "scenic artists" and modern chorus-



THE ORCHESTRA AND STAGE OF THE GREEK THEATRE  
AT BRADFELD, ENGLAND.





girls can invent. Others have rustic stages—but these usually approximate the German beer-garden type, which, indeed, is not unknown in the amusement parks on this side of the Atlantic.

A word may profitably be said regarding the type of drama suited to the modern Greek theatre stage. In the first place the lack of a curtain makes necessary the entrance and exit of all the actors in full sight of the audience. In the second place there can be no realistic scenery, so that the modern play that is built with large dependence upon that artificial feature always fails on the bare classic stage. Two types of plays are finely suited to such theatres: first, the Greek tragedies, for nowhere else can they be so well revived with a background reflecting in its dignified architecture the noble beauty of the drama itself; and second, that sort of extensive play which demands a certain concentration of attention and yet has place for pageant-like processions and mob-scenes. Entirely out of place here are the intensive plays that demand an intimate interior atmosphere, as well as the extensive pageants and masques that demand all outdoors for their setting. But the two intermediate types, the purely dramatic play that is clean-cut and gripping enough to dominate the large stage, and the play

that is built against a background of large masses of actors, here find their finest expression.

Because the theatre of classic form is thus better fitted than any other to house certain sorts of drama, and because no finer form of open-air assembly hall has ever been invented for lectures and concerts and meetings, doubtless the Greek or Roman playhouse will continue to increase in numbers on university campuses and in public parks, both in America and in the rest of the world.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE MEDLÆVAL RELIGIOUS THEATRE AND ITS SURVIVALS

**A**FTER the decay of the Roman theatre, the Western world was barren of dramatic activity for many centuries. The rebirth of the drama came in the elaboration of an incident of the church service, probably in the tenth or eleventh century. The middle of the thirteenth century saw this activity still purely liturgical in character; but the following fifty years witnessed the development of the Mystery Play, which quickly made its way out of the church into the open; and by the middle of the fourteenth century the separation of the dramatic production from the church service was complete, and outdoor drama was firmly established as an independent expression of religious feeling.

The first productions out-of-doors probably were given on the church steps. Although the auditorium was not all the audience might have desired, no finer outdoor stage could be imagined for religious plays.

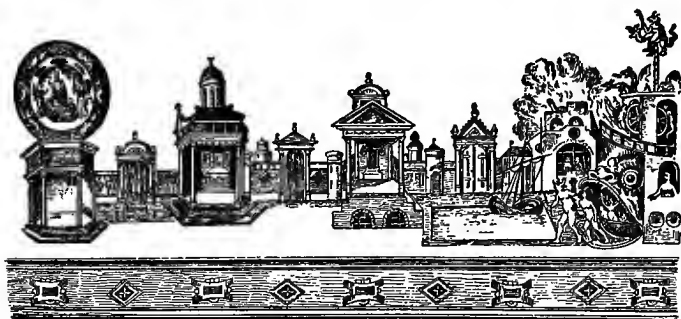
The towering church façade as background doubtless intensified the dignity and spiritual effectiveness of the production; the music drifting out to the audience from the church itself must have been strangely appealing; and doubtless God was the more convincing when he came on the stage through the church doors. Probably it was the form of this stage on the church steps that served as a model for the platforms later erected against houses or in the open square, with the people crowding around on three sides.

The Mystery Play, following closely the scriptural stories acceptable to the church, soon gave way to the Miracle Play, into which crept gradually apocryphal stories and legends of the saints, and which was characterized more often by a very broad human feeling than by religious fervor. From the time when the Mystery Play left the church steps to the time when the Miracle stage became a set type, there is little direct evidence regarding the detailed form of the mediæval theatre. Doubtless it went through many changes, although always it seems to have been of wood, and usually built for a single cycle of performances, to be torn down as soon as the "season" was done. There is extant a description of a theatre built at Autun in 1516, which had an auditorium similar to those built by

the Romans; but as the writer remarks that there were seats for eighty thousand people, there is a reasonable doubt as to the accuracy of his statements. There is also evidence of a sort that a Mystery was produced in the old amphitheatre at Bourges. But the typical auditorium of the mediæval theatre is only a thing of conjecture.

Of the stages on which the Miracles were produced, at least from the end of the fourteenth century on, there is more knowledge. In France these stages took a set form, usually being raised a few feet, and having at the back representations of the various "localities" from which the characters were supposed to come, or which they were to occupy during the action. Generally these localities were like boxes or booths, built either directly on the stage floor, or with only a few steps to lift them above the common level; or as a second story, in which case the actors in them were raised above those on the stage into full view of the audience. Some of the Miracle Plays called for as many as twenty-four localities. In the late theatres of this type the localities were decorated to indicate the characters to which they belonged, one being for the Virgin Mary, one for God, and so on. Invariably the two localities at the ends represented Paradise and Hell, the latter usually being in the shape of a dragon's mouth.

The well-known engraving of the setting for the Passion Play at Valenciennes in 1547 shows a raised stage with an elaborate series of localities in a curve at the back. Hell is formed by the mouth of a ferocious-looking dragon, and the adjoining Purgatory is emitting very realistic flames.



*Stage of the Passion Play theatre at Valenciennes, 1547.*

In England the system of presenting the Miracles in cycles, each guild being entrusted with a certain incident or scene, led to the use of movable instead of stationary stages. The guild of the bakers, appropriately presenting "The Last Supper," could hardly use the same stage-car as the barbers presenting "The Baptism of Jesus." And although one stage arrangement might do for the fishmongers with their "Flood" and the shipwrights with "The Building of the Ark," something different would be

demanding by the cooks who were entrusted with "The Harrying of Hell"—because "they were in the habit of taking things out of the fire." Thus each guild prepared a stage-on-wheels to suit its own appropriate part of the cycle. When the day of performance arrived, into the open space where the play was to be presented was wheeled the first "pageant-car," on which the first incident or act was performed; that finished, car one went on to the next "station," and car two took its place—and so on, until the whole series of cars (varying from three to twenty-four) had formed the stage at each one of the several stations.

The cars varied widely in form and appointments. None could be as elaborate as the French stationary stages, but often they were built in two stories, and many of them showed several localities—"Hell-mouth" being a characteristic feature now as before. Some were curtained and roofed, while others were open at the top and on three sides. At some of the stations auxiliary stages were built, with an open middle space into which each of the cars in turn was drawn. Similar pageant-cars were utilized in Spain long after they had gone out of use in England. Lope de Vega wrote four hundred "scenes," designed for production out-of-doors during the processions of the Bloody Sacrament. These produc-

tions were forbidden in Spain in 1765. But even to-day there are survivals of the pageant-car play in parts of Spain, and in such religious processions as that of the Holy Blood at Bruges.

In Cornwall a special type of open-air theatre developed in the time of the Miracle Plays. This was in the form of a low amphitheatre, somewhat like our present-day athletic fields, with a few tiers of seats built on heaped-up earthen banks surrounding the "field" or "stage." The ruins of such theatres, or "rounds" as they are sometimes called, are found at several places in Cornwall, the best known, and one of the best preserved, being at St. Just, near Penwith. Edwin Norris, in "The Ancient Cornish Drama," describes the structure as follows: "It was an exact circle of 126 feet diameter; the perpendicular height of the bank, from the area within, now seven feet; but the height from the bottom of the ditch without, ten feet at present, formerly more. The seats consist of six steps, fourteen inches wide and one foot high, with one on the top of all, where the rampart is about seven feet wide. . . . The benches are of stone." Of the methods of production and the settings, when the Miracle Plays were brought to the "rounds," there is no authentic evidence.

It was not a far jump from the pageant-car to the



temporary platform stage that was used for the Moralities and early secular plays in England. Nor was it a far jump from that again to the stage of the early Elizabethan playhouse. The first real English theatres had a double origin. When the drama had in succession gone out of the hands of the churchmen and then out of the hands of the guilds, it was carried on by companies of strolling actors. These bands were wont to set up their temporary platforms in the inn courtyards. The encircling galleries formed excellent boxes for the nobles of the audience, while the ground before the stage did very well for the common people. The Elizabethan theatre was evolved from this inn-court arrangement and from the "bear-ring," a sort of arena or amphitheatre in which the people of the time were accustomed to enjoy bear-baiting, cock-fighting and similar edifying exhibitions. James Burbage built the first playhouse, after this pattern, and "The Theatre," "The Swan," "The Rose," and the others, were simply variations of the one type. Thus Shakespeare wrote for a theatre with a high round exterior wall, with a circle of roofed boxes, tier over tier, with a "pit" open to the sky, where the "groundlings" sat, and with a stage partly covered and partly open. How far the theatre developed toward the pure indoor type during the



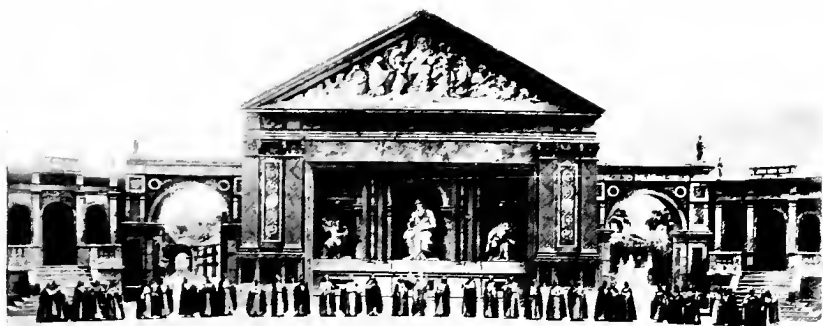
period of Shakespearian "first nights" is uncertain. But before the great poet-dramatist's death, no doubt, the typical playhouse had most of the characteristics of the indoor stage of to-day, and very little of the airiness and freedom and openness that theretofore had persisted from the time of the Greeks. Already everything pointed indoors—and with Shakespeare's death the breath of the out-of-doors went out of English drama.

Among the open-air theatres of to-day there is no survival of the Elizabethan or Renaissance playhouse. The modern drama and the modern audience demand either four close walls carefully roofed over, so that no nuance of meaning and no subtle facial expression may be lost, or else all out-of-doors—and there is no place for the intermediate type. But of the Mystery or Miracle theatre there is one very close parallel, and a very notable one: the Ober-Ammergau Passion Play Theatre.

Most of the writers about the Ober-Ammergau Passion Play insist that it is not a survival of the mediæval religious drama, but a separate growth; and it is well-known that the current series of productions goes back only to 1633, when the people of the village, for deliverance from a plague, vowed to present the Passion of Jesus every tenth year. Others, however, claim to have found evidence of

earlier dramatic activity of this sort. The point need not be debated. But one who has studied the mediæval stage need only see the Ober-Ammergau theatre to be convinced that, whether it is survival or reversion, it is unmistakably of the Miracle Play type. The existence of the several "localities" is the most striking of the characteristic features. For here on one side of the stage are Annas' palace and a street in Jerusalem, and on the other side a street and Pilate's house, while in the centre is the curtained proscenium arch behind which the tableaux are presented. The general form of the stage, too, raised a few feet above the ground, and with the curved architectural background, is remarkably like that of the typical mediæval stage.

It is not necessary to describe the play here. Its fame has already gone out to every corner of the world. But it is worth while to consider the relation between the play and the outdoor setting. One wonders whether this drama that is so simple and so spiritual, and that is such a spontaneous expression of the religious faith of the people, could be adequately given on a roofed-in stage. The whole spirit of it is so much the spirit of the open-air, and the sky overhead and the mountains in the background are so much a part of the *atmosphere* of the action, that any other setting would be not only



THE STAGE OF THE PASSION PLAY THEATRE AT OBER-AMMERGAU.



unnatural, but actually destructive to the entire effectiveness of the play. The spirit of reverence that suffuses the whole production, the unaffected earnestness of the villagers, the solemn sense of religious worship—all these would be lost if the stage were taken indoors in the modern fashion. Unthinking visitors to Ober-Ammergau, complaining that it rained during the performance and that there was no shelter,—as if the play were designed primarily for them—brought about the roofing of the auditorium for the performance of 1900. It compels one to realize how utterly the contemporary theatre makes the outward pleasing of the audience its first and dominating concern. The drama that exists for art or religion or the other great moving forces of life survives only in such simple, spontaneous productions as this one in an out-of-the-way mountain village. And even here a partial concession was made, in the covering of the seats—although it is to be hoped that the villagers will always cling to their open stage.

The theatre at Ober-Ammergau is comparatively large, being 250 feet long by 140 feet wide; the total seating capacity is about 4500, and the benches are of wood. The extreme stage depth is sixty feet. At the ends of the stage are the two "palaces," and next to these the streets of Jerusalem;

and in the centre is the curtained inner stage where the tableaux are presented. The realistic painted back-drops used in these tableaux form the one modern note in the staging.

Of the other modern Passion Plays none is so notable as that at Ober-Ammergau, as regards either the production or the theatre. The most important ones are found in the villages of Southern Germany and the Tyrol. That given at a village near Innsbruck is said to be a worthy rival of the Ober-Ammergau production, and is quite as old. The Passion Play at Selzach, in Switzerland, is a modern imitation, and is not yet characterized by the simplicity and reverence which tradition has imparted to the Ober-Ammergau villagers.

One might go farther afield and find parallels to the mediæval religious drama in the devotional festivals of other Christian countries, and especially in the nativity plays that are acted here and there throughout the Western world. In non-Christian countries, too, there are processional and dramatic episodes that are strangely like those of the old and modern Christian church. The religious drama of Thibet, and the ceremonial drama of Japan are typical examples. But although most of these activities find their natural setting out-of-doors, there is little to record about open-air theatres built for



them.\* For the present one may only hope that the Ober-Ammergau theatre will long survive, to remind men that once the church and the theatre united to give dramatic expression to man's innate spirit of worship. And one may well wonder whether religion will ever again give rise to a form of drama so spontaneous and so genuine that it will naturally find its setting under the open sky.

\* It is said that the Japanese No-dramas were originally played out-of-doors, but there is no available evidence in English regarding the form of the theatres or the date of bringing the productions indoors. In the modern enclosed No-theatres the stage has an ornamental roof (below the regular theatre roof), which is said to be a survival from the old open-air structure.

## CHAPTER V

### THE NATURE THEATRE

OF all the types of open-air theatre, the nature theatre is the one that has the maximum of openness and natural beauty. It is the closest to the heart of the out-of-doors, and in it Nature brings her loveliness most effectively to the aid of art.

Unlike the Greek and Roman theatres, the nature theatre has no masonry bowl or architectural stage. Unlike the garden theatre, it has no pergolas, or clipped hedge "wings" or walled stage platform. While it usually is shaped to semblance of theatre form, with cleared stage and rising auditorium, man's manipulation still is disguised as far as possible. Nature is trained subtly and inconspicuously to the uses of dramatic art. The usual background is one of trees and shrubs, though some of the most inspiring nature stages have vistas of mountain, sea and valley; and sometimes rivers, brooks and lakes actually form part of the stage equipment.

Of the European nature theatres the one that is most important in dramatic achievement, and one of the most interesting structurally, is the Harz Mountain Theatre (Das Harzer Bergtheater) at Thale in the Harz Mountains, Germany. It was built in 1903 by Dr. Ernst Wachler, one of the pioneers in the open-air theatre movement in Europe. Dr. Wachler turned to the production of drama out-of-doors not only to escape the artificial trapperies and trickeries of the indoor theatre, but with the definite intention of contributing to the development of a German national drama. More than a century before, Klopstock had pointed out the possibilities of such a venture, and Goethe in his time showed more than a passing interest in the idea. But it remained for the twentieth century to see a German open-air theatre offering an extended series of plays each season, with the avowed purpose of expressing national ideals and contributing to a purely national art.

The Germans long have chafed under the domination of French and Italian ideals in the world's accepted drama and in the accepted form of theatre—and with reason. The Southern ideal in dramatic art was of a highly polished, over-decorated, and entirely sophisticated sort of play, that would lend itself easily to combination with "social" functions;

and the Italian-French theatre, with its horse-shoe shape that divided the house into sections of good and bad seats, with its boxes for the be-jewelled aristocracy, and with its be-gilded and be-spangled ornamentation, was all that a democratic house of art should not be. In the last decade Professor Littmann, Professor Kaufmann, and others of the Germans, have developed a form of theatre building, based on the Greek semi-circular pattern, without boxes, and dignified in decoration, which in its simple beauty and perfect fitness to use is an infinite improvement on the French-Italian type; and Wachler and his associates have attempted in a similar way to displace the old artificial drama by something similarly simple and beautiful. The Harz Mountain Theatre has presented an unusual number of plays by contemporary dramatists, dealing to a great extent with Teutonic mythology and German life; and the more than five hundred performances have at least pointed the way to the development of a new sort of national and folk drama. The Greek classics have been revived and studied, since the Greeks were the great masters of outdoor drama; and naturally the works of Hans Sachs have been brought back to life; and the German classics have had their place. But, important as these and the new folk dramas may have been from the German



TWO VIEWS OF THE HARZ MOUNTAIN THEATRE.



standpoint, it is interesting to note that Shakespeare's "A Midsummer Night's Dream" has proved the most popular of all the theatre's productions.

The auditorium of the Harz Mountain Theatre is on a mountain side, with an inspiring outlook over wooded valleys and ranges of hills. The seats are wooden benches on roughly shaped stone terraces. About one thousand spectators can be accommodated. The stage is merely a large levelled space, with jagged boulders at one end, and a few small trees here and there. All along the back is a rustic fence, serving presumably to prevent the actors from taking a too realistic plunge over the precipitous cliff below.

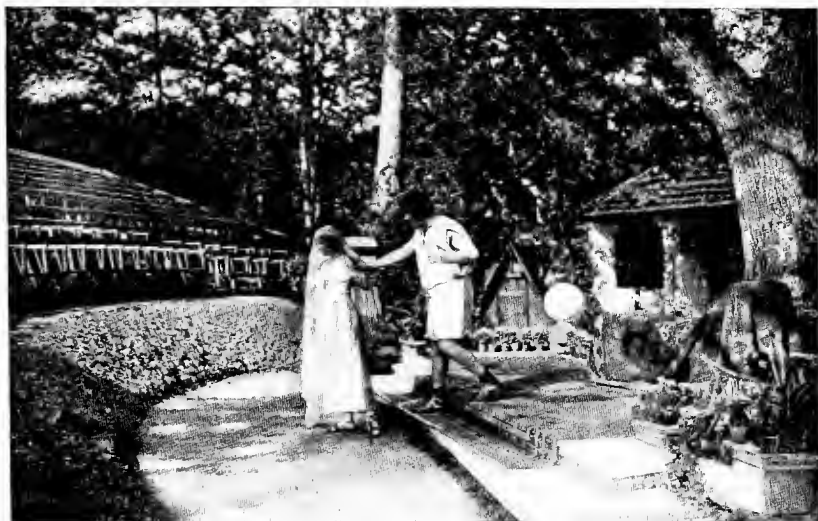
The open-air theatre at Hertenstein, near Lucerne, Switzerland, stands next in importance to that at Thale, among the nature theatres of Europe. It was established in 1909 by Rudolf Lorenz, who already had had long experience with dramatic production in the open, and with two or three improvised outdoor theatres. At Hertenstein the productions have been less original, and less important as influencing the growth of a body of national drama, than those at the Harz Mountain Theatre. But the revivals of the classics have been far finer. In the first two years of the theatre's existence noted

actors appeared in old Greek dramas, in plays by Goethe and Hebbel, in Shakespeare, and even in the work of such moderns as Ibsen and Hauptmann. Discerning critics have pronounced the achievement of the theatre a distinct artistic success; but financially the venture has proved a failure—due more, perhaps, to its comparative isolation than to a lack of interest in serious drama.

Structurally the Hertenstein theatre is especially interesting. The auditorium is comparatively large, with rising tiers of strongly built wooden seats arranged in the form of a wide arc. Between the stage and the auditorium is a sloping bank that effectually increases illusion by making a distinct break between the plane of action and the real world of the spectators. The stage is over one hundred feet wide, and its greatest depth is nearly eighty feet. On the stage three buildings were constructed to provide proper entrances and exits for those plays which would not fit into the natural setting: in the centre, a temple, or palace-front, in massive classic style; at the right a three-storied tower; and at the left a porch-like structure. Large trees add greatly to the attractiveness of the stage, and the background is of trees and shrubs.

Although the whole composition is set in a natural wood, and has many of the characteristics of the





THE NATURE THEATRE AT HERTENSTEIN, SWITZERLAND.

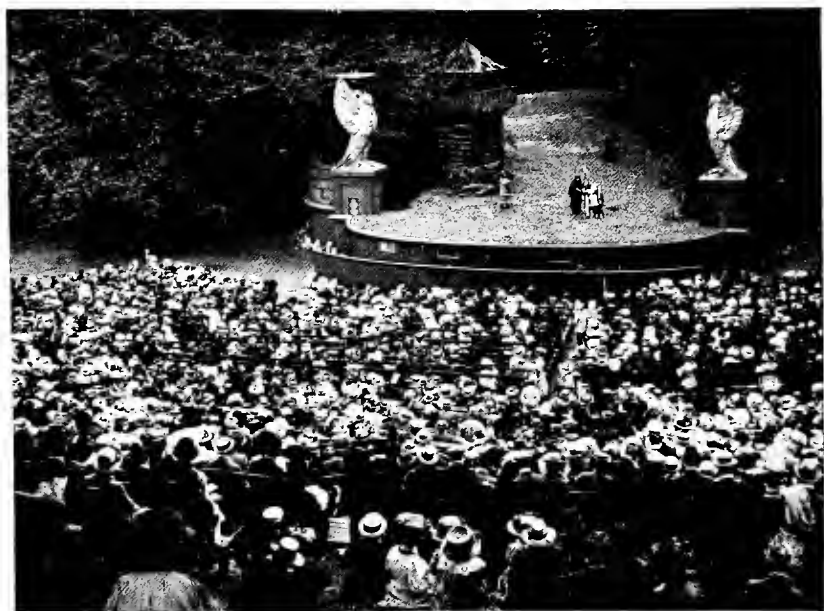


nature theatre type, the existence of the buildings on the stage challenges a comparison with the conscientiously natural American nature theatres. In the playhouses at Peterborough, and Meriden, and Madison, and in the Bohemian Grove Theatre, there is a careful avoidance of the artificial touch, and especially of the formal lines of man-made structures in the stage background. In America the prime consideration has been to keep the theatre as wild as possible, with a consequent maximum use of the beauties of nature. Perhaps because long training in the traditional theatre has made impossible an absolute divorce from the artificial elements of the indoor stage, or perhaps because they prefer to sacrifice natural beauty to convenience in presentation, the European directors have failed to take advantage of nature to the full. Practically all their outdoor playhouses show concessions to the standards of indoor art—even incongruous painted scenery occasionally finding its way into the open. At the nature theatre at Potsdam, Germany, the artificial element is even more pronounced than at Hertenstein, a large permanent building forming most of the stage background. The most satisfying example of the pure nature theatre type on the Continent is the "Théâtre de la Nature," at Cauterets in France. Not only is the construction

entirely of natural elements, but the staging has been wholesomely independent of indoor stage accessories.

In the theatre in the Klampenborg Woods near Copenhagen, the productions have been made with a minimum of artificial "scenery" in the background; but here the hand of man is only too evident in the construction of the stage itself. The stage floor is raised about eight feet above the lowest level of the auditorium, and a wooden retaining wall bounds it at the front. In this wall are several windows, which give light to the dressing rooms that have been constructed under the stage. A few feet before the wall is a solid board fence, leaving a space in which the orchestra can be hidden. At each side of the stage-front is a massive pedestal, perhaps seven feet in height, surmounted by an immense statue of a bird. The two vigorously carved figures that thus stand guard over the stage, one at either hand, add a very decorative touch to the composition, and afford a finished appearance that most nature theatres lack; but one who has not seen a production in the theatre may well speculate upon the possibility of the huge statues dwarfing the action, and upon the seeming incongruity of any such artificial feature in a place where a perfect union of art and nature is designed to be effected.

The Klampenborg theatre is unusually large,



THE KLAMPENBORG WOODS THEATRE, NEAR COPENHAGEN,  
DENMARK.



easily accommodating more than three thousand spectators. Perhaps this is one reason why it has been more successful financially than any other nature theatre. With the most able members of the dramatic profession in Denmark employed, the first season, in the summer of 1910, yielded a net profit of more than five thousand dollars. The plays given during the season were only two: "A Midsummer Night's Dream" and a Danish national drama.

Perhaps the most remarkable of the American nature theatres, and the oldest, is that in a redwood grove near Monte Rio, California, owned by the Bohemian Club of San Francisco. In the natural beauty of its stage background it is unequalled among the forest theatres of the world. The stage is a steep hillside, which is covered with a dense growth of underbrush, except where a trail winds up, now open, now half-hidden, and finally lost in the trees and shrubs. At the bottom is a wide open space, and several smaller platforms stand at intervals along the trail, one above the other, each masked by plants; and the actors may be grouped on any one of these, or by ones and twos along the trail. The stage is framed by two towering redwood trees, whose naked trunks stretch upward until they are lost in the mass of foliage far overhead. Other

redwoods, two and three hundred feet high, rise out of the hillside at intervals, forming a succession of diminishing inner frames, and giving a remarkable sense of distance to the setting. Immediately before the stage is a sunken pit for the orchestra, screened by a thicket of ferns; and back of this the rows of seats, fashioned from redwood logs, begin. Like the stage, the auditorium is surrounded by immense redwood trees.

In this theatre the Bohemian Club has presented its annual "grove play" since 1902, developing a new form of musical masque that is unique in the field of dramatic art. The play has evolved gradually from the club's old-time midsummer celebration, or "jinks," but its form has really been determined by the physical features of the theatre, the strict limitations as well as the magnificent possibilities of the almost vertical stage shaping the spectacular as well as the poetic features of the production. The type as it now stands offers a close parallel to the old-time masque, but with greater emphasis upon musical accompaniment; the story is always poetically worked out, and there is a frank reliance upon the purely visual as distinguished from the subtly emotional elements. Masque-like in its poetic presentation of the story, approaching opera in its dependence upon music, and pageant-like in



the breadth and magnificence of its decorative effects, the Grove Play is indeed a novel as well as a very beautiful form. Among those who have written the plays are George Sterling, Herman Sheffauer, and Will Irwin, whose "Hamadryads" touched perhaps the highest point of all in literary achievement. Porter Garnett, author of one of the most successful of the plays, has written also a book about the Grove Theatre and the dramatic type developed there. The volume contains synopses of all the plays presented up to 1908, and is well worth perusing if one is interested in the byways of the art of the theatre.

A second California nature theatre is that constructed by the colony of writers and artists at Carmel-by-the-Sea, named "The Forest Theatre." Structurally it is unimportant; the auditorium is made up of rows of wooden seats on a gently sloping hillside; and the stage is merely a raised wooden floor, against a thicket of trees and shrubs. On this platform a small stage building usually is erected, varying according to the type of play to be presented, being now a miniature Egyptian temple, and again an Indian hut. Dramatically the theatre is one of the most important in the West, for here the plays of several promising dramatists have been tried out, and extensive experiments made

in staging. Of the local authors whose work has been presented, the most notable is Mary Austin. Of late there has been a tendency to widen the field of the theatre's activity, and some of the little-acted poetic dramas of William Butler Yeats were recently produced very successfully.

Comparable with the Bohemian Grove Theatre in the wildness of its setting is the theatre of the Outdoor Players at Peterborough, New Hampshire. Two large trees frame a comparatively level, but boulder-strewn, stage. On both sides there are pine trees, maples, hemlocks, and thick undergrowth, and at the back is a wooded hillside. The bed of a little brook separates the stage from the auditorium, which also is a very small clearing in the midst of dense woods. During the first "season," in the summer of 1914, chairs and benches were used for seats; but now semi-circular terraces have been built of the native rock. The smallness of the auditorium, which seats only a few hundred people, and the thick foliage on all sides, combine to create a sense of seclusion and intimacy that is rare in nature playhouses. The activities of the theatre are notable as indicating the extent of interest in open-air drama in America. So far they have been limited to productions by the Outdoor Players, who constitute a school for the training of those who de-



THE NATURE THEATRE AT VASSAR COLLEGE. THE SUNKEN  
PATHWAY DIVIDES THE SLOPING AUDITORIUM (AT THE LEFT) FROM  
THE STAGE, AND ALSO SERVES AS A HIDDEN RECESS FOR THE  
ORCHESTRA.

[LORING UNDERWOOD, ARCHITECT]



sire to produce outdoor drama. The student-actors are drawn from all parts of the country, and are instructed in composition, staging, costuming, acting and dancing, by such well-known leaders as Livingston Platt and Marie Ware Laughton. Among the productions of 1914 was Poliziano's masque "Orfeo."

The nature theatre at Vassar College is of a less rugged type. The lines clearly have been shaped by human hands, and yet the natural atmosphere has been preserved. But the reflection is of nature in her gentler aspect. There is a suggestion of the more artificial garden theatre in the hemlock hedge which bounds the auditorium at the front, and again in the pool on the stage. Of particular interest structurally is the sunken passageway between auditorium and stage, which serves as a pit in which to hide the orchestra at times of performance. There are no permanent seats, folding chairs being placed on the sloping lawn when needed.

At the beautiful little Dell Theatre on the grounds of the Hill School, Pottstown, Pennsylvania, a formal touch is added by the planting at each side of the stage, while the background is left as a pretty bit of tangled woodland. The terraces, which seat nine hundred people, have been shaped concentrically, but the slope is not great enough to make

chairs unnecessary. The theatre is used in connection with class-work; but the really important events there have been the productions of Hermann Hagedorn's "The Heart of Youth" and "Victory."

One of the simplest and yet one of the most satisfying of nature stages is that of the little open-air theatre at Meriden, New Hampshire. The background is a solid mass of foliage, affording a pleasing sense of enclosure. The stage is given an additional "finished" appearance by a log that has been placed along its front. In productions that demand two "planes of action," as one celestial and one mortal, the log is used to separate the one from the other, the earthly characters never being permitted to intrude on the inner stage of the spirits. In this theatre Percy Mackaye's beautiful bird masque "Sanctuary" was first staged. The production was so successful that the masque was added to the repertory of the Coburn Players; but never will it find a more nearly ideal setting than its initial one at Meriden.

It is largely due to the Coburn Players, perhaps, that the nature theatre idea has taken strong hold at the colleges and normal schools of the Middle West. At least a dozen of these institutions have built or planned outdoor playhouses, with the primary purpose of providing adequate settings for



THE DELL THEATRE, AT POTTSTOWN, PENNSYLVANIA. A COMBINATION OF THE NATURE THEATRE AND GARDEN THEATRE TYPES.





the productions of travelling bands of open-air players. The most interesting of these theatres is on the grounds of the Western Illinois State Normal School at Macomb. A clearing has been made in a wooded ravine, and a raised stage, seventy-five feet deep and forty feet wide, has been constructed of earth and sodded. Its background is an informal arrangement of trees and shrubs, with openings for entrance and exit at irregular intervals. Immediately below the stage is a wide orchestra pit, also of sod, and back of this the concrete "risers" of the auditorium begin. These are in the shape of an arc, the lowest one being seventy feet long, and on the circumference of a circle one hundred feet in diameter. Each "riser" is three feet wide, and each is six inches above the one next below. At times of performance folding chairs are placed on the concrete terraces—an inexpensive arrangement that is common in the Middle Western outdoor theatres. At present the Macomb playhouse seats about six hundred people, but additional terraces are to be placed on the hillside above the present auditorium. The stage also is to be widened to seventy-five feet. The theatre was opened with Shakespearean productions by the Coburn Players in the summer of 1913.

The theatre of the State Normal University, at

Normal, Illinois, is similar to that at Macomb, but is less elaborate and less permanent. The First District Normal School at Kirksville, Missouri, has started the construction of a playhouse that is partly of the nature type and partly of the Greek or architectural type. A massive concrete wall bounds the stage at the front. The orchestra pit is sunk four feet below the stage floor, and back of it the tiers of chairs rise in horseshoe form. Additional seating space is provided by movable "bleachers" which are brought in on runners from the athletic fields. The stage is forty feet wide and thirty feet deep, and slopes up slightly from front to back. An interesting feature is the temporary awning that is erected over auditorium and stage at times of performance, giving shelter from sun and rain.

Very similar to the Macomb Theatre is that connected with the Building of Arts, at Bar Harbor, Maine. The stage, however, is more open, and more indefinite, with large trees scattered here and there. It is, therefore, better fitted for pageants and dances, but not so satisfying as a background for plays. Its existence within a few hundred feet of an indoor theatre suggests a wise foresight on the part of the builders. In a climate that brings scattered rainstorms every month of the year, such an



THE NATURE THEATRE AT MACOMB, ILLINOIS.



arrangement of adjoining outdoor and indoor stages would seem to be imperative.

A distinction may be made between the nature theatre that is designed primarily for the production of plays, and the theatre for pageants and dances. The pageant theatre seldom has the enclosed and more or less intimate atmosphere that is essential to the other sort; it is more open, with wide sweeps of landscape behind the stage, sometimes of river and lake, sometimes of mountains, and sometimes merely of lawns and woods. Perhaps the most perfect of the pageant stages in America, because it combines a certain sense of enclosure with breadth of outlook, is that at Peterborough, New Hampshire, where the MacDowell Memorial Pageants have been presented. A fringe of woodland affords a solid background of foliage for the action, but a vista above carries the eye out to a panorama of hill and forest, with Mount Monadnock in the distance. The stage is unusually large, permitting extensive spectacular effects and processions. The auditorium seats two thousand spectators.

The musical pageant which has developed at the Peterborough theatre is a new and notable type. Under the inspiration of the memory of Edward MacDowell, and with the able aid of such dramatic leaders as Professor George Pierce Baker and

Hermann Hagedorn, the artists and art-lovers of the MacDowell colony have created a form of production that is comparable to the Bohemian Grove Plays. The Peterborough production, however, is distinctly of the pageant rather than the dramatic masque type. It has not the unity of action of the Grove Plays, and it utilizes dancing and spectacle more expansively. It may be described as a musical festival rather than as a musical masque or opera. As the first of its kind, the MacDowell pageant has had great influence on the growth of pageantry throughout the country.

A theatre of the open pageant type, but differing widely from that at Peterborough, has been constructed on the grounds of the University of Wisconsin, at Madison. Groups of trees frame the wooden platform stage at both sides, but at the back there is an almost unbroken view of Lake Mendota. The whole forms a very pretty composition, and a more satisfying background for pageant-like productions could not be desired. The theatre in its present form is not permanent, being in the nature of an experiment. Those interested in drama at the University of Wisconsin, under the leadership of Professor Thomas H. Dickinson, took up the question of open-air theatres with commendable thoroughness and conservatism. They did not



THE PETERBOROUGH PAGEANT THEATRE, AT PETERBOROUGH,  
NEW HAMPSHIRE.

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rush into the construction of an outdoor playhouse; and the story of their study of, and experiment with, the problem should interest every producer of open-air drama. At first plans were drawn for a Greek theatre similar to that at Berkeley. But after studying the productions at Berkeley the Wisconsin producers decided that the architectural type was not at all fitted for the production of the extensive pageant and spectacular masque which are a very distinctive and valuable part of the creative work of the Middle Western dramatists. So the experimental theatre that has been described was erected on the lake front. Immediately, however, it was discovered that while the wide outlook added finely to the spectacular effects and afforded a very flexible setting, there was a loss of intimacy and of concentration of interest that was not to be accepted without serious consideration. Now the experimenters for the time being have abandoned their "meadow theatre," as Professor Dickinson has termed it, and are trying out what they call the "cup" type. This is planned as a compromise between the other two, sacrificing the maximum of openness to a more rounded and protected sort of structure, but still retaining the nature background instead of the architectural "skene." It still is doubtful whether the beautiful outlook can be utilized and the closed-

in feeling at the same time preserved; but one can be very certain that when a permanent theatre is constructed at Madison it will fit local conditions and local needs more perfectly than could any other.

In point of size and breadth of conception the temporary pageant theatre at Forest Park in St. Louis was the most notable ever constructed in the country. The immense auditorium retained almost its natural form, being in the shape of an arc, and sloping just enough to give perfect sight-lines from every portion. At the production of the ambitious Pageant and Masque of Saint Louis, there were seats for forty-five thousand spectators, and it is said that between one hundred and one hundred and fifty thousand people witnessed one of the performances. The stage was built on a scale quite as large. Its front was no less than one thousand feet, and its depth two hundred. The actors in the production numbered seven thousand five hundred. The stage was separated from the auditorium by a lagoon, which was utilized in the pageant and masque for spectacular entrances by boat. To dominate such an immense theatre is a task for a dramatic giant; but Percy Mackaye, with his "Masque of St. Louis," and Thomas Wood Stevens with his accompanying pageant, held the audiences spell-bound, and proved the feasibility of production on a community scale.

Like a miniature edition of the St. Louis pageant theatre is the Bankside Theatre at the University of North Dakota. Here a stream about fifteen feet wide, curving in the shape of a semi-circle, separates stage and auditorium. The stage is approximately one hundred feet along the curving front, and slopes up slightly from the water's edge to a grove of low trees at the back. The present wooden seats of the sloping auditorium are to be replaced by rising concrete terraces. When the theatre is completed according to the plan now in hand the seating capacity will be three thousand. The theatre was dedicated in 1914, when "A Pageant of the North-West" was produced under the direction of Frederick H. Koch.

As the only reason for taking drama to the mountain-tops is to gain breadth of outlook, the mountain theatres are all of the pageant type. The Harzer Bergtheater, to be sure, has done much to develop a new form of pure drama; but when the plays of concentrated dramatic interest have been produced there, it has been found necessary to build up backgrounds of buildings and foliage, blotting out the wide vista over the mountains and valleys. Perhaps the most notable mountain theatre in America, that on Mount Tamalpais, near San Francisco, in the same way is too open for successful production of

intimate drama. When the Sanskrit play "Shakuntala" was produced, most of the poetic subtlety and intimate charm was lost, only the broadest and most obvious of the humorous and pathetic situations carrying to the audience. The things that the average spectator remembered best were quite aside from the characteristic virtues of the play: the groups of horsemen galloping up a glade, across the stage, and away through the trees; the yellow-robed Hindoo standing on a rock, silhouetted against the sky, chanting a Sanskrit prologue in tones quite in keeping with the strangeness of the setting; the groups of gaily-dressed dancers against the trees; and above all, the wonderful view beyond, with the wooded valleys and the foothills seen between two shoulders of the mountain, and still farther down the blue bay on one side and the white fog-banks drifting in from the ocean on the other. In such a theatre surely the only production in which most of the actors' efforts will not be wasted is that in which nature and man collaborate spectacularly in mass effects. It was the experience with "Shakuntala," perhaps, that led the producers to choose more wisely for later productions "Rip van Winkle" and "William Tell."

At the Mount Tamalpais Theatre the auditorium has not been shaped, an irregular hollow affording seating space for perhaps seven or eight thousand



ABOVE, THE BANKSIDE THEATRE, AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH DAKOTA.    BELOW, A PORTION OF THE STAGE OF THE MOUNT TAMALPAIS THEATRE, NEAR MILL VALLEY, CALIFORNIA.

[PHOTOGRAPH BY GABRIEL MOULIN]



people. The stage had been changed only slightly to centre the interest. The theatre is owned by the Mountain Play Association, a group of amateur and semi-professional actors and drama-lovers, who produce one play annually. On Mountain Play day literally thousands from San Francisco and neighboring communities climb to the theatre, and already the occasion has become a red-letter day in the community's art calendar.

Some of the places that have become famous for outdoor productions really do not deserve the name "theatre" at all. Thus the Tree Day festivals and other productions at Wellesley College, which are known throughout the country, have been produced in a wooded glade that bears very little likeness to a playhouse. Of the long list of American pageants very few are associated with permanent open-air theatres. Some of the stages improvised for these productions have been interesting, but being ephemeral, they hardly demand description with the permanent structures.

It only remains to say a word about the so-called "water theatres." In these the actual stage may be nothing more than a narrow river bank against a mass of trees, with a broad sheet of water in front. The well-known theatre at Tiefurt in Germany is a typical example. The St. Louis pageant theatre

might be cited as an American example, except that the lagoon is rather an incidental feature than the centre of the composition. The effects that can be obtained on the water theatre stage are so unique, and in their way so beautiful, that the type will doubtless find its adherents here as in Europe.



## CHAPTER VI

### THE GARDEN THEATRE

THE world has heard much of certain outdoor playhouses: of the modern Greek theatres in the West, and of the forest theatres and pageant stages of many states and countries. But of the unassuming garden theatre little has been said. Usually hidden away on a private estate, often fitting into the surrounding landscape so well that the casual observer would not guess its purpose, and seldom housing productions that are advertised to the public, the garden playhouse remains, except to the initiated and understanding few, an almost unknown phase of modern theatre-making. And yet to the garden lover, and to the amateur actor and producer, it is the most interesting of all the types. In it nature and dramatic art meet and blend most perfectly.

The garden theatre differs from the "Greek" theatres in that its architectural features are only incidental, as perhaps a pergola, or masonry terrace, or stone steps. It differs from the nature theatre, or

forest theatre, on the other hand, in that the stage of the latter is usually only an open space in the woods, with an idyllic natural background, while the garden stage usually is formally shaped with a background of clipped hedges, or other conventional arrangement of trees and shrubs. But perhaps the most noticeable difference is that the garden theatre almost always is very small. While the Greek or architectural theatres and the nature theatres seat four or five thousand or more people, the more modest garden theatre is content to accommodate a few hundred. Each type of open-air playhouse has its distinctive virtues, and perhaps this very littleness is the chief one of the garden theatre, bringing as it does a charming sense of intimacy, and an atmosphere of cloistered seclusion.

Because only the greater monuments of Greek and Roman architecture have survived the vicissitudes of time, no one can say certainly that the garden theatre existed for the delight of the Greeks and Romans. But it seems that in those days when drama was so close to the hearts of men, and when so much of art was developed under patronage, and when nobles were wont to entertain their friends with every sort of recitation and musical and dramatic production, the private open-air theatre must have had its place. When one thinks back to Sappho and to

Anacreon it seems that no place but a garden playhouse would have been perfectly suited to their recitations. And indeed one has in the paintings of Alma-Tadema a very suggestive picture of what the Greek garden theatre may have been: not so much a matter of shrubs and lawns and trees, but rather a miniature of the larger public theatre, with all the perfection of line and all the exquisite richness of the Greek temple. And may not Mæcenas in his time have built a private playhouse on his estate, where Horace might recite his latest ode, or the budding Roman dramatist produce his newest comedy before a select audience of friends? It is well known that the famous Villa of Hadrian near Tivoli could boast both a Greek and a Roman theatre. Is it probable that the dramatic equipment did not include also the more intimate, but less permanent, garden theatre? These, indeed, are only conjectures; but in one case there is authentic proof of a very real approach to the garden theatre in classic times. At the Roman Imperial Villa at Pausilypon the private theatre, which was very small as ancient playhouses go, had no stage building. Instead, the archæologists say, the audience looked across the stage to a formal garden.

Of the garden theatres that have survived from other times to the present the most famous and the

most interesting are those of the Italian villas. The broad estates of that magic Italy of three and four centuries ago were rich in outdoor theatres that reflected the peculiarly finished beauty of the surrounding gardens and palaces. These *al fresco* play-houses usually served more than the single purpose of a place for dramatic performances; the theatre was an integral part of an elaborate formal design, having a very definite relation to the house, the walks, the terraces, the fountains, and the other architectural features. Thus the stage usually terminated an important axis, and often a statue was placed in the centre of the rear stage-wall, to give just the right finish to a vista from other openings in the garden.

Purely architectural elements were rigidly excluded from most of the Italian garden theatres; there were no pergolas, or pillars, to frame the stage, and no built-up wings or backgrounds. The type was perfectly the "*teatro di verdura*." The necessary formal character was obtained by the use of hedges clipped to conventional lines, with an occasional retaining wall or flight of stairs to complete the set design. The most characteristic type,\* of which the theatres at the Villa Gori, the Villa Mar-

\* Sketch-plans of four representative villa theatres will be found among the illustrations of Appendix I.



GARDEN THEATRE ON THE ESTATE OF MR. HENRY E. BOTHIN AT  
MONTECITO, CALIFORNIA. A COPY OF THE ITALIAN VILLA THEATRE  
TYPE.



lia, and the Villa Collodi are examples, showed a flat auditorium floor, usually of gravel or lawn, where chairs or benches could be placed, and a nearly level stage raised two or three feet above this floor; cypress or ilex hedges formed the wings for the players' entrances and exits, and other hedges or masses of trees and shrubs surrounded the stage and often the auditorium. The green turf of the stage floor and the green hedges, harmonizing in one soft background, produced a perfect setting for the action.

The most famous of the Italian villa theatres is that at the Villa Gori, near Siena. Edith Wharton, in her book "Italian Villas and Their Gardens," describes the approach to the theatre, through a tunnel of interwoven ilex hedges, and continues in this way: "The pit of this theatre is a semi-circular opening, bounded by a low wall and seat, which is backed by a high ilex hedge. The parterre is laid out in an elaborate *broderie* of turf and gravel, above which the stage is raised about three feet. The pit and the stage are enclosed in a double hedge of ilex, so that the actors may reach the wings without being seen by the audience; but the stage setting consists of rows of clipped cypresses, each advancing a few feet beyond the one before it, so that they form a perspective running up to the back of the stage, and terminated by the tall shaft of a sin-

gle cypress which towers high into the blue in the exact centre of the background. No mere description of its plan can convey the charm of this exquisite little theatre, approached through the mysterious dark of the long pleached alley, and lying in sunshine and silence under its roof of blue sky, in its walls of unchanging verdure. Imagination must people the stage with the sylvan figures of the 'Aminta' or the 'Pastor Fido,' and must place on the encircling seats a company of *nobil donne* in pearls and satin, with their cavaliers in the black Spanish habit and falling lace collar which Van Dyke has immortalized in his Genoese portraits; and the remembrance of this leafy stage will lend new life to the reading of the Italian pastorals, and throw a brighter sunlight over the woodland comedies of Shakespeare."

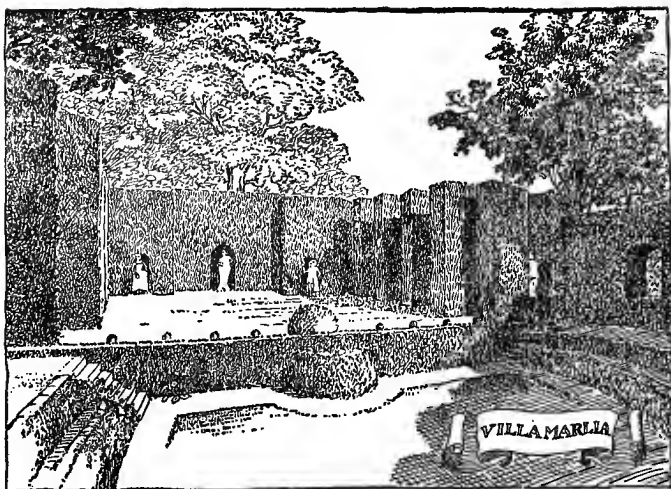
The theatre at the Villa Collodi (sometimes called Villa Garzoni, from the family name), at Pescia, is similar to that at the Villa Gori in stage arrangement, there being the same series of clipped hedges to form the wings, but of ilex instead of cypress. The auditorium is merely a widening of a garden path. The stage is rather low and is cut into a hillside, with retaining walls on three sides. An interesting feature is the prompter's box at the



front of the stage, shielded by a rounded wall of clipped ilex.

The theatre at the Villa Sergardi, near Siena, is unique in that the front stage wall forms one of the four boundaries of a court, two of the other sides being flanked by buildings. Thus the court, which had many other uses at other times, became the theatre pit when plays were presented; and the windows of the palace across the court from the stage doubtless were utilized as boxes. The stage floor is of turf, with an encircling gravel walk, and the wings are formed of ilex hedges. The stage is especially interesting for the unusual atmosphere of enclosure and intimacy, and for the decorative topiary work on the hedges.

Professor Henry Vincent Hubbard, who has made an extensive study of the Italian garden theatres, has kindly allowed his drawing of that at the Villa Marlia, near Lucca, to be reproduced herewith. He describes the theatre in this way: "The auditorium is divided into three levels, a horse-shoe shaped area about forty feet across, behind which are two terraces, the lower and smaller being about eighteen inches high and three feet wide, the upper being about three feet above the lowest level and about nine feet wide. The walls supporting these terraces, as well as the four-foot wall supporting the



*The garden theatre at Villa Marlia. This drawing, by Henry Vincent Hubbard, shows the details of a typical Italian garden theatre of the simpler sort. The flat auditorium and slightly sloping stage, the simple arrangement of cypress hedges to form a background and "wings," and the general atmosphere of intimacy, are characteristic of the type.*

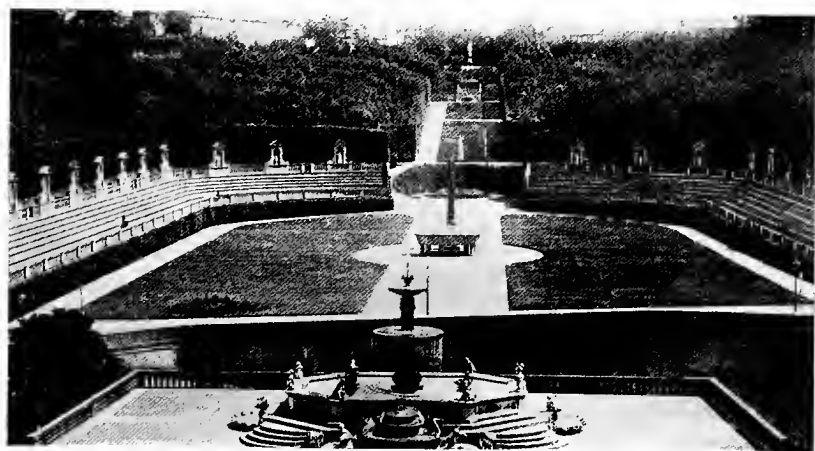
stage, are screened by box hedges, each kept at the height of the wall, so that the masonry is invisible. Behind the upper terrace is a carefully clipped ilex hedge, with four openings on each side equally spaced, three of which are windows and one a door, giving access to a sort of ante-room under the shade of great ilexes behind the auditorium. The stage is enframed with cypress screens, behind which, as usual, are the wings, in this case more ample than in the other instances, surrounded on the outside by a tall ilex hedge and shaded by overhanging trees. There are three statues at the back of the stage, one in the central axis and the other two symmetrically disposed in front of the two rear cypress screens. There is a prompter's shelter, made of clipped box, in front of the stage, as at Collodi. Running along the front of the stage is a row of little clipped box bushes, behind which lights could be placed when performances were given by night."

One of the smallest and simplest of the Italian garden theatres is at the Villa Serraglio, near Siena. Here the stage is rectangular, with a gravel floor and with yew hedges for wings. The auditorium also is rectangular, and lies four feet below the stage level. An unusual feature is a group of eight stone seats, arranged by two, at the centre of the auditorium.

An example of the Italian theatre of the decadent period is that at Isola Bella, on Lake Maggiore, known as the Theatre of Hercules. The structure is clearly designed for decorative rather than dramatic uses, although dramatic productions doubtless were given there. The ornate architectural background, with its overlarge statue of Hercules and its many minor figures, lacks all that sense of repose which is such a pleasing accompaniment of the clipped hedge type.

The largest of the true garden theatres of the Italian Villas is at Castelnuovo, near Palermo. The general design is similar to that at Villa Gori, but here the dimensions are greater in every detail. There is the usual arrangement of cypress wings; but a unique feature exists in a stucco wall used as a stage background. Painted scenery was introduced against this wall. Reflecting on the perfect fitness of the restful hedge backgrounds elsewhere, one feels that this artificial touch would appear a false note.

Of a very different type—and to be included among the garden theatres only by a generous extension of the term—is the outdoor playhouse in the Boboli Gardens at Florence. Here several tiers of stone seats rise on each side of a large level plat, where hundreds of players could take part in dances



ABOVE, THE "WATER THEATRE" AT VERSAILLES, FRANCE.  
BELOW, THE AMPHITHEATRE IN THE BOBOLI GARDENS, FLORENCE,  
ITALY.



and masques and pageants. Above the seats are statues in niches, against high laurel hedges. The whole composition forms a horse-shoe, with an elaborate fountain at the open end, with the palace rising directly behind it. This sort of amphitheatre is of more interest architecturally, and as part of a formal garden design, than dramatically. It is perfectly suited to festivals and pageants, but it is hardly fitted for those forms of drama in which concentration of attention is necessary.

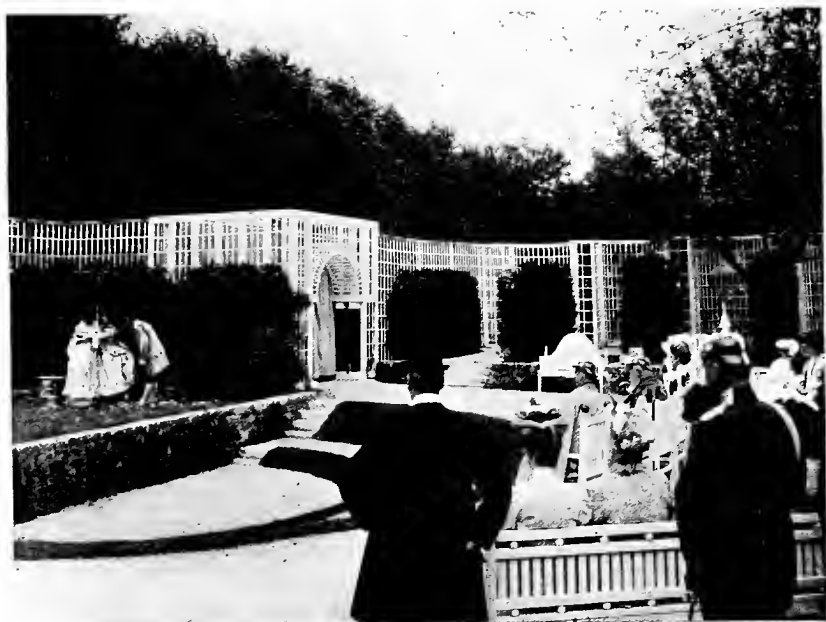
The clipped hedge theatres of Italy were at one time extensively copied in the more northern European countries, and a few examples may still be found in France and Germany. The playhouse in a park at Rheinsberg, in Germany, is an almost perfect survival of the type. Goethe's interesting little theatre in the gardens of the Belvidere Palace near Weimar is a miniature example. Here the stage is only fifteen feet wide and twenty-five deep, and the hedge wings only six feet high. The tiny auditorium could accommodate hardly more than a score of spectators.

Perhaps the most famous of the French theatres in Italian style, that at St. Cloud, is now entirely gone. But there is at Versailles a survival of the *theatre d'eau* or "fountain theatre," which was very popular at one time. In structures of this type a

wide circle, used for dances and spectacles, was surrounded perhaps two-thirds of the way round by low terraces of seats. On the third side was constructed a higher section of terraces, appearing at first glance to be a more elaborate part of the auditorium. In reality, however, these decorated terraces formed a series of fountains; and when the flow of water started, the whole became a dazzling series of miniature water-falls, semi-circular in form, with the composition varied here and there by tall slender jets. The term "theatre d'eau" seems to have been used to name not only the structures thus built in theatre form, but any arrangement of seats from which spectators could watch the groups of fountains and jets that were common in the gardens of the time.

An adaptation of the Italian type, and one that suited the colder northern countries better than the clipped hedge variety, was the *treillage* or "trellis-work" theatre. In this the stage background was formed by a combination of hedges and trellises, the latter often in elaborate design. Arms of the trellis work occasionally encircled the auditorium also. In Holland especially the *treillage* type was popular in the golden period of garden-making and garden-theatres. The most interesting of the examples now existing, however, is at Mannheim, in





THE TREILLAGE-WORK THEATRE AT MANNHEIM, GERMANY.



Germany. The photograph of this theatre which is here reproduced shows a dramatic performance being given before Emperor William and his party. The structure is well proportioned and well arranged, and may well prove suggestive to the builders of garden theatres in America.

H. Inigo Triggs, writing of the gardens of Holland, and especially of treillage-work, says: "Garden theatres were frequently to be met with. That at Westerwyck was quite elaborate, with a proscenium of hornbeam arranged as a big arch, behind which the orchestra sat in a sunken oval arena adjoining the stage. The wings were of hedges closely trimmed and formed backgrounds to a series of leaden statues. The back of the stage was a permanent architectural [trellis-work] composition. These theatres were often constructed of treillage, but naturally none so made are now in existence."

The American theatre that approaches closest to the Italian type is that on the estate of Mr. Henry E. Bothin at Montecito, California. This little playhouse is, indeed, one of the most beautiful of all the examples in which clipped hedge wings are used. It is clearly inspired by that at Villa Gori, and achieves something of the same purity and simplicity of design. An unusual feature is the half-circle of enclosed "boxes" around the auditorium. These are

six in number, each one seating nine people. On the auditorium floor there is room for one hundred spectators.

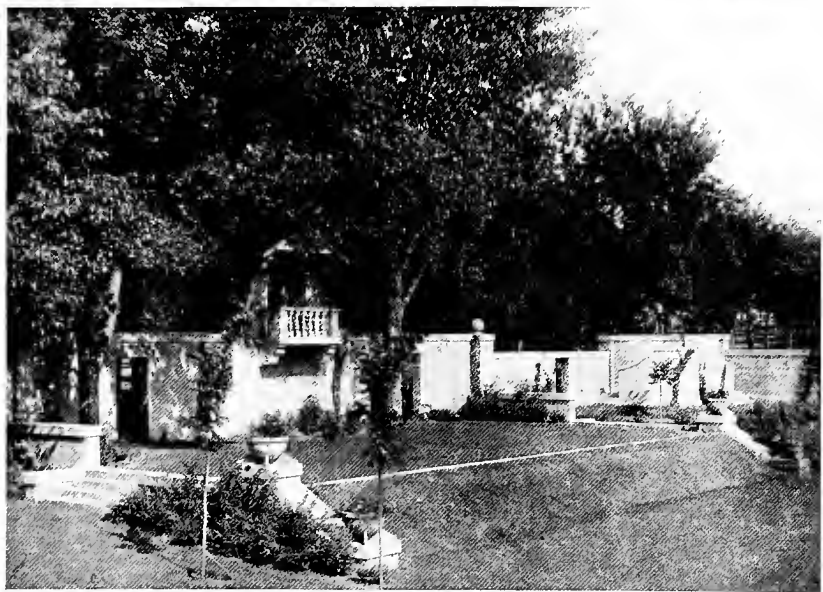
Another American theatre modelled after the one at Villa Gori is that at "Ragdale," the estate of Mr. and Mrs. Howard Shaw, at Lake Forest, Illinois. Ragdale Ring, as it is called, originally had the same arrangement of clipped hedge wings and background. But after several years of actual experience in producing plays, the owners found it wise to make considerable changes. The auditorium is still very similar to that of the Italian theatre, being circular and surrounded by hedges; and one of the approaches is through a pleached thorn alley, doubtless suggested by that at Villa Gori. But the stage has been entirely remodelled. The clipped hedge wings have given way to more informal arrangements of deciduous shrubs and trees, and the conventional rear wall has been taken out, opening up a vista into a sloping glade. In this way the stage depth has been enlarged from the original inadequate thirty feet to ninety feet; and thus the theatre has been made a much more fitting setting for pageant-like plays, spectacles and dances. The playhouse is more suited to this sort of production than to literary or intimate drama, because it was unfortunately placed at a spot too little sheltered from

the winds, the acoustics thus being interfered with, and the sense of intimacy to some degree destroyed. The stage is framed at the front by two twelve-foot columns. Electric lights have been set in these columns, on the stage side, and other lights are reflected from the wings, all being regulated from a switch-board in the auditorium. The effectiveness of the productions has depended to a large extent upon the lighting, and some very unusual and beautiful effects have been created with vari-colored lights. At the times of performances sixteen gaily colored masts are set in sockets in the wall surrounding the auditorium, and on these are hoisted gonfalons and Chinese lanterns. The auditorium floor is sunk two and one-half feet below the stage level, is seventy feet in diameter, and seats from three to four hundred people.

Perhaps the finest example of an open-air theatre perfectly suited to the unconventional type of American garden is the Brookside Theatre, at Mount Kisco, New York. Here Miss Martia Leonard has brought into being a little playhouse that affords a very beautiful setting for the poetic drama. The stage is of turf, and is framed by the projecting arms of a pergola. Unlike the stages of most outdoor theatres, this one can be curtained by hangings which stretch between two of the pergola

columns. There are six rising tiers of rough stone seats, in semi-circular form, and the surrounding lawn affords further seating room. The total seating capacity is perhaps three hundred and fifty. The theatre lies in a narrow valley, and the high hills on either side, serving as walls, create a sense of intimacy that is impossible to obtain in most outdoor playhouses; and thus there have been presented here successfully several "intimate" modern comedies, which would have lost all their effectiveness in the greater spaciousness of the average open-air theatre.

Miss Leonard has prepared specially adapted versions of most of the plays presented, and has directed all the details of production. The theatre was opened with John Jay Chapman's "The Treason and Death of Benedict Arnold." The non-dramatic productions have varied greatly, from cock-fights on the one hand to æsthetic dancing on the other; and the dramatic productions have included Euripides' "Electra," the "Lysistrata" of Aristophanes, Rostand's "The Romanesque," Shakespeare's "Twelfth Night" and "The Taming of the Shrew," and Maeterlinck's "Aglavaine and Selysette." The value of the presentation of these dramas, which so seldom are seen on the commercial stage, cannot be doubted. Altogether the Brookside Theatre has been remarkably successful



ABOVE, THE BROOKSIDE THEATRE, AT MT. KISCO, NEW YORK.  
 AN EXAMPLE OF THE DECORATIVE USE OF PERGOLAS.    BELOW,  
 THE STAGE OF THE GARDEN TERRACE THEATRE, AT YANKTON,  
 SOUTH DAKOTA.





artistically; and physically it is one of the most charming of all its kind. It might well serve as a model for the owners of many an informal American estate.

The "Garden Terrace Theatre" on the grounds of Yankton College, South Dakota, is unique in its combination of architectural and landscape motives. It very well carries out the originators' conception of a theatre reflecting the spirit of Italian romantic comedy, and especially the spirit of Shakespearean comedy. An official bulletin of the College, describing the theatre, is worth quoting: "The practical features of its construction were developed out of the experience of the past eight years of the College in presenting a Shakespeare play out-of-doors at commencement time. Those features, particularly the structure of the stage, were based upon the stage of Shakespeare's time in London, having two rear entrances and a stage balcony, but without curtain or wings and with a minimum of movable properties. . . . The thing is essentially an Italian garden, inclosed by formal hedge and garden wall, with a terrace for the stage and a sloping lawn for seating the audience. . . .

"The detail plans for the Yankton garden theatre were prepared by Mr. Phelps Wyman of Minneapolis, and the wall architecture by A. R. VanDyke

of Minneapolis, a specialist in that particular field of design. . . . The theatre enclosure, which consists of hedge and garden wall, is 140 x 200 feet, and will seat 2500 spectators within perfect view and hearing of the stage. The terrace, or stage proper is 30 x 60 feet, but on occasion the entire stage end of the garden, an area 50 x 140 feet, may be used for a dramatic scene or pageant spectacle. The theatre is provided with complete and permanent equipment for electric stage lighting and illumination. The seating provided is light folding chairs which are removed when not in use, leaving the seating area a beautiful sloping lawn. A fountain at the rear centre of the stage will be one of the ornamental features, and there will be garden seats of stone or marble and other ornamental objects of sculpture to carry out the style of the formal Italian garden."

In the Lazienski Gardens, at Warsaw, Poland, is a unique open-air theatre, which at least approaches the garden or park type. The stage has been constructed on an island, with a background of artificial classic ruins against high trees. Between the front stage wall and the auditorium there is a narrow channel of water, on which the swans may sail in from the adjoining lake. The lower auditorium is formed by straight rows of seats, while above there is a semi-circular opening in the hillside, with



THE OPEN-AIR THEATRE AT LAZIENSKI GARDENS,  
WARSAW, POLAND.



additional wooden benches. Surrounding all is a masonry wall adorned with statues at regular intervals. The structure is more notable for its unique form than for its dramatic activities.

A similar blending of the several types of theatre, and a similar arrangement of water separating stage and auditorium, are to be found in the Rosemary Theatre, which Mr. Roland R. Conklin has constructed on his estate at Huntington, Long Island. Here the concentric rows of seats clearly follow the Greek theatre system; but the stage background is of the nature theatre type; while the formal use of groups of cedar to frame the stage at the sides, and the more or less formal planting around the auditorium, would seem to justify inclusion among the garden theatres. The seating capacity—at least four thousand spectators can be accommodated—is that of a public playhouse, though the structure is on private grounds. Mr. Conklin has kindly supplied the following complete description:

“The stage is separated from the auditorium by a lagoon, both ends of which are hidden by trees and shrubbery. This lagoon is fifteen to thirty feet wide, and the water goes into it over a cascade. The terrace next to the water is slightly lower than the stage and is for the musicians. There are four small terraces and four large ones, and they are each

built from boulders gathered on the farm. In the interstices of these boulders have been planted from sixty to seventy varieties of perennial and rock flowers, arranged in groups or colonies of colors. The stage is about one hundred feet in width and stretches back three or four hundred feet in the forest beyond. There are no proscenium columns, but I have planted for each proscenium a group of three tall cedars, close together, about twenty feet high. I have tried to work out everything without any formal architectural additions, and even the entrance is made from cobble stones in the form of a court, paved with flagging. The theatre is about 125 feet above Oyster Bay, and at least one-third of the audience, when seated, can look out over Long Island Sound to the shores of Connecticut fifteen miles away. Water pipes extend around each terrace, fitted with irrigation jets, so that when the water is turned on to water the grass, the appearance is given of the fountains of Peterhoff. Electric wires have been laid for lighting each of the terraces by colored globes hidden in the foliage. There are three spot lights from the auditorium and arrangements for several spot lights on the stage. The electrical arrangements are such as to include also a dimmer so that the lights can be turned on or off gradually to give the appearance of twilight. There are out-



THE ROSEMARY THEATRE, AT HUNTINGTON, LONG ISLAND,  
NEW YORK.





lets arranged for over two thousand electric lights."

Although structurally the Rosemary Theatre, on account of its unique form, is one of the most interesting of American playhouses, it has seldom been tested for fitness to purpose. Before its construction, the natural site was utilized successfully for a production of "As You Like It," but the structure was not completed until the summer of 1914, and up to the time of writing, no productions had been given in the theatre. Professional companies will appear only for the sake of charity, but the theatre will be widely utilized for amateur and social affairs.

A garden theatre in which some of the natural beauties of the site have been preserved exists in the lovely playhouse of Mrs. William Miller Graham at Montecito, California. Here the old oaks and the more or less natural stage background would give the theatre a claim to be included in the "nature" group. But the conventional stage-wall and steps, the marble bench that so well centres the interest of the spectator, and the row of slender cypresses at the back, all are earmarks of the garden type. Behind the stage there is a little hedged-in "green room," and close by, in the garden, are an *al fresco* Italian dining-room and a grill.

At Tarrytown, New York, Mrs. Charles Judson Gould has built a little playhouse that shows a curi-

ous mingling of Greek theatre and garden theatre motives. Although called a Greek theatre there is little beside the seat arrangement that is truly Greek. There are four rows of seats, solidly constructed of stone quarried on the spot, in the typical classic form of rising semi-circular rings. This auditorium will hold about one hundred people, but several hundred more can find places on the sloping meadow at the back. There is no raised stage, but merely a rectangular extension of the "orchestra" floor, surrounded on three sides by a low masonry wall, with three massive columns at the back. Behind, the woods make a charming background; but it is possible to erect "scenery" against the columns if desired. The chief drawback of the theatre as a setting for drama is the paucity of entrances. There is only one entrance to the stage—which will hardly meet the demands of the usual dramatic production. The structure is an ideal place for music and lectures, and has been so used many times; and at least one play has been presented quite successfully. But it would be unwise to copy the type, if one had the production of plays in mind as a primary end.

There are many gardens in which stage and auditorium can be improvised and passable productions given without the actual construction of anything worthy the name of theatre. Sloping lawns, archi-

tectural terraces, open hollows—all these have been utilized for amateur performances time and again. There are few large estates that do not include some such suitable spot for outdoor acting. But even the most unpretentious of garden theatres is far more satisfying than the mere improvised stage and pit. For if the designer has done his work well, the theatre will afford each spectator a perfect view of the stage, the actors will have facilities for changing costumes and for perfectly timed entrances, there will be no glare of sunlight in any one's eyes, and there will not be a vista behind the stage that will continually tend to draw the attention from the action. There will be, in short, a perfect background for the play, and the maximum of comfort for the audience. At this time when most of our young people—and many who are only dramatically young—are interested in some measure in amateur dramatic societies, or in school or college dramatic clubs, or merely in dramatic affairs in general, there are few cities where a small open-air theatre in a large private garden or in a public park would not in a single season more than justify the initial construction cost. All those amateur performances "for friends only," the productions of the several travelling bands of professional outdoor actors, the occasional play-entertainments of the women's clubs, even the frequent

dramatic readings—they all would gain a new beauty and a new significance if carried from the usual surroundings to the garden theatre.

The spreading of the outdoor dramatic movement goes deeper than the mere matter of amusement; and the owner of a garden theatre possesses more than a pleasing toy. The growth of the open-air playhouse is a very real part of the nation-wide protest against the commercialization of the regular theatre, and an indication of a desire for sounder and less artificial dramatic fare. The amateur and semi-professional performances are training more discriminating audiences for the true art that will inevitably take larger place in the future professional theatres; moreover they are moulding the talents of many a native playwright and actor of the years to come—for if the work in play be wide enough and sincere enough, very surely here and there an amateur artist will graduate to the wider dramatic world. The garden theatre may, indeed, become a very significant force for good, not only for a few individuals, but for society and for dramatic art in general.



GARDEN THEATRE ON THE ESTATE OF MRS. WILLIAM MILLER  
GRAHAM, AT MONTECITO, CALIFORNIA.



## CHAPTER VII

### THE DRAMA OF THE OPEN

THE casual commentator is only too likely to describe one specific type of production as the most characteristic, if not the only true, form of outdoor drama. Thus one finds that those who have directed productions in the Hearst Greek Theatre at Berkeley consider a simple, almost austere play the most typical form, while the pageant-masters of the East and the group of masque-writers of the Middle West consider the spectacular, pageant-like production the truest outdoor drama; and then comes the owner of a garden theatre with a very deep conviction, born of experience, that neither of these forms is typical, and that the poetic, the romantic and the literary drama alone are perfectly suited for production in the open. The difference of opinion arises from the lack of understanding that there are several distinct types of open-air theatre, each with its individual limitations and advantages. Every study of the drama of the open should be prefaced by the statement that no one

open-air theatre can adequately house more than one of several distinct types of production; and the builders of open-air playhouses will do well to study carefully the probable type of play to be given, before deciding upon the style of theatre to be constructed.

Certain general characteristics, nevertheless, pertain to all productions out-of-doors. If there is one quality that, more than any other, distinguishes the drama of the open from the indoor drama, it is *genuineness*. In the successful outdoor production the play, the setting and the acting must above all else be simple and sincere. The whole must be lit up by a certain joyousness in life, and interpreted with a sympathetic understanding of the openness and freedom of nature. The producer can take out-of-doors only the sort of drama that can stand the clear white light of day; the "white-slave" play, the bombastic melodrama and the intimate "society" comedy show forth only too clearly in the open air their elements of artificiality. Moreover, certain really vital developments of the indoor drama lose their effectiveness in the open through the lack of intimacy there; the play of sustained emotional interest, the play that depends for its appeal primarily upon climactic story growth and emotional tension, fails because absolute and continued concentration



of attention is impossible in the open-air. The typically effective *al fresco* drama is simple, decorative and poetic, rather than intricate, realistic or intensely emotional.

Beyond this general division line, one can easily identify three distinct sorts of production in the open-air group: first, the simple, stately play of compact action and broad spiritual significance, of which the Greek tragedies are the finest examples; second, the play that depends primarily upon the sensuous beauty of line and mass and color, the drama of decorative movement, of which the more dramatic forms of pageant and dance are typical; and third, the drama rich in beautiful poetry, the play in which an imaginative story is embroidered with beauty of language and incidental verse and fantasy of thought. The three primary elements thus suggested, the simple stateliness of action, the decorative beauty of movement and color, and the poetic richness of language and thought, are in some measure mingled in all successful productions. But the emphasis on one or another of these elements may be made the basis of a distinction between the three dramatic types, which in turn correspond very closely to the three general types of open-air theatre. The Greek tragedies of course are perfectly suited to production on the massive, severely beautiful stage of the

classic theatre; the pageant-like play, in which movement and dancing and beautiful costuming are of more importance than plot or richness of language, is characteristically the play of the nature theatre, with its wide background of trees or meadow or water, and its auditorium of maximum openness; whereas the poetic play is typically the play of the intimate garden theatre, in which every subtle tone and delicate facial expression, and every nuance of thought and feeling, has its full effect.

More than one producer with a glittering reputation on Broadway has failed dismally when he brought his "art" to the stage of a Greek theatre. The history of the Hearst Greek Theatre especially is replete with records of the unsuccessful efforts of professional stage-managers to "put over" the effects they have achieved so cunningly within doors. In staging the old Greek plays, which of course are perfectly fitted to the limitations of the theatre, the greatest possible economy of means is necessary. The subterfuges of the professional stage become transparent and detract from, rather than add to, the production. The sustained nobility and the almost severe loveliness of the tragedies must be reflected in a certain stateliness and breadth of staging and acting. Everything must be carried out in large mass, or the play is lost on the immense stage. At

the Hearst Greek Theatre perhaps the most successful of all the ten years' productions have been Margaret Anglin's presentations of Greek masterpieces. The student productions of Sophocles' "Ajax" and "Œdipus Tyrannus," although less polished, achieved much of the same dignified effect. Plays given in the same theatre that were successful because they have the Greek breadth and dignity to a certain extent, were Ben Greet's "Hamlet," Sarah Bernhardt's "Phedre," and Maude Adams' "L'Aiglon." Of humorous plays it has been found that Shakespeare's "The Merry Wives of Windsor" and Dekker's "The Shoemakers' Holiday," with their broad caricature and rollicking fun, carry to the audience far better than do the subtler and more refined types of comedy. Aside from the play that dominates the Greek theatre by the largeness of its spiritual significance and the sustained quality of its dramatic effects, there is a sort that succeeds by compelling visual attention through concentrated spectacle and pageantry. One thinks immediately of Max Reinhardt and his productions in a circus. Just as he dominated the immense spaces of the tent-like structure by compelling the attention of the eye and surface senses every minute, so the producer in the Greek theatre can hold his audiences if the visual elements are decorative and sweeping enough. The

trouble in working with this sort of Reinhardtian spectacular simplicity is the difficulty of sustaining the interest—for a moment's let-down is fatal to the total effect. At the Berkeley theatre the production that most successfully achieved this visual effectiveness was the Sanskrit drama "The Little Clay Cart." Other plays have been saved from merely boring the audiences by being framed in spectacular scenes, with a procession here, a "mob scene" there, and a gorgeous tableau to leave a vivid impression at the end.

In entering upon a discussion of the type of drama suited to production in the nature theatre one plunges immediately into the question of the relative values of play and pageant. Considered entirely from the standpoint of permanent dramatic art, the play, the pure drama, is far more important than the pageant. For the play text, perpetuated in book form, may be reproduced on the stage for the pleasure and inspiration of succeeding generations, whereas the pageant is gone for all time when the end of the final procession passes off the stage. In this sense the play is like the statue in marble or lasting bronze, whereas the pageant is like a figure modelled in sand, to be washed away and lost to the world with the coming of the next tide. But in the direction of civic betterment the pageant is by far

the more important form. It draws large numbers of people into a common artistic pursuit, and in its symbolism and historic allusions it tends to awaken civic consciousness. Considered as art alone the pageant is usually ephemeral, but as a communal expression and inspiration it is one of the most significant developments of modern life.

It is not within the scope of this volume to describe the recent remarkable growth of the pageant in America and elsewhere, or to point out the several variations in its form. But it is worth while to pause to enquire why the pageant is typically the form of production suited to the nature theatre, and especially to the sort of theatre that has a stage opening on a wide vista of lake or sea or meadow. The story-thread of the pageant is at best a series of detached fragments, without any dramatic or emotional continuity, and the spectator's interest is held primarily by the spectacle. So anything that adds to the visual beauty, whether it is the clouds floating over a distant mountain peak, or an unusual bit of woodland light and shade, or a broad sweep of water framed in trees, is just so much clear gain from the producer's standpoint. As the lover of pageants turns his mind back, the things that stand out most vividly and most satisfyingly are the groups of gaily caparisoned horsemen that sweep into sight and

across the stage so impressively, or the picturesque galleons floating in to the stage landing across a lake, or the dances in leaf-strewn meadows before stately groves of trees. Not only are these things impossible in the Greek theatre and the garden theatre, but if they could be staged there they would disturb rather than increase the total effectiveness. For in the typical Greek theatre play there is definite dramatic unity, and in the typical garden theatre play there is at least definite poetic unity; and in either, the striking "episode" of the pageant would be a ruinous interruption. But not so in the nature theatre—for the very openness of the stage, and the diversity of background, and the vistas, preclude concentration of attention. The whole interest is necessarily episodic; and the success of the episodes depends largely upon the extent to which the characteristic beauties of nature are utilized. So the nature theatre alone affords a perfect setting for the pageant, and for the "drama of decorative movement," for the drama wherein dancing, and costuming, and the effects of nature, are of more importance than dramatic story and poetry.

Of course no two nature theatres are exactly alike, and the type of production that fits one may lose half its effectiveness when staged in another nearby. There are even nature theatres that demand specific

types of drama that never would be satisfying elsewhere; the Bohemian Grove Plays, for instance, are a direct outgrowth of the narrow limitations and unusual advantages of the one theatre. In discussing the typical production of the nature theatre, the playhouse of maximum openness, such as the Peterborough and St. Louis pageant theatres and the Tamalpais Mountain Theatre, have been considered as the truest examples. But certain of the nature theatres approach the garden theatre type, as when they are small and more or less enclosed, or when they have stages shaped more or less architecturally for formal exits and entrances. Most of the European nature theatres have certain characteristic features of the garden stage, probably because the European producer finds it harder to break away from the traditions of the indoor theatre as the Americans have done at Peterborough, and in the Bohemian Grove, and on Mount Tamalpais. In America the Forest Theatre at Carmel is really an example of the mixed type, like the "Nature Theatre" at Hertenstein and the Klampenborg Woods Theatre; and the stage at the Meriden Theatre is so far enclosed by trees that its advantages and limitations are those of the garden theatre rather than of the true nature theatre.

It is the highly imaginative and the subtly poetic

drama that is most perfectly suited to the garden theatre: the play with the primary appeal of a pretty tale richly embroidered with fanciful conceits and literary beauty. In the garden theatre there is a feeling of seclusion from the vulgarities of the world, which creates a new and delicious intimacy between players and spectators. No change of position, no shade of meaning, no physical expression, no half-spoken word, is lost. Every whimsical turn of expression, every symbolic suggestion, every incidental lyric poem, has its full value. And here the slow action of the loosely joined play, which only bores in the indoor playhouse, becomes tolerable if only the poetry is rich enough and the fantasy fanciful enough. The intoxicating sense of out-of-doors and the caressing atmosphere of lawns and flowers and trees, creeping into the heart and mind, make possible the comprehension of elusive poetic thoughts and feelings that vanish entirely in the larger sorts of playhouse.

The ideal plays for the garden theatre and the intimate sort of nature theatre are of the type of Shakespeare's fantastic comedies and Maeterlinck's poetic tragedies. The idyllic "As You Like It," and the fanciful "A Midsummer Night's Dream," which never satisfy completely in the incongruous setting of the indoor "stage artist," find here their natural



accompaniment of sunshine and shadow, of whispering winds and singing birds, and at the same time the necessary intimate atmosphere. And "Twelfth Night" gains a new charm and effectiveness when staged under the open sky. Milton's "Comus" is typically an outdoor play, and yet not a play for the extensive sort of open-air theatre. Maeterlinck's richly poetic dramas are for the most part adapted to presentation out-of-doors: "Pelleas and Melisande" surely would have a more pathetic appeal in a garden theatre than on the usual tawdry artificial stage; and some of the seldom acted plays, like "Aglavaine and Selysette" have found their loveliest interpretation in the open. Those literary plays whose beauty is too reflective and whose action is too slow to make them effective indoors, might well be revived in a garden playhouse: the several dramas of Tennyson, and Browning's wonderful dramatic poems; and of contemporary work, the plays of Stephen Phillips and Alfred Noyes. Many of these compositions must be judiciously adapted, and usually cut, but nearly always the resulting outdoor version brings forth beauties unexpected in the reading of the original. Carrying the work of adaptation a step further, many of the longer poems of Browning, and Keats, and Longfellow, and others of the great poets, can be very ac-

ceptably dramatized by amateurs with the "dramatic sense." The idyllic garden theatre somehow seems perfectly fitted to the presentation of such poetic adaptations, and also to the production of those plays by amateur dramatists, that so often are slight in thought and lacking in the powerful emotional climaxes of the indoor intensive drama, and which yet have an occasional lyric beauty and imaginative charm that are very real and—out-of-doors—very appealing.

Returning to the consideration of *al fresco* drama as a whole, one may well enquire into the peculiar qualities necessary in the actual mounting and acting of the drama out-of-doors.

The setting of the open-air production must above all be simple, and the "properties" on the stage must be few. Whether the background is the beautiful architectural wall of a Greek Theatre or the mass of trees and shrubs or open vista of the nature or garden theatre, there is little that man's hand can add to make the setting more satisfying—little, indeed, that can be added without making the whole ridiculous. All the false perfection of realistic detail and all the extravagance of canvas and paint and tinsel that have marked recent indoor staging, prove doubly futile in the creation of illusion out-of-doors.



A PRODUCTION IN THE BOHEMIAN GROVE THEATRE, SHOWING THE  
EFFECT OF ARTIFICIAL SETTING IN A NATURE THEATRE.

[PHOTOGRAPH BY GABRIEL MOULIN]



In the drama of the open, more than in any other sort, suggestion is the only method by which true artistic illusion can be achieved. If the director understands perfectly the manipulation of his materials, a curtain stretched between two poles on a lawn, with a single massive chair before it, can be made more suggestive of a throne-room than the most labored efforts of the indoor stage designer. Thus a single bit of *plastic* background, or a single stage "property" seen in its own embodiment and not as a painted semblance, may evoke in the spectator's mind the exact atmosphere required by the action; whereas the usual collection of painted canvas scenes and make-believe properties can at best imitate only the hard reality of a place, and never its subtle atmosphere. The outdoor setting, insofar as it is artificial at all, must be simple rather than involved, plastic instead of pictured—genuine in every sense.

In the nature theatres there has been a wholesome tendency to leave Nature alone as a background, and even to make natural beauties a compelling part of the total effect. Of this utilization of Nature's materials, of what may be called the collaboration of Nature in stage production, Professor Thomas H. Dickinson has written:

"The discovery of the dramatic values of the features of nature is distinctly a modern thing. These

are now recognized not only as expedients for the securing of primitive effects, but as mediums, which, when handled with understanding and cunning, are capable of some of the richest and most elusive effects in all the domain of art. The phenomena of nature and natural objects are the most adaptable, rich and suggestive mediums within reach of man's hand. In versatility, and yet in fidelity to type, in variety of responsiveness and amenability to an exact requirement no color or line provided by the hand of man can compete with nature if she is properly schooled. The color values of trees, lake, and meadow, the shadows thrown by trees and clouds, the light of moon and stars, the varying outline of trees and hills as seen through the changing palpatilities of atmosphere provide infinite material for the stage director. Nature makes no mistakes. Chameleon-like she adapts herself to the action. It would be impossible for a bird to sing in the wrong place in 'As You Like It.' The interspersed silences and insect voices of the night are both fitly chosen for their parts."

Nature, it may be added, is sometimes an unexpected collaborator—and curiously enough the unexpected incidents usually fit in as perfectly as if the stage director had released them through his electric switchboard. Professor Dickinson notes that "even

the falling stars seem to be exquisitely timed"; and one easily recalls times when distant thunder added its effective voice to that of a tragic actor; and at least once the sun has become properly clouded at just the moment when the twilight nymphs commenced their dance.

It has been hotly debated whether the open-air theatre should be utilized only in the daytime, or at night with artificial lighting. There can be no doubt that the lighting effects entail the loss of a certain amount of the naturalness that is one of the outdoor drama's most pleasing qualities, and that they smack strongly of the hackneyed elements of indoor staging. On the other hand there is a compensating gain in the richness of coloring and decorative play of light and shade that cannot be achieved in daylight. Some of the typically outdoor plays seem uncompromisingly to demand a night sky and artificial lights, as "A Midsummer Night's Dream" and "Comus." It can be concluded only that each sort of performance has its distinctive virtues, and that while the afternoon production may achieve a maximum of open, natural beauty, the night production may bring out more decorative and more colorful effects.

Like the play and the setting, the outdoor actor must be free from the artificiality of the indoor

stage; must be sincere and genuine in the best sense. Freedom from the indoor mannerisms and conventions is imperative; the "society manner" will never carry on the outdoor stage. In a peculiar sense the actor must "live" his part, and he must have perfect sympathy with and a subtle understanding of the open-air stage atmosphere. For the actor of true artistic perception there is, moreover, a very deep inspiration in the setting under the open sky, a sort of exhilaration of soul and body. Margaret Anglin gave expression to this inspirational feeling after she played "Antigone" in the Hearst Greek Theatre. She said: "The experience of playing in that wonderful theatre in California is, I believe, the greatest mental intoxicant that an actor can feel. For myself—and I have played many parts—I have never known anything to equal the thrill of the performance at Berkeley three years ago. The air was so still and so heavy with perfume, and the stars so bright and so near the earth, with one radiant planet hanging just above the altar, that it was no great task to span the centuries and believe oneself beneath Attic skies; and this same exaltation (I don't know how else to name it) seemed to seize the whole company. The usual 'first-night' hysterical excitement was utterly absent, and in its place came an extraordinary calm which seemed almost religious. When

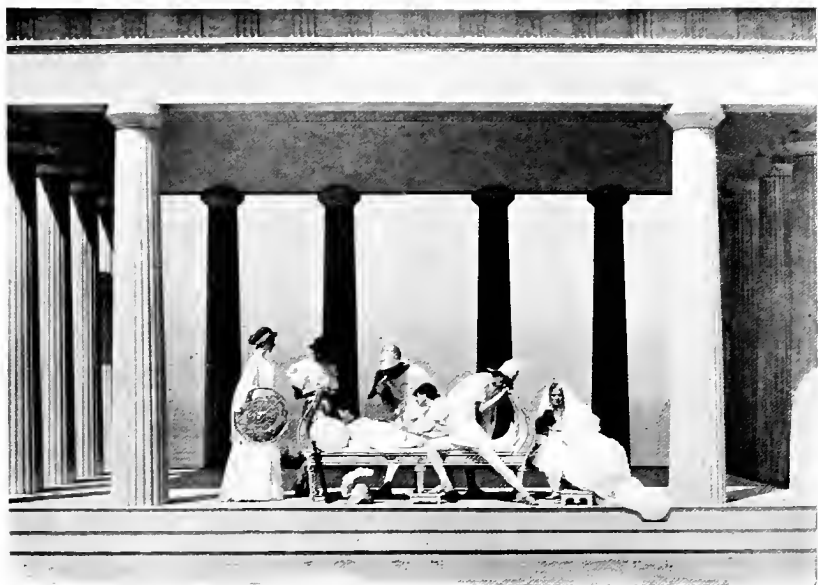


it was all over, I believe I was happier than I had ever been before in my work."

Just as the pure poetry of a play may be enjoyed in the open-air, although it may only bore the audience indoors, so the actors' beautiful intonation of the lines may be enjoyed for its own sake out-of-doors. The slurring voice and the careless enunciation of many professional actors are doubly offensive to the trained ear in an open-air production. Perhaps it is because the greater emotional tension of the indoor drama holds the attention beyond the remembrance of mere carelessness of speech; or perhaps it is because out-of-doors the spectator's perceptions are keener and quicker to note any lapse to commonplaceness or any rise to new beauties; but certainly beautiful intonation is more pleasing and careless speech more offensive here than on the ordinary stage. It seems, too, that the "star system," which has done so much to discourage sincere dramatic effort in America, is peculiarly out of place in the open. One reason is that the "star" usually depends for her popularity upon the interpretation of a climactic emotional part, and that sort of part usually is not characteristic of the drama of the open. The system, moreover, is so undemocratic that it seems entirely out of keeping with the more democratic forms of dramatic art.

The special sympathies and abilities required in the successful actor out-of-doors have led to the formation of companies of open-air players, which each year travel from community to community presenting plays in the few permanent open-air theatres, or in improvised settings on lawns, in woods and in gardens. The first important company of this sort in America was that organized by Ben Greet, who has pioneered in many of the really valuable and progressive movements of the theatre.

The best known of the present bands of open-air actors is that organized by Charles Douville Coburn. From April to August of each year the Coburn Players travel through the Eastern and Middle Western States, appearing at universities, schools and country clubs. Their repertoire includes sixteen of Shakespeare's comedies and tragedies—"As You Like It," of course, "Twelfth Night," "The Merry Wives of Windsor," "Hamlet," "Romeo and Juliet," "Othello," and others; and several of the Greek classics—notably Euripides' "Electra" and "Iphigenia in Tauris." Recently they have added three of Percy Mackaye's plays to the list, "Jeanne d'Arc," "The Canterbury Pilgrims" and the bird masque "Sanctuary," and they have played successfully "The Yellow Jacket," by G. C. Hazelton and Benrimo. The company was organized with the



SIMPLICITY IN STAGING, AS ILLUSTRATED IN A PRODUCTION AT THE  
POINT LOMA GREEK THEATRE.

[PHOTOGRAPH COPYRIGHT BY KATHERINE TINGLEY]



declared intention of doing away with the evils of the star system, the play being presented for the play's sake, with adequate interpretation but without over-emphasis on any one part. The plays were chosen with the intention of making the productions something more than mere entertainments. Mr. Coburn realized the tremendous educational and inspirational force latent in the drama, and by seeking intelligent audiences he has been able to achieve the ideal of the higher types of dramatic art: entertainment plus spiritual satisfaction. Many communities look forward to the visit of the Coburn Players as one of the artistic events of the year and this company perhaps has done more than any other to establish the outdoor production as a permanent part of dramatic life in America.

The very definite relation between the drama of the open and national life can be seen in the great number of pageants of civic communities presented during the last decade and in the communal interest in more strictly dramatic productions in the open. It is significant that Percy Mackaye, the leading American exponent of the "civic drama," turns to the open-air theatre for an adequate setting for his communal productions, finding there alone the co-operation of artists and people that makes possible

the finest interpretation of drama. Mr. Mackaye more than any other writer has shown the impossibility of a truly national drama developing in the indoor theatre as at present constituted, and has pointed out that the theatre must escape from commercial speculative limitations before it can develop as a vital expression of the life of the people.

The civic possibilities of the drama of the open are unlimited. Already one sees that while the commercial indoor theatre exists to take men's minds off their work and to afford rest in idle amusement, the open-air theatre not only affords rest but stimulates men to new effort and new ideals. The world needs the indoor theatre in a more wholesome and more vital form than that in which it now exists; and in two particulars the form doubtless will gradually be changed after the pattern of the open-air theatre: the building will become more democratic, without boxes and with good seats for all; and the drama presented will be close to the life of the people. But there always will remain this difference: that the drama of the indoor stage is unavoidably the art of the few—although designed, perhaps, to stir the many emotionally—whereas the outdoor drama is distinctly social, communal and national. In the one particular of community participation, the indoor theatre absolutely fails to meet the outdoor theatre

—and the inspirational possibilities of the latter are infinite. It is hardly to be expected that any American community will rise to the sober union of drama and religion which is seen in the outdoor Passion Play of the villagers of Ober-Ammergau, where indeed the desire to be a part of the decennial productions is a very potent incentive to clean living and clean thinking; but one may see therein the possibilities of making the drama a significant force in the life of every citizen who retains the primal religious and dramatic instincts.

At the present time, at least, the “regular” theatre is by force of circumstances outside the flowing current of human life. Perhaps because it was long ago pushed aside by a jealous church, perhaps because men were simply too busy with governmental and economic affairs to remember it, very certainly the indoor theatre has passed outside the bounds of community responsibility. It long has been and is now in private hands, and insofar as it has to do at all with true dramatic art, it exists to exploit that art for private gain. It is distinctly commercial. The open-air theatre, however, as it is free from this speculative limitation, already approaches in some measure the conditions of that time when Greek drama was part of the state administration of communal affairs and an expression of the people’s reli-

gion, and of that other time when the church developed drama as part of its ritual. The open-air theatre is returning drama to the people's hands as a religious force, and is becoming a medium of expression of their spiritual life.



## APPENDIX

(This appendix contains material which is designed to be of use to architects and others who may be charged with the actual creation of an open-air playhouse. As it includes repetitions, in more detailed form, of much that has been described briefly in earlier chapters, the general reader will be wise to skip it. The architect, however, will, it is hoped, find it of practical assistance in determining the details of his design.)

## APPENDIX I

### THE PLANNING AND CONSTRUCTION OF OPEN-AIR THEATRES

In the actual designing of an open-air theatre, the first determining factor is the site. Unlike most of the architect's problems this one is partially solved instead of complicated if the site is hilly. Whether the structure is to be of the Greek type, or of the nature type, almost invariably it may be built at less cost if there is a hollow or a hill to be utilized. Very often, indeed, the existence of something approaching a natural theatre determines the placing of the architectural structure.

The Greeks were obliged to utilize hill-side hollows for their auditoriums, because they lacked the knowledge of vaulting, and so could not build such huge structures on the flat. The Romans overcame this difficulty, but still saved unnecessary expense by taking advantage of hills when they existed where the theatres were to be built—and the modern architect will do well to follow their lead. In case the ground is perfectly flat the designer usually will

find it wise to abandon the classic bowl type entirely, unless saving of money is no object. There are in general two possible arrangements of stage and auditorium: first, a low stage with sharply sloping auditorium bowl; and second, a high stage with flat or saucer-shaped auditorium. The latter is the natural arrangement for flat ground.

If the site is flat, or if there is a choice of hollows, the architect should keep in mind this principle, known to the Greeks and voiced by Vitruvius: Never face a theatre to the south. As the modern day-time performance usually occurs in the afternoon, the theatre should not face the west, as a rule, for the glare in the spectators' eyes interferes with the illusion; and a theatre facing east would permit a similar glare in the eyes of the actors. The ideal facing for an open-air structure in the United States is to the north, or a little to the east of north. That arrangement provides the maximum of comfort to spectator and actor. In cases where the ideal facing cannot be obtained, much of the discomfort may be prevented by the planting of quick-growing tall trees, at points where they will throw shadow across the theatre in the afternoon.

Occasionally the site of a theatre is determined by some unusual bit of natural beauty. Thus at the Peterborough Pageant Theatre the audience looks

out beyond the stage to Mt. Monadnock in the distance, the University of Wisconsin theatre faces Lake Mendota, and in the Greek Theatre at Point Loma the usual rear stage-wall has been omitted in order that a chaste little temple may stand out against an inspiring sweep of ocean and sky. The tendency in America of late has been to take full advantage of every attractive vista of mountain, lake, woods, or sea, and to set the stage entirely with relation to some such individual or local bit of beauty. If the theatre is to serve certain uses, this utilization of nature is wise; but the custom offers a pitfall to the architect who does not understand fully the several kinds of outdoor drama and their distinctive demands on the theatre. The essence of the matter is this: in a theatre designed for pageants or for spectacular masques, every possible beauty of nature should be utilized, as every added loveliness increases the sum total of effectiveness. But in a theatre designed chiefly for pure drama, a vista through the trees or across a lake is likely to prove an interruption of the action, and the more appealing and the more comprehensive the outlook is, the more likely the spectator is to let his attention wander away from the stage and what is happening there. In other words, if the theatre is designed for extensive, episodic drama, the stage may profit-

ably be as open and the vistas behind it as appealing as possible; but if the productions are to be chiefly plays, in which cumulative and sustained interest in the action is necessary, the stage should be as enclosed as possible and especially should be free from compelling bits of landscape beauty in the distant background. To have the theatre right, the owner must choose the sort of production, and the architect must plan to fit that type of production.

Very often it has been said that whenever possible a lake or stream should be utilized as a part of the stage of an open-air theatre. The advice is well meant but it should be well considered before acceptance. The architect should remember that here again those who give it are interested in only one direction of outdoor production, in the pageant and masque. A stage that is half lake, or a stage to which the actors can canoe or sail on a real river, may afford the opportunity for some of the most beautiful entrances and tableaux that can be imagined; but such a stage will probably fail entirely as a setting for true dramatic action. The very fact that it is so open precludes concentration of interest.

In general arrangement the open-air theatres of all types vary extraordinarily: some are short and fat, some are long and thin, some are very much up-and-down, with almost vertical stage backgrounds



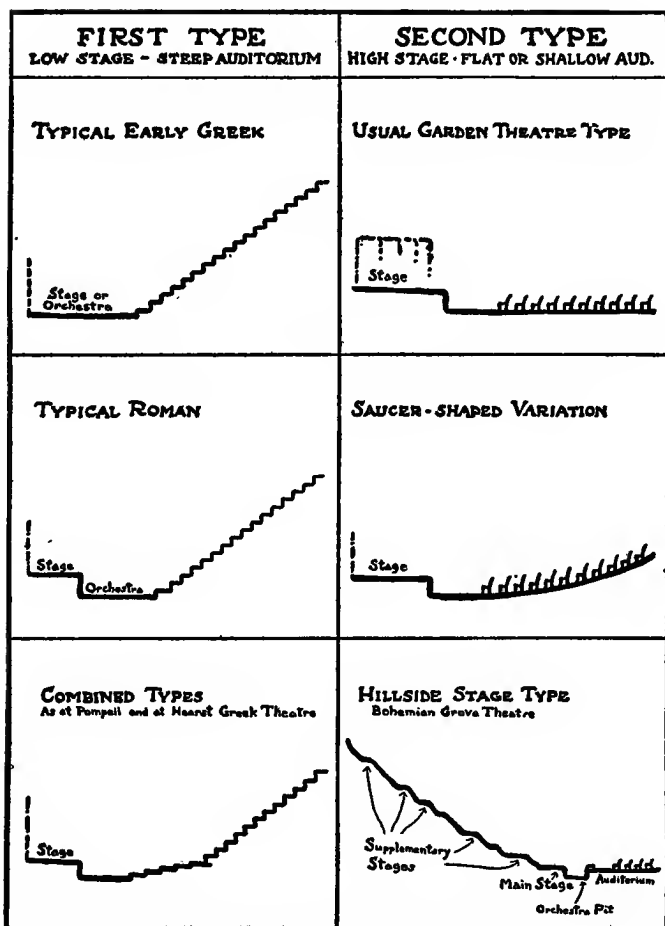
REMAINS OF THE ANCIENT THEATRE AT FIESOLE, ITALY. THE PHOTOGRAPH CLEARLY ILLUSTRATES MANY OF THE STRUCTURAL FEATURES OF THE ROMAN THEATRE. THE ARRANGEMENT OF LOW STEPS BELOW THE DIAZOMA IS TYPICAL OF THEATRES OF THE LATE ROMAN PERIOD.





or very steep terraces of seats, and some are almost flat. But in all one primary consideration dictates the arrangement: the sight lines must be clear from every portion of the auditorium to every portion of the stage.

Of the two typical systems, the low stage with sharply sloping auditorium, and the high narrow stage with flat or saucer-shaped auditorium, the former was always used by the Greeks in their theatres. The steep slope was necessary because the action took place in the orchestra circle. The usual slope was about thirty degrees. When the Romans carried the action to the stage, they pushed the auditorium forward, cutting the old orchestra circle, or dancing place, to a half-circle and filling that with seats. The auditorium kept its steep slope, but the stage had to be raised in order that the actors might be clearly seen by those who now sat in the orchestra. So the Roman theatres usually have the steep auditorium of the one type, and the high stage of the other. Perhaps the best modern example of fidelity to the Greek system of levels is the theatre at Point Loma, California. Here the wide orchestra floor is used for part of the action and for dancing, while the floor of the small stage building is raised only a few steps. At the modern



*Diagram showing variations of the two typical relations between auditorium and stage.*

Greek Theatre at Bradfield the stage building is similarly very low.

Of nature theatres of the flat stage type, naturally most of the mountain theatres are examples; for here a hill-side forms the auditorium and a terrace at its foot forms the stage. Most of the garden theatres follow the other system; but the little Brookside Theatre has a stage on the flat and tiers of rising seats with a slope of about twenty degrees. The Greek Theatre at Berkeley combines the two types; the main auditorium begins at the level of the stage and slopes up at an angle of thirty degrees. Between this steeply sloping portion and the stage, however, there is a section with a fall of one foot in six, and at the bottom of this a flat orchestra circle, from which the spectators look up at the stage six feet above them. This arrangement is an interesting variation of the Greek and Roman types, and has been copied at the Pomona Greek Theatre and elsewhere. The diagram indicates its practicability for very large structures.

The second system of levels, with high stage and flat auditorium, is the one commonly used in garden theatres, and in nature theatres constructed where there are no hills. It is a type seldom found in the purely architectural structures, except when the stage is enclosed and curtained—in which case the

structure becomes not a true open-air theatre especially suited for outdoor drama, but merely an indoor theatre with the auditorium roof lifted off. Typical examples of the arrangement as applied to garden theatres may be found at Villa Gori, where the auditorium floor is flat and the stage about three and one-half feet high, and at Villa Marlia, where the main auditorium floor is perfectly level, and the stage floor four feet higher. Very often the stages of the garden theatres slope up slightly from front to back—a method of helping out the difficult problem of sight lines, which the architect will do well to remember. At “Ragdale Ring,” an American garden theatre modelled after that at Villa Gori, the front of the stage is only two and one-half feet above the level auditorium floor, but a rise of one and one-half feet more between the front and rear of the stage makes the total height sufficient. The flat auditorium floor is found in nearly all garden theatres, but in many cases it is surrounded by one or two terraces on higher levels. In the little theatre at Mannheim, Germany, the level central space is contracted to the minimum, and the best seats are at the front of the second terrace, which is practically on the level of the stage. One of the most interesting stage arrangements is the Bohemian Grove Theatre. Here the main stage is a few feet



THE GREEK THEATRE

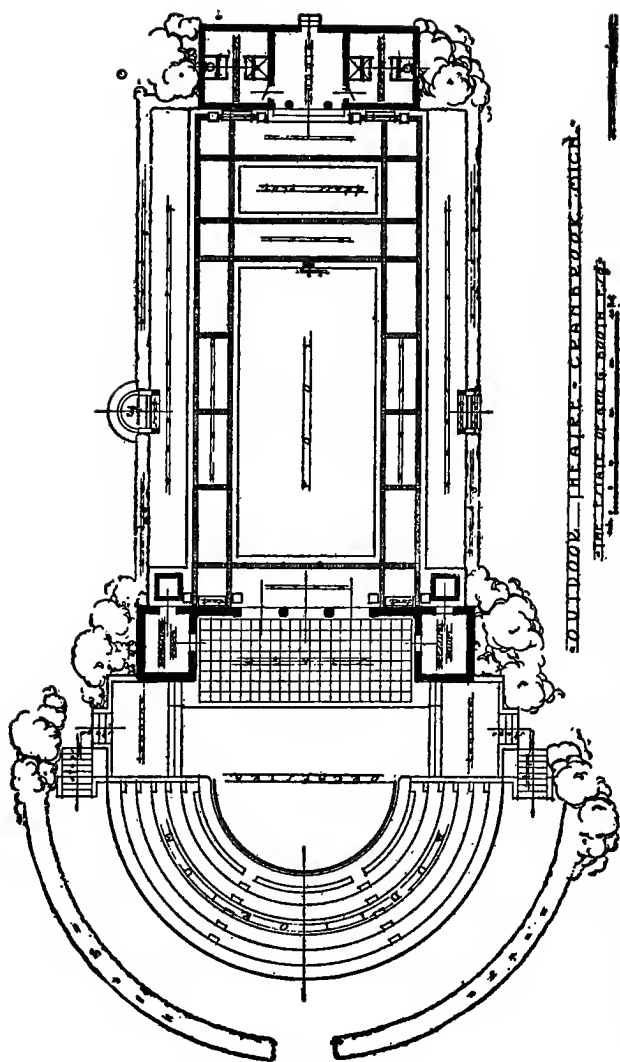
PLAN OF THE HEARST GREEK THEATRE.  
[JOHN GALEN HOWARD, ARCHITECT]



above the auditorium, and behind it a trail ascends a very steep hillside; and along that trail smaller platform stages have been erected at intervals, one above the other, so that action may take place on several levels.

Turning now from the matter of sight-lines as they affect the relative levels of stage and auditorium, it is worth while to pause a moment to consider how they affect the general shape of the theatre. One would think that the architect's common sense would lead him to determine the side lines of the auditorium by the depth, width and shape of the stage—but continually one is finding both indoor and outdoor theatres where the spectators in the outmost seats can see but half the stage. There are three common arrangements to insure perfect sight-lines laterally: first, a semi-circular auditorium facing a very wide and shallow stage; second, a fan-shaped auditorium facing a wedge-shaped stage; and third, a rectangular auditorium facing a rectangular stage of the same width.

The Greek and Roman theatres all had auditoriums of the semi-circular type. In the early Greek structures the rows of seats formed more than a half-circle, sometimes having the ends of the curve prolonged on tangents, forming a "U," and sometimes making a perfect two-thirds of a circle. But



Plan of the Cranbrook Greek Theatre. Both the arrangement of stage, orchestra and auditorium, and the added pool, gardens and loggia as a "second stage," are unique. Marcus R. Burrowes, Architect.

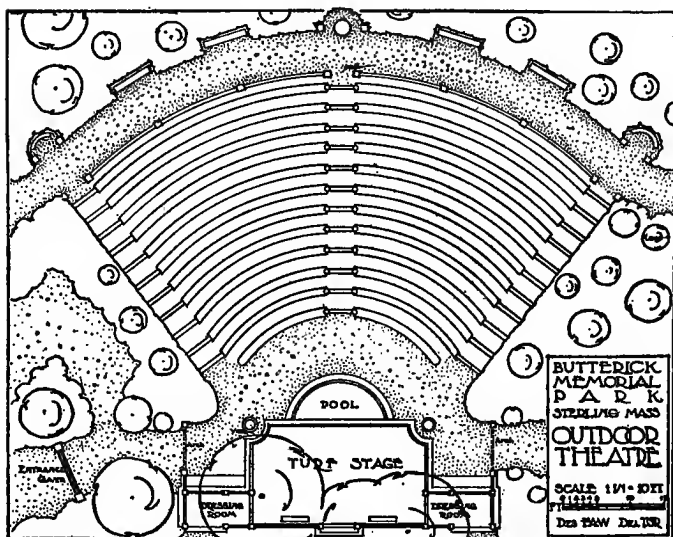


as soon as the action left the orchestra or dancing circle, to be confined to the stage, the auditorium was shortened to the conventional half-circle of the Roman theatre.\* The modern architect returns to the Greek type only at risk of adding a number of unsatisfactory seats to his structure. At the Cranbrook Greek Theatre the auditorium is limited to the exact semi-circle. At the Hearst Greek Theatre the ends of the semi-circle are extended along tangents a few feet, but not enough to interfere in the least with the sight-lines. In the plan for a theatre for Garfield Park, Chicago, the auditorium terraces form almost a full two-thirds of a circle, but there is a certain compensation in that a fore-stage is pushed out between the proscenium columns into the orchestra; but still the sight-lines never could be satisfactory for more than half the audience, as the immense rear-stage would be partly or wholly hidden from large sections at each end of the auditorium. It may be put down as a rule that if one adopts the semi-circular auditorium, one must also plan for a stage almost as wide as the diameter of the outmost rows of seats. The wide shallow stage is a necessary accompaniment of the large classic auditorium form. The semi-circular auditorium is successfully used in garden theatres, because there the stage

\* See comparative plans in Appendix II.

almost invariably is as wide as the auditorium.

Of the second and third types, which are common in nature and garden theatres, little need be said.



*Plan of the Butterick Memorial Theatre, Sterling, Massachusetts. An example of the fan-shaped auditorium. Frank A. Waugh, Architect.*

It is obvious that if the stage is wedge-shaped, the auditorium will naturally widen out along lines that take their direction from the side-lines of the stage; and if the stage is rectangular, the auditorium width must be limited almost to that of the stage. The rectangular auditorium permits the largest possible

stage-depth, and so it is the type best suited to pageant theatres. The fan system is probably the most economical of ground space, and it allows the greatest possible number of people to have perfect views of the entire stage. The plan for an outdoor theatre at Bryn Mawr College, by Olmsted Brothers, and that for a park at Sterling, Massachusetts, by Frank A. Waugh, shown herewith, are interesting variations of the fan type.

The architect should note that in most successful outdoor theatres there is a clear space, or pit, between the stage and the first rows of seats. This space, corresponding in some measure to the "mystic pit" which Wagner insisted should separate stage and auditorium in the opera-house, has a very definite purpose: that of preserving the sense of illusion, which is so necessary to full enjoyment of drama. In theatres where the stage is raised, a gap is formed naturally, since the first rows of seats are pushed back to allow the spectators to see over the edge of the stage. In other theatres the break between the two parts of the structure is more obvious, as at the nature theatre at Hertenstein, where a sloping bank seems to divide the place into two planes, and at the Harz Mountain Theatre, in which the audience looks down at the action seemingly from a world above. This matter of the desirability of keeping

the audience in a different plane or atmosphere from that of the action is better understood in Europe than in America, the architect in this country too often crowding the auditorium directly against the stage-front. At the little Brookside Theatre, however, a sloping bank of turf, similar to that at the Hertenstein Theatre, was constructed with the definite intention of creating a break, and at the St. Louis Pageant Theatre, and elsewhere, a channel of water serves the same purpose.

The matter of acoustics is far less a puzzle and far less a gamble in open-air theatres than within doors. It is very seldom that an outdoor theatre suffers in this particular. In the construction of nature theatres and the more open types of garden theatre, the natural acoustic properties of the site settle the matter. If they are bad, the architect will do well to go elsewhere; if they are good, the chances are that they will not be changed by the slight grading and planting entailed in the shaping of stage and auditorium. Certain sites seem to be perfectly shaped for the proper distribution of sound waves. At the Brookside Garden Theatre every whisper can be heard distinctly, due probably to the conformation of the hills on either side, which also create a charming sense of intimacy and seclusion. At Ragdale Ring, on the other hand, the unfortu-

nate placing of the theatre in an exposed spot leaves the question of hearing dependent upon changing winds and atmospheric conditions. The only other case of bad acoustics noted in American open-air theatres is at the very attractive little "Greek Theatre" at Bakersfield, California. Perhaps because the rear of the stage is an open colonnade instead of a solid wall, or because the auditorium is so low, the sound waves diffuse badly. The architect originally planned formal planting of trees and shrubs behind the colonnade openings and about the rim of the auditorium, and this may correct the fault. At present the theatre cannot be satisfactorily used without heavy hangings between the columns. On the whole it is to be doubted whether a broken stage background of this sort will ever prove adequate acoustically. It is undoubtedly true that the bowl-like shape of the classic theatre has special advantages, the semicircular rings of seats and the high stage wall holding in the sound and yet giving back no echo. Occasionally nearly ten thousand people crowd into the Hearst Greek Theatre, and every one of them can hear words spoken in ordinary conversational tones on the stage.

Vitruvius gives elaborate instructions for the placing of bronze sounding vessels in open-air theatres, to accentuate and more perfectly to distribute the

sound-waves. But in the absence of any definite proofs of the efficacy of the device, and in the absence of modern experiments with it, one may well hesitate to recommend it.

Turning to the matter of stage details, it may be said that no more satisfying background has ever been invented for real drama than the Greek masonry wall, with its single row of columns. In both Greek and Roman theatres it was customary to have this long wall running the full length of the stage at the back, and extending forward at each end of the stage platform. There is a very spirited controversy raging among archæologists as to whether the action in a Greek theatre took place partly on a raised platform stage or entirely on the level of the orchestra floor. But it is certain that the Romans, entirely giving up the orchestra circle as a place for action, constructed high stages; and since the modern drama has no counterpart of the Greek dancing chorus, it is only natural that the modern architect should follow the Roman system and build raised stages. The height of the stages in Roman theatres varied from five to nine feet. At the Hearst Greek Theatre the stage is six feet above the orchestra circle. The height of the rear stage wall depends more upon the height of the auditorium

bowl than upon the size of the stage. Vitruvius \* set it down as law that the top of the wall must be on the level of the highest tier of seats, or of the top of the surrounding portico. At Orange, as a matter of fact, the stage wall, rising one hundred and eighteen feet above the orchestra floor, is much higher than the auditorium; at Aspendus the top of the wall is flush with the top of the colonnade which surrounds the auditorium.

The stage buildings of the truly Greek theatres are so far in decay that it is impossible to estimate reasonably the heights of the stage walls. At the Hearst Greek Theatre the wall is slightly higher than the auditorium, rising forty-two feet above the stage-floor. In decorating the wall there is no doubt that the modern architect will do better to follow the Greek system of a single row of columns than to adopt the over-elaborate Roman system of two or three rows of columns and pilasters, one above the other. In the Greek system there is a sense of dignity and a quiet impressive beauty which should characterize every background of serious dramatic action. But after all, there is nothing except an absurd slavery to convention, and a total lack of artistic initiative, to prevent American archi-

\* Vitruvius' rules for the construction of Greek and Roman theatres will be found in Appendix II.

fects from inventing entirely new forms of design and decoration for the stage wall.

The entrances in the classic theatres were usually five: three doorways in the wall at the back, and one at each end. To provide less than this number in a theatre of large size would be unwise. There are five at the Hearst Greek Theatre, and even the comparatively small stage building at Bradfield has as many. At Cranbrook there is an entrance at each side, and three-fifths of the rear-wall is left open to show the pool and rear stage. The matter of entrances to stages on which the stage buildings are mere colonnades, is always a puzzle. At Point Loma there is only one way of reaching the stage without being seen by the audience: by coming up through the precipitous gulch at the back of the temple. Even that entrance would be impossible if the theatre were not situated at the head of a canyon. In general such an arrangement is a serious handicap except in the production of pageants and festivals, where formal entrances and exits are unnecessary.

The sizes of the stages of theatres of classic type vary greatly. At Orange the stage is over two hundred feet wide and forty-two feet deep. The stage of the Greek Theatre at Berkeley is one hundred and thirty-three by twenty-eight feet. That





TWO VIEWS OF THE GREEK-ROMAN THEATRE AT PRIENE, SHOWING  
UNIQUE STRUCTURAL FEATURES.



of the Greek Theatre planned for Griffith Park, Los Angeles, is to be two hundred feet wide and fifty feet deep, with stage equipment adequate to accommodate one thousand performers. On the other hand, the stage of the little Greek Theatre at Bakersfield is only forty feet wide by nineteen deep, and that at Cranbrook, exclusive of the rear-stage, only forty-five by eighteen feet. In general it may be said that the size of the stage in a structure of the classic type depends almost entirely upon the size of the auditorium.

Turning from the architectural theatres to the stage details of the garden theatre, it is worth while to note the radical difference in the shapes of the stages in the two types. The architectural theatre stages are wide and shallow, while in the garden theatre the stage-depth usually is greater than the width. The following are measurements from typical garden theatres: At Villa Gori the stage is twenty-five feet wide and thirty deep; at Collodi twenty-five feet wide and twenty-five deep; at Marlia forty feet wide and forty deep; at Villa Sergardi (which is unusually large) fifty feet wide and seventy deep. In most garden theatres, including all of these, the stage width decreases at the back. In general it is well not to make a stage less than twenty feet wide at the front, and certainly

not less than twenty feet deep. A stage more than thirty-five or forty feet wide, on the other hand, or more than forty deep, will prove unwieldy in a garden theatre.

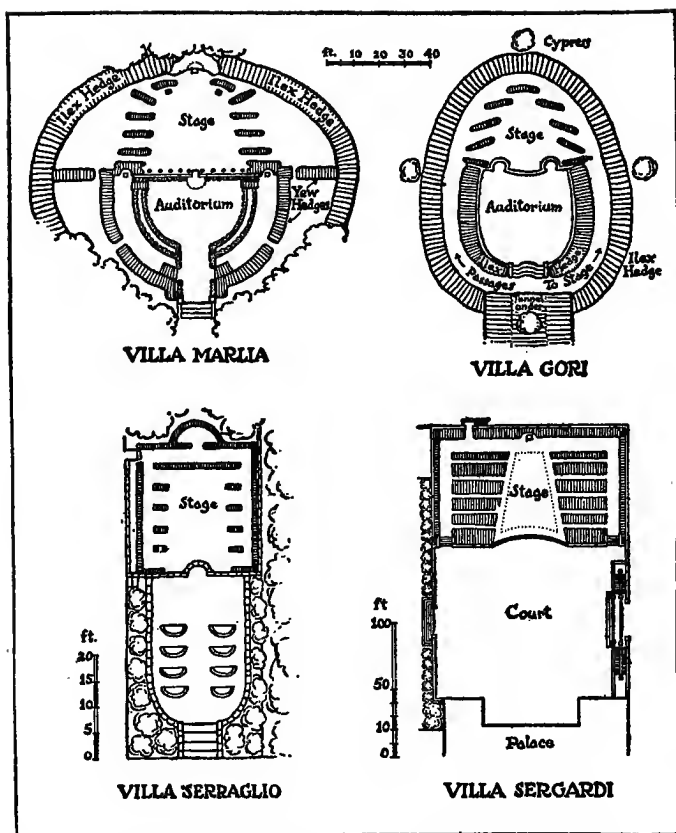
The background of the garden theatre stage nearly always is formed by clipped hedges. The arrangement and proportions of these hedges, usually placed on each side of the stage in converging rows, afford an interesting problem for the designer. The Italian Villa theatres show what exquisite effects can be gained with backgrounds of this sort. Usually the hedges are set against masses of less formal foliage, though at the Villa Gori the conventional character is maintained throughout, the only trees showing above the clipped wings being three tall cypresses, one at the exact centre of the hedge at the back and the other two on the axis of the front stage-wall. At one time treillage-work became very popular in garden theatre design, the vari-formed trellises combining beautifully with the formal hedges. The garden theatre at Mannheim, Germany, is one of the finest existing examples of this type. The combinations that are possible with treillage-work and hedges are infinite, and the architect who is called upon to design a garden playhouse can study the type with advantage. Pergolas have been used very successfully in the same way,

although usually with more informal masses of trees and shrubs. The finest example in America of a stage framed by a pergola is at the Brookside Theatre at Mt. Kisco.

The entrances to the stage are more easily arranged in a garden theatre than in any other type. The series of hedges form natural "wings," and in the more informal sorts it is easy to leave gaps between the groups of shrubs and trees.

The accompanying plans of representative garden theatres show the usual arrangement. A point that is sometimes forgotten by the architect is that there must be ways of access to the wings, hidden from the audience. The arrangement at the Villa Gori, by which hidden passages run between high hedges from the back of the auditorium to the wings, is very good; and a similar but less simple arrangement exists at the Villa Marlia, where there is also very welcome working-space at either side of the stage. At the Villa Collodi, on the other hand, there is no passage to the wings except across the front stage, the actors having been obliged to gather before the audience took its place, or else to enter in full sight of the spectators.

Although the floor of the architectural theatre's stage is usually of stone or cement, the garden theatre may more appropriately have a floor of sod,



#### COMPARATIVE PLANS OF ITALIAN GARDEN THEATRES

**VILLA MARLIA:** Stage floor of turf, slightly sloping; wings of cypress; main auditorium flat, of turf, about four feet below stage level, with two terraces at back; yew hedge behind auditorium, and ilex hedge surrounding all; prompter's shelter at front of stage.

**VILLA GORI:** Stage floor of gravel, slightly sloping; wings of cypress, twelve feet high; auditorium  $3\frac{1}{2}$  feet below stage level, with elaborate "broderie" pattern of turf and gravel; twelve-foot ilex hedge behind auditorium, with fifteen-foot ilex hedge surrounding all; entrance through ilex tunnel.

closely clipped. Earth or gravel tamped hard has proved satisfactory in some cases, but the green turf usually fits in more harmoniously with the general composition.

Of the stage detail of the nature theatre very little need be said. Indeed, the stage arrangements are so various, and depend so largely upon the existing background that nothing approaching rules can be formulated. There is one cardinal principle, however, which the architect must keep in mind: never allow a building to intrude into the background. The first virtue of the nature theatre is the naturalness, or even wildness of its setting, and a building, even if only glimpsed through distant trees, strikes a discordant note.

In connection with stage construction the matter of dressing rooms must be considered. In the purely architectural theatres the problem is easily solved, as the architect may build whatever he wishes behind the stage wall, without marring the appearance of the theatre from the audience's side.

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*VILLA SERRAGLIO: Stage floor of gravel; wings of yew; ten-foot yew hedge surrounding stage and wings; auditorium four feet below stage level, of gravel, with eight stone seats; prompter's box at front of stage.*

*VILLA SERGARDI: Stage floor of turf within gravel walk, slightly sloping; wings of ilex, eighteen feet high, joining at top with surrounding twenty-foot hedge, forming tunnels for entrances; hedges decorated with topiary work; auditorium formed by court four feet below stage level.*

Some of the old Greek and Roman theatres had elaborate systems of dressing-rooms, the space under the stage being utilized for this purpose in some examples. In the garden theatre the problem is also relatively simple, as the entire stage is enclosed, the space outside the wings being available for tents or more permanent structures. But in nature theatres, with the maximum openness in all directions, the question often is very puzzling. Sometimes a tent may be hidden in a clump of trees, and sometimes a creek-bed offers shelter. At the large theatre in the Klampenborg Woods, near Copenhagen, the dressing-rooms are under the stage; but here the wooden stage-front, and the necessary windows, form a false note in a structure which should have kept its natural character as far as possible. Long waits while actors go to change their costumes are disastrous in any sort of production, and it is proper to build dressing-rooms close to the stage even at some sacrifice in other directions; but the sacrifice should not entail the bringing of false notes into the composition.

Of other stage accessories, the prompter's box may well claim serious consideration. In the garden theatres of Italy this feature was common. Usually it was a rounded shelter, open on the stage-side, built of hedge directly against the front stage-



wall, and just large enough for a man to sit in comfortably. Such a shelter may be constructed very unobtrusively, from the auditorium often appearing to be merely an enlargement of the hedge that masks the stage retaining-wall. In the Greek theatres any such construction is impossible, and in the nature theatre it usually is necessary to place the shelter in a clump of trees or shrubs at one side of the stage. But wherever practicable it is a valuable help to the director of productions.

As to a hidden position for the orchestra, no satisfactory arrangement has yet been invented for Greek theatres. There is something ridiculous in the sight of musicians fiddling away for dear life within a few feet of the centre of a stage where pathetic action is taking place. Moreover at night performances the glare from the musicians' lights is very often a weighty factor in destroying illusion. It might well be that a recess could be hollowed under the front of the stage-floor, wherein the orchestra could be hidden by a grating that still would not destroy the effect of the music. In the garden theatre design, an enclosed recess should be left for the musicians at one side of the stage, or, failing that, behind the hedge that serves as a "back-drop." Here, of course, since the construction is all of hedges and trees, the sound will carry from any

point near the stage to the auditorium. Similarly the orchestra in a nature theatre can be hidden by any convenient clump of trees, and often the placing of the musicians at a little distance from the stage and audience will add to, rather than detract from, the effect. In a theatre with a comparatively flat auditorium floor, a pit can be sunk for the orchestra immediately in front of the stage platform. This arrangement has been adopted at the Bohemian Grove Theatre, where a slightly sloping bank covered with ferns hides even the fact of the pit's existence from the audience. A similar recess is provided for the orchestra in the nature theatre at Vassar College.

In the matter of detail of auditorium construction the architect has to consider little beyond the shape of the seats. If these are to be of wood, there are numerous types of benches to choose from. If the construction is to be of concrete, probably a straight step arrangement will be best. But if the seats are to be of permanent stone, the architect will do well to go back to the Greek and Roman theatres for models. Some of the arrangements are unusually graceful as well as practical. The usual rise of each terrace of seats was sixteen to eighteen inches, while the "tread" was twenty-four to thirty inches, this combination giving a satisfactory slope



CHAIRS OF HONOR IN THE THEATRE OF DIONYSUS AT ATHENS.



to the whole auditorium. At the Hearst Greek Theatre the rise is between seventeen and eighteen inches, and the tread thirty inches, except below the diazoma, where the risers are only six inches high and the tread thirty-six deep. As the latter portion of the auditorium is below the level of the stage the six-inch step is adequate—although of course, such a small rise makes necessary the use of chairs. In the ancient Greek theatres there was usually a row of “chairs of honor,” elaborately carved from marble, at the outer edge of the orchestra circle. The photograph of the seats of the priests in the theatre at Athens, shows some of the finest of these chairs. The Hearst Greek Theatre is the only modern structure in which this feature has been copied, eight marble seats of honor having been placed already at the front edge of the diazoma.

The auditorium of the garden theatre is usually a pit with turf or gravel floor, on which chairs are placed at times of performances. An exception among the Italian theatres is at Villa Serraglio, where there are eight stone benches. At the Villa Gori the floor of the auditorium is an elaborate “broderie” design of turf and narrow gravel walks.

Ordinarily each seat is considered to occupy a width of twenty-six to thirty inches and a depth of thirty-three to thirty-six inches—although an even

larger allotment of space is wise in the out-of-doors. At the smaller figures, each seat will occupy six square feet. Starting with these figures, the designer can by an easy mathematical calculation determine the seating-capacity of any given plot of ground.

The problem of lighting an open-air theatre for night performances is one of the most perplexing of all that the architect must meet. In the large structures of the architectural type, especially, it is difficult to work out a stage-lighting system that is adequate without creating a disillusioning glare in the eyes of a part of the audience. At the Greek Theatre at Berkeley the system has proved inadequate time and again. Here the only set feature is a row of masked footlights in a shallow depression along the stage-front. This is sometimes supplemented by a string of lights, masked on the auditorium side, suspended above the stage, and by "spot-lights" thrown from the centre of the diazoma. But always the suspended lamps are noticeable from certain seats, and invariably the spectators who sit close to the spot-light machines are disturbed by the sputtering of the lamps, and by the glare of the lights when the operators are shifting their colored screens. Moreover the very movements of the operators are an interruption and

an annoyance. The only solution that will be permanently satisfactory in such a theatre is the building of temporary hoods or shelters which will entirely cover machines and operators, with holes only on the stage side for the streams of light. The designer of a new theatre of the Greek or architectural type might well consider the advisability of setting in permanent boxes for the light-machines, under the centre of the auditorium at the height of the stage.

In the more flexible nature and garden theatres the lighting problem becomes much simpler. A row of footlights can always be masked by a log in the one case, or by a miniature hedge in the other. Side lights can be thrown, moreover, from almost any point in the wings, the hedges or clumps of shrubs serving to hide the actual lamps from the audience. At the Bohemian Grove Theatre the profusion of trees and shrubs at the sides of the narrow stage has made possible the achievement of remarkably rich and subtle light effects. Similarly the deep stage of the garden theatre at Ragdale offered opportunities which the owners were quick to grasp. In this theatre use is made of proscenium columns, not alone to frame the stage decoratively, but to cover the source of certain lights. The utility of such columns in distributing the lights, is a large

factor in determining the adoption of this feature in nature and garden theatres; and in those theatres in which the architect does not wish to disturb the natural look by the permanent introduction of any such formal feature, sockets can be left at each side of the stage-front, into which the columns with the lighting equipment can be fitted just at the times of night performances. The design by Hermann Rosse for the stage of an open-air theatre shows an interesting arrangement of pylons to mask light-sources.

In general, the architect's duty to the producer is to make provision for ample lights both from the front and from the sides; and his duty to the audience is to see that these lights are so masked that not a single lamp can be seen from the auditorium—for nothing else so quickly destroys illusion as a glare.

The drainage systems of open-air theatres are very simple affairs. If the stage slopes, as it does slightly in so many nature and garden theatres, a small gutter at the front may prevent damage by carrying away excess water. Always when the auditorium pit is sunk below the level of the surrounding ground, it is necessary to provide a drainage outlet from the lowest point. The Hearst Greek Theatre has a gutter on the level of the





DESIGN FOR THE STAGE OF A PAGEANT THEATRE, BY HERMANN ROSSE. HERE THE COLUMNS OFFER SHELTER FOR LIGHT-SOURCES.



diazoma, another around the little orchestra circle, at the lowest level, and another along the full length of the stage-front. All of these are covered with continuous iron grating. In the Greek and Roman theatres the drainage system was exactly of this sort.

The cost of an open-air theatre depends upon the type chosen, the size, and the topographical conditions. Often a nature theatre may be shaped in a hollow of the hills for two or three thousand dollars, while a garden theatre may easily be constructed for even less. In both types it is the grading that is most expensive, although much may be spent in planting and in incidental architectural features. In the architectural theatres, the cost may run up to the hundreds of thousands of dollars if the structure is built of stone, being less if the material is concrete, and still less if wood is chosen. In general it may be said that the community with two or three thousand dollars to spend can have an open-air theatre that will serve for the production of pageants and masques; and usually if the need for a more elaborate structure is proved, the further sum necessary will be forthcoming.

Occasionally the prospective owner comes to the architect with the unqualified demand for *an* outdoor theatre. The architect is left to choose or at least suggest the style or type. So it may not be

amiss to outline the distinctive advantages and limitations of each of the three types. It would be as ridiculous for a pageant association to build a structure of the rigid Greek type, as for a university to build a very open nature theatre or tiny garden theatre. The designer must weigh carefully the kind of drama to be presented and the probable size of the audiences; and of course he must keep in mind whether the gatherings will be public or private.

A theatre of the Greek or purely architectural type is the only one in which very large crowds can be seated and all hear perfectly. The only large modern Greek theatre, that at Berkeley, ordinarily seats sixty-four hundred people, and there is no point in the auditorium at which words spoken in ordinary tones from the stage cannot be heard distinctly. The acoustics of the ancient Greek and Roman theatres are described as perfect, although the seating capacities often were immense; for example, the theatre at Athens accommodated about 17,000 people, Megalopolis 20,000, Epidauros 18,000, and the Theatre of Marcellus at Rome 20,500. The partially enclosed form, the bowl-like shape, doubtless prevents the sound-waves from diffusing as they do in the more open nature theatre. The sense of enclosure, moreover, affords to the

audience that feeling of being close to the action on the stage, or even of being a part of the action, which is such a large factor in preserving the illusion of drama in the indoor theatre. The Greek type of open-air playhouse is better-fitted than any other for the production of any of the ordinary forms of drama, and its atmosphere of protection from outside interruptions makes possible the enjoyment of concerts and all other sorts of activity that demand concentration of attention. Its one limitation is in the direction of pageant-producing. Its rigid background and inflexible stage do not lend themselves well as a setting for pageants, masques and spectacles. The Greek theatre is the theatre *par excellence* for universities, where most of the dramatic productions are likely to be plays rather than pageants, and where concerts, meetings, and lectures are to be included in the theatre's activities; and of course it is the type for any community that desires to utilize its structure thus widely. It is interesting to note that although the series of plays at the Hearst Greek Theatre has been remarkable in many ways, the purely dramatic activities have totalled less than one-fourth of all the exercises there.

The distinctive advantages of the nature theatre type lie in its openness and flexibility. It affords a perfect setting for pageants and masques and for

æsthetic dancing, but not for plays or meetings or lectures. At the Peterborough Pageant Theatre concerts have been given successfully, but as a rule music demands a more intimate atmosphere. If the architect is building for a pageant-association, he should by all means turn to the nature type; and in those cities where theatres are to be constructed in public parks chiefly for the use of the playground departments, for folk dances, flower festivals, and similar activities, this is the best type.

The characteristic virtues of the garden theatre are derived chiefly from its smallness. It has the same sense of enclosure and protection as the Greek theatre, but it has also the atmosphere of intimacy that results from the very limited size of the stage and the closeness of the audience to the stage. It is the perfect type for poetic plays and dramatic readings, and for most amateur performances. So, of course, it is the perfect type for private estates, and for amateur societies.

## APPENDIX II

### VITRUVIUS ON THE CONSTRUCTION OF GREEK AND ROMAN THEATRES

(Vitruvius was a Latin writer, probably of the Augustan Age. Although he wrote without literary distinction, his work, "Ten Books on Architecture," is very important as a contemporary source of knowledge about the architecture and building of the Romans, and to some extent of the Greeks. The extracts here printed form four chapters of this work, and are reprinted, by permission, from the translation of Morris Hicky Morgan, published by the Harvard University Press.)

#### THE THEATRE: ITS SITE, FOUNDATIONS, AND ACOUSTICS

After the forum has been arranged, next, for the purpose of seeing plays or festivals of the immortal gods, a site as healthy as possible should be selected for the theatre, in accordance with what has been written in the first book, on the principles

of healthfulness in the sites of cities. For when plays are given, the spectators, with their wives and children, sit through them spellbound, and their bodies, motionless from enjoyment, have the pores open, into which blowing winds find their way. If these winds come from marshy districts or from other unwholesome quarters, they will introduce noxious exhalations into the system. Hence, such faults will be avoided if the site of the theatre is somewhat carefully selected.

We must also beware that it has not a southern exposure. When the sun shines full upon the rounded part of it, the air, being shut up in the curved enclosure and unable to circulate, stays there and becomes heated; and getting glowing hot it burns up, dries out, and impairs the fluids of the human body. For these reasons, sites which are unwholesome in such respects are to be avoided, and healthy sites selected.

The foundation walls will be an easier matter if they are on a hillside; but if they have to be laid on a plain or in a marshy place, solidity must be assured and substructures built in accordance with what has been written in the third book, on the foundations of temples. Above the foundation walls, the ascending rows of seats, from the substructures up, should be built of stone and marble materials.



The curved cross-aisles should be constructed in proportionate relation, it is thought, to the height of the theatre, but not higher than the footway of the passage is broad. If they are loftier, they will throw back the voice and drive it away from the upper portion, thus preventing the case-endings of words from reaching with distinct meaning the ears of those who are in the uppermost seats above the cross-aisles. In short, it should be so contrived that a line drawn from the lowest to the highest seat will touch the top edges and angles of all the seats. Thus the voice will meet with no obstruction.

The different entrances ought to be numerous and spacious, the upper not connected with the lower, but built in a continuous straight line from all parts of the house, without turnings, so that the people may not be crowded together when let out from shows, but may have separate exits from all parts without obstructions.

Particular pains must also be taken that the site be not a "deaf" one, but one through which the voice can range with the greatest clearness. This can be brought about if a site is selected where there is no obstruction due to echo.

Voice is a flowing breath of air, perceptible to the hearing by contact. It moves in an endless number of circular rounds, like the innumerably in-

creasing circular waves which appear when a stone is thrown into smooth water, and which keep on spreading indefinitely from the centre unless interrupted by narrow limits, or by some obstruction which prevents such waves from reaching their end in due formation. When they are interrupted by obstructions, the first waves, flowing back, break up the formation of those which follow.

In the same manner the voice executes its movements in concentric circles; but while in the case of water the circles move horizontally on a plane surface, the voice not only proceeds horizontally, but also ascends vertically by regular stages. Therefore, as in the case of the waves formed in the water, so it is in the case of the voice: the first wave, when there is no obstruction to interrupt it, does not break up the second or the following waves, but they all reach the ears of the lowest and highest spectators without an echo.

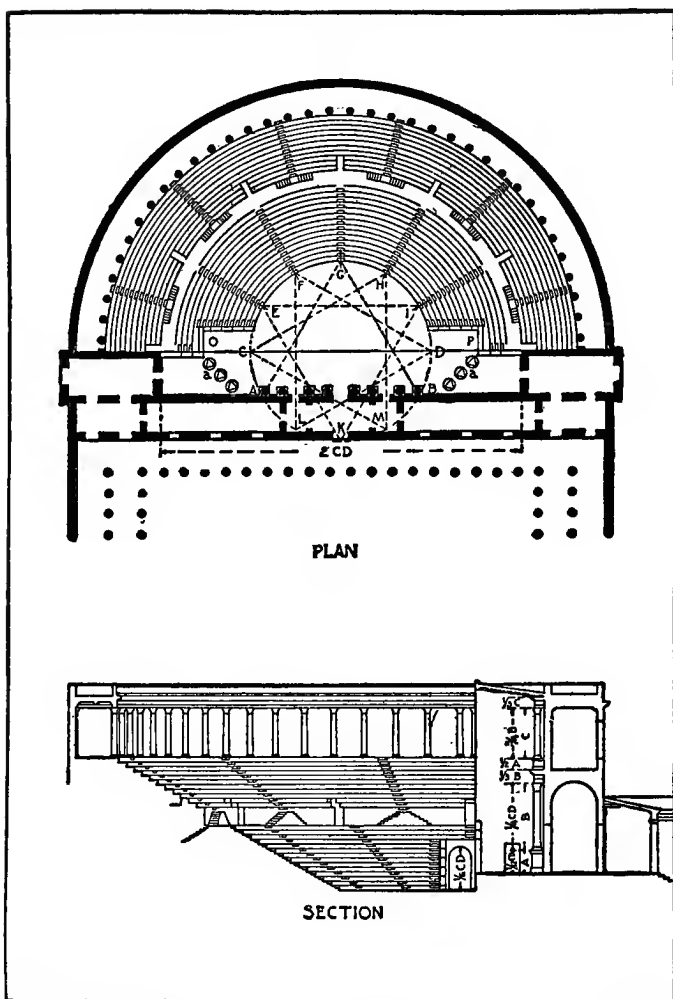
Hence the ancient architects, following in the footsteps of nature, perfected the ascending rows of seats in theatres from their investigations of the ascending voice, and, by means of the canonical theory of the mathematicians and that of the musicians, endeavored to make every voice uttered on the stage come with greater clearness and sweetness to the ears of the audience. For just as musical instru-

ments are brought to perfection of clearness in the sound of their strings by means of bronze plates or horn *ῥηεῖα*, so the ancients devised methods of increasing the power of the voice in theatres through the application of harmonics.

[At this point there are abstruse chapters on "Harmonics" and "Sounding Vessels in the Theatre."]

#### PLAN OF THE THEATRE

The plan of the theatre itself is to be constructed as follows. Having fixed upon the principal centre, draw a line of circumference equivalent to what is to be the perimeter at the bottom, and in it inscribe four equilateral triangles, at equal distances apart and touching the boundary line of the circle, as the astrologers do in a figure of the twelve signs of the zodiac, when they are making computations from the musical harmony of the stars. Taking that one of these triangles whose side is nearest to the scaena, let the front of the scaena be determined by the line where that side cuts off a segment of the circle (A-B), and draw, through the centre, a parallel line (C-D) set off from that position, to separate the platform of the stage from the space of the orchestra.



*Plan and section of the Roman Theatre according to Vitruvius.  
(By courtesy of the Harvard University Press.)*

The platform has to be made deeper than that of the Greeks, because all our artists perform on the stage, while the orchestra contains the places reserved for the seats of senators. The height of this platform must be not more than five feet, in order that those who sit in the orchestra may be able to see the performances of all the actors. The sections (*cunei*) for spectators in the theatre should be so divided, that the angles of the triangles which run about the circumference of the circle may give the direction for the flights of steps between the sections, as far as up to the first curved cross-aisle. Above this, the upper sections are to be laid out, midway between (the lower sections), with alternating passage-ways.

The angles at the bottom, which give the directions for the flights of steps, will be seven in number (C, E, F, G, H, I, D); the other five angles will determine the arrangement of the scene: thus, the angle in the middle ought to have the "royal door" (K) opposite to it; the angles to the right and left (L, M) will designate the position of the doors for guest chambers; and the two outermost angles (A, B) will point to the passages in the wings. The steps for the spectators' places, where the seats are arranged, should be not less than a foot and a palm in height, nor more than a foot and six fingers; their

depth should be fixed at not more than two and a half feet, nor less than two feet.

The roof of the colonnade to be built at the top of the rows of seats, should be level with the top of the "scaena," for the reason that the voice will then rise with equal power until it reaches the highest rows of seats and the roof. If the roof is not so high, in proportion as it is lower, it will check the voice at the point which the sound first reaches.

Take one-sixth of the diameter of the orchestra between the lowest steps, and let the lower seats at the ends on both sides be cut away to a height of that dimension so as to leave entrances (O,P). At the point where this cutting away occurs, fix the soffits of the passages. Thus their vaulting will be sufficiently high.

The length of the "scaena" ought to be double the diameter of the orchestra. The height of the podium, starting from the level of the stage, is, including the corona and cymatium, one-twelfth of the diameter of the orchestra. Above the podium, the columns, including their capitals and bases, should have a height of one-quarter of the same diameter, and the architraves and ornaments of the columns should be one-fifth of their height. The parapet above, including its cyma and corona, is one-half the height of the parapet below. Let the

columns above this parapet be one-fourth less in height than the columns below, and the architraves and ornaments of these columns one-fifth of their height. If the "scaena" is to have three stories, let the uppermost parapet be half the height of the intermediate one, the columns at the top one-fourth less high than the intermediate, and the architraves and coronæ of these columns one-fifth of their height as before.

It is not possible, however, that in all theatres these rules of symmetry should answer all conditions and purposes, but the architect ought to consider to what extent he must follow the principle of symmetry, and to what extent it may be modified to suit the nature of the site or the size of the work. There are, of course, some things which, for utility's sake, must be made of the same size in a small theatre and a large one: such as the steps, curved cross-aisles, their parapets, the passages, stair-ways, stages, tribunals, and any other things which occur that make it necessary to give up symmetry so as not to interfere with utility. Again, if in the course of the work any of the material fall short, such as marble, timber, or anything else that is provided, it will not be amiss to make a slight reduction or addition, provided that it is done without going too far, but with intelligence. This will be possible, if the

architect is a man of practical experience and, besides, not destitute of cleverness and skill.

The "scaena" itself displays the following scheme. In the centre are double doors decorated like those of a royal palace. At the right and left are the doors of the guest chambers. Beyond are spaces provided for decoration—places that the Greeks call *περιάκτοι*, because in these places are triangular pieces of machinery which revolve, each having three decorated faces. When the play is to be changed, or when gods enter to the accompaniment of sudden claps of thunder, these may be revolved and present a face differently decorated. Beyond these places are the projecting wings which afford entrances to the stage, one from the forum, the other from abroad.

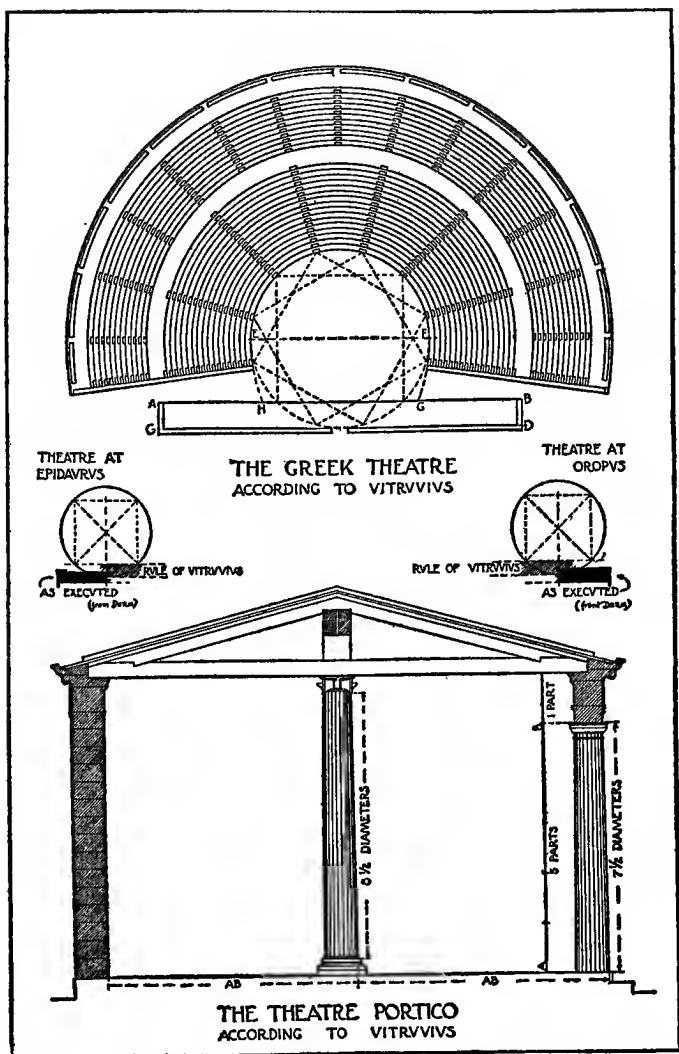
There are three kinds of scenes, one called the tragic, second, the comic, third, the satyric. Their decorations are different and unlike each other in scheme. Tragic scenes are delineated with columns, pediments, statues, and other objects suited to kings; comic scenes exhibit private dwellings, with balconies and views representing rows of windows, after the manner of ordinary dwellings; satyric scenes are decorated with trees, caverns, mountains, and other rustic objects delineated in landscape style.



## GREEK THEATRES

In the theatres of the Greeks, these same rules of construction are not to be followed in all respects. First, in the circle at the bottom where the Roman has four triangles, the Greek has three squares with their angles touching the line of circumference. The square whose side is nearest to the "scaena," and cuts off a segment of the circle, determines by this line the limits of the "proscænium" (A-B). Parallel to this line and tangent to the outer circumference of the segment, a line is drawn which fixes the front of the "scaena" (C-D). Through the centre of the orchestra and parallel to the direction of the "proscænium" a line is laid off, and centres are marked where it cuts the circumference to the right and left (E,F) at the ends of the half-circle. Then, with the compasses fixed at the right, an arc is described from the horizontal distance at the left to the left hand side of the "proscænium" (F-G); again with the centre at the left end, an arc is described from the horizontal distance at the right to the right hand side of the "proscænium" (E-H).

As a result of this plan with three centres, the Greeks have a roomier orchestra, and a "scaena"



*Plan of the Greek Theatre according to Vitruvius. The small circular diagrams represent two actual variations from the theoretical type. The reference "from Durm" is to Josef Durm's "Die Baukunst der Griechen."*

*(By courtesy of the Harvard University Press.)*

set further back, as well as a stage of less depth. They call this the *λογεῖον*, for the reason that there the tragic and comic actors perform on the stage, while other artists give their performances in the entire orchestra; hence, from this fact they are given in Greek the distinct names "Scenic" and "Thymelic." The height of this "logeum" ought to be not less than ten feet nor more than twelve. Let the ascending flights of steps between the wedges of seats, as far up as the first curved cross-aisle, be laid out on lines directly opposite to the angles of the square. Above the cross-aisle, let other flights be laid out in the middle between the first; and at the top, as often as there is a new cross-aisle, the number of flights of steps is always increased to the same extent.

#### ACOUSTICS OF THE SITE OF A THEATRE

All this having been settled with the greatest pains and skill, we must see to it, with still greater care, that a site has been selected where the voice has a gentle fall, and is not driven back with a recoil so as to convey an indistinct meaning to the ear. There are some places which from their very nature interfere with the course of the voice, as for instance the dissonant, which are termed in Greek *κατηχούντες*;

the circumsonant, which with them are named *περιηχοῦντες*; again the resonant, which are termed *ἀντηχοῦντες*; and the consonant, which they call *συνηχοῦντες*. The dissonant are those places in which the first sound uttered that is carried up high, strikes against solid bodies above, and, being driven back, checks as it sinks to the bottom the rise of the succeeding sound.

The circumsonant are those in which the voice spreads all round, and then is forced into the middle, where it dissolves; the case-endings are not heard, and it dies away there in sounds of indistinct meaning. The resonant are those in which it comes into contact with some solid substance and recoils, thus producing an echo, and making the terminations of cases sound double. The consonant are those in which it is supported from below, increases as it goes up, and reaches the ears in words which are distinct and clear in tone. Hence, if there has been careful attention in the selection of the site, the effect of the voice will, through this precaution, be perfectly suited to the purposes of a theatre.

The drawings of the plans may be distinguished from each other by this difference, that theatres designed from squares are meant to be used by Greeks, while Roman theatres are designed from equilateral

triangles. Whoever is willing to follow these directions will be able to construct perfectly correct theatres.

THE END



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