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THE COMÉDIE FRANÇAISE AT ORANGE.

WITH PICTURES BY LOUIS LOEB.

I.

AFTER a lapse of nearly fifteen centuries, the Roman theater at Orange — founded in the time of Marcus Aurelius, and abandoned, two hundred years later, when the Northern barbarians overran the land — seems destined to arise reanimate from its ruins, and to be the scene of periodic performances by the *Comédie Française*: the first dramatic company of Europe playing on the noblest stage in the world. During the past five-and-twenty years various attempts have been made to compass this happy end. Now — as the result of the representations of “*Oedipus*” and “*Antigone*” at Orange, in August last, under government patronage and by the leading actors of the national theater — these spasmodic efforts have crystallized into a steadfast endeavor which promises to restore and to repeople that long-abandoned stage.

If they know about it, over there in the shades, I am sure that no one rejoices more sincerely over this revival than do the Romans by whom the theater at Orange was built, and from whom it has come down to us as one of the many proofs of their strong affection for that portion of their empire which now is the southeast corner of France. To them this region, although ultimately included in the larger *Narbonensis*, always was simply *Provincia* — the province: a distinguishing indistinction which exalted it above all the other dependencies of Rome. Constantine, indeed, was for fixing the very seat of the empire here; and he did build, and for a time live in, the palace at Arles, of which a stately fragment still remains. Unluckily for the world of later periods, he was

lured away from the banks of the Rhone by the charms of the Bosphorus; and so, without knowing it, opened the Eastern Question, that ever since has been fought over, and that still demands for its right answering at least one more general European war.

Thus greatly loving their province, the Romans gladly poured out their treasure in adding to its natural beauties the adornments of art. Scattered through this region — through the Provence of to-day, and, over on the other side of the Rhone, through Languedoc — are the remnants of their magnificent creations: the Pont du Gard; the arena, and the baths, and the Tour Magne, and the beautiful *Maison Carrée*, at Nîmes; at Arles the arena, the palace of Constantine, and the wreck of the once exquisite theater; the baths at Aix; the triumphal arches at Orange and Carpentras; the smaller but more perfectly graceful arch and the charming monument at St. Remy — all these relics of Roman splendor, with many others which I have not named, still testify to Roman affection for this enchanting land.

The theater at Orange — the Arausio of Roman times, colonized by the veterans of the Second Legion — was not the best of these many noble edifices. Decidedly, the good fortune that has preserved so large a part of it would have been better bestowed upon the far more beautiful, because more purely Grecian, theater at Arles, which the blessed St. Hilary and the priest Cyril of holy memory fell afoul of in the fifth century and destroyed because of its inherent idolatrous wickedness, and then used as raw material for their well-meant but injudicious church-building. But the Orange theater —

having as its only extant rival that at Pompeii — has the distinction of being the most nearly perfect Roman theater surviving until our day; and, setting aside comparisons with things non-existent, it is one of the most majestic structures to be found in the whole of France. Louis XIV., who styled it “the most magnificent wall of my kingdom,” placed it first of all.

II.

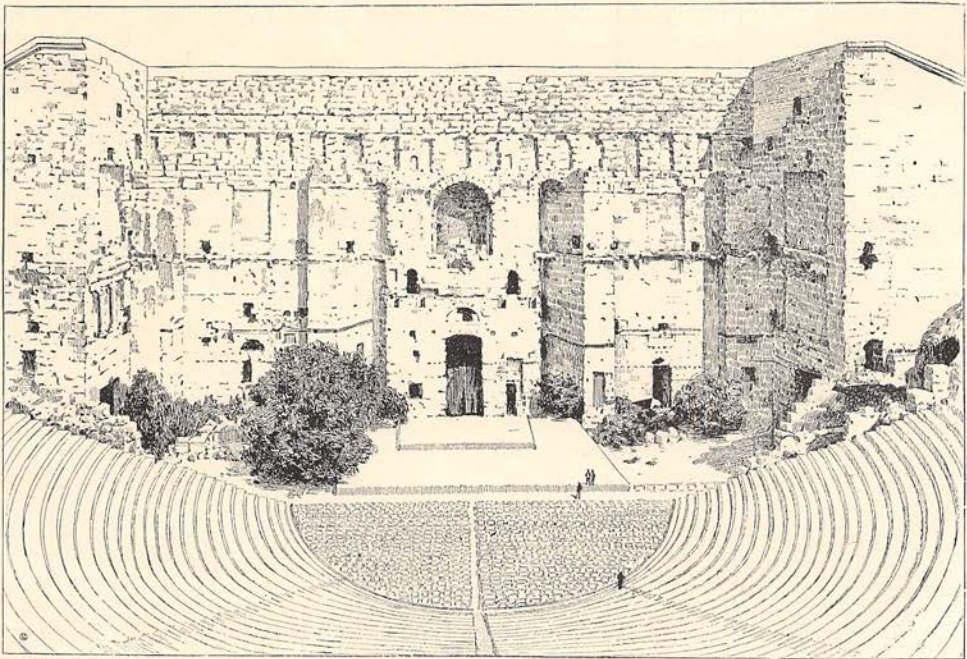
THE unknown architect who wrought this great work traversed the usual Roman custom of erecting a complete building upon level ground, and followed the Grecian custom of hollowing out a hillside, and of facing the open cutting with a structure of masonry, which completed the tiers of seats cut in the living rock; provided in its main body the postscenium, and in its wings the necessary dressing-rooms; and, rising in front to a level with the colonnade which crowned and surrounded the auditorium, made at once the outer façade and the rear wall of the stage.¹

Save that the colonnade and some of the upper courses of masonry on the lateral walls are gone, and that the wooden portico which extended across the whole width of the front has been destroyed, the exterior of the building remains substantially intact — a great parallelogram jutting out into the very heart of the little town. Its dominant characteristic is its power-

ful mass. The enormous façade is severely simple: a stony height based upon a cornice surmounting open Tuscan arches, and broken only by a few strong lines. The essential principle of the whole is stability. It is the Roman style with all its good qualities exaggerated. Elegance is replaced by a heavy grandeur; purity by force.

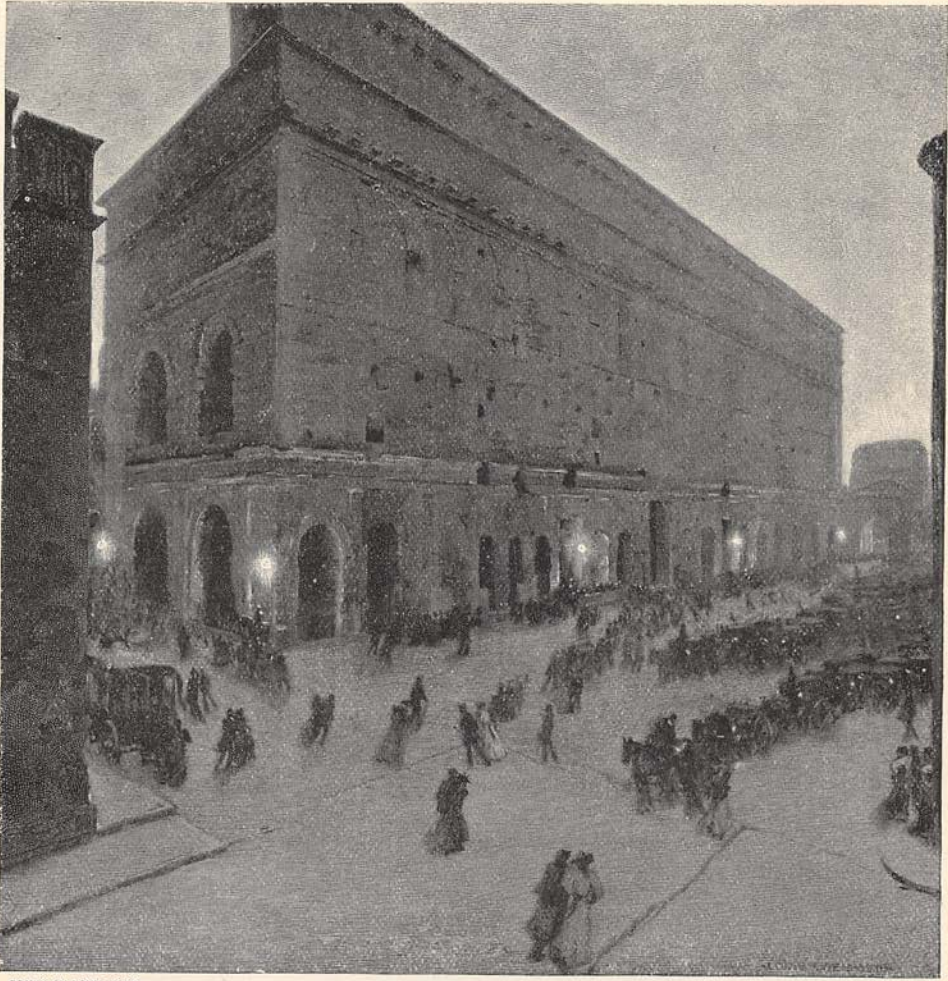
The auditorium, as originally constructed, — save for the graceful colonnade which surmounted it, and for the ornamentation bestowed upon the front wall of the stage, and also, probably, upon the wall inclosing the lowest tier, — was as severe as the exterior: simply bare benches of stone rising, in three distinct stages, in a great semicircle. But on the walls forming the back and the sides of the stage decoration was bestowed lavishly. Following the Grecian tradition, this permanent set represented very magnificently — being, indeed, a reality — a royal palace, or, on occasion, a temple: a façade flanked by projecting wings, adorned with carved and gilded marbles — columns, pilasters, cornices; its flat surfaces covered with richly colored mosaics; above each of its five portals an arched alcove containing a statue — that over the central royal portal being a colossal representation of the emperor or of a god.

¹ The dimensions of the theater are: width, 338 feet; depth, 254 feet; height of façade and of rear wall of stage, 120 feet; radius of auditorium, 182 feet.



DRAWN BY LOUIS LOEB.

GENERAL VIEW OF THE ROMAN THEATER AT ORANGE, SHOWING RESTORED SEATS AND TEMPORARY STAGE.



DRAWN BY LOUIS LOEB.

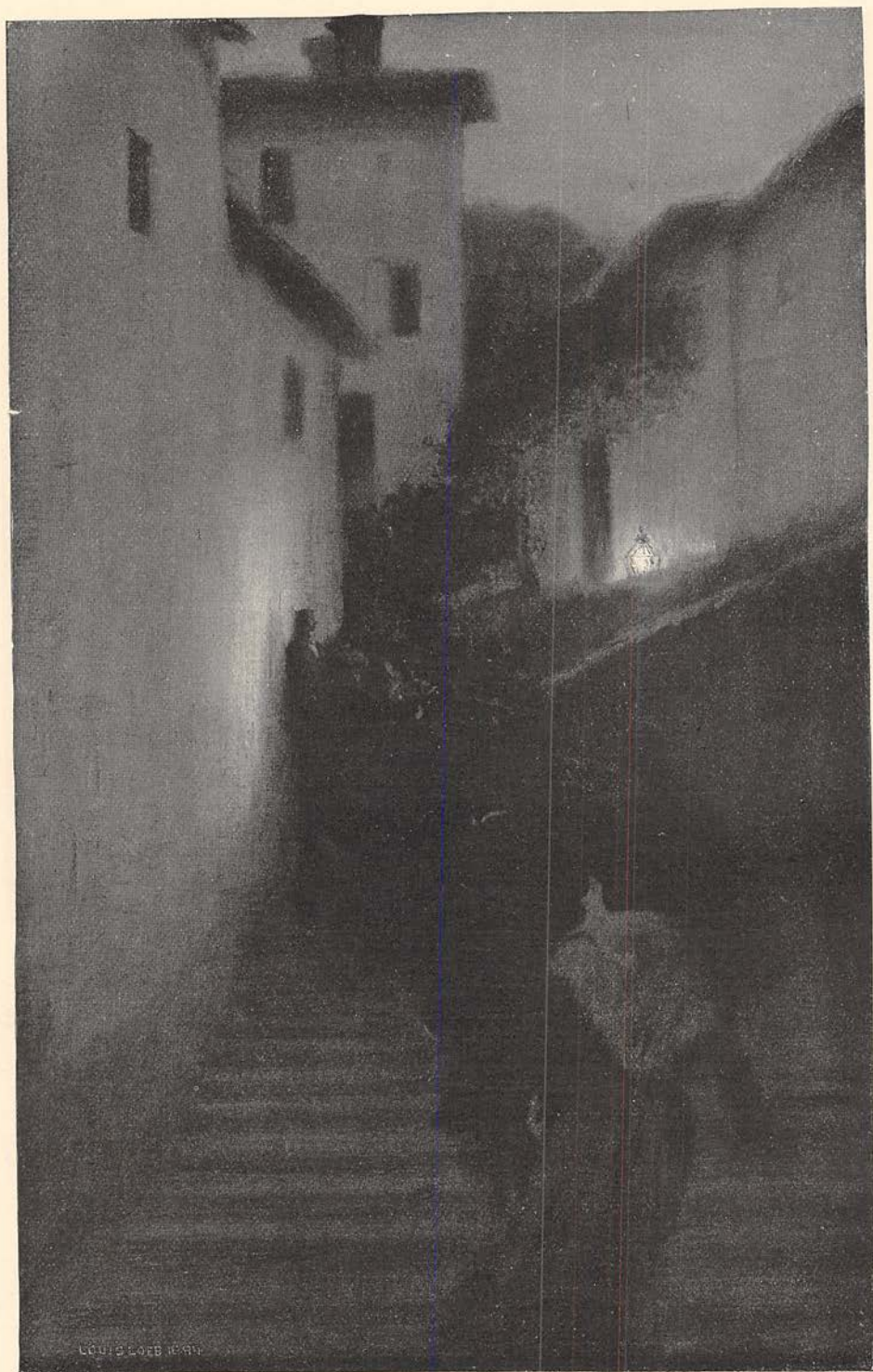
THE AUDIENCE BEGINNING TO ARRIVE.

The stage extended across the whole front of this wall, entirely filling the space between the wings. Ninety feet above it, also filling the space between the wings, was a wooden roof (long since destroyed), which flared upward and outward, at once adding to the acoustic properties of the building and protecting the stage from rain. Still further to strengthen the acoustic effect, two curved walls, in the nature of lateral sounding-boards, extended outward from the rear of the stage, and partly embraced the space upon which the action of the play mainly went on. I shall not enter into the vexed question of scenery. It is sufficient to say that this permanent set, in regard to which there can be no dispute,—a palace that also would serve as a temple,—made an entirely harmonious framework for most of the plays which must have been presented here. Indeed, a more fitting or a more impressive setting could not have

been devised for the majority of the tragedies of that time, which were filled always with a solemn grandeur, and which had usually for their chief personages priests or kings. Above all, the dignity of this magnificent permanent scene was in keeping with the devotional solemnity of the early theater, when an inaugural sacrifice was celebrated upon an altar standing in front of the stage (where now sits the leader of the orchestra), and when the play itself was in the nature of a religious rite.

III.

CERTAINLY for two centuries, possibly for a longer period, the people of Arausio maintained and enjoyed their theater. Then came the break-up of the empire, and the descent upon this rich region of the lean barbarians of the North. After the second German invasion, in the year 406



LOUIS LOEB 1891

DRAWN BY LOUIS LOEB.

ENTRANCE OF THE UPPER TIER.

of our era, there was little left in Gaul of Roman civilization; and after the coming of the Visigoths, four years later, Roman civilization was at an end.

Yet during this period of disintegration the theater was not injured materially; and it actually remained almost intact — although variously misused and perverted — nearly down to our own day. The Lords of Baux, in the twelfth century, made the building the outguard of their fortress on the hilltop in its rear; and from their time onward little dwellings were erected within it, the creation of which nibbled away its magnificent substance to be used in the making of pygmy walls. But the actual wholesale destruction of the interior did not begin until the year 1622, when Prince Maurice of Nassau and Orange, in manner most unprincipally, used the building as a quarry from which to draw material for the system of fortifications devised for his little capital by his Dutch engineers. In later times the theater was used as a quarry on a smaller scale; but, practically, it has remained as this outrageous prince left it, save that, until the work of restoration began, the whole of its interior was infested with mean little dwellings which choked it like offensive weeds, and that rain and frost steadily were eating into its unprotected masonry, and so were hastening its general decay.

This was its evil condition when, happily, the architect Auguste Caristie, vice-president of the commission charged with the conservation of historical monuments, came down to Orange early in the present century, and immediately was filled with an enthusiastic determination that the stately building should be purified and restored. The theater became with him a passion — yet a steadfast passion which continued through more than a quarter of a century. Practically, by removing the mean little dwellings which defiled the interior, and by protecting with new masonry the crumbling walls, he cleansed and preserved it. His theoretical work was not less valuable. As the result of his patient researches he reestablished the building, on paper, substantially as the Roman architect created it; and upon the lines of the plan thus lovingly made the present architect in charge, M. Formigé, working in the same loving and faithful spirit, is making the restoration in stone. Most righteously, as a principal feature of the ceremonies of last August, a bust of Auguste Caristie was set up at Orange close by the theater to save and to restore which he worked with so strong a heart.

Another enthusiast — they are useful in the world, these enthusiasts — took up the work at the point where Caristie had laid it down. This was Fernand Michel, more widely known by his pseudonym of Antony Réal. By a lucky

calamity — the great inundation of the Rhone in the year 1840 — Michel was detained for a while in Orange, and so was enabled to give to the theater more than the ordinary tourist's passing glance. By that time the interior of the building had been cleared, and its noble proportions fully revealed; and as the result of his first long morning's visit he became, as Caristie had become before him, fairly infatuated with it.

For my part, I am disposed to believe that a bit of Roman enchantment still lingers in those ancient walls; that the old gods who presided over their creation, and who continue to live on very comfortably, though a little shyly and in a quiet way, here in the south of France, have still an alluring power over those of us who, being at odds with existing dispensations, are open to their genial influences. But without discussing this side issue, it is enough to say that Michel, lightly taking up what proved to be the resolute work of half a lifetime, then and there vowed himself to the task of restoring and reanimating that ruined and long-silent stage.

For more than twenty years he labored without arriving at any tangible result; and the third decade of his propaganda almost was ended when at last, in August, 1869, his dream was made a reality, and the spell of silence was broken by the presentation of Méhul's "Joseph" at Orange. And the crowning of his happiness came when, the opera ended, his own ode, composed for the occasion, "Les Triomphateurs," set to music by Imbert, echoed in the ancient theater, and the audience of more than seven thousand burst into enthusiastic cheering over the victory that he had won. Truly, to be the hero of such a triumph was worth the work of nine-and-twenty years.

Half a decade later, M. Michel and his group of enthusiastic collaborators — prominent among whom was M. Antony Réal *fils*, upon whom has descended worthily his father's mantle — arranged for a performance of grand and light opera at Orange, to which attached a curious importance in that it brought into strong relief an interesting feature of the theater's psychology — its absolute intolerance of small things. "Norma" was received with a genuine furor. Two pretty little operas given on the ensuing evening, "Le Chalet" and "Galathée," practically were failures. The audience, profoundly stirred by the graver work, seemed to understand instinctively that so majestic a setting was suited only to dramas inspired by the noblest passions and dealing only with the noblest themes. And a like result has followed each subsequent attempt to present the minor drama on this major stage.



DRAWN BY LOUIS LOEB.

MADemoiselle BREVAL SINGING THE "HYMN TO PALLAS ATHENE."

IV.

IN August, 1886, in direct defiance of the modern French canons of centralization, a new play demanding positive and strong recognition — the magnificent “Empereur d’Arles,” by the Avignon poet Alexis Mouzin — was given its first presentation, not at Paris, but at Orange. Silvain, of the Comédie Française, was the *Maximien*; Madame Caristie-Martel, of the Odéon (a granddaughter of Caristie, the architect who saved the theater from ruin), was the *Minervene*. The support was strong. So presented, the play went on in a whirl of enthusiastic approval to a triumphant end. There was no question of ratifying the opinion of Parisian critics: an opinion was delivered at first hand. In other words, the defiance of conventions was an artistic victory, a decentralizing success.

Then it was that the *Félibres* — the poets of Languedoc and Provence who for forty years have been combating the Parisian attempt to focus in Paris the whole of France — perceived how the Orange Theater could be made to advance their anti-centralizing principles, and so took a hand in its fortunes with the avowed intention of establishing outside of Paris a national theater wherein should be given in summer dramatic festivals of the highest class. With the *Félibres* to attempt is to accomplish; and to their efforts was due the presentation at Orange in August, 1888, of “*Œdipus*” and Rossini’s “*Moses*,” with Mounet-Sully and Boudouresque in the respective title-roles. And then was planted the strong seed that now is germinating.

The members of the two *Félibrien* societies of Paris — the *Félibrige* and the *Cigaliers* — were present in force at the performances so timed as to be a part of their customary biennial summer festival in the Midi; and their command of the Paris newspapers (whereof the high places largely are filled by these brave writers of the South) enabled them to make all Paris and all France ring with their account of the beauty of the Orange spectacle.

Out of their enthusiasm came practical results. A national interest in the theater was aroused, — and so strong an interest that the deputy from the Department of the Drôme — M. Maurice Faure, a man of letters who finds time to be also a statesman — brought to a successful issue his long-sustained effort to obtain from the Government a grant of funds to be used not merely for the preservation of the building, but toward its restoration. Thanks to his strong presentation of the case, forty thousand francs was appropriated for the beginning of the work: a sum that has sufficed to pay for the rebuilding of twenty of the tiers.

And thus, at last, a substantial beginning was made in the recreation of the majestic edifice; and more than a beginning was made in the realization of the *Félibrien* project for establishing a national theater in provincial France.

The festival of last August — again promoted by the *Félibres*, and mainly organized by M. Jules Claretie of the Comédie Française — was held, therefore, in celebration of specific achievement; and in two other important particulars it differed from all other modern festivals at Orange. First, it was directly under Government patronage — M. Leygues, minister of public instruction and the beaux arts, bringing two other cabinet ministers with him, having come down from Paris expressly to preside over it; and, second, its brilliantly successful organization and accomplishment under such high auspices has gone far toward creating a positive national demand for a realization of the *Félibrien* dream — that the theater, again perfect, shall become the home of the highest dramatic art, and a place of periodic pilgrimage, biennial or even annual, for the whole of the art-loving world.

And I am disposed to regard myself as rather more than usually fortunate in that I was able to be present at what will pass into history as the first of these festivals: a piece of good fortune that I owe to the thoughtfulness of my Provençal brethren, who sent me early word of what was forward among them, and so enabled me to get from New York to Paris in time to go down with the *Félibrige* and *Cigaliers* by train to Lyons, and thence — as blithe a boat-load of poets as ever went lightly on the galloping current of the Rhone.

V.

AVIGNON was crowded with dignitaries and personages: M. Leygues, who was to preside over the festival; the ministers of justice and of public works, who were to increase its official dignity; artistic and literary people without end. Of these last — who also, in a way, were first, since to them the whole was due — our special boat from Lyons had brought a gay contingent three hundred strong. With it all, the City of the Popes fairly buzzed like a hive of poetic bees got astray from Hymettus Hill.

From Avignon to Orange the distance is less than eighteen miles, not at all too far for driving; and the intervening country is so rich and so beautiful as to conform in all essentials — save in its commendable freedom from serpents — to the biblical description of Paradise. Therefore, following our own wishes and the advice of several poets, — they all are poets down there, — we decided to drive to the play rather



SCENE FROM THE FIRST ACT OF "OEDIPUS."

DRAWN BY LOUIS LOEY

than to expose ourselves to the rigors of the local railway service: the abject collapse of which, under the strain of handling twelve or fifteen hundred people, the poets truthfully prophesied.

It was five in the afternoon when we got away from Avignon. A mistral—the winter bane and summer blessing of Provence—was blowing briskly; the sun was shining; the crowded Cours de la République was gay with flags and banners and streamers, and with festoons of colored lanterns which later would be festoons of colored fire. We passed between the towers of the gateway, left the ramparts behind us, and went onward over the perfect road. Plane-trees arched above us; on each side of the road were little villas deep-set in gardens, and bearing upon their stone gate-posts the names of saints. As we increased our distance from the city, we came to market-gardens, and then to vineyards, olive-orchards, farms. Rows of bright-green poplars and of dark-green cypress—set up as shields against the mistral—made formal lines across the landscape from east to west. The hedges on the lee-side of the road were white with dust—a lace-like effect, curious and beautiful. Above them, and between the trees, we caught glimpses of Mont Ventour, already beginning to glow like a great opal in the nearly level sun-rays. Old women and children stood in the gateways staring wonderingly at the long procession of vehicles, of which our carriage was a part, all obviously filled with pleasure-seekers and all inexplicable. Pretty girls, without stopping to wonder, accepted with satisfaction so joyous an outburst of merrymaking, and unhesitatingly gave us their smiles.

We crossed the little river Ouvèze, and as we mounted from it to the northward the tower of the ruined Château-neuf du Pape came into view. A new key was struck in the landscape. The broad, white road ran through a brown solitude—a level upland broken into fields of sun-browned stubble and of gray-brown olive-orchards; and then, farther on, through a high, desolate plain tufted with sage-brush, whence we had outlook to wide horizons far away. Off to the eastward, cutting against the darkening sky, was the curious row of sharp peaks called the Rat's Teeth. All the range of the Alpilles was taking on a deeper gray. Purple undertones were beginning to soften the opalescent fire of Mont Ventour.

Presently the road dipped over the edge of the plain, and began a descent, in a perfectly straight line but by a very easy grade, of more than a mile. Here were rows of plane-trees again, which, being of no great age and not meeting over the road, were most noticeable as emphasizing the perspective. And from the crest of this acclivity—down the long dip in

the land, at the end of the loom of gray-white road lying shadowy between the perspective lines of trees—we saw rising in somber mass against the purple haze of sunset, dominating the little city nestled at its base, and even dwarfing the mountain at its back, the huge fabric of the theater.

VI.

Dusk had fallen as we drove into Orange, thronged with men and beasts like a Noah's ark. All the streets were alive with people, and streams of vehicles of all sorts were pouring in from the four quarters of the compass, and discharging their cargoes on the public squares to a loud buzzing accompaniment of vigorous talk—much in the way that the ark people, thankful to get ashore again, must have come buzzing out on Ararat.

I am sorry to say that the handling of a small part of this crowd by the railway people, and of the whole of it by the local management, was deplorably bad. The trains were inadequate and irregular; the great mistake was made of opening only three of the many entrances to the theater; and the artistic error was committed (against the protest of M. Mounet-Sully) of filling the orchestra with chairs instead of reserving it for the chorus: with the result that these so-called first-class seats—being all on the same level, and that level four feet lower than the stage—were at once the highest-priced and the worst seats in the building. Decidedly the best seats, both for seeing and hearing, were those of the so-called second class—the newly erected tiers of stone. But so excellent are the acoustic properties of the theater, even now when the stage is roofless, that in the highest tier of the third-class seats (temporary wooden benches filling the space not yet rebuilt in stone in the upper third of the auditorium) all the well-trained and well-managed voices could be clearly heard.

Naturally, the third-class seats were the most in demand; and from the moment that the gates were opened the way to them was thronged: an acute ascent—partly rough stairway, partly abrupt incline—which zigzagged up the hill between the wall of the theater and the wall of an adjacent house, and which was lighted, just below its sharpest turn, by a single lamp pendent from an outjutting gibbet of iron. By a lucky mischance, three of the incompetent officials on duty at the first-class entrance—whereat, in default of guiding signs, we happened first to apply ourselves—examined in turn our tickets, and assured us that the way to our second-class places was up this stairway path. But we heartily forgave, and even blessed, the stupidity of those officials, because it put us in the way of seeing quite the most



DRAWN BY LOUIS LOEB.

SCENE FROM THE LAST ACT OF "ŒDIPUS."

picturesque bit that we saw that night outside of the theater's walls: the strong current of eager humanity, all vague and confused and somber, pressing upward through the shadows, showing for a single moment the hurrying mass resolved into individual hurrying figures as it passed beneath the hanging lamp, and in the same breath swept around the projecting corner and was lost to view. It looked, at the very least, treasons, conspiracies, and mutinous outbursts — that shadowy multitude surging up that narrow and steep and desperately crooked dusky footway. I felt that just around the lighted turn, where the impetuous forms appeared clearly in the moment of their disappearance, surely must be the royal palace they were bent upon sacking; and it was with a sigh of unsatisfied longing that I turned away (when we got at last the right direction) before word came to me that over the swords of his dying guardsmen they had pressed in and slain the king!

The soldiers on guard at the ascent, and thickly posted on the hillside above the highest tiers, gave color to my fancy. And, actually, it was as guards against assassins that the soldiers were there. Only a little more than two months had passed since the slaying of President Carnot at Lyons; and the cautionary measures taken to assure the safety of the three ministers at Orange were all the more rigid because one of them was the minister of justice — of all the government functionaries the most feared and hated by anarchists, because he is most intimately associated with those too rare occasions when anarchist heads are sliced off in poor payment for anarchist crimes. This undercurrent of real tragedy, with its possibility of a crash, followed by a cloud of smoke rising slowly above the wreck of the gaily decorated ministerial box, drew out with a fine intensity the tragedy of the stage, and brought into a curious psychological coalescence the barbarisms of the dawn and of the noontime of our human world.

VII.

WE came again to the front of the theater — to an entrance, approached between converging railways, which brought the crowd to an angry focus, and so passed its parts singly between the ticket-takers, leading into what once was the postscenium, and thence across where once was the "court" side of the stage to the tiers of stone seats.

However aggravating was this entrance effect in the matter of composition, its dramatically graded light and shade was masterly. From the outer obscurity, shot forward as from a catapult by the pushing crowd, we were projected through a narrow portal into a dimly lighted passage more or less obstructed by

fallen blocks of stone, and thence onward, suddenly, into the vast interior glaring with electric lamps; and in the abrupt culmination of light there flashed up before us the whole of the auditorium: a mountain-side of faces rising tier on tier; a vibrant throng of humanity which seemed to go on and on, forever upward, and to be lost at last in the star-depths of the clear, dark sky.

Notwithstanding the electric lamps, — partly, indeed, because of their violently contrasting streams of strong light and fantastic shadow, — the general effect of the auditorium was somber. The dress of the audience — cloaks and wraps being in general use because of the strong mistral that was blowing — in the main was dark. The few light gowns and the more numerous straw hats stood out as spots of light, and only emphasized the dullness of the background. The lines of faces, following the long curving sweep of the tiers, produced something of the effect of a gray-yellow haze floating above the surface of a sable mass; and in certain of the strange, sharp combinations of light and shade gave a weird suggestion of such a bodiless assemblage as might have come together, in the time of the Terror, at midnight in the Place du Gréve. The single note of strong color — all the more effective because it was a very trumpet-blast above the drone of bees — was a brilliant splash of red running half-way around the mid-height: the crimson draperies in front of the three tiers set apart for the ministerial party and the *Félibres*. And for a roof over all was the dark star-set sky, whence looked down upon us gallantly the belted Orion, and whence the Great Bear gazed wonderingly upon us with his golden eyes. We were in close touch with the higher regions of the universe. At the very moment when the play was beginning there gleamed across the upper firmament, and thence went radiantly downward across the southern reaches of the heavens, a shooting-star.

Not until we were in our seats — at the side of the building, a dozen tiers above the ground — did we fairly see the stage. In itself, this was almost mean in its simplicity: a bare wooden platform, a trifle over four feet high, and about forty by sixty feet square, on which, in the rear, was another platform, about twenty feet square, and reached from the lower stage by five steps. The upper level, the stage proper, was for the actors; the lower, for the chorus — which should have been in the orchestra. The whole occupied less than a quarter of the space primitively given to the stage proper alone. Of ordinary theatrical properties there was absolutely nothing — unless in that category could be placed the plain curtain which hung loosely across the lower half



DRAWN BY LOUIS LOEB

SCENE FROM THE SECOND ACT OF "ANTIGONE."

of the ragged gap in the masonry where once the splendid royal portal had been.

But if the stage were mean in itself, it was heroic in its surroundings, being flanked by the two castle-like wings abutting upon huge half-ruined archways, and having in its rear the scarred and broken mighty wall, that once was so gloriously magnificent, and that now, perhaps, is still more exalted by its tragic grandeur of divine decay. And yet another touch of pathos, in which also was a tender beauty, was supplied by the growth of trees and shrubs along the base of the great wall. Over toward the "garden" exit was a miniature forest of figs and pomegranates, while on the "court" side the drooping branches of a large fig-tree swept the very edge of the stage—a gracious accessory which was improved by arranging a broad parterre of growing flowers and tall green plants upon the stage itself so as to make a very garden there; while, quite a masterpiece, beneath the fig-tree's wide-spreading branches were hidden the exquisitely anachronistic musicians, whose dress and whose instruments alike were at odds with the theater and with the play.

Two ill-advised electric lamps, shaded from the audience, were set at the outer corners of the stage; but the main illumination was from a row of screened footlights which not only made the whole stage brilliant, but cast high upward on the wall in the rear—above the gaping ruined niche where once had stood the statue of a god—a flood of strong yellow light that was reflected strongly from the yellow stone, so making a glowing golden background whence was projected into the upper darkness of the night a golden haze.

VIII.

WITH a nice appreciation of poetic effect, and of rising to strong climax from an opening note struck in a low key, the performance began by the appearance in that heroic setting of a single figure—Mademoiselle Bréval, in flowing white draperies, who sang the "Hymn to Pallas Athene," by Croze, set to music by Saint-Saëns—the composer himself, hidden away with his musicians beneath the branches of the fig-tree, directing the orchestra.

The subduing effect produced by Mademoiselle Bréval's entrance was instantaneous. But a moment before, the audience had been noisily demonstrative. As the ministerial party entered, to the music of the "Marseillaise," everybody had roared; there were more roars when the music changed (as it usually does change in France nowadays) to the Russian anthem; there were shouts of welcome to various popular personages—notably, and most deservedly,

to M. Jules Claretie, to whom the success of the festival so largely was due; from the tiers where the Parisians were seated came good-humored cries (reviving a legend of the "Chat Noir") of "Vive notre oncle!" as the excellent Sarcey found his way to his seat among the Cigaliers; and when the poet Frédéric Mistral entered—tall, stately, magnificent—there broke forth a storm of cheering that was not stilled until the minister (rather taken aback, I fancy, by so warm an outburst of enthusiasm) satisfied the subjects of this uncrowned king by giving him a place of honor in the ministerial box.

And then suddenly the shouting ceased, the confusion was quelled, a hush fell upon the multitude, as that single figure in white swept with fluttering draperies across from the rear to the front of the stage, and paused for a moment before she began her invocation to the Grecian goddess whose altar-fires went out in ancient ages, but who was a living and a glorious reality when the building in which was this echo of her worship came new from the hands of its creators—1700 years ago. The mistral, just then blowing strongly and steadily, drew down upon the stage and swept back the singer's Grecian draperies in entrancing folds. As she sang, standing in the golden light against the golden background, her supple body was swayed forward eagerly, impetuously; above her head were raised her beautiful bare arms; from her shoulders the loose folds of her tunic floated backward, wing-like; and before us, in the flesh, as in the flesh it was of old before the Grecian sculptors, was the motif of those nobly impulsive, urgent statues of which the immortal type is the Winged Victory.

The theory has been advanced that the great size of the Greek stage, and of the palace in its rear which was its permanent set of scenery, so dwarfed the figures of the actors that buskins and padding were used in order to make the persons of the players more in keeping with their surroundings. With submission, I hold that this theory is arrant nonsense. Even on stilts ten feet high the actors still would have been, in one way, out of proportion with the background. If used at all in tragedy, buskins and pads probably were used to make the heroic characters of the drama literally greater than the other characters.

In point of fact, the majestic height of the scene did not dwarf the human figures sustaining serious parts. The effect was precisely the contrary. Mademoiselle Bréval, standing solitary in that great open space, with the play of golden light upon her, became also heroic. With the characters in "Œdipus" and "Antigone" the result was the same: the somber grandeur of the tragedies was enlarged by the

majesty of the background, and play and players alike were upraised to a lofty plane of solemn stateliness by the stately reality of those noble walls, which themselves were tragedies because of the ruin that had come to them with age.

Upon the comedy that so injudiciously was interpolated into the program the effect of the heroic environment was hopelessly belittling. M. Arène's "Helot" and M. Ferrier's "Revanche d'Iris" are charming of their kind, and to see them in an ordinary theater, with those intimate accessories of house life which such sparkling trifles require, would be only a delight. But at Orange their sparkle vanished, and they were jarringly out of place. Even the perfect excellence of the players — and no Grecian actress, I am confident, ever surpassed Mademoiselle Rachel-Boyer in exquisitely finished handling of Grecian draperies — could not save them. Quite as distinctly as each of the tragedies was a success, the little comedies were failures, being overwhelmed utterly by the stately surroundings, and lost in the melancholy bareness of that great stage. It was all the more, therefore, an interesting study in the psychology of the drama to perceive how the comparatively few actors in the casts of the tragedies — how even, at times, only one or two figures — seemed entirely to fill the stage; and how at all times these plays and their setting absolutely harmonized.

IX.

OF scenery, in the ordinary sense of the word, there was none at all. What we saw was the real thing. In the opening scene of "Œdipus," the *King* — coming forward through the royal portal, and across the raised platform in the rear of the stage — did literally "enter from the palace," and did "descend the palace steps" to the "public place" where *Creon* and the priests awaited him. It was a direct reversal of the ordinary effect in the ordinary theater, where the play loses in realism because a current of necessarily appreciated, but purposely rejected, antagonistic fact undercuts the conventional illusion, and compels us to perceive that the palace is but painted canvas, and, even on the largest stage, only four or five times as high as the prince. The palace at Orange — towering up as though it would touch the very heavens, and obviously of veritable stone — was a most peremptory reality.

The fortuitous accessory of the trees growing close beside the stage added to the outdoor effect still another very vivid touch of realism; and this was heightened by the swaying of the branches, and by the gracious motion of the draperies, under the fitful pressure of the strong gusts of wind. Indeed, the mistral

took a very telling part in the performance. Players less perfect in their art would have been disconcerted by it; but these of the *Comédie Française* were quick to perceive and to utilize its artistic possibilities. In the very midst of the solemn denunciation of *Œdipus* by *Tiresias*, the long white beard of the blind prophet suddenly was blown upward so that his face was hidden and his utterance choked by it; and the momentary pause, while he raised his hand slowly, and slowly freed his face from this chance covering, made a dramatic break in his discourse, and added to it a naturalness which vividly intensified its solemn import. In like manner the final entry of *Œdipus*, coming from the palace after blinding himself, was made thrillingly real. For a moment, as he came upon the stage, the horror which he had wrought upon himself — his ghastly eye-sockets, his blood-stained face — was visible; and then a gust of wind lifted his mantle and flung it about his head so that all was concealed; and an exquisite pity for him was aroused — while he struggled painfully to rid himself of the encumbrance — by the imposition of this petty annoyance upon his mortal agony of body and of soul.

In such capital instances the mistral became an essential part of the drama; but it was present upon the stage continuously, and its constant play among the draperies — with a resulting swaying of tender lines into a series of enchanting folds, and with a quivering of robes and mantles which gave to the larger motions of the players an undertone of vibrant action — cast over the intrinsic harshness of the tragedy a softening veil of grace.

And an enlargement of the same soft influences was due to the entrancing effects of color and of light. Following the Grecian traditions, the flowing garments of the chorus were in strong yet subdued color-notes perfectly harmonized: against which rich tones the white-robed figures of the leading characters stood out with a brilliant intensity. And these groups had always a golden background, and over them always the golden glow from the footlights cast a warm radiance that again was strengthened by the golden reflections from the wall of yellow stone, so that the whole symphony in color had for its under-note a mellow splendor of golden tones.

X.

IN this perfect poetic setting the play went on with a stately slowness that yet was all too fast for the onlookers, and with the perfection of finish that such actors naturally gave to their work amidst surroundings by which they were at once stimulated and inspired. Even the

practical defects of the ruinous theater were turned into poetical advantages which made the tragic action still more real. The woeful entrance of *Œdipus* and the despairing retreat of *Jocasta* were rendered the more impressive by momentary pauses in the broken doorway, that emphasized by its wreck their own wrecked happiness. In "Antigone" a touching beauty was given to the entry of the blind *Tiresias* by his slow approach from the distant side of the theater, led by a child through the maze of bushes and around the fallen fragments of stone; and Mademoiselle Bartet (*Antigone*), unable to pass by the door that should have been but was not open for her, made a still finer exit by descending the steps at the side of the stage and disappearing among the trees.

But the most perfect of these artistic utilizations of chance accessories — which were the more effective precisely because they were accidental, and the more appreciated because their use so obviously was an inspiration — was the final exit of *Œdipus*: a departure into desert regions that Mounet-Sully was able to make very literally real.

Over in the corner beside the "garden" exit, as I have said, was a tangled growth of figs and pomegranates; and thence, extending almost to the stage, was a light fringe of bushes growing along the base of the rear wall among the fragments of fallen stone. It was through this actual wilderness that *Œdipus*, crossing half the width of the theater, passed from the brilliant stage into shadow that grew deeper as he advanced, and at last, entering the gap in the stonework where once the doorway had been, disappeared into the dark depth beyond.

An accident of the moment — the exhaustion of the carbons of the electric lamps — gave to this exit a still keener dramatic intensity. The footlights alone remained burning, flooding with a golden splendor the stage and the great yellow wall, and from the wall reflected upward and outward upon the auditorium, casting over the faces in the orchestra a soft golden twilight, and a still fainter golden light over the more remote hillside of faces on the tiers, which rose through the golden dusk, and vanished at last in a darkness that still seemed to be a little softened by the faint suggestion of a golden haze.

Interest and light thus together were focused upon the climax of the tragedy. Leaving the light, and with it love and hope and life, behind him, *Œdipus* descended the steps of the palace, leaning upon the shoulder of a slave, and moved toward the thickening shadows. Watching after him with a profoundly sorrowful intensity was the group upon the stage: a gorgeous mass of warm color, broken by dashes of gleaming white and bathed in a golden glow. Slowly, painfully, along that rough and trou-

blous way, into an ever-deepening obscurity merging into darkness irrevocable, the blinded king went onward toward the outer wilderness where would be spent the dreary remnant of his broken days. Feeling his way through the tangled bushes; stumbling, almost falling, over the blocks of stone; at times halting, and in his desperate sorrow raising his hands imploringly toward the gods whose foreordered curse had fallen upon him because of his foreordered sin, he went on and on: while upon the great auditorium there rested an ardent silence which seemed even to still the beatings of the eight thousand hearts. And when, passing into the black depths of the broken archway, the last faint gleam of his white drapery vanished, and the strain relaxed which had held the audience still and silent, there came first from all those eager breasts — before the roar of applause which rose and fell, and rose again, and seemed for a while to be quite inextinguishable — a deep-drawn sigh.

XI.

"ANTIGONE," played on the second evening, — being a gentler tragedy than "Œdipus," and conceived in a spirit more in touch with our modern times, — was received with a warmer enthusiasm. No doubt to the Greeks, to whom its religious motive was a living reality, "Œdipus" was purely awe-inspiring; but to us, for whom the religious element practically has no existence, the intrinsic qualities of the plot are so repellent that the play is less awe-inspiring than horrible. And even in Grecian times, I fancy, — human nature being the same then as now in its substrata, — "Antigone," with its conflict between mortals, must have appealed more searchingly to human hearts than ever "Œdipus" could have appealed with its conflict between a mortal and the gods. Naturally, we are in closer sympathy with the righteous defiance of a man by a woman — both before our eyes, passionately flaming with strong antagonistic emotions — than we are with a man's unrighteous defiance of abstract and invisible Fate.

And, as given at Orange, the softening influences which had subdued the harshness of "Œdipus" were still further extended, and served to make the tenderness of "Antigone" more tender still. The inspersions of music of a curiously penetrating, moving sort — composed by Saint-Saëns in an approximation to Grecian measures — added a poetic undertone to the poetry of the situations and the lines; and a deeper feeling was given to the crises of the play — an artistic reproduction of the accident of the night before — by extinguishing the electric lamps, and so bringing the action to a focus in the mellow radiance

with which the golden footlights overflowed the stage.

The poetic key-note was struck in the opening scene, when *Antigone* and *Ismene*, robed all in white, entered together by the royal doorway, and stood upon the upper plane of the great stage, alone — and yet so filled it that there was no sense of emptiness nor of lack of the ordinary scenery. Again, the setting was not an imitation, but the real thing. The palace from which the sisters had come forth rose stately behind them. Beside the stage, the branches of the fig-tree, waved lightly in the breeze. In the golden glow of the footlights and against the golden background the two white-robed figures — their loose vestments, swayed by the wind, falling each moment into fresh lines of loveliness — moved with an exquisite grace. And all this visible beauty reinforced with a moving fervor the penetrating beauty of *Antigone's* avowal of her love for her dead brother, — tender, human, natural, — and of her purpose, born of that love, so resolute that to accomplish it she would give her life.

Again, the utter absence of conventional scenery was a benefit rather than a disadvantage. When *Creon* entered upon the upper plane, attended by his gorgeous guard, and at the same moment the entrance of the chorus filled the lower plane with color less brilliant but not less strong, the stage was full, not of things, but of people, and was wholly alive. The eye was not distracted by painted scenery, — in the ordinary theater a mechanical necessity, and partly excusable because it also supplies warmth and richness of tone, — but was entirely at the service of the mind in following the dramatic action of the play. The setting being a reality, there was no need for mechanism to conceal a seamy side; and the color-effects were produced by the actors themselves, whose draperies made a superb color-scheme of strong hues perfectly harmonized, of gleaming white, of glittering golden embroideries, which constantly was rearranged by the shifting of the groups and single figures into fresh combinations, to which every puff of wind and every gesture gave fresh effects of light and shade, and over which the golden light shed always its warm radiance.

Of all these beautiful groupings, the one which most completely fulfilled the several requirements of a picture — subject, composition, color, light, and shade — was that of the fourth episode: the white-robed *Antigone* alone upon the upper plane, an animate statue, a veritable Galatea; the chorus, a broad sweep of warm color, on the lower plane; the electric lights turned off, leaving the auditorium in semi-obscurity, and concentrating light and thought upon the golden beauty of the stage. With the

entry of *Creon* and his guards both the dramatic and the picturesque demands of the situation were entirely satisfied. In the foreground, a mass of strong, subdued color, were the minor figures of the chorus; in the background, a mass of strong, brilliant color, were the minor figures of the guards; between these groups — the subject proper — were *Creon* and *Antigone*, their white robes, flashing with their eager gestures and in vivid relief against the rich background, making them at once the center and the culmination of the magnificent composition. And the beauty and force of such a setting deepened the pathos and intensified the cruelty of the alternately supplicating and ferocious lines.

There was, I regret to say, an absurd anticlimax to this noble scene. *Antigone*, being recalled and made the center of a volley of bouquets, ceased to be *Antigone* and became only Mademoiselle Bartet; and the Greek chorus, breaking ranks and scampering about the stage in order to pick up the leading lady's flowers, ceased to be anything serious, and became only ridiculous. For the moment French gallantry rose superior to the eternal fitness of things, and in so doing partially destroyed one of the most beautiful effects ever produced upon the stage. Even in the case of minor players so complete a collapse of dignity would not easily have been forgiven. In the case of players so eminent, belonging to the first theater in the world, it could not be excused.

XII.

BUT it could be, and was, for the time being forgotten, as the play went on with a smooth perfection and with a constantly increasing dramatic force, as the action strengthened and quickened in accord always with the requirements of dramatic art.

Without any apparent effort to secure picturesque effect, with a grouping seemingly wholly unstudied and always natural, the stage presented a series of pictures ideal in their balance of mass, and in their color and tone, while the turning off and on of the electric lights produced effects analogous to those in music when the soft and hard pedals are used to give to the more tender passages an added grace and delicacy, and to the stronger passages a more brilliant force. And always, be it remembered, the play thus presented was one of the most tenderly beautiful tragedies possessed by the world, and the players — by natural fitness and by training — were approximately perfect in their art.

Presently came the end — not a climax of action; not, in one sense, a climax at all. With a master-touch, Sophocles has made the end of "*Antigone*" the dead after-calm of evil ac-

tion—a desolate despair. Slowly the group upon the stage melted away. *Creon*, with his hopeless cry upon his lips, “Death! Death! Only death!” moved with a weary languor toward the palace, and slowly disappeared in the darkness beyond the ruined portal. There was a pause before the chorus uttered its final solemn words. And then—not as though obeying a stage direction, but rather as though moved severally by the longing in their own breasts to get away from that place of sorrow—these others also departed, going slowly, in little groups and singly, until at last the stage was bare.

The audience was held still in reality by the feeling which had seemed to hold still the chorus after *Creon’s* exit. Some moments

passed before the spell was broken, before the eight thousand hearts beat normally again, and the eight thousand throats burst forth into noisy applause, which was less, perhaps, an expression of gratitude for an artistic creation rarely equaled than of the natural rebound of the spirit after so tense a strain. In another moment the seats were emptied and the multitude was flowing down the tiers—a veritable torrent of humanity—into the pit, there to be packed for a while in a solid mass, before it could work its way out through the insufficient exits, and so return again to our modern world.

And then the Roman Theater, to whose roll of the centuries had been added a fresh legend of beauty, was left desert beneath the bright silence of the eternal stars.

Thomas A. Janvier.

TRIBULATIONS OF A CHEERFUL GIVER.

BY WILLIAM DEAN HOWELLS.

PART FIRST.

I.



OME months ago, as I was passing through a down-town street on my way to the elevated station, I saw a man sitting on the steps of a house. He seemed to be resting his elbow on his knees, and holding out both his hands. As I came nearer I perceived that he had no hands, but only stumps, where the fingers had been cut off close to the palms, and that it was these stumps he was holding out in the mute appeal which was his form of begging. Otherwise he did not ask charity. When I approached him he did not look up, and when I stopped in front of him he did not speak. I thought this rather fine, in its way; except for his mutilation, which the man really could not help, there was nothing to offend the taste; and his immobile silence was certainly impressive.

I decided at once to give him something; for when I am in the presence of want, or even the appearance of want, there is something that says to me, “Give to him that asketh,” and I have to give, or else go away with a bad conscience—a thing I hate. Of course I do not give much, for I wish to be a good citizen as well as a good Christian; and as soon as I obey that voice which I cannot disobey, I hear another voice reproaching me for encouraging street beggary. I have been taught that street beggary is wrong, and when I have to unbutton two coats and go through three or four pockets before I can reach the small coin I mean to give in compliance with that imperative voice,

I certainly feel it to be wrong. So I compromise, and I am never able to make sure that either of those voices is satisfied with me. I am not even satisfied with myself; but I am better satisfied than if I gave nothing. That was the selfish reason I now had for deciding to yield to my better nature, and to obey the voice which bade me “Give to him that asketh”; for, as I said, I hate a bad conscience, and of two bad consciences I always choose the least, which, in a case like this, is the one that incensed political economy gives me.

I put my hand into my hip-pocket, where I keep my silver, and found nothing there but half a dollar. This at once changed the whole current of my feelings; and it was not chill penury that repressed my noble rage, but chill affluence. It was manifestly wrong to give half a dollar to a man who had no hands, or to any sort of beggar. I was willing to commit a small act of incivism, but I had not the courage to flout political economy to the extent of fifty cents; and I felt that when I was bidden “Give to him that asketh,” I was never meant to give so much as a half-dollar, but a cent, or a half-dime, or at the most a quarter. I wished I had a quarter. I would gladly have given a quarter, but there was nothing in my pocket but that fatal, that inexorably indivisible half-dollar, the continent of two quarters, but not practically a quarter. I would have asked anybody in sight to change it for me, but there was no one passing; it was a quiet street of brownstone dwellings, and not a thronged thoroughfare at any time. At that hour of the late afternoon it was deserted, ex-