

GEORGE II., DUKE OF SAXE-MEININGEN.

## THE COURT THEATRE OF MEININGEN.

BY CHARLES WALDSTEIN.

**I**N the year 1881 the Meiningen company gave a series of performances in London. It was a revelation to the theatrical world of England, and to all people interested in literature and art—a revelation, in the first place, in that it directed the eyes of the English people to Germany, where they had not been accustomed to look for models of theatrical art; and, in the second place, in that it opened the eyes of many to a new principle of dramatic representation, while others saw realized in the acting of this company what they had for a long time in-

sisted upon as a necessary reform of the stage in England and America.

Most of the severer critics of the English stage were in the habit of pointing to the French theatre, notably the Comédie Française of Paris, when they wished to insist upon the need of reforms in organization and acting which were required in their own country. They either ignored or did not know anything of the German stage. They all knew that Germany was leading the way in music and in the opera; but they were under the impression that the Germans were still un-



der the bane of the "old school, stagy" forms of acting, and so paid little heed to what was going on in that country.

This neglect was partly justified by the fact that in dramatic literature the French had distinctly taken the lead, so much so that for modern society plays the Germans have themselves been greatly dependent upon adaptations from French dramas, as even the more successful plays by German authors may be said to be of the French school of society drama.

Moreover, the more realistic acting and stage-managing required for these contemporary dramas have been brought to such a supreme state of perfection in France that, despite the excellent manner in which they are put on the stage at Vienna and Berlin, Paris has been, is, and will for some time to come be the real hearth of such histrionic effort.

In spite of these facts, the world at large, France included, can learn much from Germany in the acting of the greater dramas of the Shakespearian type, and especially in the organization of the theatres and in the stage-management for these purposes. Their representations are marked by the greatest degree of highest intelligence and unity of adequate conception throughout, and this again is chiefly due to the perfect organization of the theatres, based upon a correct tradition of long standing. This organization again consists in the proper practical and artistic realization of all the scholarly theoretical qualities of the German critics,

long since and universally recognized as bringing out and opening out to the world the genius of a Shakespeare and of the classical dramatists, freed, in this practical manifestation, from all the pedantry which may sometimes accompany such thorough criticism. And by this organization this wide culture and the adequate conception of the poet's meaning are carried through the various steps from the scholar to the stage-manager and to the practical actor.

Thus it was that the appearance of the "Meiningers" in 1881—in every one of these best points of the German stage the most representative—was a revelation to the London public. And when it became known that this company, composed almost exclusively of well-trained actors, travelling with a whole ship-load of scenery, costumes, and property, such as none of the largest London theatres could boast of, came from a small provincial town of Germany of 11,300 inhabitants, the surprise took the form of wonder, and this wonder ceded its place to the enthusiastic appreciation of new and great principles of stage-work, and to a humble, receptive attitude of mind—a desire to learn what was the cause of this perfection.

How could so many points in a drama known to the English public for centuries be missed, and how were they here brought out? How could Marc Antony's speech in *Julius Caesar*, in itself always impressive, produce an effect which had never before been realized by the *habitué* of



HERZOGLICH HOFTHEATER, MEININGEN.





SCHLOSS LANDSBERG.

the theatre and the Shakespearian scholar, while it appealed with the most thrilling intensity to the pit and the gallery? The Roman mob on this stage really became a delicate and responsive instrument, at first refusing in wild tumult to listen to the orator, gradually calming down and paying some slight heed to his words, and, as he played upon their feelings, manifesting the influence of his words, until it reached the climax in a tumult, now in the orator's favor, as before it had been directed against him. The speech and its drift could almost be realized from the acting of the crowd, without seeing or hearing the orator. The speech was not merely a speech, it had become an action; the scene and the people were not merely a scene and an assembly of costumed and grouped actors, but had become a speech, a speaking medium, telling an intrinsic part of the story. This is perhaps the touchstone of a good drama and of good acting. In a bad drama and in bad stage-representation the speeches are mere speeches, words that might be spoken with equal effect anywhere, or under any circumstances, or might be in the mouth of any person; while the scenery and grouping are mere tableaux, do not add anything to the words spoken or the things done, nor do they gain by these; they do not, in their turn, receive full artistic life from the action or the recitation of which they are the visible framing. Perhaps it will be worth while to bear this point in mind in the course of the remarks which I may have to make in this paper.

If one were to look for one central principle underlying this marked success of the Meiningen company, it might perhaps

be found in the principle of artistic subordination. I feel tempted to demonstrate how this is one of the fundamental principles of all the various arts, be it poetry, music, painting, sculpture, or, especially, architecture; but I fear that we should have to wade through volumes before coming to the Meiningen company. Suffice it to say that the principle of artistic subordination as applied to theatrical representation means that in this hierarchy of artistic elements—and I use the word hierarchy advisedly as indicating the earnest reverence with which the Meiningers consider their art—each has its proper place. Above all thrones the drama as a whole as born in the poet's mind, and the highest and most adequate conception of the work of genius. To this all is subordinated, a mere means and instrument, yet as such, and because it is thus a part of a noble whole, requiring fullest development in itself. As the great drama is built up in itself, each part, each character and scene organically interwoven with the other and the whole, so must every portion of the performance and every actor taking part in it be an organic member of the work of art.

Each actor is thus subordinated to his *part* (the word in its literal meaning), and *there is no "star."* This was perhaps the most striking lesson—at least the one most called for—taught by the Meiningers. We shall see how effectively the "star" abuse is counteracted. Also,



no one scene is to be out of proportion (as is so often the case): if in the poet's mind it is the climax, then it is to appear as such; if the exposition, it must serve its function of introducing the dramatic situation; if the dissolution, it is not to be dragged out into tawdry or gaudy scenic importance. In appearance and costume, also, the actor is to be considered in the light of the higher artistic interest of the play. And so finally with the scenery.

This distinctive quality, as underlying the success of the Meiningen company, soon became apparent. What was not so evident was how this principle could be carried into practice so efficiently and effectively. At the time I felt a strong desire to study this organization, and to follow the effects up to their primary causes. It was not until last year that I was put in a position to make my desire known to the Duke, and I at once received a cordial invitation to visit him at Meiningen. Of this I gladly availed myself, and was treated with a kindness and consideration which it is hard for me to acknowledge properly in the publicity of print. As regarded the theatre, all possible means of studying its organization and working were put at my disposal, certain representative plays were selected, I was allowed to accompany the Duke to the rehearsals, to examine the costumes and sceneries, and finally to hear from him the main points in the history of the theatre. As a climax to his kindness he put at my disposal a large number of his own drawings, illustrative of the theatre and of his own artistic powers. From these I have made a selection which now serves to illustrate this article.

It at once became clear to me that the efficient cause of the successful carrying out of the principle of artistic subordination was to be found in the personality of the Duke himself—as a man and as a duke. In him there is at once a combination of the highest artistic capacity and of the authority which makes it possible to realize any desire, and to carry into effect without friction any suggestions made to the actors. There have before been instances of men possessed of the keen artistic appreciation and power of conception; but they have not possessed the means to realize fully their highest and purest aspirations, nor the complete authority to impose their will upon the hypersensitive natures of actors and all

persons connected with the stage. At least, though many managers may have attained the necessary control over the actors, it required struggle and expenditure of energy to establish such authority, while a prince starts, by means of his position, with the supreme authority which any real capacity he may possess only tends to confirm and increase.

It is significant to the history of the Meiningen theatre that the artistic genius of the Duke is not specialized and limited to one form of art, but that his artistic tastes and activity are universal and most versatile. He is not only a cultured amateur of poetry, music, and architecture, so that he has drawn to his court as friends men like Bodenstein and Brahms and Bülow (the last conducted the excellent orchestra of Meiningen for five years), but is a practical architect, and a painter and draughtsman of the highest merit. Kaulbach said of him, "if he had not been born a prince, he would have been a greater artist than Kaulbach." The present director of the theatre, talking of the Duke, said, epigrammatically, "Carl August of Saxe-Weimar (the patron of Goethe and Schiller) encouraged art from art-interest [*Kunstinteresse*], our Duke from art-understanding [*Kunstverständnis*]." In other words, the one was a great amateur, the other is an artist. I have selected but one out of a large number of drawings which will illustrate his power of composition. They belong to the German school of the previous generation, Kaulbach, Overbeck, Cornelius. The battle scene here reproduced shows a power of composition and freedom of draughtsmanship which, whatever may be the advance of the modern schools of art in other directions, must be recognized by all. In painting, again, he is very versatile: large historical compositions, small *genre* scenes, landscapes, even caricatures, are in his domain. This great collection of drawings, which he values but little himself, was chiefly made in the hours of the evening without models. His mother, the late Duchess (a princess of Hesse-Cassel) was struck with deafness in her old age. In the evenings which her son passed in her company she was in the habit of reading aloud to him, and while she read he made these drawings, some of which are quite remarkable for vigor and for poetic feeling. He has almost entirely given up drawing now, ex-





“SCHLACHT DER DITHMARSCHEN GEGEN DIE DÄNEN.”

[This drawing was made when the Duke was nineteen years old.]

cepting for the sketches of costumes and scenery for his theatre. “I now like to compose with living figures,” he says; and this he certainly has done with the greatest success in some of the scenes the Meiningers put on the stage.

The artistic talent has been carried on in the family, one son (Prince Ernst) pursuing serious studies as an artist at Munich; while the hereditary Prince (the brother-in-law of the present Emperor of Germany), an excellent Greek scholar and archæologist, has translated Greek dramas, and has set music to the *Persæ* of Æschylus. In his surroundings, too, his refined artistic taste is satisfied, be it in the fine collection of old-master pictures in the great palace of Meiningen itself (the façade of which is 500 feet long), or in the lovely Villa Carlotta, on the Lake of Como (named after his first wife, a Princess Charlotte of Prussia), or in the picturesque castle of Landsberg, near Meiningen, or, finally, in the castle of Altenstein, in another part of the duchy.

The latter of these castles he has recently restored and enlarged, showing himself an architect of considerable skill. The fourteen or fifteen other castles and villas which he possesses contain many a gem.

The first incentive to his love for the theatre occurred in his childhood. He remembers, when a boy, acting with his brothers in the great hall (*Riesensaal*) of the castle, in the presence of the whole household, and even some citizens of the town. This must have been many years ago, as he is now sixty-five years of age. In those days there were no stationary troupes, but the ordinary itinerant players of the palmy bohemian days. His father, Duke Bernhard, developed the theatre, but chiefly in the direction of the opera. In those days the actors had to help as dummies in the opera, sometimes much to their disgust. He remembers how, in one of Gluck's Greek operas, one of the actors tried to hide his face in closing down a helmet which



he wore. Perhaps this matter of sheer necessity was the beginning of one of the central features in the discipline of the Meiningers. Some time in the fifties the present Duke, then hereditary Prince, undertook to put on the stage the *Iphigenia in Aulis*, by Gluck. He designed and had made all the costumes, and this was the foundation of what afterward became widely known as the "*Erbprinzliche Garderobe*." Before that time, and for a long time since (in fact, the system is by no means introduced everywhere—in America and England nowhere, to my knowledge), the actors had their own costumes made; and nowadays an actress makes a point of appearing in as many beautiful dresses as she can fit into an indifferent play. Owing to his position as prince, he could soon persuade the actors to wear the costumes provided by him. After his accession to the throne (his father abdicated in his favor in 1866) there was a short suspension of the theatre, and then it was started by him on the principles upon which it now exists.

Recognizing the physical limitations under which a provincial theatre in so small a town had to labor, he cut off entirely the opera and operetta, and even the modern society drama, devoting all the energy at his command to the great drama—historical, romantic, and melodramatic. One of the early directors, or *intendant*, as he is called, was the marshal of the court, Von Stein; but as the theatre grew in ambition, weight, and importance, this truly modest man assured his sovereign that his powers were not equal to the task ("*ich genüge Ihnen nicht*"), and recommended him to take the poet Frederic Bodenstedt. He accordingly was made intendant, and a patent of nobility was conferred upon him by the Duke. But Bodenstedt did not remain long at Meiningen. More and more the Duke took matters into his own hands. Yet he also possessed the power of a true organizer in finding capable people to assist in the work, and in conferring the proper amount of responsibility upon them. This efficient help he found in a former comedian, now the manager of the troupe, Hofrath Chronegk, who is not only a very able stage-manager, but also a clever man of business, who arranges the complicated machinery of the tours of the company. But the most important assistant the Duke has found in

his present wife, Baroness von Heldburg, a lady of great refinement and taste, of English origin on her mother's side, and formerly (she was married in 1873) the leading actress of the Meiningen theatre. This lady has worked indefatigably at the perfecting of the troupe; the training of the actors, male as well as female, is now in her hands, and she also supervises the department of costumes for the actresses. Thus, with such a conscientious and able manager as Herr Chronegk has proved himself to be, and with his cultured spouse supervising and inspiring the work of the actors, the efforts begun by the Duke have been carried to their highest realization. But the final authority remains with the Duke himself, and with him is the final appeal. It is no doubt owing to his exceptional advantages as a ruling prince, and to his own personality, that the discipline has been so perfect.

The family of which Duke George is the head is one of the oldest and most illustrious of the ruling houses of Germany. The founder of the houses of Wettin was a certain Count of Budsis (the modern Budisin), who died in 982. At the end of the fourteenth century, Frederic the Valiant, who died in 1428, was made the first Elector of Saxony. The sons of his successor, Frederic II., the Gentle, Ernst and Albert, divided the realm, the one becoming the founder of the so-called Ernestine line, the other of the Albertine line. The head of the Albertine line is the present King of Saxony; the Ernestine line branched out into the four ruling houses of Saxe-Altenburg, Saxe-Weimar, Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, and Saxe-Meiningen.

The present Duke George of Saxe-Meiningen is a man of martial appearance, like all the Saxon princes, well over six feet in height, and, in spite of his sixty-five years, robust and active, an excellent shot and indefatigable sportsman. He studied at the universities of Bonn and Leipzig, and then entered the army, joining the Cuirassiers of the Guard at Berlin. In 1849 he fought in the Schleswig-Holstein campaign as a major in the Meiningen contingent. In 1863 he was made a Prussian general *à la suite*, and in 1868, as Duke of Meiningen, a general of infantry of the Prussian army. In the Franco-German war he accompanied his own Meiningen regiment (the 32d) through the whole campaign and all the battles in which this regiment took part. I



have seen some most interesting drawings made by the Duke of scenes witnessed by him in this campaign. But the military side is certainly not the most marked in his nature, though it may have given him the appearance

actor is engaged, or about to be engaged, he says to him, "If you wish to become a Meininger, you must hold the Institute in such respect that you will sacrifice everything personal to contribute to the glory of the whole, and you will act as a



BARONESS VON HELDBURG.

of firmness which helps to exert the authority over men which he no doubt possesses. But to see him among the children of Baroness von Heldburg's home for poor children of dissolute parents at Meiningen will soon show the gentleness which abides with strength.

For the spirit which is to guide the whole Meiningen troupe the Duke has certain definite maxims. When a new

stage supernumerary." One of the main principles is that no actor is ever to be idle; and this is intimately connected with the other central principle: there is to be no chorus as such; there are no supernumeraries. He holds that keeping the actors and actresses always busy is good for them morally in a general way; it furthermore increases their versatility, thus counteracting the mannerisms which



come from acting too much or too frequently certain parts, or genus of parts; it counteracts vanity in the actors, and creates a democracy among them which engenders and maintains that *esprit de corps* for the strengthening of which the Duke uses every effort. Finally, it has led to the creation of the Meiningen chorus, the most perfect and unique feature of this company.

The parts are assigned by the managers, and there is no appeal from this. An actor or an actress who has played Hamlet or Mary Stuart on one night may have to be a messenger or a dummy attendant on another. I have seen the principal actor in the *Bluthochzeit* as one of the chorus in the *Braut von Messina*, and as one of the mob in *Julius Cæsar*. If an actor have a cold or be slightly hoarse, he will still have to play a dummy part if he can go out without prejudice to his health. The actress who was to take the chief part in the *Maid of Orleans*, but was taken hoarse at the last moment, appeared as a simple attendant.

Nor must it be supposed that this severe discipline causes friction. It is so perfect in its working, and has become so distinctly a tradition of the Meiningers, that things do not reach the phase of discussion; nor do they resent the system of fines rigidly carried out, and imposed upon actors and all the mechanical and stage *personnel* for delinquency or the disobeying of orders. While I was at Meiningen, for instance, I was told that the chief hair-dresser had been fined two marks for giving to Margaret of Valois, in the *Bluthochzeit*, a coiffure which was not historically correct, and was contrary to orders. It availed nothing to say that the actress herself desired the change. The hair-dresser was responsible for his department, and had to bear the fine.

So little are these rules felt to be a hardship that throughout Germany it is a matter of ambition for an actor or an actress to become a member of this company. Though the pecuniary advantages may not be as great as in some of the theatres of Germany, the prestige which the company has in the profession and in the country is so great, the opportunities of learning and of self-improvement are so patent, that an actor considers it a good piece of fortune if he can get a foothold there.

While at Meiningen I was informed that a young actor coming from the north was to be tested for admission. He was to play the part of one of the brothers in Schiller's *Braut von Messina*. He was the son of that prince of German concert singers, Stockhausen, and had evidently inherited much of his father's artistic talent. After the performance, which was highly successful, as far as he was concerned also, it was refreshing and instructive to see the enthusiasm of the young man.

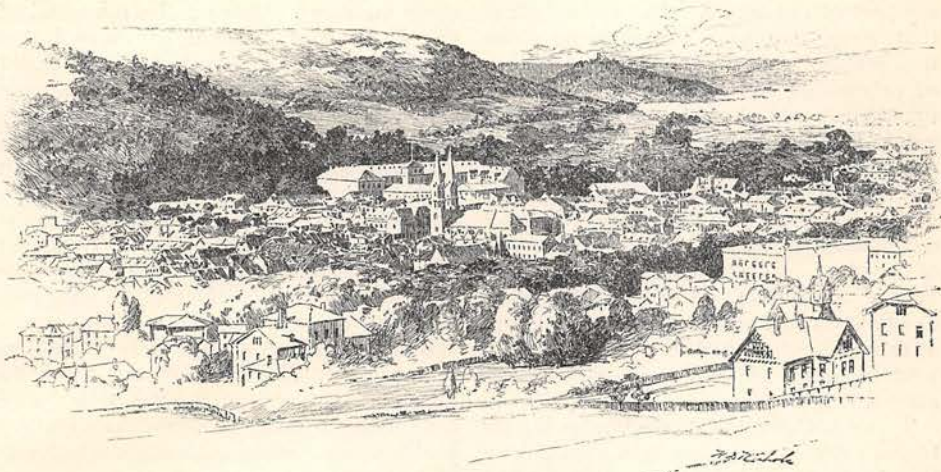
"The delight, in the first place," he said, "to get into a proper costume, to have all the actors, down to the simple attendant, acting up to you, pushing you on to do your best and strain your every faculty—the whole atmosphere of the place! Why, I have never acted as well. I feel almost a humbug, as if it were a mere accident, my acting so this evening."

"Well," was the reply, "try to make this *mere accident* a controllable habit—that is the height of the actor's training." This certainly was a most important testimony to the value of the methods pursued by the Meiningers, coming, as it did, spontaneously from an actor.

If the rules are severe, there is, on the other hand, great kindness and consideration shown the actors. Their pay is comparatively high, and there exists a well-organized pension fund highly subsidized by the Duke. Of this each actor receives the benefit after he has been with the company for ten years, even after he has left the company and joined another. Should an actor be incapacitated, the Duke also assists generously out of his private means. The company consists of about thirty-six actors and twenty-five actresses. As I have already said, there is no chorus; soldiers of the garrison are used to form a background. All the actors are capable of taking important parts. When the troupe travel abroad they have from twenty to thirty mechanics, scene-shifters, and other assistants. They even take their own gas-man with them. It requires enormous trains with special cars to transport the scenery, for they take with them all their scenes, costumes, and properties. One of the difficulties in the suggested American tour was the means of transporting this bulky material.

For about three months of the year the troupe play at Meiningen, the rest of the time is taken up with rehearsals, vacations,





MEININGEN, FROM THE BIBRAS BERG.

and foreign tours. On these tours, by the Duke's special desire, reductions in prices are made for students of the universities, scholars of the upper classes of schools, art students, and those of the conservatories of music. "The Meiningers are coming!" is a popular cry in the German towns they visit.\* They have gained a firm footing of regard at Berlin and in London, and are great favorites at St. Petersburg, where they have given performances for the last few years. Their first visit to Berlin was in 1874, since then they have been there repeatedly. Their greatest success there was attained three years ago with the representation of Schiller's *Joan of Arc*, which the late Emperor Frederick visited sixteen times. The individual actors when they thus travel also enjoy the consideration of the educated classes. It is a strange anomaly and survival that, though the Duke himself gives such great attention to his troupe, the inhabitants of his small capital are still eat-

\* Since this paper was written I have had authentic information that the Duke intends to discontinue the tours (*Gastspiele*) of the company. This will entail a diminution in the numbers of the company; but the plays at Meiningen will continue, and, in fact, will receive greater attention than ever before. This step is owing chiefly to the fact that Herr Chronck, the trusty manager, is broken down in health, and that the Duke does not feel justified in putting so heavy a tax upon his strength any longer. No doubt he also feels that the company has taught its lesson to the world, and that now he has a right to use his theatre more immediately for his own gratification and that of his own people.

en up with the narrow prejudices of fifty years ago, and the nobility of the court turn a cold shoulder on the theatrical world. But I believe that the actors live very happily without them.

The most interesting insight into the working of the theatre is, of course, afforded by the rehearsals. For a new play they have from twenty to twenty-five rehearsals. One single scene is often rehearsed for two or three days. They begin with one general rehearsal, for the purpose of getting a general oversight of the play, and of determining the fitness of actors for certain parts. Then the work of detail begins. Each scene is rehearsed separately, then follows the rehearsal of a whole act, and then come the final general and dress rehearsals. Before these begin, the Duke and his assessors have selected and carefully studied the play and agreed upon its general conception. Formerly the Duke himself also supervised the reading and the declamation; but now it is his wife who trains not only the actresses, but even the actors. But everything, scenery, costumes, and the actors themselves, must receive the final confirmation of the Duke. It is easy to realize how the subordination of actors and all elements of the play to the unity of artistic conception is effectively carried out.

But the doubt may arise whether this complete unity of conception may not stand in the way of the proper development of individuality and originality on



the part of the actors. But I am assured that those who have the supreme direction seek for nothing more than for signs of originality and individual power in the artists, and that any such signs are recognized and encouraged. The actors, moreover, can make suggestions themselves, and any new view of their own is gladly accepted, provided always it is not out of harmony with the main conception of the play. Criticism is often put in the form of a query as to how an actor understands a certain passage, and the attempt at answering the question often makes his mistake clear to him, and leads him to amend it himself.

I do not think that there is any danger to the vividness and strength of acting in this centralized discipline. I should be more inclined to point to one general cause which may lead to a certain stereotyping of style. It is to be found in the exclusiveness with which the great historical and heroic drama is performed, so that the contemporary society drama is eschewed.\* I cannot help thinking that it would be a wholesome corrective for the actors of the greater historical parts to have to force themselves occasionally into the naturalism or realism of contemporary life on the stage, and to have to doff the historical costume and the *tricot* for the modern dress. It would act as a wholesome tonic; just as it is a great rectifier of style and counteractant to mannerism, giving new life to pictorial manipulation, for a historical painter to try his hand occasionally at portrait-painting. Unfortunately we have even in art reached a degree of specialization which forces the artist to continue in the one groove in which he has once been successful and has made his reputation, at the cost of his further development and improvement. Still the plan of rotation of parts, and the careful study and vigilance of the managers at the rehearsals, tend to counteract much that would otherwise undoubtedly lead to degeneration.

To be present at one of these rehearsals is a great privilege. At one side of the stage is seated the *Regisseur* for the time, one of the troupe who acts as assistant

\* An exception to this is to be found in the performance of Ibsen's plays. These, as well as the plays of Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson, the Meiningers presented to Germany twenty-two years ago, before any foreign stage had taken notice of these Scandinavian authors.

stage-manager. During the rehearsal of the *Braut von Messina*, at which I was present, the very able actor Herr Richard performed this function. He is generally some older actor who has been with the company for some time, and knows its traditions. In one of the front rows of the orchestra stalls sits Herr Chronegk, with a call-boy beside him, who takes his messages to the back of the stage. The Duke takes his seat somewhat more in the centre of the theatre, in the stalls. His presence seems to work like a charm upon the actors, who immediately begin to "play up." He had several times to check the fire of some of the actors, and ask them to reserve their voices for the performance. Each intonation is noticed, and a wrong accent upon a word is not allowed to pass unheeded. I remember that the leader of one of the choruses, an excellent actor, got into the way of raising his voice on the last word of the last line of the play. "*Wo der Mensch nicht hinkommt mit seiner Qual.*" He had to repeat it three times before the right accents were put upon the words *Mensch* and *nicht*, and the voice dropped solemnly at the last word of the play. But not only criticism and correction, also words of praise were given here and there for a good piece of rendering, which were like the highest tribute to the actor. All seemed to enter into the spirit of the whole play, and watched each actor while he recited his part, nodding their heads with approval when he succeeded well, and—though it is difficult to look into the inner working of a company of players—the whole troupe seemed singularly free from jealousy. I noticed the Duke calling one man who was playing in the chorus by name, and asking him to stand in the foreground, and to recite with one other actor lines that were spoken but by two. He told me that the young man was a beginner, rather shy, and that he wished to give him confidence and to bring him out. During the performances also the Duke goes behind the scenes between the acts and makes remarks to the actors, generally of praise and encouragement. But, as I have said, he no longer takes so active a part in the declamative side, which is chiefly the province of his spouse.

What he is chiefly interested in is the *ensemble* and grouping. For a "crowd" no theatre in the world can equal that of





JEAN D'ARC AT RHEIMS, FROM SCHILLER'S "JUNGFRAU VON ORLEANS."

Meiningen. A Meiningen crowd is a real crowd; a riot, a real revolution of the people; a battle, a real battle; and it is therefore in plays like *Julius Cæsar* and *Wallenstein's Lager* that they achieve their greatest successes. There is none of that stolid indifference or foolish consciousness or stilted prattling that gets into one's nerves in ordinary plays. During the rehearsal he constantly pointed out small defects in this direction, not in general terms, which hardly help to mend matters, but in pointing to definite mistakes. He asked them to stand in a certain way, avoiding sameness of poses, to move their hands, bow down their heads, or look eagerly forward, to give variety. He particularly asked them to make remarks to each other that were pertinent to the scene they were seeing, or the words they were hearing. And he thus produces a variety of gesture and attitude, while all are subordinated to produce the strongest expressions of the main situation. Within this expressiveness he always aims at beauty of line in the different attitudes. He will ask an actor to turn his shoulder to one side, to rest upon one leg more than the other, and to stand or move more in conformity with his part, his figure, his costume.

The most striking feature in the playing of this company is the action of the chorus as a whole. Sounds have been studied most carefully. I believe it was here that the secret of effective shouting of a mass of people was first detected. An effective shouting noise can never be made if they all shout the same sound or in the same pitch. Accordingly each person is instructed to make some one distinct noise, and the total effect is most life-like. Then the gradation of sounds is most carefully considered. The advance of a mob was repeated several times (though it was the last rehearsal of a piece they often played) before the effect of the sound rolling nearer and nearer was produced: a gradual *crescendo*, far distant at first, becoming deafening shouts as they enter the stage. Further nice distinctions are made in causing the various emotions swaying the mob to become at once discernible: the grumble of a discontented populace, the raging of battle, the subsiding into gradual contentment and quiet, and the shouts of exultation, victory, or joyous thanksgiving—all are studied in sound and gesture, and practised with a painstaking conscientiousness which would astonish the ordinary stage-manager.

But the real delight of the patron of





OFFICER OF THE THIRTY YEARS' WAR.

this theatre is in the general grouping. It is here that his love of draughtsmanship asserts itself, and has led to his favorite occupation of "composing with living figures." But though he delights in the beauty of line of the compositions of the older school, he is opposed to all lifeless convention in this sphere too. I remember his not allowing the chorus to stand in a regular pyramid; to give variety of line the two sides of the triangle were to be uneven. Not only in the larger groupings of masses of people, but also in the arrangement of any one striking moment, does he exert himself. He makes special sketches to illustrate fully some important moment in the play. I have selected one sketch from the large

number of such drawings which are sent to the theatre as models for the stage-manager. They are merely rough sketches; but it will be seen how fully they render the life and action of the scene. For the great final scenes he makes a point of always sending a sketch to illustrate the general grouping. The accompanying specimen of such sketches gives a scene from Schiller's *Jungfrau von Orleans*. It represents the appearance of Jean d'Arc at Rheims, and was, of course, not meant for publication, but simply as a guide for theatrical purposes.

It is not only for general composition that such elaborate preparations are made. The greatest care is taken with the costumes and properties. The foundation was made with the *Erbprinzliche Garderobe* over forty years ago. As he says himself, it was a child of necessity, "and I then made a virtue of necessity." For every play and character, and even all the members of the chorus, elaborate studies of costume are made. At the time of my visit there was a plan of producing Tolstoi's *Ivan the Terrible*. I found the ducal couple deep in studies of Russian antiquities. They were not only looking up books with illustrations, but were reading Russian history and literature in order to be-

come imbued with the spirit of the place and the time. They had heard that the iron-bound staff with which Ivan slew his son was kept at Moscow, and were writing to Russia to procure a photograph of it. They were much interested in the picture of Ivan over the body of his son, by Elias Efimovitch Répine, reproduced in this Magazine in December, 1889. In the exhaustive studies of costumes which the Duke has made he has discovered some general laws, such as that of the proportions in the male dress of the Italian Renaissance, in which, it appears, the width of shoulders must be equal to the length from waist to neck. A historical anachronism in dress is a crime in their eyes. Therefore they



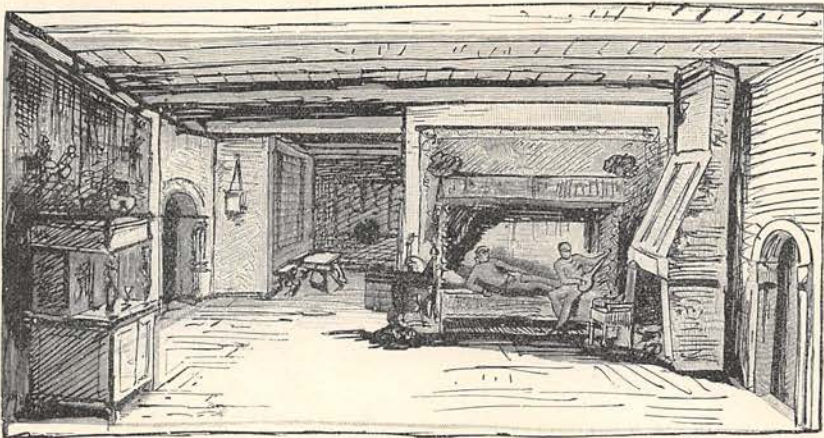
take the whole responsibility, and the actors are never allowed to wear their own dresses. This, of course, requires an enormous wardrobe attached to the theatre. Chest upon chest and drawer upon drawer are filled with dresses of all kinds and descriptions, and are kept in such order by the responsible chief of this department (bound down by a system of fines) that at a moment's notice he can lay his hands upon any dress or piece of property required. The properties and stuffs are often of great value; and I have no doubt that the first impulse to the costly fittings of the Bayreuth theatre by Wagner, and the similar movement in England, was given by the example of this wardrobe. For these dresses and properties the Duke makes drawings, which are intelligently carried out by his tailors and workmen. The accompanying sketches of officers of the Thirty Years' War are made for the *Wallenstein* performance. The sketch is to be followed as closely as possible, not only for the costume, but for the type of body and the make-up of the face.



OFFICER OF THE THIRTY YEARS' WAR.

Finally, the same care and intelligence are brought to bear upon the scenery. Several immense barn-like buildings are completely filled with scenes of all possible periods and countries. I doubt whether any other theatre has such a supply. The architectural studies of the Duke here stand him in good stead. He prepares a slight sketch, which his scene-painters are trained to carry out with thorough efficiency. For costumes as

well as scenery he possesses an extensive library and collection of photographs from all parts of the world. As an instance of such a sketch, I have here given a room, in a play by Björnstjerne Björnson called *Maria in Schottland*. On all these sketches the Duke makes pencil notes for the scene-painter and the stage-manager,



DARNLEY'S ROOM IN "MARIA IN SCHOTTLAND."



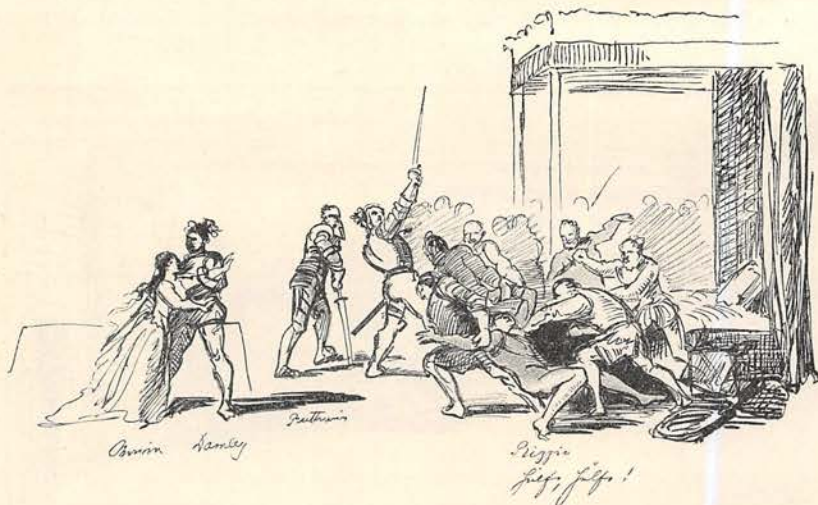
and they are kept for reference in the archives of the theatre.

When we look into the elaborate organization of this theatre we must at every moment be struck by the great care and attention given to what may be called the accessories of the drama, upon which formerly hardly any care was bestowed. Chorus, costume, scenery are raised to an importance almost equal to that of the training of the actor, and the star system is efficiently counteracted.

There is no doubt a danger in this system which we are frequently reminded of when we see some of the successful plays as put on the stage nowadays. It is the danger lest these accessories, costumes, and scenery, in their claim to or assertion of historical correctness, be not raised to too great importance, and in their turn distract the attention from what is really essential in the play, to the detriment of the fullest artistic appreciation. The whole "putting on the stage," the *Inscenirung*, is then used as an advertising medium, and it is spoken of in the same terms and language as the star actor or singer is referred to. The "mounting of the play" and the *ensemble* are (to use a paradox) then made a star. I must confess to having felt the same irritation when I have heard a play or an opera praised above all things, or exclusively, for the historical correctness or brilliancy of its mounting, or the careful elabora-

tion of the *ensemble*, as I have formerly felt when I was told, "Oh, you have never seen Macready or Rachel or Sontag in this or that part," or, "You ought to have heard the Grisi or the Malibran sing that aria." The play itself or the opera was quite a secondary matter, and the poet or musician who created the work of genius was ignored or put into the shade by the calves or robust figure or the perfect larynx of the actor or singer. Just as I am painfully amused by the newspaper reports of the unveiling of statues, in which columns are given to the prominent people who unveil the work, and what they say and may look like, while I have often looked in vain for the name of the sculptor who made the monument.

No, the great point of the Meiningen company is that all this care given to the details, all the work bestowed upon scenery and costume, is not meant to be realized in itself and made capital of. It is to be lost in the results, subordinated entirely to the general artistic effect of the work which the poet has created, and to this ultimate aim the principal actor is but a means, but one link in the organic chain of living art. The creators of the Meiningen stage never desired to derive praise and recognition from the elaborate efforts by which they succeeded in obtaining a complete artistic effect; this was their own work in the privacy of the study and in the rehearsal, and no



ASSASSINATION OF RIZZIO IN "MARIA IN SCHOTTLAND."



consideration was to interfere with the living and complete illusion of the play as they put it upon the stage in its final form.

This consciousness of the elaborate steps by which a work of art is produced, sought for by the public and asserted by the artist, is one of the diseases of our time. The novelist in his preface, or by the name he gives himself or his school, the painter and sculptor, the architect—all want us (and the critics and the public encourage them in this) to look over their shoulders while they are working. The novelist invites us to look into his note-book, to examine the elaborate memoranda he makes in the hospital, or the railway station, or in worse places; the artist tells us of his methods of arranging his lights and studying his values, calls himself a *plein air* painter, or an impressionist, or some other *ist*, or *ismist*; the architect informs us of the effect of texture or color and broken roof lines he *desires* to produce, until we no longer know how to hear or see or be moved by artistic illusion, but reflect the painful process of creation, which we project through the medium of the advertising agency of *isms* and causes without real effects. Why, Scott and Balzac and Thackeray and George Eliot kept note-books and read science (chiefly, it is true, for their own general education), but they did not rest their claim to excellence as novelists upon this, but upon the power of their stories to interest and move! If an artist or an architect can widen the sphere of his technical activity, so much the better for his work, and for him and for us; but he need not tell us of this one thing constantly, and develop or distort it out of all proportion to the other elements in his art. And so with "realism" on the stage, and with "historical consistency in mounting."

Now there is another opportune lesson which the Meiningen theatre teaches. It is an answer to the reactionary criticism we so often hear nowadays—reactionary against the elaborate display and straining for historical accuracy in the mounting of plays. We often hear a regretful sighing for the old days when the great actors thrilled the public, dressed in ridiculous costumes, and with a few boards and pieces of painted canvas to represent an elaborate scene. And we are told that the redundancy of scenery and costume

oppresses the actor and destroys the spirit of the play, as a Shakespeare conceived it in his days of simplicity of *décor*. But this is just as vicious reasoning as when the mere display asserts itself. From the highest point of view of art they have both the same destructive influence in opposite directions. The speech that becomes action, and the scene that speaks, only tell the story fully when combined. But the speech unsupported or interrupted by the scene leads the actor to shout and rant, and the scene not illustrating the speech becomes a second-rate panorama or picture. The imperfection of the scenery and mounting must have asserted itself and obtruded itself upon the attention of the spectator negatively, as much as an exaggerated and inopportune display of scenery does so; while both detract from the playful completeness of illusion and historical or personal sympathy which the poet really aimed at as his highest aspiration. The danger in those days was that the actor gained too much in importance; the want of scenery no doubt led him to exaggeration and to old-school ranting. Moreover, it must not be forgotten that a modern audience has advanced in general historical training over a Shakespearian pit, and what the latter would not remark, becomes a painful want or disturbance to the former.

This idea of "simplicity" which is now asserting itself in canting obtrusion, not only in matters of stage criticism but also in architecture and decoration, covers many sins and fallacies. Simplicity out of place is meanness or vulgarity. The soul of art is the harmonious and proportional adjustment of the artistic means to the artistic ends. A ballroom differs from a kitchen. It calls for brilliancy, and cannot be too brilliant. A kitchen or a cottage sitting-room calls for simplicity and neatness. And to treat either in the spirit of decoration belonging to the other leads to what is vulgar or caricatured. In former days, when Wagner's music was still almost universally called "music of the future" (by-the-way, just as Beethoven's was called in his time), I remember his opponents often insisting upon the fact "that Haydn and Mozart produced their beautiful effects with such absolutely simple means, while Wagner required such elaborate and difficult orchestration." If they maintained that Wagner's effects were bad or ugly, they



had grounds for criticism. But the *means* used by Haydn or Wagner are none of our (the public's) business when we judge the work of art as a work of art. It would be as foolish to blame Wagner for the *elaborateness* of his orchestration as it would be for his admirers to claim this as his artistic merit. The virtue of the beautiful effect of Haydn and Mozart rests upon the intrinsic quality of the music itself (which was simple, and required simple instrumentation to be perfect), and not upon the thinness or fulness of instrumentation. The means must be forgotten in a perfect work of art. Gold and jewels covered the great statues of Phidias, and they were just about good enough in material to clothe physically the spiritual ideas of the greatest of Greek artists. But the use of the mass of gold, which happened to be the proper medium for his inspiration, did in itself not stand forward as the end of his work; nor did the Greeks of that period cry for the archaic statues which, with conventional symbolism, expressed as perfectly as the earlier people could their highest art.

The Greeks of the time of Sophocles did not clamor for the symbolic and rhapsodical recitals from the times of Thespis; but, unless they were obstinate or affected reactionaries, they looked upon the more complete and adequate stage arrangements of their time as an artistic advance. The symbolical phase of art is always an imperfect phase, and though we ought, by an effort of historical sympathy, to be able to relish its delicate flavor, it is a morbid craving to desire it to become our daily normal food.

The truth remains that all the elements which contribute to dramatic perfection are to be subordinated to the supreme aim of representing with greatest fulness and adequacy the spirit of the poet's work, so that his ideas and situations strike the public most directly. And no one of these elements, actor or mounting, is to stand forth so prominently that it attracts the attention for its own sake, and thus detracts from the organic quality of the whole work. This truth is illustrated most fully, at least to my knowledge, by the Court Theatre of Meiningen.

## DON CARLOS.

BY MARGARET CROSBY.

HEINE, in his poem of the "Princess Sabbath," tells of her betrothed, the Prince Israel, who was transformed by witchcraft into an animal:

"A dog, with the desires of a dog, he wallows all the week in the refuse of life, amidst the jeers of the boys in the streets."

"But every Friday evening, at the twilight hour, the magic passes away, and the dog becomes once more a human being."

"A man, with the feelings of a man, with head and heart raised aloft, in festal garb, in spotless garb, he enters the halls of his father."

"Hail, beloved halls of my royal father! Ye tents of Judah, I kiss with my lips your holy door-posts."

Like the Prince Israel, Don Carlos Villanueva also led a double existence; but it was in the evening of each day that he descended from his high estate, that of a noble of Cuba and Spain, and direct descendant of the Counts of Villanueva. Not until the day returned did the second transformation occur, and in festal garb, with head raised aloft, he resumed the grand air that was his birthright. Don Carlos farther resembled Prince Is-

rael in that he was deeply in love. But his love was no woman, no princess, but a deity before whom he sacrificed all things—himself. Besides this deity, the only creatures he loved were his two greyhounds. He had had them since they were puppies, and their adoration of him was like incense. As they required no response, they were a constant source of pleasure to him. He called them Francisco and Louis, after his patron saints, whose names he bore in addition to Carlos.

One of the few picturesque landmarks in New York is the old church of St. Mark. It stands at the junction of Second Avenue and Tenth Street, surrounded by an old graveyard, with flat gravestones sunk in the ground. In spring-time the gray church, with its velvet lawn and shady trees, rests and soothes the eye wearied by the monotony of shops and houses. The church stands at the apex of a triangle, where Tenth and Stuyvesant streets converge into Second Avenue. The steps at the iron gate of the