

A HISTORY OF
THE AMERICAN DRAMA
From the Beginning to the Civil War

ARTHUR HOBSON QUINN

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OF THE
AMERICAN DRAMA.

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BY

ARTHUR HOBSON QUINN

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PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

IN the histories of our literature, there has been one notable omission. The failure to treat the drama has sprung primarily from the rarity of the printed plays, which were usually issued in perishable form and whose very popularity proved to be their doom. Many of the stage successes, both of the past and the present, have been kept from publication by the protective instinct of the producing manager, who feared for his property rights and to whom the literary reputation of the playwright was of secondary importance. Conditions are much better now, however, in this regard than they were in the days when the researches began whose result is this volume. The old plays are coming from their hiding places and the universities are beginning to recognize the importance of obtaining specimens of our dramatic literature. The most significant of our dramas are becoming more accessible in printed collections, but there still remains much to be done before a complete body of dramatic material is generally available to the student. It is comforting to note the steady increase in the publication of modern plays and the growing habit of reading plays as our drama is being rediscovered. It had been my first intention to complete the account of the drama in America before issuing any portion of it, but it became evident that a different treatment must be accorded to the early and to the later drama. No convenient date presents itself as one in which a sudden change took place, for the progress of our playwriting has been continuous, and the roots of our modern drama lie deep in the early days. It has been found possible, however, to treat the drama before 1860 with a completeness that is forbidden to the historian of the period since the Civil War. When one realizes that the list of plays copyrighted in the United States since

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1870 includes over 56,000 titles, it becomes apparent that such a wealth of material will have to be approached in a different manner from that which has been attempted in this volume. It seemed best, therefore, to publish first the record of our drama up to 1860, including, however, for the sake of completeness plays by men like Boker and Boucicault which fall beyond that limit. For reasons which are given in detail in the final chapter, the history of our drama up to the Civil War can be considered not as a fragment but rather as a work complete within itself. All necessary bibliographical material has therefore been furnished and a List of Plays arranged for ready reference has been appended. The form of these is explained in the appropriate places.

In the absence of a chart, the method of treatment of the material becomes important and the writer has been guided rather by his desire to present a helpful survey than by any worship of mere uniformity. Certain of the playwrights have their special significance, but as the subject develops, the type of play becomes usually of more importance than the individual playwright. A compromise has been effected, by which the work of the most significant dramatists has been made the center of a group of plays of similar nature. Thus while the greater dramatists have been treated as a unit, the minor playwrights may appear in more than one chapter, depending upon the nature of their contributions.

The drama has been considered throughout as a living thing. No attempt has been made to treat the unacted drama except incidentally, and except for the Revolutionary satires, attention has been concentrated upon the plays which actually reached the stage. From another point of view it has not been so easy to define the limits of our theme. The term American Drama presupposes native origin, and yet the interwoven threads of our early stage history make this term uncertain if we are to observe the spirit rather than the letter. It has seemed best to include those playwrights who, while born abroad, remained here and became identified with our stage and whose work has

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taken its place, however humble, in the progress of our drama. When, like Boucicault, they have become vital forces in that development, it is easy to select for discussion those plays which were written in this country, leaving the balance to their proper position in British drama. In the case of playwrights like Burton and Brougham, where their plays remained largely foreign in spirit and indeed were frequently revamping of earlier plays, the distinction is not made so easily, but it has seemed best to disregard their contributions unless they come definitely under one of the types into which our native drama runs. On the other hand, the work of men like Ralph and Bernard, who were born in America but who became identified with the stage in England, seems to lie outside our province. It is the nature of the play and the circumstances of its production that determine the nationality of drama and not the accident of birth.

So generous and so courteous has been the assistance rendered me that recognition becomes a real pleasure. The very extent of that help, however, proves an embarrassment, and special mention seems invidious. The work would have been impossible had it not been for the establishment of the Clothier Collection of American Plays in the Library of the University of Pennsylvania and for the continued support of the generous donor. The endowment of a fund for a similar purpose by my fellow members of the class of 1894 has been one of the most encouraging episodes of the progress of the work. The constant interest of both authorities and attendants in the University Library has been invaluable, and indeed the expert assistance of Miss K. S. Leiper, now unfortunately no longer in charge of the Collection, cannot be overestimated. Among the many other libraries which I have laid under tribute, that of my friend Dr. F. W. Atkinson has been of the greatest service. He has placed at my disposal not only his remarkable collection but also his wide knowledge of the field itself, and the pages of this volume constantly reflect our many conversations. It is to be hoped that he will soon publish his

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Bibliography of American Plays, to which only a few fellow workers have had private access. Miss J. L. Farnum of the Library of Congress, Mrs. L. A. Hall of the Shaw Theatre Collection, Mr. T. Franklin Currier of the Harvard Library, Mr. H. L. Koopman of the Brown University Library, Mr. Ernest Spofford, of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, and Miss P. H. Fowle of the Boston Athenæum have been of great service to me, either upon the ground or through correspondence.

It is with especial pleasure that I acknowledge here the generosity and courtesy of the descendants of playwrights and actors. Mrs. George Boker has not only placed at my disposal the manuscripts of her father-in-law, but also has confirmed by her testimony the results of my study of them. Miss Helen Tyler Brown has interrupted her own labors upon her memoir of Royall Tyler to loan me unpublished manuscripts and to establish dates of performance. To Mrs. Laura E. Richards I owe the privilege of reading unpublished manuscripts of Julia Ward Howe, and to Mr. Murdoch Kendrick the opportunity of examining the prompt books of James E. Murdoch. Here again must be recorded, too, the debt of the the University of Pennsylvania and the writer to Mr. Robert Montgomery Bird for his splendid gift of the entire manuscript collection of his grandfather to the playwright's alma mater.

The encouragement of my colleagues has been most gratifying. Naturally, I have turned to Professor Schelling for counsel, which has been given with unfailing sympathy and with discrimination born of his wide experience. Professor Baugh's unsparing effort is reflected in the Bibliography and the List of Plays. Professor Crawford has been of great service in connection with the sources of our drama in France. Among my friends in other universities, the advice and encouragement of Professor Brander Matthews has been most stimulating, coming as it does from one who knows the field so well. I am only one of many who have experienced the generosity of a scholar who is never too busy to perform a graceful action.

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His comments upon the proof as well as those of Dr. Atkinson and Professor Crawford, have been invaluable. Professor Odell of Columbia and Professor Snowden of South Carolina have been cordial in their response to inquiries concerning the New York and Charleston stages. The greatest service of all, however, came from my wife who through many seasons has read to me the forbidding typography of the early drama, when my work would otherwise have been at a standstill.

A. H. Q.

University of Pennsylvania

March 1923

PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

Since the publication of the First Edition in 1923 there has been a great deal of scholarly activity devoted to the history of the American Theatre. Dr. Odell's monumental *Annals of the New York Stage*, the *Histories of the Philadelphia Stage* by Dr. Pollock, Dr. James and Dr. Wilson, and *The Theatre of the Frontier*, by Dr. Carson, to mention only a few of the contributions, have been published, and I have reflected their new information concerning the theatre in my revision of this record of the drama.

For practical reasons, the text has not been completely reset. It proved not to be necessary to alter the general plan of the *History*, but by resetting some pages and many individual lines it has been possible to correct errors and to add vitally necessary information.

Fortunately it has been possible to revise completely the Bibliography and the Play List, and they have been entirely reset. In making these revisions, I have had the advantage not only of the new printed sources already mentioned but also of unpublished monographs which the courtesy of their authors has permitted me to see in advance of printing. Mr. Julius Tolson's *Life of Dion Bouicault*, Dr. William S. Hoole's *History of the Charleston Stage* and Dr. Nelle Smither's *History of the New Orleans Stage* have been of particular value. Four hun-

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dred and fifty additional plays have been recorded in the *Play List*.

It has been a source of great satisfaction to me to know of the interest taken in this revision by scholars in the field. It would not be possible to thank every one of my correspondents, but I am especially grateful to Dr. William Van Lennep, Curator of the Harvard Theatre Collection, Dr. S. Foster Damon, Curator of the Harris Collection of American Poetry at Brown University, Dr. Zoltán Haraszti and Miss Harriet Swift of the Boston Public Library, Director Clarence S. Brigham of the American Antiquarian Society, Mr. George Freedley, Curator of the Theatre Collection at the New York Public Library, Mr. Barrett H. Clark, Dr. Oral S. Coad of the New Jersey College for Women, Dr. Roger A. Law of the University of Texas, Dr. Arthur H. Wilson of Susquehanna University, and for the Portland Theatre Mr. James Moreland of the Oswego State Teachers' College. The continued interest of Mr. Seymour Thompson, Librarian of the University of Pennsylvania, and of his associates in maintaining the Collections of American Drama has of course been invaluable and among my colleagues Dr. Alfred Harbage and Mr. E. B. Heg have been of great service in checking the *Play List*.

A. H. Q.

University of Pennsylvania
August, 1942

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CHAPTER I

THE DRAMA AND THE THEATRE IN THE COLONIES

WHEN the first play written by a native American to be performed by a professional company was put on the stage of the Southwark Theatre in Philadelphia in 1767, the Colonial period was almost over. In our native literature there had been produced chronicles of adventure, histories and diaries, essays of many kinds, some lyric and narrative verse, but no novel or short story. That the drama was delayed so long in its coming was due partly to the literary dependence upon the mother country, which postponed creative writing of all kinds, but in the case of the drama there were special reasons which prevented its growth. These were connected with the prejudice against the theatre, rather than against the drama, but since there could be no real drama until there was a theatre, the result was the same. It is the custom to attribute this hostility to the prevailing religious tone of the different colonies, and to point out that while Puritan New England, Huguenot New York, and Quaker Philadelphia were inhospitable to the playhouse and all it stood for, Episcopalian Virginia and South Carolina and Catholic Maryland welcomed the first traveling companies and even antedated their efforts. It was only natural, of course, that the church out of whose ritual the drama grew and the church under whose shadow the great age of English drama had flowered should show no hostility to the theatre. It was to be expected also that the Puritan, who grouped the drama, together with the kindred arts of painting and music, with his dearest foe, Anti-Christ, should oppose the playhouse where it was performed. But the reasons for the opposition were deeper and were temperamental rather than theological, and were woven out of the social and economic constitution of the people.

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The Puritan and the Quaker were accustomed to abstract thinking, and the symbol was to them, repugnant if not unnecessary. They associated it with monarchical forms in politics as well as religion, and they had no use for it. To the race that discoursed earnestly about the existence of witchcraft in the soul of man, and the race that felt the direct influence of the Spirit in their daily lives, the mimic representations of the stage may have seemed trivial.

The motives of those who opposed the theatre were mixed. They had little to do with freedom of conscience, as is often stated, for the Quaker was one of the most intolerant so far as the theatre was concerned and the Virginia cavalier who welcomed it was tolerant only of those who agreed with him. The Puritan and the Quaker were opposed to the theatre on account of the expense. They were averse to providing a livelihood for "profane shows" and in this thrifty feeling they were joined by the Dutch burgher of New York, who might have been indifferent to their antisymbolic objections. How strong was this feeling may be shown by the necessity felt by more than one manager of the time of publishing his expenses and receipts and by the resolution of Congress which finally closed the colonial theatre.

When Governor Hunter, of Pennsylvania, allowed Hallam's Company to act in 1754 it was with the distinct understanding that "nothing indecent or immoral" was to be performed. It was this general reputation of being connected with loose living that had descended from Restoration times, during which many of the ancestors of the colonists had left England, that hurt the theatre most in New England and Philadelphia. Between the standard of morals prevailing in the theatrical profession in the days of Charles II and of George II there had undoubtedly been improvement, but there was still room for more. Hallam's Company seems to have been composed for the most part of decent, hard-working people, but when one remembers that half a century later it was still possible for the manager's wife to appear on the stage of the Park Theatre in New York

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in a state of intoxication, he has to confess that the prejudices of the respectable members of society had at least some foundation. Certainly anyone who has been handicapped in his researches in theatrical history of the time by the casual, not to say kaleidoscopic, changes in the marital relations of the leading men and women, cannot deny that the standards of that life were not the ordinary ones. The standards of right living may not have been any lower in Virginia or South Carolina than in New England, but personal derelictions on the part of the players would certainly have been more easily condoned, provided the latter contributed to the pleasure of their audiences. For the social constitution of the Southern colonies provided in its scope more liberally for public amusement. Despite the absences of large towns—there were none in Virginia when the first company came—the race courses had accustomed the gentry to travel long distances for their entertainment. For them entertainment was a necessary part of life; they were willing to pay for it, since their money came easily to them, and they saw no reason why the theatre was at all illegitimate.

When all the difficulties under which the theatre labored are considered, the wonder is, not that it was handicapped in its development, but that it survived at all. That there was a real appreciation of good acting in this country is proved not only by the favor of the Southern colonies, but also by the determined stand taken by the friends of the playhouse, largely of the same temperament, in Philadelphia and New York. In the eloquent words of the first historian of our theatre:

A large portion of the inhabitants, however, saw no offence to morality or religion in any of the colours which diversify and beautify the works of creation; or any of those innocent amusements which bring men together to sympathize in joys or sorrows, uniting them in the same feelings and expressions, with a brotherly consciousness of the same nature and origin.¹

¹ Dunlap, William. *History of the American Theatre*. I, 27-8.

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And that the creative drama had its birth was due likewise not to the patronage of the cavaliers in the South, but to the artistic sense of a young Philadelphian, under the personal inspiration of a great lover of the arts. After all, when we remember that it was but ten years after the first regularly organized company of actors performed in this country until the first American play was written and that it antedated by thirty years the first American novel, the appeal and the vitality of the drama as a form of art in colonial America may be regarded as established.

Unlike the novel, the first American drama had a respectable ancestry and inspiration. It was the study of Shakespeare, of Beaumont and Fletcher, of Dryden, of Ambrose Philips and Nicholas Rowe that inspired Thomas Godfrey to write *The Prince of Parthia*. But it must not be forgotten that it was as an actable play that Godfrey planned his work, and it was definitely for the company of players whom he had seen in Philadelphia that he wrote it. He was prompted also by his association with the amateur production of masques, odes, and dialogues in the College of Philadelphia, and since the beginnings of any art have an intrinsic interest it will be necessary before the first drama is itself discussed to trace the development of these two strains of influence, professional and amateur, which culminated in Godfrey's work.

The first theatrical performance in what is now the United States seems to have been given in Spanish on April 30, 1598, on the Rio Grande River below El Paso. The author was Captain Marcos Farfán de los Godos, and the play, which has not survived, is said to have been a *comedia* dealing with the march of the soldiers under Juan de Oñate. The same expedition on July 10, 1598, performed an anonymous drama, *Los Moros y los Cristianos*, which is still played throughout the Southwest. There was much theatrical activity even earlier in the Spanish provinces in North and South America, and a French masque, *Le Theatre de Neptune en la Nouvelle-France*