

# FOR THE MODERN STAGE

THE MECHANICAL DEPARTMENT  
ALWAYS IMPROVING.

Its Evolution Within a Few Years Has  
Been Very Great—Many Marvels Have  
Been Wrought—The Application of  
Some Simple Electrical Effects.

In a recent issue of PROGRESS an account was given of the mechanical principle of many of the regulation stage effects, but the following from a St. Louis paper, shows that many of the things there described are now being supplanted by more modern ideas, due to the constant demand for the greatest possible realism.

"Much has been written of the evolution of the drama," said Thomas J. Bent of Chicago, one of the delegates in attendance at the sixth biennial session of the Theatrical Mechanical Association. "And truly its evolution has been remarkable since the days when it found its highest expression in the now much-despised Punch and Judy show. But the evolution of the drama is no less remarkable than the evolution of what I may call the mechanical department of the stage upon which it is presented. And while the one is the result of centuries the other is the result, at least in its most striking developments, of only a very few years."

Mr. Bent is about the oldest delegate of the association present. He was for over a quarter of a century what was humorously described as the "nocturnal illuminator" of one of Chicago's principal theatres. He is accompanied by another delegate, whose hair had turned a silvery gray, in the position of stage carpenter at the same theatre. This is Mr. John Faust.

"In the evolution of the mechanical branch of the stage," continued Mr. Bent, "the artist is enabled, provided he has been gifted with the histrionic power, to hold the mirror up to nature. When one recalls how imperfectly in days past was the art of producing stage effects, one is surprised that the drama held so high a place in the minds of the people. The fact that it did hold so high a place is a tribute to the genius of our leading actors and actresses, as well as to the judgment and care of theatrical managers in catering to the public taste."

"A revolution has been wrought in stage management by electricity. And the revolution has resulted in giving to the incidents which go to make the production complete a naturalness which without electricity would be impossible of attainment. Take, for example, that one matter of lightning. Without it the stage storm scenes would lack their chief element, the element that gives a realistic touch to the picture presented. Up to a few years ago, this was produced by a flask box with a light in its centre. The box was filled with a preparation called lycopodium. Into this box you put some cotton saturated with alcohol. To this there was a hose attached. You blew through the hose, ignited the cotton, and created the flash. You can see what the flash would be like. Now we have, you might say, real lightning made to order."

We take two electric wires, run them through some handle, say two file handles, from a current, bring the two wires together, and you have a flash that dazzles the eyes. It is produced as quickly as nature itself. And so with everything."

"Even in thunder making," suggested Mr. Faust, "there has been a great improvement."

"Yes," Mr. Bent went on. "I suppose no one ever thought the old sheet iron and balls would be replaced. Now there are no less than four or five systems. The best thing I have seen, however, was that which was introduced by a German company in Chicago a short time ago. There was placed on the stage, out of view of the audience, of course, a large machine, with a skin drawn tightly over it like a drum. The machine was five or six feet in diameter. It was divided into two different parts. The one was suspended in the air. The other rested on the ground. From above the first several small balls were dropped. These set the first portion of the machine in motion, and the balls produced that rumbling which presages the bursting of the thunder storm; gradually it grew louder and louder, till they tell with a terrific explosion on the second portion of the machine. The sound was as nearly like that of natural thunder as anything I have ever heard."

"Then take a scene in the moonlight. Now we produce the moon by the aid of a magic lantern. How used we to do it before, you ask. Well, such as it was, we produced it through the use of a square box, a piece of transparent cloth, and a tall candle. This would be hung by a couple of strings from one of the drop scenes. It would have to be pulled up when you wanted the moon to conveniently disappear. In the pulling up and lowering you would have the moon suddenly appear to take a jump or possibly hide itself just at the moment when the hero was beginning to repeat his lines in a moonlight love scene. The situation was awkward under the circumstances. Now the moonlight flash becomes as natural as the lightning flash."

"What I regard as one of the best electric effects I have ever seen I witnessed about a year ago," said Mr. Faust. "This was the sudden illumination of a number of dancing girls. There were about twelve

or fifteen in the group, and at a certain point in the dance the heads of all seemed to the observer to be lighted up in various colors. And their heads were, as a matter of fact, illuminated in the colors witnessed by the audience, which was dumfounded by the novel feature of the show. It was done in this way: Over the carpet on the steps were a number of small brass plates about three inches square. They were so placed that each dancer at the particular point would step on them with both feet. They had the colored lamps on their head and shoulders, and by stepping on the little plates a current was produced which resulted in the illumination. You remember, too, in the production of America at the Auditorium some two and a half years ago how the danseuse was wrapped in the national flag as the dance comes to a close. The scene is exceedingly striking, one of the most striking of that spectacular production. The flag is produced through the aid of electric lights and vari-colored shades. And day by day electricity is finding new uses on the stage, and is bringing stage scenery to a degree of perfection undreamed of even twenty years ago.

"No, there has been no substitute introduced for snow so far. It is still the same old thing, the white paper cut into slips and then recut and placed in a box covered with slats. Or sometimes it is a canvas bag, arranged so that the proper quantity will be shaken out at the one time. The great difficulty in finding a substitute for this lies in the fact that it is very hard to get anything which is light enough to drift in a very slight current of air. One man in Paris has tried to supplant it by white kid. He is at the head of a glove factory, and, in endeavoring to find a use for the shavings or the waste material, the idea occurred to him that he might dispose of it profitably to theatrical companies for the purpose named. The kid has certainly many advantages over paper. Before it goes through the final stage of its conversion into gloves or other articles of apparel it contains a sort of lining that is fluffy and downy, and is a much nearer approach to snow than can ever be found in paper. But its weight rendered it altogether useless for the stage."

"There are a good many, I suppose," continued Mr. Faust, "who regard stage property, furniture, etc., as being a very unimportant accessory to the production of a play. Such people make a great mistake. Take, for instance, the absence of a pen and ink. Very small in itself, but yet it may spoil a whole scene. If the actor in a certain part has to write a letter, and the pen and ink are absent, what is he to do? And, in connection with the writing of a letter it is curious that the actor never really writes a letter. When I spoke of ink, I should have said ink-bottle, for the bottle is always empty. On the other hand, when an actor is supposed to read a letter, he always has the letter before him. The reason is curious as it may seem, the average actor and actress possess an exceedingly poor memory, and a letter contains a greater number of lines than they are usually asked to repeat on the stage. Now, the arranging of the letter, the ink-bottle and everything in the way of property depends on what is known as the property man, the man who has charge of all the property. Again, take such an apparently small thing as the arrangement of a chair for a tragedian. The chair has a certain amount of business depending upon it. Suppose it is not exactly in the spot where the scene spoils it. What happens? The actor is a nervous man; he keeps his eye on the chair; he thinks of the chair; he forgets his lines, and he spoils the production. I recollect such a comparative small thing as the turning on of the light a moment before the proper time leading Mansfield into a violent fit of temper. He was appearing in 'Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.' Just as he retired the audience gave vent to its feeling of appreciation, and Mansfield came forward to acknowledge the compliment. While he was doing so the lights in the house were turned on, which, of course, showed his make-up under a stronger glare than that displayed while he was playing the part. There was a possibility of spoiling the illusion of the double character, and, naturally, he became exceedingly angry. I remember, too, the exactness which Salvini demanded in the arrangement of stage scenery. There was one scene in which he required a door exactly in a certain place. I had arranged it to suit him, as I thought. The stage manager came to me in a great hurry one afternoon and told me Salvini would have to have the door rearranged. I asked why; what difference could a few inches make one way or the other? He then explained to me that Salvini during his part stepped backward before he retired; that he knew exactly the number of steps it took to reach the point where he was accustomed to come to a stand-still; that if the door were not changed, he would bump against it and spoil the finest piece of acting to which he treated the spectators."

"Realism has been carried to a remarkable extent as the result of the introduction of electricity. And as in the matter of scenery, so it is in everything else; Mansfield, I think, shows a greater desire for it than any other actor of our day. When he appears in a supper scene he has a real supper. Oysters on the half shell must be obtained, no matter how; so must chicken and other salads, and he never uses anything but the real champagne. In this matter a change has come over the stage. Years ago everything used during any scene of which eating and drinking formed a part was the genuine article. Now it seldom is. You have imitations of every edible and of every liquor. The reason for the change is this: Some years ago all such necessities were supplied by the stage managers; now they are supplied by the managers of the theatrical companies. Since the expense comes out of the treasury of the company the luxuries of real champagne suppers have been almost wholly dispensed with."

Scotch and English Farmers.  
Scotch farmers who have settled in the east of England are looked on with favor, "because their wives and daughters milk cows, take it to the village, feed calves, and do other work." Scotch farmers succeed thereabouts, while English farmers do not.

## SEEN IN OLD ENGLAND.

EXPERIENCES OF A VISITOR IN A FAIR COUNTRY.

The Land Looks Its Best at This Season of the Year—The People Seem to Very Good Advantage—Some Qualities that Give Favorable Impressions.

All railways in Great Britain in the vicinity of towns are either submerged, run on viaducts, or in tunnels, so that the passengers see nothing of cities which they enter or leave, writes Mary H. Krout. You are well out of Edinburgh in the green country, winding through the hills, before you realize it. And you see, far off, the smoke of London, then the roofs of houses, and are at your station in the same unexpected way; the tunnels are interminable—miles of them must be threaded before you are finally set down at King's cross.

Scotland and England both, at this season of the year, August, are inexpressibly lovely. In the north the hay harvest has just been gathered, and the fields are already like lawns from the new growth. The grain is just beginning to head out, for they do not harvest the wheat until September, and here and there are great patches of blood-red poppies—a wonderful contrast to the yellow-green of the grain. There is not a foot of waste land anywhere and the same high cultivation of our rich farming regions would make us the bread-growers of civilization.

The Great Northern is, by far, the best route between Edinburgh and London, because it is the most picturesque. Darlington, and York, and Newcastle-on-Tyne lie along the line, and it passes through a country of great historic interest and of wonderful beauty. John Barroughs has written more satisfactorily of the English landscape than any one who has ever attempted it. He compares the lush greenness of the grass that springs up everywhere and grows so luxuriantly in this humid climate to the light, feathery snow of our own winters, that falls in a night and covers the earth with downy softness. While our trees bristle, the leaves seeking to escape the fierce heat of our summers, the under part of the boughs being as thickly clothed with leaves as the upper, he calls the English trees "great tents of shade," softly rounded in at their outlines, all the leaves crowding to the light, and leaving the under part of the branches nearly bare. Any one who has read his English sketches must be struck with the truth of the description.

It is hard to understand, though, how they manage to raise any grain at all, there are such myriads of crows. I saw one freshly plowed field that was literally black with them, and could well understand how crows would be made a branch of industry in which the reluctant rustic British lad is forced to engage extensively.

At York our carriage door was unlocked and we were permitted to get out and walk up and down the platform. Here there were a number of nimble boys wearing the uniform of the company selling tea. It was handed through the windows of carriages, and thirstily swallowed by the provident who had brought their lunches with them. English railway stations, in town and country, are much less ornamental than ours, but they are vastly more spacious, solid, and comfortable.

The platforms are of cement, and are on a level almost with the carriage door, so you walk instead of climb into your compartment, as we must do. There is less confusion and a great deal more courtesy, and for this latter virtue John Bull rarely ever gets any credit from Americans who travel and dislike the English railway service. There is the trouble of claiming your luggage, but this time is given you, and all your questions are answered civilly. At York I heard an entreating voice behind me say, "Please—please—please," and turned to find myself in the way of a porter wheeling a truck of "boxes." I had grown so accustomed to "Hay, there" or "Git out of the way!" it is no wonder under the circumstances that I stepped aside at once and apologized into the bargain.

In this connection it may be said that it is very singular that the English have never had the credit they deserve for being an extremely kind and polite people. We read and hear of the "British stare," of their surliness and selfishness, but I have not, up to this time, seen a single instance of what I should call rudeness. If not disposed to talk they tend to their own business, and one can respect their reticence, but on my journey down from Edinburgh I noticed that every man offered his paper to his neighbor when he had finished reading it himself; the sandy-haired youth gave the workman his copy of Punch, and the severe young woman presented me with her Chapman's Magazine, and asked me to keep it, when she politely wished me "good morning," and we parted at Newcastle. They did not, however, talk to each other at all, as Americans would have done. At York, when I asked a lady to show me the ladies' waiting-places, which was at the extreme end of the long platform, she insisted on going with me, although her own train was waiting, and she had but a few minutes to spare.

At the great London station the same order and system prevailed as I had seen elsewhere; all the baggage was piled together, the porter called a "four-wheeler," the trunks and bags were put on top, and I was driven to my hotel in the West End. In New York I had paid \$3 for transferring one trunk to the dock, myself, steam-trunk, and carryall to a hotel on Broad-

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way, from the Jersey ferry; the drive from King's Cross to my hotel, a distance of six miles, with my possessions, cost just 85 cents in London.

At the hotel I found an English friend awaiting me, with letters of welcome from others, which were speedily followed by calls in person. And in these small matters also the people are an example. Letters of introduction are recognized immediately; notes are answered without delay, and while they say little, they do a great deal. Your comfort, your happiness, your convenience are theirs for the time being if they have been made in any way responsible for it.

The vastness of London is impressive. It must always dwarf everything else in the world for one who has visited it. Its miles upon miles of streets—and all clean—give me a wholesome respect for the industry, honesty, and perseverance of the English people. The houses, that is, the residences, and even the public buildings, are what we should call dull, it is not a little melancholy, compared to our newer and more ornate architecture. Along the more public thoroughfares, like Piccadilly, the few residences stand behind high walls which we can see from the top of the omnibus, in which my soul delights. They turn their backs in haughty scorn upon the public thoroughfare, even behind their walls. The offices and dining-rooms are upon the first floor, the drawing-room on the second, the chambers above, and the servants' quarters at the top. Behind these houses, entirely secluded, are the private gardens. That of the Duke of Devonshire, not far from Hyde Park, is very large, and at the entrance of the street, along the south side, is posted the notice, "No thoroughfare." The good nature of the common people in the better parts of the city, the "cabbies," and policemen, is remarkable. The omnibus driver, who can drive closer to the wheels of another vehicle and not graze them than any other man in the world, is apparently never in an ill-humor, he chafes his conscience on the bus ahead of him, and stops his horses instantly when he is signalled. This is not because they have so much leisure, for Piccadilly is a tremendous rush. No one dares to attempt crossing the whole width of the street at once. His dashes from the curb to the "island" in the middle—lighted with two gas posts at night—and, having safely passed the stream of vehicles coming in one direction, can take breath, watch his chance, make another plunge, and land safely on the curb stone opposite.

There are 90,000 omnibuses running daily in London. A bright American girl hearing this statement, said: "I believe it, and I saw them all in Piccadilly." The intelligence and civility of the London police are proverbial. They apparently know the town as they know their multiplication table, and direct you, unflinchingly, wherever you want to go. I have had but one, thus far, say that "I do not know," and this was as to the whereabouts of a very difficult street to find, which was rather a paved passageway than a thoroughfare, and was for pedestrians only, out in Hampstead Heath.

A friend in Chicago some time ago said: "There is nowhere in the world where you can be so comfortable as in a little English hotel." This is true. The servants are respectful and attentive; in the morning over three times daily; in the middle of the day when there is a thorough setting to rights, and at night when fresh towels and water are brought, the shoes taken away to be cleaned, and the bed prepared, when the guest wishes to retire. The ordinary breakfast is tea, rolls, a chop, or the incomparable English bacon and fresh eggs, toast, and the inevitable marmalade; there is no fruit, or porridge, unless it is especially ordered; the luncheon consists of cold meats, more tea and cake, while dinner is remarkable for the variety of soup, fish, fowl and joints, and the tenderness of the vegetables; potatoes and vegetable marrow seem to be the chief reliance; a dozen

thin, bitter slices of cucumber adorn the fish, but it is not to be eaten seriously or lavishly, as with us; sweet potatoes, peas in abundance, corn, melons, the varieties of fruit are lacking, and the rather tame puddings, which, with cheese and biscuit, constitute the daily dessert, are a poor substitute for the luxuries to which we are accustomed. Coffee is an unknown quantity. I have seen the bean for sale in various places, otherwise I should never believe that the thick, black decoction they give you was ever made from anything but licorice. The bread is always sweet and delicious, and the unsalted butter like rich cream; the game and mutton, in an advanced state of decomposition, which greets your olfactory nerves with its powerful odor as you approach. I have not yet grown accustomed to; game reasonably "high" is one thing, and that which is more than ready for solemn burial is quite another; but the English epicure has expressed his preference for the latter, and that settles it.

The evil genius of the English hotel—otherwise so comfortable—is the "extra." You have a pleasant room at the moderate "tariff" of luxurious ease and enjoyment, but when the weekly bill comes in it is as big as one of the Australian ballists. The modern six shillings is literally nowhere; it is swamped and swallowed in extras—"service," "lights," "service," more "lights," "sundries," "cleaning shoes," and so on, and the way one's simplest and commonest needs which our hotels take for granted and include in the general total, are twisted and transformed into chargeable items, must be regarded as the highest triumph of human ingenuity. You find that what you think you are paying for is next to nothing; it is the array of what you never against you that makes you look agape at the final accounting, call a "four-wheeler," and get you to lodgings as fast as you can be driven there, lest—if you are a person of moderate means—you should be left penniless in a strange land. That would be no laughing matter in London, for, while there are charitable institutions for cats and other animals, for aged men and women, for orphans, and other afflicted persons, there is nothing whatever for destitute Americans that I have yet found.

The servants, as I have said, are respectful and attentive, and not more rapacious for fees than those in our hotels. Where a guest remains some time they expect the gratuity on the final departure. Even then they do not expect any more than those in America, but I have been told that there is a general mustering of forces when the farewell stipend is distributed. Their uncertainty as to Americans is amusing; they invariably suppose them to be enormously rich, and the more intelligent have a vague idea that there exists with us a democracy, which they do not at all comprehend is practically only nominal. They flounder in the uncertainty of wondering whether they shall serve you properly or whether they shall sit down and converse with you as a man and a brother. When they are set right they accept the situation with the utmost good nature, and thenceforth "keep their place," of which he said, to their credit, they are not ashamed. I have had a maid allot me, a kind creature and full of good sense. She has been, however, rather sitting in a conversational way, and once or twice I have had to ask her, more pointedly than politely, what time it was. In one of her dissertations in deference to my own calling, she became quite "literary," and informed me that she was "happily fond of Charles Dickens' 'Stories of England.'"

She also told me that she had an uncle living in America, "in Ohio, 130 South street," and asked if I knew any one living there. However a woman considerably her superior in position in education asked me if I was acquainted with a family named Gillespie who lived in the South? So the poor servant is not much more unenlightened than those of whom we should expect better things. In regard to the maid re-

ferred to before, however, in her ignorance of American customs, she dropped into a distressing way of entering my room without warning. I finally had to say frankly that I must ask her to knock before she opened the door; the poor thing blushed painfully and apologized, her good nature quite unruffled, and she has not offended since.

Upon the whole, with a sufficient income, one can live most comfortably in London. Lodgings and board are cheaper, and servant hire much less than in Chicago. I was offered a small apartment, sitting-room, bedroom, and a tiny kitchen all furnished; all the family "photos," as the English call them, and all the books were thrown in. There was an ingenious arrangement in the kitchen—a tiny glass range with a "nickel-in-the-slot" attachment; the gas burned just so long as you fed the little stove pennies; one would boil your kettle and grill your chop; two would nearly cook your potatoes, while quite a respectable dinner would be prepared for three copper coins of the realm. This seemed to me quite as interesting as anything yet evolved from the brain of a Yankee inventor.

### The Conscientious Catfish.

There have been many cases where fishes have been caught in and those capacious maws were found long missing rings, necklaces, baseball masks, and such like trifles. Once in a great while a thiefing fish is stricken by its conscience into a desire to make restitution. Such a fish was the giant cat which lay watching the shores of an Eastern stream all through the month of April. Many fishermen tried to land him, but he contemptuously refused the most tempting lures, until a tall man of striking personal appearance came one day. The big cat leaped from the water and fell at his feet, without waiting for hook and line. The tall man was astonished. On cutting open the fish afterward he discovered a gold eagle which he had lost a year before lying in the fish's stomach. Most wonderful of all, there were, besides, sixty copper cents—one year's legal interest, which the noble fish had yielded up its life in trying to restore. Here is a mark for other piscatorial prevaricators to work up to.—Ex.



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