

Outdoor Theatres. By FRANK A. WAUGH. (Richard G. Badger, Boston, 1917. Price \$2.50.)

This is a useful and timely sketch of the subject of outdoor theatres, containing plans of twenty-seven of them and pictures of many others with descriptions and discussions of their uses and of the problems of design. It is useful and timely because, while even in war time we must have amusement, the outdoor theatre has the advantage of being not only one of the most harmless and elevating of recreations but does so much for the spirit of community, of teamwork, of learning to amuse ourselves instead of paying others to amuse us, in which, as a nation we are so lacking.

As one looks through the book nothing is so striking as the difference in design of the various examples. It would seem as though there were more room for variety in outdoor theatres than in any other kind of structure. Not only are no two alike, but it is somewhat difficult to find what they have in common. In fact, all that they have in common is an enclosed stage and an auditorium and the openness of both to the sky. If you have an enclosed space for a stage and a place for the audience to sit, you have an outdoor theatre. This really means that anyone who has a piece of ground as big as half a tennis court can have a practical and beautiful outdoor theatre by a proper arrangement of the trees, bushes, hedges or fences with which he may elect to enclose his stage. You could make a very pretty stage by planting a dozen bushes in a half square or semicircle, and with a contiguous piece of grass, with or without camp chairs for the audience, the outdoor theatre is complete. Dressing rooms may be part of the scheme, or may be in any convenient building or behind any convenient screen of foliage or anything else. Of course this is not suited for ambitious performances, but for small and private ones, children's plays, recitations, concerts and so forth, such a thing could be arranged on almost any place that is larger than a 'lot.' It may often be made to be part of the general planting scheme so as not to be noticeable as a feature apart, except when in use. The real defect in so simple an affair is the lack of separation between audience and stage. The stage should be higher if possible, but should at least have a barrier of some kind which, in this case, might be a low hedge or moveable border of interlaced boughs where the footlights would be indoors.

Professor Waugh is discouraging and not altogether consistent in his views of the uses of the outdoor theatre. He would "never present on an outdoor stage any performance which can be better cared for indoors. This would practically eliminate all modern drama." Not only that, but it would eliminate most of Shakespeare (whose masterpieces Professor Waugh

considers "reasonably available for outdoor performance") Racine, Moliere, and in fact almost any drama written for indoors. For if a play is imagined and adjusted for indoor conditions, it will be only an accident if it is as well as or better suited for outdoors. This judgment seems too sweeping. Let us consider the essential differences between the outdoor and indoor theatre.

The indoor theatre has not only an enclosed stage, but an enclosed auditorium. Furthermore, the stage is illuminated and the auditorium darkened, causing the greatest possible concentration by the audience on the stage-picture and action.

On the other hand, the outdoor theatre, though enclosed at the sides, has no roof, and the auditorium is as light as the stage excepting for night performances. The result is less concentration of attention and more diffusion of thought and impression among the audience. This may be expected to call for more simple and definite dramatic design and speech and action on the stage, and in fact, these are the conditions that the outdoor theatre does call for. It makes no difference that the stage may be of grass, the wings and backdrop of trees, bushes, hedges or pergola columns, for any of these, or rather, imitations of them, might be used for similar purposes indoors. The only basic difference between the outdoor and the indoor theatre is that the latter shuts out the sky.

Again, we must not forget the radical difference between the outdoor theatre by day and night. At night, when the auditorium is dark and the stage in artificial light, the conditions do not differ greatly from those of the indoor theatre. There is almost as much concentration on the stage as indoors. There is the added mystery of the night, the sense of being in the limitless open, the pure air, all aiding to key one up to a greater sensibility, a more romantic expectation. In such conditions, the only kind of drama that cannot be appropriately presented will be that which depends on stage management or machinery or setting, or is trifling, banal, ephemeral, local, too thin in design and construction, too dependent on facial expression, byplay or stage business, lack of carrying power, or any kind of small scale, petty or ignoble quality unfitting it for the canopy of the sky. Why should not the *Servant in The House* or *Paid in Full* be given in the open air? But, on the other hand, such a piece as *The Seven Keys to Baldpate* could not but lose some of its fun, its snap and point if played out of doors, simple though its stage setting may be. Or, again why should not the *Rivals* or *She Stoops to Conquer* be played out of doors? Comedy is not inconsistent with fresh air, or we should have to exclude *As You Like It*; nor even farce, for then Aristophanes would have to seek cover,

a thing he never thought of. Neither is complexity of plot and change of scene necessary hindrances to outdoor presentation, for both these are characteristic of Shakespeare, and the changes of scene can be handled in the simple ways of his own time.

In short, it would be difficult to find any real play, that is, one depending for its interest on the interplay of human emotion that could not properly be presented out of doors. Of course, the play and the presentation must be adjusted to the theatre, the audience and the available resources in funds and actors. It would be quite out of proportion to stage a first class performance of a standard play in some little garden theatre, and no less so to invite a large audience to buy tickets to a display of juvenile theatricals—unless to raise money for a war charity, which is another matter.

All this is not saying that any good play could be produced in any outdoor theatre. Some plays would fit one theatre, some another. One could even imagine a Pinero drawing room play in some small and sophisticated outdoor theatre. What kind of plays were produced two or three centuries ago in the small Italian garden theatres? Probably what we should call light comedy or society plays as often as not. Recalling the precedents for many kinds of drama out of doors, farce comedy and deep tragedy of the ancient and modern classics, it is plainly unsafe to dogmatise on what could not be well presented out of doors, given the right conditions. In the last analysis one's own judgment should enable one to decide whether any particular play is suited to a particular theatre and audience.

As for stage effects, properties and setting, it is astonishing how few are needed to produce an illusion. The writer has seen a very enjoyable version of *Midsummer Night's Dream* played in an open grass court by schoolboys and girls with nothing but the dresses and music to aid the actors; and he recalls the deep impression made by a really excellent performance of Synge's play "*The Shadow of the Glen*" on a grass stage with sides and background of foliage and two or three pieces of furniture to represent the interior of an Irish farmer's cottage in which the action takes place. No one seemed to miss the walls and roof or to require any further aid to the imagination.

Professor Waugh evidently has no use for cement seats, and we may presume that he hates stone seats also, for cement can be made to look nearly as well as stone. His denunciation seems a little too sweeping. Where there is no architecture about the stage, cement seats would be plainly out of place; but for 2,000 years and more outdoor theatres of many kinds have been built with stone and cement seats, and the custom will no doubt per-

sist. Stone seats can be used not only in stadia and Greek theatres, but in very much smaller and simpler ones as in the very attractive little garden theatre of Mr. Charles Gould at Tarrytown, N. Y. where the stage is enclosed by cement columns. With a stage in keeping, the tiers of stone seats are very handsome. Being permanent, they are probably more economical in the long run than wood seats or chairs, and they are much less uncomfortable to sit on than they look, and where they are considered a hardship, can easily be mitigated by movable mats or strips of carpet. Like anything else, they are good in the right place, bad in the wrong one.

In conclusion, we recommend the subject of outdoor theatres to the consideration of any and everyone. We are all likely to need a good deal of amusement for the next year or two to divert our minds, if only for a while from the one absorbing subject of the war. In view of the mental training, the mutual help and community spirit that outdoor theatricals elicit and foster, their potential usefulness in raising money for the causes bearing on national defense, their small relative cost—for excepting where the performers are paid, the initial cost of the structure is the only serious expense, and this is always small relative to the community it serves, whether it is merely part of a suburban yard or a civic amphitheatre—it would be hard to find a form of recreation more pleasant and profitable than can be had in the outdoor theatre.—HAROLD A. CAPARN.

Garden Farming. By LEE CLEVELAND CORBETT. (Ginn & Co., 1913. 473 pp. illustrated. \$2.00. *Country Life Education Series.*)

In this book Professor Corbett gives the results of observations and investigations in market-gardening, truck-farming, and the forcing industry, (as applied to vegetables) under the comprehensive title *Garden Farming*. It is to be noted that the author makes a distinction between Market Gardening and Truck Farming—the former being defined as, “That branch of olericulture which has for its object the production of large quantities of a great variety of the standard vegetables and small fruits to supply the demand of the local market,” while the latter “Has for its object the production of a few crops in large quantities for more or less remote markets.”

About one-fourth of the volume deals in a general way with the soil and its preparation, the principles of planting and cultivation, forcing and forcing structures, transportation, precooling and cold storage of vegetables, the home vegetable garden, etc. The rotation of crops, plant diseases, insecticides and fungicides, the sterilization of the soil, and fertilizers receive con-



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