

LUDICUS SCENICUS.

A view of the Stage in the time of Chas. I.

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THE Elizabethan Stage and the Stage of the early Stuarts have received in recent years the closest of attention; yet there has not been brought to light a single, complete, satisfactory, and reliable illustration of the interior of a contemporary playhouse. The well-known De Witt sketch, *c.* 1596, is good so far as it goes; but it leaves much to the imagination and necessitates considerable interpretation. Others of the very few extant sketches of the Stuart Stage are but suggestive of realities. All have to be eked out by the aid of stage-directions diligently collected and by the assistance of the words spoken in the course of the plays themselves. Any view, therefore, which may throw light upon the early playhouse is to be welcomed, even though it be but faintly illuminant.

In the discussions of the early playhouses in this country, no mention is made of the picture of an interior which appeared in *Orbis Sensualium Pictus*—"A World of Things obvious to the Senses drawn in Pictures,"—by Johan Amos Commenius [Komensky] printed in St. Paul's Churchyard, 1664, the translation of which is by Charles Hoole "From my School, in Lothbury, London," Jan. 25, 1658. As the picture may represent the Stage—whether English or foreign remains to be seen—before the translation of the Work from High-Dutch into English, a note concerning it, together with a reproduction will be of interest. The crowded title-page of the *Orbis Sensualium Pictus* says, among other things:—

Joh. Amos Commenius's Visible World, or, A *Picture* and *Nomenclature* of all the chief Things that are in the World; and of Mens Employments therein. A Work newly written by the Author in Latine, and High-Dutch (being one of his last *Essays*, and the most suitable to Childrens capalities of any that he hath hitherto made): & translated into English.

On each of the left hand pages of the book, there is seen a plate and upon the opposite page there is set out, in two columns, a description of the plate, one column being in English and the other column in Latin. Plate cxxx, of dimensions 2 inches by $2\frac{3}{4}$ inches, is headed "Ludus Scenicus," the opposite page, page 265, containing the appropriate description. In English, the description is as follows:—

In a Play-house 1 (which is trimmed with Hangings 2 and covered with Curtains 3) Comedies, and Tragedies are acted, wherein memorable things are represented; as here the *History of the Prodigal Son* 4 and his *Father* 5 by whom he is entertained, being returned home. The Players act being in disguise; the Fool 6 maketh jests. The chief of the Spectators sit in the Gallery 7 the common sort stand on the ground 8 and clap their hands if any thing please them.

Analysing the picture in the terms of the Elizabethan and Jacobean playhouse, we see a front stage and, at the rear, the well known curtains hanging from below a valance. There should be an overhead gallery from the front edge of which the curtains depend; but the gallery is out of the picture. It is just possible, however, that what is thought to be the valance may be the "Heavens"—the roof which covered a portion of the Stage and under which the actors receded as occasion demanded. Upon the left of the spectator, there is a garden-wall with fruit-trees displayed, and, upon the right, the wall of a house with window and two door-openings. The customary "Apron" of the front stage can hardly be

detected, if at all, but "the common sort"—Ben Jonson's Gentlemen of the Understanding—are plainly present, although their situation, relatively to the "Chief of the Spectators" who "in the Gallery" seem to be sitting behind a partition, is curious. A front curtain is present; it is shown drawn and looped back.

As regards the date of the playhouse which is thus illustrated and its provenance, it may be noted that Komensky's publication was probably modelled upon an earlier "Book of Trades," such as that by Jost. Amman, the first edition of which appeared in 1568. But the present translation in 1658 of the *Orbis Sensualium* is possibly referable to a year not later than 1642, since the frontispiece shows the author, Komensky, in that year at the age of 50. As regards an earlier date, there is the possibility that the plate was freely adapted from a picture of many years previously, maybe not less than a score, but the front curtain points to a stage of a more mature character than that of James's earlier years.

A clue to the continuous scenery on either hand and the position of the spectators may perhaps be found in the disposition of the stage effects and of the audience as illustrated in the theatre of Richlieu, 1641 (Martzius' *History of Theatrical Art* [1905], Vol. IV) where a general similarity to Komensky's picture can be traced.

Upon the whole, I am inclined to think that, although English elements appear in the picture, it is not truly representative of the interior of a thoroughly English playhouse. It is more suggestive of the Continental Stage, while its date is possibly not much earlier than 1642, the date of the frontispiece. In either event it seems to have been adapted for the purpose of the book, viz., the teaching of Latin.

Although the information the picture affords may be scanty and raises unanswered problems the picture may well take its place in the group of views which includes those by, or connected with, De Witt, 1596 (The Swan Playhouse);

Alabaster, 1632 (*Roxana*); Richards, 1640 (*Messallina*); and Kirkman, 1662-1672 (*The Wits or Sport upon Sport*) and those illustrative of Continental Art of the earlier seventeenth century.