

THE IRISH PLAYERS

INTRODUCTION BY THEODORE ROOSEVELT

THE ABBEY THEATER BY JOHN QUINN

A NEW PLAY BY LADY GREGORY

IN the Abbey Theater Lady Gregory and those associated with her—and Americans should feel proud of the fact that an American, Mr. Quinn, was one of the first to give her encouragement and aid—have not only made an extraordinary contribution to the sum of Irish literary and artistic achievement, but have done more for the drama than has been accomplished in any other nation of recent years. England, Australia, South Africa, Hungary, and Germany are all now seeking to profit by this unique achievement. The Abbey Theater is one of the healthiest signs of the revival of the ancient Irish spirit which has been so marked a feature of the world's progress during the present generation; and, like every healthy movement of the kind, it has been thoroughly national and has developed on its own lines, refusing merely to copy what has been outworn. It is especially noteworthy, and is a proof of the general Irish awakening, that this vigorous expression of Irish life, so honorable to the Irish people, should represent the combined work of so many different persons, and not that of only one person, whose activity might be merely sporadic and fortuitous. Incidentally, Lady Gregory teaches a lesson to us Americans, if we only have the wit to learn it. The Irish plays are of such importance because they spring from the soil and deal with Irish things, the familiar home things which the writers really knew. They are not English or French; they are Irish. In exactly the same way, any work of the kind done here, which is really worth doing, will be done by Americans who deal with the American life with which they are familiar; and the American who works abroad as a make-believe Englishman or Frenchman or German—or Irishman—will never add to the sum of first-class achievement. This will not lessen the broad human element in the work; it will increase it. These Irish plays appeal now to all mankind as they would never appeal if they had attempted to be flaccidly "cosmopolitan;" they are vital and human, and therefore appeal to all humanity, just because those who wrote them wrote from the heart about their own people and their own feelings, their own good and bad traits, their own vital national interests and traditions and history. Tolstoy wrote for mankind; but he wrote as a Russian about Russians, and if he had not done so he would have accomplished nothing. Our American writers, artists, dramatists, must all learn the same lesson until it becomes instinctive with them, and with the American public. The right feeling can be manifested in big things as well as in little, and it must become part of our inmost National life before we can add materially to the sum of world achievement. When that day comes, we shall understand why a huge ornate Italian villa or French château or make-believe castle, or, in short, any mere inappropriate copy of some building somewhere else, is a ridiculous feature in an American landscape, whereas many American farm-houses, and some American big houses, fit into the landscape and add to it; we shall use statues of such a typical American beast as the bison—which peculiarly lends itself to the purpose—to flank the approach to a building like the New York Library, instead of placing there, in the worst possible taste, a couple of lions which suggest a caricature of Trafalgar Square; we shall understand what a great artist like Saint-Gaudens did for our coinage, and why he gave to the head of the American Liberty the noble and decorative eagle plume head-dress of an American horse-Indian, instead of adopting, in servile style, the conventional and utterly inappropriate Phrygian cap.

THEODORE ROOSEVELT.