

(Jan. 10th, 1916.)

The Dynasts

By MR. FRANK LASCELLES.*

AT a meeting of the Club held on the 10th January, Mr. Frank Lascelles, of London, England, known as "the Pageant Master" who supervised the production of the Tercentenary Pageant at Quebec in 1907, also the vast production of the Durbar in India in 1912, the Oxford Historical Pageant of 1907, and many others, and who gave his services without remuneration for the production of "The Dynasts," Thomas Hardy's great epic work, to be presented in Toronto during the week of the 14th February, gave an address on that noble drama of war and patriotism, together with a few dramatic readings of selected passages.

Previous to Mr. Lascelles' address, Mr. Alan Sullivan, of Toronto, who was associated with Mr. Lascelles in the Toronto presentation of "The Dynasts" as the honorary manager, made a statement in explanation of the production here. Mr. Sullivan said:

Mr. Chairman and Gentlemen,—It is a very great pleasure to have the opportunity of saying anything to the Canadian Club, especially in connection with "The Dynasts" and Mr. Lascelles with whom I have the honor to be associated. "The Dynasts," Thomas Hardy's great epic poem, was given in dramatic form at the King's Way Theatre, London, last year. It was put on presumably to run for one month, but it ran for five months. The cause of this long period of presentation was that it was immediately recognized to have an extraordinarily deep national significance. "The Dynasts" as a book is a very notable volume; it relates in epic form a series of circumstances, both in England and abroad, covering about ten years of the Napoleonic wars. There are three parts, relating to Trafalgar, the Peninsular War, and the happenings immediately before and after Waterloo. The method of presentation, I think, is entirely unique. The twenty-four scenes, which Mr. Lascelles proposes to give here beginning on February 14th, might be considered as units, each scene presenting some incident homely, humorous, or dramatic, connected with this period.

*Mr. Lascelles has deservedly won for himself the title of "Pageant Master of the World," having staged the Tercentenary in Quebec and the Durbar in India, together with numerous other large pageants.

The scene is both acted and spoken. The number of characters in a scene ranges from five to forty.

Immediately in front of the stage—for there is no orchestra—sits the Reader, in Georgian costume. He will read a paragraph—take that, say, dealing with the Trafalgar period,—he pauses, looks up, and on the stage immediately before him is enacted the very scene he is reading about. This progresses through the entire evening, so that by the time the curtain is rung down the audience has relived in a most poignant fashion many of those great incidents with which the history of Great Britain is indissolubly linked up.

Lady Drummond, now in London on work which we all admire, met Mr. Lascelles, and asked him if it would not be possible to have "The Dynasts" presented in Toronto. She urged that there were three appeals which made it very advisable that it should be produced here: the first, the peculiar interest attached to the introduction to the Canadian stage for the first time of the dramatic work of the greatest living writer; the second, the significance of the poem, already spoken of; and the third, that it would be given in aid of the Toronto Branch of the Red Cross. (Applause.)

Mr. Lascelles bore letters to Toronto, and for some unknown reason he was turned over to me. Since then several things have happened. The two hundred characters required are secured. I mentioned to Mr. Lascelles that two hundred people in Toronto might be glad of the opportunity to get on and off the Alexandra stage, and asked him how many he had taking part in the Durbar. Oh, about eighteen thousand, he said. (Laughter.) The characters will all be taken by Toronto people. No people in connection with the performance, with the exception of the professional business producer engaged from New York and the management of the theatre, will participate in any financial profits. Mr. Lascelles is giving his entire services without charge, (applause) and naturally the rest of us are proud to follow in his footsteps.

In connection with "The Dynasts" we have arranged for the various scenes to be taken by various groups; these represent every possible phase of Toronto society. So it is not circumscribed by any bounds such as have marked amateur performances in Toronto, where the first two or three days there were good audiences, but after that the friends were exhausted and the performance died a natural and lugubrious death. (Laughter.)

The prices of seats will be the usual prices, all bought at the box office.

Every effort is being made to secure widespread support. The Duke and Duchess have very cordially promised to be our patrons, and when asked if they could not attend one performance they said they would use their best efforts to do so, but it was impossible to state at so early a date whether they could definitely promise.—We live in hope.

The University of Toronto, through its Faculty and President Falconer, has given us splendid support; many of the characters are taken by well known University men.

I have approached the School Board to ascertain if it would not be possible during the previous week, that of February the 7th, to give a special performance for the school children in the afternoon. It is quite impossible to imagine that any child who has ever witnessed such magnificent scenes should fail to be impressed, and I think you will agree with me that it is the children as well as the adults whom we want to reach, and there are no finer, nobler, more exalted thoughts to be put into a child's mind than those which will be aroused by this work.

The Daughters of the Empire, the Red Cross Society, and many other organizations, are helping us, and we make bold to think that, considering the cause for which we are working, and considering the support we have been promised, we have really touched a spring that is producing a sort of universal answer. We ask nothing except that the citizens of Toronto will join us and will aid us by their presence in reproducing so vital, so poignant, and so real a period in a performance in which you see at work and in tremendous action all those characteristics and qualities and attributes of the British which to-day are again in action, and for precisely the same cause, on so magnificent a scale. An added interest of "The Dynasts" is this, that whereas in 1815 Britain was then fighting for the freedom of Europe, and the spiritual, economic and civil freedom of the world, and is still fighting for that freedom, the opposition has changed sides, and our enemies of 1815 are now our heroic allies of to-day. (Applause.)

I think I will not trespass more on your time. Mr. Lascelles is much more capable than myself of leading you into the inner meaning of "The Dynasts." I beg to thank you for listening so patiently to what I have said. (Applause.)

Mr. Lascelles said:

Mr. Chairman and Gentlemen,—My mind at once flies back to the first occasion on which I had the honor of addressing a meeting of a Canadian Club: that was in the very early days of the organization of the Quebec Tercentenary. It was in those early days in that town of Quebec in the Province of Quebec, there was a good deal of anxiety, and the sympathy and support which I received then from the Canadian Club of Quebec City heartened me very much on my way.

The Quebec Tercentenary is now ancient history. Your fellow member and honored member of this Club, Sir Edmund Walker, was, I suppose, as much responsible as anyone for the great success of that event. He was a member of the Royal Commission which had the organization of the whole celebration, and it is needless for me to say how well that organization throughout was carried on.

Gentlemen, I think it is a rather difficult task that I have in a very few minutes to perform this afternoon; it is to give you some little idea of what Thomas Hardy, whom Mr. Sullivan has rightly spoken of as our greatest English litterateur, looks upon as his greatest life work. Mr. Sullivan has given you the outline of what it is proposed to do, and some idea of the very comprehensive organization called into being to produce "The Dynasts." He very modestly refrained from saying how much work has fallen upon his own shoulders. When Lady Drummond asked me to produce the epic here on behalf of the organization of the Red Cross, in due course I hunted up some one to look after it, and found Mr. Sullivan. It is no slight task he has been called upon to do, but has entailed upon him the expenditure of a great deal of time and energy. He has found that I was right in what I said,—I think he realizes it now,—that it has given him a great deal more to do than he had any idea of. But one thing I am equally sure of, that the success which will attend the production of the epic itself will thoroughly repay him and his artistic and literary mind for all the trouble to which he has gone.

Where this production is different, I venture to think, to any which we have seen in Canada before, is in this, that it approaches, I think, more nearly in its effect and in its spirit to the ancient drama, the oldest drama of all, when the temple was the theatre. And the idea that you will get, I hope, from seeing this production is something of the kind of feeling that one expects when one goes into some great and impressive building which is dedicated to our thoughts of another world.

There are many of us who feel that the theatre of past years is not reaching its high ideals; it no longer touches those more deep and intimate thoughts of our hearts and of our souls as it should do. We are rather apt to look upon the theatre as if it were a tawdry place of amusement—I hope I am not doing any injustice to your theatres in Canada in saying this. (Hear, hear and laughter.) It undoubtedly is the case in England, and when one makes an effort to bring the other side of the theatre's possibilities and power forward, I think it is a thing which all very heartily welcome.

Perhaps we have approached more nearly in the great historic pageants of the past few years, such as that at Quebec, to the keen religious feeling—I use the word "religious" for want of a better word—the keen, clamant feeling that is expressed. For instance, I don't suppose that anyone will forget that first scene at Quebec, when those hundreds of men pulled up that enormous cross, seventy feet high, which was put up on the shores of Quebec by one of the first pioneers. I remember, and am quite sure you will all remember, how this cross was up in its place; we could feel a kind of catch in our breath till it slipped down into its place, till the mind acknowledged this as a sign that this great country of Canada had come under a Christian monarch. This play, "The Dynasts," undoubtedly touches that same kind of note. I am not going to tell you that it is not full of humor,—it is; many most amusing scenes are found in it, as well as others extremely touching. And I think as you watch it you will feel that it expresses what we feel at this time most keenly, the enormous heroism of those who have had the honor of laying down their lives for the Empire, of laying down their lives for their own country. It is such an intimate thing, a thing we feel so deeply, every one of us here, that we find it hard to put it into words. I hope many of you will find that "The Dynasts" has given you expression for what you yourselves may lack, and done something to show, in this great coming country of Canada, that there is a possibility behind the power of the stage which is greater than most of us realize.

I am asked just to give you a couple of very short scenes—I haven't a watch, but the selections will be short, so you need not get anxious. (Cries of "Go on!") They will give you some little idea of what the play treats of. I think the Prologue gives you, perhaps, in a few words, the heart of the matter.

The Reader, as Mr. Sullivan has explained to you, joins up, something in the way of the ancient Greek chorus, these different scenes in the history of England at that time. In

his poem Thomas Hardy called it "The Spirit of the Years," and I am inclined to think that the best expression of his duties. He sees these scenes go by.

PROLOGUE

Reader:

In these stern times of ours, when crimson strife
Throws shade on every thoroughfare of life,
Disfigures comely countries with its gore,
And sends back mangled heroes to our shore,
The gift of gifts is sturdy hardihood,
That holds it firm through each vicissitude,
Not only hour by hour, but year by year
If need be till life's lurid skies are clear.

Arrested by perceptions such as this,
We gather that it may not be amiss,—
During the few brief minutes you can spare
From the innumerable claims that call your care,—
To raise up visions of historic wars
Which taxed the endurance of our ancestors;
That such reminders of the feats they did
May stouten hearts now strained by issues hid;

Therefore have we essayed to represent,
By our faint means, event upon event
That Europe saw a hundred years ago.
What matters that Napoleon was our foe?
Fair France herself had no ambitious ends;
And we are happy in the change that tends
To make our nearest neighbors closest friends,
(Applause.)

I would like immensely to give you the scene in the cockpit of the "Victory," Nelson's flagship, but for fear of keeping you too long (cries of "Go on!") I will first give just a very brief scene of Napoleon's soliloquy, shortly after the battle of Waterloo. The Reader explains that it is midnight; Napoleon is seated alone, waiting for his troops which have been ordered. Then the Chorus, who sit on the other side, and from time to time intone some extraordinarily beautiful lines which link up these various passages, chant, "Thus is it pleasing to the immortal gods," and Napoleon soliloquizes:

O hideous hour, why am I stung by spectral questionings?
Why did the death drops fail to bite me close I took at
Fontainebleau? Had I then ceased, this deep had been unplumbed;
If but a Kremlin cannon-shot had met me, my greatness would
Have stood, I should have scored a vast repute, scarce
Paralleled in time. As it did not, the fates had served me
Best if in the thick and thunder of to-day, like Nelson,
Harold, Hector, Cyrus, Saul, I had been shifted from this
Jail of flesh, to wander as a greated ghost elsewhere.

—Yes, a good death, to have died on yonder field; but never
A ball came passing down my way. So, as it is, a miss-mark
They will dub me; and yet I found the Crown of France in the
Mire, and with the point of my prevailing sword, I picked
It up. But for all this and this I shall be nothing.
To shoulder Christ from out the topmost niche in human fame,
As once I fondly felt, was not for me. I came too late in
Time to assume the prophet or the demigod, a part past playing
Now. My only course to make good shewance to posterity was
To implant my line upon the throne. And how shape that, if
Now extinction nears? Great men are meteors that consume
Themselves to light the earth. This is my burnt-out hour.

There is a little scene at King George's Watering-place.
We enter the "Old Rooms" Inn, and the talking starts, where
they are discussing the death of Nelson. I think I might have
told you before beginning to read, that the reason Thomas
Hardy wrote this play, is that he lives in that part of Dorset,
and there going among the cottages of the people he found
a lot of legends still remaining about the Napoleonic wars;
the people remember their great-great-grandfathers telling
them about fearing that Napoleon would land, and how
special constables were out, bonfires lighted the hilltops. And
from this, from finding how the immense revolution in the
world affected little country places, Thomas Hardy came to
jotting down notes, and out of these grew the epic.

The interior of an Inn is discovered. Boatmen and burghers
sit round the fire, smoking long pipes and drinking from tall
pint cups:

1st BURGHER: So they've brought him home at last, hey? and
he's to be solemnized with a roaring funeral?

1st BOATMAN: Yes, thank God. . . . 'Tis better to lie dry
than wet, if canst do it without stinking on the road gravewards.
And they took care that he shouldn't.

2nd BOATMAN: 'Tis to be at Paul's; so they say that now.
And the crew of the "Victory" have to walk in front, and Captain
Hardy is to carry his Stars and Garters on a great velvet pin-cushion.

1st BURGHER: Where's the Captain now?

2nd BOATMAN: (nodding in the direction of Captain Hardy's
house.) Down at home here biding with his own folk a bit. I zid en
walking with en on the Esplanade yesterday. He looks ten years
older than he did when he went. Ay—he brought the gallant hero
home.

2nd BURGHER: And how did they bring him home so that he
could lie in state afterwards to the naked eye?

1st BOATMAN: Well, as they always do,—in a cask of sperrits.

2nd BURGHER: Really now.

1st BOATMAN: (Lowering his voice) But what happened was
this. They were a long time coming, owing to contrary winds, and
the "Victory" being little more than a wreck. And the grog ran

short, because they used near all they had to peckle his body in.
So—they broached the Adm'l.

2nd BURGHER: How?

1st BOATMAN: Well, the plain calendar of it is, that when he
came to be unhooped, it was found that the crew had drunk him dry.
(Laughter.) What was the men to do? Broke down by the battle,
and hardly able to keep afloat, 'twas a most defendable thing, and
it fairly saved their lives. So he was their salvation after death as he
had been in the fight. (Laughter and applause.) If he could have
knowned it, 'twould have pleased him down to the ground. (Laughter.)
How he would have laughed through the spigot hole; "Draw on, my
hearties. Better I shrivel than you famish!" (Laughter.)

2nd BURGHER: It may be defendable afloat, but it seems queer
ashore.

1st BOATMAN: Well, that's as I had it from one that knows—
one of the "Victory" men that's going to walk in the funeral.

CANTLE: Oh, let's touch a livelier string. Peter Green, strike
up that new ballet that they've lately had prented here, and were
hawking about town last market day.

1st BOATMAN: With all my heart. Though my wyndepipe's a
bit clogged since the wars have made beer so mortal small.

Then proceeds the song. (Applause.)

THE NIGHT OF TRAFALGAR

I.

In the wild October night time, when the wind raved round the land,
And the Back-sea met the Front-sea, and our doors were blocked with
sand,

And we heard the drub of Dead Man's Bay, where bones of thousands
are,

We knew not what the day had done for us at Trafalgar.

(ALL) Had done,
Had done,
For us at Trafalgar.
Etc., etc.

Well, then, the Epilogue, gentlemen, tells you at the end
that we have gone through these various scenes. But two
extraordinarily short extracts give you no idea, though perhaps
they may give you more interest in coming to the Alexandra
to see what it is really like. (Laughter.) It is different from
anything you have had here before. It attempts to give by
suggestion that effect of leading us, as I think you will agree,
to touch a different note to anything which you have seen in
the theatre before.

EPILOGUE

Reader: We have now set forth, in our imperfect way,
Ten Years of history, as a three hour's play,
Leaving to your fancy all, or much,
That made a stern reality of such.

Yet how should art, even thus, call clearly back
Court, camp and council, battle and bivouac,
The din and uproar of that crashing time
By the mere conjurings of masque and rhyme,
Were it not helped to-day in saddest wise
By sudden, sharp events beneath our eyes?—
Nation at war with nation, cruel wrong
Inflicted on the weaker by the strong?

May such reminders soon forever pass,
And war be but a shade in memory's glass;
May might uphold the injured peoples' cause,
And Europe move again to genial laws;
May soon succumb all influences malign,
And still the Star of England proudly shine!
God save the King!

(Long applause.)