

Rev. Dr. Owen B. McGuire


PAUL VINCENT CARROLL and THE ABBEY THEATRE

A new play by Paul Vincent Carroll has been put on the stage at the Royal Theatre in New York. It is reviewed in America by the

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dramatic critic of that excellent Review, Elizabeth Jordan (June 8, Page 24). She is very severe in her condemnation of some aspects of the play and of the playwright's "mental handicaps."

But in the same article Miss Jordan has this to say of Carroll's previous work: "Every Catholic theatre-goer desires to admire every play that Paul Vincent Carroll writes. We are all proud of the good work he has done, which we have acclaimed with loud acclamations. (1) In the new type of priest character usually shown. His leading priests are almost always superb human types—wise, sympathetic, understanding, tolerant."

Well, I am a Catholic, I have read Paul Vincent's plays. I have seen his two most lauded plays on the stage in New York; and I venture to say there is not one statement in that paragraph in Miss Jordan's article that is true in fact.

OTHERS CONCUR
Nor am I alone among Catholics in this appreciation of Mr. Carroll. In 1937 at the time *Shadow and Substance* had been put on the stage in New York I was on my way to Spain. Because of some articles on the Spanish Revolution I had contributed to various Catholic periodicals, I had awoke one morning to find myself famous! The night before I embarked a number of Catholic journalists gave me a little banquet as a send-off. Nearly all of them had seen *Shadow and Substance*. One of them was a critic of drama. He said, "I am sorry you were not in New York the night before last to see Vincent Carroll's play." "Well," I said, "I am not sorry myself. I have read the play and I believe that from the Catholic point of view it is thoroughly bad." Whereupon the dramatic critic jumped up, grasped my hand across the table and said, "Heavens! I am glad to hear that." There was not one at the table who did not agree, especially after they heard my reasons.

Since that night I have often intended to give those reasons in extenso. That would require a series of articles, or even a little book. Such a series or book is badly needed not only to show what Paul Vincent Carroll is driving at, but also to show what the Abbey Theatre is in fact, what it was intended for by its founders (Yeats and Lady Gregory), that it is not "national" in any true sense of the word, and that neither in Dublin nor in the provinces has it ever had the support of the Irish theatre-going public. It is a little theatre. It spends little on the paraphernalia of staging, its actors have been poorly paid, and yet it would have gone bankrupt long since had it not been subsidized by the government—in hope of improving it. This is all the more significant in view of the notorious fact that the people of Dublin (in proportion to its population) are the most theatre-going people in Europe, perhaps in the world. They support three large theatres that prosper. Some people say they are theatre-mad; and an Irish periodical said recently, "A foreigner walking down O'Connell Street and observing the queues waiting to get into the movies would never suspect that there are hard times in Dublin or that war is at our doors."

BUT WHAT IS GOOD
There are other reasons why the series or book is needed, to show how and why the Catholic public in this country are misled by what comes over here from the Abbey and from the new Irish intelligentsia—save the mark! Some Catholic publicists in this country act on the principle that nothing but what is good can come out of Ireland. Well, there is much that is evil in contemporary Ireland; and much of it comes over here. But if, to prove that, you quote the Irish Bishops, or Irish priests who are in daily communication with their people, or the Irish Catholic press, then you will be told that these are all puritanical.
Then, there is a number of shallow-pated publicists here who, so soon as they see a priest on the stage if he is not made a downright scoundrel—and the dramatic personae representing a Catholic people in action, think they should forthwith applaud.
But the dog-days are now on us, and if the series or book is to be written, it must wait for a cooler atmosphere.

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