THE HISTORY AND INFLUENCE OF DUKE GEORGE II OF SAXE-MEININGEN AND HIS COURT ACTORS

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by

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"The artists are nothing, but only Art has value, that is, only the artist deserves support who promotes Art as such for the benefit of mankind. The other artist, however, who approaches Art with levity and uses it to delude mankind, to him it is proper that we make war upon him and render him harmless. My wrath is and will be directed against everything that is flippant in Art, now and as long as I live. To whom God has given a talent, let him not bury it. I shall also use my little perception of art in the service of the all Highest. If I regard acting higher than the many others, then this is to be charged less to my account than to those to whom Art is also not equally sacred."

Duke George II of Saxe-Meiningen
Introduction

Over the future of every art hangs the ghosts of the past. Whether it be painting, music, or the theatre, if one turns back to search he will find that the torch he carries now has already been lighted. It may have been smothered and left smoldering, yet it threw out sparks which kept alight the spirit of its beginning.

In this age of attempts at creation which finally become re-creations, much is snatched from the chambers of the past and cast into a new mould. At this moment of sensation one fails to look back to the father of the idea and permits all things which seem new to be our own.

It is not to Craig, Appia, Robert Edmond Jones and others that one should bow for so much in the theatre but rather to Duke George II of Saxe-Meiningen. Lee Simonson says, "All modern stage experiments are based upon cardinal principles established at Meiningen."¹ Simonson goes further to say, "When a director today plans a production he fills in a concept originally established by a royal amateur, Duke George."²

² Ibid. 307
Somewhere in the progress of the theatre, Duke George was wedged out of the picture. His work was grasped and overshadowed. Lee Simonson, our well known theatre critic and historian, felt the injustice done to the duke and devoted one entire chapter of his book, "The Stage is Set," to his work. Other writers of the theatre have mentioned him, yet they have failed to give him due credit for such unforgettable contributions. With Lee Simonson, the writer wishes to make the people of the theatre more conscious of the influence of the duke's work. There has been very little material recorded about him in English, and a comparatively small amount in German which is available to English readers.

In this work effort will be compensated if after reading it, people of the theatre will take off their hats to the one who lifted the mould off the theatre and let in the sun so that it could blossom and grow.

This is not intended to be an exhaustive report on the work done by the Meiningens in the theatre. The aim is to bring together under one cover a compilation tempered by the writer's opinions, of the scattered reports of the work of the Meiningens in the theatre. Techniques and new ideas which the
duke brought to the theatre will be considered and an attempt will be made to show how he has influenced today's leading producers.

This thesis is composed fundamentally of ideas gathered from American writers with a small part of the work translated from a German book\(^3\) which was written by one of the duke's actors, Max Grube.

There will be a list of the plays produced by the Meiningens and a list of the cities where the plays were presented. There will also be a list of the duke's actors with the roles which they played in the theatre.

\(^3\) Max Grube, *Geschichte der Meiningen*, Berlin, Deutsche Verlag, 1926
Herzog Georg der Zweite
Zeichnung von Prinz Ernst von Sachsen-Meiningen
Chapter I

The Artistic Trio

A thorough and imaginative man was born in 1826, in the minor principality of Saxe-Meiningen in Germany. He was the son of Duke Bernard II and came to the throne in 1866 upon the resignation of his father.

Grube, one of his outstanding actors, describes him for us in his book as "a prince of whom it is difficult not to write a panegyric." Grube was privileged to enjoy his confidential association during the few winter weeks that he lived in Meiningen and learned to know the hidden qualities which were unexpressed by the duke except through his theatre. Grube tells us that his manners were not condescending, yet he was always a gentleman. Whenever a guest was invited to a performance at Meiningen, the duke himself would meet him at the castle door and bade him to come in.

"In life and in the theatre he concerned himself about every little detail. He was never known to be a one-sided theatre man and never neglected his duties as reigning prince because of his artistic activities. One day each week he held a performance to which everyone was admitted, a custom which he continued for years until he was forced to cease it

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4 Max Grube, Geschichte der Meiningen. Berlin, Deutsche Verlag, 1926. Page 54
because of approaching deafness."  

Throughout his life his modesty was above all praise. He never mentioned his interests or activities in a conceited or knowing manner. He was ever a naive artist, born to create, yet he felt that this ability was to be taken for granted. He was perfectly satisfied to keep his name in the background and wished always to be known as a "Meiningen". His troupe was known as the "Meiningen Players", and not as the duke's players. For a long time people thought Chronekg, his director, was the author of the Meiningen stage scenes and the duke never wished to contradict this, his being the soul of a true artist. As a matter of fact, Grube was the first to become aware of this unjust shift of praise, and felt he should direct the praise in the right direction. When the duke was asked why he wished to present his plays to the whole world, he replied, "I was annoyed that Shakespeare was so badly played in Germany." 6 Throughout his life and works we find that his effort and work was expended toward the authentic perfection of Shakespeare's plays. When Duke George was behind the stage, he handled everybody with the highest respect. There was never any spirit of the proud duke. Everyone was fascinated

5 Max Grube, Geschichte der Meiningen, Berlin, Deutsche Verlag, 1926. Page 32
6 Ibid. Page 33
by his personality and he was able to get the best from his players. Someone has said that he would have been a great general on a battlefield, not as a commander, but as one for whom his men would give their lives out of pure respect for their leader. Grube observed that "Praise and criticism were accepted from him alike, for he spoke to those backstage as if he had just been playing Antony or Brutus."  

The duke had the good fortune to enjoy an excellent education. He received the major part of his education at Bonn and Leipzig. Moritz Seebeck, one of the young mentors to the prince, had great insight into his pure and noble soul. Letters which they had written to each other were expressive of a beautiful relationship between teacher and pupil. Great talent and interest in that which was noble and beautiful was cleverly awakened by this teacher.

It was a second piece of good fortune for the prince in his mature life that he had the courage to enter into a marriage for love. Death had robbed him of two wives of equal rank. These marriages had brought him three sons which assured secession to the throne. Then, he was free to marry his choice, regardless of criticism. His choice was a worthy one,

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7 Max Grube, Geschichte der Meiningen, Berlin, Deutsche Verlag, 1926. Page 34
for "seldom has any marriage more deserved to be called a model marriage, that that of the duke and the actress, Helene Franz, to whom he gave the rank of Baroness of Heldburg".8

Helene Franz came from a good family. Her father was a doctor and teacher and her mother was of an English aristocratic family and had also been a teacher. To the German people she was a commoner and her marriage to the duke aroused considerable talk and interest. It was not a common thing that a duke should marry the most prominent member on his stage. The duke's artistic soul took him beyond the common custom of the day yet in his private life he was quite as much the innovator as in the theatrical world. Finally, the affair became nothing more than a small town event and in due time interest and skepticism passed away. "Helene Franz was able to become a part of the duke's artistic life. Being a commoner she was able to make him understand the other side of life; how the lower classes lived, thought and talked."9

Duke George and Helene Franz lived together as man and wife, composing two-thirds of the trio directing this little theatre. Ludwig Sronkeg, a Jew, was joined with them in this great artistic work, forming

8 Max Grube, Geschichte der Meiningen, Berlin, Deutsche Verlag, 1926. Page 35
9 Ibid. Page 34
the "United Trio"\textsuperscript{10} cooperating to attain the best in this theatre experimental work. Duke George was the creator of the decoration and scenery, Chronekg was the organizer under the duke and Helene Franz gave her life to developing the acting in its most intricate detail with great emphasis on interpretation. Helene Franz was the real coach of the basis touches which demanded the very fine handling that only a true artist can weave into his work. She, who might have been a princess, gave her life in tutoring other students. It was this "three headed regency" which influenced the workers to unite, until there was developed a family spirit of cooperation. Helene Franz, who bore the light of the creator, emphasized the spirit of the "ensemble".

The joy and interest in staging came from the duke's artistic temperament but the dramatic and literary significance of the Meiningen work is ascribed to the influence which the Baroness of Heldburg exerted upon her husband.

It is well known that the duke possessed an unusual artistic talent, or rather an instinct for drawing. "If I experiment in colors," he said, "the people always find in horrible."\textsuperscript{11} This talent for drawing was like-

\textsuperscript{10} Max Grube, \textit{Geschichte der Meiningen}, Berlin, Deutsche Verlag, 1928. Page 72

wise awakened by his teacher, Seebeck.

When Kaulback said, "It is too bad you are a little prince, otherwise you might have become a great painter," the remark referred to his talent for composition which followed the style of Kaulback and Cornelius.

All, or almost all, of the sketches for the stage scenes executed by the excellent theatre painter, Bruckner, came from the hand of the duke or were carried out according to his plans.

The most important groupings of his production were almost always determined beforehand by drawings. It is especially interesting to note how movement was conceived and represented in these sketches. "Duke George belongs to the few who can not only paint water and waves but who also can paint the foaming and surging of the ocean until one sees it move." In these as in landscape pictures, the duke seems to have been more significant than in figure compositions. In the landscape pictures he developed his own style, but with figures he remained more or less a conventional painter and was more or less a student of what he was taught. His instructor, Seebeck, gives us a nice description of the duke as a boy, when he said, "When I

draw figures, then I draw something as it should be; with landscapes it is as it is." 13

A series of drawings was sent in for the great Vienna Theatre exhibition. When one of them disappeared, they were finally bound. Now, the duke's works in painting have been collected in seven volumes which along with his work in the theatre testify for the industry, the ability and the knowledge of the artist duke.

The theatre appeared to the duke as a huge canvas, upon which he could cause to appear in quick succession the most changeable, the most beautiful and certainly the most fleeting pictures. What the duke accomplished is easily stated. First, he freed the art of acting from absurdities, holding it in sway, and secondly, he freed the stage from its archaic trappings. Thus freed, the oncoming rush of playwrights with their powerful message had a chance and a hope of having a workable place to create their illusion and receptive working people, known as actors, were ready to help interpret them.

The third one of this famous trio, Ludwig Chronekg, who has already been referred to as the director and organizer, learned a great deal from the duke. He was

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13 Max Grube, "Geschichte der Meiningen," Berlin, Deutsche Verlag, 1925. Page 74
an actor in the Knesgstadt Theatre in Berlin and in November 1866, he appeared before the Meiningen Public "as a little, fat, youthful comedian, in the role of the golden star. He was considered an outstanding actor and one of very high intelligence in both practical and artistic matters. It was because of these attributes that he had so much in common with the intellectual Fraulein Franz, and with her exerted so much influence among the members of the Meiningen group." 14

Herr Chronékg was made the theatre manager and never did any one give the happy, little man credit for the necessary efforts that he put forth for such a responsible position, until a Russian director Stanislavsky recognized his ability as a director. After Chronékg became the director he never appeared in any of the plays for he realized his ability was not great except in the role of a simpleton. "In such a role he knew how to act amusingly and dressed as a lady he was droll and even graceful. He was a great impersonator, especially in the art of impersonating foreign personalities, excelling in his ability to bring out satire and in making casual remarks." 15

Chronékg's activities as an artist up to this time, when the duke recognized his abilities did not make him

14 Max Grube, Geschichte der Meiningen, Berlin, Deutsche Verlag, 1926, Page 53
15 Ibid, Page 54
appear as a stage manager whose emphasis rested upon the classic works for he was always free and jolly.

Weillenbeck, one of the great actors, who discovered in Chronskg a great thinker, used to tell him, "When God gives one an office he gives him knowledge to fill that office." Helene Franz, his former colleague, likewise had an insight into the latent qualities of the little comedian. His literary education was not outstanding, yet he liked to speak the dialect of Berlin, and was also able to speak in choice High German when it was necessary. Helene Franz realized in him the ability to understand clearly and quickly techniques of the stage, making him capable of finding a simple and natural solution for any problem of staging or acting. He had an unbelievable lasting capacity for work and great businesslike cleverness. He manifested at times an energy which deteriorated into disregard and coarseness. It was his great gift to be able to impress an actor to the extent that he would give his best in the theatre. Outside of the theatre Chronskg's relations even with the third-rate actors of his company were simple and friendly. He seemed to flaunt such simplicity of conduct,

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16 Constantin Stanislavsky, My Life in Art, Boston, Little, Brown and Company, 1924. Page 203
yet, when a rehearsal began and Chronekg mounted his usual place, he would be reborn. There he sat in complete silence and waited for the hands of the clock to reach the time scheduled for rehearsal. Then, he rang the bell and said in a quiet voice, "Auflagen". Everything quieted down and the rehearsal began at once and continued until the bell rang again. During this bit of intermission he took a few minutes to make his remarks and criticisms in a dispassionate voice, soon he rang the bell again and the rehearsal continued."17 Stanislavsky, the Great Russian director describes another scene which he observed one day. "There was an unexpected stop and confusion on the stage. The actors whispered, the stage managers ran about. Something seemed to have happened. One of the leading actors was late, and it was necessary to leave his scene out. One of the stage managers tells this to Chronekg and waits for his orders near the prompter's box. Everybody is quiet. Chronekg tires them out with a long pause. It seems to be endless, threatening. Chronekg pauses and decides while everybody stands as if awaiting sentence. At last he pronounces:

"While we are in Moscow, the roles of the actor who is late will be played by actor Y, and as far as X

17 Stanislavsky, My Life in Art, Boston, Little, Brown and Company, 1924. Page 198
is concerned, I will let him lead the mob actors in the rear. Anfangen!"

The rehearsal continued with an understudy in the part of the actor who was late."18

"At another time, Chronekg, after a performance of Schiller's "Robbers," conducted a court martial. One of his assistants was late in letting a group of extras cut on the stage. After the performance Chronekg called him over and began to reproach him in a soft, aged voice. The assistant tried to justify himself laughingly.

"Herr Shultz,"Chronekg said to a stage hand who was passing at that time, "tell me, please, at what words in such a scene does a group of robbers come on the stage from the left?"

The stage hand declaimed a whole monologue with pathos, trying to show his acting abilities. Chronekg patted him on the shoulder, and turning to his assistant, said to him severely:

"He is a simple stage hand, and you are a stage manager and my assistant. Shame on you. Pfui!"19

Chronekg was not lacking in personal courage. When the workmen whom he usually treated very friendly, began to grumble, after the performance he would go to the

18 Constantin Stanislavsky, My Life in Art, Boston, Little, Brown and Company, 1924. Page 199
19 Ibid. Page 201
place where they gathered and would seat himself among them and make a special effort toward the dissatisfied ones. Naturally nothing was said to him and the threatening storm became a tempest in a water glass. This was very important, for if the Meininger workmen had gone on a strike, it would have been impossible to secure substitutes. No new stage workers, however skilled, could have done the work in these complicated sets and the performances would have been simply impossible.

Elevated above all praise was Chronekg's faithfulness to his great master. One must give him the credit for having called the "Meiningen Stage" to the life of the world. It occurred to him first, that here was something never seen before, a great work of art, which should not be wasted in its small town existence. It must be brought to the capital city. His inborn business sense made him realize immediately that the probable revenues of such a play could be secured to continue the valuable work. The greatest importance of Chronekg to the Meiningen players rests in the organization and carrying through of the trips which he proposed. It took great skill and business sense to close a complicated contract with theatres of other countries and at the same time to keep

his troupe of artists together and ready. Max Grube says that only those belonging to the theatre will ever realize the extent of his difficulties.

During a performance in Düsseldorf in June, 1886, Chronekg's health broke; it was thought to be a slight stroke. Here he began to break in his activity. This brave manager recovered again but the eighty-first performance in Odessa, 1890, was to be the last, for the prince wanted to spare his faithful worker the pain of seeing a successor working in his place. In June 19, 1891, the fifty-three old manager died of heart trouble which had bothered him for years.

The stone which marks his resting place in the Jewish cemetery in Meiningen, is adorned with these words:

"George, Duke of Meiningen and Helene Franz, Baroness of Heldburg, to their friend." 21

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21 Max Grube, Geschichte der Meiningen, Berlin, Deutsche Verlag, 1925. Page 96
CHAPTER II

Conditions of the Stage Prior to the Duke

In that period when the great art of the drama seemed destined either to die or to perish still-born in expectancy, an ambitious man by the name of George II, decided to establish a little unpretentious theatre which should seek to light a vivid torch from dying embers of the inspiration of the past. "He was a lover of the maxim "Beauty is truth, and truth beauty." He had a vivid feeling that there is nothing either new or old in that eternal region where truth and beautyjoin hands and dance together, to the music of melodies."\(^{22}\) He devoted his time to the drawing of the thing as he saw it for the God of things as they are. Clinging to the theory that the drama is essentially an art of authorship and that the purpose of the theatre is to recreate and project the mood and purpose of the dramatist, he made this his chief purpose in the theatre.

Let us glance at existing traditions of acting and the state of scenic design and costume prior to the duke.

The star system was rife. Antoine complained,

"The Comedie Francaise finds itself in the same

\(^{22}\) Max Grube, \textit{Geschichte der Neulungen}, Berlin, Deutsche Verlag, 1925. Page 105
situation today as the other theatres in Paris where the star system is doing such an injury to dramatic art and to the box office receipts as well. In all theatres everything gravitates about one or two artists of the first order, the rest are unknown. In such a state of things, what becomes of the equilibrium of a dramatic work from a strictly artistic point of view? Actors are concerned only with parts and will go to the extreme of throwing the play out of equilibrium to make their parts stand out.\textsuperscript{23}

I insert this example or quotation because that which was true about the state of the theatres in Paris, was typical of the theatres elsewhere for Paris prior to 1874 was the theatrical center of the world and the Comedie-Francaise was the core of everything correct in the theatre.

What was the nature of the acting of these stars of the first order, around which everything at the Comedie-Francaise resolved itself?

Acting was stereotyped - it amounted to mere recitation for the most part. Declaiming was the vogue and the actor with a 'voice' was the one who could draw audiences. Some one on the Paris stage of that time

\textsuperscript{23} Samuel Waxman, \textit{Antoine and The Theatre Libre}. Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1926. Page 94
complained that all actors spoke through their noses. They made technical gestures, they spoke in a louder than ordinary tone, and they were constantly forced to come out of the picture to pose before the audience, acknowledging ovations in the midst of a scene, while other actors stood foolishly waiting for the play to proceed.

Stage scenery was crude. It consisted of a series of wings and back drops, clumsy footlights and furniture painted on which contrasted strangely with furniture that was real. Formerly, when the stage was twice times the depth of the auditorium, perspective had been preserved and scene design of this sort had some claim to artistry, but shortening of stages had done away with perspective. For example, the audience might be looking at a chair on the stage which looked the same height as a tree painted on the backing. The incongruity of an actor standing beside a flower-pot painted on with one real flower-pot beside it, a row of painted violins with one actual violin near, painted bookcases, and painted on windows were common inconsistencies, which deceived no one.

A great deal of money was spent on costumes--actresses often were compelled to spend more money on
clothes than they received in salaries. It was not rare to find chambermaids dressed like duchesses, Antoine tells us. There was an utter lack of historical exactitude. Greek heroines wore starched petticoats under flowing Greek robes. Stanislavsky complained, "Almost no one was interested in the business of costume--all theatrical tailors had their own traditions and did not even want to look at the books and sketches of artists--the tailor was the best judge of how to make costumes." 24

The condition of acting, costume and stage design in Paris was only less dull than in other European capitals. Paris set the style--the others copied. In Germany, after Goethe and Schiller, the theatre was at a low ebb. Conventional beauty was the only aim and progressive movement was entirely lacking.

The plasticity of a theatrical performance, was almost unknown in productions before the time of the duke. Between 1870 and 1890 acting in almost all the leading theatres meant reading lines. Some action accompanied the lines but it became a matter of traditional routine. "The more serious a play, the more likely it was to be declaimed. Actors and actresses would declaim obliquely into the audience during an

24 Constantin Stanislavsky, My Life in Art, Boston, Little, Brown and Company, 1924. Page 201
entire performance and never once look each other in the eye."25 The stage business was arranged without any reference to the text, in order to give leading players the most conspicuous entrance and exits. Many times an actor would walk out of any scene and come to the prompters box to address the audience, leaving the other actors planted behind him on the stage as so much scenery.

Such theatrical crudities could not exist if the theatre was to progress. It was the foresight of the duke that was instrumental in saving the theatrical world from repetitive treatment of such incongruities. The crucial moment in the life of the stage had arrived and it was an opportune time for the duke with his reforming spirit to strike.

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CHAPTER III
Theatrical Innovations

"The Duke of Saxe-Weiningen's claim to the title of "Theatrical Innovator" rests upon two accomplishments. He established the dramatic value of the stage picture as an indispensable factor in interpreting a script, and he demonstrated that scenic effects must be fundamentally related to the actor." 26 The duke did his planning with his eye on the human figure. The human figure was to be the center of attention and his settings were planned to fit the movements of the individuals and groups. Stage settings were to follow later. "He felt that the fundamental problem to be answered by the scene designer was "what will my setting make the actor do?" His was the idea of a mobile actor and an immobile setting." 27

The duke was an accomplished painter and designer. He designed every detail of his productions down to minute details. It must be remembered that in his work the duke adhered strictly to historically accurate costumes. His costume sketches rested upon thorough study, for the duke was a pioneer in the study of historic costume. At that time there was no

27 Ibid. Page 284
adequate volume in the history of costume. Lee Simonson says, "His research antedated the collections of Racinet, Hattenroth, Hefner-Alteneck, and the immense reference library on the subject that has since been built up. He laid the foundation for the scope of costume design in the theatre and impressed the world with its imaginative goal." 28

In planning the production, the duke worked out the whole picture on a large octavo sheet. At this point his drawings were only in outlined sketches, yet they allowed all characteristic details to be clearly recognized. On the evening of the performance every actor found just such a paper at his place, so that no difference of opinion could arise between the director and himself as to how certain apparel was to be worn, etc. The duke painted out the costumes in the characteristic times of the countries they depicted. He wanted "truth for the sake of truth." His performances were very instructive, for whoever saw the plays went away with a true picture of the times. When materials which were characteristic could not be found they were woven especially for the production.

The pencil drawings were later traced over with a steel pen and ink. Almost always these pictures of roles show a characteristic motion of the character who

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is to wear it.

Sketches of his actions were also penciled out. Important groupings were often determined beforehand by drawings. He is to be praised especially for his ability to conceive movement and to express it in his sketches.

Duke George had a particular interest in bringing out the exact impressions of death scenes of animals and persons. For example, in the dying scene of Talbot in Schiller's play, "Die Jungfrau von Orleans," the duke insisted on a dead horse to give the actor a position in which he could die in a becoming fashion and at the same time turn his back to the audience. George studied the position of animals on the stage and the horse of Talbot was an original concoction built by the Meiningens. The idea for the horse had been in the mind of the duke for some time. For many hours this stuffed horse was dragged to every possible position because its rigid legs made the acting between or over them so ridiculous looking. He wanted the corpses of the battlefield to seem to tremble and die correctly when the horse fell under the rider. Finally, he turned the legs up-stage so that Talbot died in an effective pose supported by the horse's back. In an effort to prevent distraction of the audience from the performance of the artists, he put a white cloth over
the horse and left him on the stage. Chromekg and Helene Franz disagreed about the use of the white cloth for they felt that a dark cover would be far less noticeable.

In costume or acting the duke felt that the stage should be full of expression. The frivolous, the fantastic or extraordinary should not be brought out on the stage, he said, but there should be a leaning toward the realistic. He wanted details, for he said, "True details make the performance more classical and beautiful."29

In his costuming he found the best and oldest materials. He used heavy broadcloth, silks, velvets and the best pelts, and many heavy and fine tapestries. From Genoa he brought material called Kalmuck. From Paris he brought armor. Later he had two special tin makers who built his artistic armor. When they had made armor, instead of glittering ringlets on the suits, they wore steel armor, and the costumes did not look stagy any longer. At this time the beauty and coloring of the costume was especially emphasized.

Duke George was not an inventor of the idea of true historic costuming and staging but he improved upon the idea and brought out characters in real his-

29 Maz Grube, Geschichte der Meiningen, Berlin, Deutsche Verlag, 1926. Page 119
torical costumes which later did bring about a revolution in costuming. In olden times the theatre looked for beauty and richness; George looked for reality and truthfulness. Now, "instead of every actor following his own whim with the attendant result of a stage resembling a masquerade party, attention was given to historical silhouette, fabric, and mode. Clothing was made from sketches supplied by the producer. Not only costumes but wigs, shoes, swords and canes were provided and delivered to the actor." 30

Four years before the duke sent his first troupe of tour he wrote in his notebook:

"Pieces of scenery on which actors lean for support such as doorposts and tree trunks must be made of solid material, that is to say, plastic. The simultaneous use of painted and plastic objects on the stage must be managed so that the difference in material is not disturbingly apparent." 31

The idea of adding to the plastic possibilities of stage setting was not original with the duke but it was he who started the wheels rolling. George varied his experiments in plastic solidity by means of ar-

31 Max Grube, Geschichte der Meinungen, Berlin, Deutsche Verlag, 1926. Page 113
ranging the stage floor at different levels. Modern scene designers well know the psychological effect of height to inspire awe, how it creates a sense of majesty or fear. They know that an actor coming down a flight of stairs is more impressive than one entering from the same level. In the duke's day it was revolutionary to do such a thing, but he used these devices in every imaginable way. In "The Merchant of Venice," he had the masqueraders dancing on a bridge over a canal while Jessica eloped in a gondola beneath. In "Macbeth," in the scene where MacDuff's children were murdered the murderers entered from a window, stealthily walking down the steps as they approach their victims. This was a device which greatly heightened the dramatic effect. And this stairway was the prototype of many stairways of the days to follow. The details of the duke's settings were essential for they emphasized the dramatic action. 32

Now the old conventional decors, such as cut-cloth drops with buildings, halls, gardens or forests painted on them in perspective; borders of clouds, ceilings of painted leaves stuck on nets; pictures back in Moliërsque interiors made of three flats with as many doors and windows in them as the action required, were done away with. The Moliérgens introduced the idea of the "fourth

wall," the half circular sky cloth and sets which had
to be faithful copies of nature or of rooms in which
people could live.

"The Duke of Saxe-Meiningen demonstrated by his
work of director-designer that the scenic design is
fundamentally related to architecture, not because it
produces architectural forms, but because it is based
on an architectural plan and like the plan of a build-
ing, directs the human activity it shelters. This was
the great contribution of the duke. He had a secret
power or ability to conceive an interaction to its
last detail and to develop both elements of it simul-
taneously."33

33 Lee Simonson, The Stage is Set, New York, Harcourt,
Brace and Company, 1932, Page 285
CHAPTER IV

Ensemble Acting and Mob Scenes

An harmonious unit must exist in anything to make it artistic. It was this harmonious total effect of the unity of the spirit behind everything that was done that made the ensemble acting of the Meiningen an influence on the theatre through the years to follow. The duke's theatre was a cooperative one, the aim of which was to produce the total essence of the playwright's soul. The duke felt that art and nature were as one on the stage and from the playwright's mind and soul came a message in a historical setting, which could be portrayed only in its truest sense if it was to be artistic. It was a culmination of playwright, artist, actor, director and scenery that was to make up the "Hoftheatre Meiningen". It was a "three-headed regency" that made for unity among the workers. If there were misunderstandings they were worked out over and over again in unity to get the very best performance. When they worked, there was no thought of time nor of finances. Many nights they practiced so long that they forgot what time it was. "Once George II called out at one o'clock, much to their surprise, "Happy New Year," and apologized for interrupting the scene. A great many times they brought their lunches to the theatre and failed to interrupt the scene while they ate."

Chronekg understood very well how to make the ensemble fulfill the wishes of Duke George. The menial work was not understood by the duke and Chronekg carried it through. Wherever George was, there was art in his mind. Max Grube tells of a time when a group were hunting, how a young woman was hurt on a rock coming down the cliff. Her husband ran to her in sympathy and George called out, "Stand still, that's a very sad picture and a good performance." When he had succeeded in arousing the attention of all his players in the crowd, he asked her to sit down if she was tired. "Let this be an example of a beautifully well acted scene in an artistic setting."

Every member of the Meiningen troupe was looked upon as one of the performers whether he had a big or a little part. Every member was depended upon to learn, to observe and to create, with a view to enabling each one to be as exact as possible in all of his work.

The exact knowledge of every play that was made and every change of position was exactly a personal creation for every actor. The entire play, however, was a performance created as a whole by one person, the duke. If a new performer joined the group the director did not find it necessary to give him every detail, but each actor helped him to make it a unified play. They worked together and served each other, working
in common for the good and love of the art, which was the outcome of the manifold performances and rehearsals. Each actor in the group took a greater interest and not any single actor was respected more than another. "The troupe called themselves 'The Meiningen as a Whole,' and the motto was 'One for all and all for one, and both for the public as a whole.' Even the commonest character felt himself a collective performer of the Meiningen troupe. The duke was able to create a living tradition that everyone was proud to be walking together in common pride and inspired by the 'Meiningen Divine Art'. "35 The duke was able to make the performers feel that everyone had helped to build the creation. Even the best actors had to be surrounded by shop workers as well as the common players.

"The troupe of the Meiningen contains about eighty actors of both sexes. All those who do not take a part are expected to figure in the play, and every evening, too. If there are twenty actors occupied, the fifty others without a single exception even in the case of the lead-players, appear on the stage in the tableaux, and each leading actor is the chief, the corporal of a group of real supernumeraries, whom he directs and watches as long as the company is under the public eye."36

35 Max Grube, Geschichte der Meiningen, Berlin, Deutsche Verlag, 1926. Page 135
Lee Simonson tells us that no detail was too small to be planned, studied and rehearsed by the duke. This was the basis of success in ensemble acting. The wearing of costumes was part of the business of rehearsing until an actor grew accustomed to the typical stance and gestures that each historic period of costume induced. The Meiningen company did not work by the clock. Every play was rehearsed until it was ready and was not produced until it was ready. Their rehearsals usually began at four or five in the morning and continued past midnight.

It was their practice to have the settings and costumes ready for the first rehearsals. Essential properties such as furniture or weapons that might prove difficult to handle were used in rehearsals at a very early date. They wanted their actors to become accustomed to the stage so that they would be quite natural. Dress rehearsal as we know it today was unheard of in the practices of the Meiningens. Last minute repairs, inappropriate furniture to which they must adjust themselves were not permitted one or two nights before the performance, for the duke felt that the unity and rhythm which they had attained in the rehearsals to date would be lost. When the actors appeared on the stage they had to be in a spiritual state of mind. Everything was quiet and no directions
were to be given during a scene. After the play was set, there was to be no change in tempo, character, positions or voices. Once the opinions were formed and set they were standing on a solid basis and their performance went off with the smoothness of running water."37 At this stage of the show or near the approaching time of the performance the players were especially commended and considered. This was Chronekg's method of directing and at the same time it was building a unity for the whole troupe. This method worked so well because of the strict discipline that was ever present in Chronekg's theatre.

This work done in so spiritual a light was the duke's way of creating the spirit of his playwright. He worked as though he were dealing with the most sacred of things. Max Grube describes his direction as "some-one wandering in a beautiful path hewed by an artist to whose soul it caused pain to see the noble work mutilated through indifference and laziness. Everywhere there was nothing new and nothing out of place the night of the performance. One could see the work of the master as his soul produced it."

Chronekg insisted that his actors should learn the stage business at the outset and they were not allowed to forget it. They did not keep a written record of

37 Max Grube, Geschichte der Meiningen, Berlin, Deutsche Verlag, 1926.
the action for each new rehearsal was to bring something fresh and new.

This great trio was ever ready to experiment and they always welcomed ideas from members of the troupe. They tried out the different ideas and chose that one which proved to be the best. Scenes and lines were rehearsed over and over again. One actor waited for his cue with a candelabra of four immense tapers for two hours. When he was ready to go on the stage and found his candles were burned out he was frightened. Chronegk had rehearsed for two hours the eleven lines which preceded his scene and the actor remained on his feet ready for the entrance.

The duke always insisted that the soul of a play had to have a body and the smallest break in its texture might let its life breath escape like a hole in one's windpipe. The least detail remained important to him because a single ridiculous detail could in a moment destroy a mood that had taken half an hour to create.

The duke of Saxe-Meiningen was able to achieve the effect that all directors search for. He was able to make remote events seem natural to his audience. Antoine tells us how he was intensely moved by the assassination of a Swiss tyrant and Stanislavsky was reduced to tears by the degradation of an inconsequential
French king. The duke was able to get his effect because his whole performance was built in such a unified way that it became an organic and dynamic whole.

His actors and the design were tied together by varied intensities of light. Antoine cites one lighting effect that he saw in Brussels as an example of "épico naïveté." At the moment an old man lies dying, a shaft of sunlight coming through a high window strikes his face. This lighted face in the darkened room accentuated the pathos of the scene and was a means of tying the action of the dying man to the emptiness around him when this beam of light struck his face. This is not an unusual thing in the present day but it was a new idea in the day of Duke George's work. Apoll and Reinhardt have furthered the use of lighting.

One of the aims of the Neincome was to abolish the star system which had originated in the classic theatre of the seventeenth and eighteenth century and which because of its appropriateness to the individual philosophy of romanticism had been adopted by the romantic theatre.

In the productions of the duke, the actors instead of playing for themselves as was customary under the star system, became independent of one another, thus creating an "ensemble". They did not rant, pose, or give exhibitions of simulated temperament so charac-
teristic of the romantic acting, but they had to behave naturally on the stage representing life-like types without any conscious playing to the audience. This emphasized the idea of the ensemble.

The actors had to look to actual life for characteristic intonations, faces, gestures, attitudes, and to make use of them in their parts with the assistance of assumed voices, complicated make-up, etc. Chronekg introduced the method of teaching the actors like parrots. He gave them every inflection and gesture and moved them about at rehearsal on a floor marked out with chalk into squares and numbers like so many chessmen.

In this ensemble acting the actors played to each other. The supernumeraries became absorbed in the scene taking place and turned their backs to the audience if they wanted to. Antoine describes a scene from "Wilhelm Tell" where a beggar and his two children play with their backs to the audience begging at the feet of Wilhelm Tell. "Could you have seen it," he says, "you would have been as enthusiastic as I was and admitted that a back turned to the audience at the right moment can convince the spectators that there is something more important in the theatre that paying attention to them."\(^\text{38}\) When an actor

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today turns up-stage to play a scene we are not amazed for since the duke began this new idea, producers through the years have realized its dramatic effect and its naturalness and have incorporated the technique into their own work.

Stanislavsky describes a single scene in another Meiningen production, in which he says the effect was so great that he can never forget it. "The Maid of Orleans." A skinny, piteous, forlorn king sits on a tremendous throne; his thin legs hang in the air and do not reach the floor. Around the throne is the confused court, which tries with all its strength to uphold the semblance of kingly ritual......Into this picture of the destruction of a king enter the English ambassadors, tall, stately, courageous, and impudent.....When the unhappy king gives his demeaning order, which insults his own dignity, the courtier who receives the order tries to bow before the king's presence. But hardly having begun to bow, he stops in indecision, straightens up, and stands with lowered eyes. Then the tears burst from them and he runs in order not to lose control of himself before the entire court.

With him wept the spectators, and I wept also, for the ingenuity of the stage director created a tremendous mood by itself and went down to the soul
of the play."39

The Meiningen players are not spoken of but that ensemble acting and mass scenes or stage crowds come to the mind. These were the high lights of the Meiningen productions.

The super or the extra was made an important part of the productions by the characteristic thoroughness with which the duke integrated every detail of a performance into an ensemble. The extra was rehearsed as often as the actor and was as carefully costumed. The mob was broken up into smaller groups and a definite role was assigned to each group and words improvised for them, so that when they spoke as a crowd it created a definite meaning and was not merely a jumbled sound. The actors who were not cast for the leading parts in a certain play led each group. These same people were to alternate in the mob scenes in which they had played important roles. The ideal there was first a lead and then a super. With such a method as this they were able to make their ensembles extraordinarily true to life. This obligation was so great that the wife of Von Bulous, one of the stars who refused to perform this service of an extra, was dismissed although her husband had the title of Kappelmieister to the Duke of Saxony.

"These players of the Meiningen court were able to adapt themselves to circumstances. Mlle. Lindner, their star playing in "The Winters Tale," took a silent part in the tableau of the seat of justice and mimicked a woman of the people as conscientiously and carefully as she interpreted on the following evening the role of Hermene in the same place."40 This, Antoine says, is the secret of the crowds which were absolutely the best in the eyes of the French. He says that these new, logical and not too costly things eventually replaced their unsupportable conventions which everybody endured without knowing why. The mechanic of the tableaux were perfected in a superior fashion in the crowds of the Meiningen. On the stage the protagonist could make periods of silence ring true with a gesture or a cry. The crowd listened and looked at the actor instead of looking at the audience or down or up with silent but visible deference. It is not unnatural that two hundred persons should be silent, and listening in rapt attention to a character as he spake, cried or shouted.

In the mob scenes general symmetry of arrangement was avoided, actors were forbidden to use the stage center and parallel crossings were banned. The avoidance of symmetric lines was carried into the actor's

individual stance. When they were playing, each was to avoid falling into the same position as his neighbor. The duke pointed out to them that soldiers on the march would not walk so symmetrically as those on parade. They were to have individual gaits and were not to carry their weapose on the same level. The duke went so far as to study the characteristic stance of each period in its relation to the costume.

Actual numbers do not make a mob, the duke asserted. To get the effect of a mob the audience was not permitted to see the sides of the crowd for they were always made to disappear behind the wings. We know how essential these were to stage practice, but it was the duke who was the first to recognize them and to make them a part of modern theatrical technique.

The technique of their mob scenes can be more easily understood by a description of how they were created. Lee Simonson gives us a description of two of the scenes which makes them very easy to understand.

"In the opening scene of the "Hermannsschlacht," by Heinrich von Kleist, the invading Roman legionnaires enter a primitive German village. At royal theatres elsewhere it was the rule to send twenty or thirty supers, bright as tin Caesars, marching with the precision of Prussians on parade against a landscape backdrop. At Meiningen the invaders debouched through a
narrow lane that barely allowed them to pass four abreast. Their bronze armour was dulled to a brown-black as if by months of campaigning. They entered down-stage and disappeared up-stage into the alley between the house fronts. What the audience saw most of the time was not a succession of faces but the sombre repetition of the backs of bucklers and helmets; the total effect was that of an almost impersonal, relentless, military machine. The power of an invader was dramatized as the play began. 41

Simonson says that perhaps the most celebrated of the Meiningen mob scenes was the coronation of the dauphin in Schiller's "Maid of Orleans." "The crowd packed a shallow square under the portals of Rheims Cathedral. The stage was too small to hold them as they waited for the first sight of the cortege; they disappeared off stage, strained against soldiers trying to keep a lane free, climbed on each other's backs, stood on tiptoe, hopped up and down, packed every spare ledge on a fountain, jammed the stairways of near-by houses, leaned over window-sills on each other's shoulders. The mounting excitement was carefully timed as the royal procession crossed the stage into the cathedral and increasing bursts of cheers greeted each notable, such as Dunois, when he was

recognized. The crescendo of jubilation swelled at the sight of the dauphin under his canopy. All the while trumpets repeated a single theme adapted from one of Brahms' chorales, with clarion insistence that mounted higher and higher until at the appearance of Joan it reached a climax of frenzy that usually incited an echoing ovation from the audience.

Reinhardt says that there are two main problems of the stage crowd. First, the problem of bringing the crowd on the stage and taking it off, and second, the management of it while it is on the stage. There are two forms of stage crowds, he says: the crowd of the mass or the classical crowd, and the crowd composed of individuals. "George's crowd had a mental unity and coöperate and acted as one person. This is the psychological crowd. The individuals who compose the crowd seem to take possession of a sort of collective mind which makes them feel, act and think in a manner quite different from that in which each individual of the crowd would be in a state of isolation. The psychological crowd is formed of heterogeneous elements, combined exactly as the cells constituting a living body and formed by their union." 42

Thus, one sees how a new chapter was begun in our

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theatre. The Meiningen theatre became a theatre of the whole and made the world feel its influence in its ensemble, its stage sets, and its crowds.
CHAPTER V

The Guest Theatre

In 1870 Chronekg proposed to present the Meiningen plays before a dramatic critic, before they took them to other countries. They presented "Julius Caesar" and later some Shakespearean comedies which were not favorably accepted by the critic. The praise that he expounded over their other work encouraged the players and they decided to go to Berlin.

May 1, 1874, was the date of the first performance of the Meiningen company in Berlin and was surely the high point of the revolution in the modern stage. This troupe was from a very minor principality yet the material composing it was of daring and competent personalities, driven and directed by one that should be recognized as the great innovator of the modern stage.

These troupes were prepared to let shine the light of a director's techniques built up with great dexterity. They engaged Leopold Teller of Leipzig er Stadttheater, who made a brilliant Mark Antony, and Barnay, one of the most famous actors of the time, to play Brutus.

During their first performances on their trip to Berlin, many came to sneer for they felt they were trying to run competition with the royal groups.
Those who came to sneer went away applauding a dramatic performance quite unlike those they were accustomed to seeing.

The great artistic unity of spirit so evident in the troupe elevated them above the artistocratic laziness of the Imperial Theatre and virtuosos. Theirs an artistic simplicity. The actor was ever in submission to the spirit of the writer and his poetry.

The classic dramas of Berlin and Paris were played by well known actors who were type cast. Too often their exit or entrance was built up for the actor, diverging completely from the poet's thought. They were more concerned with costuming their actors beautifully than with how well they acted.

The next year the troupe returned to Berlin and went to Vienna and Budapest as well. Between 1874 and 1890 they gave three hundred and eighty performances in Berlin and two thousand two hundred and six were given on tours that carried that company to all the leading cities; to Amsterdam, London, Rotterdam, St. Petersburg, Copenhagen, Stockholm, Basel, Warsaw, Moscow and Odessa.

The ducal house had created and supported a talented company of players that won renown and became
the first theatre of Europe. A school of the theatre for every theatrical centre was recognized in the Meiningen troupe.

The players were directed by a witty and tactful duke. When the troupe was to present a production of Julius Caesar, the duke was worried about a certain actor, Pfutz, who had coached himself in a death scene. The duke sent a telegram saying, "Good luck to all. Tell Pfutz not to be too long dying."43 This little message shows how much concerned the duke was about very minor details. The Meiningens were at the head of the movement to make Shakespeare known on the stage, where alone he can be truly known.

"Julius Caesar, A Winter's Tale, and Twelfth Night have apparently commanded the greatest success, having been acted during the last two years respectively thirty-two, twenty-nine, and thirteen times at eight different theatres. England heard the echo of the Meiningen Company's reputation and caught it up with alacrity with which we are apt to believe in the dramatic skill of every nation but our own. When the company opened its campaign at Drury Lane their expectations were great and they welcomed the actors with great cordiality.

43 Max Grube, Geschichte der Meiningen. Berlin, Deutsche Verlag, 1926. Page 185
The Meiningens had been called the propagators of what England had been told was the true faith in regard to Shakespeare. The stage of Drury Lane was filled with a magnificent display of the qualities of fine actors. To the great body of the audience there was a novel charm in the completeness of the mise-en-scene, the beauty of the costumes, the picturesque grouping, the thoroughness with which the intentions of the director were carried out by all the performers. The audience, influenced by this charm, was completely carried away in enthusiasm. It was the general opinion that nowhere had so much been done to illustrate Shakespeare and to show him to the best advantage. People seemed to forget that Shakespeare appeals to the heart and imagination and trusts little to the exuberance of scenic accessories and decoration. 

The Meiningen presiding spirit of using such an excess of scenic illustration for Shakespeare made a great mistake. The people became interested in the scenery and costume and forgot Shakespeare. The duke confined his efforts in the cause of the drama to making the most of such talent as could be made available upon easier terms.

44 S.H. Smith, "We Learned It from Them," Blackwoods Vol. 9 1914. Page 244-248
Duke George brought together a company of actors of more than average ability. He gave to them permanent engagements and every motive for working together in the friendly rivalry of true artists under the discipline of a stage director of paramount authority.

Each was bound to co-operate in giving strength to the cast of the plays produced by taking for themselves a subordinate part in them if necessary. No pains were spared to make the members of the company respect themselves and the art which they professed. All that a liberal subvention could do was done to the richness and local colour of the stage, and these were selected with a skill, and applied with an energy, that helps to keep alive in the establishment a spirit of emulation and a wholesome pride in the successful results of a common effort.

It was a bold enterprise to transport the troupe and the scenery of the theatre to London. The London playgoers were in a position to judge of its merits and defects as favorably as though they had made a pilgrimage to Meiningen itself. It seemed the Drury Lane stage had the qualities in which these representatives chiefly excel and had ample opportunities for display. The strength of the Meiningen Theatre lay
not in the pre-eminent excellence of its actors, so much as in the pomp and prodigality of the scenic accessories. For this mode of treatment, Julius Caesar's best exemplified their work. The mob of Rome lays a not insignificant part in that play, as Herr Chronekg turned to the best account the opportunity of making them serve as a striking background to the main action. The wholesome operation of a system which allows no point, however small, to be slighted, is at once brought home to the audience in the spirit and individuality given to those of the mob. They were represented by actors well trained in their art, fit mouthpieces for the shallow unstable mob, who winced visibly under the taunts of Marcellus. The key note was well struck for what was to follow in the procession of Caesar, with an array of attendants. The striking figure of the soothsayer, with his single sentence, "Beware the Ides of March!" admirably delivered was a further proof of the care taken to give due effect to the smallest incident of the play by placing every character in capable hands.

"The duke rendered unto Shakespeare that which was Shakespeare's." The Julius Caesar production transformed the theatre of Drury Lane into a source of in-
spirations. Smith quotes Ellen Terry in the same article as saying, "From that moment there was reform amounting to revolution." 46

The duke was not afraid to present Ibsen as were some of the other producers. In 1888 he presented Ghosts, then forbidden on the stage, at his own estate, before an invited audience including the author and a group of German critics.

The first performance of Ibsen in Berlin was The Pretenders, in June 1876 by the Meiningens.

As has been said the artistic work of the Meiningens benefitted above all the mass scenes. Here from the very beginning no indifference, no humdrum fashion was tolerated. "Every actor, who was not otherwise engaged, had to assist here. The permanent supers, the real supernumeraries had likewise been shaken out of their conventional mannkin-like gestures by means of untiring instruction and rehearsals." 45 Cronský at that time had moreover a wonderful talent of arousing a group-spirit and histrionic pride in even the foreign super material, upon which they naturally had to depend abroad, in what was a surprisingly short period of time.

45 The Meiningen Theatre and the London Stage, D. Appleton Company, 1916 page 48
The future criticism, which moreover is wont to display a noticeable lack of instinct and of perception for the essential and the living rights on critical occasions, attaches itself first of all with preference to all sorts of little deviations of these assisting supers, who sometimes play a little bit too lively and even perhaps a little too loudly.

One German professor, in a lecture to his students, said, "You who would be ready to grab at small mistakes of the Meininger will find them overbalanced by the vigor, which the great, heroic, historic drama experienced. This loving dedication to the work of art as a whole could not remain hidden. You can no longer know what happened in a production of a Schiller, Shakespearean, or Goethe drama on the German stage before the appearance of the Meininger, and you can therefore scarcely imagine what effect the Meiningen had on us at that time. Everything that they brought acted like new productions. One of the most played-out pieces of the repertoire, "The Robbers," which with its whole world of ideas and its speech bears so much the stamp of the storm and stress period, one could scarcely expect a strong effect upon a modern public any more, even that piece had an effect like a premier when the Meininger first gave it in Berlin."47

47 Max Grube, Geschichte der Meininger, Berlin, Deutsche Verlag, 1926. Page 189
The Meiningers put the authors upon their thrones and have relegated the histrionic art as the auxiliary art back again to its fitting limits.

That they succeeded in carrying this out and that they also forced the obstinate opponents and envious ones to break with the old set way of doing things, this was the first sign that really a change for the better was preparing itself in literary matters. Thus, the Germans became no blind admirers of all that, which one at that time was wont to understand under Meininger direction; especially in no wise was this fact sanctioned, that the German theatre awakening out of its sleep, hastened to imitate much of the Meiningers without looking at it.

If one wants to be just to the Meiningers and the reforms instituted by them then one must clarify for himself those motives from which this small model stage arose.

When the Meiningers undertook their first expedition and as a whole gained artistic success, as never before an individual had done, then that was a success which this small troupe had honestly earned for itself in many years of earnest and quiet preparation. It was the reward for unselfish devotion, which they had dedicated for the sake of art to the program born of
the important personality of the duke.

It is strange, that the idea of a remodeling of the modern stage arose almost simultaneously in two heads independent of one another, and this idea of remodeling the stage arose from quite similar considerations and working with similar means still in part strove for something quite different. This idea arose in the mind of Richard Wagner and in the mind of the young duke, whom the events of the year 1866 had brought to the throne. Wagner's idea was the "music-drama" of the future, with a belief in the co-ordination of artist, actor and director.
The Significance of the Meiningen for the Modern Stage

Probably there is not in all theatre history a more dramatic story than that of the cultivated, talented, modest, nobleman, George II of Saxe-Meiningen, as aristocratic in his tastes as in his traditions, who made of his small Hoftheatre a stage for a perfect working ensemble. George was not as rich in money as in spirit and the economic problems of court life and of the theatre might often have been confusing for anyone who loved art less. For the duke as for his wife, there was always only one answer to questions which arose in the theatre; honest and true labor and an untiring spirit. It was not money the Meiningens loved; it was art.

The Meiningen players were a group that did as much to direct the course of the modern theatre as any in history. Strangely enough, they are already, much to the modern theatre's loss, largely forgotten.

The inheritance of the Meiningen has been received in many respects and even increased, yet one of its fundamental theories that seems to have been entirely lost is the respect and reverence the Meiningens dedicated to the poet. We live in a time of interpretation and the ambitions of every stage manager culminate in bringing a new interpretation for stage expression, diverging
as much possible from the present one. The living poet can oppose every attack and often the producer must fight with him for every line. The classic writers can no longer defend themselves, everything is ruthlessly crossed out for them, which might contradict any interpretation. Some have even believed themselves obliged to deviate so far from the authentic costume of the Meiningen that classic drama has been given in modern dress, and even in theatres of reputed

Before the Meiningen players, the actor was a jewel gleaming upon a dark velvet background. Now he is the jewel artistically set; a part of a piece of jewelry.

Previous to the time of the Meiningen the manager was not much more than the director, as he was called in the 18th century, and it was the Meiningen players that first made him the producer.

The Meiningen wanted to bring the stage closer to life and to this end they fought the existing stage routine and deteriorated traditions of the romantic school of acting.

The duke did not wish to make the stage merely a foundation and background of histrionic production; it was to be the picture of a conception born of a
playwright's mind; this thought, the Meiningen first made public. Its realization was the fact which assured a place of honor in the history of the theatre to Duke George as an artist.

The Meiningen Company was welcomed into every theatrical center almost as missionaries with a new message for which the people were unconsciously hungering and starving. The message of the Meiningen was as bread to the starving populace and the producers grasped it making it a part of their own methods. The organization and methods of that company formed the basis of Appia's plan for an Ideal theatre. The intuitive understanding of Stanislavsky for the need of inner discipline for the actor and the Meiningen methods of production made the Moscow Art Theatre the first theatre of Europe for the next generation.

Antoine was so inspired by the quality of acting that he embodied his ideas in a letter to Sarcey expressing the influence that he felt from the court players:

"I must tell you that I have just come from Brussels where I have spent a fortnight studying that German troupe. To go to see the Meiningen was then a matter of course. Since I have been going to the theatre, I have been annoyed with what we do with
our supernumeraries. I certainly got the sensation of a multitude from seeing the Meiningens. They showed us things absolutely new and very instructive. Their crowds are not like ours, composed of elements picked haphazard, working men hired for dress rehearsals, badly clothed, and unaccustomed to wearing strange and uncomfortable costumes, especially when they are exact.

Immobility is always required of the crowds on our stage, whereas the supernumeraries of the Meiningen must act and même their characters. They do not force the note and distract the attention from the protagonists. No, the tableau is complete and in whatever direction one may look, one finds his eyes on a detail in the situation or character. At certain moments its power is incomparable.48

We do not yet realize vividly enough the degree of influence that the Meiningen had on this younger generation, but in a bit of direction here, some momentary sparkle in acting there and the great innovations brought about by the Meiningens, the theatre has become a much greater institution than it was in the past; a place where artistic people can bury their hearts and souls.

The Meiningens took from the stage room the un-

48 Samuel Waxman, Antoine and The Theatre Libre, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1926 Page 84
iformity of a square which always remained the same. Only very seldom was it changed because of necessary stage settings; to produce a picturesque effect. The closed rooms have not been invented by them, which was often assumed, and is justly refuted by Adolph Winds, but they have contributed much to their naturalization. The advantages which the closed room brings to a realistic performance have not been waived by the style of the stage, only the expressionists of the theatre gladly turn to inefficiency of the wings and the hanging arch.

Also, the changing of the level of the stage floor by means of terraces and steps is taken over from the Meiningens. Formerly, these devices were used only in emergency, except by Dingelstedt who must be named as the forerunner of the Meiningen. Herein lies one of the chief tricks of the modern theatre for making picturesque and interesting drama.

Unlike Reinhardt and Craig, the duke did not take into the theatre with him a pre-conceived idea and then make the play conform to any arbitrary plans concerning its production. Like Craig, he looked first at the play not for the color or forms but for the purpose and mood of the dramatist. The duke believed like Copeau that a play was essentially a literary art and
and that first of all the dramatist must be satisfied, and that in so doing, the decor should be in the hands of an artist who understands drama, one who could make the drama true in every sense of the word. To the duke as to Copeau a play was the expression of the ideas of a dramatist through the medium of actors, with the proper setting. A real play did not consist of a mass of people brought together in a spectacle such as Reinhardt produces on a meaningless stage. However, Reinhardt produces with a basic idea drawn from the duke in his mob scenes as well as the integrated lighting, which he used.

Mas Reinhardt's projects have been ambitious, symbolic of things great in size. Gordon Craig was striving for a new theatre, a new play and a new actor; the uber-marionette. The one man who subordinated all to his ideal decor was Reinhardt. Like Copeau, Duke George coordinated the arts of the theatre and made them a closely knit and organized unit.

To the duke like Copeau, "The play is the thing," and the dramatist was to be understood, respected and satisfied before anything else was considered. These two looked to the play for the mood and purpose of the dramatist, and the actor was to be the vehicle of the portrayal of the dramatists reason, emotion and
passion. Craig interpreted the play to emphasize a particular part for the sake of decoration, Reinhardt sacrificed the play at times for a well-planned colorful effect. Copeau stressed relationship between word and movement. Copeau decided that there would be no stars in his group for he realized from the Meiningen work that it made for an interdependence among the actors which guaranteed successful cooperation.

Someone has said that if the ghost of the good duke could appear upon the stage which he so steadily haunted when he was alive he would say, "Here is your stage with actual doors, walls and windows. It can be a copy of Rosmersholm or whatever room you have in mind, but it will be exact. You may handle actual chairs, violins and flower-pots. The clothing will be correct and not a composition of a tailor's idea. If your character happens to be a little goose-girl from the fiords of Norway she will be dressed so, not as a fashionable dressmaker might conceive of a goose-girl. There will be no stars teasing you to rewrite the play, building out their parts. No detail is too small to be planned, studied and rehearsed. Effective crowd scenes, historical accuracy in the matter of costumes properties, settings and plastic scenery have been my means of accomplishing all that I have done."
In 1914, the acknowledged father of the modern theatre, the man who had revolutionized the art of producing, left his world of artistic endeavor.
The Meiningen Troupe

Duke George II
Helene Freifrau von Heldburg
Ludwig Chronekg

Josef Weilenbeck
Ludwig Barnay
Josef Kainz
Leopold Teller
Wilhelm Arndt
Paul Richard
Karl Weiser
Amanda Lidner
Olga Lorenz
Auguste Grevenberg
Marie von Moser-Soerner
Wilhelm Hellmuth-Brunn
Josef Nesper
Karl Gorner
Ludwig Raupp
Alexander Barthel
Alexander Otto
Max Grube
### Die Werke Dritte Tabelle

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Autoren</th>
<th>Aufführungen</th>
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<tr>
<td>Schiller</td>
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<td>Shakespeare</td>
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<td>Heyse</td>
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<td>Morre</td>
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Miß Sara Sampson. Zweiter Akt
Max Grube

als Talbot
Die Jungfrau von Orleans. Vierter Akt