

## Drama

### The First American Play

IN view of the increasing attention which the dramatic literature of America is attracting, one turns with curiosity to the first play to be written and printed in this country. Its title-page reads: "Androboros A Biographical Farce In Three Acts, Viz. The Senate, The Consistory, and The Apotheosis. Printed at Moropolis since 1st August, 1714." (Moropolis means Fool's Town, which is to say New York.) The sole surviving copy of which there is any trace is now in the possession of Mr. Henry E. Huntington, of New York city. Among its previous owners were David Garrick, John Philip Kemble, and the Duke of Devonshire. From the fact that the words "By Governour Hunter" have been written on the title-page in an antiquated hand, it is agreed that the author of the sketch was Robert Hunter, Governor of the Colony of New York from 1710 to 1719.

Hunter was one of the most able of the Colonial Governors, but he was not without enemies, and in "Androboros" he took occasion to pillory them ruthlessly. Before coming to America, his keen mind had won him the friendship of Addison, Steele, and other wits of his day, and in this satire he displayed a caustic and trenchant mode of attack of which the author of "The Dunciad" himself would not have been ashamed. The two persons most distinguished by the writer's ridicule were Colonel Francis Nicholson, formerly Lieutenant-Governor of the colony, and Dr. William Vesey, Rector of Trinity Church. At the very beginning of his administration Hunter, though a good Anglican, ran foul of the Established Church by refusing to obtain for it grants of land, and by a seeming lukewarmness towards its interests. Dr. Vesey, pious but bigoted, charged him with plotting to turn the control of affairs over to dissenters, and used his influence to embarrass and oppose the Governor wherever possible. Vesey's chief abettor was the arrogant and overbearing Colonel Nicholson, whom Hunter accused of attempting to usurp his power. In the spring of 1714 Vesey, at Nicholson's suggestion, went to England to secure governmental support against his antagonists. It was probably this hostile act that called forth "Androboros."

The Huntington copy of the play, which Kemble conjectured to have been Hunter's own, contains a key to the *dramatis personæ*. From it we learn that the four main characters, Androboros (man-eater), Fizzle, the Keeper of the Senate, and Solemn are disguises respectively for Nicholson, Vesey, Hunter, and Lewis Morris, who was Hunter's ally and may have had a hand in writing the sketch.

The first two acts reflect a number of contemporary events and conditions. At the outset we find the loquacious and incompetent Senate in session under the suzerainty of the Keeper, whose domineering attitude recalls Hunter's tendency to dissolve the Assembly whenever it proved unruly.

Subsequently the Senate forms itself into a Consistory, presumably for the purpose of defying the Keeper. This body, as it sits in grave deliberation, is startled by the sudden appearance of Fizzle, who has intentionally besmirched his robe and comes before the Consistory, blaming the Keeper for the outrage, and threatening dire punishment with

the aid of Androboros. This episode was based on one of the numerous skirmishes between Hunter and the church party. In February, 1714, Trinity Church was broken into and the vestments were torn and defiled. In proclaiming a reward for the apprehension of the culprits, the Governor took a covert fling at the reputation of Dr. Vesey by declaring that the act must have been performed by "such as are avowed enemies of religion in general, or to the civil and religious constitution of England in particular, or such as for filthy lucre, or worse purposes, may have in appearance conformed to, or complied with either, but by their unchristian and lewd conversation, and their disloyal and seditious conduct, sufficiently manifest their aversion to both." In their wrath at this attack, the churchmen addressed a condemnation of Hunter to Nicholson.

While the Consistory is discussing the indignity which Fizzle has suffered, an important message is received from Androboros. Earlier in the play he had blusteringly announced his intention of making war upon the traditional enemy of his countrymen, but now his dispatch states that the expedition has been abandoned, the foe having shown his friendship by offering to resign the two poles to the New Yorkers and to retain for himself only that which lies between. For this triumph the Consistory votes Androboros a statue. In these scenes the author was lampooning Nicholson's ill-starred attempt in 1711 against the French in Canada, with whom the colonists had been frequently embroiled. This expedition, which the Colonel had strongly advocated, and in which he led the land forces, proved a failure, for after the disaster which befell the fleet he retreated without striking a blow.

In Act III the playwright beguiled himself by depicting the complete discomfiture of his opponents. The Keeper's friend, Solemn, tricks Androboros into thinking himself dead. While under this delusion, he is made the victim of much horse-play; he is knocked from a chair, he is covered with floor-sweepings, he is sprinkled with water, and he is blinded with snuff. Thus deprived of his sight, he comes charging into the Senate room and runs upon the Keeper's chair. Now Fizzle has so contrived it that this seat will sink through the floor when the Keeper takes his place. But the treachery proves a boomerang, for the weight of Androboros springs the trap, and both he and Fizzle are swallowed up. Solemn pronounces their obituary in these words:

In former Ages virtuous Deeds  
Rais'd Mortals to the blest Abodes,  
But Hero's of the Modern Breed  
And Saints go downward to the Gods.

The sketch, which in all probability was never acted, is obviously the work of a man who was not experienced in play-writing. None the less it possesses, especially in the third act, some ingenuity and effectiveness. Delicate the humor certainly is not, but it is abundant and at times has satiric point. The misreading of Fizzle's petition by

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Tom of Bedlam, Clerk of the Senate, is fairly typical. In place of the conventional conclusion: "And your petitioners like as they are duty Bound, shall never cease to pray," Tom reads: "And your petitioners like asses as they are, in a durty pound, shall never cease to bray."

"Androboros" was hardly designed to allay the quarrel which engendered it. On the contrary, the friction continued for over a year longer until a sort of armed truce was eventually declared. But the play is of interest both as a mirror of certain conditions of its time and as our first political satire in dramatic form, a type that came to be frequently employed in the Revolutionary period.

ORAL SUMNER COAD

## BOOKS OF THE WEEK

### POETRY AND DRAMA

- Furman, A. A. *Martial Lyrics. Poems on the War for Democracy.* New York: S. L. Parsons & Co. 50 cents.  
 Clapp, F. M. *New York, and Other Verses.* Boston: Marshall Jones Co. \$1.25 net.  
*Horizons. At Dawn and Dusk.* Poems by Colin Tolly. New York: Hodder & Stoughton.

### FICTION

- Porter, G. S. *A Daughter of the Land.* Doubleday, Page. \$1.40 net.

### HISTORY AND BIOGRAPHY

- Journal of Thomas Dean. An Account of a Journey to Indiana in 1817.* Indianapolis: John Candee Dean.

### NATURAL SCIENCE

- Annals of the Astronomical Observatory of Harvard College: Vol. 91, the Henry Draper Catalogue, by A. J. Cannon and E. C. Pickering. Vol. 83, Part 2, Observations and Investigations made at the Blue Hill Meteorological Observatory, 1917, directed by Alexander McAdie. Vol. 79, Observations of 323 Variable Stars, 1911-1916, prepared by Leon Campbell and E. C. Pickering.* Cambridge, Mass.: Astronomical Observatory of Harvard College.

### SOCIAL SCIENCE

- Leffingwell, G. W. *Social and Private Life at Rome in the Time of Plautus and Terence.* Columbia University Studies in Political Science, Volume LXXXI, No. 1. Longmans, Green. \$1.25.  
 Read, H. E. *The Abolition of Inheritance.* Macmillan. \$1.50 net.

### PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGION

- Bailey, C. S. *Stories for Every Holiday.* Abingdon Press.  
 Bashford, Bishop J. W. *The Oregon Missions.* Abingdon Press.  
 Faunce, W. H. P. *Religion and War.* Abingdon Press.  
 Smith, N. K. *A Commentary to Kant's Critique of Pure Reason.* Macmillan. \$6 net.

### EDUCATION

- Arp, J. B. *Rural Education and the Consolidated School.* World Book Co. 99 cents.  
 Ayres, M., Williams, J. F., and Wood, T. D. *Healthful Schools.* Houghton Mifflin. \$1.50 net.  
 Butterworth, J. E. *Problems in State High School Finance.* World Book Co. 99 cents.  
 Hamilton, C. *A Manual of the Art of Fiction.* Doubleday, Page.  
 Hughes, Thomas. *Tom Brown's School Days.* Edited by H. C. Bradby. Ginn. 80 cents.  
 Judd, C. H. *Introduction to the Scientific Study of Education.* Ginn. \$1.80.  
 Judd, C. H. *The Evolution of a Democratic School System.* Houghton Mifflin.  
 Lee, A. *Lessons in English. Book One.* Charles E. Merrill Company.  
 Moore, W. N. *The Law of Commercial Paper.* Appleton. \$2.  
 Thom, C., and Fisk, W. W. *The Book of Cheese.* Macmillan. \$1.90.

### THE WAR

- Gaines, R. *A Village in Picardy.* Dutton. \$1.50 net.  
 Lichnowsky, Prince. *My Mission to London, 1912-14.* Preface by Gilbert Murray. Doran. 10 cents.  
 MacNab, A. J. *Individual Instruction, in Rifle Practice.* Cincinnati: Stewart & Kidd Co.  
 Massey, W. T. *The Desert Campaigns.* Putnam. \$1.50 net.  
 Smith, Mrs. A. B. *An Englishwoman's Home.* Doran. \$1.35 net.  
*What Every American Should Know About the War. A Symposium of the Leaders in All Branches of War Activity.* Edited by Montaville Flowers. Doran. \$2 net.

### JUVENILE

- Hunting, G. *Sandsy Himself.* Harper. \$1.25 net.  
 Payne, F. N. *Plays for Any Child.* Harper. 75 cents net.  
 Thorp, J., and Kimball, R. *Patriotic Pageants of To-day.* Holt. \$1 net.

### MISCELLANEOUS

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