

## Drama For Manilans

By GLADYS TRAYNOR\*

Hopes nurtured by the reports of those returning from the States that the popularity of the talkies is turning people away from the legitimate stage were nipped in the bud at the first showing in Manila. Our own *Community Players* as yet need have no fear of the sound pictures carrying off their laurels as the best entertainment to be had in the Philippines. Whether it be because the first pictures shown here are old ones made in the experimental stages, or because tropical theatres are not adapted to the sound reproducing mechanism, the fact is they remind one of the first screechy, wheezy phonograph being displayed before a village audience, gaping with astonishment and greatly impressed that any kind of noise should come from a small box, a disc, and a horn. To see screen figures to whose silence we have long grown accustomed open their lips, and to hear sounds which are supposedly related to the action on the screen, does smack of thaumaturgy. The art is new to the magician, of course, but these sounds leave much to the imagination. Putting her hands to her ears, *Thalia* turns hopefully to home talent.

The new director of the Community Players, George M. Ball, comes to us from the Carmel Players in California with a background of nearly fifteen years' theatrical experience. While the Board of Directors retains the management of the organization, under Mr. Ball's direction I think we may expect the Players not only to continue amusing Manila audiences but also to develop into a worth-while dramatic group with an artistic conscience. For five years Mr. Ball worked with Maurice Browne as assistant stage manager, also playing juvenile leads. Mr. Browne is the author of *Wings Over Europe* and *Journey's End*, two plays of unusual merit which won the recognition of both London and New York critics and discriminating playgoers. Through this association, Mr. Ball became interested in the Little Theatre movement, and for the last eight years has been identified with community groups in California.

With the passing of the stock companies, due to prohibitive costs, movie competition, and other factors, including radio entertainment, the professional legitimate stage in the United States is today practically non-existent except in a few large cities. Community dramatic groups have taken its place. Local players have provided such good entertainment for their audiences that communities are building their own theatres—as we talk of doing here. While on the one hand the American theatre in New York is forging its way into pioneer fields, drama is also returning to its amateur origins. Both groups are attempting to eliminate much of the driftwood accumulated through the centuries and carried down by stage traditions to be meted out to us in present-day hocus.

The small theatre may be obliged to start in the same way as the strolling actors of the sixteenth century, so far as training, equipment, and patronage are concerned, but it has the advantage of the experimental work and thought of the best minds interested in the drama over a period in the history of the stage which corresponds to that of the Renaissance in the history of art.

When groups in numerous small towns with little cultural background, striving toward an artistic ideal, gain the support and interest of their public, it is indeed proof that it is not always the limited, "hard-boiled" theatrical manager whose unimaginative mind is caught by glassy farcical facets of caricatured and burlesqued comedy, or by cheap melodrama which typifies certain characteristics of real life, but distorts the picture of reality as a whole, who knows *what the public wants*. It seems that small town audiences, who choose their own entertainment, as well as progressive patrons of metropolitan art theatres prefer plays of substance. The movies, with their imaginative

and sentimental thrillers, have not so much ousted the legitimate drama as they have provided a hearing for the play with an idea.

The Manila Community Players, if they will but keep abreast of progressive thought, need not lag behind similar groups in the States. To be sure, difficulties confronting them are greater. They are more out of touch with current criticism; they have not the stimulus of competitive entertainment available in even the smaller American towns. But they do have the advantage of a full exchequer. Perhaps the advent of Mr. Ball is an indication that they are preparing to adventure into new fields. Some good work, not all of it particularly suited to the diverse tastes of the community, was done last year. Money was made, and it is altogether probable that the success of the Community Players provided the impetus which is launching the building of the new theatre. If they pleased many Manilans with their last season's production, one wonders, in the face of the work done by small groups at home in towns where there is less money and more competition, what may not be the proportions of their success when they are molded into a more homogeneous group working hard to get across ideas as well as laughs.

Mr. Ball has expressed the hope that some time this season the Manila community might put on an out-door pageant. We heartily endorse the idea. Surely a most appropriate setting could be found. Several splendid open-air performances have been staged in California, among them one produced by the Carmel Players, which attracted the attention of the entire country. There are open-air theatres in Java, and other oriental places, presenting native plays, which appeal greatly to globe-trotters. If the Community Players were to present some sort of oriental masque in a natural Philippine *mise en scene*, they might furnish the inspiration

now lacking for some one to write a Philippine pageant or play. It was thus that many other historical pageants were suggested.

The first offering this season of the Community Players was *The Bad Man*, which man enjoyed. We are optimistically awaiting the next production, *You and I*, by Philip Barr which has been popular with Little Theatre groups in the States. Mr. Barry is one of a group of modern American playwrights who found an applauding public soon after graduating from Prof. Baker's 47 Workshop. *You and I* brought him his first public recognition, critics agreeing that he had been successful in accomplishing what he had set out to do—"to set down in terms of comedy, the underlying serious drama of human life." This is good news to Manilans who have been wishing for a little more substantial fare than the surface comedies presented to them heretofore.

There is much to be commended in the policy of selecting actors from the entire community, but it is also to be hoped that a nucleus of talent may be brought together and interest sustained, so that the public may have the advantage of their experience. At present it seems to me that there is too much casting for type and not enough uncovering of real talent. Most of the small theatres who have achieved something like professional excellence have encouraged discovery of talent by holding competitive readings; the one who read a particular part most satisfactorily would be chosen to play that role. The result was competition and a conscious effort to improve.

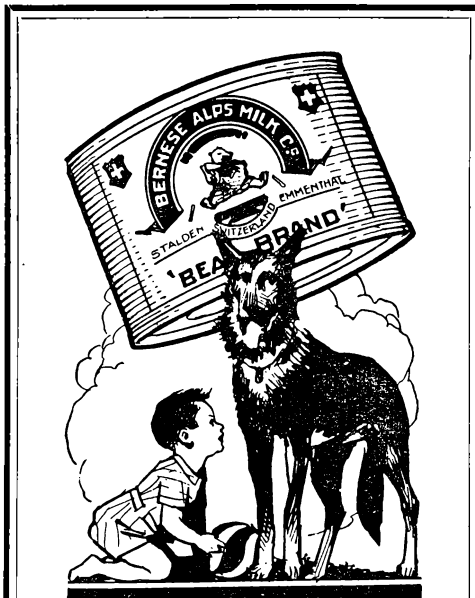
### BIG DAYS AT LOS BAÑOS

One of the main features of the twentieth anniversary celebration of the College of Agriculture on October 10 to 12 of this year will be the agricultural exposition. Every department of the College will present exhibits showing the line of activity of each. The members of the staff of all departments are now fully mobilized for the preparation of these exhibits. Each department is promising to make the exposition a real "show," a show that will fully show the progress made by the College since its foundation twenty years ago. In other words, there will be open house where visitors from near and from afar will see what the College is doing. Nobody should miss this rare opportunity of inspecting the work this institution, financed by taxes paid by the public, has done and is doing for the agricultural development not only of the Islands in particular but also of the Far East in general.

### The Port of Manila

I like to see the whitecaps on the bay—  
A typhoon blowing up, and storms abroad.  
To see the snarling white fangs of the waves  
Flashing on stones ribbed in the harbor wall.  
For all the time the harbor wall stands firm,  
The boats at moorings strain, but nothing more.  
With hempen cables holding fore and aft.  
Stanch is the wall, stanch was the country's will  
When it conceived this harbor safe and still,  
When it said, "Here shall stones be laid,  
Here built the wall, and here, the city's mart.  
Unto this point the storm may come—beyond,  
Behind the wall and round the piers,  
Be safe calm waters for a fleet of ships,  
For commerce, and for traffic of the seas."

Epigrams are terse facts which lesser brevity would quickly prove fallacious.



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\*Mrs. Traynor's views on the talkies differ from the editor's, but deserve expression just the same.—Ed.