The almost total absence of titles of dramatic works in the advertisements inserted in the newspapers by booksellers of early Pittsburgh is noticeable. Not only was the whole of Elizabethan and Restoration drama passed by, but there was no mention of the works of Goldsmith or Sheridan, or of the lesser English dramatists of the late eighteenth century. Shakespeare and Moliere found a place in the library of Henry Marie Brackenridge, and, doubtless, others of his intellectual position were acquainted with them also. The appearance of fragments of Shakespeare in one of the almanacs indicates that his name was not unknown. Yet, it seems that dramatic writings were neither offered to nor sought by the general reading public.

This lack cannot be traced to a general neglect of the theater in America, for the eastern cities had long had playhouses and plays were sold by eastern booksellers. It might be attributed to the lack of acquaintance with the drama that resulted from a lack of facilities for its production. The fundamental reason for the indifference or opposition to the theater lay, however, in the Calvinistic nature of a majority of the people to whom the theater had to look for support. This community, made up chiefly of Scotch-Irish and Scotch, and guided chiefly by Presbyterian ministers and Presbyterian codes of morals, looked askance upon the frivolous, placed all drama in the same category with shady literature, or, if they had no moral objections to the entertainment, were very suspicious of the entertainers. The spirit of thrift, born on the frontier, also entered into the attitude toward the theater.

There were not a few who thought differently, however, and, for this reason, the drama was the one art
about which there were expressions of sharp and opposing opinions, opinions upon its moral rather than artistic side. A reflection of the attitude of some was shown in a letter to the Gazette in 1790, the first token of local interest in the drama. After complimenting the nearby town of Washington upon the production, by amateurs, of Thomson's Tancred and Sigismunda and a farce, The Register, the writer added with a satiric touch: "How the Almighty is pleased with an exhibition of this nature, as it savors of the stage, I do not know; but it is certain that his creatures were much amused on the occasion, the young ladies especially." And he concluded that if such exhibitions could be kept chaste, of a reasonable expense, and of not too great length, they would be commendable.

He must have won few to his cause, for the first public theatrical production in Pittsburgh did not take place until thirteen years later when "the young gentlemen of the town" presented John O'Keefe's very popular comic opera, The Poor Soldier, and a farce, The Apprentice. The program was repeated three weeks later for charity. Both productions were given in the court house.

The next step in the city's dramatic history came with the organization, in 1806, of a Thespian corps by a group of law students of whom Henry Marie Brackenridge was one. His father, who had written two masques in his youth, refused to let his son continue in this pastime, however, for he believed that it was a waste of time and that it led to bad associations. The other young men were able to go ahead with their project nevertheless. They procured a room in the court house for a theater, and, unable to find competent musicians in Pittsburgh, imported from Philadelphia, at a cost of several hundred dollars, musical accompaniment for the plays that they produced that winter. In the following year, another society was formed by some young mechanics of the borough. The two societies united. Under the direction of an artist-musician from Boston, named Dearborn, the court house room was fitted with attractive settings. Here the players performed about once a month during the winter, and creditably except in the female roles.

These societies, the length of whose existence is unknown, were succeeded in 1817 by a new organization, the
The Thespian Society, composed of students of the Academy. Its first presentation, consisting of John Hodgkinson's *The Man of Fortitude* and a farce, *The Review*, was made for the benefit of the Male Charitable Sunday School. Some of the audience were enthusiastic about the execution of the plays themselves and about the theater in general, placing the drama above the preacher as a teacher of morals. Many were unenthusiastic or openly opposed. The society persevered, nevertheless, and produced Otway's *Venice Preserved*, accompanying it, as was customary, with a farce, *The Register*.

The following year, they produced Thomas Morton's *The Cure for the Heartache* and, along with it, *The Wag of Windsor*. This production, which, incidentally, was not announced in the newspaper in any other way, occasioned another letter to the *Gazette*, possibly from someone connected with the production, which praised the actors, defended the stage on moral grounds (with quotations from *The Spectator*), and made a comment that is interesting—

A complaint has frequently been made against the western country that we are so much occupied with the pursuit of gain as to have acquired a sordid and unsocial cast of character. This charge is usually urged in the coarse and indiscriminate terms which characterize others from the same quarter; yet it cannot be denied that the eager and enterprising industry which so honorably distinguishes our citizens leaves them but little time to attend to minor objects. Whatever, therefore, has a tendency to mingle us harmoniously together, to soften the manners, to relax the brow of care, and to wear off those sharp points of character which seem to grow out of an exclusive devotion to business deserves attention. Nothing is better calculated for this purpose than a well regulated stage, and we therefore express our hearty good wishes toward the company whose performance has drawn us into these we fear tedious remarks.

The West was beginning to realize the choking grip that industry and trade had upon its nascent culture. Yet better things were coming. The professional drama followed the amateur. It was not only slow in becoming established, but was very irregular for many years afterwards. The first obstacle, the lack of a regular theater, was overcome in 1812 when William Turner, whose wife was a singer and actress of some local fame, organized by subscription the Pittsburgh Theater. An auditorium with a capacity of four hundred was erected or otherwise procured and, in 1813, the theater was opened with
Mr. Webster in *To Marry or Not to Marry*, by Mrs. Inchbald, and *The Irishman in London*, a farce. The theater prospered. Actors were imported to take the leads with the support of the regular company, and, in the manner of the times, received their remuneration through benefit performances. The plays produced were not ones that have lived as classics, but they were the sort of melodramatic and partly musical works that had been written and produced in England and America of the preceding half century, and they were very popular at that time. It was customary to have the serious production, tragedy or comedy, accompanied by a farce or by some light or spectacular piece of entertainment, such as “a grand transparency representing the apotheosis of the immortal Washington,” “a ‘view of the River Rhine by Moonlight,’” comic songs, or feats of legerdemain.

The following season (1814-1815) was more irregular, but it brought the first play of Shakespeare that was produced in the city; *King Lear* was given along with Colman’s *Inkle and Yarico*, a popular opera. In the autumn of 1815, Pittsburgh was visited for the first time by a company of actors from the East when Samuel Drake led a troupe on the first regular tour of the West. The actors were not of the best, and all sorts of improvisations had to be made in order to present a play successfully. Tobin’s *Honey Moon* and Sheridan’s *Pizzaro*, or *The Virgins of the Sun* were among the plays given during the company’s stay of more than a month.

For some reason, all the plays produced—evidently a majority of them—were not advertised. This was especially true in 1816-1817 when only the “last nights” of the Thespian Society and of the Pittsburgh Theater were announced. The next season, however, was ushered in with greatly increased publicity. As early as June of 1817, the public was informed that the theater would present performers of “first rate talent” from New York, Philadelphia, Boston, and Charleston theaters. The season opened in early August, and the editor of the *Gazette*, young John Scull, could not contain himself. He, who could remember the town as little more than an Indian village, “when the only circumstances that tended to chase the gnome of dullness . . . were the occasional visits of an awkward itinerant
slight of hand man, or the war dances of our red breth-
ren on their periodical visits to their great father in Wash-
ington," believed that "the appearance of Mrs. Entwisle on
the Pittsburgh boards will constitute an important era in
the annals of western taste and improvement." And he
called "upon the fair sex in particular to step forward on
this occasion and, with their presence as well as praises,
prove that taste is not confined to the seaboard." 22

A more widely traveled and less prejudiced person
was not so enthusiastic. Henry B. Fearon, the English
traveler, happened to visit the Pittsburgh theater that sea-
son when Hamlet and the farce of Turn Out were being
presented. He agreed with Scull that Mrs. Entwisle's act-
ing in the farce could scarcely be surpassed on the English
stage. But he found Horatio "dead drunk and extremely
dirty." Poor as the acting was, however, he believed it
superior to the audience, who he thought could not have
appreciated it had it been good. 23 Yet he later saw the
same company performing in the national capital. 24 What-
ever its qualities, the company continued for fifteen weeks,
giving two performances each week, with a change of pro-
gram at each performance, a comedy and a farce usually
being presented. Performances were on Wednesdays and
Fridays at seven-fifteen, in order that they would not
last too late. Admission was one dollar for boxes and
seventy-five cents for the pit.

For a year, dramatic production was in abeyance, and
a play by the Thespian Society in 1819 was received with
great enthusiasm by the editor of the Gazette, who was
glad to "hear of anything that is calculated to rouse and
shake us up a little from this lethargy." 25 Used only
occasionally, the theater, much too small to make a per-
formance profitable, became very dilapidated. 26 For al-
most fifteen years, the city had been without a regular
theatrical season when, in 1833, a new theater was erected.

The new theater was advertised daily for two months
prior to its opening in September, 1833. The architect was
said to be a famous one. A London artist designed the
costumes to surpass anything in America. The scenery
was the best. Most important of all, Edwin Forrest was
engaged for two weeks and was induced to stay a week
longer. Consequently, a goodly number of Shakespeare's
plays were produced. In all, it was a gala season.

Yet, the theater was not unreservedly accepted, and the opposition of the church-going people especially was still an important obstacle. Under such conditions, the theater had to serve the limited number of its patrons well if it expected to make any profit. The absence of twenty or thirty families and their friends from a performance was sufficient to seriously affect the receipts. The theater did not prosper, and in a few years, was little used.

The plays that were given in Pittsburgh at this period were not the sort to live. They were of a highly amusing or melodramatic nature and were well accepted by an audience that, on the whole, could not have been too well educated. Even the plays of Shakespeare and of the Restoration dramatists were not produced in a serious manner. This condition was not peculiar to Pittsburgh, however; rather it was one common to all theaters in England and America. In England, where the style of American plays was set and where a majority of the plays produced in America were written, the theater no longer entertained all the nation, as it had done in Elizabethan times, or the court class, as it had done at the Restoration, but catered to a more unpolished class. This circumstance, together with the increased size of theater auditoriums which made the actions and words of the stage more difficult to follow, had brought the introduction of less subtle comedy, moral rather than serious intellectual plays, and exaggerated gestures and expressions. The stage in the early nineteenth century held much the same position that the motion picture theater holds today; the plays presented could occasionally be enjoyed by cultured people, but they were written and produced especially for a less well educated class.

The plays produced in Pittsburgh were, in most cases, the ones that had been produced or were to be produced within a short time in the East, which, in turn, was not far behind London. The class of people that viewed the plays must have been very much the same in each place. Serious plays were produced, of course, but the character of the production depended upon the character of the audience, and the audience demanded a certain
amount of slap-stick entertainment. As if in fear that the audience might be dismayed by something no more heavy than a comic opera, a performance always closed with a farce, even if the main production had to be abruptly curtailed to allow time for it. Such was the theater in Pittsburgh; such was the theater of the time.

* * *

The theater was supplemented and sometimes rivaled by exhibitions of various kinds. The displays of wax works, portraying famous people and famous scenes, were numerous. Music of some kind usually accompanied these shows. Other recreational attractions included a display of "philosophical entertainments and epiric fireworks," "illusions in ventriloquism," and feats of magic. On two occasions, menageries of African animals were exhibited to the accompaniment of music on the "patent organs." Circuses also appeared, although they were opposed by conscientious and thrifty church people almost as much as the theater. These amusements, however, came at long intervals; fortunately, perhaps, for they provided times long to be remembered by people who had been temporarily lifted from a life that must have been rather dull even in that age.

NOTES

1. *Pittsburgh Gazette*, December 18, 1801, "a variety of plays" advertised Cramer. Ibid., May 7, 1802, He advertised Lillo's *George Barnwell*.
2. Ibid., February 20, 1790.
3. Ibid., February 18, 1803.
7. Ibid., April 14, 1817.
8. Ibid., November 13, 1818. The same feeling also in S. Jones, *Pittsburgh in 1826*, p. 43.
10. Ibid., May 15, 1812.
13. Ibid., November 26, 1813.
15. Ibid., November 5, 1813.
16. Ibid., January 29, 1819.
17. Ibid., March 11, 1815.
18. N. M. Ludlow, *Dramatic Life As I Found It*, p. 50ff.
19. Ibid., p. 61.
20. Pittsburgh Gazette, April 4, 1817.
21. Ibid., June 6, 1817.
22. Ibid., August 12, 1817.
24. Ibid., pp. 294-295.
25. Pittsburgh Gazette, November 12, 1819.
27. Ibid., p. 409.
28. Lyford, Western Address Directory, 1837 (Baltimore), p. 73.
30. Pittsburgh Gazette, October 22, 1802; December, 1816; Pittsburgh Mercury, July 31, 1822; Pittsburgh Gazette, August 22, 1817.
31. Pittsburgh Gazette, April 8, 1803.
32. Pittsburgh Mercury, December 6, 1820; Pittsburgh Gazette, October 28, 1833.
33. Pittsburgh Mercury, May 15, 1827.
34. Pittsburgh Gazette, October 28, 1814; November 8, 1818.
35. Ibid., May 11, 1819; January 14, 1834.
VII

MUSIC

The public execution of musical compositions, along with the production of dramas, long played a minor role in the life of Pittsburgh. Like a successful theatrical performance, a successful concert requires a training on the part of the performers and an appreciation on the part of the audience that a frontier settlement could scarcely supply.

There were, however, numerous persons interested in music. As early as 1786, a newspaper advertisement gave assurance that a teacher of vocal music would find encouragement in the town. Such a teacher appeared later in the person of a former chorister of an English cathedral, a Mr. Tyler, who taught both sacred and secular music. Soon after the beginning of the new century, the Appollonian Society was organized under the direction of Mr. Dearborn who turned to music when his preferred art of painting failed to provide him a livelihood. The dozen gentlemen who composed this society rendered private concerts with unexpectedly good taste, and many people joined it just for the privilege of attending these concerts.

This early start in organized musical entertainment leads to the conclusion that there was much more music in the town than can be found in the scattered references to such an interest that appeared in the newspapers. One early Pittsbourgher boasted of his ability to compose songs. This was Dennis Lougery whose forte was celebrating contemporary military events. None of his works are preserved. Yet his newspaper advertisements tell that he composed a song about General Harrison's victory at Tippecanoe, another on *The Prospect of Taking Canada*, and a third to celebrate Perry's victory on Lake Erie.

As schools for girls became established, the opportunities for learning to play upon the piano or the violin or to sing increased. And several music teachers offered their services. They must have found pupils, for the city had two stores at least which sold the latest and most fashionable airs and waltzes. One sold violins, ladies' shoes, and French paper hangings in addition to sheet music. A violin maker was also to be found in the town.
in 1809. Sometime before 1826, William Evens, the first Pittsburgher of whom we know who took a great interest in music, opened three singing schools. The young people attended such schools chiefly on account of the opportunities for social intercourse that they offered. There they could spend pleasant evenings while learning to sing church music, to which Mr. Evens's schools were confined.

Sacred music was also practiced by several musical societies which were organized from time to time. These societies probably functioned weekly, but they presented very few public concerts, so few, indeed, that in the carefully kept scrap book of William Evens there are only six recorded in fifteen years. At these concerts music was presented which was "calculated not only to please, but to improve the taste for sacred music which is so essentially wanted in our churches." The numbers presented were, many of them, ones that are still favorites in the churches.

Concerts of secular music also occurred at irregular intervals. In 1799, a Mr. Declary and a Miss Sophia Weidner announced a concert of vocal and instrumental music in the assembly room of one of the taverns, a place which even the most genteel of the borough's citizens could frequent. Two years later, a military band performed at the same tavern. In that year also, Mr. Declary, who then termed himself "music master in Pittsburgh" conducted a public concert by his pupils. It included the long-famous Battle of Prague, played, as it was played publicly many times later throughout the West, by a child of eight. The concert was concluded by the new President's March, the title by which Hail, Columbia was first known, and was followed by a ball. Mr. Declary could not have been very successful as a music teacher, for he later opened a grocery and drygoods store. The advertisements of other teachers indicate, however, that the town was not without musical instruction.

Other of the teachers had a sufficiently great number of pupils to present concerts. The next such concert announced, that of the pupils of a Miss Demilliere in 1814, consisted of compositions that show good taste. Among the numbers given were selections from Mozart, Martini, Nicoli, Rust, J. B. Cramer, and Steibelt. How well these
numbers were executed, is, of course, another question.

A concert that is interesting for the light that it throws upon the frontier attitude toward the arts was that presented by a Mr. Lewis and his five children. In this instance, the attraction lay in the performers rather than in the performance. As in theatrical productions and, as will be seen later, in displays of art, the appeal was to the audience's desire for the curious or spectacular. Even if the performers were proficient and had good taste in music, they were, after all, earning their living and, although they may have presented music of a high order, could not depend upon that alone to draw patrons. The city was a bustling, growing place, neither calm enough or old enough to have acquired fine taste. A spectacle was a spectacle, whether it was presented in the theater, the concert hall, or in the circus tent.

Those who were really interested in music indulged their interest privately. As time passed, however, the Apol lonian Society began to give public concerts in the grand jury room of the court house. Still later the Pittsburgh Musical Fund Society was organized and established Concert Hall. Two concerts were announced there, although many others must have been given. One was by the "Tyrolese Minstrels," appearing in their native costumes and singing English versions of Swiss songs. The other was a "soiree musicale" that complimented the taste of its listeners with selections from Kreutzer, Rossini, W. Schindlocker, Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Whitefield, Merk, Blum, and Martini.

It is fair to say that an advance had been made in the quality of music presented in the city. It would be unfair to say that Pittsburgh at this time had any musical life that was at all distinctive. Its was the musical interest of the average town of the time outside the large cities of the East, nothing more.

(TO BE CONCLUDED)

NOTES

2. F. Cuming, *Sketches of a Tour*, p. 64.