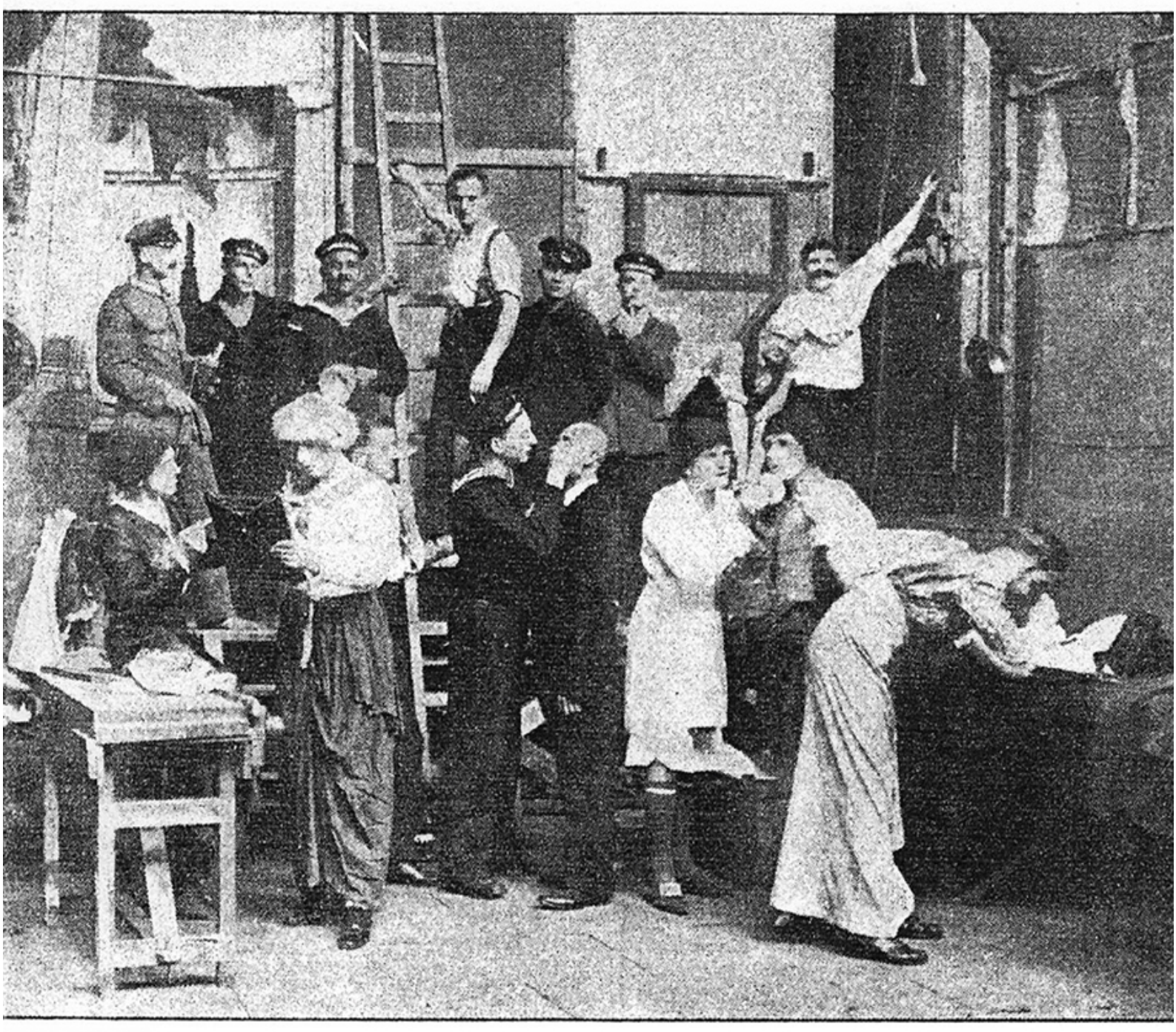
MUSIC AND DRAMA IN THE GERMAN PRISON-CAMPS



A GERMAN REHEARSAL IN AN ENGLISH CAMP.

"Making up" for a diversion permitted by England to her German war-prisoners at Dorchester Prison-Camp.

WHAT THE STAGE MAY PROFIT as a result of dramatic training afforded by the war prison-camps is a revelation of the future. The immediate effect is, of course, alleviation of long and burdensome days. Cares enough there are at best, even in a model camp such as Ruhleben, but the tedium has been relieved at times by music and play-acting. This camp has been fortunate in having a large contingent of musicians, actors, and artists, and, says Mr. Israel Cohen, writing in the London *Outlook*, "it was particularly due to the efforts of our musicians and actors, who received no reward for their self-imposed labor, and who were really exposed to candid criticism, that we were able to maintain a cheerful spirit throughout the long and weary months of our internment." During the first winter an orchestra of from forty to fifty was organized and concerts were given on Sunday evenings when the program ranged over a considerable field, and included selections from Handel and Wagner, Verdi and Puccini, Beethoven and Bellini, Sullivan and F. H. Cowen. But more activity was displayed in the dramatic field, and plays were performed on three or four successive nights, giving a majority of the prisoners the opportunity of seeing it. Two dramatic societies were formed, one animated by the spirit of edification, and the other by the spirit of amusement. There were offered comedy and tragedy, farce and problem-play, pantomime and melodrama, comic opera and revue. There was, we are told, a notable predilection for living playwrights:

"Bernard Shaw was the first to be chosen, his 'Androcles and the Lion' having been performed—for the first time in English on German soil—in the middle of March, 1915, and later 'Captain Brassbound's Conversion' and 'John Bull's Other Island' were also successfully produced. John Galsworthy was represented by 'Strife,' which was much too somber for the majority of the camp, and 'The Silver Box,' which was a popular success. Jerome K. Jerome contributed 'The Passing of the Third Floor Back' and Conan Doyle 'The Speckled Band.' We also had, among a host of others, such favorites as 'The Importance of Being Earnest,' 'The Private Secretary,' 'What Happened to Jones,' 'Mr. Preedy and the Countess,' 'Liberty Hall,' and 'Mary Goes First.' Ibsen's 'Master Builder' was also produced, not in Mr. William Archer's authorized translation, but—such was the spirit of conceit—in a prisoner's English version of a German translation of the original. We also had some evenings devoted to one-act plays, one of the most successful being an evening occupied by three plays of Stanley Houghton. Probably the most notable triumph on our stage, from the artistic point of view, was achieved by 'L'Enfant Prodigue,' the pantomime drama by Mr. Carré, with the musical accompaniment by A. Wormser. The first attempt at comic opera was made with 'Trial by Jury,' which was witnessed by a number of English military prisoners, who happened to be transferred to Ruhleben for a few days on their way

Pictured above is a French production from the Koningsbruck P.O.W. Camp.
(image and caption added)

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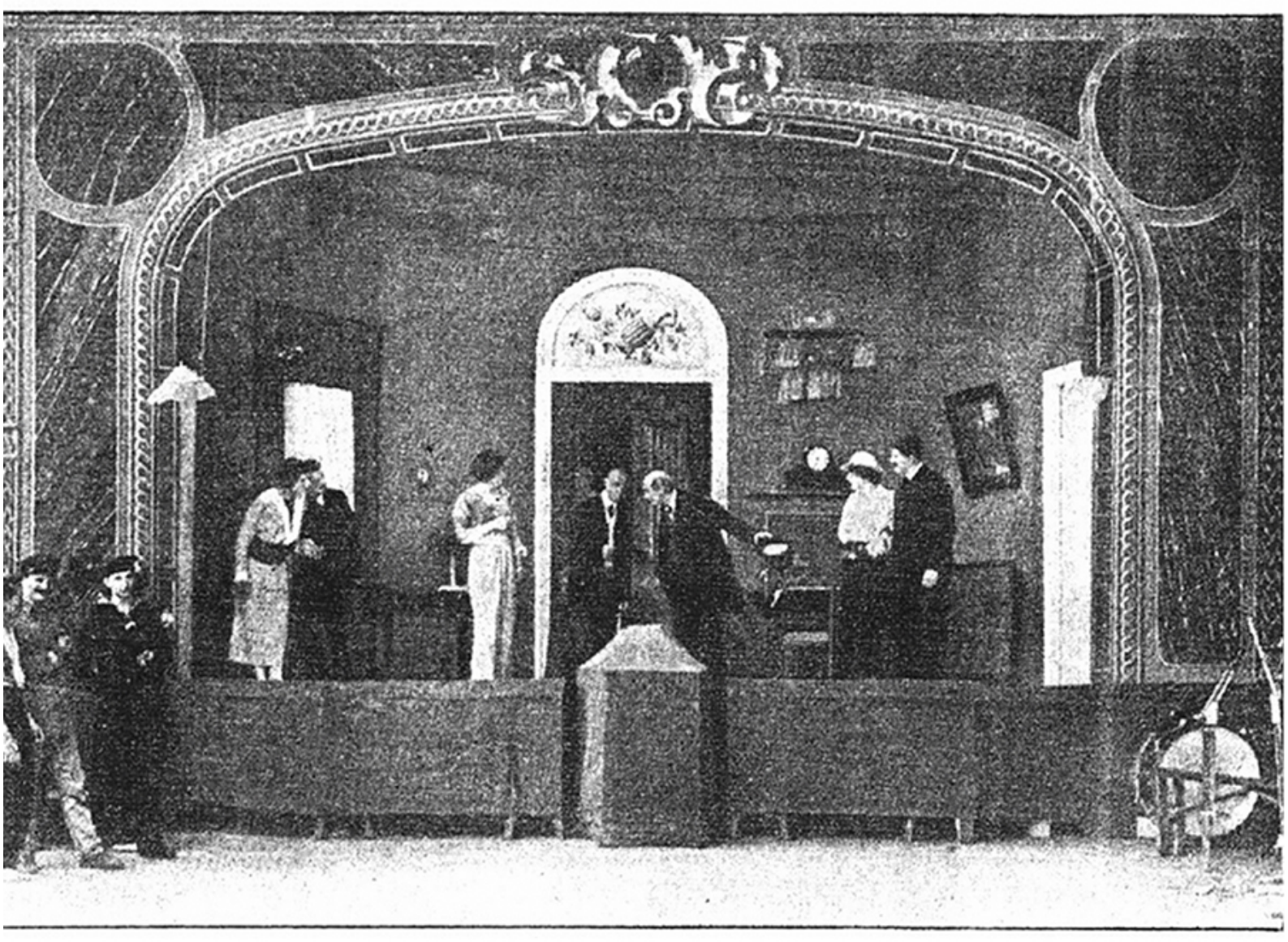
THE LITERARY DIGEST
for March 24, 1917

from one prison-camp to another.

"There was a certain diffidence about the presentation of Shakespeare, as it was feared that he would not be entertaining enough for the taste of the camp. The first attempt was made in June, 1915, with the forest scenes of 'As You Like It,' upon which a great deal of labor was lavished. The producer was Mr. C. Duncan-Jones; the scenic setting, apparel, procession, and dance were arranged by Mr. Leigh Henry, a disciple of Mr. Gordon Craig; and the music was specially composed and conducted by Professor Treharne. Altho gratifying from an esthetic point of view, the performance did not appeal to the majority, and hence Shakespeare was allowed to rest until the following April, when his tercentenary was celebrated upon an elaborate scale. Three performances were given of 'Twelfth Night,' which was remarkably well acted, and three of 'Othello'; while the two intervening nights were devoted respectively to a program of Elizabethan music and to a literary symposium on Shakespeare's England."

There were two popular productions wholly created in the camp, both words and music. One was a revue, "Don't Laugh," produced by a former ballet master of the Metropol Theater, Berlin. The other was a pantomime, "Cinderella."

"The revue was in eight episodes, and its distinguishing feature was a 'beauty chorus,' which was a tribute to the wondrous power of costume, paint, and powder in transforming a number of athletic youths into a bevy of alluring beauties. The production was rendered topical by the inclusion of an episode in which one of the characters sang a rollicking song, 'Has Anybody Here Seen Jackson?' and alluded to the efforts made by Mr. Jackson, of the American Embassy in Berlin, to effect the release of certain classes of prisoners. Mr. Jackson was present at a special performance, and was greatly amused by the parodying of his personality. The 'Cinderella' pantomime was also produced by Mr. Roker, and as it was such a success a 'command' matinée was given on New year's day, 1916, in honor of the American Ambassador, Mr. J. W. Gerard, and his wife, and several members of his staff with their ladies."



THE PLAY IN PROGRESS.

The tedium of prison-camp life in both England and Germany is relieved by theatrical performances. This scene at Dorchester could be duplicated at Ruhleben.

Nationality began to assert itself after the parent dramatic society had proved a success, and there were formed an Irish, a French, and a German dramatic society. We read:

"The Irish players specialized in Hibernian drama, and their best productions were 'John Bull's Other Island' and 'Cathleen in Houlihan.' The French Society produced several amusing comedies and farces, including 'L'Anglais Tel Qu'on Le Parle.' The German Society began with a successful production of the popular musical comedy, 'Der Fidele Bauer,' and then ambitiously produced the comic opera, 'Der Graf von Luxemburg,' which failed owing to the inability of the men who took female parts to work up a soprano voice. This opera, however, also had the honor of a 'command' performance, the distinguished visitor being General von Kessel, the Commander-in-Chief of the Military District of the Mark of Brandenburg. Other German plays produced were 'Doktor Klaus' and 'Der Erbförster.' A

A promotional poster from one of the camps
(image added)

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Spanish play and a Russian play have also been performed, and occasionally variety entertainments were given by the 'Ruhleben Empire Company.'"

A Russian production being rehearsed at the German prison camp at Konigsbruck.
(image & caption added)

Early in the summer of 1915, we are told, the professional musicians formed a musical society, "to secure accommodation for practise and study for the professional musicians and students interned, and to organize concerts and other musical entertainments in the camp." We read:

"It was a long time before the Society was able to secure special accommodation for musical practise, especially on the piano: ultimately, in combination with the artists, it had a wooden shed built beyond the barracks at the extreme west of the camp, half of which was used as a musical salon and the other half as an artists' studio. Henceforth, the conductorship of concerts presented an agreeable variety. . . . Mr. Peebles-Conn introduced the popular promenade concerts on Tuesday evenings, which have enjoyed two summer seasons. Mr. Bainton, who had already delivered an interesting course of lectures on European Schools of Music, with pianoforte illustrations, trained a madrigal choir, which proved a popular attraction at subsequent concerts. Some of the works performed were the compositions of prisoners, including a few written among all the distractions of the camp."

The graphic arts were not neglected by the prisoners, tho the "artists could naturally not attain such continuous publicity as that of the musicians and actors."

"There were a number of portraitists who worked either in oils or crayon, and who were always busily engaged in limning the features of their fellow prisoners or guards. The first Art Exhibition was held in a partitioned portion of the Grand Stand Hall in July, 1915, and was successfully organized by Mr. E. Hotopf. There were about a hundred and fifty exhibits, comprising portraits, landscapes, Spandau sunsets, humorous camp scenes, imaginative creations, a few sculptures, and cunningly designed marble paper-weights. The exhibition, after being passed by the military censors, was thrown open for three days, and many of the objects were bought by prisoners. The second exhibition was held the following Christmas in the studio which the artists had built in conjunction with the musicians; and the third exhibition, held in April, 1916, was more varied in character and also more successful than its two predecessors."

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