



The English actress Mrs. Scott-Sidon, "the best Shakespearean actress that Battle Creek saw in the 1880's."

tastes. In truth, Seventh-day Adventist leaders, perhaps unconsciously, may have made the correct choice in applying Ellen White's counsel to the film entertainment industry rather early in this century. Michael Booth, the historian of melodrama, makes this link clear.

Yet melodrama is still with us, and in one form or another probably always will be, as long as there is human interest in thrilling stories and tender emotions, and as long as people want to lose themselves in a world which is not their own. What happened was that popular melodrama and its audiences were taken over by the cinema (and, later, television); it was the cinema that dealt the real death blow to stage melodrama. We have already seen how necessary speed is to melodrama: a rapid series of short scenes and quick scene changes. This the cinema was far better equipped to do than the stage, and the ponderously elaborate realism of the sensation drama of the 1880's and 1890's cried out for cinematic rather than theatrical techniques.¹¹

What Booth says about the cinema can perhaps be doubled for commercial television. There is no need today to ride a horse or take public transportation or walk the many blocks from the West End to downtown Battle Creek! The true descendants of the Battle Creek stage are no further away from most of us than across the living room.

Ellen White's comments of the early 1880's about theater attendance were made in the context of the then-popular stage, a stage (at least as far as Battle Creek records show) crowded with farcical and sentimental comedy, with racially-slurred variety shows, and with escapist, morally-oversimplified, sensational melodrama. Any historian of the American drama can easily show that fundamental changes took place in the development of the theater about the turn of the twentieth century. A variety of influences contributed to this shift: new tastes for realism in the portrayal of characters, modern psychological concerns with the complexities of the inner person, philosophical uncertainty about moral absolutes, copyright protection for dramatists, staging innovations, influences from Western Europe, Russia, and the Far East.

As much as anything else, however, the shift from live theater to other media for popular entertainment has resulted in a new seriousness, an almost artistic snobbery, in theatrical circles of the twentieth century. No longer needing to pander to the tastes of the masses, serious artists such as Eugene O'Neill, Maxwell Anderson, Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller and Edward Albee have added American drama to the scope of world literature.

It is the other mass media popular entertainments, public cinema and television, that seem most directly the inheritors of nineteenth-century theatrical

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1. Reproduced in E. G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4 (Mountain View, Ca., 1848), pp. 652-653. This testimony was probably written between September 1880 and August 1881.
 2. See Arthur H. Quinn, *A History of the American Drama from the Beginning to the Civil War* (New York, 1943), p. 115.
 3. E. G. White, "Notes of Travel," *Review and Herald*, 60 (6 November, 1883), p. 689.
 4. A slang word equivalent to the modern day "great," or "groovy."
 5. Robert Spiller, et. al., *A Literary History of the United States* (New York, 1963), p. 1000.
 6. Carl Sandburg, *Abraham Lincoln: The War Years*, vol. 4 (New York, 1945), pp. 276-277.
 7. Myron Matlaw (ed.), *The Black Crook and Other Nineteenth-Century American Plays* (New York, 1967), p. 319.
 8. Garff B. Wilson, *Three Hundred Years of American Drama and Theater* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1973), pp. 185-186.
 9. Michael Booth, *Hiss the Villain* (New York, 1964), pp. 9-10.
 10. Barrett H. Clark, *America's Lost Plays*, vol. 20 (Bloomington, Ind., 1965), p. 145.
 11. Booth, *Hiss the Villain*, pp. 39-40.