IN MEMORIAM

BEN IDEN PAYNE

Ben Iden Payne was born in Newcastle-on-Tyne, England, on 5 September 1881 to Alfred and Sarah Payne. His father was a Unitarian minister who encouraged presenting appropriate plays in the Sunday School of his church. His parents regularly attended plays, and their enjoyment of theatrical art undoubtedly nourished the young Payne's dormant interest in acting. As a very young boy he had played the part of a waif in a semi-professional revue when the regular actor could not appear. He first saw a Shakespearean play when Twelfth Night was presented in a local theatre. During his second year as a scholarship student at Manchester Grammar School he played Bassanio in The Merchant of Venice. By the time he was eleven years old he knew he would become a professional actor.

In the Fall of 1898 he applied for membership in the "Mr. & Mrs. F. R. Benson's Shakespeare and Old English Comedy Company". When the company came to Manchester, Mr. Benson granted an interview to the seventeen year old Iden and asked him to read Hotspur's lines from The First Part of Henry the Fourth. Benson agreed to give the boy an "assignment" with the company but strongly urged that he first finish his final year at school. In 1899 Payne, too excited to complete his last year of school, became a "walker-on" with this reputable company. Thus began a
seventy-four year career in the theatre, among the longest on record.

After a four week trial period, Benson recommended that Payne join a less demanding company in order to gain needed experience. The disappointed young actor purchased copies of several plays and The Actor's Handbook and joined the Mlle. Gratienne Repertory Company. On his first night with the company he played his first role as a professional actor. He was an unnamed manservant with one five-word line which, when delivered, received audience applause. The next night, after watching a rehearsal, he played a much more significant role, Diggory in She Stoops to Conquer. The following season he returned to the Benson Company as a full-fledged member.

He was next with the Carlyon and Charlton Company, but in 1902 he was again a Bensonian. It was at this time that Payne was first used as an assistant stage manager. There followed a series of tours with different companies in which he played scores of roles and occasionally served as stage manager. He was a member of a special Benson West Indies Company tour and played several Shakespearean roles thus becoming more familiar with the Bard's works. There were also tours with the Copping Company and the Norman Company. It was with the former that he became acquainted with the "new drama" of George Bernard Shaw as exemplified in "Plays: Pleasant and Unpleasant". Although acting was then Payne's consuming passion in theatre, his stage managing experiences inevitably led to directing, an aspect of theatrical production made more necessary because of the writing styles of such playwrights as Ibsen and Shaw. When
with the Maclaren Shakespeare Company, he had his initial experience in
directing while at the same time portraying such roles as Iago, Laertes,
Mercutio, Macduff, Jacques and Bassanio.

While he was a member of the Cyril Keightley Company, he met W. B. Yeats,
J. M. Synge and Lady Gregory in Dublin. He accepted their offer to be
stage director for the Abbey Theatre. He served unhappily in this capacity
for several months and resigned. This experience, however, led to an
association with Miss A. E. F. Horniman in the Fall of 1907, in what
was to become the English Repertory Theatre Movement. Miss Horniman's
generous contribution made possible the rebuilding of the Gaiety Theatre
in Manchester. At Payne's insistence, she invited William Poel, founder
of the Elizabethan Stage Society, to produce Measure For Measure in
celebration of the opening of the refurbished theatre. During the second
season he decided to do Much Ado About Nothing for a Christmas play.
As he prepared the script, the natural rhythm of the lines made it obvious
to him that the play should be performed without the customary scene omissions
and transpositions. He devised a plan whereby connecting scenes were
played in front of curtains located downstage close to the proscenium
arch, a daring innovation in those days. Thus began Payne's experimentation
which eventually resulted in his "Modified Elizabethan Production" method of
staging Shakespearean plays. By his own admission, it is likely that the
idea was at least partially based upon observation of Poel's first season
opener, Measure For Measure. However, ultimate refinements in the original
plan gave it a distinctive character which became the Payne hallmark for
all Shakespearean plays staged at The University of Texas, and for many
of those directed earlier at Carnegie Institute of Technology.
He resigned as director of the Manchester Repertory Company in October, 1911 having directed more than two-hundred plays by such authors as John Galsworthy, Arnold Bennett, St. John Hankin, Harold Brighouse and Stanley Houghton. He also played scores of roles during the years that he had worked with Miss Horniman.

Payne sent two companies on tour in the following eighteen months. The first used only Stanley Houghton's popular comedy, *The Younger Generation*. He managed the second with the assistance of Mona Limerick (Mary Charlotte Louise Gadney) whom he had married in May, 1906. They featured plays of George Bernard Shaw. When *Man and Superman* became popular, the Paynes decided to use only that play for the second company and to form a third which would stage other Shaw plays. He also organized repertory companies in several English and Scottish cities.

A new period in the life of B. Iden Payne began in the Fall of 1913. Through the good offices of Miss Horniman, he was selected to form a company which would play eight weeks at the Chicago Fine Arts Theatre. He directed, and, with his wife, acted in plays by Shaw, Galsworthy and others including short works written by Kenneth Sawyer Goodman. The company was well received and its contract was extended to run twelve weeks. In February, 1914 Payne was sponsored by the Drama League of America to produce a series of plays in Indianapolis. In the Fall of the same year he was appointed artistic director of the Philadelphia Little Theatre. His performance as Puff in *The Critic* was witnessed by Lee Shubert who engaged him to produce the play on Broadway. He was subsequently employed by the Shuberts and directed John Barrymore in
Justice, the first serious Broadway role for the popular young actor. Another first was the production of Harold Brighouse's Hobson's Choice. Payne accepted a position as general stage director for the Charles Frohman organization in early 1917 despite his passionate opposition to the Frohman "star" policy. For the next five, often frustrating, years, he conscientiously directed such actors as Ethel Barrymore, Otis Skinner, William Gillette, Maude Adams, Elsie Ferguson, Billie Burke, Ruth Chatterton and Helen Hayes, among others, in scores of plays in New York and St. Louis. In several of these he played major roles. He left the Frohmans early in 1922 and became a free lance director.

While working at the Chicago Fine Arts Theatre in 1913 an event occurred which changed, according to Payne, "...my whole professional outlook and ultimately diverted the whole current of my career". He was introduced to Dr. Arthur Hammerschlag, President of Carnegie Institute of Technology, and Thomas Wood Stevens, organizer and chairman-to-be of Carnegie Institute's new Department of Drama. Payne's advice was sought concerning purposes and functions of the new department, and he was invited to direct a play during its first season. He staged Shaw's You Never Can Tell. Despite misgivings about the value of educational theatre, an attitude typical of professionals in those days, he quickly adjusted to the eager dedication of his drama students. He soon came to realize the potential of a school theatre program designed specifically to provide highest quality drama training for those seeking careers in theatre. Between 1914 and 1951 Payne directed fifty-eight plays at Carnegie Institute of which twenty-six were by Shakespeare. He accepted the departmental chairmanship in 1925, a position which he relinquished in 1928. However, except
for the years he was at Stratford-upon-Avon, he returned to Carnegie Institute each year until 1951 to direct a Shakespearean play often using his modified Elizabethan production method to stage these plays.

Although he was quite fully occupied during his tenure as departmental chairman at Carnegie Institute, Payne found time to accept occasional acting and directing assignments elsewhere. Because of his keen desire to act even more frequently, he joined the Goodman Repertory Theatre Company of Chicago as an actor-director in 1928. He also played a season in the Garden Theatre, St. Louis and worked with the Players Guild in New York City. He collaborated with T. W. Stevens in construction of the Old Globe Theatre at the Chicago Century of Progress World's Fair, 1933, where he adapted and directed shortened versions of Shakespeare's plays.

In 1935 B. Iden Payne accepted the directorship of the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon, England. He directed no fewer than thirty-seven plays and was actively involved with many more. Because of World War II, the theatre was closed for one year in 1939, and its production activities were severely restricted. These limitations, along with refusal of the management to permit him to use his method of staging, caused him to give up his position in 1942.

He returned to the United States to lecture for the British Ministry of Information the following year. In 1944 he did several plays for the Theatre Guild of New York including _Embezzled Heaven_ with Ethel Barrymore. He directed _Much Ado About Nothing_ for Le Petit Theatre du Vieux Carre, New Orleans, in May, 1945. The following March he staged _The Duchess of Malfi_ for the Cleveland Playhouse. He produced Shakespeare's plays

It was at The University of Texas that Professor Payne had his longest tenure in educational theatre. He was selected by Dr. E. W. Doty, then Dean of the College of Fine Arts, to be Guest Professor of Drama. He served as chairman of the Department of Drama in 1946-47 and again in 1951-52. He retired in May, 1973 as Professor Emeritus in Drama after having directed twenty-nine plays at The University of Texas, of which twenty-four were by Shakespeare. He was a member of the Graduate Faculty and served on numerous M. F. A. and Ph. D. committees involving Department of Drama major students. During these years he spoke at dozens of city, state, regional and national organizational meetings. He died 6 April 1976. He is survived by two daughters living in England, Sara and Rosalind, a son, Padgett residing in San Francisco, and his second wife, Barbara Rankin Chiarone of Austin, whom he married in 1950.

Dr. Payne played active and important roles in the establishment and development of the repertory theatre in Great Britain and in the professional,
community and educational theatre programs in the United States. He refined a unique, creative process for the staging of Shakespearean plays which eventually was adopted by directors throughout England, Canada and the United States. His dedication to achieving the highest quality of performance in all aspects of theatre activity was strongly maintained to the end of his career. He was revered and loved by a legion of friends, former colleagues and students, many of whom are currently prominent in professional and school theatres here and abroad. He finished writing an autobiography shortly before he died, and concluded the two volume work with a couplet from The Tempest, Shakespeare's last play and the last one Dr. Payne directed.

As you from crimes would pardon'd be
Let your indulgence set me free.

Lorene L. Rogers, President
The University of Texas at Austin

Bill D. Francis, Secretary
The General Faculty