

*Baltimore Evening Sun*  
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*A Drama Of Ideas.*

The New Theatre Company of New York, closed its first Baltimore engagement at the Auditorium last night with an extremely brilliant performance of John Galsworthy's "Strife," a drama dealing with the war between capital and labor. The audience was as fashionable as an opera crowd, but it by no means filled the house, nor did it deafen the actors with huzzahs. But perhaps the meteorological phenomena of the night were largely responsible for both facts, for it was chilly and muggy without the theatre and hot and muggy within.

The scene of "Strife," as the play has been Americanized, is a small town in southeastern Ohio, the home of the Ohio River Tin Plate Mills. It is early in February, and a strike has been going on since the autumn, to the loss of both the company and the men. The latter are fighting for a new wage scale, and the company is holding out for the old one. The unions have nothing to do with the strike, for the pay the men demand differs from the union scale in various important particulars. In consequence, they have had no support from without, and when the play opens they are on the verge of starvation.

*The Two Gladiators*

Simon Harness, a walking delegate of the Tin-Plate Workers' Union, comes to the mills to offer the men the support of the union if they will only abate their demands a bit, but led by David Roberts, a striking engineer, they refuse to do so. Harness then turns to the directors of the company, but here, too, he is unsuccessful, for John Anthony, the president, refuses absolutely to listen to any talk of compromise.

It soon becomes apparent, in truth, that the contest is not a war between the company and the men, but a duel between Roberts and Anthony, the one a fanatical champion of labor and the other an irresponsible champion of capital. The majority of the strikers are for compromise. With Harness as mediator, the majority of the directors are also for compromise; but Roberts and Anthony set their faces against any such weak yielding. Each demands a complete victory, or utter defeat. Each declares for a struggle to the death, no matter how appalling the cost.

That cost, it soon becomes evident, will be staggering enough. The company has already lost \$230,000 by the strike, and every day sees its loss increasing. Thirty-four years of prosperity are behind it, but not far ahead, unless something is done quickly, bankruptcy will begin to threaten it. As for the men, they are in a miserable plight, indeed. Their savings have been swept away, they are getting no help from the union, and the winter is bitterly cold. Upon the women and children, huddling in their cold, cheerless homes, the penalties of the struggle are falling.

The men are shaken by the sight of all this suffering, and begin to murmur against Roberts, but he sweeps them aside imperiously. Who has made greater sacrifices than he? Into the strikers' war fund he has thrown \$4,000—the savings of his whole life. And who is suffering more than his own wife—a helpless invalid? The comforts that might prolong her

life he cannot buy for her. When they are offered by the pitying daughter of Anthony, Roberts refuses them with scorn. He is determined to bring the mill to terms if he has to sacrifice the lives of all the strikers, and the lives of their wives and children in the process.

### *The End of The Fight*

As for Anthony, he is a fighter of the same desperate, unyielding sort. The other directors, including even his own son, urge him to offer the men a sensible compromise. They are tired of the struggle, they think of their lost dividends, they want to get back to Pittsburgh, they are moved by honest pity for the suffering women and children. But Anthony waves them aside. He has been fighting labor, he says, for 50 years, and he knows the game. It must be played standing up, and with a desperate determination to win or die.

It soon becomes apparent, of course, that, with Roberts and Anthony leading the opposing sides, the strike will never end. In each man the yearning to overthrow and humble the other is an ungovernable passion, transcending all mere ideas. They are like two huge stags, locking horns in a death struggle. Neither will yield an iota: neither will even talk of yielding. And meanwhile the cold winds blow and the women and children shiver, and the Ohio River Tin Plate Mills, after a generation of successful operation, come close to bankruptcy. Roberts' wife is the first actual victim. She dies for want of the common necessities of life.

This dramatic proof of the hopelessness of their plight moves the strikers to demand that Roberts come to some terms with Anthony: and at the same moment the directors of the mills, shrinking from responsibility for more suffering among the helpless, demand that Anthony come to terms with Roberts. The two grim leaders fight this treason in their respective camps doggedly, but in vain. The strikers depose Roberts and take the matter into their own hands. The directors depose Anthony, and ask Harness, the union leader, to settle the strike in their name. As the curtain falls Roberts and Anthony stand face to face.

### *The Uselessness of It*

"Then you're no longer president of the company!" cries Roberts, mocking his old enemy. Suddenly some understanding of the grim humor of the situation comes over him. "So they've thrown us both down!" he laughs. "Thrown us both down!" And he staggers out, a beaten man at last.

Anthony sits there for a moment in his chair—a beaten man, too. Then he slowly rises and goes out, and as he does so the directors crowd up to sign the new agreement with the men. Tench, the secretary of the company, and Harness, the union leader, gather up the papers.

"Do you know," says Tench, "that these are the very terms we drew up, you and I, and put to both sides before the strike began? All this—all this—and—what for?"

Harness wonders, too. Then a thought strikes him.

"That's where the fun comes in," he says.

No critical acumen is needed to see the dramatic effectiveness, the sturdy structure, the rare craftsmanship, the human interest of this fine play. The action proceeds, as one may say, in a straight line: there is no turning aside for "relief," comic or otherwise: there is no dependence upon stock characters and ancient stage devices. The idea at the bottom of the drama is apparent from the very start, and the audience is engrossed to the end by that gigantic duel between fanatical labor leader and hunkerous, inhuman capitalist.

And the merits which appear in the general plan of the play are matched by equally striking merits in detail. The dialogue is straightforward, nervous, real; the characters, great

and little, have rotundity and verity; we are constantly interested in them and in the things they are doing. The play as a whole, indeed, is a remarkably good example of the new style in playwriting—the style of the later Pinero of Breiux, of Sodermann, and of Shaw in his serious moods. Let Mr. Galsworthy be made welcome to the theatre. He is a dramatist with something to say—and he knows how to say it.

*The Work Of The Actors*

The New Theatre Company plays “Strife” in a manner which deserves all praise. There is constant evidence of the sacrifice of individual opportunity to the general effect of that admirable team-work remarked in “The Winter’s Tale.” The smallest parts are played by excellent actors. Oswald Yorke is a servant: Henry Stanford has scarcely a dozen lines: Beverley Sitgreaves appears in but one short scene.

The parts of Roberts and Anthony are in the hands of Albert Bruning and Louis Calvert, respectively—both actors of sound intelligence and notable skill. Nothing could be more impressive than Mr. Calvert’s picture of the cold-blooded, implacable and ruthless Anthony—nothing, perhaps, says Mr. Bruning’s picture of the wild-eyed, fanatical and equally ruthless David Roberts.

An admirable performance indeed and of a play of the first calibre! Let us hope that the New Theatre Company will return next year. Its three days’ engagement has been sufficient to take away the bad taste left by a long series of dull, stupid, maudlin dramas, written by fools and played by fourth rate actors.