UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY

OU_170066

UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY

OSMANIA UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

Call No. 822/MAC/D. Accession No. 2122

Author MacCarthy Desmond

Title Drama. 1940.

This book should be returned on or before the date last marked below.

DRAMA

Desmond MacCarthy

DRAMA

PUTNAM

LONDON & NEW YORK

First published November, 1940

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN AT THE CHISWICK PRESS LTD.
NEW SOUTHGATE, LONDON, N.11.

CONTENTS

SHAKESPEARE

THE PRODUCTION OF POETIC DRAMA, February 14th, 1914 3

A Midsummer Night's Dream, February 21st, 1914 10

SHYLOCKS PAST AND PRESENT, January 24th, 1920 15

Othello, May 7th, 1921 21

SHAKESPEAREAN CRITICISM, November 25th, 1922 28

Cymbeline AND OTHER PLAYS, September 22nd, 1923 35

THE NEW HAMLET, March 7th, 1925 . . 39

HAMLETS IN GENERAL, March 8th, 1930 . 48

CONTINENTAL PLAYS

The Death of Tintagiles, December 27th, 1913 54

THE DRAMATIST OF THE FUTURE (*Ghosts*), May 26th, 1917 61

GUITRY AND GRANVILLE-BARKER (*Deburau*), November 12th, 1921 68

IBSEN AND THE TRAGIC SENSE (*John Gabriel Borkman*), December 24th, 1921 . . 74

Magda, April 7th, 1923 79

DESOLATION IS A DELICATE THING (*The Cherry Orchard*), June 13th, 1925 . . . 84

DRAMA AND DOSTOEVSKY (*The Idiot*), September 25th, 1926 91

Rosmersholm, October 9th, 1926 . . . 95

STRINDBERG STRINDBERG (*The Father*), August 20th, 1927 101

The Kingdom of God, November 5th, 1927 . 106

The Insect Play, May 26th, 1928 . . . 110

The Three Sisters, November 30th, 1929 . 118

STAGE SOCIETY PRODUCTIONS

Uncle Vanya, May 16th, 1914 . . . 123

A SPANISH DRAMA (*The Cleansing Stain*), February 10th, 1917 131

The Girl and the Puppet, February 23rd, 1918 136

D'ANNUNZIO (*La Città Morta*), March 9th, 1918 141

BEN JONSON AN OBJECT LESSON (*Volpone*), February 5th, 1921 147

BEAUMONT AND FLETCHER (*The Maid's Tragedy*), November 19th, 1921 . . 154

SOMETHING NEW (*Six Characters in Search of an Author*), March 4th, 1922 . . 161

Troilus and Cressida, March 18th, 1922 . . 166

BEN JONSON'S LAUGHTER (*The Alchemist*), March 24th, 1923 171

Ivanoff, December 19th, 1925 . . . 174

STRINDBERG AGAIN (*Miss Julie* and *The Pariah*), October 22nd, 1927 . . 178

Orpheus, April 21st, 1928 184

FATE AND THE SUBCONSCIOUS (*The Machine of the Gods*), March 30th, 1935 . . 190

SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The Fugitive, September 27th, 1913 . . 194

The Mob, May 2nd, 1914 200

Exiles, September 21st, 1918 . . . 206

The Madras House, December 5th, 1925 . 214

The Silver Cord, November 19th, 1927 . . 221

BERNARD SHAW'S *Apple Cart* AND MR. BELLOC'S APPLES, September 28th, 1929 . 225

SATIRES AND COMEDIES

SOMERSET MAUGHAM (*Our Betters*), October 6th, 1923 233

THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY (*Lionel and Clarissa*), February 6th, 1926 . . 240

SOMERSET MAUGHAM AND NOEL COWARD (*The Breadwinner* and *Private Lives*), October 11th, 1930 243

EXCITEMENT SATIRE SPEED (*Dinner at Eight*), January 14th, 1933 249

A BOOTLESS BENE (*The Late Christopher Bean*), May 27th, 1933 255

MR. NOEL COWARD (*A Conversation Piece*), March 3rd, 1934 261

HISTORICAL PLAYS

MR. SHAW'S JULIUS CÆSAR (*Cæsar and Cleopatra* I), April 26th, 1913 . . . 266

CÆSAR AGAIN (*Cæsar and Cleopatra* II), May 10th, 1913 271

St. Joan I, April 5th, 1924 276

St. Joan II, April 12th, 1924 . . . 281

RICHARD AND MR. GIELGUD (*Richard of Bordeaux*), March 11th, 1933 . . . 286

AN HISTORICAL PLAY (*Queen of Scots*), June 16th, 1934 290

DETECTIVE DRAMA

MELODRAMA AND MEDIUMS (*The Thirteenth Chair*), November 13th, 1917 . . 294

FEAR AND FUN (*No.* 17), August 22nd, 1925 300

DETECTIVE DRAMA (*The Ringer*), May 22nd, 1926 306

VERY MUCH ON THE SPOT (*On the Spot*), May 17th, 1930 311

MORALITY PLAYS

SIR JAMES BARRIE (*Dear Brutus*), October 27th, 1917 315

THE FIRST ENEMY (*The Last Enemy*), December 28th, 1929 322

THE STAGE AND THE SPIRITS (*The World of Light*), April 11th, 1931 . . . 327

A CONVENT PLAY (*Cradle Song*), September 19th, 1931 334

A Comedy of Good and Evil, February 4th, 1933 338

MR. MAUGHAM'S NEW PLAY (*Sheppey*), September 16th, 1933 343

HYDE PARK (*Within the Gates*), February 17th, 1934 349

FILMS

CHARLIE'S CANE (*The Pilgrim*), September 8th, 1923 355

THE ARABIAN NIGHTS (*The Thief of Bagdad*), November 15th, 1924 358

ACTORS AND ACTRESSES

SIR JOHN HARE, December 31st, 1921 . . 362
SARAH BERNHARDT, March 31st, 1923 . . 364
ELEANORA DUSE, June 16th, 1923 . . 368
DUSE AND BERNHARDT, April 26th, 1924 . 372
CHALIAPINE, October 15th, 1927 . . . 376

DRAMA

THE PRODUCTION OF POETIC DRAMA

BEFORE criticizing the performance at the Savoy Theatre I must (I apologize) discourse on the production of poetic drama in general.

A Midsummer Night's Dream is a difficult play to produce so that everybody shall find in it satisfaction, and it is hard to find out what one wants. In the theatre that each playgoer carries under his own hat, it has already been performed, perhaps several times and in several ways. We are our own scene makers and shifters in that theatre, and what easy miracles we perform! The action takes place amidst surroundings more vague and changeable than clouds; the scenery paints itself, as we read, upon the darkness of the mind, a more suggestive background for beauty than any decorative curtain. Indeed, can we even say that anything definite is painted on that darkness at all? We *feel* as we read; we have hardly time to see. Did we see anything when we read, for instance:

> Met we on hill, or dale, forest or mead,
> By paved fountain or by rushy brook,
> Or in the beached margent of the sea,
>
> To dance our ringlets to the whistling wind?

We were charmed, but did we *see* what charmed us? Now you put the question to yourself you may, at the words "rushy brook", see rushes and water for a hundredth of a second; and "the beached margent of the sea" may call up for an instant a scene before you. Indeed, as I wrote down the above lines they

called up one for me: the moon is up, but it is not night; a sea, green as the stalks of daffodils, spills softly wave after wave over smooth white sand. But how utterly irrelevant such details are! Next time I may see a different shore or nothing at all. I can even trace to their sources these particular irrelevancies. I happen to have spent a month this summer on the coast of Wexford; "rushy" in the previous line must have lingered in my mind and made me think of the reedy grasses which grow on the dunes there, and then of the magic emptiness of that beach one evening, and the little, tossing fringes of fresh foam running in, more frailly white than snow, one after the other. How recklessly the imagination picks and jumps and chooses! There was not a suggestion of "the whistling wind" in my picture, on the contrary, a warm stillness; though the dancing and the fairies and their ringlets were somehow there—in the foam.

Again, what different dawns the following lines will call up to different minds, at different times:

> Even till the Eastern gate, all fiery red,
> Opening in Neptune with fair blessed beams
> Turns into yellow gold his salt green streams.

In my picture there may be a headland—I may be seeing England on a summer morning from the sea; you may be looking upon a broad, restless circle of empty water, a path of gold across it to the rising sun; another reader, a green swell heaving against the sky, catching on its side a golden light. And another may see nothing at all.

The poet has written what he has written, and we have all found different things upon the page. But our various experiences have this in common: a *feeling* of morning and the sea. It does not matter that this feeling should be centred in one case upon

one detail, in another upon another. The important fact is that each vision has a certain consonance with sea and morning and that the poetry has created in us a capacity to feel (this is the only test of poetry) the beauty of whatever picture or idea the words happened to call up.

Such psychological facts are not unrelated to the art of the theatre. They suggest the limits of the art of interpreting poetry with dress and scenery on the stage, and a standard by which to criticize it. They suggest that this art, like the art of words, should leave us to a great extent fancy free. What scenery should aim at is the expression of a beauty consonant with the underlying emotion which runs through the poetry of a scene, act, or play.

There are, of course, some people whose imaginations demand absolute freedom. To them any attempt to express emotion visibly is irksome; and they, too, go to Shakespeare performances sometimes, sitting through them with resigned patience. Perhaps, for their benefit, goggles might be procurable for a shilling in the slot, as opera-glasses are now for others. Certainly the producer can do nothing more for them than that; he cannot be expected to consider people who want *only* to use their ears in the theatre.

But, clearly if we are to be left to a great extent fancy free, the staging of poetic drama should not tie or direct our imaginations too definitely. That it should be beautiful in itself no producer denies; but if it is added that it must also possess a beauty consonant with the spirit of the act or scene they are all at sixes and sevens—at any rate in their practice. And well they may be. For what is meant by the beauty of stuffs, colours, forms and light being consonant with the beauty of the poetry is something extremely vague. Suggestion of place, of night or day, is another matter and a simpler one. The scene

must always be laid somewhere, and this must be indicated, if only by a symbol or an announcement. The attitude towards scenery of different schools of producers are discussed and distinguished in Mr. Palmer's *Future of the Theatre.* Beauty in the setting of a play must, he asserts, detract from dramatic art, which is "the realization through the living player of the conceptions of a dramatic poet". "It is psychologically impossible", he says, "to receive more than one appeal at a time." I deny this generalization, and with an energy which, if he could see my gesture, he might mistake for personal animosity. He appeals to our experience, and instances Purcell's setting of one of Shakespeare's songs. *Santo Diavolo!* I am unconvinced! I will appeal to his experience. Has he never been glad a beautiful song has been sung in an unintelligible language, not because the poetry was too good but because it was too bad? Has he never glanced at a programme translation afterwards with a sense of relief at what he had providentially missed?

I know a man who heard a lady sing a pretty song he thought was about an Indian potentate called Sir Cusha Sweesong Twar. Unfortunately, when he discovered that the refrain was "*Ce que je suis sans toi*", I neglected to ask him if the song appealed to him more, but probably, in this instance, on either alternative his answer would have been another nail in the coffin of Mr. Palmer's theory that good words and good music inevitably spoil each other. And as for his twin theory that what delights the eye and charms the fancy in stage settings must subduct from the poetry of drama, and his deduction from it that the scenery for Shakespeare must be so conventional, so much in every detail a matter of course as to become psychologically invisible like Mr. Chesterton's postman in his detective story, they leave us in a pretty quandary. For it follows

that it is impossible to produce Shakespeare at all. As he points out, Mr. Poel's more or less archæological method of staging the plays, though it may get near the bare stage conventions of Shakespeare's time, is so strange to ours that it needs a "complicated mental gymnastic" on our part "before we can begin to see and appreciate the play". We must, however—this is granted—indicate time and place on the stage. But then what hopeless difficulty we are in! If we have no scenery, then we cannot attend to the play; if we have elaborate naturalistic scenery we are distracted; and if the producer "decorates", intead of "illustrates", he is calling in a conflicting element of beauty.

How can we establish a convention as stable, and therefore as unnoticeable, as the Greek stage was to the Greeks? If we build a Shakespeare theatre for that purpose, would not its bare, unchanging platform prove also distracting to an audience which frequented other theatres in which every degree of realism and abstract decoration was in vogue? I know I am pressing Mr. Palmer's theory in a way which will suggest to those who have not read his book that it contains extravagant theories, instead of being remarkable for good sense and even knife-like discriminations. But seeing eye to eye with him at so many points, I want him to admit that he has overstated his theory, and that he would accept as the description of the kind of scenery appropriate to poetic drama that it should be unobtrusive and beautiful with a beauty consonant with the spirit of the play performed.

All producers are agreed that it should be beautiful; where they differ is in what they consider to be consonant beauty. Sir Herbert Tree considers any picture which may be called up by the poetry (just as the empty beach rose in my mind while copying the quotation from Titania's speech) to be relevant,

provided that it can be reconciled with the stage directions; and even if it cannot be, he often puts it in. I remember in his *Antony and Cleopatra* in the middle of the play the lights went down, and as if there was not enough witchery and mystery in Cleopatra herself, a symbolic transformation scene was introduced: a sphinx loomed out of the darkness to die into it again, while a thrumming, vibrating, aromatic kind of music fell on our ears, to suggest the maddened luxury of the East and the exasperating, enigmatic attraction of the queen. This tableau was greeted, I remember, with louder applause than any part of the play. The scenery at His Majesty's is sometimes charming and beautiful, but, as everybody has been saying for years, amazing, amusing, as the scenic effects often are, Shakespeare on that stage is smothered in scenery.

To Mr. Poel it is the atmosphere of the Elizabethan playhouse which is always relevant whatever the time and place at which the action nominally takes place. He has taught us much. The beauty and spirit of Shakespeare's age, at any rate, does seem the right inspiration for the consonant setting of some of the plays, but not, I think, of all. Parts of Mr. Granville Barker's *Twelfth Night* must have convinced people of this. Mr. Gordon Craig often writes as though his chief difficulty would be not to find decorations and schemes of movement which would produce an effect of beauty consonant with a play, but a play which would prove duly subordinate to them. Dr. Reinhardt (but I have only seen two of his productions and am generalizing chiefly from his *Œdipus*) seems to hold that if only an effect is impressive and beautiful it cannot be too strong. He dismisses, it seems to me, the principle of consonance and subordination as flimsy and unimportant compared with producing a vivid effect to the eye. He, too, tethers our imaginations like Sir

Herbert. Mr. Granville Barker—but I am to criticize him in detail next week. I could not do it without explaining from what point of view I approached *The Midsummer Night's Dream*—namely, that the setting of poetic drama should be beautiful but not compete with it, lead our fancies in the direction of the spirit of the scene but leave them free.

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

LAST WEEK I wrote about the art of producing poetic drama. The reaping machine went clattering round and round, diminishing with each circuit the standing corn till it was a mere island in a shaven field, and when the game did come out, it was only a small rabbit. The only generalization which bolted at last was that the setting of such plays should be beautiful yet undistracting, leading our fancies in the direction of the spirit of each scene, yet leaving them free.

Had space permitted, I should have gone on to say of the performance of *A Midsummer's Night's Dream* that I did not think Mr. Norman Wilkinson's scenery beautiful, that it was distracting and not in harmony with the spirit of the play. I should have left it at that. I am glad I had no room. I am glad I had the sense to go again before writing my criticism. I strongly recommend everyone who felt, while enjoying the performance, dissatisfied with it on such general grounds to go again. They will enjoy it a great deal more the second time. The merits of this production come out clearer when surprise at the scenic effects, the golden fairies, and the red-puppet-box Puck has subsided.

Mr. Granville Barker has said in his preface that he wished people were not so easily startled. If you are among such people you ought certainly to go twice. The producer has always two choices open to him in such cases. He can employ methods which disconcert at first sight, but when familiar serve his purpose best, or others, not in the end so

serviceable, which on first acquaintance are no so likely to attract disproportionate attention. Mr. Granville Barker chose the first alternative. I am sure (the newspaper criticisms confirm this) that the majority of the audience thought as much about scenery at the Savoy Theatre as ever did an audience at His Majesty's. It was a different kind of scenery, but just as distracting to most people.

When, however, your astonishment at the ormolu fairies, looking as though they had been detached from some fantastic, bristling old clock, no longer distracts, you will perceive that the very characteristics which made them at first so outlandishly arresting now contribute to making them inconspicuous. They group themselves motionless about the stage, and the lovers move past and between them as casually as though they were stocks or stones. It is without effort we believe these quaintly gorgeous, metallic creatures are invisible to human eyes. They, therefore, possess the most important quality of all from the point of view of the story and the action of the play. Dramatically, they are the most convincing fairies yet seen upon the stage. Whether their make-up is the best for making the peculiar poetry of Shakespeare's fairies felt is another question. Personally, I do not think it is.

In this case, as throughout this production, Mr. Granville Barker has chosen to bring out the dramatic quality ot the scene before the poetic one. He seems to have said to himself, "I am staging a work written for the stage. It is my business to look after the drama; the poetry can look after itself." The production is primarily a dramatist's production, not a poet's. You may be thinking, remembering the stuff out of which the play is woven, that this implies a condemnation. As a reader I am with you. I have always enjoyed *A Midsummer Night's*

Dream as a poem, not as a play. What is remarkable about Mr. Granville Barker's production is that it shows as has never been shown before, how dramatic also passages and scenes are which seem to the reader to be entirely lyrical. This is a very considerable achievement. There are consequent losses, and these were what at first I felt most; on a second visit to the Savoy it was the positive achievement which impressed me.

People are always wondering whether it is true or not that first judgments of others are most trustworthy. First impressions of people often seem to tell one most, and yet one finds one is always going back on them afterwards. The truth is we are often aware of the *temperament* of a person we meet for the first time more acutely than we are afterwards aware of it again; his character, intellect, etc., we judge of far better on closer acquaintance, so that those we liked at first we often cease to like, and *vice versa.* If a play can be said to have a temperament, and I don't see why it shouldn't, the temperament of Mr. Granville Barker's production was not one which attracted me; but on nearer acquaintance, as might be the case with a human being, I began to be immensely impressed by admirable qualities.

I missed poetry at all sorts of points. Puck was a shock to me. I kept staring at Mr. Norman Wilkinson's arrangements in green and red and blue and gold and asking myself if each moment were a picture should I like to buy it, and answering emphatically, "No". The scene upon the stage was so absorbing that I did not think of it as a background for acting, and judged it solely on its own merits. But the second time I was not so attentive to it, and began to notice instead that it served excellently as a generalized background against which any sort of figure, Greek, gilded or bucolic, was more or less congruous. I had ceased to wonder if there were

too many silver stars on the curtain of night, or if they were cunningly placed.

I had given up my Puck, a phantom born of reading, a bundle of glorious inconsistencies, and begun to wonder, since he must be materialized on the stage, if Mr. Calthrop were quite so impossible. Puck is at once will-o'-the-wisp, Oberon's jester, and a rowdy imp; he touches Nature on one side, and on the other country superstitions about poltergeists. Mr. Granville Barker has decided, with that peremptoriness which is responsible at once for the merits and the shortcomings of the whole production, that he must be either one or the other, and he has made him a buffoon-sprite. There is nothing of Nature in him, nothing of Ariel, nothing of Loki; he is a clowning bogey. Much of the poetry of Puck is therefore lost. When Puck says, "I'll put a girdle round the earth in a minute", Mr. Calthrop (quite consistently) pronounces these words as a piece of fantastic bombast, and off he struts extravagantly kicking out his feet in a comic swagger. It is true that Puck is a creation of English folk-lore, but he is English folk-lore transmuted by Shakespeare's imagination, and by turning him again into Robin Goodfellow we lose the effects of that wonderful alchemy. On the other hand, all in Puck that is represented in his exclamation "Lord, what fools these mortals be!" that is to say, all that tells dramatically in such situations as the quarrel between Hermia and Helena and the rivalry between the two lovers, was excellently brought out. Whenever the presence of Puck as a spirit of unmalevolent mischief on the scene adds to the piquancy of the situation Mr. Calthrop succeeds. He was very good in this scene, and it was also one of the very best in the performance.

Hermia and Helena (Miss Cowie and Miss Lillah McCarthy) were admirable. Hermia's vin-

dictive, suspicious fury, her gradual transformation into a spiteful little vixen, and the fluttering, frightened indignation of Helena were excellent. The acting revealed more dramatic comedy in the situation than any reader, however imaginative, is likely to feel in it.

Everyone has praised Bottom and his friends. The fussy, nervous, accommodating Quince, the exuberant Bottom, poor timid old Starveling, Snout with his yokel's grin, and Flute with the meek blankness which marks him out for the lady's part, the laconic and cautious Snug—they were perfect.

The performance of Pyramus and Thisbe was the great success of the production; for the first time the presence of an audience, of Theseus and his court, on the stage was a sounding-board for fun. Mr. Dennis Neilson-Terry was a graceful and dignified Oberon. His movements, his stillness were delightful to watch. In some passages his elocution was excellent, but his voice—a fine one in timbre—is not yet completely under his control. He fails when the passage demands rapidity of utterance (just, by the by, where Miss McCarthy as a speaker succeeds most), and there is a curious kind of expression of composed surprise in his voice which often suits the lines ill and becomes monotonous. Miss Silver was a delicious Titania. She spoke her first long speech beautifully, or rather the first part of it, losing her art, it seemed to me, over the description of the floods and frosts, recovering it again in her second speech—and delivering perfectly the lines at the close:

> But she, being mortal, of that boy did die;
> And for her sake do I rear up that boy,
> And for her sake I will not part with him.

SHYLOCKS PAST AND PRESENT

ON RETURNING to England I inquired whose acting was being most admired in London, and I was told that Maurice Moscovitch's acting in the part of Shylock at the Court Theatre had roused the critics into saying enthusiastic things about him. Having missed my colleague's comments I do not know how far my praise falls short of theirs. Perhaps after their comments mine will seem cold; I do not feel coldly about his performance—far from it.

Mr. Maurice Moscovitch is, I am informed, a Russian subject and by birth a Jew. He has surmounted triumphantly the drawback of acting in a foreign tongue; proving himself the best elocutionist in the cast, only keeping a slight accent such as an actor might even assume to stress the difference between Shylock and the Venetians. His birth has given Mr. Moscovitch one huge advantage. His Shylock is a realistic Shylock, and being himself a Jew, instinct prompts him to all those gestures and movements which an actor of another race can only acquire by painstaking mimicry. For deprecating movements of the hands, shrugs, dubious slantings of the head, agitated shakings of the wrists, for a certain pervasive subserviency of manner, for effusiveness in cajolery, for homely expansiveness in joy, for childish abandonment to weeping (poor miserable, puckered face!), for gusto in *schadenfreude*, his Shylock is perfect. Wherever in the list of famous Shylocks you finally decide to place Mr. Moscovitch, this is certain—he is "damned good to steal from".

But I have got much more praise to give than that (see lower down). What I have said would be consistent with his having played Shylock as a little Yiddish pawnbroker, who at painful moments might squirm his way into our sympathies and at triumphant ones wake in us a desire to stamp on him. Shylock has been played like that; the text will stand it. And if then in the trial scene Portia is given a false beard and paunch, and Jessica is played as more of a sly hussy (the text will support this interpretation, too) than even Miss Nesbitt makes her, the play can be a great deal better pulled together than the Court Theatre company succeeds in doing. Their performance, however, aims at something better, but it is dreadfully out of gear. Very little imagination has been spent on the production. Mr. Fagan does not seem to have made up his mind what the total effect of the play is to be; what dominant mood should be sustained in us by it. He has merely trusted Shakespeare to muddle through to some kind of emotional result: "We'll say all the words and go on and off when Shakespeare tells us and accompany the words with more or less expected gestures, and then the glory of his creative imagination will shine upon you." Ah, if it were only as simple as that!

In conducting an orchestral symphony, it is not sufficient to see that the flutes come in at the right places, and the fiddles and trombones at theirs, and that the performers play the notes written down for them; the parts have to be blended. The composition must be interpreted. The conductor must carry the whole of it in his head, and according to his interpretation he will modify the prominence of this passage, or bring out the quality of that instrument at such and such a moment, knowing in each case it will effect the emotional value of what is past and to come. He may not be able to define what he wants

to convey, or know why this or that stress is important, but he feels that it is so. He has an emotional conception of the whole and in proportion to the fineness, sureness, and richness of that conception so (setting aside their varying skill) will the playing of the individual musicians be good.

The parallel between a symphony and a piece like *The Merchant of Venice* is close. The producer has to decide how much realism in the acting is needed in this scene, how subordinate realism must be in that; when the audience is glad to forget that all this is happening in Venice or anywhere on earth, when they must be sharply reminded again of time and place; how rampant the fun should be, not only judging it as though it were an independent comic turn, but from the point of view of its being also a transition to something else. Does it matter if Gobbo kills the casket scene when he enters? Shall we be reminded by Jessica's voice, when she speaks from the window, that she is a wily, caressing little runaway, capable of stealing her dead mother's ring from her father and exchanging it for a monkey, or is that side of her character better kept out of sight until it is wanted to bring out the pathos of Shylock? Or shall we hear first and last only the voice of a beautiful girl in love? How sympathetic is Shylock himself to be? How unreal are the Venetian gallants to appear? How simple and young or how unfeeling? How like fairyland is Portia's palace to be? How like a real court of justice the Trial Scene?

I can imagine many people, and I am tempted to include Mr. Fagan among them, saying: "But Shakespeare himself has decided all these questions; he was the greatest of dramatists; we need only read the play and go straight along." The answers may be in the written book, but it is not easy to find them. Every speech which advances a plot, or creates atmosphere or expresses character is a many-

faceted thing. Take by itself a passage or dialogue—its largest facet may be obvious; but when you come to put it in its setting, it by no means follows that the strongest beam of light should flash at that moment from that facet. I have been drawn into making these remarks because great as the pleasure is which the company at the Court Theatre have lately given to an unexacting public, they would give a great deal more if attention were directed to this side of their art.

By an irony of fate, the element in their performance (namely, the acting of Mr. Maurice Moscovitch) which makes it worth seeing, explodes the whole play as they act it. His Shylock is a piece of dignified realism introduced among the tame, histrionic conventions of the stock Shakespearean touring company. No one will blame Mr. Fagan for allowing an actor of Mr. Moscovitch's talent a free hand, but no array of terms can express the reprobation he deserves as a producer for not bringing the acting of the others into some sort of harmony with him. One adjective will suggest the quality of Mr. Moscovitch's Shylock; it is Rembrandtesque. Imagine, then, the æsthetic effect of a figure by Rembrandt introduced into a Maclise illustration of Shakespeare! His Shylock reminds one of those old Jews Rembrandt was fond of painting, of the dramatic realism of their poses, their picturesqueness, their dignity, and of the passion which smoulders in their dark, impersonal eyes. I do not myself believe that a Rembrandtesque Shylock is consistent with the finest production of *The Merchant of Venice* conceivable. To continue to use painting as an indication of a possible presentment of character, the quality which a Tintoretto figure possesses would blend better the stormy, tragic human elements of the play with the unreality, suavity, gaiety, and tenderness of the rest.

Until the ugly loud-voiced Irishman, Macklin, persuaded "Lun" Rich to try him in the part at Covent Garden in 1725, Shylock was never played realistically. The immediate effect was tremendous. Macklin's performance kept George II awake all night and moved Pope to compose a couplet which on internal evidence no one would attribute to him. If he could see Mr. Moscovitch perhaps he would exclaim again:

> This is the Jew
> That Shakespeare drew.

Macready made Shylock (according to George Lewis) into "an abject, sordid, irritable, argumentative Jew"; he did not show him as a vindictive man whose vengeance is a retribution of wrongs to his sacred nation and himself, nor did his acting bring out that passionate passage (so necessary to the pathos) in which Shylock refers to his dead Leah. In both these respects M. Moscovitch was certainly admirable. Irving's Shylock, as some readers will remember, was extremely dignified and full of that vivid unreality which Irving infused into all his successful parts. His Shylock turned the Venetians into "a wilderness of monkeys". Baited, betrayed, forlorn, implacable, Irving's Shylock was so dignified and pathetic that it made nonsense of the play; yet in itself it was a beautiful performance. Mr. Moscovitch does not attain to that imaginative dignity; yet dignified he is—except in his exit in a sort of convulsion from the Trial Scene, half supported by Tubal. During the trial itself he has moments of true dignity; but the physical and moral collapse should come before, not after his last words:

> I pray you, give me leave to go from hence;
> I am not well: send the deed after me,
> And I will sign.

This is important not only from the point of view of Shylock's character (for life has taught him resignation as well as cruelty), but as a means of modulating the scene into another key. It is a hopeless task to attempt to make the whole Trial Scene realistic. The only performance I have seen in which it seemed credible that a pound of flesh was actually going to be cut from a man's breast before our eyes was a Japanese version of the play, which Sada Yacco and Kawakami brought over here nearly twenty years ago. After the Portia speeches, Kawakami, as the Shylock of the piece, made faces like a man who has swallowed bitter medicine. In their acting the emphasis on the physical was extraordinary.

Where Mr. Moscovitch excelled and other Shylocks have fallen short of him, was in exhibiting in the Jew a lurking doubt that Justice will be done him; a doubt which makes him all the more resolutely implacable. Shylock's contempt for Antonio as a sentimentalist, a plunger, a bad merchant and a Christian was splendidly brought out. And a still subtler point he marked with extraordinary skill. Shylock's hatred is not a wild passion, it is a tamed passion; it is caged within another—a passion for legality. When the law will not allow him to be revenged, we feel he will not attempt to satisfy his revenge by violence—as Antonio might do. In the manner in which Mr. Moscovitch made the word bond, "my bond, my bond", echo through the whole play, was expressed the longing for security of an oppressed people to whom the law is the only, but by no means certain, refuge. The sound of his voice at those moments will linger in my memory. His Shylock had the first quality it should possess; he was passionate in hate, in business, in family and race-feeling, in revenge and in despair.

OTHELLO

I HAVE been reading Tolstoy on Shakespeare. Nearly all his criticisms are well founded, yet his conclusion is hopelessly wrong. When Tolstoy says that Shakespeare spoilt the old story about the Moor, who murdered his innocent wife from jealousy, what he says is part true, and, oddly enough, though in a very different spirit, Swinburne agrees with him.

Tolstoy says that Iago in Cinthio's story is an intelligible character, while Shakespeare's Iago is quite unreal. He says that in the old romance there is a simple clear motive behind Iago's machinations, for his passion for Desdemona turned to hatred when she repulsed him and preferred the Moor. In this story, Iago steals the handkerchief, and Cassio, finding it in his room and knowing it to be Desdemona's, tries to return it, but, meeting with Othello, he runs away, thereby confirming more naturally and forcibly the suspicions which Iago has already sown in Othello's mind.

Swinburne recognizes that the dropping of the fatal handkerchief and Emilia's, "I am glad I have found this napkin", are devices less moving and impressive than the contrivance by which Cinthio makes it fall into Iago's hands. In the old story, Iago had a little girl of whom Desdemona was very fond, and once, while she had taken the child upon her lap, the villain twitched it from her girdle. "No reader of this terribly beautiful passage can fail to ask himself why Shakespeare forbore to make use of it. The substituted incident is as much less probable

as it is less tragic." But, of course, Swinburne finds an explanation: "There is but one; but it is all-sufficient. In Shakespeare's world, as in Nature's, it is impossible that monsters should propagate: that Iago should beget, or that Goneril or Regan should bring forth."

This is a good example of the spirit in which the most famous critics have explained away the blemishes they could not but see in Shakespeare's work, and Coleridge's praise of Iago's speech, in which he expounds his intentions, as "the motive hunting of motiveless malignity", is another, though a less glaring example, of the same infatuated determination to see perfection in carelessness, and subtle profundities in plain contradictions, where the work of the master poet, the enchanter, is concerned. Yet who doubts that Swinburne's estimate of Shakespeare, though he praises him as though he were a god and not a man, is nearer truth than Tolstoy's?

Tolstoy thought the world was under a gross delusion with regard to Shakespeare, because he judged him from the point of view of a realistic, religious writer, from which he rightly found Shakespeare's plots and characters full of inconsistencies and improbabilities and often far from lifelike. He constantly complains of the bombastic, inflated, affected language in which all the characters express themselves. Would a man, he asks, suffering from grief and remorse and intending to kill himself, make phrases about his services and pearls, and about his eyes dropping tears "as fast as the Arabian trees their medicinal gum"? It is absurd and disgustingly unnatural. Tolstoy has not felt the magic of Shakespeare's marvellous language; that is to say, he has missed his essential quality. On the level from which he judges him the faults he finds are usually there, though reaction against Shakespeare's reputation sometimes makes him, even on the level

of psychology, unfair to him; but his book is a wholesome corrective to critics who are swept away by the beauty of poetry into attributing to Shakespeare all the merits a realistic writer can possess.

If a critic proceeds to assert that Shakespeare's character-drawing is always true, subtle and profound, Tolstoy has him on the hip; and if Shakespearean actors act their parts as though the poetry were not the very soul of the play, their performance, unless seen with eyes blinded by prejudice, will not be the exhibition of a world's masterpiece. If the poetry of *Othello* is not felt, the play becomes an energetic, brutal, rather senseless melodrama, open to the most damaging criticism. All that we are then aware of, thanks to having read the play, is that behind the horrors and improbabilities something very wonderful and strange is going on.

The performance of *Othello* at the Court Theatre does not achieve much more than that. I found myself continually criticizing it from the realistic level. One reason why Shakespeare is so hard to act, is that up to a certain point parts like Othello and Iago and Desdemona are actor-proof. They cannot fail to make some kind of vivid impression, though that impression may not be æsthetically or intellectually worth much. The advantage of Mr. Poel's archæological method of Shakespearean production is that it prevents the spectator taking the realistic point of view, and leaves the poetry a fairer field. There are other even better ways of achieving this. The fundamental objection to the performance at the Court is that it does not attempt them.

On the realistic plane *Othello* is not over-acted but it is under-felt. Mr. Godfrey Tearle has dignity, and he has presence, but he does not communicate passion. His facial expression and pose are often excellent, especially in those passages when Othello is beginning to be uneasy. Miss Madge Titheradge's

Desdemona is colourless, painstaking and merely meek; her acting falls as short of real pathos as Othello's does of real passion; Mr. Basil Rathbone's Iago inclines to the cat-like, wicked-grinning, demon-detective tradition; Mr. Cowley's Roderigo is too much the gaby. Roderigo is a tragi-comic figure; the comedy of the scenes between him and Iago is more delicate than appeared at the Court Theatre. Roderigo is an ass, but he should be an ass with the carriage of a *galantuomo*, a man with a show of martial impetuosity which, it is true, it is easy to dash or divert. Mr. Cowley plays him as a yokel with a modest poke and hanging underlip, whom no one could imagine so hot in pursuit of Desdemona that he is prepared to sell all he has and attempt murder to get her. Mr. Cellier plays Cassio without finish. A half-articulate, but most sensitive, baffled loyalty is the essence of the part.

Cassio, the friend, is even more pained at losing Othello's trust and friendship than his post; here lies the strength of his appeal to Desdemona. His ruling passion is the one human passion of which Iago, with all his insight into human nature, has no inkling: the desire to serve where he loves and serve disinterestedly. These are the points to bring out. In Cassio, Othello had precisely the kind of friend he *thought* he had in Iago; that is to say, a man in whose affection and honest intentions he could for ever trust. In this Othello and Cassio were alike, that in friendship both were unsuspicious. But where woman is concerned, to say that Othello was not a jealous man is fantastic. Yet critics as fine as Coleridge have said it. Coleridge, indeed, denies that Othello killed Desdemona in jealousy. He accepts Desdemona's word that such a passion was contrary to Othello's nature, and Othello's description of himself as "one not easily jealous, but being wrought, perplexed in the extreme", as true statements,

and he proceeds to contrast Othello with Leontes and Posthumus, both frank studies in the green-eyed passion. As a matter of fact, Othello himself is entirely mastered by it, and, as Mr. Frank Harris points out, being jealous, he is, like Leontes and Posthumus, nothing if not sensual. He is driven to the verge of madness by it, and Iago's words which call up an image of Desdemona in the arms of Cassio throw him into a fit. (The fit was omitted at the Court, perhaps wisely, for Mr. Tearle, while he was excellent when Othello was master of himself, and a dignified soldier, could not forget himself in fury, let alone work up to that convulsive climax.) The greater part of the play, indeed, is the exhibition of the frenzies of jealousy. Othello, when he examines Desdemona's hand, and comments on its moist warmth, is seething with the rage of a Leontes at "paddling palms and pinching fingers". His exclamations, "Damn her, lewd minx, O damn her!" and that wonderful

> O thou weed
> Who art so lovely fair, and smell'st so sweet
> That the sense aches at thee—would thou hadst never been born

are more revealing of his temperament than the lines:

> It is the cause, it is the cause, my soul.

And:

> Yet she must die, else she'll betray more men.

One need not be an Iago to see in those lines the working of passion to find a moral justification for itself. Had his agony throughout the play been that

of the judge who finds he must condemn his dearest, would he have been so blind? One has only to put the question to one's self to see how absurd it is to deny that Othello is consumed with that most extreme jealousy which has its roots in the body.

Of the two sides of Othello's character there is no doubt which Mr. Tearle did best. He had not savagery enough for the fiery sensual Moorish side. When he struck Desdemona in the face you felt no thrill of horror. There are some passages within his compass the delivery of which a little care would improve. Mr. Tearle spoke the lines:

> Excellent wretch. . . .
> And when I love thee not—chaos is come again

as though he were saying, "When I cease to love you the end of the world will have come", instead of speaking them as though they were the expression of the agonised confusion of his spirit when he hates her. The line should be broken by a desperate gesture. There should be a radiant impulsiveness too in his manner when he greets Desdemona on landing in Cyprus after the storm:

> O my soul's joy!
> If after every tempest came such calms,
> May the winds blow till they have wakened death!
> . . . If it were now to die,
> 'Twere now to be most happy.

This is the first deep glimpse we get into Othello's vehement, emotional nature. Mr. Tearle was too aloof and calm here. It is extremely difficult to retain a musical quality of voice when delivering tirades of overwhelming passion. To say that Mr. Tearle failed in this is merely to say that he is not one of the most gifted Shakespearean actors of all

time. His facial expression, which was admirable while Iago was dropping his poison in his ear, was not terrible enough when he stood in the last scene beside the curtain of Desdemona's bed, and his voice should sound more ominous when he asks her if she has said her prayers.

As for the cuts (they are always regrettable, except the scene between Desdemona and the clown, which can well be spared), there were only two which were serious mistakes—granted that the culmination of Othello's fury was wisely left unattempted—namely, Iago's soliloquy, which explains his motive for murdering Roderigo, and the omission of Shakespeare's ending, which informs us of what is in store for Iago. His last words:

> Demand me nothing: what you know, you know:
> From this time forth I never will speak word

should make an impression of dauntless contempt and will, against which torture is futile. Mr. Rathbone did not deliver them so as to convince us that they were indeed the last words that Iago would ever speak. Shakespeare founded the character of Iago on Cinthio's description of him as "who had the wickedest nature that ever man had in the world". He is not a real figure except in a poetic world, and therefore almost impossible to act realistically. In that world he is tremendous. Perhaps the best compromise in such a performance as we see at the Court Theatre would be to represent him as a bluff Bismarckian type. It was inconceivable that anyone should call Mr. Rathbone "honest Iago".

*SHAKESPEAREAN CRITICISM**

DE QUINCEY in his essay "On the Knocking at the Gate in Macbeth" thus apostrophizes Shakespeare: "Oh, mighty poet! Thy works are not as those of men, simple and merely great works of art, but are also like the phenomena of Nature, like the sun and the sea, the stars and the flowers; like frost and snow, rain and dew, hailstorm and thunder, which are to be studied with entire submission of our own faculties, and in perfect faith that in them there can be no too much or too little, nothing useless or inert—but that, the further we press in our discoveries the more we shall see proofs of design and self-supporting arrangement where the careless eye had seen nothing but accident!"

The passage is characteristic of a phase of Sheakespearean criticism which came in with the romantic movement at the beginning of the nineteenth century and only at the very end of it began to thin away. That Shakespeare can be profitably studied only "with entire submission of our own faculties" is a notion which still unconsciously influences nearly all critics, except those who are either remarkable for not possessing a bump of reverence, or are preachers of a morality which is offended by his royalism and epicureanism. The aim of criticism has been to show, since Shakespeare could not err, that apparent defects are really subtle merits, and as much ingenuity has been expended upon this task as upon defending Holy Writ.

The influence of what may be described as the

* *Character Problems in Shakespeare's Plays.* By L. L. Schücking. Harrap. 10s. 6d.

De Quincey attitude towards Shakespeare still appears in the self-consciousness of those who point out defects, and in the inclination of the reading public to regard all such demonstrations either, mercifully, as paradoxes, or, more unkindly, as attempts at self-advertisement on the part of the would-be clever.

Mr. Bernard Shaw, when he first pointed out the limitations of Shakespeare's understanding of life, was subjected to both charges; Mr. Frank Harris's remarkable study, *Shakespeare the Man*, never received the respect it deserved, because "the man" he discovered behind the plays was too fallible and human. I am ignorant of recent German Shakespearean criticism, but I expect that the tradition of Gervinus is still strong enough in Germany to have prepared an unfriendly reception for Rümelin's *Shakespeare-Studien eines Realisten*, or more recently for Professor Schücking's *Character Problems in Shakespeare's Plays*.

Coleridge, though the pardon and marriage of Angelo at the end of *Measure for Measure* moved him to a cry of protest, took up fundamentally the same attitude as De Quincey, and discussed the characters in the plays as though they were "phenomena of Nature". Finding, for example, Iago's account of his own motives utterly insufficient, Coleridge decides that Iago's soliloquy is an example of "the motive-hunting of a motiveless malignity". "How awful it is!" he exclaims. "Yea, whilst he is still allowed to bear the divine image, it is too fiendish for his own steady view—for the lonely gaze of a being next to devil, and only not quite devil—and yet a character which Shakespeare has attempted and executed, without disgust and without scandal!" A comment which implies that Shakespeare had a deep purpose in supplying Iago with inadequate motives.

Professor Schücking's book is a remarkable one. It may be crabbed, but in the end it will be cribbed. It will be a death blow to subjective Shakespearean criticism which aims at finding the most beautiful, and incidentally the most modern, interpretation, regardless whether or not that is also the most probable one. His book offers a method to Shakespearean exegesis:

> Shakespearean exegesis has hitherto started almost exclusively with the most advanced side of his art, and has sought to judge all the rest from this. But Shakespeare's art-form is in fact a mixture of the most highly developed with quite primitive elements: on one side an inexpressible delicacy and subtlety in the portraiture of the soul, on the other aids and props to the understanding of the most antiquated description, as well as elements in the plot uncritically adopted and never properly fused into the play of character. . . . An historical understanding of Shakespeare is to be reached only by taking him much more literally than we have been wont to do, his art as more naïve, his methods as frequently far more primitive.

The question which Professor Schücking always asks himself first is, What was the probable attitude of Shakespeare's contemporaries towards incidents and passages in the plays which either perplex or disappoint the modern reader?

The popular theatre for which Shakespeare wrote arose out of an anonymous obscurity, like that from which the cinematograph is just beginning to emerge to-day. He appears to have been most reluctant to relinquish the old popular features; the bloody head, the Clown whose jokes and discourses interrupt his tragedies and are filled with allusions to contemporary events which have no bearing on the play (*cf.* the doorkeeper's jokes about the trial of the Jesuit Garnet in *Macbeth*). The better educated part of the audience probably despised the laughter raised by the gravedigger's reference in *Hamlet* to a

well-known pub, just as Ben Jonson despised Shakespeare's anachronisms. Professor Schücking shows how many things become clear when it is remembered that Shakespeare wrote for a naïve audience.

Modern drama presupposes that no spectators are present; Shakespeare's stage was surrounded by them on three sides; dramatic devices which to us seem clumsy, to them seemed natural. The relation between actors and audience was utterly different. The monologue was a means of explaining the character to the audience; it was not an attempt at psychological realism. Thus we often find Shakespeare's characters expressing frankly harsh views of themselves. Iago calls himself a villain, Lady Macbeth calls her intentions "fell", her actions "cruelty", Edmund tells us he is "rough and lecherous", Cloten recounts the scoundrel orders he has given. His good characters expound themselves in a similar manner; Cordelia describes herself in language only natural in the vain, yet vain she is not meant to be; Brutus asserts that it is an honour to be slain by a man so fine as he (V. I. 59), yet he is not meant to be a boaster; Cæsar expatiates on his greatness to such a pitch that it is difficult for a modern actor not to make him a braggart, and Brandes has even asserted that that is the character Shakespeare intended him to possess!

But Iago and Cloten are not to be taken as cynics because they describe their behaviour as "knavery" or "villainy". These speeches are not realism but indications to the audience how these characters are to be judged. They resemble those scrolls which in primitive pictures proceed out of the mouths of figures in them, inscribed with the legend: "I am, etc." And from this follows an important critical principle, that "if we wish to know how the author himself wants us to understand his characters, we must in every case look closely at what they say

about themselves, and we ought to take these utterances far more seriously, and see in them a more direct expression of their author's intentions than our modern dramatic technique would allow us to do".

Equally striking is the way in which Shakespeare makes his villains do justice to the nobility of their victims. Oliver, who tries to murder his brother, and even seeks to burn him alive, speaks of Orlando as "full of noble desire, of all sorts enchantingly beloved"; Edmund praises Edgar; Iago, though he suspects Othello of seducing his wife, says that the Moor is of "a constant, loving, noble nature"; Macbeth speaks of Banquo's "royalty of nature", and with great admiration of him. "We see clearly that the villains in Shakespeare are not allowed to appear as honest characters even in their own eyes, and that the noble characters must be noble even in the eyes of their wicked enemies." Shakespeare's art swings perpetually "between an advanced realism, unfettered by tradition, which allows characters instinctively conceived to work out their relations in unrestricted liberty", and this submission to traditional practice which ignores the facts of life and character. One of the main principles of Shakespearean exegesis must therefore be to take literally, as mere plain statements, what the characters say about themselves and each other, and to avoid interpreting these comments as though the utterance of them threw subtle sidelights on the speaker's own character.

We must avoid that mistake also in the case of the "set speeches" which were delivered at the audience from the apron stage, such as Polonius's farewell speech to Laertes, which, by its ripe wisdom and dignity, has given critics much unnecessary trouble, as being inconsistent with the old man's "plentiful lack of wit". Shakespeare is indifferent

to breaking the unity of character on such occasions, and on others he is capable of exchanging the point of view of the speaker for that of the audience. "Done like a Frenchman: turn and turn again", Joan of Arc exclaims in an aside, which expresses an English rather than a French view of the French character. "Acting out of character was perfectly familiar to the dramatic art of the time."

There is no doubt that Shakespearean drama still bears distinct traces of its primitive origins; its principal aim was to achieve the greatest possible episodic intensity. The subordination of parts to a comprehensive dramatic idea is a criterion which was imposed in the following period under the influence of the classics, and Shakespeare's art is still half-mediæval. When Shakespeare made Hamlet, after speaking with his father's ghost, refer to

> The undiscovered country from whose bourne
> No traveller returns,

or the childless Lady Macbeth say,

> I have given suck and know
> How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me,

he never dreamt that he would set critics explaining away these contradictions. The amount of subtle speculation which has been wasted upon discrepancies in his character-drawing is appalling. Goethe was right when he said to Eckermann: "The poet on every occasion makes his characters say what is effective, right and appropriate to the situation, without troubling overmuch to reflect whether the words may not possibly come into apparent conflict with some other passage."

Another cause of the disagreements between

character and motive, in which Shakespeare's interpreters have sought for hidden meanings, is that Shakespeare usually borrowed his plots, or took his stories from someone else, while he developed the emotional life of his characters to a pitch far beyond what was consonant with the crude or ramshackle framework of the action. As Professor Schücking says: "It is a necessary aspect of the emotional trend of his creative activity which makes him inclined at all times to build impulsively at once in marble . . . rather than to spend a lot of time over the dry calculations of a ground-plan and the erection of a scaffolding. Therefore, he is apt to hold on to a motive which he has once found, and generally manages—at least in *King Lear*, though hardly in the very monotonous *Love's Labour's Lost*—to make a virtue of necessity."

Professor Schücking's book is not a book of æsthetic criticism, but it is of the first importance in clearing the ground for true appreciation. This is the conclusion which it most clearly and entertainingly brings home to us: in spite of all appearances to the contrary, Shakespeare's art remains the art of clear and precise statements; it abounds in primitive methods, and we must understand these methods if we are to grasp what he actually wanted to convey to his audience.

The less complicated and the more natural, therefore, the solution of the difficulties we attempt, the more we endeavour to make the given ideas suffice for an explanation, the fewer the unexpressed ideas we introduce, the greater is the probability that we shall hit upon the correct meaning—that is to say, the meaning intended by Shakespeare himself. We are justified, as a rule, in adding a motive only when no sense results without it. And whether a sense results must be ascertained from the point of view not of our time but of the Elizabethan age and in connection with the whole of Shakespeare's dramatic activity. Here the necessity of literary research comes in.

CYMBELINE AND OTHER PLAYS

ON TWO consecutive evenings in one week I have been disappointed by Chesterton and Shaw and badly let down by William Shakespeare. On Tuesday *Magic* and *The Dark Lady of the Sonnets* were revived at the Kingsway Theatre, and on Wednesday at the New Theatre (I believe one never speaks of Shakespeare being "revived") *Cymbeline* was subjected to the latest methods of artificial respiration. I have criticized both the first two plays at considerable length and with some severity, so I will content myself now with a word or two upon the performances. Both plays require adroit production; they did not get it. Mr. Chesterton's *Magic* wants continual care if its amateurishness is not to spoil its effects. There are some delightful moments of dialogue in it and one delightful new character—the Duke. Unfortunately, Mr. Brember Wills represented the Duke as a languid, drooping half-wit, while it is in an absurdly good-natured, hazy exuberance that the comedy of the part lies.

I believe Mr. Harcourt Williams, who took the principal parts in both plays, is responsible for the production. This is a mistake. It is almost impossible for an actor who is on the stage most of the time to judge general effects. For example, in *The Dark Lady* Queen Elizabeth enters with a speech about cosmetics, a freckle on her hand which they fail to remove, and the decapitation of Mary, who, she is surprised, had so much blood in her. The soliloquy, in which phrases from Lady Macbeth's sleep-walking scene occur and are duly noted by the

poet for future use, is incomprehensible unless the audience realizes that Elizabeth, too, is walking and talking in her sleep. Miss Haideé Wright who was certainly the best of the quartet, failed to convey at once this impression. Had the producer been looking on he would have seen this instantly. The part of William Shakespeare, which is a monotonous one, requires a mercurial alertness to be tolerable. Mr. Harcourt Williams is lacking in grace of pose and in swiftness; embarrassment he can convey by attitudes and intonations, but in quick recovery and airiness, the two essential qualities in Mr. Shaw's interpretation of the poet's character, he noticeably fails. The joke of Shakespeare finding his happiest cadences in the casual speech of others and being compelled to write their words down at once, owing to a deficient memory, wearies after the third repetition, unless the actor can impart each time fresh business to vary the incident. Mr. Harcourt Williams did not come to the rescue here.

Cymbeline is one of the plays which give me personally most literary pleasure. There is in it an exquisite spontaneous adroitness in phrasing and cadence such as Shakespeare never excelled. The mountain scene is more magical than the scenes in the forest of Arden to the reader; the lovely clearness and simpleness of Imogen's character far superior to Desdemona's who is her counterpart; the magnificence of Iachimo's speech when he steals the bracelet and looks upon her sleeping; the numberless unemphatic yet perfect lines; the touches of unconscious sublimity such as Imogen's exclamation when she hears from Iachimo the details which must wound her most deeply, "My Lord, I fear, has forgot Britain", make such an impression upon the reader that he is not surprised to find Swinburne reserving *Cymbeline* as the play of plays to receive at the end of his long pæan the last salute of his love.

"The pathos in *Cymbeline*", says Hazlitt, "is not violent or tragical, but of the most pleasing and amiable kind. A certain tender love o'erspreads the whole." It does for the *reader*. But these aerial charms exhale from an untidy, artificial, absurd story, the machinery of which grinds and creaks with an intolerable insistence on the stage. The most delicate poetry is everywhere mixed with situations worthy of "Savonarola Brown"; and on the stage the aroma of Mr. Crummles' sawdust and orange-peel overpowers all the perfumes of Arabia. The audience is tempted to think Voltaire and Rymer must be after all the best Shakespearean critics! The contradictory qualities of the play seem summarized in the splendour and failure of that famous instant when Imogen after having been knocked down, embraces Posthumus:

> Think that you are upon a rock; and now
> Throw me again,

she exclaims (a line so meaningless that it has been suspected of corruption). "Hang there like fruit, my soul, till the tree die", he answers; and never did passion and tenderness find more perfect expression in a single cry.

There are passages in *Cymbeline* which are perfect examples in the art of sinking. Even the producer, who spared us few of them at the New Theatre, could not persuade Miss Thorndike to speak the whole of Imogen's speech when she discovers the headless body of Posthumus (as she thinks) by her side:

> Damn'd Pisanio,
> From this most bravest vessel of the world,
> Struck the main top! O Posthumus! alas!
> Where is thy head? Where's that? Ay me!
> Where's that?

Could any Shake-scene fall flatter?

It was not therefore entirely the fault of the actors at the New Theatre that we were woefully disappointed, though they often rubbed the bad points in. Miss Thorndike's mannerisms are irritating to me; that habit she has of sailing about with too rapid strides, holding out a bent arm from her shoulder; that perpetual lowering and then raising of her voice at the end of a sentence, which often destroys the verse, and over and above that suggests a false note, reminiscent of the business-like alacrity of a kind governess setting down her little pupils to their morning tasks. She lacks dignity, passivity and warmth, as Imogen; and this lack of dignity is most noticeable whenever her part requires her to be gay. Her finest moment was the moment when Iachimo suddenly makes violent advances; her revulsion, horror and surprise were admirable. I am inclined to think that Miss Thorndike has too strong a sense of personal dignity to simulate dignity effectively on the stage, just as a real gentleman or lady is often the worst hand at representing themselves. Mr. Farquharson's Iachimo and Mr. Bould's Pisanio were the most satisfactory parts. The former was particularly good in his quarrel and wager with Posthumus and his wooing of Imogen. In the bedroom scene he should be more economical of gesture and movement. It is to a voice in the darkness we ought to attend—grave, sinister, meditative. The stiller he is until he bends over the sleeping Imogen the better.

The mechanics were clever, though on the first night there was one hitch. But the geological strata in the mountain scene were absurd and some of the dresses excessively ugly.

THE NEW HAMLET

HAMLET is a part in which it is very difficult to triumph and easy to avoid complete failure. The character is woven of so many strands that it is capable of various readings; hence its perennial attraction to actors interested in their art. The play itself, too, has different threads of interest running through it, and being too long in its perfect folio form for representation, it has to be cut.

Modern stage versions ignore the story and concentrate upon the character of Hamlet.

Mr John Barrymore's first night was a formidable ordeal for him. He struck me as a sympathetic personality, not a dominating one, and only to an actor with a dominating personality are such occasions spurs. Some of the best points in his performance confirmed that impression. It was in the passages of friendly tenderness and in those moods when Hamlet feels most the lack of sympathy that he excelled. Excellently as he spoke Hamlet's speech of almost feminine effusiveness to Horatio,

> Since my dear soul was mistress of her choice
> And could of men distinguish, her election
> Hath seal'd thee for herself,

it was still more his manner of breaking off with half-reluctant shyness—"Something too much of this"—that showed most clearly the kind of moments at which his temperament would never fail him on the stage. Though he moved with graceful

agility, in retrospect I see him at his best when seated; seated, and fingering his "inky cloak" while the King and Queen endeavour to persuade him to put off that all-too-pointed mourning; seated alone upon the stage and falling into the famous meditation upon suicide ("To be, or not to be", he delivered well, except for one gust of unnecessary emphasis at the words "bare bodkin"); seated beside Ophelia's grave, with Yorick's skull between his hands, and speaking perfectly with measured and quaint melancholy the great prose passage, only failing to render as perfectly the flight of bitter philosophic fantasy which breaks it off.

> Imperious Cæsar, dead and turned to clay,
> Might stop a hole to keep the wind away, &c.,

should not, to my mind's ear, be spoken ruthfully but wildly and with excited gaiety. Indeed, where Mr Barrymore's interpretation failed was in conveying Hamlet's bitter-gay, intellectual exhilaration, which is the desperate reaction of a thinking sensitive nature against life's humiliations and the depravity of man. Hamlet's neurotic condition—another note in the complicated chord of his character—he did strike. Indeed, in Hamlet's relation to his mother he struck it too hard, so that the scene between Hamlet and his mother took on a Freudian significance. This is a mistake and artistically uninteresting. Hamlet's habit of dwelling in words of hideous emphasis on what most revolts him in his mother's marriage is only part of that general morbid horror of procreation and the physical side of life, which shows so harshly in his treatment of Ophelia, and in the passages (cut in this performance) in which Hamlet jests about the body of Polonius. To turn, therefore, in that scene with his mother, the green light of the Ghost upon Hamlet's

face before it appears, to hold her frantically embraced, to speak as during a neurotic trance the lines:

> Nay, but to live
> In the rank sweat of an enseamèd bed,
> Stew'd in corruption, honeying and making love
> Over the nasty sty,

is to degrade the scene ("Angels and ministers of grace defend us!") into a psycho-analytic demonstration and even to suggest that "the Ghost" is after all a projection of an "Œdipus complex"! Mr Barrymore acted it with marvellous energy, but this emphasis is wrong, artistically wrong. Hamlet's behaviour must be distracted to the last degree, but I see no justification for the clutching, frantic physical tenderness which Mr Barrymore exhibits towards his mother. In the first quarto (every actor should consult the quartos for lights upon Shakespearean parts) the Queen, in giving an account of it, says: "He throws and tosses me about." Ruthless harshness must predominate and Hamlet as "scourge and minister" should not, weeping, hug his mother in his arms. It is true that the interest of Hamlet's character depends on "that within which passeth show", and though morbid psychology is part of what is within, Hamlet's "noble mind", should engage far more attention.

One little gesture of Mr Barrymore's in the scene with Ophelia showed how inclined he was to lose sight of the intellectual Hamlet. When he spoke those words of self-disgust, "What should such fellows as I do crawling between earth and heaven", he paused after the word "earth", and, by surrounding Ophelia's face with his hands and lowering his voice to a tone of longing tenderness, conveyed that *she* was "Heaven". This was to nar-

row the scope of Hamlet's tragic sense of life, repeatedly expressed in passionate soliloquies.

I have never seen a Hamlet who played this scene with Ophelia as it acts itself in the theatre of the attentive reader's mind. "Love! his affections do not that way tend", exclaims the King, emerging from concealment. He would never have said that had he been spying on our stage-Hamlets. Tree used to return to kiss the tresses of the prostrate Ophelia; Kean, it is said, used to play the scene as though Hamlet were counterfeiting brutality in order to conceal the tenderest passion; Wilkes, so Davis says, "preserved the feelings of a lover and the delicacy of a gentleman". Mr Barrymore let his voice tremble to a sob, when he told Ophelia that "he did love her once". It may be traditional, but it is a bad tradition; Hamlet was no lover. Polonius was nearer the truth when he warned his daughter that the Prince's vows were "springes to catch woodcocks", than he was when he exclaimed "this is the very ecstasy of love!" Hamlet's outranting of Laertes by the grave is not the expression of passionate love-grief. It is an outburst of hysterical fury in a man suffering, for a hundred reasons, at the sight of an histrionic display of grief in another. He apologizes for that outburst later: "I'll court his favours," he says, "but, sure, the bravery of his grief did put me in a towering passion." How poor, too, and trite is Hamlet's love-letter to Ophelia compared with his devotion to Horatio! Hamlet was no lover.

An actor could find a clue for playing the Ophelia-scene by recalling Byron's last letter to Caroline Lamb: rage to have done with it, suspicion that she is on the side of his enemies, resentment that life, which had already laid intolerable burdens on him, has also now involved him in "an affair" from which he cannot extricate himself—O cursed

spite!—without inflicting torture and self-reproach. Self-reproach is there, even remorse; but it is the kind of remorse which quickly turns to railing, finding relief from itself in lashing "woman". There is a great deal of Byron in Hamlet, or, if you like, of Hamlet in Byron. Stupendous creation as the character of Hamlet is, we must not forget that it follows closely a conventional contemporary pattern, even down to dress and mannerisms. Hamlet is "The Melancholy Man", whom Sir Thomas Overbury has described in his *Characters*, who appears as Lord Dowsecer in Chapman's *A Humerous Day's Mirth*, as Hieronimo in *The Spanish Tragedy* and elsewhere. He was a Byronic type. "The Melancholy Man" was a cultured, aristocratic pessimist, castigating the vanities and vices of men, brooding, self-critical, excitable, weak, above all ostentatious of his difference from other men and proud to feel an exile on this earth. It is a mistake to assume that Hamlet's way of looking at things is only the result of his father's death and his mother's marriage; he was by nature "The Melancholy Man", or, as the nineteenth century would have called him, "The Byronic Man".

In this scene, it is the pathos of Ophelia which should hold the stage, and the error of all "Hamlets" has been to draw our sympathies towards "the lover". Do they want pathos? Is there not more in the pain of a girl, uneasy at being used for a purpose she does not understand—perhaps to the danger of the man she loves, meeting him with the trifles in her hands which he had given her? "I gave you nothing", he growls, twinged intolerably at the sight of those reminders of a tenderness now incredible. How much more moving (the scene being played up to Ophelia) it would be if, instead of sobbing out the words, "I did love thee once", Hamlet stood glower-

ing at her pretty face, as he uttered them, nodding his head in gloomy recognition of a now incomprehensible fact. An embrace, a sob, destroys her reply, so profoundly touching in its truth and simplicity: "Indeed, my lord, you made me believe so." Again, how much more credible such acting would make Hamlet's immediate rush of self-reproach, "We are arrant knaves all; believe none of us. Go to a nunnery", which in its turn leads on to that torrent of abuse of feminine charm that betrays men into false positions: "You jig, you amble, you lisp and make wantonness your ignorance. . . Go to, I'll no more on't; it hath made me mad. I say, we will have no more marriages. . . To a nunnery go." Yet our actors play this scene as though it were a lovers' quarrel! One which might end by Ophelia saying soothingly, "Darling, you *know* you love me!"

The "Play Scene" was injudiciously cut and inappropriately the climax of emotion had risen higher on the fall of the curtain in the Act before. True,

> The play's the thing
> Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the King,

is a splendid curtain, but damn curtains. Whatever passion Hamlet throws into these words, he must keep his top note of triumphant excitement for wild snatches of song which burst from him, when the King has rushed from the hall and the torches are tossing; for that whirl of nonsense, irony, joy, which suddenly subsides on the entrance of the quaking Rosencrantz and Guildenstern with the message that the Queen is in great affliction and must see her son.

In the soliloquy in which Hamlet decides not to kill the King while he is praying, no actor has

probably excelled Mr Barrymore. It would certainly be hard to do so. His fault as an elocutionist is not to distinguish sufficiently between the verse and the prose passages of his part, and occasionally to underline certain words unnecessarily, as thus:

> There are more things in Heaven and earth, Horatio,
> Than are—*dreamt of*—in our philosophy.

But his delivery was beautifully free from mouthing emphasis; his voice, at grave moments, most gracious and pleasant; his enunciation and phrasing excellently distinct. Every word he spoke (this is rare) was intelligible. Probably no English actor, now that Forbes Robertson has retired, could give us as good a performance.

With regard to the other parts; the King wants careful playing. One hint taken might make all the difference to Mr Malcolm Kean's performance. Though we are meant to think the King a worthless blackguard, it is not until he plots Hamlet's death that his words and actions betray him. On the contrary his speeches to Hamlet are marked by dignified and courteous forbearance, to the Queen never verbally ignoble, and his courage when he faces alone the furious Laertes and the rebels is impressive. The clue to playing the part lies in the note Hamlet scribbles in his book, "That one may smile and smile and be a villain"; in the King's manner towards Hamlet there should therefore be visible a dubious over-civility, and towards the Queen a rather greasy over-attentiveness. The Ghost I liked, though several critics have crabbed him. I am sure Mr Thorpe is right in wailing out his lines with ominous monotony in a voice like the wind in a chimney. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern

have most of their words taken from them and naturally don't know what to do.

Miss Fay Compton as Ophelia is admirable in the scene in which she describes to her father the young Prince's attentions. She is also as touching in the scene with Hamlet as Mr. Barrymore's method of playing it allows; and in the mad-scene she is just what—not, alas, more than —one normally expects. This scene, without a thrill-compelling voice and fantastic grace of gesture, inevitably induces that uncomfortable feeling that we ought to be more moved than we are. It is better therefore kept low in tone; and it would, perhaps, help most Ophelias to enter with a lute to which to sing, as the first quarto stage-direction indicates. Let her madness be quite conventional madness; it is safer. Let her not study as some Ophelia's have been known to do, the gestures and expressions of lunatics.

Ophelia's burial was badly stage-managed. Away with these white nuns! The perfunctoriness of the ceremony shocks Laertes, just as the absence of "a hatchment o'er his father's bones" had previously intensified the grief of that extremely conventional young man. The corpse of Ophelia ought to be borne in by a few rustics from the fields, and Hamlet and Laertes must jump *into* her grave. The callous, competitive rhetoric of that raving pair only gets its true value if the two of them, in the very act of declamation and flying at each other's throats, are actually trampling the poor body underfoot; and the savagery and horror of that must be reflected in the gestures and cries of the onlookers. They, however, stood like supernumeraries.

It is the great fault of the English stage that on it seldom more than three people act simultaneously. The play-scene also suffered from this national defect.

I shall always remember the contrasting exhilaration of watching the Yiddish players at the Scala last year. There was not one old Rabbi, even at the back of the stage, who was not contorted by passion and distress in the top scene of their Messianic play.

HAMLETS IN GENERAL

BY THE time these remarks appear in print the soul of Mr. Esmé Percy will have migrated from the body of Hamlet to that of John Tanner, but the performance of *Hamlet* at the Court Theatre was in some respects so interesting that when some day a history of stage Hamlets is written it should not be omitted. The performance at the Court proved one thing: that Mr. Gordon Craig's methods of production are extremely efficient even when they are not carried out with the fine æsthetic balance which he could have supplied himself. In so far as the performance was indebted to his principles (I will not say to his conceptions, for the lighting at the Court would have sometimes exasperated him like a parody), it was a distinct improvement upon any *Hamlet* I have seen. There being no changes of scene and only one break, we were able to see and hear much more of the play than is usual.

Everybody who knows anything about stage designs and the recent developments in stage-craft knows that the impulse due to the work of Gordon Craig has been the most pervasive and creative of all modern influences. The most eminent and enterprising designers have nourished their imaginations on his. It will be a matter for astonishment and scorn to posterity that his contemporaries made so little use of him and offered him so few opportunities to carry out himself his own ideas. That he is "damned good to steal from" has been discovered, yet his methods have been labelled as unpractical even by those who have made use of them, and in

spite of the fact that their practical simplicity is an essential part of their beauty.

A massive pillar, beyond it a terrace walk, with two flights of steps leading up to it on each side, one steep and the other turning and broken by a landing, proved all that was necessary. When it came to the grave-digging scene, an open oblong in the floor and out-of-door costumes were sufficient to support the amount of illusion necessary. The solemn passage of the ghost, pursued up the steps to the left by Hamlet and his companions, at first occulted by the pillar, then motionless and erect beside and behind it at the top of the steep flight of steps, was most impressive; though why its speech should have been spoken for it, off the scene by another voice, I did not understand. Again, by occasionally throwing light upon the scene from the auditorium, shadows, sometimes coloured, repeated most effectively the gestures of the actors. The duel and the play scenes were, by another change of light, silhouetted in dense black in the foreground against the illuminated spectators on the stage. Æsthetic discretion was by no means always in control of these devices, but Gordon Craig's principle that by means of simple masses of masonry, the grouping of coloured figures and the shifting of emphasis of light and shadow, drama could be intensified, was fully proved. The results often left much to be desired, but they suggested what might be done. Moments of complete darkness marked changes of scene as effectively as a dropping curtain, and changes of light prepared the spectator, by isolating Hamlet in the imagination, for some of the chief soliloquies. The total effect of these devices was to make the performance an excitingly rapid one; *Hamlet* became a play of lurid action.

Hamlet himself was a contrast to this effect. Mr. Esmé Percy was admirable in the scene between

Hamlet and his mother, and in those moments of urgent conference with Horatio and Marcellus. His fine eyes are noticeable at moments of emotion and his face and gestures can express deep nervous agitation. His carriage and figure, however, lack dignity. His Hamlet belonged to the class of morbid Hamlets; though never mawkish, he was not a Hamlet to whom a funeral with military honours seemed at all appropriate. He was a somewhat feminine Hamlet. It was noticeable that his interpretation toned down ringing lines and the rhetorical rhymed flourishes of the exits. It was characteristic of his performance that he spoke the lines.

> The time is out of joint: O cursed spite,
> That ever I was born to set it right!

with depressed weariness, mounting heavily the steep staircase. He was inclined to turn the fantastic meditations upon Yorick's skull into demonstrations of personal grief, which is surely wrong. The imaginative and intellectual detachment of Hamlet was thus in part lost, or muted into a temperamental lassitude. On the other hand, there was often a charming urgency of tenderness in his address, and often a pathetic ferocity in his energetic moments fascinating to watch.

It was a happy thought to play the King as a man in the full flower of life, and the Queen as one whom the King might desire herself as much as a throne. I never saw the Queen occupy more easily, yet unobtrusively, her right place in the play than Miss Miriam Lewis succeeded in doing. Ophelia was not crazy enough in her main scene, but charmingly demure in the earlier ones. She went mad in black, not in the traditional white, and proffered imaginary flowers.

What remains with me from this performance

is above all an impression of hurried, crowded action; and I found that refreshing. Indeed, if the corpse-strewn scene at the end is not to fail of its effect, this sense of events racing to one overwhelming, comprehensive catastrophe, must be conveyed.

Shakespeare-lore is so bewildering a subject for investigation that I have made but faint attempts to learn. It is a region of controversy which it is hardly worth while only to visit; you must settle down in it to learn anything—and if you do, you are apt to go mad. The tourist, on entering it, is at once buttonholed by voluble guides, each of whom has apparently good credentials. But presently, having chosen one, in spite of the reassuring letters on his cap, the tourist is apt to grow uneasy on catching from time to time the fixed stare in his guide's eye. Can he be quite sane? he asks himself, ever with more and more misgiving. These guides can be divided roughly into four classes. Those who think Shakespeare wrote not only the plays attributed to him, but everybody else's; those who think he wrote only mere fragments of the plays which pass as his, the guide selecting lines he thinks best; those who think that every possible meaning or shade of significance in the works was intentional, and those guides (they are robust fellows) who think that every subtlety or meaning beyond that which could have been grasped by the groundlings is pure accident. If the inquirer listens to all he is distracted by bewilderment, and if he listens only to one sort he becomes a monomaniac. I do not recommend Shakespearean studies.

Last time I ventured into those regions I came across a guide of the robuster sort. He pointed out an interesting fact in the history of Hamlet as reflected in opinion down the ages. His name was Dr. Elmer Stoll and his pamphlets are published by the University of Minnesota. He showed that our inter-

pretation of Hamlet's character as one sicklied o'er with thought, of the part as a profound study in irresolution and a diseased will, never entered the heads of any one who saw the play till the Romantic Movement was in full swing at the end of the eighteenth century. To all earlier commentators Hamlet was a hero of brilliant dash in a story of revenge, courageous and resolute, who set about the slaying of his uncle as expeditely as the exigencies of the plot, the old plot, allowed. He told me to rub my eyes and read the play again. Look! this is an impetuous, fiery fellow with plenty of self-confidence. His self-reproaches in soliloquy are not judgments on his character but expressions of moods. They find no echo in the judgments passed upon him by Horatio or any other character in the play. They are traditional elements in the drama of revenge. Does not the bloody and impetuous Hieronimo, Hamlet's forebear, indulge in such damaging reflections? Does not Seneca's Atreus, in the *Thyestes*, brood over his remissness:

> O Soul so sluggish, spiritless and weak?

And do not Medea and Clytemnestra, who have never been considered weak women, spur themselves on by similar self-castigations? "Why," cries Clytemnestra:

> Why, sluggish soul, does thou safe counsel seek,
> Why hesitate?

"In these cases," says Dr. Stoll, "to be sure, there is no such long interval of delay as in *Hamlet*; but delay of some sort there is in all classical and Renaissance revenge tragedies, and these exhortations serve to motive it."

In short, we of later days have read our sensi-

tive bewilderments into a character which his creator designed more simply. Well, even if Shakespeare would himself agree with Dr. Stoll, we ought to be thankful that we can read in a richer significance.

Figures of literature and history live in the thoughts of men on the condition that they change their aspect. Humanity is only interested in past ages and dead authors in so far as it can attribute to them its own passions and thoughts. That they are able to go on doing so—seeing now this, now that, in them—is the sign and proof of an immortal creation.

THE DEATH OF TINTAGILES

THE PERFORMANCE fell far short of what it might have been. Though full of incidental beauty for the eye and ear, it failed in general impressiveness. It was moving and mysterious, but in degrees which tantalized, suggesting only how much more beautiful and terrible the play might have been made. To explain where, I think, the fault lay I must fetch a rather wide circle.

The subject of Maeterlinck's art is not that of ordinary drama. It is not human character, it is not the logic of events, it is not the action of one character impinging on another; it can hardly be even said that the passions are his subject.

His originality lies in having dramatized emotions which hitherto have found readiest expression in lyric poetry. The materials in which he works are *moods*: fear without tangible cause, divinations, obscure presentiments of death, astonishment at finding ourselves alive, the fragility of happiness, the sweetness and briefness of security; the pathos, as it were, of a lonely house, its windows bravely lit, against which the dark batteries of the elements are moving up; the feeling that we neighbour the invisible, the vast, the unknown; the significance of a gesture or casual event to one attentive to the whisperings of his own destiny; wonder at the simplicity of the emotions which bind us to each other in such complex ways; sorrowful delight at the depths at which we are able so slyly and unsatisfyingly to touch each other—all things, in fact, which the soul fancies it perceives when its eyes grow accustomed to its own darkness.

Such is the subject-matter of Maeterlinck's drama. To convey these emotions from the stage he invented a peculiar technique: a language of elementary, musical simplicity, a dialogue possessing a kind of limpid chiaroscuro in which meanings are lost and found, which arrests the attention by seeming to say so little that the imagination seeks for what is implied; a speech full of symbols often too obvious or too obscure; of repetitions often too infantile—if they did not serve the purpose of dissociating, as repetition will do, these sentences from their commoner significance. You will notice that Maeterlinck's first care is to move in precisely the opposite direction from that which other dramatists take in opening a play. The object of the dramatist is to *place* his figures, to tell us, that we may be more interested in them, and measure their weight in momentum, as much about them as he quickly can. He aims at telling us as definitely as possible their characters and circumstances. But Maeterlinck's first object is to delocalize his figures. They are farther off from us than any who have lived in history. They are dwellers in a kind of limbo, retaining the affections of an earthly state, questioning a Providence which bends upon them a countenance that neither smiles nor frowns, but is charged with a great authority. These forests in which they wander, these thick-roomed palaces where they sit, uttering rare speech with modulated voices and grave gestures, these crumbling castles and inhuman towers beside dolorous seas, are scenery of dreams: things more real when spoken of than when seen.

As in dreams, what we do actually see in this twilight world are little things: a sword, a lock of hair, a door. And, as in dreams, these objects stand out with an odd, familiar definiteness against what is merely felt to be there. A successful staging of such a play as *The Death of Tintagiles* must preserve

this subtle proportion between what is perceived and familiar and what is unknown and unseen. The scenic artist must construct with light and shadow and a few properties—with much shadow and a little light. We are in a far vaguer place than the Camelot or Ascalon of the poets. Mr. Rickett's high cobweb-silvery curtains were beautiful; the magnificent inventiveness of Ygraine's dress on her first appearance took the breath; but the castle rooms were too definite, prompting rather a tourist's wonder. Best of all perhaps were the three servants of the Queen, in whose aspect there was something of that low, sinister ferocity of cowardly strength which Blake depicted in his "Ghost of a Flea".

In this play the familiar object which should be the cynosure of our terror is a door. The huge tower with its unending windowless corridors, now dark, now aglare, down which, whether alight or dark, velvet-footed terror creeps; the rooms where whispering and a cowed tittering are sometimes heard—these approaches to the abode of the unseen, evil Queen are things which must be felt as they might be felt in dreams. They cannot be represented; stage masonry will help us little to realize them. But we *can* see the door, the massive door. Once it opens to let in a ray of white light, the precursor of death; when it is closed again through the frantic efforts of the two sisters hurling themselves against it to save their little brother from something they hardly comprehend. The second time the child, stolen from them while they slept, is behind it. We hear him crying to Ygraine for help, who batters and scrabbles at it in the agony of her distress, kissing its immovable smoothness as Tintagiles' voice grows weaker and weaker, till we hear his body fall.

In the first of these scenes the massive door on the stage of the St. James's was well enough, but in the second, and more important one, it was only

an item in the scenery. It was heavily studded, divided by a white stripe, and it had a grating at the top. It looked like a door in a painted steel partition in a modern ironclad, and it occupied only a corner in an immense apartment. This was wrong. The brandished shadows of the flickering lamp Ygraine carries will make scenery enough. It is better not to comprehend the kind of place to which she has tracked the servants of the Queen, who have stolen her little brother while she slept. It is the end of a frantic pursuit up flights of hapless stairs, along empty passages, long as the corridors of dreams, and our eyes must now be fixed only on that great, smooth door. Let it be lit by a gleam sufficient to show it implacable as death. And when she has dashed her lamp against it in despair, let the last words be spoken in darkness. We want to *see* no more. The actress has already exhausted every gesture of distress. Let the kisses she showers on its surface be given in darkness, and her imploring abasement before the unseen evil power, and her curses, be only a voice.

When Maeterlinck proposed to stretch a gauze-veil between the stage and audience, and spoke of his characters as puppets, he knew what he was about. He meant to destroy in us all inclination to apply standards of reality. His people, are, indeed, more voices than characters. We need to hear them more than to see them clearly. The impressions of sight are too circumstantial, too literal, to reveal his imaginary world. It is not the expressions but the voices of the actors which must convey the emotions of this play. When Mr. Granville Barker and Mr. Ricketts staged the scene in hell in *Man and Superman* they left the imagination the liberty vagueness and shadow permit. Who could tell what manner of place it was in which that close argument was carried on? Yet in this play, one far more

dreamlike, far more dependent on emotion, they seem to have thought that if we could not see circumstantial details or the play of passion on the faces of the actors, we should think ourselves cheated. By all means let us see Miss Lillah McCarthy and Tintagiles in their living beauty for a moment, their beautiful dresses, elaborate in detail; but let them return into a shadowy world of obscure gleams and soft depths, strange and vague as a vitreous tank at dusk in some aquarium. That this production did not destroy utterly our inclination to compare it with reality and to scrutinize it, is one reason why we could not feel to the full the emotions which the play is capable of conveying. To trace what I think was the second reason why the performance did not rise much above mediocrity I must fetch a second, though a smaller, circle.

If Maeterlinck's first step is to delocalize his figures in time and space, his second is to empty them of individuality. He piths them of all we call "character" till each becomes an empty reed, through which the wind of fate may blow one plaintive note. Notice in this play how little he tells us of the characters of those who figure in it. Of the sisters we know nothing except that they have beautiful hair; of Tintagiles, the little boy, that a ship has brought him back to them. These three are alone, except for a shaken, helpless, aged man, in a castle by a sea, inhabited by an old Queen who never goes out, whom nobody ever sees, who wants "to reign alone". She has mysterious servitors and strange powers. "She is suspicious and jealous, and they say she is mad." "She is", they say, "not beautiful, and has swollen to an enormous size." Mr. Sutro! Mr. Barker! how could you leave out that touch, palming off upon us instead "they say her form is strange"? "Those who have seen her dare not speak of her." Her unseen presence has

weighed upon the sisters like a tombstone for as long as they can remember. She is, indeed, the heroine of the play. Every word that is spoken makes her pervasive presence more stiflingly real.

Now the fatal false stress in the St. James's production was to make Ygraine the heroine: Ygraine with her passionate human affection for her little brother, whom the Queen fears may oust her from her place. Ygraine's passion is a necessary part of the play, but it is only a part. Make it the pivot of emotion and the terrible scene in which the boy is strangled by invisible hands behind the door becomes merely a piece of sensationalism. The true heroine of the play is the woman—the Thing which never appears. We know what she is: she is the vague type and symbol of maleficent tyranny; the soul of all the tyrants from Tiberius to Lobengula, from Ivan the Terrible to the many-handed Gyges of capitalism. The lights of her tower are the lights of Yildiz on the Bosphorus. She is a lonely, mad, grasping thing, which, like a hydra, "sucks away insensibly in its fat folds" the strength of those who would resist it. For this reason the words in this play which describe her and the dread and helplessness she inspires, are more important than the cries of the victims. They will tell enough in any case. It is, so to speak, the recitative and not the passages of passion which require the attention of the producer; and it was here I thought Mr. Granville Barker failed, thus bringing the play too near sensationalism, and presenting the scenes too circumstantially before us.

Mr. Vaughan Williams' music seemed to me to express wonderfully the pain and frustrate effort of these strange, imaginary beings; the desolate, delicate beauty of the play. But one was much distracted by the audience, who did not seem to realize that the music was also part of the performance.

Women have become considerate about taking off large hats; but at this time of year, when a percentage of every audience have colds, those afflicted have not yet grasped that it is just as unpardonable to prevent others from hearing as seeing. When the lights went out and the music began, there started such a rustling, sniffing, genteel hawking, coughing, choking, sneezing and whispering, that it was most difficult to listen.

The Death of Tintagiles was followed by that admirably compact play, which achieves just what it sets out to do, *The Silver Box.* It was splendidly acted. The police-court scene was one of the most perfect pieces of realism you could see on the stage. The repertory system is certainly a means to getting good acting. It increases the scope of an actor, and, by preventing him from getting mechanical, it increases the vigour and subtlety of his powers of impersonation. We should never have discovered the range of Mr. Arthur Whitby or Mr. Leon Quartermaine if it had not been for Mr. Granville Barker. Mr. Whitby's John Barthwick was as perfect as his performance in *The Harlequinade*, and those who saw that know that no praise can be greater. Mr. Granville Barker week after week spreads for us the most generous and varied feast, and if as a critic I sometimes turn up my nose (ostentatiously as becomes a critic) at one of the dishes, I do not forget that he provides the best entertainment in London. Next month the Repertory Company move to the Savoy.

THE DRAMATIST OF THE FUTURE

THIS ARTICLE is about Ibsen and *Ghosts*—now running at the Kingsway Theatre. I have put that heading at the top, hoping it may seem provocative. There are many who think the world has long ago absorbed as much "Ibsen" as the system can stand, and that, like a vaccinated person, it will not "take" again; there are others who regard him as a didactic and dingy playwright, as an egotistic and elementary thinker, and some of the *jeunes feroces*, I suspect, even suppose he was no artist. How natural it is, however, that such false opinions should be current I shall at once explain; and what follows is addressed to those who hold them. To those who at the first night felt like boys again, and glowed to find they had been no fools when they were young, I can only offer the mild pleasure of reading what they already believe, or, incidentally, perhaps the keener one of noting how much better it might have been put.

Soon after returning from the first performance of *Ghosts* I was rung up on the telephone.

Voice: "What did you think of it?"

D. M.: "Splendid play; poor performance." (*The production and the acting have improved immensely since the first night.*)

Voice: "What! Splendid? . . . Pastor Manders? . . . The whole thing? . . . It was like hunting down a mangy old stag let out of a box for the day."

D. M. (*with the confidence of the critic whose ideas are as yet a rushing wind in his head, and seemingly irresistible*): "You just wait till you've read my article."

Voice (*expressing a mixture of patience, politeness, and scepticism*): "Well, I know I'm . . ." (I caught a murmur, ". . . no artist and out of date"). "Well, good-night."

I felt every bit as polemical and confident as Mr. Archer or Mr. Shaw felt in the 'nineties. "Ibsen", I said firmly, as I replaced the receiver, "is among modern dramatists a sun among farthing dips." Not Art, indeed! Out of date! The notion that there were intelligent people who could hold such views was disgusting to me. Now, too, of all times; precisely when there was more humbug about than ever before, more need of soul-searching, more need of the kind of clinical introspection that Ibsen stimulates; now, when people were forcing themselves all day long, on principle, to forget some things and take others for granted, to feel some things and not to feel others, to steer exclusively by ideals and yet keep one eye askew on the main chance. Out of date, indeed! No artist! After the Ibsen battle had been thoroughly fought out and won too! It was disgusting.

But then it occurred to me that it was also inevitable; it was always thus things happened in the history of thought. A great man appears, or a sense of the world is born which has implications of importance (Evolution, for example), there is at once a prodigious shindy. All active minds start going for each other about it; while one writer sits forging arguments in its favour or against it, feeling he is giving his best to his generation, in the same street another is reading him and exclaiming: "The fool, the animal, the jackass!" As long as this battle rages, everyone, even if ignorant, is still intensely aware of its importance (during this period the censorship of the Press or drama can do enormous harm), and everyone feels how much hangs upon it. At last discussion becomes a bore; a lull occurs; both

sides begin to count their dead, and one to retire ("voluntary evacuation") from positions which have become ridiculous and untenable; the tone adopted being, "So that is what you meant? Why *we* drank in that with our mother's milk!" accompanied by a tacit resolve henceforth to kill only by kindness and silence.

But before this peace is patched up discussion will have raged up and down every sort of question which could possibly be connected with the new philosophy; and it is precisely over such remote practical implications that at this last stage of the controversy, discussion is likely to be fiercest and the loudest voices are likely to be raised. The consequences of this are serious. For the next generation remember consequently the artist or philosopher whose work has been alternately a weapon and a cockshy, as an *ad hoc* writer. They think of him inevitably as one whose work may once have been useful, but, since the shoe of social life pinches each generation in a slightly different place, must be now beside the point; and above all they come to regard him as a writer belonging to that inferior class of artists who find inspiration in the social problems of the moment. This has been the fate of Ibsen.

At the present moment many people actually think *Ghosts* a play of the same calibre (of course better constructed) as *Damaged Goods*; a pamphlet it requires only a slight alteration in our laws to render nugatory. They think it is a play with disease for a theme; Oswald, they think, is the central figure. They are wrong. Ibsen was a profound and meditative mind. Whatever his story, his theme is always of lasting interest; it is, indeed, *the* supreme interest and attraction of the intellectual vision, the individual soul. It is Mrs. Alving who is the central figure of the play; the revolution

in her its theme. Miss Darragh depicted admirably Mrs. Alving's sorrows and her tenderness; less adequately the rebel, who with a great price has won her freedom; ironically indulgent when let alone, but savage and shameless when conventions and traditions would push her again from the little bit of solid ground she has found at last in the quagmire of her life.

Ibsen's theatre is the theatre of the soul. Important as he was, and is, as a social reformer, it is that which makes him even more important as an artist. Society changes quickly; the soul hardly at all; it is that which makes his work permanent. It is that which makes his plays thrilling, gives them their curious intensity, enables him to mingle with a realism which sometimes has even a perverse kind of commonness, fantastic symbols—rat-wives, wild ducks, houses with lofty towers, and so to blend both together that the ordinary takes on a strange significance (a character in his plays can hardly thank for a match without seeming also to say something more), and the fantastically fanciful becomes in them oddly familiar. An architect who falls off his own scaffold because he would show off before a young lady; a sleek, shabby photographer addicted to noble poses and to shuffling away unpleasant thoughts by fooling with rabbits in a garret, like a child (a common type); a fraudulent financier, who after prison still hugs the dream of immense possibilities, and throws the cold shadow of his egotism across the lives of two devoted women; a successful sculptor who finds fame flat and is bored with his wife; smug and stuffy homes of all sorts, with here and there a character ugly or pathetic in his or her revolt against them; what dingy, mediocre events! And yet—what tragic plays! What insolent indifference to the surface value of materials; yet what profound intensity!

If one looked only at the sequence of events in Ibsen's dramas they would seem to have small value; the spell and the beauty lie within. He invented the realistic tragedy; but his successors have mostly not observed how he did it. A passage in one of his letters throws light:

> Everything that I have written has the closest possible connection with what I have lived through, even if it has not been my own personal experience; in every new poem or play I have arrived at my own spiritual emancipation and purification—for a man shares the responsibility and the guilt of the society to which he belongs.

It is from his own dreaming, solitary mind they derive their intensity. There was always a connection, impossible perhaps to define, but there, between the nature of the theme he chose and the adventures of his soul. The base characters are not merely observed; they are known also by their kinship to the motives he has found in himself, squatting like toads in the marble virtues which his hammer has broken; the feeble are known as only a man who has lived a meticulously strenuous inner life himself can know weakness, its protean shapes and Boyg-like quality; the strong are read in the light of his own strength; they carry about with them, too, the roughness and badgered impatience of a long struggle, and youth in his plays is the cry in himself of all he had ever given up. How he respects the aplomb of their selfishness and trusts the directness of their desires!

Ibsen is the out-and-out revolutionary. He is the militant poet of one side of man's nature, a one-sided poet therefore if you like, but by far the greatest spokesman of that side. His plays were a bag of dynamite into which any social reformer could dip, but it was not the fall of this or that institution or law that interested him. His scepticism regarding political reforms was well known;

the words "a committee has been appointed", when he read them in the papers, it is said, always made him laugh. There is a queer ironical poem of his, addressed to a revolutionary orator, in which he says: "Go on, flood the world with your eloquence; let us have the deluge by all means, but then, please, allow me to torpedo the ark." These are not the sentiments of a man who feels intensely that man is "a political animal"; though that man is indeed such an animal was about the first truth he ever discovered about himself. Let it be admitted then: as a poet, Ibsen ignored that fact. He was the spokesman of the individualistic side of man's nature. If man is by nature one of a herd and nothing by himself, he is also conscious of being in himself the judge and dispenser of values, the end for which all traditions and customs exist. "The State is the curse of the individual", he wrote to Brandes; and it is not only the State, but all ideals, all aims, which ignore the simple, solid happiness of the individual and his right to it, that are also curses.

Men, according to Ibsen, are always being led by their idealistic noses away from the places where their welfare lies. His tragedies are stories of the sacrifice of natural good, of which the individual is the only judge, to some false ideal which has no instinctive root in human nature. Sometimes the ideal is a mean one as in *Ghosts* (Respectability), sometimes heroic as in *Brand* ("all or nothing" Religion), sometimes half-and-half as in *Gabriel Borkman* (Ambition, at once beneficent and egotistic), sometimes, as in *The Wild Duck*, a craze for saving souls; but the clash and tragedy is the same. It is "the joy of life", "the love life in the individual" which it is "the unpardonable sin" for any cause or reason to destroy. In his last play he turned on himself, on the artist; and in *When We Dead Awaken* he wrote a play inspired by the feeling that the disinterested artist

was just as mad as the priest or the financier, the respectable citizen or the prig. Rubeck the sculptor is a man who has sacrificed his own and another's happiness to make out of it a symbol of the ideal. "The love that belongs to the life of earth, the beautiful miraculous life of earth, the inscrutable life of earth—that is dead in both of us", Rubeck says to Irene. The ruthless artist is also a traitor to the natural good.

But supposing everybody believed only in what was right in their own eyes? This is the question with which those who are most conscious of man as "a political animal" pose the Ibsenites. It can only be countered by another question just as disquieting: "Suppose nobody did?" Upon what a wild, fantastic dance mankind would then be led, far from the natural goods on which his happiness (and therefore ultimately his integrity of feeling and thinking) must rest.

When I wrote "The Dramatist of the Future" at the head of this article I was thinking partly, too, that many people might well be feeling that men had been lately thinking of themselves too exclusively as "political animals", and that a violent revulsion towards a philosophy which respects the individual and his happiness more might be near. There may or may not be a revolution in the streets, but in the minds of men the highways will be broken and the waters will be out. Then Ibsen will be our poet.

GUITRY AND GRANVILLE-BARKER

IN ONE of my favourite items in the book called *Trivia*, the author turning over the pages of the old fashion plates of 1840 reflects that those tight-waisted, whiskered beaus and billowing ladies adored each other with a despairing admiration, which neither their predecessors, nor those who came after them, ever matched. Mr. Granville Barker has translated M. Sacha Guitry's play which is laid in Paris about that date, spiritedly and neatly. I feel like Mr. Logan Pearsall-Smith about 1840. The period has a peculiar fascination for me too, and for the same reason: I envy the lovers revealed in the confidential literature of those days. Modern Romanticism is a failure, our atmosphere is too wintry, critical and humorous, but when the great Romantic movement was blowing and growing, it must have been splendid to tear a passion to tatters; to rocket up, like Musset, into the sky, burst in a shower of golden tears and come down like the stick. And about the famous syrens and courtesans of the period—I do not say that there was, but it was easy to suppose there was, a poetic depth of wickedness, combined with an enchanted innocence, which it is somehow impossible to attribute to the "Cora Pearls" and "Skittles", though they, too, are rather romantic, of thirty years later.

And then, the Geniuses! The universal worship of that mystical, adorable quality genius, irradiating Bohemia, illuminating drawing-rooms and attics, drawing beauty from her sphere to kiss the lowly Endymion, decking the obscure in a splendour

which, if brief, was well worth while, for there were then real swells to strut amongst and outshine; while, like a ground bass accompanying this grand efflorescence of sentiment, the hungry arrivism of the Second Empire grinned and growled and snatched and pushed, roaring through the mouth of Balzac, turning to philosophic egoism in Stendhal, and hailing the embodiment of its day-dreams in the Count of Monte Cristo.

The period fascinates me; perhaps this was one reason why I sat through the performance of *Deburau* at the Ambassadors so well content all the time to be there. But there, too, the production, as productions go now, was a distinguished one. Great pains had been taken with it, and successful pains, except in the case of the last half of the last act, which fell flat.

Mr. Granville Barker's translation is in rhymed verse like the original, and I do not think I have ever heard jingles more adroitly side-stepped than they were in the speaking of this dialogue. It was some time before I woke up to the fact that it was rhymed; indeed, even after I had, my ear continually missed the rhymes. Mr. Robert Loraine is a most accomplished elocutionist, indeed, about the best on the stage; he phrased so naturally that he often obliterated them for minutes together. It was a fault on the right side; but there were moments when it would have been better to stress them a little more, when the slight sense of unreality which such contrivances produce would have given sentiment a little lift (for instance, in Act II), or when, by titillating us, the skill of that convention would have filled in the gaps of absent wit.

Mr. Loraine, on the whole, failed as the pathetic lover-clown of genius, yet you could not help admiring him; it was a respect-worthy failure. He played the part too heavily, or rather was himself much too

simple and solid, temperamentally, for the part. He clearly did not remember (perhaps if he had it would have been no use) that Gaspard Deburau *is* Pierrot, not merely a man who was the most perfect Pierrot in his day on the stage, and off it a simple, tender-hearted fellow. Deburau's story, the story of the play, is a Pierrot story from beginning to end. What are the two experiences in reaction to which Pierrot shows that sentiment which is peculiarly his? Entirely sensual, yet airily tender, hopeless love, and the tragedy of old age. (Don't you see him kneeling in whimsical adoration, his geranium mouth pouted to an O, then drooping, drooping in despair?) Then come old age and impotence—there is nothing in poor Pierrot's philosophy to fight these ills which he feels so keenly. Still, he has one resource, namely, indulgence in an exquisite, slightly mocking self-pity. His escape is, indeed, to make a beautiful little work of art out of that unattractive emotion which we usually handle so clumsily—self-pity.

Now, I do not say that M. Sacha Guitry has written here a perfect Pierrot play, in telling this pathetic story of a clown who lived a week in the softest Cloud-Cuckoo Land with a deliciously young, but faithless, courtesan, waited for her seven years, and then, on going back to the stage and finding old age had withered his talent, launched his son as Pierrot.

No; light and swift as his handling of sentimental moments are, there is always something—the word must out—vulgar in M. Sacha Guitry's art; it is detectable even in his acting, I think. He is deft rather than subtle. Sometimes you think to yourself, "Why, this is delicious, this is poetry!" Then you call up the feeling in a play like *On ne badime pas avec l'amour* and you see at once, though the shimmer on one of M. Guitry's plays is sometimes not unlike Musset's, that they are not made

of the same stuff. Still the sentiment of *Deburau* is real Pierrot sentiment, though it is at bottom handled rather grossly and casually, and what the production at The Ambassadors lacked all through was a grasp of this. Mr. Loraine was not flimsy, fiery and frivolous enough, and these qualities are essential if the play, and above all the last scene of it, is to come off, when with tears of pride and jealousy in his eyes Deburau teaches his son how to be Pierrot, and philosophizes on the tragedy and glory of those who live to make men laugh.

Pierrot is, of course, a simpleton too, and Mr. Loraine managed the pathos of this side of Pierrot; but —I can suggest with him all I mean (for once) in a phrase—he played Deburau as though it were a Hawtrey part. The result was that the high-flown litany of sensual love did not, well—fly, and you cannot imagine Mr. Charles Hawtrey (fine and conscientious actor as he is) delivering convincingly, so as to move you, a speech quivering with romantic emotion about the subtlety and sublimity of the actor's art. It is a most un-English thing to do! Indeed, I do not believe a thorough Englishman can act Pierrot at all; he is a child of the Latin zone, born beyond the influence of Northern tenderness, though he in a different way is tender, and of Northern seriousness, though in his way Pierrot too is serious. The prime requisite of a Pierrot is complete absence of reserve and of all fear of emotion, and where, I ask you, will you find *that*, either in art or life, on this island?

If this play, for it is a very pretty one, does not attract, it will be due chiefly to the flatness of the last act, which seems on the stage to drag and drag and then suddenly just to stop. The part of Charles Deburau in this scene, Pierrot's young son, is an exceedingly difficult one to play; he must suggest the timid eagerness yet truthless impatience of

young talent which seizes hungrily its opportunity. We must be convinced that when he leaps on the stage he will inherit that very night his father's fame. If we do not, the conflict of emotions in Pierrot himself will not seem moving, nor will the irony of the crier's bawling to the public outside to come in and see a new Deburau as wonderful as the old, make touching the son's sudden revulsion of emotion, when, feeling at last, like a stab right through him, absolute certainty he will inherit his father's fame, he flings his arms round him, crying—the happy supplanter—" No, no. It is not true, father. Why does he lie, like that?"

The old Pierrot then shakes his head, "But it is."

"No, father, how can I succeed like you, in your own parts?"

"Why not? Who knows?" Then he adds—it is the last flicker of an old discarded favourite's pride and envy—"The public are so odd".

It is a very pretty ending; but it must be acted with perfection, or it comes to nothing, and I am afraid it was quite impossible to believe in Charles's talent.

To Miss Madge Titheradge's acting in the part of the syren, Marie Duplessis, my colleagues have not, I think, done justice. It was an extremely intelligent performance. She understood her part perfectly, and she was quite exquisitely careful to make the points, but she could not, of course, *be* herself surprisingly young. However, she mimicked admirably the curiously still, demure ways of a child courtesan. She shook her head very well when the old procuress-fortune-teller asks her, in some surprise, if she does not then love her Deburau; and the beauty of her sigh when she confesses she only did so for two days (she has got so good at making men think she loves them—another sigh) was that it

was a shallow little sigh, and only over the prospect of having to tell her Pierrot the truth. Mr. Ivor Novello as "the young man", her new lover, whom, having caught the art of adoring from her Pierrot, she really worships, put into his brief wooing the respectful ecstasies of 1840. He did very well.

I am glad to have seen *Deburau;* it was a daring play to try, but we ought to be grateful. M. Sacha Guitry writes plays with the image of himself before his eyes in the principal parts. They are always full of those peculiar turns and effects at which he is himself particularly adroit. In short, they are like dandy coats, made and padded for a particular customer by a first-rate tailor. It is dangerous for another to come along and take such a garment off the peg and wear it, and I have indicated that Mr. Loraine burst the seams. M. Sacha Guitry is the son of the most perfect actor in France, and though his father remains unrivalled, he is, of course, no longer young, while his son's triumph has been a louder one, being as he is playwright and manager too. No doubt, father and son acting together, or M. Sacha Guitry alone in the part of Deburau, could put a special intensity and pathos into that last act.

Mr. Michael Sherbrooke was very good as the manager of the theatre; trust him to play a part of rasping geniality.

IBSEN AND THE TRAGIC SENSE

JOHN GABRIEL BORKMAN has given place to *Prunella* at Everyman's Theatre, Hampstead. It is to be hoped, however, that it has gone into their repertory; for, although the acting left much to be desired, there were excellent points about M. Komisarjevsky's production, and Mr. Franklin Dyall's Borkman was, in the quiet passages, extremely good. The actors were not up to the tragic intensity of their parts, but it is not surprising that they did not succeed in gripping and hurling across the footlights the huge massive emotions the play contains. The performance was well worth seeing, nevertheless, and if another chance of seeing it occurs do not miss it. At least you will be reminded what great drama is, even if it does appear to put too much strain on its interpreters; you will, at any rate, be reminded that there is such a thing as modern tragedy.

Reflecting as I walked down the hill on what I had seen, and upon the failure of the actors and actresses to convey that intensity peculiar to characters whose wills are irrevocably set in one direction, without whom tragedy is impossible, I found an excellent excuse for them in the temper of the times. How could they represent those characters? Such emotional obstinacy was incredible! For the times are anti-tragical; "Pack up your troubles in the old kit-bag and smile, smile, smile", is the most serious modern contribution to the philosophy of the ages, and, though it is by no means to be despised as a practical one, yet the mood which engenders it is

one to which tragedy is incomprehensible. Nowadays "to die hard" is equivalent to doing something absurd; failure to follow at once the line of least resistance, not to treat the past, even if it is but a few weeks old, as though it had never happened, not to forget, when forgetfulness facilitates, what you felt or stood for a month ago, is to be ridiculous. No one can deny that is the temper of the times, and it is killing to the tragic sense; indeed, it presupposes that it is already dead.

A criticism of *Gabriel Borkman* appeared in the *Daily Mail*; it was an interesting criticism because it was an entirely honest one. The writer told the story thus: Gabriel Borkman was a fraudulent financier who, after release from prison, lived seven years pacing up and down a gallery upstairs waiting for a deputation to call on him, while his wife, a most unpleasant woman, lived down below. His old love, her sister, came unexpectedly to see him and he went out, caught a chill, and died. His wife wanted his son to redeem the family name, but he preferred to run off with a frisky widow and he did so. The writer concluded from this rotten story that Ibsen as a dramatist was a wash-out. The summary is quite accurate and the conclusion inevitable, if the passions of the characters are dismissed as incredible and therefore uninteresting. If you cannot believe that Borkman had an irresistible vocation, and that he was an imaginative man to whom the imprisoned millions in the mines called incessantly to release them, you can understand neither how dead he was all those years after his fall, nourishing himself in solitude on the dream that one day his fellow-citizens would find his services indispensable, nor can you understand the significance of his awakening to physical death when Ella visits him. The first effect of that interview, of his first reaction to reality after years of dreaming, is to fill him with hope. "I

have been close to the verge of death", he cries. "But now I have awakened. I have come to myself. A whole life lies before me yet. I can see it awaiting me, radiant and quickening. And you—you shall see it, too."

"Never dream of life again", answers his wife. "Lie quiet where you are." How absurd to one without the tragic sense it seems that this unforgiving wife has never till then, in all those years, spoken to her husband, and that all she lives for should be to raise a "living monument" upon his grave, in the shape of her son: "His life shall be so pure and high and bright, that your burrowing in the dark shall be as though it had never been." The woman is clearly overstrained . . . but to make her breakdown persist for seven years! What nonsense, too, Ella talks; because Borkman married her sister for money, she accuses him of having committed "a crime for which there is no forgiveness!" . . . "What you held dearest in the world you were ready to barter for gain. That is the double crime you have committed. The murder is on your soul and on mine. . . . You have done to death all the gladness of life in me." And at the last when, from the hill where long ago they used to sit together, they look again across the mining country covered now in darkness and snow, and Borkman listens, as he did in his youth, to the call of his imprisoned millions: "I love you, unborn Treasures yearning for the light", she breaks out again. "Yes, your love is still down there, John. But here, in the light of day, here there was a living, warm human heart that throbbed and glowed for you. And this heart you crushed. Oh, worse than that! Ten times worse! You sold it. . . . And therefore I prophesy to you, John Gabriel Borkman—you will never enter in triumph into your cold dark kingdom."

This is clearly not a woman who packed her

troubles in the old kit-bag and smiled, smiled, smiled, and in tragic sentiment "Bear it and grin" is, I maintain, the highest pitch to which modern sensibility will follow the dramatist. Such a play as this obviously overshoots that pitch and to the modern sense falls plumb into the nonsensical. "Unforgivable sin!" There is no such thing; neither are there irrevocable crashes in life, or words, however passionate, which cannot be quite simply retracted. Pain, of course, remains, but pain is painful, not tragic; besides, even that can be avoided perhaps by repeating, "I am better and better every day in every way".

The sense of the momentous and irrevocable is too weak just now for Ibsen to be understood, who in his own fashion was as possessed by it as Robert Browning, Carlyle, or any revivalist. He was both realist and poet, but he did not write his best when he wrote only as a realist (*The League of Youth*, *The Pillars of Society*, *The Doll's House*, etc.); though he was always a marvellous craftsman, or when he wrote chiefly as a poet (*Brand*, *Emperor and Galilean*); his real power showed when from his vision he began to create types, and lastly when in his old age he began to draw his dramas from his inner experience. Where he was unrivalled was in finding a story, just matter of fact enough to be plausible and exactly fitted to carry his thought, which was exciting and profound. Indeed, the intensity of the thought below the current of events was so great, that he could even indulge in concrete and arbitrary symbolism without the story losing its matter-of-fact convincingness. It is not his stories which are so remarkable, but the significance within, and it is with that the present generation is losing touch, for when Ibsen is not hewing at some social evil he is essentially a tragic poet.

Much has been written about the nature of

tragedy and why it should delight men; this famous "purging of the emotions" through the spectacle of suffering—what is meant by it? Art enables us to focus our dumb emotions, and by so doing relieves them. Tragedy does not show that evil is somehow good or calamity a blessing in disguise; to do that is the function of apologetics and dubious theology. It simply confronts us with the apprehension of how evil evils are and what goods are possible though they may be thwarted. It finds expression for sorrow just as other forms of art express joy, and both bring the same relief and gratification through expressing what was previously in us dumb or half-articulate and confronting us with it. Catharsis is not a result peculiar to tragedy. But it can appeal, of course, only to those who in their lives confront sorrow and calamities and do not shuffle them out of sight. The genius of Ibsen at the close of his career was a purely tragic genius; his theme becomes spiritual death, not regeneration. You may say that the public never understood him. They did not, but they felt there was something there to understand. My impression is that they are losing that dim perception, and chiefly because they handle the stuff of tragedy in their own experience differently.

MAGDA

IT HAPPENS occasionally that a young man of ample fortune, growing tired of living upon it, takes to a hard profession, and slaves at it as though all that is already his depended on it. Miss Gladys Cooper was born with the kind of beauty which secures for its possessor an instant rise to the sunny surface of her profession. She was lovely; her beauty drew; upon that natural capital she flourished. She always acted her parts prettily and properly, but lately, though her natural capital is unimpaired, she has taken to working hard. She is making herself into an actress of far wider scope and accomplishment.

As Magda (the Playhouse Theatre) she has had Duse, Sarah Bernhardt and Mrs. Patrick Campbell as her predecessors. She is too young to have profited from seeing Duse and Sarah act Magda in London in 1895, but it is quite clear she has learnt much from Mrs. Campbell. On not a few occasions she even mimicked her voice, her gestures, and her Magda's slow, wondering, insulting gaze and perfunctory tenderness, which suited the part so perfectly. Mrs. Campbell's Magda was Sudermann's Magda. I never saw Duse act Magda, but it is hard to believe that she did not import into the part a delicacy of character foreign to it. Although I can imagine that Duse's entrance in the first act was far more touching and beautiful than either Sarah's or Mrs. Campbell's, the pathos of that entrance (one of the most moving entrances in modern drama) springs rather from the joy of her young sister and

the expectancy of the others, than from the character of Magda herself. Magda in the doorway of her harsh, stuffy, modest home should be a vision which takes the breath; but after her first wild impulse of tenderness, when she seizes the worn hands of her little sister and kisses them again and again, Magda exhibits traits of the spoilt prima donna; the coarser radiance of success, an abrupt, domineering condescension, over-confident bad manners, which, rash as it is at a venture to set limits to the art of genius, I can hardly imagine Duse not having etherealized away in the beauty of her own personality.

The proper title of the play is not *Magda* but *Home*, and its main theme, now an old-fashioned one, the struggle between the authority of a biblical father and a rebellious daughter, who in the past has defied him by running away, and now urged by a sudden waft of homesickness, returns in triumph. She has had a bitter, hard struggle. She has known hunger; she has borne a son in loneliness and poverty to a man whom she presently meets again as a pillar of respectability under her father's roof. Magda is the type of the revolting woman of the 'eighties and 'nineties, a victorious example of "self-realization"; she is one of the young released from the prison of "Home" by Ibsen trumpets. But the walls of Jericho are now so flat that a modern audience has to make an effort of imagination, not unlike that demanded by a Greek play, in order to measure the strength of the bonds she has burst, or to believe in the passionate conviction with which her palsied old father still continues to assert his right to control her conscience and manner of life. Magda's tirades, which once sent through us a thrill of fearful joy, now only prompt a mood of easy assent. We murmur, "No doubt, no doubt", when she declares that she must be herself and keep her child; and her concession in the matter of marriage with her odious

ex-lover astonishes us a great deal more than her subversive ethics. It also appears incredible that Magda's eminence as a singer of European fame should have flashed after years of absence as an overwhelming surprise upon her family. Magda's independent career in this generation would have been punctuated (perhaps after a first interval of rather ominous silence) by notes like this:

Dear Daddy,—You must have been simply wild when I went off suddenly like that, but I simply *couldn't* stand it any longer. You know, you silly old thing, you *were* awfully unreasonable. Tom turned out an utter rotter. I'm glad I have seen the last of him. I have had a pretty rough time, you were right about *that,* but I've got a part, a wretched little pip-squeak part, still something, in *Madam Butterfly.* I am singing at Cardiff on the 23rd. I don't suppose you will, but I should be awfully pleased if Lottie and mamma and you came to hear me. We would open the fatted potted meat for the prodigal old dad's return to the bosom of his affectionate daughter!!! Give Marie a thousand hugs from Magda. Tell her from me not to get married too quick. Sow your tame oats when you're old, that's my advice. I'm going to be another Galli Curci. I dare say you've never heard of her. She gets such tremendous sums only South Americans can afford her. Cheerio.—MAGDA.

Even had she failed, the modern Magda would have merely become a theme for sad, vague head-shakes. You cannot, however, make a play out of a modern Magda. She does not lend herself—and it is one of my objections to her—to tense situations: no morals, no plays—hardly even funny ones, I fear.

Though the ethical framework of *Magda* is old-fashioned, yet, as in all fine, solid pieces of dramatic work, the emotions depicted, once the imagination has accepted the situation, remain untouched by the destructive *Zeit-geist.* The first act of the play strikes one as extraordinarily good, and there are memorable moments throughout. But as the framework of the tragedy has become academic, we are thrown more and more on the contest between the

two opposing characters, father and daughter, for our excitement; and in order that these antagonists should balance more approximately in our sympathies, it is most important that Magda should not appear as a beautiful character as well as a woman obviously in the right. For this reason, Miss Cooper could not have had a better model than Mrs. Campbell's interpretation of the part, and to say that her influence permeates Miss Cooper's performance is to praise it. No new reading could be as true, or, now, as dramatically effective. She might even at one moment further accentuate the resemblance. In the last act, when Magda is kneeling by her father's chair, and he, possessed by an itch to find out how disreputable her life has really been, keeps questioning her, she tries to stop him by petting him. The old man shakes off her embrace in a fury, his paralysed arm working more violently than ever. "You are treating me like a child", he shouts. The poignancy of that cry (for a second our sympathy rushes to him) depends upon the perfunctory tenderness of a caress that does not dissimilate contempt. No actress can make such a gesture more humiliating than Mrs. Campbell can, and if Miss Cooper imagines herself Mrs. Campbell at that moment, it will drive the pathos deeper home.

The part of Magda's father is one in which it is impossible to fail and possible to act with great effect. Mr. Franklin Dyall, without over-acting, achieved that effect. His hobbling exit at the end of the first act was particularly good. It is a part which requires careful support from the others who are on the stage at the same time. None can act a terrible yet helpless old man by himself; the awe he is observed to inspire is all-important. There was certainly one scene which fell below its possibilities. Nothing can be more disquieting than what is happening behind a door, and when Magda and her

father are shut in his study after he has discovered her previous relations with Von Keller, the agitation of the anxious mother and sister was not vivid enough. I was in some doubt if the extremely parsonical voice and demeanour of the pastor, once the mild aspirant to Magda's hand, added to or detracted from the effectiveness of Mr. William Stack's performance. It checked our sympathy for him as a man, but that again had the effect, at any rate in the first interview with Magda (the second is quite unconvincing), of drawing our attention to the fact that it was the strength of his case which prevailed with her and his dismal, self-contained formalism added a pathos to his confession—when Magda says she wishes she was like him—that since seeing her again he had been tortured by the regret that he had not always lived from his own impulses.

DESOLATION IS A DELICATE THING

THE MEN of Leinster have a proverb, "All the cows in Connaught have long horns", and doubtless many who go to the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith, to see *The Cherry Orchard* come away thinking that such characters are peculiar to Russia. Of course the "atmosphere" is Russian, and this is one of the difficulties which, not unnaturally, the company failed to overcome. A Russian would no doubt smile at some of the scenes for being wrong as far as imponderables are concerned, just as an Englishman might smile at a performance of Galsworthy in Milan; but though the "atmosphere" is Russian the human-nature in the play is universal. That is what makes it moving. Take Gaev, perhaps the most fantastic character in it, who, whenever a thought stabs him or he has to make a painful decision, whisks off his mind to his favourite game, billiards, and cries out, "Cannon off the red and into the centre pocket." How very Russian! exclaims the Englishman who takes refuge from worries in cricket scores, and in the middle of a quarrel with his wife will withdraw his mind and think of the approach shot he is going to make at the third hole next Saturday.

I have, I am glad to say, known a "perpetual student"; and surely all have met an impulsive, hazy Madam Ranevsky (Lyubov), who gives largesse instead of paying bills, is a prey to any adventurer, and slowly, tender-heartedly resigns all she loves rather than stop muddling along. No; if you regard *The Cherry Orchard* as a study in national

character you will miss its point, and, worse loss, you will not be touched, for nothing chills sympathy so much as consciousness of superiority. There is a difference, but it is not a deep one, between these characters and ourselves: the conventional façade of self-respect is not kept up between them; they would admit to being the childish creatures they are. This atmosphere of impulsive candour is intensified by Tchehov's method of making character reveal itself casually, irrelevantly. It is a method which requires the most careful minute acting. In acting Tchehov "timing", the right pause before speaking and the right change of tone are more than usually important, since it is not so much through literal meaning of remarks as through the attitude they betray in the speakers that we are conducted into the heart of the drama.

Take one instance: Trofimov, "the perpetual student", "the mouldy young man", who has been ten years taking his degree, ex-tutor to Lyubov's boy who was drowned, is obviously in love, or about to be in love, with her daughter Anya. He has been boasting (there is some truth in the boast too) that Lyubov need not be afraid; he is above passion. He has been scolding her, as the young will do, because she will not "face facts"—the fact that she must sell her home and look forward to a new life. She has replied, as elderly people often reply, "You settle every problem so trenchantly! Dear boy, isn't that because you haven't yet understood one of your own problems through suffering? You look forward boldly. But isn't it because you don't see and don't expect anything dreadful because life is still hidden from your young eyes? You're braver, more honest, deeper than we are; but think, be just a little magnanimous—have pity on me. I was born here, you know, my father and mother lived here, my grandfather lived here. I love this

house. I can't conceive life without The Cherry Orchard. If it really must be sold—then sell me with the orchard. (She kisses him.) My boy was drowned here. Pity me, be kind."

"You know I feel for you with all my heart", says Trofimov. And her reply shows how vital for the drama it is that there should be coldness in his voice. "Not like that"—she exclaims "you should say that so differently." Then a wave of wide, maternal tenderness sweeps over her: "Don't be hard on me, Petya—I love you as one of ourselves. I would gladly let you marry Anya—I swear I would—only, dear boy" (here the practical mother speaks), "you must take your degree. You do *nothing*—you're just tossed by fate from place to place.—And " (suddenly she sees him from outside, a poor, weedy, feckless fellow) "you must do something with your beard to make it grow. (She laughs.) You look so funny." Trofimov answers sullenly, "I've no wish to be a beauty", and picks up a telegram which her lover has sent her from Paris.

The sight of it sets her off on wailing about the man whom she still loves in spite of his abominable treatment of her; and Trofimov, the remark about his beard rankling, blurts out angrily the truth: that this fellow lives on her and that she is a fool. As in real life, it is the feeling behind the words she answers. She, too, flares up. She sees again before her not the affectionate, high-minded Petya, but a weedy, presumptuous, pretentious weakling. "You should be a man at your age—understand love." Wounding words pour from her lips. He is a prude—a comic fool, a freak, a scrap of a man—"At your age you haven't even a mistress." "You, *above* love! You're a ——" and Trofimov in distracted agony, crying "This is awful", dashes from the room. There is a crash and the sound of laughter outside. He has fallen down-

stairs! Lyubov is now very repentant, and when he enters again presently (there is an untidy party going on) she insists on their dancing together. She, like a woman, is glib in asking to be forgiven; Petra is silent and still sore.

In almost every other modern play this scene would stand out as a moment of condensed emotion and revelation of character. In *The Cherry Orchard* it is only part of a consistent perfection. There is not five minutes space anywhere in the dialogue, which would not, like a drop beneath a microscope, be found swarming with life. I have translated it here into a sort of Braille, raised letters for the blind, because those bracketed comments, insulting to the intelligence of the sensitive, bring home the special importance of "timing" and intonation in acting Tchehov. All depends upon the actors making pauses, pace, tone psychologically significant, so that we are made to feel the twists and turns of emotion within the speakers. If this is difficult in a dialogue, it is harder still when several people are speaking disjointedly and seemingly about indifferent matters. It was due to careless "timing" that passages in the play seemed at the Lyric huddled and muddled. Perfection in this respect, however, is hard to attain without the pains which, even with the best will in the world, few companies can afford to take. No work requires more delicacy in orchestration. Even the poignancy of the departure of the family at the end of the last act depends on the way in which the interjected remarks, "The things are all ready", "Here are your goloshes", the hopeful cry of Anya, "Good-bye old home", the flourish of Trofimov, fall into a deep pool of still hopeless emotion, and make rings there.

What a master Tchehov is of farewells! Recall the last act of *The Three Sisters*, when the regiment marches away, taking with them the sisters' friends

and their last hope, of the dim little speech of Sonya at the close of *Uncle Vanya*—"We must go on living. We shall go on living, Uncle Vanya", a speech so touching in the inadequacy of the comfort it can bring; and then that sudden rush of emotion in this play, when brother and sister fall on each other's necks; a desolation of spirit led up to with such delicate art, interrupted so naturally, and heightened so dramatically, by the constant intrusion of the commonplace. Tchehov understood better than anyone that just as walking is a perpetual falling so living is a perpetual series of good-byes, and that courage lies not so much in the power of looking forward to new things as in the power to break with the old. These two hapless elderly people could not do that. The young Anya and "the perpetual student" had unsatisfied curiosity and day-dreams to support them; the other two only their incorrigible fecklessness.

We get close to the spirit of Tchehov himself in these scenes of farewells. He could not "break the parting word into its two significant halves adieu", though the tenderness of his indulgence sprang from seeing life as a constant slipping from one good-bye into another. It is difficult to suggest a philosophy which is never formulated. It is a feeling rather than a thought which his work leaves behind, a feeling that though everything is brief, precarious and empty, just because that *is* all, there is a kind of sacredness about it which the angry cynic and impatient moralist are too stupid to feel. Get rid of enormous hopes, especially of exorbitant expectations regarding yourself and others, and you will share an emotion towards mankind in which irony and sympathy are so blended that it leads the living, too, beyond "a vale of tears".

I will admit no writer to be a greater writer than Tolstoy, and if as a reader of men and women I am about to compare him for a moment with

Tchehov to his disadvantage, I am not forgetting Tolstoi's superiority as a poet and a creator. With terrible insight Tolstoi puts his finger on the very spot and tells us we ail there and there. After that pitiless diagnosis, since he is wise, he, too, forgives. But in Tchehov penetration and sympathy are not successive movements of the mind, but simultaneous; a single faculty, thanks to which no weakness escapes him or remains unpardoned. It is a subtler justice.

Consciousness of the futility of men and the humiliating brevity of their passions, tragedies and noble impulses, also leaves behind a kind of phantom, first cousin to hope. It is a very gentle irony which makes Tchehov put into the mouth of the ineffectual Trofimov the expression of man's hopes—a double irony, I think, which reflects as much on the practical Lopahin as on the indolent "perpetual student" himself.

In the dialogue between him and Lyubov quoted above observe how even in two such affectionate and effusive people egotism keeps them apart—to join, to part again, and so on inevitably for ever. One source of the poignant impression Tchehov's picture of life makes upon us is that justice is done in it to the isolation of human beings. Each lives in his or her bubble of egotism; only at moments do those bubbles break and join. The note is struck at the very beginning of the play when the longed-for travellers arrive.

DUNYASHA. We've been expecting you so long (*takes Anya's hat and coat*).

ANYA. I haven't slept for four nights on the journey. I feel dreadfully cold.

DUNYASHA. You set out in Lent, there was snow and frost, and now? My darling! (*laughs and kisses her*). I *have* missed you, my precious, my joy. I must tell you . . . I can't put it off a minute.

ANYA (wearily). What now?

DUNYASHA. Epihodov, the clerk, made me a proposal just after Easter.

ANYA. It's always the same thing with you . . . (*straightening her hair*). I've lost all my hairpins . . . (*she is staggering from exhaustion*).

This stress upon natural universal egotism takes sublimity from the sorrows of those we watch, but it adds to the moving reality of their sufferings.

And we must not forget Tchehov's laughter. *The Cherry Orchard* is in part a comedy, and a comedy which verges, as Tchehov said himself, on farce. My general criticism of the Lyric performance is that it was too lugubrious. The comic element was submerged. The actors were too self-conscious to act the farcical passages with due extravagance, all except Mr Allan Napier (Gaev). The rainbow effect of laughter shining through a rain of tears was lost; it would also have made the play more moving. Tchehov, as his letters show, was most insistent it should not be. Mr Gielgud's Trofimov and Mr Allan Napier's Gaev were the parts played best. Lopahin is an extremely difficult part, and a very important one; Lopahin is less of a piece than the rest.

DRAMA AND DOSTOEVSKY

THE PRODUCTION of *The Idiot* at the Little Theatre is certainly much more interesting than most plays running at this moment, but it is also far more disappointing than all but the poorest of them. It is disappointing because it is practically impossible to dramatize Dostoevsky, though he is the most dramatic of all novelists, and because it is very difficult for English actors and actresses (unless they are trained and looked after by a producer like M. Komisarjevsky) to act Russian characters. The moments on the stage when Russian characters are supposed to be speaking out of themselves are just those which are apt to appear on our stage particularly unnatural. Mr. Michael Hogan, who adapted the novel and produced the play, undertook a task of enormous difficulty, probably impossible to achieve with complete success. That he might have done it better than he did, I also believe. Let what I have to say about this play be read in the light of that admission.

Dostoevsky's method as a novelist is essentially dramatic; his characters exhibit themselves in talk —in pages and pages of dialogue. Compare him with Tolstoy and one notices how little he relies in comparison on description or statement. Tolstoy states briefly what is in the minds of his characters; he describes with unmatched vividness how they look and behave. True, the people in his stories when they speak always speak in character, but we get to know them so well largely through *seeing* them act and move before us. Dostoevsky's method of

approach is the reverse. He gets his effects, not by describing in each case the body and its gestures so vividly that we divine the movements of the soul, but by making his characters expose so completely every emotion within them in talk that we can infer their substantiality.

It might seem, then, that the dramatist who aims at putting a Dostoevsky novel on the stage, has only to choose the passages of this wonderfully revealing dialogue and string them together. But there is an insuperable difficulty: Dostoevsky's method is expansive. Look at the length of his novels and the short time the action occupies. He requires as many pages to describe the events of hours as Tolstoy takes to describe the events of years. Profusion, intricate modulation, repetition are essential to Dostoevsky's effects. Each drop of water, each minute, is put under a microscope; in the end there is a revelation of swarming life positively oceanic in effect, but the method is one inadaptable to the stage. Only on the Chinese stage, where a play is permitted to last a week or so, could the dramatist hope to produce the same result. Attempts to telescope Dostoevsky's intricate, impassioned conversations inevitably over-emphasize the crude erratic violence of the situations and the spiritual melodrama of these huge stories, which are only made convincing by innumerable strokes—subtle, unexpected and profound. It takes more time than stage-presentation allows to burrow into the characters as deep as Dostoevsky's themes require. We must, also, get gradually used (this is especially true of an English audience) to the hectic, restless chaos in which his characters live, before we can measure their moral natures or estimate the momentum of the emotions impelling them. If this preparation is scamped, the climaxes appear hysterical or lurid.

This was the case on the stage of the Little

Theatre, and I do not see how it could have been otherwise. What can we make of Aglaya, if we have heard her only utter a few sentences before her scene with Nastasia and Muishkin? She must seem to us merely a wild hysterical little thing; we may be sorry for her, but she can hardly seem tragic to us. And how much more development is required in the case of Nastasia than the sight of her excited behaviour in Act II, if we are to understand how, in her, unselfish adoration of Muishkin was shot with a morbid self-centred impulse towards death and suffering.

The softening, calming influence of Muishkin's saintliness on others, when restricted to a few signal instances, instead of being spread out like a sweetness in the common air, becomes suspiciously evangelical. I thought Mr. Ion Swinley's performance no mean one—quite the contrary; yet Muishkin on the stage was not entirely unreminiscent of the principal figure in that sentimentalized drama of the power of goodness, *The Passing of the Third Floor Back*. I think Mr. Michael Hogan made a mistake in substituting for the closing scene of the novel, in which Muishkin soothes the raving murderer Rogozin, Rogozin's suicide and an idiot's monologue for Muishkin to speak as the curtain falls. Rogozin was too crazy a figure to be interesting. Mr. Michael Hogan, who acted the part, found himself driven to reinforce the interest of the part by physical contortions and grimaces almost as violent as Muishkin's rapidly evanescent fits.

The defects of the stage-version which I have dwelt upon seem to me inevitable, but where the critic may with justice bring Mr. Hogan to book, is over the failure of the production to animate the whole of any scene. Too often the figures on the stage were grouped as a *tableau vivant*, while a duologue of impassioned violence was taking place. This inevitably destroyed the intensity of the effect. The dia-

logue required to be more evenly distributed at such moments, the duologue occasionally broken, and the speaking of the lines better timed. The most perfectly adequate acting was seen in the minor parts; Ferdishemko (a remarkable performance by Mr. Clive Currie, whom I shall look out for in future) and Ivolgin (Mr. George Cooke). The best passages were Mr. Ion Swinley's acting in the first act and Miss Stella Arbenina as Nastasia, in Act III, Scene I. In Act II she failed to give the impression of wild misery simulating hardness and gaiety. On her entrance, we could not gather what her mood was or what sort of a woman she was; her transitions of emotion appeared merely pathological. But in the last act her pleading resignation was admirable. Aglaya (Miss Beatrix Thomson) acted well, but we had seen too little of Aglaya to be deeply interested in her.

I wish to conclude this notice by saying that although I could only enjoy the play with reservations, it is not waste of time to see it. Nor is it one for which those who care for drama will be ungrateful; it flutters and flops, but it is a brave attempt to fly.

ROSMERSHOLM

ROSMERSHOLM is a magnificent play. Do not miss *Rosmersholm*. It will remind you how high dramatic art can rise, and how deeply intellectual courage can probe human nature.

We attend so many plays, we read so many books, of trifling, varying merit, that we are apt to lose our sense of real achievement. Some people hope by directing destructive sniffs at the small meritorious successes of little men to preserve that sense—usually in vain. The important thing is to respond to greatness when we meet it, and to deplore incessantly its absence does not increase our power of response.

Like nearly all fine plays, *Rosmersholm* has a vital moral interest. Ibsen's genius is inseparable from his conscience. He is, indeed, the dramatist of the Protestant Conscience ("Save his own soul he hath no star") at its highest pitch of searching intensity. For this reason his work is repellent to those who rest upon authority and to those who are bored with, or made uneasy by, moral questionings. To both these types his works must seem pernicious and even unintelligent. In so far as such people cannot escape being impressed by his power, they will attribute it to his amazing "dramatic craftsmanship": a most incomplete analysis, a shocking-bad analysis, a shirking, loose analysis. I am sorry for those who hope that the theory that morals have never anything to do with art, or conscience with creation, for Ibsen is a difficulty, and so is Tolstoy, and so are—well, no matter. It is impos-

sible not to admire their works, and yet without their passionate preoccupation with moral values where would those artists be? True, it is possible, especially in the case of Tolstoy, to point to the interruptions of the moral theorizer as blemishes in his work. They often are. But that does not get us over the fact that his sense of life, which impresses by its beauty and startles by its reality, is saturated in conscience. In Ibsen's plays, too, it is the search for the right way of living which sharpens to penetration his eye for character and dramatic situations. To think that it is possible for anyone to bend upon life the intense attention which leads to discovery and creation, without something within him far more urgent than detached curiosity or a desire to write a good play, is to betray a colossal ignorance of psychology. It is the tension within —"I must know, know or perish"—that is the driving force behind the creative faculty in these writers. And to know what? To know what is most important to man, how it can be obtained and kept. A poodle is the most teachable of dogs because it is the most greedy; Ibsen was the greatest of modern dramatists because he was the most hungry after truth.

The "moral" of an Ibsen play is seldom the most important thing—indeed, usually it is not there, or discoverable only by ignoring part of the play. What, however, is always significant is the manner in which moral issues in his plays are juxtaposed and the tension between them exhibited. If you are rather clever you will probably think you have discovered "a moral" in *Rosmersholm*; if you are clever you will probably not. When it was first performed the representatives of a Norwegian youth-movement wrote to Ibsen asking if the call to work for mankind were not the message of *Rosmersholm*. The hungry lambs looked up (you

can see their faces); the shepherd, though he seemed so grim, was kind; he nodded a "No doubt, no doubt". "But", he added, "the play also deals with the war all serious people must wage with themselves to bring their lives into harmony with their convictions. Different spiritual functions do not develop evenly and abreast of each other in any one person. The intellect hurries on from victory to victory; the moral consciousness, what we call conscience, is, on the other hand, very conservative. It has its roots deep in tradition and the past. Hence the conflict." Then he adds, and the sentence should be printed on the programmes of even the most apparently didactic of his plays: "But the play is, of course, before everything a drama of human beings and human fate."

Rebecca West is an embodiment of the vanguard intellect; "Rosmersholm" of the moral consciousness, so slow to move, so hard to justify, so strangely authoritative.

And "Rosmersholm" broke her. You remember her cry before she goes to her death. "I am under the spell of the Rosmersholm view of life—*now*. I've sinned and must expiate it." But was *that* the tragedy for Ibsen, that the self-confidence of an amoral young woman who had hitherto always made for what she wanted and grabbed it, who had slowly and slyly lured her benefactress to suicide in order to possess her husband, should have been sapped? Only that? To answer yes is to fail to measure the diameter of her creator's mind or the profundity of his doubts. Remember, that Rosmer has changed Rebecca. Her frantic passion for him had, under his influence, changed into love, bringing with it a new sense of values. She asserts this with all the energy of a woman ready to die to convince him of it. And it was true. We have watched on the stage altruism and delicacy of

feeling begin to have a meaning for her. We have seen her change; seen her reject her adored one because the words in which he urges her to take him prove it cannot be a marriage of true minds. We have heard her confess to him, in the presence of her bitter enemy, his brother-in-law; a confession which leaves not a rag to cover her hideousness in her lover's eyes, in which she takes on herself the whole responsibility for Beata's death, in order to enable him to live henceforth with self-respect, as himself—not the man she once hoped to make him, but as himself, with all his inborn moral scruples and aspirations. It is true, he had changed her. She has become an "idealist", and presently she will die to prove it.

Disbelief in the possibility of that change from passion to love, not to believe in love—however rare you may think it, however common you may know its counterfeits to be—is the sign of a vulgar soul—such scepticism is only pardonable in a Democritus or two, and Ibsen was far from being either a vulgar soul or a laughing philosopher. He is not "on the side of" the amoral egotism of the young Rebecca. Had he been, he would have soon found rest, and we should have had from him, instead of masterpieces, robust materialistic plays, with "morals" attached as legible as posters; plays as cut-and-dried and cooked as Brieux's stage-tracts for the times. Nor, either, is he "on the side of" Rosmer with his fanatic's cry, "There is no judge over us; therefore we must do justice upon ourselves." Yet it is impossible to study Ibsen without feeling how *near* it comes to being a cry also from his own heart. Ibsen was torn between two ways of taking life.

Rosmersholm is a play which springs from the divided allegiance of the modern conscience to two different moralities; both with their beauty, both

seemingly fitted (and yet also unfitted) to guide men. The tug of war between the ethics of the will to power and Christianity, between the gospel of self-assertion and of renunciation had been a vital matter to Ibsen as early as *The Vikings*. In *Emperor and Galilean* he had attempted more, but only succeeded in depicting again their struggle, not their reconciliation. "Who shall conquer, the emperor or the Galilean?" The answer was: "he who shall swallow up both", but *he* does not appear, neither then nor at any time in Ibsen's work.

In *Rosmersholm* Ibsen transfers the same struggle into a psychological drama of modern life and then—watches what will happen. The result is mutual laceration, not reconciliation—unless that climax-scene between Rebecca and Rosmer, that moment's marriage between them, is intended to be, not merely a *Liebestod*, an exalted crisis of erotomania, but a symbolic union of the forces each represents. The scene, immensely powerful to read when the imagination of the solitary reader is glowing and awake, is nearly impossible to act. The only fault Ibsen has as a stage-craftsman is that sometimes he will ask too much from actors. There are moments in his drama when the characters, whose motives and dispositions have been revealed with psychological exactness, suddenly become luminous and transparent; so that we are not so much aware of *them*, as of the forces they represent, and when the words they have to speak become expressive of their ambiguous condition. Sometimes, on the other hand, he frankly introduced a symbolic non-human figure to achieve this effect; the Rat Wife, for example, who enters a solid suburban home. When these moments occur (they are frequent in the later drama, in *The Master Builder*, in *When We Dead Awaken*) it is important that the producer should explain to the actors that, however solidly real they

have been till then, they are *now* also almost like figures in a symbolic drama. To modulate out of realistic psychological drama into poetic, symbolic drama puts an enormous strain upon both actors and producers; yet upon that successful modulation all depends. The beauty of Ibsen's work is at stake.

Such a moment is the suicide of the two main figures in *Rosmersholm*. There is another moment, just before it in the play, in which a minor figure—Brandel, a sort of little Peer Gynt (exceedingly well played by Mr Farquharson) should appear with the effect almost of a phantom. He crosses the scene twice. The first time he is a megalomaniac day-dreamer, who is at last prepared to thunder out his message to the world, and give away his hoarded gold of thought. He acts for the moment as a stimulant to Rosmer's courage when meeting the harsh conventionalism of Kroll, utter sham though Brandel is. (Sham prophets often help a little while people more sincere than themselves.) The second time Brandel appears it is as a self-confessed bankrupt. On Rosmer he has now the effect of a shabby spectre of all idealistic aspiration. I cannot suggest any definite alteration in Mr Farquharson's manner, but the staging of his appearance might well help him more to achieve that spectral effect. (I am indebted for this Brandel point to Professor Weigand's excellent book *The Modern Ibsen*.)

STRINDBERG STRINDBERG

THE TWO most important facts about Strindberg, apart from his genius, were that he was liable to violent attacks of suspicion-mania and that he could not get on with or without women and married wife after wife. He did not know how to live with women, or how to quarrel with them, how to make it up, or how to break with them. They threw him into a state of agonized bewilderment shot with flashes of piercing hate-directed insight. A large part of his work may be roughly described as the sorrows of a hen-pecked Blue Beard. Possessing the lucidity of genius, he could also suddenly recollect himself and see himself as mad or impossibly exacting; and he rightly named his longest account of the agonies of such an intimacy *The Confessions of a Fool.* Being a poet, he could sometimes invest such agonies with the tatters of a lurid beauty and make you feel, "O what a noble mind is here o'erthrown", but he could never put the personal aspects of exasperation and misery far enough behind him; never get rid of resentment towards the figments of his imagination because of their resemblance to the actual persons who had served him as models. His imagination and his power of reviving as he wrote intense perceptions of what he had experienced enabled him to create figures filled with powerful vitality, but once created he could not let them go their own way or allow them the right to live, however balefully, as human-beings. He would snatch up his own creations and by doing so turn them into wax-effigies to stick with nails of spite

and roast before the fire of his private anger. This is clearly to be seen in the play I am about to criticize; and this degrades it from the category of the excellent to that of the remarkable.

The same flaw runs through nearly all his work. (I have not read his historical dramas; perhaps they and his fairy dramas should be excepted.) His art judged as a whole is of the kind often euphemistically called "cathartic" (unduly exalted in periods of perplexity), in which egotism, sometimes sympathetic, sometimes childish, sprawls and spews before the public, indifferent to the impression it makes so long as it exhibits itself. Strindberg was a struggler: "To search for God and to find the Devil! That is what has happened to me", he cries in *Inferno*. The man who is all struggle may be huge, but he cannot be great.

The curtain goes up; we are looking into one of those northern homes which give us an odd arresting sense of isolation. This is the study of a distinguished man of science (Strindberg—I never could make out whether, or not, it was one of his delusions—considered that he had made, or was on the verge of making, important mineralogical discoveries), and the owner of the study is also a cavalry captain. As usual, the only neighbours are a pastor and a doctor; and without the home broods the terrific atmospheric pressure of gossip and respectability—quite Ibsenish, in fact. The spirit of the drama is, however, not at all like Ibsen. In Ibsen the woman nearly always has the *beau rôle*; in Strindberg's plays she is not even the conduit of disaster, but evil itself. The house is upside down. "The Captain" is struggling in a mesh woven by the maleficent wills of wife, nurse, mother-in-law and grandmother-in-law. (Mr. Loraine acted admirably throughout the neurotic lion.)

The struggle of the moment is over the educa-

tion of his daughter; her mother wants to make her an artist on the strength of the admiration of a young man who was rather in love with the girl, her grandmother wants to make her into a spiritualist, the servants to convert her to the Salvation Army, the Captain's old nurse into a Baptist; while he is determined that she shall be taken out of confusion and sent away to school. He will assert his rights as "the Father". Her mother is equally determined that she shall control the destiny of her child, and, as we presently see, she is a formidable woman of relentless cunning—all the more formidable because she is entirely without magnanimity or a sense of honour, and because her cunning is of the hand-to-mouth kind.

Ibsen was fond of showing how much more humane women were because they were not conscience-ridden, often too, how much more sensible they were in consequence. Strindberg revelled in showing that it made them monsters. Laura will stick at nothing to get her way. She is prepared, we discover, to drive her already neurotic husband crazy, and in order to hasten that process and detach him from his child, to suggest that he is not her real father. Her method of getting her own way hitherto has been to exasperate him into nerve storms, and to reinforce the impression he makes at such times on others by writing letters, in which she intimates that she fears he is not in his right mind. Their last doctor, however, had seen that he was fundamentally sane, so by making this man's life unbearable in the neighbourhood Laura has got another doctor to take his practice. He, she hopes, may prove more amenable. He does, though he at once catches her out lying about her husband. Lying, did I say? That word gives a false impression of the semi-conscious subtlety of her schemes. Even her crass stupidity, her miscomprehension of her

husband's work, helps her towards the end her remorseless will is set upon. She tells the doctor that her husband suffers from delusions. She tells him that he thinks he knows what is going on in the planets from looking through a microscope. The doctor pricks up his ears; but when he talks to "The Captain" himself he discovers that he is merely investigating the composition of planets through the spectrum. When that piece of information has failed in its effect, Laura is surprised but unperturbed.

In a dispute with her husband she learns, or thinks she learns, that if a child is illegitimate the father has no control over its education. She then proceeds to suggest to him that Bertha is not his child, a suggestion which takes instant and deep root, because in the opening scene we have seen him confronted, as a soldier in authority, with a paternity case he cannot solve. In his already half-distracted state the doubt drives him to real, though temporary, insanity. She then tells the doctor that her husband has an extraordinary delusion that he is not Bertha's father, which is amply confirmed by his ravings upon that point. The doctor is thus won over, and "The Captain's" old nurse coaxes the exhausted patient into a strait-waistcoat. She hypnotizes him into docility by crooning old nursery reminiscences to him—a terrible scene, excellently acted by Miss Haidée Wright. He struggles but it is too late to escape, and he finally falls into a state of unconsciousness which may end in death or a living death in a lunatic asylum.

Now, why this horrible woman behaves in this way, and where that flaw I spoke of as running through Strindberg's work comes in, are questions which the reader may well ask. Strindberg puts into her mouth the statement that she detested her husband as a husband, though she was willing

to mother him as a sick child, but the dramatist has, without knowing it, drawn the portrait of a man with whom no woman could ever live in peace and affection.

There are two sides to "The Captain's" nature, both as extreme as they were in Strindberg himself; the impulse of the tyrant, of the gigantic hero whom woman, and especially a wife, must blindly obey, and a soft, yielding, pathetic side which cries out to be petted and nursed like a child. The passage from one state to the other is in this case unmodulated by a touch of humour; they are both stark demands upon a wife, who cannot well regard the same man both as a sublime, unshakable hero and as a baby. The interest, however, of this double emotional demand is that in a less violent form it is so common as to be, not perhaps what every woman knows, but, at any rate, recognizable by many an egotistic man, and one which is met, if at all, only by cautious bigamy. The fury and despair of Strindberg at finding that the same woman cannot be an adoring slave, and the next moment (just as his quick moods shift) the patient and tender mother, vented itself in a malignant analysis of "woman".

Although it is absolutely necessary dramatically that Laura should deceive both the doctor and the pastor, Strindberg's rage against her is so hot that he makes, certainly her brother the pastor and in a lesser degree the doctor, actually see through her! It is difficult to recall a more striking nemesis of failing to attain in art the indifferent justice of the artist.

*

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

IT IS possible that the title of Sierra's play may act as a deterrent to some theatre-goers. It is a religious play and the subject is the "Kingdom of God". And on that account this Spanish play running at the Strand Theatre is well worth seeing. The English version by Mr. and Mrs. Granville-Barker is an excellent one. The production leaves much to be desired; though two actresses, Miss Gillian Scaife, as Sister Gracia, and Miss Kathleen O'Regan, who takes a small but most important part in Act II (Margarita), are very good indeed. Miss Scaife I have always admired. I remember her parts; I remember her in *The Bucket-Shop*; I remember her gestures and her voice in The Stage Society's production of *Uncle Vanya*; I remember her as one of the few actresses who have given me in a modest way complete satisfaction. Her "Sister Gracia" is the finest and most exacting part she has taken; and I feel sure that her playing of it will remain with me as something beautiful and satisfying. Miss O'Regan is a new discovery. Watch her face; do not miss the crescendo of her hysterical despair. She has "looks", too, and an Irish accent; both may prove assets. I am only afraid that alert managers may discover her at once and cast her for silly parts. In the brief scene she plays in *The Kingdom of God* she shows herself an actress. May she continue to be one!

The play has no plot, but it has a pattern. Its three acts are three scenes from the life of a nun, and there is an interval of ten years between the

first and the second and of forty between the second and the third. In Act II the dramatic climax is reached; Act III is a diminuendo. And it should be. Doubtless, the audience (I use the word with a certain contempt) would have preferred that the last act should have been the death of a saint, and to have been moved by a scene which obviously canonized in closing it a life of devotion; but those who know what's what will be glad that Sierra chose the better, stronger and really more moving alternative.

In the last act he shows Sister Gracia as a practical woman managing an orphanage; exhibiting the power of goodness in a practical form, namely, in quelling a rebellion which has its origin in the badness of the food provided by the institution, and in seizing that occasion to deliver a homily, beautifully impressive as coming from this old woman whose life we have followed. It was well interpreted by the actress:

"Lord, Lord, we thank Thee for this food which is given us in Thy name. There is not much of it, it is not very good, and we will not forget the taste of this bitter bread. And by Thy love we swear Thy children on this earth shall eat of it no more—say it with me—say it. Jesus, Son of God, Christ, Son of Man, by the precious blood Thou didst shed for us we swear to spend our own to the last drop when we are men—that children may not be forsaken any more, that mothers may not be wronged any more, and go hungry and be ashamed to carry their children in their arms. My sons, my sons, promise me that when you are men you'll try to bring these things to pass, that you'll help to build on earth the Kingdom of God."

Thus the play ends. Sister Gracia, though seventy, is still a vigorous old lady; and she will probably continue to manage for some years yet this foundlings' home, wisely, firmly, tenderly, before she rests. This is the last stage of her career.

In Act I, the first stage, she is eighteen and one of the nurses in a refuge for old men. In that stage she gives what is of most use in this particular work:

her youth, her charm, her gaiety. Ten years later she has been transferred to a lying-in home for the mothers of illegitimate children. Various types are represented in Act II: the woman who cares for her lover and her child and is proud of both; the prostitute who uses the institution as a convenience and drops a child there every year like an egg; the woman who hates her man and his offspring; the woman who is passionately hard and bitterly ashamed (Marianna).

In this second stage of Sister Gracia's life she has to make a deeper sacrifice: the offering of her sympathy to every kind of woman, a sympathy which is mixed with the longings of her own womanhood, yet must be kept pure of that agony or it will not help others. It must be remembered that she belongs to the Order of St. Vincent de Paul, who take their vows yearly and may renew them or not as they wish. It is during this stage that her severest trial comes. The doctor of the institution falls in love with her. Her first reaction to his declaration is one of indignation, "And you dare to speak to me of love—here—where we see how it all ends." But it is the love which is health, strength and opportunity that he offers, and he explains this very well. I am afraid the doctor was stockish, but Miss Scaife acted beautifully. "Oh yes, you're right. . . . I am unhappy . . . unhappier than you can think. And I'm tired and perhaps I'm ill—poisoned. . . . Oh, no doubt as you say. But God, who has my love, is with me. I may not see Him, but He is with me. . . . Oh yes, it's true that just now he has put bitterness in my cup—but He has given me so much. . . . And He will again. . . . I know He will. And even if He does not I have given myself for ever."

The curtain falls on her cry as she rushes to meet the Sister Superior: "I want to leave here at once—and without anyone knowing—or knowing

where I go! I beg you—for the love of God! It is a case of conscience." (I admired at this moment the gesture of Miss Scaife's hands.) This passage is dramatic in the most real sense of the word, for we are present at tremendous conflict.

In the last stage (Act III) it is, as I have tried to suggest, her shrewdness, her serenity, her selfless courage, that Sister Gracia as an old woman offers to the cause of the "Kingdom of God"; the mother instinct in her has expanded into a patient and unshakable tenderness towards all children.

Genuine goodness is (we know) in art as well as life a beautiful and moving thing, far more touching than misfortune on the stage. It is the strongest colour on the writer's palette. The better sort are often justly afraid of using it. They are right. If it is not used with complete understanding the result is a sickening sentimental daub. Among contemporary dramatists Bernard Shaw is the only one who for a minute or two can create human goodness in a manner which allows it to wake in us the response proper to it (see *Major Barbara*, end of Act I; moments in *Captain Brassbound's Conversion* and in *John Bull's Other Island*); but he is a little too hearty and afraid of ridicule to handle it successfully for long at a stretch. In this play, if the production were more intelligent, I think the treatment of the theme of goodness would strike you as beyond cavil. Tolstoy can handle goodness perfectly in fiction; in Dickens there is now and then a pure touch of it, but it tips over perpetually into sentimentality.

The performance suffered all through from the actors ceasing to act as soon as they had spoken their lines.

THE INSECT PLAY

THE INSECT PLAY is a satire on humanity. I have been disappointed by the strictures of my fellow critics upon it, for it struck me as a most original and particularly stimulating entertainment. Even where they praised—the entirely successful second act, for example—they appeared to do so with reluctance.

"Satire of humanity at large never much excites individual human beings, who are too familiar with its commonplaces, besides, what is everybody's fault is nobody's fault", said *The Times*. These sentiments surprised me in the author of a delightful preface to *Candide*. But the play seems to have run into Mr. Walkley at a tender point: "We won't fuss about it", say the Snails when the Tramp dies, "it's the way of the world", and "there's a pretty idea for the curtain", is his comment.

However, the articles of Mr. Francis Birrell and the agile and acute Mr. Agate have since shown me that there are others beside myself who think *The Insect Play* remarkable and enjoyable. It would be a bad mark for the theatre-going public of London if they did not speak for many.

The writings of Fabre are disconcerting reading. Not only are the morals of the insect world regrettable, but the spectacle of instinct aping so precisely the motions of intelligence reminds us how "instinctive", after all, rational beings are, though they can look before and after and sigh for what is not. The word "instinct" is peppered all over current literature. One of the few "lessons" of the

Great War which has gone home is that it is safer to calculate upon instinctive than rational behaviour in human beings. Though attempts are made to glorify instinct at the expense of reason, nevertheless everyone feels humiliated when it is brought home that his own reaction to circumstances is as clearly due to innate habit, as a beaver's behaviour when it fusses about with sticks, and tries to build a dam across its cage at the Zoo. Instinct is mechanical. The moment we see our fellow human beings as walking, talking, laughing, loving, hating mechanisms, as "Robots" in fact, (it is no accident that R.U.R. and *The Insects* have the same authors), something essential to their inspiring emotion in us vanishes.

Everybody has probably experienced the feeling of cold condescension which replaces lively interest towards others when they betray in our presence that they are obviously being pulled by strings of which they are themselves unconscious. Fortunately, the sensation of freedom is so convincing and immediate in the breast of each of us that it is almost impossible to believe we can resemble them. But if that fact is ever irresistibly borne in on us in retrospect, we experience for a time the most desolating of sensations, a complete loss of interest in ourselves. Many people have said that they would close with an offer to be wound up every morning to do right things all day, but I doubt if they would stick to the bargain, if its condition was that they should also be conscious that they were acting mechanically.

In the first act we watch the flitter-flutter courtship of human butterflies, and the producer has been blamed for eliminating beauty from it. But although not particularly fortunate in his choice of female butterflies, the scene as performed is, I am sure, nearer the intention of the author than critics of the production have allowed. The object of the

authors is not to emphasize the charm, but the uninteresting instinctiveness, of the butterflies' pursuit of each other, and their matings. Thus, instead of sipping the essence of flowers, the human butterflies crudely stimulate their quivering, impatient excitement at a refreshment bar, and then—it matters really nothing which one couples with the other—each pair sinks into the euthanasia of a matter-of-fact *liebes-tod*. . . . The authors have been careful to introduce among the human butterflies one which has no antennæ, but wears instead a laurel wreath—a love poet. He dies alone, lamentably unembraced. Instinct has been transmuted, or rather derailed, in his case. "The Life Force", as Mr. Shaw would say, "passes him by." The brothers Capek take nature's view of him. "Beauty", they might have quoted, "is the marking-time, the stationary vibration, the feigned ecstasy, of an arrested impulse unable to reach its natural end."

Mana Aboda, whose bent form
The Sky in arched circle is,
Seems ever for an unknown grief to mourn.
Yet on a day I heard her cry:
"I weary of the roses and the singing poets—
Josephs all, not tall enough to try."

If this interpretation of the first act is correct (and I cannot doubt it), the criticism which has been brought against Mr. Playfair, the producer, that the scene was too vulgar, too like "Maxim's", is not fair. Such was the intention of the authors. The Tramp (admirably acted by Mr. Edmund Willard) who plays the part of Chorus, and represents poor, ragged, Rational Humanity throughout the play, is disgusted at the purposeless spectacle. But when the curtain rises on his next vision, the parallel in the insect world to "serious" as opposed

to amorous human characters, his disgust if anything intensifies. He sees, and we see, the dung beetles (excellent grotesques!) rolling and patting their ball of dirt; no light sinners these, but steady folk:

Mr. Beetle: Our capital—that's what it is—our lovely capital—careful—careful.

Mrs. Beetle: Can't be too careful with our capital—our little pile.

Mr. Beetle: How we've saved and scraped and toiled and moiled to come by it.

Mrs. Beetle: Night and morning, toiled and moiled and saved and scraped.

Mr. Beetle: And we've seen it grow and grow, haven't we, bit by bit—our little ball of blessedness?

Mrs. Beetle: Our very own it is.

Mr. Beetle: Our very own.

Mrs. Beetle: Our life's work.

Mr. Beetle: Smell it, old woman—pinch it—feel the weight of it. Ours—ours.

But while Mr. Beetle is away looking for a safe hole in which to hide the precious ball, a robber Beetle comes and trundles it off. We see a more adventurous type in whom the acquisitive instinct is also uppermost, Mr. Ichneumon Fly, who is a born assassin with a dagger. But he is a worker in his way, too. He expounds his views to the Tramp. "Up early, home late, but as long as you're doing it for someone worth doing it for, what does it matter? Am I right?" (He is a devoted father, nourishing on the tit-bits of an excessive number of corpses an extremely unpleasing little *larva* of a daughter.) "And how it cheers you up when you do your duty like that. 'Do the job that's nearest, though it's dull at whiles.' When you feel that, you feel you are not living in vain. . . . Brains, expert knowledge, enterprise, imagination, initiative. . . ."

We see his victims, too, little Mr. and Mrs.

Cricket, who would chirp away their lives in roseate, harmless domesticity. But the Brothers Capek hold the balance true. They do not spare the triviality of the Crickets' mutual endearments, the feeble tinkle of their egotistic merriment over the fate of another cricket, whose house they inherit, snapped up by a bird. Yet like the Tramp, we feel a pang of pity when the helpless little creatures are stillettoed by the bounding, active Ichneumon (acted with excellent gusto by Mr. Ivan Berlyn), and we are hardly sorry when Parasite, a ragged idle rascal, whose motto is "Down with larders, storing is robbing", emerges from that ill-omened home, bulging with the swallowed *larva*. "Gah! Bleedin' Bolshie", is the Tramp's comment on Parasite:

> These 'ere insec's never dream
> Of workin' to some general scheme.

But next time he dreams his head is on an ant-heap. Now we see a "selfless" community, and the spectacle is not cheering. The satire of heroic state-and-army civilization is pungent.

But I have not yet mentioned a character which must not be forgotten, the Chrysalis, who stands like a little grey mummy at the side of the stage during this act uttering, in a sweet youthful voice, sentiments of purest hope and confidence. When she is born, she cries, the whole world will be changed. I awaited her emergence with considerable anxiety. The merit of the play seemed largely to depend on what would happen then.

"One, two, three, four." A blind ant in goggles squats beating the time to which slaves of the State move like machines. Wires rule the sky, chimneys and poles rise against it; the ground is trampled brown. "One, two, three, four." All for the Whole! The master of Time will rule the world! Speed the

out-put! "*Blank*, two, three, four." Through the mouths of two engineers the philosophy of the Human Ant Heap is bawled at us in the staccato of heroes. Peace means work! He who works possesses more, requires more, has more to defend. Work, Strength, War! An inventor-ant gropes his way carrying in his brain the most destructive machine ever invented. Great is Science and it will prevail; nothing serves the State like Science! We must have that bit of the world now from the Birch to the Pine Tree; we, or the Yellows. They have insulted us! War! War is forced upon us! To arms! And the Tramp soliloquizes:

It does yer good to see 'em pass,
  Prepared to shed their blood—
  And jest for 'alf a yard o' mud.
Between two blades of grass.

. . . . .

It makes yer think o' them ole scenes,
  With star-shells over 'ead,
  The night we left a thousan' dead,
And keptured two latrines.

The din increases; the Engineer-Dictator-Emperor shouts commands; the telegraph clicks out news of victories and retreats "according to plan", and again victories; groaning wounded are borne across the stage; female ants, selling flags, collect pennies for them; the journalist keeps up the Heap's morale. Now the fourth army is destroyed; the fifth takes its place. Splendid! Victory at last is ours! And the Dictator kneels in gratitude to the Great God of Ants and appoints him an honorary colonel. More din, more confusion. Now *our* armies are flying! Send the unfit to the front! Mobilize the nation! But all is vain; the Yellows have taken the

City! "Fight, fight on", still roar the leaders. "After them—murder them all!" roars back the Yellow captain; and he, in turn, kneels to the most righteous God of Ants—"Thou knowest that we fight only for justice, our victory, our honour, our commercial interests". But this is more than the Tramp can stand. "Bah! Yer insec', yer insec'", he shouts, as he stamps him flat.

The *Morning Post* described this act as "nerve-racking"; but surely it is not at our "nerves" that it is directed.

Once or twice during the jagged staccato shindy we have heard rise like an exhalation of hope the cry of the Chrysalis:

> Wild voices of the world be dumb!
> Your woes are at an end. I come.

The Tramp wakes sick and shivering in the dark. The wood is full of voices: "I am wounded"—"Water"—"Aha! Got 'em." (That must be the voice of the Ichneumon still at work.) "Iris, Iris, I love you"—"My pile, my pile"—"Army of occupation, advance". The day begins to peep and Mayflies to dance in the daylight. The Chrysalis bursts her cerements, and with a cry of ecstasy joins them. One by one the happy little creatures stop, hail life, and die. Is *this* the secret of life?—the Tramp asks himself. They seem to die as rapturously as they lived.

And our particular Mayfly? Almost at once her turn comes, too. She stops dancing to tell us the whole world's meaning, softly lies down and dies. The Tramp, too, feels death at his throat; but he cannot resign himself; he gurgles, struggles and fights. At last he too lies quiet, when two slow, lisping snails crawl one each side of him out of the wood, and speak that indifferent valediction Mr. Walkley found so far from pretty.

But now the sun is up and human beings cross the scene—a wood-cutter who, finding the body, says "Poor old chap. . . . Well, anyway, he'll have no more trouble"; a young woman, a baby in her arms, who shudders, but soon thinks again of her baby; and, lastly, a boy and a girl who pass singing, while the man and woman considerately stand in front of the body to hide from them, for a while, the sight of death.

I have described this play in detail because the flavour of it could not otherwise be conveyed, because it is remarkable, not easy to forget, and because I am anxious my readers should see it. It is worth forty R.U.R.s.

I have only two serious criticisms to make upon the production. It would have been so easy by composing a scenery of gigantic grass blades and moss to intensify the illusion that we are looking at an insect's world. Not a wood, but grass and one enormous tree-stump was wanted; and a greenish light glimmering through green stalks would have heightened at once the mystery and the illusion. This was not thought of. Secondly, I have described the voice of the Chrysalis as I heard it in my mind's ear, rather than as I actually heard it. Her accents should have been far more arresting; and the moment when as a dying Mayfly the actress holds the stage, though she has not alas poetry to speak, might be made, vocally at least, magnificently moving.

THE THREE SISTERS

WHENEVER I have occasion to write about Tchehov I always recommend an excellent book of criticism: Mr. Gerhardi's *Anton Chekov* (Cobden-Sanderson). It deals with the whole of his work, but that part of it concerned with the dramatist ought to be read by everyone interested in modern drama.

"How did he do it?" Mr. Gerhardi writes. "Not by dispensing with plot, but by using a totally different kind of plot, the tissues of which, as in life, lie below the surface of events, and, unobtrusive, shape our destiny. Thus he all but overlooks the event-plot; more, he deliberately lets it be as casual as it is in real life. Before Tchehov realism was no more than a convention. Realistic literature had begun to bear a closer resemblance to real life as it piled on more and more certain superficial irrelevancies characteristic of real life. . . . The object of realistic literature was obviously to resurrect the complete illusion of real life by means of things characteristic of real life, they forgot to make the plot characteristic of real life; so much so that Mr. Bennett once confessed that, so far as the story was concerned, the odds were against any novel happening in real life. Tchehov saw that, and made his plots characteristic of real life by choosing for his themes stories which were not of the unlikely kind (because taken from real life and developed into 'stories'), but just as they would probably have happened if allowed to run their natural course in real life." *The Three Sisters* is a prime example of this art. It is to my mind the best of all his plays.

And there are two other characteristics common to all his plays, most interesting to the critic of modern realistic drama, and from which much can be learnt. First of all—and here, too, I make use of the words of another critic, the late George Calderon, who translated as long ago as 1912 *The Sea-Gull* and *The Cherry Orchard*—the interest of Tchehov's plays "is, so to speak, centrifugal instead of self-centred. . . . They seek, not so much to draw our minds inwards to the consideration of the events they represent, as to cast them outwards to the larger process of the world which those events illuminate; that the sentiments to be aroused by the doings and sufferings of the personages on his stage are not so much hope and fear for their individual fortunes as pity and amusement at the importance which they set on them, and consolation for their particular tragedies in the spectacle of the general comedy of Life in which they are all merged." (I query the word "consolation", but let that pass.)

Secondly, Tchehov solved, far better than his contemporaries, the problem of naturalistic dialogue, of preserving the triviality and broken rhythms of ordinary talk and still making every word significant of character, and those group relations and larger processes which George Calderon noted. It was easier, or perhaps it only seems easier now Tchehov has done it, for a Russian to write this kind of dialogue—the Russians speak more readily out of themselves than English men and women. Anyhow, he succeeded perfectly in doing for his own people what modern English dramatists have hitherto only approximately accomplished for us. Mr. Granville-Barker in his two last unacted plays, *The Secret Life* (1923) and *His Majesty* (1928), and in his rewritten but unacted version of *Waste*, has made far the most competent and successful attempt to write dialogue in this way. When *The Secret Life* was published I did not see

what he was after—which was a revelation of the inner life through the medium of informal and casual talk such as Tchehov achieved. It is very difficult for the imagination to function while *reading* a play, and mine did not.

Now the kind of acting which is absolutely essential in the case of such plays is acting which restores the unity of impression. The method of this dialogue is disjunctive; the underlying unity must therefore be made prominent, and this can be done only by keeping every actor and actress on the scene continuously and simultaneously acting. Mr. Komisarjevsky's productions of Tchehov are beyond comparison successful because he insists upon this simultaneity. The result is not confusing. The dramatist has put words into the mouths of each character so characteristic that there is no need for the rest to make a space either of silence or stillness round those who are speaking. The spectator loses himself completely in the scene before his eyes. At the Fortune Theatre I only regained consciousness of my own identity in between the acts. That is the test of a good production of a good play.

The Three Sisters was first performed in London in the spring of 1920 by the Art Theatre Society: they made rather a hash of it. It was acted again at Barnes two years ago. This was a fine performance. Mr. Komisarjevsky produced it and several of the cast were the same as those acting now at the Fortune Theatre. The part of Solyony is again taken there by Mr. Elliott Seabrooke (he is very good), and Mr. Daniel Roe again acts excellently the old army doctor. I recognized, too, Miss Margaret Swallow as Masha, Mr. Douglas Burbridge as Andrey and Mr. Ion Swinley as Vershinin. All these parts are well acted. I have one fault, however, to find with Mr. Swinley. Vershinin is a one-speech character. When ever he is moved he breaks out into an impassioned

discourse about the glorious future for which the thwarted petty lives of the present generation are a preparation. It is largely through his liberal eloquence that he first touches the heart of Masha. But as time goes on something mechanical ought to creep into his delivery. His speech ought therefore to have been more fervid when he was addressing a new audience, and his last repetition of it, when he is parting from Masha, would then by contrast have the flatness of a gramophone record; thus giving another turn to the ironic screw. Andrey is admirable in his seedy, lazy dilapidation which results from his disastrous marriage to the hard, vulgar, little upstart Natasha. I was not quite satisfied with Miss Margot Sieveking's interpretation. She ought to have been more odiously self-assertive in contrast to the helpless refinement of "the three sisters". Yet one realized, while watching those scenes between her and her sisters-in-law, what a handicap magnanimous sensitiveness is in dealing with a sobbing, hectoring, managing vulgarian. Olga seemed to me perfect. There have been dramatists with a wider sweep and a stronger hand than Tchehov, but none has brought to the weighing of human character a more delicate sense of justice.

Tchehov is the dramatist of good-byes; good-byes to hopes and ambitions, good-byes between lovers. Yet out of this conception of life, which might be thought "depressing", Tchehov makes a work of art which moves us and exalts us like a beautiful piece of music. It is not in a mood of depression one leaves the theatre after seeing *The Three Sisters*. How true it is that a good play should be like a piece of music! For our reason it must have the logical coherence of fact, but for our emotions the sinuous unanalysable appeal of music. In and out, in and out, the theme of hope for the race and the theme of personal despair are interwoven one

with the other. Each character is like a different instrument which leads and gives way alternately, sometimes playing alone, sometimes with others, the theme of the miseries of cultivated exiles, or the deeper one of the longing of youth; the dreamy, once gay Irena, the sober and steady Olga, the passionate Masha, half ashamed of her greedy clutch on happiness—vulgarizing herself, she knows, but not caring for that. And what queer harsh notes proceed from that black pit of egotistic megalomania and ferocious diffidence, Solyony! Solyony thought himself a romantic Lermontov; nowadays he would pride himself on being a ruthless superman of the underworld. *Plus ca change, plus c'est la même chose.*

UNCLE VANYA

UNCLE VANYA is an unforgettably good play. I do not think the Stage Society did justice to it; yet there were excellent passages of acting in their performance. The play is one of those which require, just because the dialogue is so natural, an extreme finesse if its values are to be fully brought out. I thought highly of Miss Gillian Scaife's Sonya. Indeed, my respect increases every time I see her act. She was excellent and touching as the secretary in Mr. Frank Harris's *Bucket Shop* a few weeks ago, and now in a part nine times as deep she has proved herself adequate. That cold word implies great praise in this connection. Mr. Guy Rathbone as Uncle Vanya was extremely good at moments. When, for instance, he stood at the door with the roses, and during the last five minutes, while Sonya makes her dim little speech about the happy world beyond the grave, where both will forget, she thinks, the stale ache of their disappointments. Oh, Mr. Rathbone understood his part as he sat there motionless, the pencil with which he had been totting up accounts still between his fingers, staring before him and suffering as only the passive, the empty, the weak can suffer, soothed a little—do you know the irony of that?—by consolations which do not console. . . . At least those two, the uncle and the niece, will be sweet and patient towards each other; that is the shred of comfort we spectators carried away when the curtain fell on Tchehov's tragedy. It is a real tragedy. It has in it the flatness and poignancy of life itself. There is no depth of

reflection upon humanity at which it were inappropriate to discuss this play if one were master of obedient words.

In the garden of a country house in Russia, remote and ramshackle as such houses mostly are by our standards, are gathered a strange (and yet how familiar!) set of people. There is an old lady who never has her nose out of a literary essay or a pamphlet, a middle-aged man (Uncle Vanya, her son), restless, sensitive, intellectual, a doctor who has a poetic passion for forestry, and is bored by his work (he, too, like Vanya, feels he has run to seed), a quiet girl who is withering on the stalk (Sonya), a queer, simple, gentle hanger-on, who contributes a little music and any amount of hero-worship when required (he is a peculiarly Russian type in this sense, that in our country he would not find it so easy to graft himself on to a family), a faithful old servant, and a retired professor of literature about sixty (father of Sonya by a first marriage), and his young, curiously attractive wife. These last two have a maleficent influence upon the others, and to understand how this influence affects them you must appreciate the spiritual atmosphere in which all of them, the Professor and his wife included, live and move and have their being.

Tchehov follows in the steps of Turgenev. His favourite theme is disillusionment, and as for the kind of beauty he creates, beneath it also might be written "desolation is a delicate thing". He is fond of the same kind of setting for his stories as Turgenev: summer woods, an old country-house full of cultivated people, who talk and talk. There you will find the idealist who melts over the futility of his own idealism, the girl who keeps a faster clutch upon daily duties in order to forget that youth is sliding away under her feet, the slightly stronger, clever man turned maudlin-cynical after his failure to find

a purpose which can hold him—to think, so he feels, *he*, too, should be wasted!—the old woman who only wants things to go on peaceably on old humdrum lines. The current of days is slow here; the air they breathe is sultry with undischarged energy, and broken only by unrefreshing nerve-storms; it is an atmosphere of sighs and yawns and self-reproaches, vodka, endless tea, and endless discussion. These people are like those loosely agglutinated sticks and straws which revolve together slowly in some sluggish eddy. They long to be detached and ride down the rushing stream, which they imagine somewhere near sparkles for ever past them. Where it is rushing they do not know. Some day—two hundred, five hundred years hence—perhaps life *will* be life. And those blessed heirs of all the ages, will they be grateful to their poor predecessors who made them possible? It is doubtful—another reason for self-pity. Stop! This is ridiculous (so they argue). What *are* we doing for them? Absolutely nothing. Indeed, what, *what* is there to do?

That is the atmosphere in which Tchehov's intellectuals live. It differs from that of Turgenev's generation in being a still closer air, still more unresponsive to effort and hope. There are no Bazarovs or Insarovs to break its spell and bring down the violent rains of tragedy. It creeps about every man and woman of them like a warm muffling mist, narrowing the world to the garden gates. We have no right to label this atmosphere "Russian", and regard it with complacent curiosity. Have you not felt that fog in your throat on English lawns, in English houses? Indeed, the main point of difference between this spell-bound cultivated Russian society and the English variety is not in our favour. If Tchehov's intellectuals are half dead, the other half of them is very much, painfully much, alive. They suffer more consciously; there is intensity in their

lassitude; at least they torture themselves, and each other, by displaying each his own bankruptcy. They are not comatose and outwardly contented, but sensitive, self-conscious, and critical.

> Is it a party in a parlour,
> Crammed just as they on earth were crammed,
> Some sipping punch—some sipping tea,
> But, as you by their faces see,
> All silent, and all—damned!

—Wordsworth's description of an English family circle in Hades will not fit them. Damned they may be, but silent, no. They have a wail in them which is responsive not only to their own frustrations, but to the inevitable disillusionment of life. It is this quality in Tchehov's work, birth, though it essentially was, of a phase, a period of Russian history, which must keep it fresh:

> Entbehren sollst du! sollst entbehren!
> Das ist der ewige Gesang.

Indeed, when the curtain has been up a little time and we have watched the grey-haired Vanya mooning about, tortured by a tremulous passion for the professor's wife, longing to fall upon her heart, one weak wave of ecstasy, humility, and abandonment; watched, too, the restless doctor, also attracted to the house by Elena, the zest for his work ebbing out of him, we say to ourselves: "Why, these people are suffering from an unduly protracted youth!" In Vanya's elderly passion there is indeed something of the piteousness, humiliation, and beauty of a young longing that expects everything and does not understand itself. All these people, except the professor and the two old women, believe that life would be wonderful, if, if, if . . . And to feel like that is to be, as far as it goes, young. It is young to want to prop your ladder against a horn

of the moon, and also young not to know that though we have immortal longings in us, there are—eternal paradox through which the work of the world gets done—wonderfully satisfying properties in a little real bread. It is like these Tchehov characters not to know that. A word or two more about them—and if I tell the story in a few sentences, the tragedy will be before you; for it is a true tragedy, lying in the persons themselves, in their passions and minds, and not in the external coincidences.

First, then, Elena. She has already played her stake. In the professor she thought—Heaven help her!—she had found a great mind, one it would be good and thrilling always to be near. Now, she has found her mistake. She is like a ship aground on a mudbank, and the only breezes which come to shake her sails are the passions she rouses in men, but she does not believe that they will blow her to any port where she would be. Like the others she has no sense of direction, no destination. Vanya's helpless passion merely pesters her, and what between that and the exactions and pomposities of her eminent husband, who, now he has retired, only wants to watch his diseases and jaw to admirers, she is almost beside herself. (I was not satisfied with Miss Ernita Lascelles's performance in this part.)

The doctor, Astrov, through knowing better than the others what he wants and despising them, does move her a little. She nearly . . . but she is afraid. This man throws a fascination over poor, plain, dutiful Sonya, too. He has that attraction for women which the idealist a little damaged often exercises. Astrov, to Sonya, is so fine in himself; his slackness and coarseness are to her but wounds he got beneath the devil-defended walls of his peculiar virtues. He is a person to be saved (there is joy, too, in that) and comforted as well as loved; then he is handsome, and his voice is beautiful, and she is most affectionate.

Lastly, the old professor, he is an industrious and magniloquent fraud. We know his prototypes and regret that so large a public should read again with so much admiration what has often been written before. For years Uncle Vanya and Sonya have slaved on the estate to provide tribute for the loquacious monster, the former at first with the conviction he was watering the roots of genius. On retirement the Professor came to live there, bringing his beautiful, unhappy, baleful wife. That was event number one in the play; event number two, they departed. In between arrival and departure nerve-storms (one of them homicidal), exasperations, and draggle-tailed disorder. Astrov seeking to renew his capacity to feel by keeping near Elena's charms, forgets his work, Sonya is tortured by his continual presence, the long-retarded tide of youth is loosed together with a flood of bitterness in Uncle Vanya, and upstairs the tyrannic old invalid gasses and scribbles and groans among his medicine bottles.

Elena and Sonya had a *rapprochement* late one night, after the men had been drinking. Elena ever so tenderly drew from Sonya her heart's secret, and both women cried and were so happy. She undertook to sound Astrov and find out if there was any hope for Sonya. She felt very embarrassed next day when she had to speak to him; it was too exciting. Did her sensitive antennæ tell her that they would soon begin to talk about themselves? Yes, no, yes; I think so; but, of course, she thought she was only thinking of Sonya. It ended by his seizing her in his arms, and that moment Vanya, who had been out to pick her a bunch of "*autumn* roses" (that touch of sentiment in his departing words had exasperated her), returned, stood in the doorway, and saw them. If a man of forty-six could squeal with sudden misery like a child, we should have heard him.

Then down comes the professor and summons a

family conclave. He has made a resolve. The country is intolerable; they must sell the estate and all live in the town. This is too much for Vanya; he explodes at the old vampirine humbug, and wild with hysteria, he dashes from the room, crying, "I know what must be done!" Everybody flies after him. We heard a shot. Of course, we thought he had shot himself. No; in rushed the professor leaping like a hare, coat-tails flying, mouth open, eyes goggling, and after him Vanya with a revolver and Sonya clinging to his arm. He wrenched himself free; fired; missed again!

It is hard to describe the effect of this scene upon one. It hits one between wind and water—between laughter and tears. The futility! During the last act we live in poor Vanya's heart, feeling his exhaustion, and shame, and that dreariest of all sensations: the beginning of life again on the flat, when a few hours before it has run shrieking up the scale of pain till it seemed the very skies might split. If I were a painter and painted the animated features of Tragedy I should not forget the puffy, sodden-eyed familiar who peeps from behind her with a smile, something kind if it were not so vacantly meaningless; I should not forget the heavy Goddess Anticlimax.

In this act Dr. Astrov tries to get from Vanya a bottle of morphia he has pocketed: "Go out into the woods and put a bullet through your head if you want to, but give me that bottle." Vanya sullenly refuses; but one touch of affection from Sonya gets it from him. Then he has to rouse himself to say goodbye to the professor, who, of course, is leaving at once, and he receives from him a double salute on each cheek, perfunctory as the stropping of a razor. Everything has been overlooked; the old man feels now quite sure of his tribute. Elena and Astrov have their farewell scene. He tells her she

has been a fool. Here were woods, even a ruin! She is sure to yield to a lover in town sooner or later, and hired rooms are not a lovely setting for a love affair. She is going, so she kisses him passionately. And at last Vanya and Sonya sit down together at the dusty table to work; work that is the only chance.

One after the other the inhabitants of the house come into the room and settle down into their old neglected habits. "They've gone," they say, one after the other, "they've gone." Astrov has gone; Elena has gone; uncle and niece are sitting side by side. It is then she comes closer to him and makes that dim little speech about the time when all tears will be wiped away, when, looking back, even the long years before them will seem beautiful. Vanya cannot say a single word.

The technical qualities of this play are superb. Note that soliloquies (there are three or four) do not conflict in the least with perfect naturalism in dialogue. Our dramatists' terror of introducing soliloquy is absurd. Mr. Granville Barker, I implore you, put this play in your repertory.

A SPANISH DRAMA

ON SUNDAY last "The Pioneer Players" scored a triumph. So, Pioneers, strike while the iron is hot. Produce at once two other plays as good, as exciting, as moving as *The Cleansing Stain*, and your fortunes are made! London will continue to look forward to your performances for at least one year afterwards.

It is not easy to stir people in the theatre at the present time. They laugh as readily as ever perhaps, but they do not feel. Take a casual three hundred well-to-do people, average out their moods, and they may be diagnosed as numb-hearted and light-headed. But Echegaray's *Mancha que limpia* moved and riveted them. It is a play of great vigour and invention. It has a superb emotional crescendo in it, and many little subtle scenes in it, like natural backwash eddies made by the rushing stream of story, which sweeps on to the fall of a noble murder. Is there such a thing as a noble murder? Well, I can't go into that . . . What was interesting from the point of view of a critic who quite a short time ago was modern (I am speaking of myself) was to find that "the well-made-play", which the success of plays decidedly *not* well-made had taught him to despise, the play in which scenes are deliberately engineered for the sake of particular effects, could justify its artifice so completely, could make one so utterly forget it.

A wedding day: the wicked bride in white, of course, the noble outcast woman in black, of course, a blow with a dagger (or rather with a paper-knife

shown to be sharp a few minutes before by cutting the bride's hand accidentally), a hurly-burly of fright and horror among the guests, a pair of real lovers (one the bridegroom) separated by the lies of the dead bride till this tragic moment, each claiming the guilt to shield the other, and he, over and above, with enough poetic presence of mind left to point to the blood, and to call it solemnly "the cleansing stain" . . . this, this was a melodramatic climax with a vengeance!

Yes, but it was melodrama more in the sense in which *Othello* is melodramatic than in the sense in which that word is abusively employed. For we had been made to believe thoroughly in the nobility of Mathilde, who struck the blow, in the honesty of her resolve that such a beastly thing should not happen (the expression, though unacademic, will suggest that common jealousy was *not* her impelling motive) as Fernando being bound for life to such a mistress of the delicate, bottomless, merciless art of lying as Enriquetta. The dramatic machinery was barefaced throughout. (The curtain in the second act falls on a *tableau*; a kiss between these two women that—on the one side *or* the other—must be the kiss of Judas, while a man looks on and murmurs, "Which?") But in a play in which the characters express passion frankly and theatrically, this method has an artistic congruity.

Between the acts I was reaching after reflections which seemed then of some critical interest. In print they may not justify themselves; but I'll risk it—here they are. It is not Nature, but second nature that makes us undramatic, untheatrical if you will, in the expression of emotion. If you are writing a play in which the characters are ruled by second nature, then the intensity of their story is best brought out by avoiding situations and climaxes which are improbably appropriate; for your char-

acters are people who cannot rise to such occasions except by ceasing to be themselves. But if your characters are people unselfconscious enough to find natural relief in being the play-actors of their own emotions, then you cannot make events happen too pat for them. Make things happen just as these sort of spontaneous people would *like* them to happen in order to express themselves to the full, and the audience will catch the fervour of their emotions.

The reason why melodrama is so often ridiculous is that the men and women to whom tremendous opportunities for showing emotion occur have been presented first as precisely those types who would, in such circumstances, be hopelessly inexpresssive—diplomats, baronets, country squires, &c. The reason why the novel has flourished in modern times more than the drama is not the effect of the Censorship or of commercial causes alone; it is also due to the fact that the most exciting things which happen to people happen to them without their attempting to express them. The novelist can get at these things; the dramatist has to invent expressive words for them which he knows his people would not have spoken, second nature being so strong in them. A new kind of drama has been tried in consequence—the stammering, stiff, inarticulate, natural drama; but, except in the hands of a few, it has turned out deplorably dull.

Mr. William Archer, in a short, interesting paper read before the curtain, pointed out that Echegaray's characters are, even when they wear modern dress, as in *The Cleansing Stain*, more like seventeenth-century characters. That is to say, they seem rather to belong to an age when people cried and kissed at the smallest provocation, tore their hair. swaggered magnificently, showed off their eloquence, roared and screamed, washed in the street, slept all over the house, read each other their poems in and

out of season, acted their good manners, boxed each other's ears, trumpeted out their lusts, their jealousies, their loves, their humiliations, their hates, and generally went on in a much more showy childish way than we find natural. For we in the north have submitted since to two self-repressive models—the Puritan and the eighteenth-century gentleman.

The men who took the lovers' parts in this play clearly found it hard to let themselves go enough. Mr Basil Sydney, in spite of his shy, angular mannerisms, managed, however, to infuse his stiffness with a good deal of intensity. But Julio, the secret lover of Enriquetta, who snatches a brief interview with her after dinner, and as much by his contempt for her as the force of his desire, extorts a promise that she will come to him next evening, was much too English.

It was the characters of Mathilde and Enriquetta, and the acting of Miss Hilda Moore and Miss Mona Limerick in those parts, which kept us standing and clapping after the fall of the curtain. Miss Saba Raleigh as Dona Concepcion, the rich widow who has adopted these two orphan girls, was excellent also.

When the play begins, Enriquetta is already betrothed to Dona Concepcion's son, Fernando, and there is already a strong mutual attraction between Fernando and Mathilde. Her relation to Enriquetta is a complicated one, and it is one calculated to bring out perfectly the characters of the two girls. Mathilde is straightforward and passionate, and the circumstances of her birth were such as to have turned her strong sense of honour into a kind of religion. She has a natural aversion for the wheedling, cold, spoilt Enriquetta, whose father was ruined by her father. She struggles against it, tries to help her in every way; and hardly knows, till a

conversation with the tutor in the house makes her admit aloud and to herself her love for Fernando, that *jealousy* has intensified that aversion. Miss Hilda Moore made that admission with a miserable, blunt outspokenness which could not have been more expressive. Although Fernando presses her, with a force we can hardly believe she will resist, to marry him, she feels she is bound in honour and gratitude not to take him away from her benefactress's favourite foster-child. Only when she finds that Enriquetta has a lover does she change her mind, and then it is too late; for, in following Enriquetta, she has been seen coming out of Julio's house, and suspicion falls on herself.

Fernando, in a fury of disillusionment, throws her off, and determines to marry Enriquetta. Nothing is left of Mathilde but one despairing determination to save Fernando and stop his marriage with such a treacherous creature. Miss Hilda Moore acted finely the scenes of her humiliation and helplessness, for Fernando won't believe her, and she does not know what to do. She appears on the wedding day, but without any plan. Enriquetta prevents Fernando from reading a letter from Julio by persuading him it is from Mathilde; he crumples it up and flings it at her. So the last chance of preventing the marriage is over. Afterwards he reads it, and as he reads, cries out: "I am bound to this wretch for life." Then Mathilde stabs her.

Miss Mona Limerick was superb as Enriquetta; her nestling amenities, the cold, vague, unresenting wonder in her face when she is again and again accused and on the point of being exposed, the activity of her cunning, black little wits, and the peculiar, meek, sweet flatness of the liar's voice could not have been better represented. When I think of all that, I want to drop the pen and clap my hands again.

THE GIRL AND THE PUPPET

IT IS NOT likely that we should have had a chance of seeing this play had not the Pioneer Players performed it. So far, then, their choice was justified; still, we should not have missed very much had they let it alone. The play was solid enough to criticize; that is the best that can be said of it.

The Girl and the Puppet is a study in physical passion; its merit is that it contains no sentiment. English audiences do not take kindly to such plays. They must have that theme dished up with sentiment as a sauce, or the exhibition of such emotions seems to them regrettable. Of course, in every audience there are some so pleased with themselves for not being censorious that the titillation of this pleasure predominates over all other impressions—their sensibilities are never wounded; nor, of course, are those of the genuinely detached and honestly curious. But the latter are only a fraction of any audience. *The Girl and the Puppet* could not, therefore, be really to the liking of an English audience taken as a whole.

If I stop to consider what is good and bad in this English preference for treating sexual passion, as they say, "seriously", though nine times out of ten it means "sentimentally", it may bring us to a point of view from which the merits and failings of this play can be most quickly seen. Tennyson, in a once-famous and, oddly enough, still beautiful poem, has expressed in two lines the contrast between the Anglo-Saxon and Latin ways of feeling on such matters:

"Bright and fierce and fickle is the South,
But dark and true and tender is the North."

The adjectives "dark" and "bright" may be ignored as literary, and "true", as opposed to "fickle", had better be erased as dictated by national prejudice; but both "tender" and "fierce" have some root in observation. The characteristic of English sensibility, and it is the finest quality in it, is the immense value it sets upon tenderness in this connection—a word which cannot be translated by "tendresse"; that has either a too playful and ironical or too physical a significance.

What is to the point here is that the English mind is neither much interested in, nor entranced by, a story of passion which does not exhibit this characteristic; and the unfortunate side of this predilection is that those who are possessed by it often welcome as moving and profound what is merely sentimental. In the commonest kind of English novel or play which has sex for a theme, an attraction, which would be adequately satisfied by the couple in question being wrecked for ten days on a comfortable desert island, is inevitably represented as having wider-spreading roots in character; and once that has been conveyed, English readers or English audiences can settle down, reassured, to enjoy, even voluptuously, what to the "fiercer" Latin mind is only a story, less frankly told, of the play of instinct, in which whatever is tragic or comic in its consequences has been slurred over and whatever is most profound in it ignored.

Yet at bottom I feel the English predilection to be sound, æsthetically, though it often leads to lamentable misjudgments. The interest of the instincts is quickly worked out to an end. The writer who does not listen also at the door of the soul while

writing of love affairs has but a narrow theme.

It is not, however, M. Pierre Louÿs' way to put his ear to that door, and the fault I have to find with his play is that he seems to be asking for *too much* sympathy for his hero and heroine. Sympathy up to a certain point one was ready to give. When Concha Perez, soothing her tortured and tantalized lover and holding him in her arms, said: "Is it as bad as that?"; and when she said also, in extenuation of her unpardonable conduct: "I was ashamed, too, of you for going on loving me so much" (these struck me as the profoundest lines in the play), I felt some of that sympathy for him on which the interest of the drama depended; but I also felt inclined to add: "It is all right. You'll be better soon. You have no idea how soon you will forget or how soon you will come to hate or forgive her." M. Pierre Louÿs did not intend one, I am sure, to feel like that. Yet the story, as he told it, deserved no more from us.

The story is plain, but the character of the heroine not so simple. And here it may be remarked that the title of the play is misleading. *The Girl and the Puppet* suggests that Concha deliberately pulled the strings which made Don Ramon twitch and dance. The relation between the two is not, however, that of Lord Northcliffe and Mr. Lloyd George. Concha makes him twitch and dance, not because she wants to, though, being in love with him herself, his desperation and misery bring to her a certain bitter satisfaction—but because she is Concha. She is just as much a puppet, and her own passion pulls her strings. They met at a carnival in Seville. She is a cigarette-maker, and he a rich man with a devoted mistress of whom he is amply tired. There is a sort of vivid, erratic intensity of emotion about her which quickly attracts him. Miss Vivian-Rees acted her part very fairly, and sometimes admirably, in spite of not possessing either the voice or the ap-

pearance which made it easy. I wanted her voice to be both harsh and mellow; it was clear. I wanted her to look sullen and enigmatic in repose; she looked bright and readable. Yet, as the play went on, she was, by force of energy and good will, adequate. The character Concha is a possible subject for discussion.

The story, as a story of passion, was an interesting example of the extra intensity which perplexity may lend to passion. Don Ramon never knows if he is loved or if Concha is not ready to be anybody's mistress except his own. She speaks and behaves to him as though she had it in her to give so much, something so extreme in the way of passion and self-abandonment, that she cannot bear to give it him or to anyone. The risk for her is too tremendous, the gift too huge. Of course, if a woman can persuade a man already in love that this is true of herself, she soon makes him her demented slave. And this the unfortunate Don rapidly becomes. First he loses her because, after she has promised herself to him, he tries to persuade her old mother, by means of a handsome sum of money, to keep her to her word. This is treachery, and implies distrust on his part. Concha cannot forgive; flies, and hides herself. She has, so far, our sympathy.

Don Ramon discovers her in a cabaret, where, behind a screen, she dances naked at the close of every evening's performance. We do not see this exhibition, but we have the opportunity of observing two English tourists enjoying it. Don Ramon rushes in, and scatters the chairs in a fury of jealousy and indignation, and the curtain of that act falls on a reconciliation between them, in which he believes in her chastity and marvels at it, I think, overmuch. That she should have remained chaste is to him another confirmation that she has in herself a gift to bestow beyond price. This is comprehensible in an

infatuated man, and it is Concha's own view of herself; but the line she draws in her general conduct may seem to the philosopher a little arbitrary, though such distinctions have been known to keep a woman's self-respect in flaunting feather.

All is now going to be well. But when Don Ramon comes to the gate of the house he has taken for her, Concha has another *volte-face*. Her old cigarette-factory companions have sneeringly congratulated her on having hooked a rich man, and let drop reminiscences of Don Ramon's previous affairs. So she shows herself to her lover behind the gate being caressed by a man whom she has hired for the purpose, and tells Don Ramon that she does not love but hates him; and that to make a fool of him has been her object all along. The poor man collapses. In the last act she comes round to see if he has had the courage to shoot himself, and in a scene in which her own passion for him is again revealed, explains that she has loved him all along. He knocks her about, but cannot help believing her again. Her conduct is, of course, quite unpardonable. The explanation is, I suppose, that Concha is the prey of a passion she resents upon the object of it. When the curtain went down a great disappointment was ahead of them. Don Ramon must have been very tired.

Dr. Chalmers Mitchell's translation was very well done.

D'ANNUNZIO

FORTUNATE man, Signor D'Annunzio, to have enjoyed European fame before thirty, and at home that thrilling renown youth dreams of; to have been young and a nation's poet; to have been marvelled at, adored, and, thanks to possessing also the gifts of an amazing improvisatore and an orator's vanity, to have seldom disappointed those whom he met! For I am told that in youth Signor D'Annunzio's conversation was intoxicating to those already his admirers, that metaphor bloomed in it with the same triumphant exuberance as in his books, and that its Swinburnian-Wagnerian ecstasy carried listeners along, just as swiftly as his readers, into those regions of feeling where "the poetically nonsensical becomes good sense and the Eternal Feminine draws us aloft". Later, in middle age, to have played at a national crisis such a part as no poet has played since Lamartine, could not, after such a youth, have proved a very heady experience —if it were not Nature's rebate on his peculiar endowments that everything must fly to their possessor's head; so that, in the case of Signor D'Annunzio, one suspects that the purchase of a tie-pin probably sets up there a considerable cerebral commotion.

He was lucky, again, in the moment at which he reached France, where European reputations are made. They were getting a little tired of Tolstoy and Ibsen, and all the books too comprehensively labelled "*les littératures des Nords*"; they were sick of their realistic masters and ready to hail a *renaissance Latine*. As for his introduction into England—

any moment is a happy one for a foreigner who carries credentials. For England in this respect is rather like a hospitable, inept hostess, who welcomes anyone from an unknown social world as though the cup of her admiration were at last full, never dreaming that in her own familiar circle could be found people as rare and entertaining. There is a great fluster over him while he is taking off his coat; but soon you may observe her eye roving in calculation to the door which is to admit soon the next and possibly still more exciting stranger.

Of course, Signor D'Annunzio might always have been sure among our intelligenzia of the welcome accorded to a Gorki or the most passionately confused scribblings from Dostoievsky's waste-paper basket.

He has been fortunate, too, in contingent respects. The greatest actress of her time has interpreted his women, and he has been unusually blessed in his translators. M. Hérelles' translations of his novels have the freedom and vividness of originals, and Mr. Arthur Symons has translated several of his plays with patient and delicate respect for their verbal beauty.

It was his translation of *La Città Morta* the Stage Society performed. The fluency and the richness of the dialogue were perceptible—I was about to say even through the elocution of Mr. Stack; but no one could, at those moments, have been aware of them had not the beautiful speaking of Miss Maire O'Neill shown one that they must pervade the whole play. The daring preciosity of Mr. Farquharson's utterance (half gabble, half nimblest mastery of pace, intonation and articulation) brought out the dramatic qualities in a dialogue which might easily have run too sluggishly. Indeed, the performance was the queerest mixture of good and bad.

To watch Miss Maire O'Neill as Anna (the blind wife of the poet Alessandro) made me sorry I had never seen Duse in the part; but it was her merits, not her shortcomings, which made me regret it. The one respect in which I inferred she fell short was in a failure to express a certain mortal fatigue and intense sensitiveness; for the sadness and composure which belong to the part, and Miss O'Neill reflected so well, are those of a woman whose personal life has been almost worn out, and in whom only the nerves are still alive and a heart for others.

Mr. Stack, on the other hand, could not play the part of Alessandro at all; it was not a question of being inadequate, he did not act. The explanation is probably that he took the part at the last moment.

In the first act Mr. Farquharson was admirable. He has an imaginative technique for tortured or bedevilled characters which is very remarkable. Those who saw him as old Karamazov, or as Herod in *Salome* have never forgotten him. In this play as the brother of Bianca Maria, who is seized suddenly by an incestuous passion for her, he was too lavish of those distressing physical manifestations of inward disturbance which he can command. He did not hoard them carefully enough for the moments of acutest torture and self-disgust. The suggestion of the play is that this unclean passion is a spiritual influence breathed into him from long communion with the dead Atrides, like the very dust he has swallowed in excavating their tombs in this parched, haunted land; a torrid country where water is the very stuff of poetry, and where these four have been toiling in an atmosphere of mental excitement and emotional tension such as makes human kindness and detachment like the shadow of a rock in a thirsty land.

The most poignant beauty occurs at those

moments when each in his or her separate way struggles to keep fast hold of those elements in their relations to each other, relations which are becoming so direfully entangled. For Alessandro also loves Bianca Maria, and she him.

Mr. Farquharson rendered effectively Leonardo's entrance, when he describes how he broke into Agamemnon's tomb and saw him lying there among the treasure his wife, his children and Cassandra beside him. He rendered Leonardo's triumph, wonder; and exhaustion finely, passionately; and he succeeded in suggesting also that lurking terror as of one who knows he is possessed by an influence he loathes, even at the moment of his triumph. In spite of blemishes the force and beauty of the play emerged—at least, they do so for me now in recollection. When Leonardo has killed his sister in order that the hideous drama from the world of the dead may not be enacted once more in the lives of the living, the play closes with Anna's cry. She knows without touching that she is stooping over the body of Bianca. Her cry, "At last I see!" expresses her sudden comprehension of what in her blindness her divining mind had long been reaching out to understand—the nature of the strange trouble which has been creeping upon them. The parallel between Cassandra and Anna is not worked out by the dramatist; he hints at it—uses it as a romantic intensification. Anna comes out of Maeterlinck; indeed the atmosphere is derived from Maeterlinck, with the addition to it of the author's own careering, quivering sensuality. The best poetry seldom springs from reflected sensibility, and it was in such passages as that describing the delight of drinking with face buried in a stream or in the exalted rhetoric of the love scene between Bianca and Alessandro that power was most to be felt. The pitch which those love scenes reach may

be measured by the fact that in one of them a long passage has been inserted from Swinburne's *Triumph of Time*, and yet no one is conscious of a sudden transition to purple. I have used the words "force" and "beauty" in connection with this play, yet it left me unsatisfied, even resentful, that I should have been compelled to use them.

Signor D'Annunzio's art does not either move or delight me profoundly. From his novels I have derived a pleasure which is akin to an urchin's flattening his nose against a pastry-cook's window, coupled, of course, with delight in the spectacle of a temperament deploying itself without check and having at its command to an astounding degree the means of expression precisely suited to it. Signor D'Annunzio is undoubtedly a great master of the decorative and the erotic.

In a fine critical essay Henry James went the round of the novels, like a plumber looking for an escape of gas which his nose tells him must exist, in a house arrased with purple like a king's. In that essay he makes the discovery that the very quality lacking in them is the defect against which the artist might have seemed to be most on his guard. In spite of being packed with beautiful descriptions of exquisite things, of the passions at their most rarefied as well as at their most devastating physical intensity, in spite of the personages concerned being the most exalted types either in attainments, manners or tradition, the work as a whole lacks distinction. The pervading odour which fills these chambers, to furnish which history, art, archæology, nature, have been pillaged with marvellous industry and discrimination, is an unmistakable whiff of vulgarity.

My nose does not detect that in this play, but there is about it also a too-much-ness, a kind of facility akin to vulgarity. It is effect, that effect

the dramatist is thinking of all the time. When a writer sits down deliberately to move us to tears he usually fails, and when he piles beauty on beauty and aims only at beauty he is apt to make us feel a little squeamish. The reader who is treated like an organ with stops which are being pulled out can only then admire the skill with which it may be done, not the work of art itself. The charge of insincerity has only a meaning in criticism when it is equivalent to the charge of superficiality. In a moral sense Signor D'Annunzio is magnificently sincere in his interests, his admirations, his tastes, but he remains superficial. Except where the senses are directly concerned, he plays chiefly upon the prestige values of things. Gold is a beautiful metal, but how he runs the word to death in this play! His sense of the æsthetic values of things, incidents and emotions is that of a connoisseur rather than an artist. He has felt the quality of Maeterlinck and appraised it to a nicety. Well, he will use it like a colour to tincture his drama of passion. Anna shall be blind. Why should she not be? It will give her aloofness and mystery—extra pathos. He will suggest that the fate of Cassandra is hers, yet she neither foresees anything nor understands what is going on round her. Never mind, that she should be another Cassandra carries with it a romantic association, the intensity of which is not to be lost.

Then there is the idea of fatality; of a guilty lust which possesses a man against his will. How much more romantic to connect that possession with the ashes of legendary princes whose names have been enshrined in poetry! Let, then, the fury of their dead passions blow with their dust about the world and infect people. It is a wonderful idea? Yes, but it is also rather childish.

BEN JONSON AN OBJECT LESSON

THE PHŒNIX SOCIETY must be backed, and backed enthusiastically. Not only do their revivals give intense pleasure but the old plays they perform are precisely the right creative stimulant for contemporary and future dramatists. I enjoy a good realistic slice-of-life play as much as anybody can, but realism has proved an Aaron's rod which, having turned into a live serpent, has eaten up all the other serpents. Consequently, the monotony of our modern plays is deadly.

We have tied ourselves up with conventions only proper to one kind of play, and of that kind of play playgoers are getting heartily sick. What these old plays show us is, first, that the technique of the modern drama is absurdly narrow, that the taboo upon the aside, the soliloquy, the short drop-curtain scene is blighting, that these are not only legitimate but fine conventions, and that photographic similitude to life in a play may be utterly unimportant compared with loyalty to its essence. Once realism was stimulating; now it is a drug in the market. Shake ourselves free, not necessarily of it—I pray we may always have some good realistic plays—but free of the dogmatism which has sprung out of it, and we shall cheapen production, improve acting, and get on to something new.

But these old plays teach a still more important lesson that, after all, what counts in drama is dialogue. What has sickened people with contemporary drama is not that our plays deal with men and women of to-day and their predicaments in a

straightforward recognizable way, but that the modern dramatist, under the excuse of giving his characters only the words which they were in actual life most likely to speak, has let down dialogue to a flatness and ineptitude which it has never touched before. Pick up an average, good modern play—it is full of lines like "Let me make you a piece of toast".

Not long ago in these columns attention was drawn to the defects of long-winded naturalistic methods in fiction. Its practitioners pretend to make it a matter of conscience to put down all the facts; artistic principle is made an excuse for prolixity and slovenliness. The same is true of modern dialogue on the stage. Instead of attempting to express in words the fantastic genius of man's love for woman in a love scene, the naturalistic dramatist will merely order his hero and heroine to fall into each other's arms exclaiming "Mildred!" "Harry!"

When the play is printed, dots, of course, are put after the names to show us that these simple exclamations were charged with unspeakable passion.

I am not exaggerating. As early as 1913 Mr. Palmer, that excellent critic, drew attention to the scene in Mr. Galsworthy's *Eldest Son*, in which the hero, Bill, learns from the heroine, Freda, that she is about to have a child, and Bill makes the three following speeches: (1) "Freda!" (2) "Good God!" (3) "By Jove!"

Mr. Shaw alone of our leading dramatists has been all these years a bright exception. He writes sounder and more vigorous prose than almost anyone alive, and he takes care that his characters shall express themselves as well as he does. The words he puts into their mouths were never the words they were most likely to speak at that moment, but the most pointed they could conceivably utter—a more

difficult thing to do, yet the one thing worth doing. His dramatic dialogues, which critics refused to call plays, were pertinent reminders, at any rate, that, after all, words are of the very stuff of drama. A realist in thought, he has never been a slave to the pedantry of realistic technique.

In the old plays The Phœnix Society revives, this reminder strikes us still more vividly. As contributions to thought and stimulants to feeling they are often of negligible importance, but we came away from those performances longing to write a play; an impulse which only usually visits us after a long abstention from theatre-going. Why? Because we have been fired by an example of the glorious art of expression—felt what it can do, even when what is expressed is neither particularly new nor particularly true.

Ben Jonson's *Volpone*, which they acted last Sunday and Tuesday at the Lyric, Hammersmith, is a case in point. The humour of Ben Jonson is not of the first water; neither is his character-drawing first-rate. There is something coarse, thick-skinned, rough, in the temper of him (I am not thinking of the coarseness and harshness of his language); his comedy lacks the lambency of the finest humour; there is no real detachment in him; he is scornful and indifferent—a very different thing; he is a son of earth, a Titan; there is nothing of Olympus in him. What he has is immense gusto and an intellectual, fundamentally hostile and contemptuous sense of human folly; he boasted himself a good hater, a good fighter, and a master of his craft, and he was all three.

The classic criticism of his characters is to say that they are personifications of different humours or passions rather than complete human beings. But it is difficult to see how many an artist who has drawn characters with a hard outline and against whom this charge is not made, can, in that

case, escape it. Tartuffe, for example, is hardly a more complete man than Volpone. Yet the critics are after saying something which is true of Ben Jonson's characters when they make this charge: "In all these immortal figures (Swinburne is contrasting with Ben Jonson's some of the most famous comic characters) there is the lifeblood of eternal life which can only be infused by the sympathetic faith of the creator in his creature—the breath which animates every word, even if that word be not the very best word that might have been found, with the vital impulse of infallible imagination."

Mr. Eliot in an interesting essay on Ben Jonson has gone further into this point:

> Now we may say with Mr. Gregory Smith that Falstaff or a score of Shakespeare's characters have "a third dimension" that Jonson's have not. This will mean, not that Shakespeare's spring from feelings or imagination and Jonson's from the intellect or invention, they have equally an emotional source; but that Shakespeare's represent a more complex tissue of feelings and desires, as well as a more supple, a more susceptible temperament. . . .

He concludes that Jonson's characters are not less "alive", but that the world in which they "live" is a smaller one. Put in this way, Jonson's characters, if you think of them apart from their particular setting and their actions in it, cease to be interesting. They are rammed to the muzzle with vitality in that setting, but out of it they seem mechanisms. This seems to me much the same as saying that they are simplified down to walking monomaniacs, which is the classic criticism of them.

But Mr. Eliot is surely right in saying that Ben Jonson's "world" is comparatively a small one, and

in hinting that the fault of the artist lies there. It is a fiery, vital, various world, full of glaring contrasts, bustle, cruelty and laughter, but there is something arid about it. After the third act, when even the two leagued rogues turned on each other with the ferocity of wild cats, I began to feel as parched as if I were in a sandstorm. I was dazzled and delighted, but the marrow of my humanity was scorched within me. All the characters, with the exception of a too docile wife and a too filial son, are what Carlyle would have called "unspeakably unexemplary mortals". It is no relief that terrible punishments are meted out at the end all round, a conclusion on which Jonson particularly prided himself. That curious, perfunctory, violent exhibition of moral indignation at the end only intensifies the impression of spiritual harshness and imaginative aridity. After Ben has revelled—with such enormous gusto—in the vitality of the audacious and perfectly heartless blackguardism of the whole crew, these Jehovian thunders are ridiculous and oddly sinister.

Swinburne is of the opinion that if we were to see for a moment what might possibly be said in extenuation of their villainies, the comedy would fall through and go to pieces; that the dramatic effect would then collapse, and that the instinct of a true artist in Jonson withheld him from allowing us even a momentary relation of half-sympathy or sympathetic understanding with these figures. I dispute that. I felt while watching the play that a greater artist would have done it, and also have made Bonario and Celia something more than insipid dummies of virtue and brought them nearer the foreground.

Volpone, the crafty, greedy and lecherous, rich, old man, must, of course, predominate, and let the world be by all means a world of Corbaccios (large

ravens), Corvinos (little ravens), Voltores (vultures), hovering round the sham death-bed of the old fox, but a delicious fresh rill of comedy might have been introduced had Celia been the child of Corvino and Bonario her lover. Their relation would have been as the shadow of a rock in a thirsty land. We should have been in better trim to welcome again rays of the scorching brazen sun of mockery which blazes without intermission above this swarm of scrambling, biting, kicking creatures.

A work of art whatever its theme must somehow, somewhere, suggest the desirability of life. But *Volpone* is indubitably and splendidly a work of art. How is it then suggested? In the ingenuity of the composition? The ingenuity of that is triumphant, but it does not lie there. It is suggested by the vigour and richness and humour of the words in which these crazy Chrysophilites (they are *all* mad after gold) express themselves; in the glorious towerings of their passions and absurdities in speech.

Thus I come back to my theme: that these performances of The Phœnix Society have a peculiar value to us at the present moment, when the language of our stage is drab, shuffling and skimpy, when there is no joy, no exhilaration, hardly even colloquial hard-hitting in it. The cinema can do everything but make its figures talk; it is a dangerous rival to the theatre, as managers and dramatists know. Let dramatists see to it, then, they make it worth our while to *listen* to their characters.

The acting at the Lyric was excellent, considering how little time can be given to rehearsal. Mr. Holloway in the part of Volpone (he reminds one of Mr. Moscovitch in some of his gestures and intonations) was particularly good. Mr. Ion Swinley as Mosca (Volpone's accomplice), too, deserves praise. The part of Corbaccio is far easier;

Mr. Lathbury introduced a suggestion of helpless amiability into it which perhaps ought not to have been there, but made a delightfully comic contrast to the vicious sentiments of the avaricious old gull. We should be grateful to all the actors; sometimes they did not articulate well, sometimes their movements were inexpressive and ungraceful, but these performances must be scratch performances and as such they must be judged. This one was most creditable.

BEAUMONT AND FLETCHER

IN CRITICIZING the performances of the Phœnix Society, gratitude must temper severity even when it may be justified. If the Society did not revive these old plays we should probably never see them, and while plays founded on a different technique of acting require elaborate rehearsal, these performances are perforce preceded by the sketchiest preparations, while the actors and actresses have often to make considerable sacrifices of time and energy to play in them. Again, they play under a peculiar disadvantage. It has been the habit of literary men to expatiate upon the merits of Elizabethan drama with an unbounded enthusiasm, which rouses the highest expectations in the audience, who, being disappointed with the play when they see it, consequently at once attribute that disappointment to the interpretation.

Ever since Charles Lamb picked out the fine or lovely passages from the Elizabethan dramatists it has been the mark of literary sensibility and scholarship to pitch the note of praise absurdly high. This praise can be made plausible, too, in an essay or in a chapter of a history of English literature, where space for quotation is limited, and an account of the action and a brief description of the characters are given by a writer anxious to display his sensibility and acumen.

I could write an account of *The Maid's Tragedy* without falsifying the plot, which would give the impression that the character-drawing in it was of a subtlety and vividness to justify even Swinburnian ecstasies, while suggesting, and for all my

readers could tell, truthfully, that the play was not only of the highest dramatic power but expressed in the medium of the most delightful poetry. With a little care I could work in only such passages, carefully omitting the fustian which lets the listener down the next minute, and by selecting a telling line or two I could convince my readers that characters who ought to go the way of all waxwork were really masterpieces of insight. I should be careful, of course, to quote such passages as:

> Yes, but this lady
> Walks discontented, with her wat'ry eyes
> Bent on the earth, etc.

And I should be careful to say very little more about Aspatia, beyond referring later on perhaps to "some cunning touch of tenderness or delicate perfume of pathos".

No one would guess that Aspatia is never for one moment convincing, or that she is as barefaced an attempt to work in us the handle of the pump of tears as ever drew contempt upon contemporary work from precisely the type of literary critic I should be aping. How gruesome-fine I could make the murder of the king seem by merely mentioning Evadne's determination to "shake his sins like furies" in his face, and by stating that she "bound" her seducer "ere" she stabbed him. After mentioning the "hideous prattle" of the lackeys of the bedchamber I should merely have to quote the startled exclamation of one of them:

> Either the tapers give a feeble light
> Or he looks pale.

and my beguiled readers would then fill in from their vague recollections of *Macbeth* a murder scene of the highest tragic intensity.

I should not have done anything which literary critics do not do every day. It is the awed, hushed tone, as of one writing in the presence of a masterpiece, that does the magic trick of creating reputations. Incidentally, I should be preparing a great disappointment for those who might see and hear the play from beginning to end, but my mesmeric passes would probably have been effective enough to make them lay the blame entirely upon the unfortunate actors; "the great twin-brethren", Beaumont and Fletcher, would escape scot free.

We are much greater snobs, more deeply unconscious snobs, about the possessors of old literary reputations than of old titles, and, as in the case of social snobbishness, it is not an exaggeration of admiration which matters—indeed, that may even add to life—but the obverse side of it, contempt for others without those credentials. If *The Maid's Tragedy* were a new play by a modern author, perhaps here and there a critic at once sensitive and good-natured might mention its beauties and happy strokes, and even perhaps prophesy a future for the author, but, judged as a whole, as a serious tragedy, it would be torn to pieces.

Opinion was divided as to Miss Sybil Thorndike's interpretation of Evadne; some thought her reading of her character faulty in the first two acts, others that her rendering of the part in the last act was at fault; but nearly everyone was of the opinion that her performance was a remarkable one, though holes could be picked in it. Where precisely you picked holes depended upon the passages of the play which happened to have stuck in your memory. Did she give us too harsh an Evadne? When she confesses on her wedding night that she is the king's mistress, and refuses her husband, was the Evadne we saw too brazen? Remember, she is soon to appear as the sensitive and wronged maiden,

who loathes her lover and falls at her husband's knees in an ecstasy of loving tenderness and repentance, that she is destined in a few hours to invoke "all the spirits of abusèd ladies" to help her in the performance of just vengeance upon a vile, lustful king, "this untemperate beast", so she calls him:

A thing out of the overcharge of nature,
Sent, like a thick cloud, to disperse a plague
Upon weak catching women,

Moreover, she will presently speak of herself thus:

Once I was lovely; not a blowing rose
More chastely sweet, till thou, thou, thou, foul canker,
(Stir not) didst poison me. I was a world of virtue;

and in lines of far finer poetry, in her repentance, as one numbered among those false women

Men pray against; and when they die, like tales
Ill told and unbelieved, they pass away
And go to dust forgotten.

It looks, then, as though the actress who plays Evadne in the first acts should show herself potentially a sensitive, if weak, woman; above all, a woman wronged. But in that case, what was Miss Sybil Thorndike to do with passages (I cull a few) such as she had to speak when she refuses her husband's embraces:

I sooner will find out the beds of snakes,
And with my youthful blood warm their cold flesh,
Letting them curl themselves about my limbs,
Than sleep one night with thee.

She tells him of her oath to the king and adds:

> When I call back the oath
> The pains of hell environ me.

She has scoffed at the suggestion that her conduct has anything to do with coyness or coldness, and asked if he does not see in her face that her vow is far from being a vow of chastity:

> No; in this heart
> There dwells as much desire and as much will
> To put that wishèd act in practice as e'er yet
> Was known to woman.

In her love, she tells him:

> I do enjoy the best, and in that height
> Have sworn to stand or die.

Now, this is clearly the language of a defiant woman passionately in love, and she proceeds contemptuously to tell Amintor that she has gone through the form of marriage with him only to provide herself with a putative father for the children she intends to bear the king. This is the Evadne who has been praised for her "naked audacity", and I do not see how Miss Thorndike could very well help representing her as a hard, determined and contemptuous woman, madly in love with her paramour.

The Elizabethan dramatists did not care about character. They did not grasp that character is an essential part of drama, especially of tragic drama, in which we must be moved if we are to be impressed æsthetically. They turned on passions like taps and turned them off again; they treated human emotions, virtues and vices as though they were signalmen's levers, which had only to be pulled to

change the direction of the whole train. There they were, these lovers, in a row ready to the dramatist's hand—revenge, remorse, chastity, honour, fidelity, pity, magnanimity, lust, fear, etc. The great game was to pull at as many as possible and change the points as often and violently as possible. As to which character in the plot was made to put his or her hand on them and work the scene, that was a matter of more or less indifference.

Here lay one of the causes of Shakespeare's superiority, and, in a lesser degree, of Ben Jonson's. Shakespeare, though he was often careless about character, and Jonson, though he worked more often in caricature, did care about consistency; and Shakespeare did prepare psychologically his scenes. This, then, is the fundamental defect of Elizabethan drama, and it is a grave one, almost a damning one in my opinion, making the work of this much belauded galaxy of writers at bottom childish, and often boring and mechanical—mere sensationalism.

This grave defect, this lack of real tragic seriousness, has been hidden from people's eyes by other admirable dramatic qualities which they possessed in common. First, they had at command an admirable diction, and most of them also possessed a very telling faculty, which people are apt to confuse with the power of drawing character, namely, the art of suggesting in words the kind of gestures men and women make in certain moods or during accesses of violent emotion (Lear's exclamation "Undo this button" is an example). They were masters of suggesting states of mind and emotion, but they crammed them in pell-mell into any character indiscriminately. Lastly, they had a quick eye for superficial traits and tricks; at moments for really revealing traits, such as the last words of the comic old man, Calianax, in *The*

Maid's Tragedy, when he is faced with three corpses, one his daughter. "I know not what the matter is, but I am grown very kind, and I am friends with you all now. You have given me that among you will kill me quickly, but I'll go home and live as long as I can."

When Swinburne describes that last scene it sounds magnificent, as "exalted for an instant to the very tone and manner of Shakespeare's tragedy, when Amintor stands between the dead and dying woman whom he has unwittingly slain with hand and tongue"; but when you actually see Amintor standing without taking any more notice than a cat of Evadne's corpse (she has just stabbed herself), you know better. It was not mere failure in elocution which made the scene fall flat.

Evadne having killed the King (the lover she adored, as was shown in the first act) because her brother stormed about *his* honour, is now treated by Amintor as "a monster of cruelty", though what he would do to her lover if he were not the King, he has expressed in no measured language. "Amintor," she cries, "thou shalt love me again . . . I will die for thee." "I have a little human nature yet that's for thee, that bids me stay thy hand", he answers, but it is too late, and he turns his attention to the dying Aspatia, whom he has run through the body in a duel, thinking her to be her brother, and having discoursed on her loving devotion, he, too (inevitably), stabs himself for her sake. Then enters the new King, and reflects that

> Unlooked-for sudden deaths from Heaven are sent;
> But cursed is he that is their instrument.

Well . . . is anyone really likely to be purged by pity and terror at the end of this?

SOMETHING NEW

THE STAGE SOCIETY produced a most original play last Monday and acted it extraordinarily well. The play is by Signor Luigi Pirandello, who is one of the leading Italian dramatists and a writer of admirable short stories. It was produced last year in Rome and made a great impression. The Stage Society's programme included a note by A. W. on the play. It was needed; for without some introduction, many of the audience would have been puzzled by this experiment in dramatic form.

"It is neither a play within a play, nor yet a play in the making. Rather it is a trial—possibly an indictment—of the modern theatre. The author has created Six Characters and imagined for them a situation of poignant intensity. And then, doubtful of the theatre's adequacy of his intentions, he abandons his play—it is not to be written. But the characters remain; he has endowed them with life and they refuse to relinquish his gift. A theatrical stock company meets to put another Pirandello play into rehearsal, and as they begin their work, the six characters arrive, and demand that their story shall be given the dramatic representation for which it was destined."

What an extraordinary plot for a play! How can a play be made out of such a situation? It certainly required considerable cleverness to do it, but Signor Pirandello is clearly endowed with a quite enormous amount of ingenuity. This is how he did it.

The curtain did not go up. It was up when we

assembled; we found ourselves sitting in front of the dark empty stage, and presently, one after the other, a number of actors and actresses in their everyday clothes walked on. The humorously-strident voice of Mr. Alfred Clark was heard giving directions for a rehearsal, and the lights were turned up. A slightly quarrelsome, snappy chatter followed, and the rehearsal was just getting under way, when at the back of the stage appeared a gloomy procession of figures dressed in deep mourning. An elderly man in immaculate black, a woman, presumably a widow, in streaming weeds, a tiny girl, a young girl about eighteen, a youth, say twenty-two, and a little boy about twelve. These people are "Characters" in a play Signor Pirandello intended to write.

The rehearsal stops; the actors turn and stare, and Mr. Alfred Clark naturally asks the intruders what the devil they want. Diffidently the Father (Mr. Franklin Dyall) steps forward. It is quite easy to state why they are come, but not so easy to convince the assembled actors that the visitors are not lunatics. What these portentously grave intruders want is to be given the opportunity of living through the story for which their creator created them. At present they are hanging in a miserable sort of void; they are real—there they are, solid human beings, men and women, boys and girls—but there is nothing for them to do. Politely, but with a certain insistence which gradually mesmerizes the matter-of-fact, dumbfounded Mr. Clark (call up the image of a man vigorously, not to say blatantly, matter-of-fact), the Father explains that such a condition of nebulous unattached existence has become intolerable. They *must* fulfil their destiny; would the company kindly impersonate them and thus bring rest to their perturbed spirits? (No one can act better than Mr. Clark

that frame of mind which is expressed by the simple words, "Well I'm blowed!")

Interrupted by the titters of the actors and the passionate corrections of his family, each of whom has his or her version of their terrible story, the Father actually succeeds in getting the idea lodged in the Producer's head that the terrible events through which his family have lived might make a better play than the exceedingly doubtful stuff Signor Pirandello has actually provided. Their story intrigues him.

The Father explains that he married beneath him. "You see this poor woman?"

"But she is a widow, and you are alive!"

"Yes, but listen. I married her. I had a secretary; they loved each other; they were continually signalling to each other with their eyes for fear they should wound me by their words; it became intolerable. I let them go off together, and with them went my son—the young man over there."

Here the Stepdaughter (I have not seen Miss Muriel Pratt act so well before) breaks in with a passionate accusation against the Son, describing his intolerable icy contempt for the rest of the family. . . .

Confusion. . . .

The Father resumes his story. He had no idea that, after the death of his wife's lover, the family had fallen into poverty. . . .

More passionate family recriminations. . . .

He had lost sight of them; he is a man not old enough to be indifferent to women and yet too old to be loved by them: a very humiliating condition . . . in short he has recourse occasionally to . . . well, he buys his loves.

Now, it is very unfair to think that the whole of a man is in all his actions; yet others always judge him as though that were the case. A most

terrible thing happened. He went to a certain house which under the pretence of being a dressmaker's was a house where these sort of bargains are struck, and there, without recognizing her, he met his wife's daughter, "the girl you see over there". They were interrupted by the cry of the Mother who had come to see her daughter. Imagine how terrible his predicament is now! The girl only sees him in the light of that interview; he is to her merely *that* man. . . .

More interruption from the Stepdaughter, who expresses her loathing and contempt. . . .

Agonized distress on the part of the Mother.

This is the situation which precedes the climax. It rather takes the Producer's fancy, who suggests that the Characters should reproduce what happened before the actors and a shorthand writer. This is just what the Characters want, but they are terribly disappointed when they see themselves afterwards impersonated. They come out completely different characters; there is something fatally wrong with the stage version. What we see is the contrast between "actuality" as an author imagines it and what actually gets across the footlights.

Signor Pirandello has illustrated what every profound dramatist must feel when he sees his characters on the stage; his sufferings at the inevitable distortions due to the substitution of the personality of the actor for that of his character as he imagined it. But he has done more than that. He has suggested the inevitable limitations of the modern drama, the falsifications which result from cramming scenes into acts and tying incidents down to times and places. And he has done more yet; in an odd way he has suggested that the fate of many people is not unlike those of the "Characters" in the play; that many of us are in their predicament,

namely, like them, real enough people, for whom fate nevertheless has not written the plays in which we might have played a part.

Mr. Franklin Dyall's performance was of the first excellence; it was difficult to pull it off and he succeeded triumphantly.

TROILUS AND CRESSIDA

ON THE small stage of the A.D.C. at Cambridge, the Marlowe Society performed from Saturday to Saturday last, *Troilus and Cressida*. The Marlowe Society is composed of undergraduates and members of the University; no dilution from outside is allowed as in the case of the O.U.D.C., and women's parts must be taken by young men. There is loss and gain in this. It very seldom happens that a young man can be found who is physically and emotionally able to act a serious feminine part, especially when her character is shown in love scenes. Adequate Cassandras, Clytemnestras and comic minxes may turn up from time to time, but an adequate Cressida would be a morbid phenomenon. The love scenes in *Troilus and Cressida* must, therefore, be written off.

Patroclus succeeded at the A.D.C. in suggesting femininity far better than Cressida herself. He was not hampered by having to pretend to be a woman; he had merely to act the part of Achilles' minion; he looked boyishly feminine. But had he been dressed as a woman he, too, would have at once looked a made-up forty-two, and his gestures would have lost their coaxing, affectionate, girlish ease. So much for the loss; it is a considerable one.

Now for the gain. In the first place, such a performance, without professionals, has a better chance of attaining unity of effect. Professionals and amateurs, even when both are acting their best, cannot pull together; the finish and "speed" of the former is met by the often greater sincerity, but

also inevitable slowness of the latter and, instead of dovetailing, they jar. Secondly, a young man with a neck like a pillar and a booming contralto voice, looking down dove-like and trying to flute, is such an obvious makeshift in the part that the critical faculty is inhibited. Consequently, his performance may in effect be less annoying than a faulty one by a woman. You stare like a cow at the scene, but you listen like an intelligent human being to the *words*. Certainly, the Cambridge Cressida gave me no pain comparable to that dealt me by many a missish, miawling Juliet. I said just now that the love scenes in the Marlowe Society's performance had to be written off; emotionally that is true. But a skilful producer can insist on their being so suggested that, at least, the intelligence grasps their contribution to the drama as a whole, even though, emotionally considered, they are themselves non-conductors.

Now, the great merit of *Troilus and Cressida* at Cambridge was that the incidents of a play, singularly confusing to read, were presented in their true perspective. You saw what total impression Shakespeare meant to convey through his play. The inevitable, and to me desolating, austerity of the love scenes made this, perhaps, even easier to grasp. Had we seen a ravishing and delicately persuasive Cressida, it is possible that we might have been beguiled into thinking her animal fecklessness the whole instead of the part, the root instead of the branch, of the poet's furious indictment of life. I do not mean that a producer of *Troilus and Cressida* ought, therefore, to make purposely the love scenes emotional non-conductors; I mean merely that by a happy compensation the unavoidable flatness of those scenes made it easier for spectators with a rather lax æsthetic grip, to get a comprehensive view of the whole play.

It is a play in which Thersites has the last word; in which lovers, heroes, kings, venerable age, attractive youth, are all shown as fair marks for Thersites' bitter railings—unless, and I take it that this was the point which was intended to be emphasized by Ulysses (whose elocution, by the by, was excellent) suddenly booming out the line, "*One touch of nature makes the whole world kin*"—unless you are prepared to take a contemptuously detached, amoral view of human nature, and let off on the score of their all being made of the same poor human stuff: sweet little trollops like Cressida; idealizing lunatics like Troilus; salacious, obliging old men like Pandar; heroic oafs like Ajax; garrulous ancients like Nestor; imposing, blank façades like Agamemnon (you remember when Æneas, the envoy, finds himself in the presence how very slow he is to grasp that he is addressing "the king of men"); indifferent, selfish fathers like Calchas; cold, dull, wily statesmen like Ulysses; winsome little male coquettes like Patroclus; disappointing dolls like Helen; peacock, professional seducers like Paris; scurrilous, envious deformities like Thersites; hysterical prophetesses like Cassandra; depressed nonentities who wear horns like Menelaus; and sulky strong men of the last meanness like Achilles. But there is Hector, you say? He, at any rate, is a chivalrous gentleman. But what a fool to be one in a world where nothing counts, according to Thersites, but "lechery and clapper-clawing"! Why, he lets his enemy choose his own moment for fighting, takes his armour off trustfully in the middle of a battle, and allows Achilles to set ten men on him and thus pretend he has killed him himself!

From the peculiar keynote-prominence given to that famous line, I conclude that the producer's view was that the poet had accepted that sole remaining alternative—a contemptuous indulgence

—to Thersites' attitude towards mankind. I do not agree; I think Shakespeare was in the mood of Thersites when he wrote this devastating play. Whether he started off to ridicule Chapman and his idolatry of homeric heroes, as some suppose, or, as others, that he was prompted to write it by Essex's sulking or other political events, he certainly poured into it all the scathing, suffering bitterness, his sensibility, his love of beauty, pleasure, perfection, greatness, doomed him to suffer.

There is no steady drift of story in this play, in some ways one of the most remarkable Shakespeare wrote, yet by a miracle it has unity, and the Marlowe Society's performance brought this out admirably; it showed throughout vigour and consistency of interpretation. Pandarus was excellent, and when he sang his little song he was duly absurd. Perhaps he resembled Polonius a little too much; he might have gloated more. The stately, handsome and simple Hector, and the thick-witted ox, Ajax, were perfectly in the picture. (Bravo, amateurs!) Thersites was somewhat too monotonously and splutteringly emphatic; there are gleams of reflective wistfulness in his part which should have varied his reading of it, and his encounter with the bastard on the battlefield should have been accompanied by a roar of laughter. It is Thersites' laughter, not only his spite against life, which is formidable. The actor should have occasionally straightened his knees from the mean cringe; yet he, too, played his part well. The battle was very well stage-managed, and the scenery for it imaginatively chaotic.

The play was, as it should be, acted straight through with one rest, and on an apron stage. I hope in reviewing their achievement with complacency, as they have a right to do, the Marlowe

Society recognizes how much they owe indirectly to Mr. William Poel; it was he who set Shakespearean productions on the right path.

BEN JONSON'S LAUGHTER

THE ALCHEMIST performed on Monday by the Phœnix Society went very well indeed. Mr. Baliol Holloway was extremely good in the part of Subtle, the Alchemist, and Miss Margaret Yarde as Dol Common, though I lost a great deal of her Billingsgate, was vigorous and amusing. Mr. Andrew Leigh as Abel Drugger did not fill out the part with imaginative ingenuity, and one was left wondering how Abel Drugger could ever have been one of Garrick's most famous parts; but he did not zany the character, and what he did put into it was satisfactory. Mr. Stanley Lathbury, with his slow, grating voice, sour expression and admirable economy of movement and gesture, was an Ananias it would be impossible to better. Mr. Frank Cellier might have been a little more exuberant. The magnificent scene in which he describes to the sceptical Surly the delights which will be his as soon as the concoction of the Elixir of Life and the "Philosopher's Stone" is completed, would reward the patient virtuosity of a Coquelin. Mr. Cellier had some very happy moments, but his elocution was not flushed with the gloating glory of anticipation, nor were his intonations sufficiently varied, rich and powerful. Mr. George Desmond did not take advantage of the triple nature of his part, for Face is by turns a bluff captain, an adroit mountebank, and a cringing servant. He was at his best in the last scene, when he relapses, after his dazzling run as swindler, into serving man. Mr. Charles Straite did not make anything of

Kastril, "the Angry Boy"; so little, indeed, that one marvelled at such a description of him, and wondered if the hand of the mighty Ben had not for once failed to trace the hard, sweeping outline of a type. Still, Kastril is a small part, and the whole performance went extremely well. I thought, too, that the Phœnix audience co-operated with a more genuine relish than usual. It was a great success.

The world of Ben Jonson's comedy reminds me more of Balzac's *Comédie Humaine* than any other. Both worlds are phantasmagorias of monomaniacs, crammed to the muzzle with will and appetite, plaguing each other, devouring "conies" and torturing an occasional feeble angel on his or her appearance among them. The *demiurges* of these two worlds resemble each other in their prodigious robustness, in being imaginators rather than observers—despite the circumstantial detail with which their pictures are packed—, in their Rabelaisian effervescences, and, above all, in their hearty, though, in the case of the Elizabethan, somewhat scornful, sympathy with the resource and courage of the vicious, and in the exuberant energy of intellect with which they endow them, so that we forget their vices, and delight rather in their misdirected virtues. In Balzac's foxes, as in Volpone and Subtle, there is not a little of the lion. Volpone, at any rate, roars magnificently.

Elizabethan London and nineteenth century Paris were, to each respectively, places not unlike Hell, but one feels neither of them would have been happy in any other place. Hell was gloriously amusing. Jonson had one advantage; his thick-skinned fortitude had the intellectual justification behind it of a creed which leaves the mind free to see mankind, if it likes, as desperately wicked. A robust, tough-minded Catholic, if his experience reports that the world is damned, can afford to

envisage human nature's vileness with scornful and possibly quite outrageous gaiety; and his contempt for private enterprise in the concoction of mystic comforts will be summary and emphatic. I cannot sympathize with people who take seriously Balzac's clairvoyance, Swedenborgianism, spiritualism, animal magnetism, "the favourite science" I am afraid he calls it, "of Jesus, and one of the powers transmitted to the Apostles". The gravity of his air on these occasions reminds me of Subtle, though his faith was no doubt better.

Here is a curiously bad criticism of *The Alchemist*. Hazlitt says of the play, "It contains all that is quaint, dreary, obsolete, and hopeless in this once famed art, but not the golden dreams and splendid disappointments. We have the mere circumstantials of the sublime science, pots and kettles, aprons and bellows, crucibles and diagrams, all the refuse and rubbish, not the essence, the true *elixir vitæ*". Hazlitt here is actually asking Ben Jonson to be sympathetic, a demand which undercuts the whole of Jonsonian comedy; a comedy which is only beginning to come into its own again because people are growing sick of the wistful, romantic attitude. "You are right and I am right and we are all as right as right can be"—or "good" if you like. I do not say that Ben Jonson's laughter is the finest kind; it is certainly not the most beautiful. There are no silvery serene overtones in it as in Shakespeare's. Ben Jonson's laughter is bracing, natural thunder; with little thought behind it; though intellect guides, it is directed at the midriff first, only afterwards at the head, but it never lacks the majesty of courage or a flowing fecundity of invention.

IVANOFF

"O what a rogue and peasant slave am I."

THE STAGE SOCIETY last week gave one of their very best performances. *Ivanoff* is one of the least known of Tchehov's plays. It is not counted among his best, and yet how good it is! It was his first attempt at a big play, and it failed. Towards the end of his life he re-wrote it and improved it immensely; it was played by the Moscow Art Theatre, and again it did not succeed. The reason of this second failure was (I have good authority for saying this) that the Moscow company did not bring out the comedy of the piece. They played it too tearfully, just as the English company the other day missed the rainbow effects, laughter through tears, in *The Cherry Orchard*. In *Ivanoff* the strain of comedy is far stronger, and it was clearly brought out in Mr. Komisarjevsky's production.

Ivanoff is generally described as Tchehov's attempt to write a Russian *Hamlet*, and the description is a good one. Ivanoff, the principal figure, is a man whose will has been broken, and the line I have quoted at the top of this article runs like a refrain through all his speeches. He is sick with self-disgust. Before the curtain rises we are given to understand that he was a particularly fine specimen among Russian landowners, an active, aspiring, generous young man of high ability. He married for love a Jewess whose rich parents discarded her for making a "mixed marriage". You remember that in Hamlet's case, too, we must understand that the young Prince was full of promise. We catch

through that play glimpses of the earlier Hamlet; in Tchehov's play (I think this is a defect in it), there is only one flash of the hero's quondam spirit. It tells in his last cry, "My youth has come back—the old Ivanoff is alive again"—uttered just before he shoots himself, but it occurs nowhere else.

During the rest of the play he is exhibited to us as helpless, morbid, vacillating, crushed by shame. Now it is exceedingly difficult to bring out the tragic quality of emotions which hearty, healthy people, let alone the medical profession, label as pathological. It is in this respect that actors usually fail in acting Hamlet and Romeo. (The hysterical Romeo, for instance, especially in the scene with the Friar, seldom touches us.) Mr. Robert Farquharson's Ivanoff succeeded wonderfully in conveying a vivid sense of inner tension and refinement. It is not easy to hold our sympathy in such a part as Ivanoff, and yet it is all important that we should distinguish between Ivanoff himself, who is a good man, and the view which all the characters save two, Sasha and her simple amiable old tippler of a father, take of his character. He brings misery into the lives of all near him; he fails to act consistently; his motives are open to misinterpretation by malicious gossips. His agent, Borkin, is responsible for this, but such gossip is also the result of Ivanoff's reckless self-depreciation. In a notable passage of self-condemnation Ivanoff compares himself to a vain young peasant who broke his back shouldering, out of swagger, a load far too heavy for him. What is the load Ivanoff has to carry?

Firstly, disappointment, and provincial life—its pettiness and dullness have proved stronger than his enthusiasms. Secondly, bankruptcy: and last, but not least, he has ceased to love his wife, his sick, beautiful, lonely Anna (excellently played by Miss Casalis), towards whom he has by no means

ceased to feel nevertheless a tender loyalty. Against his will he has often found comfort in the companionship of Sasha, a young girl, the daughter of a rich, miserly mother. Her attraction for him is that of credulous, admiring, energetic youth for a tired, sceptical man who has lost faith in himself. To the neighbours it looks as though, disappointed in one rich marriage, he was preparing to make another; they know Anna is consumptive and cannot live long. She is on Ivanoff's nerves; and both the doctor, who attends Anna and is in love with her himself, and Ivanoff's neighbours think he is only too ready to hasten the poor woman's death by treating her badly. Ivanoff's self-accusations seem to bear them out.

Sasha is a character to be met in the pages of Turgenev, but here she is not idealized. She is in love with Ivanoff and it is she who does the wooing. Her passion is distinguishable from a longing to help him; she is the type of girl who loves a man because she believes she can "save" him. But Ivanoff does not believe he can be saved; he feels on the contrary that he will drag Sasha down. The death of poor Anna is heavy on his conscience in the last act. On his wedding morning, though he refuses to go to church, Sasha will not release him. Is she in love with him or with her own goodness? Both. There is a comi-tragic competition in unselfishness between them, amazing to her plain-minded father, Lebedieff, and then—Ivanoff shoots himself.

Those who have not seen the play will wonder where in such a story comedy could come in. Well, the answer is, it is by Tchehov. It is in these humiliations and self-regarding scruples of the hero that the comedy lies; in the contrast between him and such simple, kindly souls as Lebedieff and such eupeptic, thick-skinned vulgarians as Borkin (gloriously acted by Mr. George Hayes); in the fact, so true to life,

that gossip makes the most private perplexities of the soul also, alas, the concern of people who conspicuously leave that element out in judging people. This vague hum of lively indifference and callous censoriousness of which gossip is composed was wonderfully rendered in the production. The party at the Lebedieffs' house was a masterpiece of stage craft. Indeed, the whole production was one which the playgoer can look back upon and say, "I have seen Tchehov properly acted."

STRINDBERG AGAIN

A HIGH temperature ought not to prevent one appreciating Strindberg; some dramatists, perhaps, but not Strindberg. Yet when, on returning from Play Room Six, 6 New Compton Street (from Cambridge Circus, New Compton Street is the first turning on the right off Charing Cross Road going towards Oxford Street; No. 6 is about thirty yards down on the right-hand side. Play Room Six is on the first floor; it has been entirely redecorated with hycolite liquid wallpaper)—when, as I was saying, on my return, the thermometer told me that, medically speaking, I ought to have been in bed long ago, I was inclined to think that the uncanny uneasiness, the rather unpleasant but interesting uneasiness, I had experienced during the performance must have been due to purely physical causes. This was a disappointment. I had been congratulating myself in some such terms as this: "Why, after all these years, your sensibilities are still as fresh and unanalysable as a child's; as subtle and unaccountable as those of the extraordinary people who say they can detect the presence of an invisible kitten in a cathedral!"

It is a great thing, of course, for a critic to continue susceptible to impressions he does not understand. The limitations of elderly people in all directions spring from only heeding what they already understand, or think they do. Naturally, therefore, I had been gratified by my evening's experience, and, naturally, I resented the hint of the thermometer. I took it, however, to the extent

of ceasing to flatter myself in a general way; but, as the first sentence of this article shows, the conviction remained that, in this case, my peculiar condition had been a help and not a hindrance to me as a critic. You understand *Epipsychidion* best when you are in love; *Don Juan* when anger is subsiding into indifference. Why not Strindberg when you have a temperature?

Let me explain, or rather, try to explain—for I am writing under the influence of fever, which resembles the influence of drink in that, while you grasp the content of each moment, whether that content is one of sensation or reflection, and with unusual vividness, you are also unusually hazy about transitions—let me, then, *try* to explain. My only chance of doing so is to say straight away what idea I am after. If I do not seize it this very moment, it will melt, I know, like a cloud into another, so absorbing that I shall not remember my intention. It is, then, this: that there is an analogy between the sensations of fever and the æsthetic feelings inspired by a Strindberg play; and that these feelings cannot be better described than in terms of such an analogy. To obtain your assent I must remind you of feverish sensations.

It is curious. Your sensations during fever are nearly indistinguishable from pleasant ones, and yet there is a mockery about them all. To have a high temperature is the most splendid (and most unfair) sermon on the vanity of physical pleasures. You are consumed with the most promising thirst; there at your elbow stands the long, cool drink. You drink. What an uncanny and distressing disproportion appears between the glorious magnitude of that craving and the tiny satisfaction it brings! This tired, tender ache which is all over you like a voluptuous feeling, seems to promise deepest rest; but the exquisite diminuendo of consciousness does

not ensue! This fine sensitiveness to the chill of sheets; how delightful it will be to nestle into glowing warmth! The glow comes. Good heavens! it was not warmth you wanted. Turn the pillow, try the other side—there's a little cool strip left for one leg, at any rate, between the hang-over and the mattress.

Everyone has experienced these feverish sensations. The peculiarity about them, which makes them distressful, is not so much that they are in themselves unpleasant as acutely tantalizing; they are cravings closely associated with deep satisfactions which never follow. One's whole sensuous being is continually concentrated in expectation, and continually cheated. There is no better analogy for the effect on the mind produced by works of genius which are not works of art. Strindberg's plays rouse emotional expectations and leave one thirsty, restless, and either too hot or too cold. The very fact that he possesses what is roughly conveyed by the word "genius" makes their difference from satisfying work more obvious. They are products of the unfortunate "cathartic" type of creation, which purges no one but the creator. The keenest form of attention they rouse is curiosity; and that curiosity, when it finds its proper direction, is concentrated upon the author, not on the work. I could see nothing in *Miss Julie* but Strindberg's "servant" complex (see *The Son of a Servant* passim), his morbid desire to be kicked himself when loved, and the revolt of his masculine pride against that "complex", taking the form of detestation of the object which satisfies it.

One midsummer night; thus the outline of the story runs, Julie, the only daughter of a Swedish count, bullies her father's footman into taking her to his bedroom; afterwards he has the opportunity of bullying her. They are both thoroughly fright-

ened, and the solution which recommends itself is to lend her the razor, with which he was about to make himself respectable before carrying up his master's boots and coffee, in order that she may cut her throat. Strindberg's temperament has here stepped in and excluded all possibility of our feeling pity for the girl (he would never allow that) consequently the mood in which the fall of the curtain leaves one is: "Well, well, she cut her throat and her father rang for his breakfast."

This is hardly a "catharsis". It may have relieved Strindberg to send a high-born minx to an ugly death, but in me it inspired what is best described as a state of depressed equanimity. The dramatist's attitude towards the footman (well played by Mr. Douglas Burbidge) is rather more difficult to determine. He is certainly innocent in all that preceded their embraces. He behaved like a natural straightforward fellow and told her she was a fool not "to keep her place", though her tumble from it in a way rejoiced him. But when he took her canary to the kitchen dresser and chopped off its head, I am afraid, remembering the pug, or chow, or whatever it was, in *The Confessions of a Fool*, that the incident was not intended to alienate our sympathies but to illustrate "the way of a *man* with a maid". Julie's love of the bird, which she brought down in a cage as her sole luggage when they intended to elope together (I never quite grasped why this solution of their predicament was finally dropped) was, I fear, intended to exemplify the unfathomable falseness of feminine emotion.

There were, of course, vital and remarkable passages in the dialogue. The fact that when Julie falls, she falls, not to her servant's level but below it, was admirably brought out. The naturalness and integrity of his relations to the cook, Christine,

who is his mistress, were made an excellent foil to the ugly muddle of his relations with his mistress in the other sense of the term. Of course, "genius" was there, but—and this is my point—the very vehemence of the author's imagination served to throw into relief the disappointing emptiness and confusion of his conception behind the detail and the dialogue.

Miss Julie was preceded by *The Pariah*. And here I must remark upon the nature of these performances at Play Room Six. You find yourself in a little room in front of a tiny stage; and if you are in the first three or four rows, and the scene is an interior, you feel as though you were in the same room as the actors. This adds intensity to the effect of subtle realism, and makes it practically impossible to bring off stagey effects, even when these would be impressive in a theatre.

The Pariah is a dialogue between two men admirably adapted to performance in these circumstances. They are seated at a bare table with an inkpot on it, in a bare room; the looking-glass over the mantelpiece is at the back of the younger of the two. They have been living together some time (I arrived a little late, so I am not sure of this), and are about to part. The elder (Mr. Michael Sherbrook) is studying the other with a detached curiosity which begins to get on the departing friend's nerves. The thunder also fidgets him. Michael Sherbrook (every pucker of his face, every pause in his slow deliberate tones tells) begins by saying that The Other One has puzzled him. "For instance, you seem made up of two men. Looking at your face, you seem a man who braves life, while your back, which I see in that glass, is that of a man cringing under a burden. It is the back of a slave."

Well, to condense—and necessarily, therefore,

to spoil—the dialogue, after slowly piecing together, in a meditative and disconcerting manner, scraps of half-forgotten observation and deductions from The Other One's non-committal replies, the truth emerges: firstly, that this young man has served a term of imprisonment for forgery; secondly, for he has not the air of one who has paid for his misdeeds, that he has also done something else for which he fears, but has not yet received, punishment. Michael Sherbrook tries first to put a little self-respect into him by telling him that he himself killed a man. At this turn of the dialogue I thought that we were in for a robust Nietzschean moral, but the confession turned out to be the most innocent manslaughter. Cringing gratitude in The Other is presently replaced by the snarl of the blackmailer, the malice of the trapped jackal. Conclusion: Out you go, you cur. Thus they parted.

Now, what was the point of this little scene? I was interested because I felt I was in the room with these two men, eavesdropping. But what was the point? There was no point. Strindberg was just working off contempt for a type, very probably identified in his mind with somebody with whom he had been in contact. Again, as always happens when insight is merely hate-directed, the dramatist did not remember that cold and half-amused probing of another's shame does not rouse in the subject the best human response. This revelation of the hopelessness of the Pariah's case was no proof of it. Again: amazingly clever, quite empty.

But how well and quietly Mr. Sherbrook acted!

ORPHEUS

I DID NOT go with any confident anticipation of pleasure. The reputation of M. Cocteau is the sort I am inclined to regard with suspicion; he has—at least to us over here—the air of being a Coterie Celebrity. People come back from Paris as pleased as little dogs that have been scratched behind the ears, when they can report that they have met M. Cocteau. I can well believe it to be a privilege. His prose has the sincerity of prompt talk. His sentences seem to be punctuated by airy and emphatic gestures. Indeed, some of them are mere gestures conveying an attitude towards the topic rather than a contribution to it: "Eclecticism is fatal to admiration as well as an injustice. But, in art, it is a kind of injustice to be just." A kind of injustice to be just! This is no contribution to the art of criticism—just a flourish which suggests sensibility.

Though M. Cocteau returns again and again to his pet points, concentration is for him a matter of seconds. He illuminates by flashes. We read by blinks of intuition; ratiocination seems to strike him as a form of insincerity. I admit I was prejudiced against him, for I understood too well how profound and sympathetic all this would appear to a generation unwilling, or unable (I don't know which it is) to think consecutively. He seemed to me no lion, I confess; rather a pretty azure dragon-fly, poising for a quivering instant in front of this art or that, and darting at it like a needle. Reading his address before the College of France, I was reminded of Whistler's "Five o'Clock" lecture—and that

I remembered, had been a real event. In both there was a deadly, careful informality in attack; a kindred steely sincerity, the temper of which was even more impressive in M. Cocteau's "Huit minutes chez M. Barrès"—for so this interview with that slightly *passé* prophet might well be called—where with apparently casual penetration, he dealt with his host much as M. Barrès himself, in his own youth, had dealt with the dignified M. Renan. I began, therefore, to be prepared to think (I apologize for being slow) that, as a critic of both art and life, M. Cocteau was someone to be reckoned with, but whose qualities do not promise creative power. I did not go to see *Orpheus* in a hopeful state of mind.

And then I found it delightful.

It was emotionally intelligible, intellectually amusing and artistically adventurous. We owe a debt of gratitude to the Gate Theatre for giving us the chance of seeing it. As I said when I last reviewed one of their productions, these small impecunious theatrical ventures are of real importance to culture. We cannot expect managers of costly theatres to experiment (Mr. Cochran is the only one who dares) and keep us aware of developments in foreign drama. Yet even from the point of view of their box-offices these societies are useful. Just as big firms of decorators and designers of china and chairs find the studios of "impossible" artists good hunting-ground for new designs (how much upholsterers once owed to Morris and how much, more recently, Messrs. —— and Messrs. —— have borrowed from the now defunct Omega Workshops!), so, too, theatrical managers and their dramatists, even when they do not nobly dare to steal wholesale, may find in such places as the Gate Theatre Studio suggestions of new possibilities, and thus discover that there may be profit as well as truth in Jean Cocteau's epigram that "tact in audacity consists in

knowing how far we may go too far". Some of them have dim suspicions that audacity sometimes pays and would fain learn how to be audacious.

M. Cocteau thinks that the salvation of the Theatre lies in its returning to more primitive conditions. Get rid of apparatus, get rid, at least, of that air of elaborate preparation and pretension. Let everything about the theatre admit frankly to the bare-faced make-believe that a stage entertainment really is. People will enjoy themselves much more if they go in the spirit of a visit to a circus or a fair. The theatre should reek of saw-dust and orange-peel. Realism (this is a familiar cry) is played out; force the audience to collaborate in making ingenious makeshifts serve as hints to the imagination. Remember that apparent informality in stage design, in decoration, in technique, is also an opportunity for fantasy.

The play to M. Cocteau is a whole, not a book of words; it is one great conjuring trick, a work of art made up just as much from what the eye watches as the ear takes in. Mr. James Laver explained all this in an admirable short lecture which he delivered at the Gate Theatre Studio on Sunday. He defined *Orphée* as mixture of miracle play, circus and booth performance. It is a jumble of modernity, classicism and Christian symbolism. The scenes take place in Paris of to-day; the story is the death of Eurydice and her release by Orpheus from Hades—on condition that he does not look at her. The lovers are a modern youth and maiden, their guardian angel a glazier, the Greek messenger who retells the fate of Orpheus among the Bacchantes a comic gendarme. The curtain rises on a talking-horse, so we are plunged in the circus atmosphere at once. Only the horse in this case is a diabolic one to which Orpheus most imprudently has recourse, in the manner of a modern spiritualist, for poetic inspiration.

It talks by the approved method of stamping as he calls out the letter of the alphabet it wants; his horse has given him one line he thinks magnificently profound: "God Ordains That Orpheus Hunt Eurydice, Long Lost." He does not perceive it is also a cryptogram, "Go to Hell."

The spectator must never press the symbolism too hard. He must enjoy himself at this show first and foremost like a child; the symbols suggest ideas, but these should only produce a pleasant suspicion at the back of the sophisticated spectator's mind that there is more in the show than meets the eye and ear.

When Eurydice licks a poisoned envelope and is about to die, Death appears. Now, Death is a cool lady in evening dress, for only in disguise could she go about the world and do her work. She enters our houses through the looking glass (look yourself in a glass if you wish to see death approaching), and she is accompanied by two hospital nurses and an apparatus for removing the soul from the body. She puts on a surgeon's white coat and india-rubber gloves. Miss Veronica Turleigh's aspect, movement and voice were exactly right, but I could have wished her manner to have been a shade more disquietingly like a priestess—after she had put on her coat. During the next few minutes a mysterious instrument buzzes on the operating table, and Death and her attendants exchange directions and replies in the cold, quick, level tones such as people use in crises. It is done; it is over. Three swift strides takes Death to the door of the room where Eurydice lies. Death turns and lo! a fluttering dove is in her hand; she opens the window and away it flies. Eurydice is dead.

Mr. Laver drew our attention to the contrast, so characteristic of the dramatist, between the sophistication of the Death symbol and his use of a hackneyed emblem for the soul. The dramatist's

instinct in using both new and old symbols is beautifully sure. Death symbolized as a skeleton with an hour-glass made the Middle Ages shudder; to us a skeleton is an agreeably picturesque object; and "the dread reaper", the man with the scythe who passes, no longer disquiets us.

My favourite story of Disraeli describes him sitting in his carriage, old, tired, near his end. He is just about to start for a drive, when the footman hands in to him one of those circular air-cushions on which lean invalids like to sit. The old mummy opens an eye, and, waving the back of his hand, says, in that sombre and majestic voice he kept to the last, " Take away that emblem of mortality." What a far better emblem than a grinning skull is that ugly india-rubber object—for us! M. Cocteau knows, too, gallant, alert, half-frightened enemy of the prosaic that he is, that it is in the clinical aspect of Death, who with "his well-worn lean, professional smile" (why does nobody read Henley now?)

Comes to your bedside, unannounced and bland,

which is most disquieting to us. But when it comes to symbolizing the soul, the symbol of folk-lore is still the best.

So also at the end (the curtain falls on a suggestion of heaven) why strain ingeniously after exalted, but necessarily quite inadequate metaphors? Perhaps there will be more poetry in a childish conception: a table of fruit, a gramophone playing "Home sweet home" and lovers united? It is all over in a minute. The scene moves us just enough to prevent our smiling. The whole play is light as thistledown. I found Mr. Ronald Simpson's Orpheus distinctly good, and Miss Moyna Macgill's Eurydice charming, though she grimaces a little too violently.

By the bye, I am concerned to hear that the

Gate Theatre Society are to be prosecuted on Monday. Some plain-clothes policemen got in by paying at the box-office. This is illegal in the case of a Society which performs unlicensed plays for subscribers alone. I am very sorry the police had the curiosity to see if such an entrance could be somehow wangled; for in this rather stupid, grubby world we do not want sprouts of art and sensibility stamped upon.

FATE AND THE SUBCONSCIOUS

THE STAGE SOCIETY has good reason to congratulate itself both on the choice and on the performance of M. Jean Cocteau's version of *Oedipus Rex, The Machine of the Gods.* During the last few years it has been crossing a desert of public indifference. Subscribers have fallen off, and (most discouraging) some of the Society's enthusiastic supporters in the past have been saying that its work was done. If it had not been for one man . . . but its members know well what they owe to Mr. Kennedy. Such a Society is still important to the English Stage, and how it can vivify and enlarge interest in drama in London (still too lethargic and narrow) is well shown this week at the Grafton Theatre.

What the public saw there was a version of one of the oldest plays in the world—yet something new, something stimulating to modern stagecraft. Incidentally, they also saw two actresses and one actor in parts which displayed them at their best. Miss Margaret Webster as Jocasta, Miss Ursula Jeans as The Sphinx, Mr. William Devlin as Oedipus (in his first scene I thought I was not going to admire him), exhibited talents such as producers are often at a loss to discover. The immediate reward of actors who give their services to the Stage Society is small. It lies almost entirely in the opportunity of learning their art, of testing their scope, and perhaps—if managers know their business—in making an impression on those who have parts to give away.

Aristotle considered *Oedipus Rex* the prime example of dramatic tragedy. But as Mr. F. L.

Lucas has said, we go to Aristotle now not for the right answers to aesthetic questions, but to learn what are the right questions to put. The idea of Destiny was the focus of Greek tragedy; Sophocles accepted it as a tradition and as a fact. His last word on life is "Look, wonder and think."

> Aeschylus had justified the ways of God to man, and vindicated law. Euripides, finding neither God nor law, but only burning instincts on the one hand and destructive thought on the other, launches out into a restless search that has no starting-point and no goal. Sophocles does not affect to explain life; he hardly criticizes it. He shows things happening and how they happen, but not why. If he accepts conventions, it is because they are actual facts; they exist, and are among the motive forces of the world. If he seems to lack moral imagination, it is because morality is not with him a separate thing, with boundaries at which imagination can stop. Morals and religion are to him neither the foundations nor the superstructure; they are elements or functions of the one amazing and incomprehensible thing, the one thing that matters, the one thing that is—life. (*Lectures on the Greek Poets*, T. W. Mackail.)

There is a blank obviousness, a curious flatness—I do not say for scholars who have brooded over and studied Greek plays, but for the modern spectator—in the way they end. Recall the closing lines of *Oedipus Rex*, "Therefore wait to see life's ending before you call any man happy; wait till free from pain he has won his final rest." Good heavens, we exclaim, is *that* all it comes to, this horrible story of a gallant Prince, doomed at birth to kill his father, marry his mother, who after many years brought a

curse on his people whom he had ruled well, then put out his own eyes and wandered away? This threadbare commonplace, that disaster may overtake at last even the most fortunate man, is that all it comes to? Of course it is not all. The play also conveys a sense that man though great is helpless; that he is the plaything of the gods and yet divine. Any version of this story of ineluctable fate must therefore also communicate that.

M. Cocteau, as the title of his variations on the theme of Oedipus shows, has grasped this firmly. For the rest, *The Machine of the Gods* is a psychological fantasia. His play in detail is far from Greek. Yet the dramatist has managed to preserve the essential Greek thing, the sense of a Destiny which cannot be read by its victims and the awe which so dark a mystery inspires. And meanwhile he has amused and intrigued our imaginations with matters which are more familiar to us than the stark contemplation of Fate after the manner of Sophocles. He has brought out the odd, naïve, folk-lore elements in the story of the Sphinx with her ridiculous riddle about the animal that first goes on four legs, then on two, and finally on three. M. Cocteau has the invention of a fairy-story teller. (That was clearly seen, too, in *Orphée*.) He knows how gladly the imagination yields itself to the improbable if it is presented as in folk-lore, with matter-of-fact boldness, or for the matter of that in miracle-stories. Our imaginations are still in part those of children, and he sees the dramatist should take advantage of this. Such incidents are only charming and convincing on the stage when taken boldly for granted. Don't, therefore, fuss about creating an atmosphere of wonder; the wonders themselves will do that. That I believe is M. Cocteau's dramatic discovery. He has taken a hint from the old story-tellers who used to say to our complete satisfaction in childhood,

"And the witch said, 'Become a toad'; and she became a toad." Why not?

Oedipus Rex opens with the plague at Thebes and the search for the guilty Jonah responsible for that public calamity—with the *dénouement* of the original story. M. Cocteau opens with a ghost scene reminiscent of the battlements of Elsinor, where the ghost of Oedipus' father vainly attempts to warn his wife, Jocasta, against the plot prepared by the gods. Then it shifts to the Sphinx, who is a beautiful girl—at least to all who meet her wandering at night in the woods round Thebes. A peasant woman confides in her; and the Sphinx herself *when she is woman* falls in love with Oedipus. It is as a *woman* that she tells him the answer to her silly riddle. Then suddenly she turns into the dire supernatural creature, a symbol of blind meaningless destruction in the world. The only moment when I thought Miss Ursula Jeans missed a point (her great speech as Sphinx—magnificent, gruesome, beautiful—she delivered with striking virtuosity), was that moment when her hand caressed the neck of the tired peasant boy. We ought then to have felt a thrill of danger. Was she, though she seemed a gentle lady, about to kill him?

Jocasta and Oedipus (the incest motive), were treated psychologically. How real Jocasta was! How recognizable their relation! Her love for her young husband was maternal; he loved the mother in his wife. The famous Oedipus complex! In M. Cocteau's play their relation had a Freudian reality. But in spite of these condiments for modern spectators, "The sentiment of Oedipus' sublime acquiescence in fate" was not lost. It was reinforced by them. To-day, it is through the conception of the subconscious, a dark irrational power which steers us from birth, that we share the Greek conception of fate.

THE FUGITIVE

THE THEME of Mr. Galsworthy's new play is a runaway wife's battle with a hypocrite world. Imagine her penniless, attractive, fastidious, incompetent, what would be the solution which one would await with apprehensive despondency at the hands of a commonplace dramatist? Surely an attempt to sell herself, followed by suicide. I hoped Mr. Galsworthy would see more in his theme than this. Alas! he did not.

He nearly always develops his situations well, and this play is no exception. To the end of Act III, when Clare Dedmond discovers that she is ruining her lover by continuing to live with him, and leaves him, the agony is well piled up. But the characters and their relations to each other are not interesting. The art of presenting character and intimate relations is to suggest that there is much more in people, and between them, than can come into the main drift of any one story or under the head of one theme: in this art Mr. Galsworthy is deficient. With a few exceptions ("The Pigeon", Ferrand the vagabond, the youth in *The Silver Box* are among them) his characters lack personality. It is difficult to define that quality, but we all recognize it, and it is the one which makes individuals, in spite of their inevitable resemblance to other people, unique. But Mr. Galsworthy, as a rule, draws character as though he were more interested in "cases" than individuals. I imagine him often withholding his hand from adding a touch which would make a portrait less of a composite photograph, from a mistaken conscien-

tiousness, which persuades him that loyalty to his theme requires him to work it out by means of quite commonplace characters. But in life no one is commonplace; commonplaceness is a category of the generalizing not the artistic mind, and consequently in fiction such figures have no intense reality. They do not engage our deepest attention in spite of exhibiting recognizable characteristics.

In this play Mr. Galsworthy strikes me as being primarily interested in Clare Dedmond because he conceives her case to be typical of many unsupported, helpless gentlewomen and rebellious wives. He is sorry for Clare, but he is still more moved, I think, at the thought of the class to which she belongs and their predicament. That idea has been his inspiration and not Clare herself—such, at least, is the impression the drawing of her character, and of those with whom her destiny is involved, left on me. The temptation which besets Mr. Galsworthy most persistently as an artist is to think more of the representative value of his characters than of the characters themselves. That a play should have a "moral", that the events which happen should have a general bearing on other cases we have observed, that the author's mind should be full of the joy or woe of the world, are influences all to the good; but only on condition that when he begins writing his interest in the individuals concerned exceeds everything else. The grumbling over the didactic play is merely a confused way on the part of the public of demanding that the dramatist should be more interested in his characters and his story than in what they may suggest in the way of criticism of morality or institutions. That is sound advice as to method. But people sometimes talk as though no work of art should suggest a general idea or definite criticism, which is as nonsensical as to suppose that the facts of life should

not suggest them. The more plays written by people who are interested in the way the world works the better, provided the authors are more absorbed in the particular case, when it comes to the writing, than in its representative value.

Mr. Galsworthy, when he wrote *The Pigeon*, let his pen run. He fell in love with his "pigeon" and his vagabond. He used them as sticks to beat Fabians, magistrates, and parsons, and I thought the thwacks administered most effective; but even if these characters had failed as rods with which to beat the others, there they were—vivid temperaments and fellow-creatures, as individual as your friends, in whom you could be as naturally interested. But Clare is merely an arrangement of human characteristics selected with a view to making her predicament difficult. She is not even, therefore, an average specimen of a class. Her husband is uninteresting except as an instrument to torture her; her lover nothing much beyond a stimulus to revolt. Take Clare out of her predicament, and she is dull. I am unable to criticize the play except as an exemplary story, and as such it does not strike me as illuminating. Prostitutes are seldom recruited from the class of distressed gentlewomen, and suicide as an alternative is not, I imagine, more common among runaway wives than among other kinds of people. The play, therefore, judged as a sociological exposition, is not typical enough; and judged as a particular case of a woman "fine but not fine enough". It breaks down in failing to be an interesting character-study.

Clare's husband is unsympathetic to her; when she looks out of the window at the Westminster sunset, he reads the time on the face of Big Ben. He is a pushed-up, insensitive, middle-class, well-to-do fellow. He is not happy himself in his marriage, but he insists upon their domestic wranglings

being concealed as far as possible and upon his "conjugal rights". In the stress that Mr. Galsworthy lays upon this last point moral indignation against the marriage law is more visible than psychological insight. If the relations between these two were exhibited in such a manner that Clare could accuse her husband of the double crime of provoking and perverting her, she would lose none of our sympathy in her struggle to preserve body and soul, and we could more readily believe both to have been in danger as long as she remained with her husband. But in the one scene of antagonism between them which we are shown, Clare is seen to be armed with both aversion and contempt; and it is hard to believe he is endowed with that ugly but comparatively rare fury of domination which can alone overcome the freezing effect of such protections. The scene, indeed, is the sort after which both husband and wife usually wish that they did not live in the same house, only in this case he wants to keep up appearances.

After Clare has run away Mr. Galsworthy imagines four courses open to her: (1) to earn a meagre, irksome living (between Acts II and III she tries and fails); (2) to live with the man she likes best, Act III (this, however, is only marriage over again with, as it turns out, a set of different difficulties); (3) prostitution; (4) suicide. In Act IV she attempts to sell herself, finds she cannot, and takes an overdose of sleeping draught during the temporary absence of the acquaintance of the evening, who leaves her sipping champagne while he goes in search of the waiter. This curtain really only hid the next crucial scene in Clare's battle with the world. For who could believe she died? She was discovered lolling in her chair a minute or two after she had swallowed the potion. The proprietor would have been frantic with agitation; for had she died on the premises of the night club, it meant

ruin. One can imagine the bustle of the scene we did not see. "Nothing, madam. . . . Please keep your seats, gentlemen. . . . Lady ill—fainted." Clare was carried off to the cloak-room and the doctor was excitedly telephoned for, but before he arrived feathers, mustard and warm water had done most of the work. They were still slapping her face with damp cloths and she was too comatose to answer questions. Within the hour she was hustled into a taxi with the doctor and probably "the young man", who, now that the shadow of death had lifted, was enjoying himself more than if the evening had run on the usual lines. He had been touched (we remember) by what she had revealed about herself over the champagne, and had offered her money. After the doctor and landlady had put her to bed, he left a couple of sovereigns, said he would call to-morrow to enquire, and then walked home under the stars, feeling a pleasant blend of Sir Galahad and sportsman, full of chivalrous sympathy and vague exciting expectations.

Among the men who haunt such places as Clare visited that night only a few do not long for relations not merely venal with some woman. Mr. Galsworthy imagines the hunt after a woman in Clare's position to be more wolfish than it is. To "the young man" such a meeting would have been a bit of happy fortune. The miserable element in such relations is that, human though they may well be, the man with his money, however he may disguise the fact by good manners and good-nature, remains the representative of an insufferable impersonal tyranny; while the woman lies under the perpetual suspicion of selling what should never be sold. Two people standing in such a relation to each other may behave well as long as it is easy; but when it ceases to be easy they cannot be expected to preserve, on such terms, a fine consideration for each other or a sensi-

tive sense of honour towards themselves. If, therefore, we *can* suppose Clare to have continued to refuse £300 a year (offered by her husband on condition she left her lover, which she did an hour afterwards of her own accord), her history in all likelihood becomes that of a woman who has temporary relations with a series of men of a more or less monogamic kind. The effect of such a life on her character would be an interesting story. We can imagine her deteriorating in some respects and improving (it is possible) in others, sacrificing her self-respect in some directions to hold it more firmly on the whole; or going utterly to pieces; or being lucky and emerging again into circumstances in which she can exact respect from others. Any one of these developments is more interesting than her death, and if worked out would tell us more about what it means to a penniless, disgraced woman to be up against the world. Or if Mr. Galsworthy had traced the story of Clare as a burden to friends and relations, or as a cook, barmaid, servant, needlewoman—anything, we should have learnt much; but he chose, unfortunately, to make her commit suicide. Nine times out of ten suicide tells us nothing. Its advantage from a dramatist's or novelist's point of view is that it winds things up and is a sort of guarantee that a character really has been suffering all the time. Mr. Galsworthy is not a writer who need stoop to such expedients.

THE MOB

UNTIL evidence is forthcoming, I am determined to think that *The Mob* (now being acted —and well acted—by Miss Horniman's company at the Coronet Theatre) is a very early play which has lain in Mr. Galsworthy's drawer fifteen years. Its theme was a burning one when the Boer War was on. I like to think of him as a young man sitting down to write this play, championing the loyalty of those who dared cry "stop the war"; and I regret that an MS., then so opportune, should have vainly gone the round of the managers during the Khaki campaign. And since this had to be, I like to suppose that it is now only a sense of the importance of the principles the play upholds which has induced Mr. Galsworthy to allow an early work, otherwise unworthy of him to be performed. For, however belated, the play does deal with a theme which has permanent significance. It is the conflict between two kinds of patriotism, or more generally between "the mob" and the lonely propagandist—the theme of *The Enemy of the People* ("the majority is always wrong"); though in Ibsen's play the patriotism in question was local, not national. *The Mob* is therefore not out of date. Let anyone who is inclined to talk about slaying the slain and buried, reflect what an arch-body-snatcher and resurrectionist Father Time is. But it is particularly unfortunate in this case that the play should not have nicked its moment; for what might then have passed as a bold contribution to a bitter controversy must now be judged as a work of art, and it cannot stand that test.

Stephen Moor (Mr. Milton Rosmer was, I felt, exactly what Mr. Galsworthy meant his hero to be) is a young Minister of State at a time when England declares war upon a weak, semi-civilized nation. He sacrifices his career, his friends, the affection of his family, and ultimately his life, in protesting against a policy which he feels to be barbarous, greedy, and unjust. It is particularly difficult for him to take such a line publicly, because his wife comes of a military family; her father is in the War Office, her brothers are soldiers. Stephen Moor is, in fact, surrounded with the sort of people who understand his conduct least; to whom any man who weighs the rights and wrongs of his country's cause when Englishmen are actually suffering and dying for it at the front, let alone one who openly sympathizes with the enemy's side of the quarrel, appears inevitably as a most unpleasant, incomprehensible compound of traitor and prig. Honestly, they can only account for such an attitude in a public man by supposing him possessed by an itch to make himself out better than his neighbours or a fellow who wants advertisement at any cost.

Now, there are two kinds of patriots; one who feels that "my country right or wrong" is the only motto for a man with generous, warm, human feelings, and another who could not love his country so much loved he not her honour more. Stephen is such a patriot. He knows he cannot stop the war, but he is determined that "history shall not say when England did this thing not a voice was raised in protest". He feels, too, though his efforts will be vain, that they are the birth-throes of a finer kind of national consciousness. Why, he asks, should not a country behave to another with the chivalry and fairness everybody admits the strong should show to the weak? And if love of one's country is so high a virtue, why crush it in a little nation? He

judges his country's conduct by the standards we apply to individuals.

It must be confessed that so tested all nations come out badly. I am sure if you or I met Britannia and Germania in the flesh, we should dislike them very much. What a couple of vulgar, greedy, touchy old women they would be! Can't you imagine them talking incessantly about their pedigrees, swaggering about their acres and incomes, and flying, if they thought they had been done out of half-a-crown, into a vindictive fluster and swearing they would be in the workhouse next? Vilely inconsiderate both of them to people in their power; bridling like turkey-cocks, with panic in one eye and menace in the other when they came up against anyone formidable? The behaviour of nations is certainly inferior to that of the better sort of people in them. They are generally to be admired only for their strength. This is precisely the quality which excites the patriotism of "the mob".

Mr. Galsworthy has set out to draw an heroic figure in conflict with this kind of patriotism. A hero is always difficult to draw; it is so easy, and so fatal, to be sentimental about him. Among my readers there must be many who indulge in day-dreams, and some of them will know the kind of day-dream which is woven round the idea of how lovely it would be to be martyred. To stand up in the eye of the world, protesting to the last, vehement, firm, too lofty to retaliate, a victim of blind stupidity that knows too late what it has done—such a dream is a pleasant variant to visions of prodigious personal triumphs. Bad fiction, bad plays—one recognizes the source of their inspiration: they are such stuff as day-dreams are made of.

Mr. Galsworthy's Stephen Moor is a rather more objective study, but there hangs about the play a flavour of the day-dream. The dramatist has placed

him in circumstances which should make his ordeal particularly cruel; he had to sacrifice the affection and respect of those he cares for most. Well and good. But Mr. Galsworthy has not made the painfulness of these scenes rasping enough. The quarrel over the dinner table on which the curtain rises is not excruciating; the scenes afterwards between Stephen and his wife when she tries to restrain him from starting on his anti-war campaign are flat; Stephen is gentle, dignified, and depressed; she is reproachful and depressed—consequently, *we* are depressed. These characters are not endowed with that urgent temperamental directness which brings truth out dramatically. Each antagonist only represents languidly a point of view.

All through Stephen remains, in a weak sense, a dignified, pathetic figure. His election committee throws him over (Act II); he is pelted with orange peel and stones (Act III): his servants give notice, his wife leaves him (Act IV, Scene I). And when a British victory occurs a mafficking mob enters his house for a spree (Act IV), carries him round on its shoulders singing "What's the matter with Stephie", and then, when he abuses it, kills him. (This assault was not well stage-managed.) The frightened revellers melt away; but one remains to lay a paper Union Jack upon the breast of the dead, genuine patriot. Then the curtain rises for the last time to enable us to read a laudatory inscription upon a bronze statue of the young statesman. The fickleness of public opinion is proved.

Here you will say are sufferings enough to enable us to estimate the mettle of a hero. No. In effect they are merely circumstances flattering to a vanity which imagines itself in his place. Stephen's sufferings are like the halo which in an old-fashioned print of a drowned Christian martyr hovers above the dark waters where she floats,

"young and so fair". Everything that happens to him is most becoming. His wife leaves him with the words "You are too noble for me" on her lips, while he exhibits a sympathetic modesty. "Do you suppose I compare myself with the meanest private out there?" he says (a false note in a man who is sustained by the conviction that he is fighting to bring a finer patriotism into the world). He is struck by a stone, which stamps his forehead with the red seal of courage—not by rotten eggs. The fault of the play is that Moor's sufferings are distinctly decorative; and Mr. Galsworthy has not spared the accessories which add external touches of pathos: Stephen's little daughter (always in her "nighty") runs babbling in and out (and very prettily Miss Phyllis Bourke did it); strains of street music are timely; a wine-glass snaps in Stephen's steady hand (Act I). But the *inward* stress of his struggle and the pathos of that was not "done" at all.

Heroes are often pathetic. A fine man losing his fineness in a raucous nerve-wracking wrangle, sacrificing not only his peace but his virtues and dignity to a cause—that is the spectacle which can make us thrill and weep. Orange peel and an occasional stone are trifles. It is in deeper humiliations, in finding himself unable to meet at all points the other side, and compelled to bluff and juggle however right in the main; in discovering that he appeals to those he does not respect as much as he does his enemies —it is in such experiences the bitterness of standing alone lies. If in Act II, instead of being discarded by his local caucus, an incident which might have been taken for granted, we had seen cranks and ninnies flocking round Stephen Moor, as his father-in-law prophesied they would; if in Act III he had returned home fagged out for one night's rest and had had to parry the interminable nagging of a bitter, faithful woman, we should have

got a better notion of what he was going through.

It is a common device of dramatists to suggest the climax of a hero's sacrifice by making his wife leave him. But our sense of the tragedy depends upon the idea they have previously succeeded in giving us of the wife in question; and they often forget this. Katherine Moor could not live with her husband after her brother had been killed in the war. But we only saw husband and wife when they were out of sympathy. What she was to him at other times had to be taken for granted; as far as we could see she was not a woman from whom it would be very painful to part.

In Act III Mr. Galsworthy succumbed to the bedroom scene. Only in this case it was staged with great austerity—the bedroom had no bed in it. The point of the stage bedroom is, in comedy, the curious pleasure of gazing upon a bed; in scenes of high emotion, that the heroine may without incongruity let down her back hair like the old tragedy queens. There were Mrs. Moor and her sister-in-law, their hair ringing out like wild bells to the night; the latter seeing a vision of her husband dying beside a gun on the field of battle, and the former offering connubial caresses, as bribes, to a husband presumably hoarse and battered from the hustings. In Stephen Moor's ruthful departure from the room, leaving his wife fallen forward in shame upon the absent bed, there was that which reminded me of King Arthur's withdrawal from Guinevere. The best scene in the play was that in which Stephen's father-in-law tells him that England has won a victory, and then, that Katherine's brother has been killed. Mr. Lomas acted the old general well.

*EXILES**

EXILES is a remarkable play. I am more sure of this than of having understood it. I could never undertake to produce it unless the author were at my elbow; and when a critic feels like that about a play which has excited him it means he has not quite understood it. What I can do is to give an account of the play and show where I was puzzled. But first I must come to terms with a misgiving. It is a treat to be puzzled by a play, so perhaps I overrate this one because it has puzzled me? I do not think that is the case, but that possibility is the grain of salt with which what follows must be taken.

To be made to wonder and to think about characters in a play is a rare experience—outside the drama of Ibsen. It is a pleasure far excelling the simple pleasure of delighted recognition which is all that the character-drawing in the ordinary respectworthy play provides. On the stage temptations to superficiality and exaggeration are so many, and the drama is a form which requires so much condensation of subject-matter and imposes so many limitations that, within those limits, all except duffers and men of genius are, alas! more or less on a level. Once a certain knack is learnt the happy proficient in play-writing finds he can produce a play with an expenditure of a fifth of the intellectual energy and emotion necessary to produce a novel of the same calibre. If he has more to give, it does not show; if not, it does not matter, for what he may still be able to produce may be on a par with the work of a

* *Exiles.* By James Joyce. Grant Richards. 5s.

better intellect. Hence there is so much truth in sayings like: "In the art of play-writing construction is everything"; "The idea of a good play should be capable of being written on half a sheet of note-paper", &c. They are certainly true of the common run of respect-worthy plays, but they are only true of them.

Exiles excited me for the same reason that the plays of Ibsen excite me—the people in it were so interesting. Ibsen's characters have roots which tempt one to pull at them again and again. And they are so deeply embedded in the stuff of experience that tugging at them brings up incidentally every sort of moral, social and psychological question, upon which those who would understand themselves and others can go on meditating, while feeling that they have still more to learn. The relations of Ibsen's characters to each other are presented with a sureness and brevity which gives the impression of masterly definition, and yet the complexity and obscurity of intimate relations between living people at intense moments are there too. If one lays a finger on a spinning rainbow top one discovers that the effect has been produced by a few discs of different coloured paper (red, green, yellow, and blue) superimposed upon each other; but while it was spinning that changing iridescence had too many hues to be identified. The rainbow top will pass as an emblem of the manner in which the plays of Ibsen satisfy at once the two prime contemplative pleasures—the exercise of the analytical faculty and delight in watching the movement of life.

I do not take Ibsen's name in vain in connection with the work of Mr. Joyce. It is not (I beg you to believe) that habit so common in critics of chattering about anything but the subject in hand which persuades me to approach *Exiles* through the art of Ibsen. It is extraordinary, but the greatest of

modern dramatists has as yet only had a destructive effect on the drama of this country. The plays of Ibsen have destroyed a certain amount of nonsense. Of late years his influence has been countered by the suggestion that he is a writer of problem plays, and "problems", it is explained, have nothing to do with art. Ibsen is supposed to be out of date! Of all the verdicts which are now passed on the writers of the last century, this is the one which maddens me most. That great contemplative mind! . . . But the point I wish to make is that constructively Ibsen has had little influence. Few dramatists have learnt from his example. I hail Mr. Joyce as one of the few who have grasped the value of two principles in dramatic art of which Ibsen is the master exponent.

The first is that on the stage, as in the novel, character (the individual) is the most interesting thing, the ultimate thing; for nothing *happens* at all unless it happens to a particular person, and action is dependent on character. The dramatist therefore must choose characters who illustrate his theme better and better the more he goes into them. Then, the deeper he digs the clearer will sound in our ears the running water of his theme. He cannot dig too deep, if he has chosen them well. But by what sign is he to recognize those characters? I do not know. His theme, intellectually stated, is certainly not the right clue. He usually finds them in himself—at least, a shaft which goes down any depth is nearly always, I think, opened from within, though afterwards sympathy and observation may continue the excavation and even control its direction; but that ground is not broken to any depth except by an author who has an inner life of his own to explore, is certain. Now what happens with most dramatists who are blessed with an idea is that they allow their theme to control their interest in character. In other words, either they have chosen characters which

only illustrate superficially what they wish to show, or they only attempt to understand them in so far as they illustrate it. If they get really interested in human beings their theme becomes instead of clearer more obscure. I know no better test of a dramatist's imagination than observing if this happens.

One of the qualities which delighted me in *Exiles* was that evidently nothing would induce Mr. Joyce to make his characters less complex and interesting than he saw them to be. He would rather obscure his theme than do that, and though a fault, it is a fault on the right side—on the interesting side. The second respect in which he has learnt from the master is his practice of intensifying our interest in the present by dialogue which implies a past. What a little scrap of people's lives a dramatist can show us—just an hour or two! In life it is usually what has gone before that makes talk between two people significant. If we did not add the days and months and years together our relations would be as empty as those of children, without being as delightful. The deduction is obvious: make people talk on the stage as though much had already passed between them. Dramatists are too afraid of mystifying their audience to use that obvious method of enriching their subject; for that there are not many people as quick and clever as themselves is a common delusion among them. Sometimes it may be no delusion; still, I am sure it is not necessary to temper their intelligence to the extent they commonly do. Besides, it is a writer's first point of honour not to write for people stupider than himself: let birds of a feather write for each other.

The merits of this play make it hard to tell its story. Summarized, that story would not distinguish it from many a play in which the love relations of two men and a woman wove the plot. Its

distinction lies in the relations of the three points in that familiar triangle being complex and intense. Art is usually so superficial, life so profound. I admire Mr. Joyce for having tried to deepen our conventional simplification of such relations and bring them nearer to nature. Now and then I lost my way in his characters as in a wood, but that did not make me think they were not true; rather the contrary. When I put my finger on his spinning rainbow top, I do not see the coloured rings which produced that iridescence so definitely as in the case of Ibsen. The theme of *Exiles* is not so clear to me. I conjecture that I get nearest to it in saying that the play is a study in the emotional life of an artist. (I am sure, at any rate, that I am giving the reader a useful tip in bidding him keep one eye *always* upon Richard Rowan, whatever else may be interesting him besides.) And when I say that the play is a study in an artist's life, I mean that its theme is the complication which that endowment adds to emotional crises which are common to all men. It makes sincerity more difficult and at the same time more vitally important. Imagination opens the door to a hundred new subtleties and possibilities of action; it brings a man so near the feelings of others that he has never the excuse of blindness, and keeps him at a distance, so that at moments he can hardly believe he cares for anything but his own mind.

When he acts spontaneously, he knows he is acting spontaneously—if not at the moment, the moment after—much as some people, thought modest, have hardly a right to be considered so, because they invariably know when they are. *Exiles* is a play in which two men are struggling to preserve each his own essential integrity in a confusing situation where rules of thumb seem clumsy guides; and between them is a bewildered, passionate

woman—generous, angry, tender, and lonely. To understand Bertha one need only remember that she has lived nine years with Richard Rowan in that intimacy of mind and feeling which admits of no disguises, merciful or treacherous; that she has known all the satisfactions and disappointments of such an intimacy. Her nature cries out for things to be simple as they once were for her; but she, too, has eaten of the tree of knowledge and knows that they are not.

If you ask how Richard Rowan and Robert Hand stood towards each other, the answer is they were friends. There was a touch of the disciple in Robert. Richard was the intenser, more creative, and also the more difficult nature. He was an exile in this world; Robert was at home in it. But the essence of their relation was that they were friends, and friends who from youth had made life's voyage of discovery together. One was a journalist, the other an artist; but in experience they were equals. Both had lived intensely enough, and had been intimate enough to reach together that pitch of mutual understanding at which consciousness that each is still at bottom solitary is, in a strange way, the tenderest bond between them. Am I over-subtle? I think what I mean is recognizable. After all, it is in friendships of the second order (Heaven forfend that they should be held cheap!) that men are least troubled about the value of what they give. It is between these two friends that competition for the same woman rises, bringing with it jealousy, suspicion, and making candour—the air in which alone such a friendship as theirs can live—almost impossible. Well, very hard. Both make a mighty effort to preserve it; Richard succeeds best; how far Robert Hand failed is not quite clear to me. At first Richard thought his friend a common vulgar thief; against such a one he would protect Bertha

tooth and nail. But he has misgivings which in different ways torture him more than natural jealousy. Perhaps Robert can give her something he cannot (O, he knows how unsatisfying and yet how much that has been!); something no human being has a right to prevent another having. This is the first thing he must find out.

The scene in Act II between the two men is wonderful in its gradually deepening sincerity. Hand is a coward at first, but he gets over that. Then Richard is tormented by misgivings about himself. Is not there something in him (for ties, however precious, are also chains) which is attracted by the idea that Bertha might now owe most to another—now, at any rate, that their own first love is over? How far is he sincere in leaving her her liberty? Is it his own that he is really thinking of? Bertha taunts him with that. And Bertha's relation to Robert—what is that? I think it is the attraction of peace. To be adored, to be loved in a simpler, more romantic, coarser way, what a rest! Besides, Robert is the sort of man a woman can easily make happy; Richard certainly is not. Yet, just as she decided between them years ago, in the end it is her strange, elusive lover who comes so close and is so far away whom she chooses. But was she Robert's mistress? The dramatist leaves that ambiguous. He does not mean us to bother much one way or another about that. Richard says at the end he will never know what they were to each other; but I do not think he is thinking of Divorce Court facts. He means how completely Bertha still belongs to him. Bertha tells Robert to tell Richard everything; but does he? She also tells him to think of what has passed between them as something like "a dream". That, I think, is the line on which one must fix one's attention to get the focus. Robert is happy; quite content with that. Perhaps because less hot for certainties in life than

Richard, he thinks he has enjoyed a solid reality. I do not know.

I have left out much it would be a pleasure to mark. Richard's relation to Beatrice Justice (the other woman in the play)—I could write an article on that; but what I have written will be perhaps enough to persuade you that this is a remarkable play.

THE MADRAS HOUSE

WHEN I called once on Mr. George Moore, after not having seen him for over a year, in the course of conversation he broke out enthusiastically, "I have never forgotten a thing you once said to me". Radiant with appreciation, he proceeded to repeat what I remembered distinctly he had once said to *me*. This incident made an impression. So, when I read the other day a paragraph about myself in which I was praised as a talker, I felt that if the writer had only said, "He is one of the best listeners of the day", though, in the context, such a compliment might have appeared ironical, I could have said, "I understand what you mean and I thank you", and concluded that the writer was a careful reader of my dramatic criticisms. It is an elementary quality for a critic to plume himself upon, but, when I go to the theatre, I do *listen*.

It is a quality which is particularly necessary in the case of *The Madras House*. To appreciate *The Madras House* you must be "a listener"; you must listen not only to the ideas which are discussed from time to time, not only to the commonplaces and snappishnesses of the dialogue, but to the constant inaudible implications of temperament and habit. Then, I promise you rare pleasures.

You need not think during the performance. It is a mistake to think during a play. People suppose that the so-called "high-brow" plays require you to think, and very reasonably they say, "We don't go to the theatre to think". No, don't think *in* the theatre, but listen; let the play soak in—think after-

wards. There are plays which only require you to look; there are others which only require you to feel, and there are also plays which ask you to listen. Tchehov's plays make this demand and, therefore, one might expect that recent appreciation of Tchehov would have prepared the way for the appreciation of Mr. Granville Barker's plays, and that people had acquired the habit of listening in the theatre. Yet I doubt this result of recent enthusiasm for Tchehov. Tchehov is a very emotional dramatist; Mr. Granville Barker's drama is emotionally distinctly dry. It is a most interesting dryness, but his greatest defect as a playwright is an excess of emotional asceticism. This was particularly noticeable in the love passages in *The Voysey Inheritance*, where the girl, against the author's intention, turns into a prig.

Here, too, when the situation between his characters reaches the most serious pitch, instead of speaking impulsively out of themselves, they tend to transfer their predicament to the plane of generalities, discussing it as one not peculiar to themselves but to many. (*Vide* the dialogue between husband and wife with which *The Madras House* closes.) In short the drama of Granville Barker is that of a man to whom the significance of life has been most excitingly revealed, not at moments when, so to speak, he has banged up against other human beings, but when intimacy has taken the form of sounding the depths of experience together, and the condition of mutual proximity has been on both sides a high personal detachment. I can imagine Mr. Granville Barker when taxed with introducing too much "talk" into his plays, in proportion to "drama", opening his eyes with some surprise and asking in return if the critic cannot remember "talks" which in their effect upon his life, in bringing this or that tendency to a climax in him-

self, had not been as dramatic as any "event".

The youngest of the principal masculine characters in *The Madras House*, Philip Madras, is a man of this temperament in an accentuated form, and as might be guessed the Man-Woman Problem is one which naturally presents itself to such a one in a peculiarly intimate manner. Difference of sex at once makes for intimacy and disturbs the detachment, that impersonal detachment in intimacy, which for Philip Madras is the intensest form of living. The Man-Woman Problem has been the subject of countless plays in which the psychology of relations between the sexes has been the theme, but I think it may be claimed for *The Madras House* that this peculiar aspect of it (an important one) which Philip Madras is the means of throwing into relief, has never before been so curiously and delicately treated on the stage. The rest of the play is about other aspects of the same theme, seen from the point of view of men and women of different temperaments and differently circumstanced, all of which have been treated in drama and fiction many times.

Mr. Granville Barker's method is to unite superficially (chiefly connected through business or family relations) a number of men and women, and make them talk. What they talk about are the incidents of a couple of days not more closely interconnected than incidents usually are; the return of a father from the East who thirty years ago deserted his family and turned Mohammedan, adopting the Eastern solution of sex questions; the fact that a girl in a huge dressmakers' establishment is going to have a baby (an employer's problem), and that the huge business is bought by an American man of business.

If you listen carefully to the dialogue of *The Madras House* you will get the essence of several

dramas. It is equivalent to reading, say, *Au Bonheur des Dames*, a play about spinsters withering on the stalk, a play about the defiant young "woman who did", and a play, say, by M. Porto Riche, about the hash made of a man's work by woman's attractiveness. And here we touch the explanation of the form. Only in the conversation drama can so many aspects of a theme (here the Man-Woman relation) be treated. It is the quickest form; when Mr. Shaw wanted to present at once all the sides of the marriage problem he, in *Getting Married*, was forced to adopt it. To bring out a huge theme in action takes much longer.

There was no alternative open to Mr. Granville Barker besides writing a conversation play and writing six action plays on sex. Do you ask why he did not write then the six plays? Well there is an advantage in presenting the essence of each aspect interlocked and together. We can get a bird's eye view of a gigantic theme much too big for treatment in a single action drama. He has constructed his conversation drama with a skill which it is a delight to remember afterwards. I can understand a spectator thinking that the dramatist was spending too much time on the construction of a realistic atmosphere, but on reflection these little touches, like the perpetual polite introductions of the many daughters of Mr. Huxtable (Admirable, perfect Mr. Aubrey Mather!) to Major Thomas, are superfluous. Not at all. They suggest the dire extent to which human relationships in that household have been fossilized into prim formalities, just as the *mannequin* show illustrates the "moral" and commercial exploitation of sex interest.

Mr. Shaw in his conversation dramas does not care a hang about surface plausibility; in Mr. Granville Barker's drama the naturalness of every word spoken and every detail is as important to his effects

as it is to Tchehov's. Under his own direction this perfect naturalness of delivery and gesture was achieved by every actor and actress on the stage. I want particularly to mention the acting of Miss Irene Rooke in the dismal, whining part of Amelia Madras, because it is such an ungrateful one. Everybody cheers when the vivacious Mr. Windlesham or the preposterous, commercial, sentimental American leaves the stage, and excellently Mr. Ernest Milton and Mr. Claud Rains played them; but the chill damp discomfort which Mrs. Madras so properly spreads round her on the stage does not promote vociferous applause. Yet how important it was that she should be duly dank! Everybody sees at once how good Miss Agnes Thomas was as the strict and desiccated spinster, but the perfection of the sketch of the middle-class *grande dame*, for once not ridiculed (Bravo! Mr. Granville Barker and Miss Frances Ivor) might possibly escape notice.

The character-drawing and its interpretation is throughout a joy to an amateur of human nature. It is full of subtle touches that delight me, such as the hint which the old Pasha papa Madras incautiously gives to his daughter-in-law that he is the father of the shop-girl's baby; so, too, Philip's comment on hearing of it: "If he hadn't been, he'd love us to believe it! Vanity! His real spur, I do verily believe, to that fine and flamboyantly amorous career"—which also throws light on Philip, who could never, however hard he tried, completely understand his father's attitude towards women; so, too, Philip's comment on his friend Hippisly Thomas's reserve about his wife: Thomas is no Mohammedan in practice, is Thomas, but he can understand the old Pasha very well. "No nice husband discusses his wife", says Philip of him; "Upon sound Mohammedan principles, he guards her in the harem of his

heart". It is the spiritual purdah that Philip wants to tear down.

Thus the play is a scheme of ingeniously contrived talk through which illuminating rays from different temperamental quarters are thrown on the theme. Old Madras is a man to whom sex is the spice of life, but he does not like the whole of life to be flavoured with it; the sentimental American, Mr. Eustace Perrin State, wants every dish saturated with it—but in a diluted, romantic form; old Huxtable has thought all his life that the proper thing to do was to ignore it—and a nice mess the Huxtable family have made of that. The point of view of the desiccated Miss Chancellor is given, and—wonder of wonders—she is properly allowed to keep her dignity, in the hands of a lesser draughtsman she would have been just a poor old cockshy; the young mother who has thrown her cap over the windmill gives hers; the cramped and harried Brigstocks exhibit the predicament into which industrial civilization has forced them; and Philip Madras—I have indicated his position.

The weakness of the play lies in the last conversation between Philip and his wife, where also not a few of the finest touches are found. The impression this leaves behind is too indistinct. The bit about Philip's experiences as a lecturer is not wanted; it is one of the few passages in the play which is really otiose. We don't want to know more than that Philip is a man who wants to help to put the world straight, and that has been indicated. Mr. Granville Barker has, I believe, rewritten this scene, but he has not yet got it right. In the finest human relation possible, man and woman must be alike—that is *his* philosophy. Perhaps. The play at any rate suggests, through Jessica Madras, that it is pretty nearly impossible. The curtain would emphasize this point if it fell on her words "But you

can't be wise for us"—better, I think, would be the words "Don't, whatever you do, be *too* wise".

You must listen to this play to get anything out of it; if you are going to wonder what became of Marion Yates and her baby, instead of keeping your attention on the theme, you had better not go.

THE SILVER CORD

THE SILVER CORD is worth seeing and an American play. A large proportion of the plays worth seeing in London now are American. It is solid in construction and modern in subject. Sir Arthur Pinero would pass *The Silver Cord* as a well-made play; a psycho-analyst would say, "At last dramatists are beginning to handle human nature intelligently." The subject is mother-love carried to the pitch of morbid possessiveness; a maternal devotion into which enters an element of unconscious physical jealousy. We watch a mother inducing her younger son to break off his engagement, and almost succeeding in separating her elder son, not so completely dominated by her, from his newly married wife. His wife (well played by Miss Clare Eames) is a biologist by profession. She is the contrasted type. She stands for reason, health and independence; the mother for instinctive tenderness which devours the beloved. The drama lies in the struggle between them and the point of view each represents.

Mrs Phelps, still lovely, was married early to a man too old for her. His health was poor; his love was tepid; he died soon after she had given birth to her two sons, leaving her a rich widow. Even during her marriage her love-life had been centred on her boys; and when her husband died she felt it treason to them to marry again. She dedicated herself to the task of being a perfect mother to her boys. The moral of the piece is put into a line spoken by the girl who, when the play opens,

is engaged to the younger son: "One should bring up one's children, love them—and leave them alone."

Every scene, every passage of the dialogue, subtends towards proving that this concentrated devotion has been very bad for the boys and very bad for their mother's character. It turns them into muffs incapable of falling wholeheartedly in love; it creates in her an emotional duplicity which makes of her an unconscious liar.

Technically the effect of this permeation of a psychological generalization into every cranny of the action and every kink in the dialogue is to produce an old-fashioned well-made play, with all its accompanying advantages and disadvantages. Perhaps I had better (with apologies) mention them. The advantages are a clear issue, and that during the play the audience grasps instantly the dramatic point of whatever happens next; the disadvantages are that during the development the free spirit of life is apt to evaporate. Characters in such a play become too like chessmen, some always moving horizontally and others diagonally; while the movements of even those which resemble those of the knights, in being more puzzling to follow, are confined, the spectator soon observes, to the same recurrent leaps of crooked agility. Moreover, the sensitive spectator in the case of such plays is apt to feel, when the curtain falls, that what he has been watching was the result of a preconceived arrangement of pieces. He feels it was not a real match between the artist and life, in which, as in chess, the value of the human pieces continually varies, a pawn being sometimes worth more than a castle; but the solution of a mere problem—white to play and mate in three moves.

I respect *The Silver Cord*; I enjoyed it. But it has left me with little to enjoy in retrospect (the general proposition being already familiar to me)

—unless I count the acting of Miss Lilian Braithwaite, whose gentle manners and air of being an unimpeachably "good woman" blended most admirably with a thorough understanding of the unconscious duplicity of her part.

The fact is I have a distrust of all deductive art, of all stories or plays or critical appreciations in which some general proposition has controlled the treatment of a particular case. I dread for this reason the influence on literature of the new psychology. *The Life and Death of Harriet Fream*, by Miss Sinclair, was a very clever, well-written little book; there was not a detail or stage in the story which was not credible and significant; Flaubert's *Un Coeur Simple* is ramshackle compared to it. But *Harriet Fream* was not the product of an artist's intuitive reading of life, but a deduction from the theory of repressed instincts. It was thorough, but it lacked the accidental and elastic qualities of life.

Again, many people admired Herr Ludwig's life of William II. To me it appeared superficial, cruel and suspect. It deduced his whole character and career to "an inferiority complex", resulting from being born with a withered arm. The ex-Emperor's vanity, fundamental diffidence and desire to pose as a man of majestic might followed as consequences. Yet the still small voice to which I always endeavour to listen whispered, "Fiddlesticks." If you ask me what Herr Ludwig left out in his portrait of the Kaiser, I can tell you: all the Kaiser has in common with you and me, who were not born with withered arms—and that is a great deal.

One of the few historic characters of whom I have some intimate knowledge, Byron, could be "deduced" as plausibly from a club-foot. His club-foot was, certainly, an important accident in his career which must be kept in mind, but if a biographer used it to "explain" Byron, or if his biographer ran "the

snobbery complex" (connected, of course, with a sense of inferiority), the results would be merely contemptibly clever.

Cleverness, as every artist, philosopher and statesman knows, is an almost worthless quality, and one as common as the blackberry; as common as good judgment and a sound sense of probability are rare. It is easily cultivated by anyone willing to extirpate in himself or herself rational diffidence and a lurking respect for truth. How superficial a quality cleverness is, becomes obvious to us when we remember that when we know a person extremely well we cease to be able to judge how "clever" he or she is; to decide the point we have to fall back on a guess as to what the world (those who don't know them) would say about them.

Miss Betsy Trotwood's high opinion of Mr. Dick's intellect is only an extreme case in point. Now the drawback of the new psychology is that it offers cheap ways of seeming profound—and that brings me back to the play. I do not wish, in saying that, to imply, however, that *The Silver Cord* is cheap. I said the play is worth seeing and I meant it; that I enjoyed it, which I must regard myself as a compliment.

The object of this digression was only to put others on their guard against works which, based upon theory rather than divination, confidently expound human nature in a manner apparently profound. The danger is that, as psychoanalysis soaks deeper into the literary consciousness of our day, more novels and plays, some doubtless very able like *Harriet Fream* and *The Silver Cord*, will be written, in which the characters are no longer born but made up according to psychological prescriptions. This would entail dullness in the end; cleverness and dullness would then be our literary fare.

BERNARD SHAW'S APPLE CART AND MR. BELLOC'S APPLES

HE IS, WHAT in youth he never dreamt of becoming, one of the most popular men in England—I am speaking of Bernard Shaw. It is the result of having been before the public a long time. The English have a habit of proclaiming someone as the Grand Old Man of Letters and of then hailing all he does afterwards as more wonderful than anything he did before.

"How can I hope to put in a column and a half", wrote Mr. St. John Ervine of *The Apple Cart*, "a fair measure of the brains that are in it? To produce such a piece of high farce, fantastic wisdom, high discourse, at the age of seventy-three, is a feat of which men half the age of Mr. Shaw might be envious." (Yes, of course, they ought to be.) "Let me say", wrote another critic, "this is one of the most brilliant plays Bernard Shaw has written. . ." "To-day", exclaimed Mr. Hannen Swaffer, after the first performance, "was a great event in the history of the English theatre." Such praise might pass as only verbally careless if critics showed that they also remembered that Mr. Shaw has written many other plays not only as brilliant but more profound, plays which they received in a very different manner. What was it, I asked myself, at the end of the performance of *The Apple Cart*, beside the dramatist's venerable years, which made people who were wont to dismiss his "discussion plays" as all talk and no drama, accept this prolonged conversation with such grateful enthusiasm?

Not even in *Getting Married* or in *Misalliance* is the proportion of talk to action more overwhelming than it is in *The Apple Cart.*

Well, in the first place there is a theatrical reason: with the exception of the interlude, the talk centres round a situation in which one man is pitted against many, and this is a "sympathetic" situation. How is King Magnus going to escape signing the ultimatum by which his Cabinet intends to reduce him to a royal cipher? We are aware that he is cleverer and more disinterested than his ministers, but we are kept wondering how he will manage to get the better of them. He triumphs in the end by threatening to abdicate and lead a rival political party in the House of Commons. The implication is that the Labour Cabinet and its Prime Minister are content, now the whole population is enjoying a more or less American level of prosperity, to let the "Breakages Trust" and corruption alone, provided they remain in office themselves. This is the only assumption on which the effect of the King's threat became plausible.

It is not very long ago since Mr. Shaw startled Liberals and reformers by speaking up for Mussolini; and so inveterate is the popular notion that his *obiter dicta* are dictated by desire to surprise, that his defence of Fascism was interpreted as a piece of characteristic wilfulness. *The Apple Cart* proves it was nothing of the kind. And here we touch upon a second reason why the play has been received with such effusive benevolence. The central idea that emerges from the criss-cross of discussion, from the satire, the fun and the clash of character, is that Democracy as a form of Government is a hopeless fraud. This is a widespread and spreading opinion. The strength of King Magnus's position is that he knows it and can afford to admit it, while his Ministers and opponents know it, but have to pre-

tend it is not true. This gives him a great pull in argument. The discussion was consequently a walk-over affair between a clever, calm, disinterested man and a set of excitable political boobies, each with one eye askew on the main chance. As a dramatic critic I missed in it what has hitherto been the great merit of Mr. Shaw's discussion plays, an even distribution of brains among the debaters.

I have watched for years the evolution of Mr. Shaw's thought and genius. We all remember the moment when as a reformer he seemed to despair (if one so instinctively gay in temper can ever be said to despair) and clung to the idea of selective breeding (*Man and Superman*) as to a last hen-coop in the wreck of hopes. Later, he found it necessary to add another postulate to the basis of rational optimism; the idea (*Methuselah*) that the world could not really improve until men had learnt how to live to be thousands of years old. Both plays were full of insight into the radical condition of humanity. But *The Apple Cart* is nothing of that kind. It is almost as topical as *John Bull's Other Island*, though the scene is projected into the future. It has interested people because it is about things they talk and laugh about. Let us not, then, call *The Apple Cart* "profound"—brilliantly topical is the right description.

The political situation in it differs from that of to-day only in two respects: the national income is at the date of the play so distributed that there is no effective discontent in England, and life is still more Americanized. There is a King who, though glamour has deserted him, still possesses dormant legal powers, by using which an exceptional man might, as to-day, make the Throne a prime influence in the state. (Magnus is such a king.) Intelligent citizens have lost all interest in politics. The predatory have found short private cuts to

power and riches outside politics, though they exert pressure, if necessary, on frightened politicians through the press, which is in their pockets. The masses give without thinking their votes to any type of man or woman who amuses them. They are better off than they have ever been before, and they don't and *can't* bother their heads about the really precarious nature of that prosperity. They don't know and they don't care how the rich batten on the waste generated by the social machine. Politics only attract second-raters who cannot carve out for themselves a career in other fields, and the devices by which politicians become popular and "rise" (but no longer to honour) are so futile as to fill self-respecting men with nausea. The party machine makes the Cabinet independent of the House of Commons, and Cabinets are full of duds or representatives of dubious "interests". The Prime Minister has to use all his wits in trimming between those interests and cajoling those duds, instead of applying them to real problems. But one barrier against corrupt or stupid legislation remains—the Royal Veto; that is to say, the disinterested effective decisions of a man independent of the votes of idiots who are pulled and pushed this way and that by a few energetic, greedy persons, good fellows no doubt in a private life, but without the tradition of public service or any understanding of statesmanship. Such is the theme of *The Apple Cart.*

Allowing for exaggerations, all this will pass as a description of English politics to-day. But who was it who drew our attention to these features in the political scene? It was not Mr. Shaw. I looked at my programme to make quite sure that *The Apple Cart* had not been written in collaboration with Mr. Belloc. Its points were precisely those at which Mr. Belloc has been hammering for twenty years:

the humbug of a modern representative government; the unreality of party conflicts; the poor quality of the men attracted to public life; the helplessness of politicians in the hands of financiers and newspaper proprietors (Mr. Belloc wrote with Cecil Chesterton before the war a book on the danger of Press-Combines); the resulting indifference of the public to politics; the dwindling prestige of the House of Commons; the permeation of public life by indirect corruption; the Americanization and plutocratizing of old England. A few years ago, Mr. Belloc wrote a book suggesting the same remedy as *The Apple Cart*—namely a real King.

When critics of *Major Barbara* were chattering about Mr. Shaw's debt to Nietzsche, he pointed at once to Samuel Butler who also was a literary Ishmael. I think he ought to dedicate this play to Mr. Belloc. Of course, no reproach is intended in pointing out this rather odd accord between men who have hitherto always met to dispute, but I do object to others who have for years ignored Mr. Belloc's criticism of political life as the notions of a somewhat bitter and irresponsible crank, now hailing precisely the same criticisms from Mr. Shaw as proofs of startling and original insight. For my part, though agreeing with reservations to both writers' general diagnosis, I hear again that small voice which whispers "Fiddlesticks", when they proceed to recommend the Royal Veto as a remedy.

The skill is great with which the discussions are supported throughout the play by interest being directed upon the King. The types are amusing, and though caricatures they are recognizably true. King Magnus, unpretentious, subtle and selfless, is not only a real human-being, but a creation of Mr. Shaw's moral insight, which is even more remarkable than his faculty for hitting off types. It is that

gift which makes him the superb dramatist he is. Greatness of mind is not necessarily imposing or magnetic; it is something which may only gradually draw you—such are the virtues of King Magnus. A disinterested man of strong intellect, and without *amour propre*, will often make others round him look like children. This is the effect of Magnus. At rare moments, when his ministers catch the infection of his candour, they dimly know themselves to be, comparatively speaking, babies. Mr. Cedric Hardwicke acted the part with an inconspicuous perfection: no emphasis; transparent moderation in the expression of emotion; absence of obvious charm of manner, except for that which springs from respect for the self-respect of others, and often makes the most fascinating manners look a little vulgar and blatant. Of all the characters in the play, Proteus, the Prime Minister, is the only one, male or female, who is even remotely capable of taking the measure of the King's diameter. Proteus is a clever study. (I thought I recognized in him a hint or two taken from real life.) He is very intelligent; but, alas! the political game has caught him and forced him to devote his faculties to steering adroitly from moment to moment rather than to seeking a goal. Just as Napoleon learnt to use his natural bad temper diplomatically, so Proteus employs his touchy vanity and emotional hysteria to gain time or darken counsel. He is blunt of speech and devious in thought; Magnus is subtle and frank, Proteus crude and uncandid. I admired Mr. Charles Carson's impersonation, especially in that it suggested that what poor Proteus needed was time, time—*time* to consider things; while he was always being forced to speak as though he had thought out everything carefully. There was sometimes a wandering glare in his handsome eyes, as of a man trying to remember three

things at once; this glare, combined with a worn platform pomposity of speech, suited the part exactly.

The interlude is a deft piece of construction. Apparently it has nothing to do with the theme, yet it supplies what is wanted—a background. Firstly, a background, in the sense of the King's private life, in which he remains exactly the same man; secondly, it reminds us of the *beau monde*, which has turned away from social questions as drab and petty. Magnus, for the sake of a little rest, often visits this world, represented by his putative mistress, Orinthia; wondering, just a little fascinated, at the blooming extravagance of her romantic egotism. Orinthia is a more corporeal embodiment of the spirit which animated in *Methuselah* the figures of Azymandias and Cleopatra-Semiramis, who, you remember, died in that play of "discouragement" when brought into the presence of moral beauty and endeavour. Orinthia is not subject to such a test. She is quite unaware of Magnus, except that since he *is* a King, she thinks he ought to cut a shining figure on the throne with her beside him. Miss Edith Evans was self-sacrificingly blatant. I think Mr. Shaw went a little too far in showing up Orinthia, for it became difficult to believe that Magnus could like her. The feminine foil to her is Queen Jemima, a domestic lady, perfectly dignified in what Orinthia would consider a very dull, humdrum way. Was it quite right, *dramatically*, that Queen Jemima should have been so much more attractive? No.

The richest moment of comedy in the play is when the American ambassador, setting a seal upon what is a *fait accompli*, suggests, radiant with generosity, that America should return again to the British Empire—a proposal which is equivalent to the python saying to a swallowed rabbit "at last we are one".

Of course, *The Apple Cart* has rare merits; that anyone should think less of it, or admire it less than they do, was not my object in writing this article. It was to protest against its being put in the forefront of Mr. Shaw's achievements.

SOMERSET MAUGHAM

I DO NOT know if Mr. Somerset Maugham, who has travelled a great deal lately, has visited M. Coué at Nancy, but certainly every day and in every way his work gets better and better. This is as it should be with successful dramatists, yet how far more usual it is to begin well and tail off! Mr. Maugham, after a period of vain endeavour, I understand about as long as the briefless period of an able but unconnected young barrister, suddenly blazed into success. The first time I heard of him, though he had already written a grim, pathetic and remarkable little novel, he was being interviewed by the papers as an astoundingly fortunate young man who had actually three plays running in London at the same time. This was certainly an unusual triumph, but not one which excited my curiosity; indeed, looking back, I see I was then so convinced that a certain measure of ill-success was the concomitant of merit, that this put me off. Thenceforth, like everybody else, when a Maugham play appeared with expected frequency, I took a long run for granted; but, as a critic, that the play would not furnish me matter for discourse.

I went to one or two. They were eminently actable; they had the handy compactness, the shop-finish and alluring shininess of a new dressing-case. The dialogue was clear, but the diction, like Pinero's, was insensitive. I was not interested till *Home and Beauty* opened my eyes to the fact that Mr. Maugham had, in addition to his solid stage aptitudes, a far prettier gift for comedy than I had supposed. And I

discovered something else: that this gift sprang from a clear-sighted, hard-edged cynicism, rare in English writers; it was Latin, in quality. It came later to the surface, here and there, in *The Unknown*; it disappeared again in a play so negligible that I am no longer sure of its name—Miss Marie Lohr was the heroine and there was a kind-hearted doctor in it; and, to my joy, it fairly dominated his next play, *The Circle*. There the flavour of it was a little too pungent for palates which had relished *Lady Frederick*, etc. Yet in America, oddly enough, *The Circle* was a prodigious success. They must have been too innocent to feel its devastating implications; for as a rule no people strike one as more determined than Americans to insist that life is a crescendo of happiness or more prone to regard cynicism as treason. *East of Suez*, which followed, was an obvious compromise with the raree-show traditions of His Majesty's: I took it as such. The masculine characters in it were conventional and negligible; but the woman in it was admirably portrayed. She was a creation of that attention, at once indulgent and hard, characteristic of Mr. Maugham, which when directed upon certain feminine types, enables him to present them alive upon the stage, with their energies, duplicities, passions and trivialities.

Consequently, having taken *East of Suez* as a work constructed to meet rather unfortunate theatrical conditions, I went to the Globe Theatre with *The Circle* still uppermost in my mind.

Having arrived, then, at a general notion of the kind of play Mr. Maugham was born to write, the critical question for me was whether or not he was going to proceed along lines which, with the arrogance which is one of the drawbacks of the critical temperament, I had peremptorily decided he ought to travel: and I was delighted. With the exception of a single kink—one episode in which the dramatist

had seemed to wince and refrain—the play went deep and straight, directed from beginning to end by what I believe to be Mr. Maugham's true instinct as an artist.

The people who are presented as "Our Betters" are Lady George Grayson, the Duchesse de Surennes, the Principessa della Cercola, the rich, bumptiously and sentimentally possessive Arthur Fenwick, the impecunious Tony Paxton and Thornton Clay, "who calls more countesses by their Christian names than any other man in London". The curtain has not been up many minutes before we grasp the irony of the title.

The play itself is a mercilessly amusing picture of a rootless, fruitless, extremely vulgar, smart set of people; a much paragraphed, photographed set, whose habits are luxurious, whose standards are common and cynical, whose love-affairs, relieved by a certain engaging candour, are canine. And who are the ladies with high-sounding names? They are American heiresses who have married for rank.

As far as experience enables me to check the verisimilitude of the general picture, the dramatist has stressed their nationality unfairly. All the characters in the set, sympathetic as well as vulgar, are American, with the exception of the fair Tony, who gets his living in it by complaisances which used to be considered unmasculine and dishonourable, and of the harmless Lord Bleane, who fails to secure in the end his scared young transatlantic heiress. This stressing of nationality has, however, two advantages from the point of view of success: in England the play in its implications will have the air of being confined to a merely alien portion of the fashionable rich—though, goodness knows, our social soil produces "Pearl's" and "Minnie's"; while in America its satire will seem directed only against a small, and

naturally unpopular group of denationalized American snobs.

Yet satire is not the right word to describe the play. It is only a "satire" for those who attribute to the author their own moral reactions to what he shows them. Each character is allowed rope, and if, at the end of the performance, in your estimation the whole set is left dangling from the gibbet, either it was *you* who strung them up or they hanged themselves; it was not Mr. Maugham who put on the black cap. *Our Betters* is rather a sardonically detached comedy; an exposure in the manner of Maupassant of one luxuriant corner of the social jungle. If it had entered Miss Margaret Bannerman's head (she gave us an extraordinarily good performance) that Pearl Grayson was a satire on the smart modern hostess, the play would have been lost. Happily she had imagination enough to play Pearl with delicious appreciation, and intelligence enough to expect us also to delight, like naturalists, in the admirable equipment of some sly, swift animal; in Pearl's witty agility, her shameless courage, her claws and caresses, her gorgeous silly snobbishness, her tight, ferocious clutch upon money and prestige. Against a background of spiritual values, or the heart, Pearl shows up as indeed graceless and ignoble; but against the background of her own world she has a certain lustre; not so the duchess Minnie, whose comical, helpless lack of dignity, whining amorousness, and sluggish, hysterical malevolence Miss Collier acted profoundly well. Pearl is a very vulgar woman, but still she has "form"—however bad—and gay effrontery; Minnie is a shapeless jelly-fish that stings when trod upon.

When to expose it Maupassant explored the *demi-monde* in *Yvette*, he used the panic of a girl who believed her surroundings to be dazzling and enviable. Elizabeth Saunders, Pearl's sister fresh from

America and an heiress herself, also at first believes her sister's *monde* to be splendid. The invisibility of Lord George, and the ill-mannered ubiquity of "Arthur" (excellently played by Mr. Drayton), who pays Pearl's bills; the cynical conversation of the set, their insensitive discussion of her private affairs (it is taken for granted she has hooked Lord Bleane) surprise but do not deeply disturb her. When the play opens she is thoroughly used to the atmosphere, and ready to believe she cannot do better than imitate her sister Pearl. The arrival, however, of a young American lover who is a fish out of water, increases her hesitation to take the worldly matrimonial plunge. She puts off Lord Bleane. She will give him an answer when they meet again at Pearl's country house. It is there ("Arthur", as usual, is a quasi-host) she gets her scare.

We have already seen Pearl handling him and heard, too, how she talks of him behind his back; her methods are the admiration of her friends. "Tony", who finds dependence on the too exactingly amorous Minnie very trying, has a fancy for Pearl, who is herself as dependent on "Arthur". There is a rapid scene between them: "Let's go down to the tea-house." "No I won't." "We shall be quite safe there." "I daren't, it's too risky." "Oh, damn the risk." Pearl arranges poker for the rest of the party and they disappear. But the lynx-eyed Minnie has seen them go. While the cards are being dealt she exclaims that she has left her bag with her money in the garden tea-house; Lord Bleane gets up to get it. He returns saying he can't find it, and Elizabeth volunteers to hunt, for it must be there; on which Lord Bleane becomes agitated. "No, no, don't go—besides the door is locked." "Oh, it can't be," says the Duchesse, quietly, "I saw Pearl and Tony go in just now." Elizabeth bursts into tears; the Princess jumps up, "Minnie, you devil!" . . . The game goes

on; Fenwick with distorted face dealing and muttering, "The slut, the slut!" Elizabeth sobbing, presently the absent couple stroll airily in. Here was the test of the dramatist! The quick closing dialogue is a triumph. Pearl has barely begun her bland excuse before she grasps what has happened. She turns to Tony: "You damned fool, I told you it was too risky." The fall of the curtain hides what we gather, in the next act, to have been a very ugly row: the Duchesse in hysterics and "Arthur" in little better, though he would no doubt have described it as a strong man's wrath. And it is in this last act that Mr. Maugham, I think, shows his remarkable power. The sardonic comedy of anti-climax is here of the first order. The kink in his treatment of his subject, which I mentioned above, is, of course, that it should have been *Elizabeth* who went for the bag, and *her* agitation which produces the disclosure; for it is her distress, her *volte face* which is the pivot of the play.

Doubtless Mr. Maugham thought this, however, too excruciating a turn to give the scene, and the explosion is still most effective. It leaves Pearl with two objects: to get back Arthur and to prevent her party breaking up and her friends spreading the story. Her successful contrivances are as remorselessly comic as Minnie's reconciliation with Tony, to whom she offers marriage. The emotional squalor of these people's relations, the absence of anything approaching loyalty between them, is coolly exposed. Their lack of all standards, even of superficial elegance, is deliciously suggested by their enthusiastic reception of "Ernest", on whose egregious vulgarity and capers the curtain descends.

I have not mentioned the Princess (Miss Marion Terry is beautifully natural in the part); she is of, but not happy in, this group of *Our Betters*, and she is the mouthpiece of the explanation: how it was

that the lure of romance has decoyed these women into trashy snobbery. Her character is another test of her environment.*

* In the following issue of *The New Statesman* Mr. Maugham wrote to say that it was the Censor who had objected to Elizabeth being the one to discover the lovers in the garden tea-house, and that he had altered the play to meet that objection: a very good example of the sort of public interference to which dramatists are subjected in this country.

THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

SOME THOUSANDS have, I believe, already enjoyed the treat which I enjoyed the other night, and I wish now to describe, partly because it is a pleasure to do so, and partly because I hope that still more people may be induced to go to the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith, while *Lionel and Clarissa* is still on. It is charming, funny and gay.

Gaiety is one of the moods I feel most grateful to a work of art for inspiring me. It is a mood both delicious and wise, and from it we can modulate either into seriousness or laughter. It is itself a smiling mood, and when I am in it, I wonder how I could have put up with mere high spirits. We can taste it in its most ethereal form in the music of Mozart, where it reaches up to a glittering peace; but there are many humbler springs at which we can drink of this delicious non-intoxicant, which is also, by the way, the rare precarious reward of being in love, and the secret of half the pleasure we take in children.

I am not an eighteenth century man myself, but one thing I whole-heartedly admire in that century is the just value that it put upon gaiety. The people of that century did not, of course, always get what they wanted in their art, sometimes they got the counterfeit, the sprightly mechanical gesture; but even the wobblings of their artists between antic formality and adoration of sensibility, suggest the value they allowed to that light moment of refreshing freedom in which we can enjoy both

mockery and tears. Doubt abounded, but how rare was that depressing bird, the important gloomy sceptic! Sentiment was thoroughly enjoyed, but so consciously for what it was and nothing more, that we are still puzzled to guess in Sterne and Goldsmith where sentiment ends and irony begins.

The influence which made eighteenth century sentiment so light and its comedy so natural was Italian in origin. The inspiration of the music of this opera, which Charles Dibdin wrote when he was twenty-three, is Italian, and about a third of the score and many of the airs are by Italian contemporary composers—Vinci, Galuppi, Vento and Scolari, names you come across in that enchanting book of Vernon Lee's on eighteenth century Italy. (Galuppi, by the by, I was surprised to find, contributed one of the most martial and robust of those airs; surprised, because from Browning's poem upon Galuppi's *Toccata* I expected delicate, disillusioned melody.)

The blend of Dibdin and the Italians—of Alfred Reynolds, who conducts and has written a good deal of the music himself—is so complete that most people would be puzzled to portion out their separate contributions. The lovely and light finale in the moonlit garden at the end of the second act, which is a compound of Dibdin and Alfred Reynolds, when the colonel, Diana, Clarissa and their lovers sing together, is perhaps distinguishable by the ear of a musician from the work of the Italians, but hardly by other ears; so perfect is its concord with such airs as "Come then, pining, peevish lover", by Vinci, or "Why with sighs my heart is swelling", by Potenza.

If Dibdin comes into his own in the rollicking songs, such as "Ladies, Ladies, pray admire the figure", or in "In Italy, Germany, France I have been", Mr. Alfred Reynolds keeps level with him in

"We all say the man was exceedingly knowing", and other rousing and lively airs.

It is not, however, of the music, though *Lionel and Clarissa* is an opera, that it is my particular business to speak. What you will find at the Lyric, Hammersmith, is also delightful comedy delightfully acted. I have not seen a play in which the favourite old theme of the crusty father being tricked into aiding the abduction of his lovely daughter is managed with more real fun. Mr. Nigel Playfair plays the part excellently well, and if you are not pleased with the solemn, woe-begone, dutiful Lionel (Mr. Wilfrid Temple) training for the church and torn between love of his fair pupil and gratitude to his patron, with the sentimental lively ladies (Miss Olive Groves and Miss Stella Seager) and Mr. Jessamy, the fop (Mr. Rupert Bruce), you are indeed hard to please.

The dialogue is conventional and neat—a pleasure to listen to. It is all friendly and easy, all made to please, yet careful of the graces. The production has taken note of this quality; formality and informality in it are blended in that happy way which suggests that the actors are enjoying themselves as well as the audience. In philosophies of art it used to be pointed out that "the play-instinct" was an important part of the artistic impulse. That element has been overlooked lately in such treatises, and what I miss most often on the modern stage are works which are too satisfying to be called superficial, and in which the author has understood that a heed of form can supply depth and refinement to subjects handled in the spirit of play.

SOMERSET MAUGHAM AND NOEL COWARD

MR. SOMERSET MAUGHAM is not an Ibsen, and Mr. Noel Coward's resemblance to Tolstoy is not striking, yet the themes of *The Breadwinner* and *Private Lives* resemble respectively those of *A Doll's House* and *The Kreutzer Sonata*; only those themes are brought up to date and turned topsy-turvy. In *The Breadwinner* a husband, not a wife, leaves a "doll's house" to live and learn; and in *Private Lives* we are invited (most successfully) to laugh over—yes, and even to envy—the violent alternations from tenderness to exasperation and back again, which between man and woman, Tolstoy felt were so loathsomely and hideously humiliating that he saw no cure for them but to stamp sex out of life altogether. Hopeless remedy, of course—quite hopeless.

These two comedies now running in London, and with every prospect of continuing to please, are symptomatic of our times. It is not the Noras who now excite the sympathy of dramatists and audiences but the Helmers, the predicament of "breadwinners" not of wives. Isn't the slavery, we now ask ourselves, of the breadwinner to his job often as humiliating as that of woman to "the home"? And if she kicks, why should not he? So when Mr. Maugham's "Norval", as I shall continue to think of him, slips into freedom from a home in which he has been for years a mere breadwinner, slips away, after exposing the selfishness of his wife and children, the sympathies of the modern audience go with him, as

they once went with Nora when she slammed behind her the door of the "doll's house".

The shift of sympathy is significant. But the comparison between *The Kreutzer Sonata* and *Private Lives* is still more significant. To do Tolstoy's contemporaries justice, they never thought that story one of his good books. And he had a low opinion of it himself. He said he was in a bad frame of mind when he wrote it. There was a fanaticism in it far from admirable, and the deduction of a sweeping conclusion from a particular case shocked common sense. What is interesting is that Mr. Noel Coward and Tolstoy should agree about the nature of passion; only while the old prophet says, "Look, isn't this ignoble and the opposite of love?", the young writer of comedies, who does not pretend to be a thinker but, as a matter of fact, is a good deal shrewder than some who pretend to think, says, "Isn't this exciting and amusing?"

In *Private Lives* two honeymoons are entertainingly contrasted. The relation between Amanda Prynne and Elyot Chase is based upon the only kind of attraction which, in the dramatist's opinion, matters between man and woman; while their respective relations to their lawful spouses are represented as unreal, and conventional. A moment's reflection shows the weakness of both *The Kreutzer Sonata* and of *Private Lives* as pictures of life. The former is based on blind fear of sex, while in *Private Lives* we only see the beginning of the story: the worst is to come. We are told what Chapter I of the lives of Amanda and Elyot was like: their marriage had ended after exasperated quarrels in divorce and in their remarriage to other partners. Though we only watch on the stage Chapter II, namely the first three days of their joint lives after they have come together again, having just bilked their just-wedded partners, this glimpse shows that

Chapter III will probably repeat Chapter I. We watch scenes of rapturous tenderness modulate into the exchange of such sentiments as "You damned sadistic bully!" "You loose-living wicked little beast!" and finally into a scrimmage on the floor. True, the curtain falls on reconcilement and the audience is sent smiling away. *That* shindy has not mattered. Why should it? It is not the first or the second or even the fifth that matters. But surely and often very soon, such shindies destroy the overtones of passion and above all that mutual confidence which makes even its momentary satisfaction satisfying. Though a spit of mutual hatred, as Tostoy knew, can be an excellent aphrodisiac, aphrodisiacs are not love's daily food. So, although his play apparently ends happily, and the story is so deftly and amusingly conducted that the audience actually envies Mr. Coward's lovers, no one can agree with Amanda's pronouncement upon their predicament: "We may be all right in the eyes of heaven, but we look like being in a hell of a mess socially." No: they are in a hell of a mess all round, and it is a proof of Mr. Coward's adroitness that he has managed to disguise the grimness of his comedy, and to conceal from the audience that his conception of love is desolating and false.

I wonder, if these lines catch his eye, what he will think of this analysis of his airy, quick little play? That I am dissecting a butterfly which was meant to amuse us with its flutterings, and that I have rubbed off its bloom in the process? Perhaps. Let me assure him, then, that I enjoyed its flutterings and bright changing colours thoroughly.

The interpretation of character and scene throughout is very good. What a talent Miss Gertrude Lawrence has! If you want unflagging vivacity in an actor or actress look for him or her among Variety Artists. They have "go", sparkle, finish.

They must have them; also the faculty of making much out of hints. They have to hold attention, often alone on the stage, by making the most of comic and sentimental hints sometimes of the most perfunctory kind. They learn to be collaborators rather than interpreters. Mr. Coward himself is almost as good as Miss Lawrence (that is praise!) and Miss Adrianne Allen and Mr. Olivier played their parts as they should have been played. They understood them and showed it. Mr. Coward's gift as a dramatist, as I have occasion to repeat whenever I write about him, is that his dialogue has the rhythm of modern life, which is more broken and much quicker than that of twenty years ago. He understands, too, that it is more important that a joke on the stage should be spontaneous than witty. If it is also a brilliant piece of wit so much the better, but the important thing is that it should seem spontaneous.

Mr. Maugham is not so deft at catching life-rhythm in dialogue, and his wit is deliberate rather than quick. Consequently, when not first-rate, it disappoints. On the other hand he has a far firmer grip of what he is writing about, and the implications of his subject. He always knows where he is. He is adept in making his characters betray themselves in typical lines. Sometimes he abuses this power, and you think, "But if that person could *say* that, he or she would certainly know more about themselves than the dramatist intends them to know." But at others he puts into their mouths a line which illuminates character unconsciously, and the situation from top to bottom. He has a far firmer grasp of ultimate futilities about which Mr. Coward tends to be sentimental.

Mr. Maugham's works can hardly be described as the harvest of an indulgent eye. His best jokes have grim implications; his best-drawn characters are

exposures. His good people are apt to be conventional figures or hazy in outline; and he has evidently been much struck on his journey through the world by the impudent selfishness of certain types of women. In a sense he approves of selfishness. He sees it masquerading everywhere, and he has come to prefer it naked and unashamed. But really, we seem to hear him say, some women carry selfishness too far! They are such bilkers too, taking without giving, and without a notion of fair play.

The Breadwinner is a play about a man who threw his top hat over the windmill, turned on his family (leaving them a genteel subsistence), and said, "I don't see the point of slaving for you any more. You are not fond of me and I am not fond of you; you think I'm an old bore, and I find you boring as well as inconsiderate." The comedy lies in his family, who have never felt under the smallest obligation to him, and have criticized him freely, suddenly discovering that they mean as little to him as he does to them. It is a shock. What! he doesn't think it worth his while to keep them in cars and comfort! Of course the young can't be expected to enjoy *his* company, but that he shouldn't delight in theirs or in seeing them enjoy themselves—well, that is incredible!

It is quite a good idea for a comedy, but *The Breadwinner* is not quite a good play. In the first act the dialogue, designed to showing the attitude of the young towards their parents, is not nearly entertaining enough. There are two pairs of them, male and female, and all four are cousins. The consensus of opinion among them is that after forty their elders, who have had their innings, ought to make room for the young. The dramatist's object is not only to show in this act their want of affection and gratitude, but also that these bright young things are deplorably silly and boring. He succeeds

only too well. We are glad when that act is over. But the last two grip the attention; and he was blessed in Mr. Squire, with his Hawtrey methods, as an interpreter for the placid but firm Mr. Battle, also in Miss Marie Lohr who plays Mrs. Battle. The outspokenness of the "English rose" seemed to shock the audience a little. Well, she exists.

EXCITEMENT SATIRE SPEED

DINNER AT EIGHT, at the Palace Theatre, by George Kaufman and Edna Ferber, both gifted authors (her novel, *Show Boat*, was very superior to the popular play made from it), is an exceptionally animated performance: violent, unintermitted animation—that is the outcome and the aim of this ingenious mixture of ingredients, each of which is pungent enough to flavour for some palates the whole play. I can well imagine one playgoer declaring afterwards that *Dinner at Eight* is excruciatingly funny, and another, that it is excruciatingly painful. The fact is *Dinner at Eight* is both; it is extremely amusing *and* thoroughly remorseless; which of these aspects will predominate in your own retrospect depends upon whether you happen to be tender or tough; but while you are in the theatre, in either case, you will be swept along by its vivacious velocity.

One important point at which the transatlantic stage differs from ours is *tempo*; their pace is double ours. (Of course, I am only speaking of the tip-top American play of the moment, not of such deep plays as Eugene O'Neil's *Strange Interlude*.) Recall the rattle and flash with which *Broadway*, for example, dashed to its terminus. Now, an English audience was once content to ruminate receptively while the playwright was preparing his situations. It used to be for connoisseurs even an added pleasure to be able to observe him at it, digging with deliberation the dry trench down which the water was eventually to flow. In the well-made

three-act drama the whole of the first act, and often the greater part of the second, was devoted to this steady trenching. But the modern, and especially the American-modern, temperament hates preparation and adores—surprise. Of course, there must be some preparation, or incidents won't hold together and crescendo would be impossible, but what is absolutely necessary must now be conveyed by hints and flashes; by a casual word dropped in the midst of chatter, by a gesture while the spectator's eye is on something else. No more preparation is allowed; it would be boring. The quality of attention demanded of the modern audience is therefore that which enables the driver of a racing car while swerving past a van to catch the name on a signpost as it whisks behind him. When I compare these methods with old leisurely ways of telling a story on the stage, I am reminded of that pathetic figure, the Baker, in *The Hunting of the Snark*, who, by the by, has some vital information to impart. He began, you remember:

> "My father and mother were honest, though poor—"
> "Skip all that", cried the Bellman in haste,
> "If it once becomes dark, there's no chance of a Snark—
> We have hardly a minute to waste."

Then, he tried again:

> "A dear uncle of mine (after whom I was named)
> Remarked when I bade him farewell—"
> "Oh skip your dear uncle", the Bellman exclaimed,
> As he angrily tinkled his bell.

At a tip-top American play I hear perpetually the

furious tinkle of that bell. Though bewildered, for I have myself a ruminating mind, I find I am often exhilarated by this speeding-up. It certainly makes me impatient afterwards of being compelled to stare at the slow evolution on the stage of a situation all-too-clear and perhaps not important. And I am sure the movie habit has quickened considerably the rapidity of the public's capacity for attention, though we orientals must still strike western playwrights and producers as very slow in the up-take. But our own are hurrying; Mr. Noel Coward was pretty brisk in his methods in *Private Lives*—and we liked them. A London audience to-day will not find *Dinner at Eight* too fast to follow, while it is so strewn with points that if, as I did, they only take one out of five, they will find nevertheless they have a mindful.

One of the tests I apply to plays, before recommending or cursing them, is the degree to which I have lost self-consciousness myself, in the theatre. If I have been so riveted that I ceased to know that I was a human-being sitting between others, then, whatever on reflection I may think of its *value*, that performance goes straight into my category of good entertainments. The play and actors have passed the great, elementary, fundamental test. At the Palace Theatre from the rise to the fall of each curtain, and even during the short "blacking-out" intervals between the four scenes of which each act is composed, the performers succeeded in turning me into a mere characterless percipient attentive only to them. But, and this also is criticism of the play, I did not spend the act-intervals (though I was eager enough to get back to my seat to see what was coming) in that delicious state of gently-heaving emotion and astonished clarity of mind that fine drama produces. I did not wander about the lobby hoping to Heaven no one would speak to me; on

the contrary, click, I was back again in myself, ready to talk about anything and wondering, not about the play, but if I was thirsty enough to enjoy a glass of beer and when I could get my hair cut. Well, if the reader thinks me a reliable thermometer, after those two statements he ought to know for himself where to place, roughly, *Dinner at Eight* as a play and, for certain, that it was exceedingly well acted. "But what was it like? Shall *I* enjoy it?" These, too, are questions, whatever reader asks them, it is my business to try to answer.

Well, it was like Peter Arno's *Parade* come to life, with an undertow of tragedy pulling through it. Does the *New Yorker* amuse you? Do you enjoy the bite of its humour, its gay toughness, its amoral moral and anti-social social satire? If you enjoyed, say, the humour of the picture of a big "butter-and-egg man" putting a detaining paw over the too-often filled champagne glass of a little "chippy" and murmuring with a leer of portentous tenderness, "Darling, don't spoil my dream"; if you have chuckled over those drawings of spoilt women and pompous men in preposterously luxurious surroundings losing all corresponding tenu, and collapsing into a native, yet not always unamiable, indignity; if you have relished those grotesque pictorial contrasts between pretences and realities ("Get up, you mutt, we're to be married to-day"); if you have appreciated the economy with which a laconic legend will explode the whole satire of the picture (I wish to suggest a parallel here between the snap of the dialogue and the mordant humour of the situations in *Dinner at Eight*); if you have recognized in modern American satire of Americans—yes, through the very heydey of "bunk" and "ballyhoo" and of a snatch-as-snatch-can society—the survival of a civilized, intellectual standard as cruel and incorruptible as that of Forain and Lautrec in

Paris of the 'eighties—then, you will thoroughly enjoy this play.

You will appreciate, then, the acrid pathos of the male movie-beauty (all profile, no talent) whose day is over but who with the help of gin pretends it is not (Mr. Basil Sydney's performance was perfect), and, on the very night he is invited as a lion to *the* dinner party, turns on the suicide's gas in his gorgeous apartments for which he can never pay. You will relish the Billingsgate back-chat spurting from the mouth of "a dainty rogue in porcelain", and staggering, like the jet from a hose, the raging impetuosity of her millionaire husband. (One claps Mr. and Mrs. Packard wildly during their tremendous matrimonial row while dressing for *the* party.) You will not miss the subtlety of the refined doctor's infatuation (he also is invited) with the aforesaid pink and silvery little slut, or of the tableau she hastily prepares for him in bed with a book on psychology upon her knees: "not that, the big one, you nit-wit", she yells at her maid. (Kitty Packard, ex-cloak-room attendant, is an "introvert", her husband an "extrovert"; she has got those tags from her doctor-lover, and on her pearly, peevish lips they suggest the whole of the doctor's amorous technique—and his own self-deception.)

And the hostess! That agitated social climber, Mrs. Jordan, who has no need to climb, but must be in it, in it, in it; and to whom social occasions are so pre-eminently important, that when the pivots of her party, an English Lord and Lady, chuck at the last moment, she astounds us with an hysterical outburst, in the vein of, "was ever trouble like to mine?"—We who know, though she as yet does not, that one guest has suffocated himself, that her husband has been ruined by Packard and has angina pectoris, that her maid has been seduced by

her butler, that her engaged daughter is in love with the movie-star, that the Packard ménage is in dissolution, that the doctor's wife is miserable and the doctor ashamed of himself. Miss Irene Vanbrugh's deftness, alacrity and crescendo in this part are a treat to watch.

Is there a point of rest for the imagination in this rattling satire? Yes—a small one—her husband, the old-fashioned American man of business, played with dignity by Mr. Tristan Rawson.

A BOOTLESS BENE

I AM AFRAID it is not much use my saying, "Go at once and see *The Late Christopher Bean*". You are likely to find some difficulty in getting a seat—and no wonder; it is a most amusing comedy, full of point and character and excellently acted. It is an adaptation from a play by M. Emile Fauchois *Prenez Garde à la Peinture*, not a translation. Mr. Emlyn Williams has created his own atmosphere and drained it of French colouring. It is true that little bourgeois families in all countries resemble each other, and that French authors have made such a complete study of bourgeois habits, hearts, minds, pathetic and detestable meanness, Philistinism, hypocrisy, amiability and absurdities that writers of any country have, so to speak, the ground plan of the subject in their hands. An enormous portion of French fiction has dealt with the "petits bourgeois". Balzac and Flaubert were at their very best when they wrote about them; modern humorists, like Courteline and Tristan Bernard, have made fun of them, Huysmans and Maupassant have sacrificed them, Daudet and Coppée have wept over them. French fiction and drama have brought out the characteristics of the small bourgeoisie in every country, characteristics which are the inevitable results of being true to the kindred points of money and home. Nothing is more fruitful of comedy than their desperate cupidity, their transparent self-deceptions and their blank ignorance of art.

M. Emile Fauchois hit upon an idea which, like

a stone thrown in a stagnant pond, produces dancing ripples covering the whole surface. Mr. Emlyn Williams, all honour to him, has seen to it that it shall be for us a thoroughly familiar English pond. There is not a line which suggests that Dr. Haggett (what a character Mr. Cedric Hardwicke achieves in that part!) was ever a French provincial doctor, not a word to suggest that Gwenny was anything but a Welsh maid, not a nagging snap from Mrs. Haggett, not a whine from Ada that suggests a foreign origin. And the art dealers? Well, they are, of course, universal types. *The Late Christopher Bean* is an example of perfect adaptation to a new environment.

The play proves, too, a principle of dramatic art. In writing for the stage it is safest to get hold first of a plot—to use an old-fashioned word which modern practice has tried in vain to discredit—naturally and inevitably creating situations which in their turn display character. The novelist may start from character, but a playwright will be wise to start from situations. And for a simple reason. The playwright has less space and less time in which to expound character; all he can do is to show some characteristic aspects so vividly that the imagination of the spectator supplies the whole man—just a few disconnected touches in addition his form may allow him, no more. His characters must live in virtue of their contact with a very limited number of situations, and those situations will lack the highest degree of interest possible unless they are linked logically together: in other words, he must have a *plot*. *The Late Christopher Bean* has a precise and perfectly satisfactory one. All the fun—and it never flags—proceeds from the plot; and, as is proved by the acting at the St. James' Theatre, character is shown in every reaction of the people implicated in it.

The actors knew exactly what was required of them, so well indeed that they were able to add delightful touches to their parts. They understood the sort of people they were meant to be, and there was not a gesture or a pause, an expression or an attitude, which did not show that they were at home in their impersonations. In a comedy which provokes continual laughter there was not one laugh which was provoked by irrelevant by-play, or one joke which did not owe its humour to rising straight out of the situation; and that is significant both from the point of view of future box-office receipts and the playwright's craft. If you want to find out whether a comedy is going to draw and whether the author knows his business, notice the passages at which an audience laughs. They may be brilliant and quotable jokes, but if they are not funny because a particular character utters them at a particular moment, the appreciation with which they are met is no guarantee that the comedy will, or for that matter ought to, hold the public. There is not a line in this play which would be quotable as wit, and hardly one which does not provoke a feasting smile or laughter.

Dr. Haggett is a musty, crusty little village doctor who, as he complains, is compelled by law to attend the sick, but is often unable to collect his fees. He has a kind heart, which can hardly be said of Mrs. Haggett whom Miss Louise Hampton personified with superb and unexaggerated exactness—or of one of his daughters. He has a kind heart, but he has a terrible job in making two ends meet. His wife's standards have to be kept up and Ada must have her pier-trotting holidays in the Isle of Man, if only to catch a husband. We know he has a kind heart because we suspect Gwenny stayed fifteen years in the Haggetts' service chiefly out of sympathy for him. He is in a dreary, harried, worried

way content enough with his life, greed for money is not his vice until—till he has tasted, so to speak, blood. And that shattering change came about, too, through his very softness of heart.

Ten years before he had befriended a consumptive artist who was also addicted to the bottle. It seems he took him into his house when he was penniless. He couldn't cure him (I doubt if Dr. Haggett could cure anyone who was not getting well), but he sheltered him; and, while with the Haggetts, Bean painted, cheered by the sympathy of the uneducated but imaginative Gwenny. Indeed, the house at one time was full of what the Haggetts thought Bean's awful daubs, and Mrs. Haggett, after his death, used some to plaster cracks in the hen-house and threw the rest on a bonfire—or thought she had. On the back of another Ada painted a study of flowers. But Gwenny, who had loved Bean, had saved all the rest.

Well, when the curtain goes up Dr. Haggett is seen at his breakfast after an all-night maternity case, his wrinkled black coat and trousers much the worse for bicycling, and his temper the worse for the strain. A telegram arrives saying that a Mr. Davenport from London wants to see him at twelve. Before that hour, a well-dressed, self-assured young man arrives, and to Gwenny's surprise he knows her name and private facts about her sentimental life. He explains that he was Bean's great confidential friend—Brown, but Gwenny is a little sceptical because she can hardly imagine so respectable and well-set-up a man in that part. In his interview with the doctor he asserts again that he was the late artist's dearest friend, and that he knows that Bean died in the doctor's debt. To the astonished delight of the doctor he hands him over a cheque for £20. Dr. Haggett at once sends for his wife and daughter to introduce them to the

most honest and generous man he has ever met. "Mr. Brown" or "Davenport" then proceeds to ask whether by any chance he might have one of Bean's pictures as a memento. Dr. Haggett is only too ready to oblige with the one from the hen-house. The young man being told that the only other one is at the back of Ada's picture, asks if he might be allowed to buy for £10 such an exquisite little study as *her* bunch of flowers. He has no sooner gone than another stranger appears. He also offers the Doctor a cheque in payment of the artist's debt.

This gentleman is dismayed to hear that he has been forestalled when it comes to the question of pictures, and to the doctor's great indignation he explains that the first visitor was a swindler who had got valuable pictures from the Haggetts for nothing. He, the new arrival, would have been willing to have given £200 for the lot!

What has happened is, of course, that Bean meanwhile has been discovered as a great artist whose pictures are extremely rare, and the recent publication of his letters had led enterprising dealers to pounce upon the Haggetts' home as a place where they may pick up some cheap. There is Gwenny's portrait, for example, which Bean has described in one of his letters as his masterpiece.

Then the real Davenport arrives, who is a famous art critic and is writing the life of Bean. From him the Haggetts learn that their second visitor was also a "sharp-practice" man; even a small Bean is worth, say, £1,500. At these staggering figures, and all they imply, the principles of the Haggetts go to pieces. Mr. and Mrs. Haggett proceed to concoct a plan for cheating Gwenny out of her own picture, though, the moment before, they have been boiling with indignation at the unscrupulous cupidity of their visitors. The first has

had actually the face to come back, but it is to make a business proposal to Dr. Haggett of a tempting nature. He is by profession, he confesses, a faker of the work of great masters. If Dr. Haggett will collaborate with him by certifying that he recognizes the "Beans" which the former will proceed to paint himself, they will have many years of profit ahead of them. Dr. Haggett, wild with despair at his wife having burnt, so he thinks, all the real "Beans" in existence, complies; but when Gwenny, who has stoutly refused to part with her lover's picture, discloses that she also saved all his other pictures, that game is up. What is more, she turns out to have been secretly married to Bean, so they are her own property!

The wild agitations of the doctor, the grim incredulous despair of his wife, and the delicately plausible acting of Gwenny, never allow the comedy to flag for a moment.

MR. NOEL COWARD

HIS MAJESTY'S THEATRE is packed. The last time I *remember* having been there—for plays and entertainments are apt to pass from my mind more completely than books, it was also packed. Then *Bitter Sweet* was filling that enormous theatre. I enjoyed it; I wept—for I am not one of those who obstinately refuse to be led to the fountain of easy tears. It is a mistake not to enjoy sentiment; criticize it afterwards if you will, but it is stupid to withdraw yourself as though obvious pathos defiled. Pathos is one of the strong colours on the dramatist's palette; Shakespeare's pathos is often barefaced and laid on very thick.

What an astonishing man Noel Coward is! Never was a man more completely "of the theatre". Composer, dramatist, producer, actor, and, if I am not misled by certain touches, also designer for the stage. The spirit of his own fancy pervades everything.

> I am the batsman and the bat,
> I am the bowler and the ball;
> The Umpire, the Pavilion cat,
> The roller, pitch and stumps and all.

So the author of *A Conversation Piece* might almost boast—ignoring for the moment that he could not have attained his end without the light, delighting humour and delicious birdlike voice of Mlle. Yvonne Printemps. And what an astonishingly psychological *chef* he is! He knows exactly

what ingredients will—first of all—mix; then what mixture will appeal to the public palate at a particular moment. Those ingredients must be fresh and yet familiar. If they are too fresh they will puzzle: "What's this? Is it nice or nasty? I must ask someone else." A playwright cannot fill His Majesty's night after night if he sets an audience talking to itself like that. On the other hand, if the flavours are too familiar, even if they give pleasure, the public won't be content. They will be uneasy, and when they talk about the entertainment afterwards, before they praise it and say "Go, go", they will endeavour to convey that they are not behind the times, and that there was nothing new in it for them.

The explanation of the reluctance in some quarters to pay due tribute to Mr. Noel Coward's extraordinary cluster of gifts—and to his equally remarkable and sensitive intelligence—is that he so often approaches his themes from a psychological *chef's* point of view when inventing a dish. They overlook that other part of his endowment, his unerring sense of what ingredients will blend—his artistic sensibility.

In *A Conversation Piece* the ingredients are the Regency, Brighton, and a very old appealing situation: the little girl who falls in love with her elderly guardian, he having put aside the idea of winning the heart of youth. It is familiar—far older than *The Professor's Love Story*, but it is a theme on which pretty variations can be played. It is slighter than the theme of *Bitter Sweet*, which was so nicely timed. Then the young were wondering if they had not lost something in scrapping romantic love, and the older generation were quite sure that they had; and the latter had the intense pleasure of saying at *Bitter Sweet*: "Look, that is the way *we* fell in love." It was seldom true, but *Bitter Sweet*

was pertinent criticism of Cupid's latest phase, and Mr. Noel Coward's heart was in it.

In *A Conversation Piece* there is no criticism of modern life. It is a theme for sentimental and visible decoration; it is adroitly taken advantage of. Love between youth and age is never stale. The Regency craze is over, and yet it is not stale. We still like to see women looking like crocuses or elaborate milk-cans; the spectacle is not too familiar or too strange. We all know Brighton, and we all are aware of the "sunny domes" of the Pavilion and of the shades of Prinny and Mrs. Fitzherbert behind the confusion of the asphalt parade. *A Conversation Piece* is a pageant not too familiar and not too fresh; and at His Majesty's it is pretty indeed to watch. The piece is a brilliantly adorned, coloured, sentimental extravaganza. It sends up the spirits, though it is in danger at certain points of moving too slowly.

To test the *ensemble* of scenes and also the breadth of the acting I went again, a second time, to see it from the back of the dress-circle whence those things are better estimated. They passed that test magnificently. And I noticed this, that Mr. Noel Coward's acting had gained in a night or two in assurance and succinctness and authority. He, the elderly guardian and ruined French aristocrat, has a difficult part to play. Composure is its key-note; monotony its danger. He achieves that elegant composure in gesture and movement which is absolutely necessary as a contrast to the *gaminerie* and gaiety of the delicious "Yvonne", whose walk and graceful petulant awkwardness reinforces the child-of-nature note in the words she has to speak.

About the pictures which the play forms continually before our eyes—they are only "anecdote pictures", but they are very agreeable and inspire indeed an astonished pleasure. It is odd—I should

like some day to go into this—a picture which I would not look at on a wall gives me pleasure on the stage. Had I seen a painting which was a facsimile of, say, the tableau of the Regency party in Act II, I would not have given it a second glance, but on the stage it riveted me; perhaps because I knew that in a moment it would vanish and change, and because I was interested in the figures as human beings. Unconsciously in the theatre one applies standards which are different, not purely æsthetic ones. But one scene or rather one item in a scene, the sea-light beyond the sitting-room windows, seen through the graceful iron-work of the balconies of that yellow room, never ceased, even while Mlle Printemps herself was singing, to enter into my total pleasure.

But I must add a word or two about the story; Mr. Noel Coward has sprinkled a little pepper over the sweetness of his dish. In the first place the aristocrat-guardian himself is also an adventurer. He intends to marry a girl he has picked up in a cabaret in France, to a rich Englishman and thus recoup his battered fortunes with a commission on the marriage. The critical observer will not fail to notice the adroitness with which the dramatist has leapt over the common-place after she has declared her love for him. It is a near shave, but the pitfall is just cleared. There is, for instance, the first kiss between them, after which he stumbles blind and miserable to the door; and she—as we anticipated—buries her face in her hands—for love between them means ruin to both. But then, when she raises her face, she suddenly skips into the merriest of triumphant dances! That moment is brilliantly right. It is an example of that quick adroit tact which enables Mr. Coward to be sentimental without being flat. He has, too, one more surprise for us up his sleeve, when we think all is plain sailing.

The scene which struck me as missing its mark was the ballet (for so it is) in the garden, at night, after she has declared her love, and he has become aware that he longs for her and for love; when he knows that he cannot now without pain go on with his scheme of marrying her to the young marquis. The idea of his watching, in agony of mind, the roving lovers in the garden is dramatically right; but to my mind the drama would have been more effectively conveyed had his movements *not* been those of the dancer seeking in a ballet for his lost love, peeping into women's faces and making the dancer's gestures of despair—if he had remained a realistic figure; an elderly man, almost motionless beneath a tree, an outcast in a garden of love.

I cannot criticize the music. The piece is full of pretty, conciliating, titillating airs.

MR. SHAW'S JULIUS CÆSAR

IT IS not likely that Mr. Shaw will find again so admirable an interpreter as Mr. Forbes-Robertson for his Cæsar; among the huge farewell audiences at Drury Lane many must have felt that they had come to bury, not only to praise, him. Mr. Forbes-Robertson's beautiful elocution, his happy air of intellectual aloofness, his easy dignity, his personal distinction, are properties of incalculable value in a play the purpose of which is to exhibit greatness of mind, not at the moments when the hero puts on his crown, but when he is coping good-humouredly with the pettiness of human nature and the inconsequent chaos of events.

I have little dramatic criticism, strictly speaking, to offer this week. What I wish to discuss *à propos* of this most imaginative play is Mr. Shaw's view of great men in general, and in particular his conception of Cæsar. There is, however, this to be said about the Drury Lane performance: that Act III could have been better spared than Scene 1. The long speech of the god Ra was no substitute for Scene 1, which is not only admirable in itself, but serves to familiarize us, before the entrance of Cæsar, with Mr. Shaw's method of handling history. This method is the same as that which has been used with infinitely less point by the author of *The Comic History of England*, and Mark Twain, and consists in rubbing off as much as possible of the *patina* of time from historical characters and revealing the bright modern colour underneath. Up went the curtain, and we heard Cæsar addressing the Sphinx.

The opening passages of this scene are among the most admirable in recent drama—Cæsar's soliloquy and the small voice of the frightened girl, who lies between the Sphinx's paws, answering him. The rhythm of Cæsar's speech is not magical, but how much imagination there is in it, with its fine close: "I am he of whose genius you are the symbol: part brute, part woman, and part god—nothing of man in me at all. Have I guessed your secret, Sphinx?" And how admirable is the sudden modulation into comedy! Mr. Shaw, of course, as a realist philosopher and a child of the comic spirit, must see a hero on the plane of comedy before he will believe in him. To him it is the test of a great man that he should be a hero to his valet, and it is the supreme merit of the play that without the aid of tragedy, poetry, or romance, in the midst of incongruities and laughter, we are made to feel that we are in the presence of a spirit of rare magnanimity and power.

But is this man Cæsar? Mr. Walkley says No; Mr. Massingham says Yes, and suggests with intrepidity that Mr. Walkley has not read Mommsen; even leaving this an open question, I side with Mr. Walkley. I am certain Mr. Shaw's Cæsar is *not* Cæsar. Mr. Shaw is a creator; he understands one kind of human greatness so well that he can make us understand it; but any critic can guess where the bias, inevitable in a creator, lies. From among the facts we know about Cæsar, a critic could prophesy which of them Mr. Shaw would choose as significant, and which he would ignore or flatly disbelieve. Mr. Shaw understands the man who leads men, because his will is identified with what he conceives the purpose of the world or of God; who influences them, tames them, though they sometimes end by tearing him in pieces, because he is detached from the passions which possess them; in whom the light of reason, like the clean cold silver of a moon, is never

clouded or eclipsed. Absolute disinterestedness, perfect courage—there is Bernard Shaw's explanation of human greatness, and he can create characters which suggest that they possess those qualities. Above all, the test of such a man must be: Is his intellect ever beglamoured or his purpose bent by a sense of his own power or by love of women, whether lustful, or passionate, or poetical?

Now in Cæsar we might have been sure that he would emphasize his courage, which was indeed an orient virtue in him, his temperance, so marked that Cato said he was the only man who was sober when he had upset the state, his easy generosity, his exact practicality and his splendid, sensible magnanimity; and we might have counted on Mr. Shaw unifying these qualities by making them characteristics of an ascetic philosopher who was born looking down from an eminence upon the passions of mankind. Certainly no man resolved quicker or spoke clearer, knowing the edge and weight of every word. But such an explanation leaves much that we know about Cæsar incomprehensible.

There is something ethereal, something airy, insubstantial, about the man whom Mr. Forbes-Robertson impersonates which is hard to reconcile with the idea of the superfine extravagance and dandyism of the patrician youth who first gambled for popularity with a recklessness which broke the rules of his caste, while training himself in all the art of persuasion and domination, fomenting conspiracies, corrupting justice, distributing largesse, outbidding all his forerunners in display—an epileptic too, who, like Napoleon, found an outlet for an excess of nervous energy in continual excitement and an expenditure of power which would have left other men prostrate. His pallor and queer discordant voice, which he took such pains to control, have been remembered. I cannot see him as pos-

sessed of a high impartial aim to rule, but rather as filled with a hunger for *gloria*, glory—to make or destroy something great; flowering at last in a prodigious magnificently all-embracing egotism like Louis XIV's, "L'état c'est moi". It is easier to imagine him demonic rather than seraphic; the spirit in him as not so much the clear light of reason as an infernal god who underground

"With Pluto dwells, where gold and fire is found."

Remember he was the man who, with all his magnanimity, outraged the Romans by celebrating his triumph over Pompey as though his victory had been against barbarians, instead of over some of the noblest in Rome. If Mr. Shaw had lifted from Plutarch that speech of Cæsar's to Metellus, who tried to prevent him appropriating the treasury of Saturne—"Thwart me, young man, and I shall kill you; believe me it gives me more pain to say that than it would to do it"—we should have laughed. But the real Cæsar was a terrifying man. Mr. Shaw's Cæsar could terrify the conscience and make people feel miserably small, but I believe Cæsar could make the brutal quake, and that he had the manner of one in whom violent passions are only in check.

Mr. Shaw would have us believe that Cæsar's love affair with Cleopatra was so absurdly trifling that he forgot her existence on leaving Egypt. As a matter of fact, did he not, after that night when the sleek and subtle young queen was smuggled into the palace in a carpet, stay dangerously long? He had come with a half-starved, exhausted army to get fed, and to patch up the quarrel between the Cleopatra and Ptolemy parties, in order to get the tribute owed to Rome by the father of the two rivals. When the Ptolemy party found that the queen had

got at him, they knew the game was up. The Roman soldiers were feeding like locusts on the town. Cæsar was besieged in the palace, and nearly caught; but after he was rescued did he not, in spite of the urgency of his return (in his absence no officers of state except the Tribunes and Ædiles could be elected, and the rabble was out, and ruined men were brooding over the horrors of civil war), in spite of messengers, did he not stay with her two months more?

About a year afterwards he brought her to Rome, and to the scandal of the capital established her and her train in his palace, shocking the pious by setting up her statue in the Temple of Venus, and the Roman citizens by allowing her to call her son Cæsarion. Yet Mr. Shaw makes Cæsar say, when Cleopatra appears as he is stepping into his ship, "Ah! I knew there was something. How could you let me forget her, Rufio?" As far as I can see, this situation is stark fiction without a rag of probability to cover it. Cæsar had a great liking for exotic queens—upon Eunœ, queen of Mauritania, according to Naso, he spent vast sums—and ignoring the more scurrilous gossip of Suetonius, and the distich that his soldiers sung about him at the Gallic triumph, even in the obscurity of a learned language impossible to quote, there is still ample evidence that Cæsar was other than the man he is represented to be in the play. He was stupendous, noble, absolutely courageous, a man of great mind, a man of violent passions and personal ambitions, and extremely firm in understanding. He was different; but what does it matter?

Mr. Shaw has created a great man of another type, not one so likely, perhaps, to have laid down the lines on which the world, being what it was, could be governed for nearly three hundred years, but one well worth contemplating.

CÆSAR AGAIN

MR. SHAW'S article in *The New Statesman* on "Cæsar and Cleopatra" has made me neglect my duties. Instead of attending theatres, I have been haunting the Temple of Clio. It is an awe-inspiring place, and on first crossing the threshold a sense of peace envelops one; it seems so sequestered from the fuss and foibles of the world, so august and vast that hurrying footsteps sound impertinent, and voices raised in dogmatic altercation thin and trivial. "As a tree falls so shall it lie", "God Himself cannot alter the past"; of such absolute and calming sententiousness are the inscriptions upon its walls. But the irreverent cheerfulness of man is irrepressible, and under the last of these someone had scribbled: "but historians can".

That this had been allowed to stand seemed to me to argue a vein of ironic humour in the Muse herself, and with spirits somewhat lightened I sent up my credentials, explaining that I was disputing with Bernard Shaw about the character of Julius Cæsar, and respectfully begged for an interview. The answer, more considerately worded, was to the effect that the Muse of History herself could not possibly see anyone who had merely pecked about in the past like a sparrow; but that any of her secretaries were at my disposal. This depressed me, for, in spite of the uninviting dangers of the enterprise, I was set upon metagrabolizing Mr. Shaw, and how could I do this except as an historian? He would not listen to my arguments as a commentator on human nature, for as a theatrical critic I was out of court.

Now, it is perfectly true that if a dramatic critic met (on certain occasions) "Mahomet or Cæsar in the flesh" he might "put him down as a cold ascetic"; but so might Mr. Shaw! Anybody might make that error. The question under discussion is this: if the subject of a play is the love affair between Cleopatra and Cæsar, ought not *something* to transpire which would prevent even dramatic critics from making in this case that particular mistake?

Mommsen (whom I think Mr. Shaw follows too trustingly), even Mommsen, in one of his moments of professorial skittishness, writes: "the beautiful and clever Cleopatra was not sparing of her charms in general, and least of all towards her judge; Cæsar also appeared among all his victories to value most those won over beautiful women". Now, "value most" is going a great deal further than I want to go —it seems to me ridiculous; but in a "Chronicle Play" to put in Cæsar's mouth those parting words "Ah! I knew there was something. How could you let me forget her, Rufio?" seems as wrong in the opposite direction.

But, says Mr. Shaw, with irrefutable truth, the very first consideration to anyone dealing dramatically with this story of Cæsar and Cleopatra must be to distinguish it from that of Antony and Cleopatra. Certainly, even supposing Cæsar did stay dangerously long with Cleopatra, he did not, at any rate—

Vit dans ses larges yeux étoilés de points d'or
Toute une mer immense où fuyaient des galères.

And as I write commonsense whispers to me: "Shaw, as usual, has got hold of the absolutely vital point right enough. You're a fool to go on hacking and pecking at his work."

But then I remember the play itself—one of the

first, and in some respects the very best, of modern historical plays; I remember the homage which is due to the patroness of such plays, the Muse of History; I remember the entirely pedagogic nature of the relation between the statesman and the queen as it is represented in the play, and it seems worth pointing out that, if the case of Cæsar and Cleopatra must be sharply distinguished from that of Antony and his "Egypt", it must also be differentiated from that of Lord Melbourne and Queen Victoria.

In my first article I said that Cæsar stayed too long in Egypt—probably for Cleopatra's sake. Mr. Shaw replies that "Cæsar did not think it too long, and that, as the upshot proved, he was right". Now this is a way of saying Cæsar and Mr. MacCarthy differ about what Cæsar ought to have done 47 B.C.; Cæsar came home, dominated Rome, and proceeded in three years to lay down the lines on which the world was to be governed for three centuries—who in this matter do you think likely to be right? But this is not really fair. The fact is that Cæsar stayed away for an unconscionable time, leaving Italy in a state of ruinous misery and confusion to the mercies of Antony and Dolabella. And it must be remembered that in a sense Cæsar failed; the hatred and mistrust of his enemies were too strong for him, and he left his work chaotic, unfinished. It was the little unlaurelled heads working under Augustus, who made the Roman Empire.

Mr. Shaw's conception of Cæsar's character forbids him to admit for a moment that Cæsar could have been deflected from the sanest, most practical course by imagination, passion, or pleasure. It forces him to postulate that Cæsar did not send afterwards for Cleopatra, but that, like Anne chasing Tanner, she pursued him to Rome. He calls on me to prostrate myself before his picture of a character "that abhors waste and murder, and is, in the most ac-

curate sense of the word, a kind character". I do; I knock my forehead three times upon the ground at the feet of the artist; but I cannot believe this man in whom the abhorrence of waste and passion for order were the ruling passions is Julius Cæsar.

Mr. Shaw did not take my point about the effect of transferring Cæsar's words to Metellus to the mouth of his own Cæsar. I did not object to his Cæsar because he was "squeamish about killing people" (though I think the real Cæsar tended, like a Mahomedan, to be magnanimous only to his own people, and that Mr. Shaw has made his clemency too philosophical and modern), but to the absence of a terrifying quality in the Cæsar of the play which sounds in those words to Metellus, "Thwart me, young man, and I shall kill you. *Believe me, it gives me more pain to say that than it would to do it.*" I thought this a good point, because in a way that speech is so like Mr. Shaw's Cæsar, and yet—I felt he had not the fuliginous force in him to carry off its grimness. It seems to suit better the lips of a man in whom the black passion of personal domination was at least as marked as practical reason. And that is the passion which I read in Cæsar's career.

His ambition coincided to a large extent with the necessities of the world; but the driving force in him was not so much a love of reason and order as the desire of the unscrupulous adventurer for glory in the Roman sense—the desire to make or destroy something great, of one who sat down to gamble at the table of Rome, where *rouge* and *noir* were the democratic and aristocratic parties, staking now on one and now on the other. Mr. Bernard Shaw sees in Julius Cæsar only certain qualities because he takes a particular view of greatness. He believes that disinterested courage and reason are the real forces before which men and institutions go down. I am sure that is the secret of some great men's influence,

but I do not see that the world responds most to these qualities. Great men have been of all shapes and sizes, and the plungers, the colossal egotists, who go so far because they do not know where they are going, seem to me to have drawn even more men irresistibly after them.

If that is true, it is a reason for being a republican rather than a Cæsarean, in the past, now, and for ever.

ST. JOAN. I

ST. JOAN is a play of many and splendid merits. It is immensely serious and extremely entertaining; it is a magnificent effort of intellectual energy and full of pathos and sympathy. It is long but it never flags. It is deep, and I am by no means sure that I have got, or that I am going to get, to the bottom of it. It is a play it would be disgraceful to treat inadequately—I shall return to it next week. Now, I intend to make only a few preliminary remarks. We are lifted on waves of emotion to be dashed on thought. Only a languid mind could fail to find in it intellectual excitement; only a very carefully protected sensibility could escape being touched and disturbed—but I must add a proviso to that. The theme of the play is religion; therefore to be touched and disturbed by it in any appreciable degree, the spectator, some or other, must have experienced religious emotions himself; and further, having done so, he must not loathe them as some people loathe amorous emotions after having been dipped in them. He may distrust religious emotion, he may dislike exceedingly many of its manifestations (as, indeed, I do myself), but he must know what kind of a feeling it is, and how it can draw and drag at the heart; otherwise he will neither apprehend the play as a whole, nor feel the force of its most dramatic moments.

Of course much remains which a spectator who lacked such experience could and would enjoy; but *St Joan* is not a chronicle play. It is not primarily historic but religious drama. Mr Shaw, needless to

say, has a very powerful and dramatic imagination, but the historic side of it is not the strongest. Has he a love of the past? I believe he would scout the idea; the question would seem to him like asking if he had a love of bric-a-brac. I do not believe he cares a dump for things that are dead, gone and changed. The first thing he invariably does when his setting is in the past, is to rub the patina of time off his period (vide *Caesar and Cleopatra*). He will scrub at it till contemporary life begins to gleam through its surface unfamiliarity. He is confident that he has reached historic truth only when he has succeeded in scratching historic characters till he finds, beneath, the modern man in fancy dress. He is careful of historic facts in this play; he never introduces anything equivalent to making Cleopatra play billiards. But the play is full of spiritual anachronisms. The atmosphere is not that of the Middle Ages. Let me give some examples: when Joan is told that her voices are the work of her imagination, she replies, "God speaks to us through our imaginations." No idea could be more foreign to the Middle Ages than that, or more typical of the latest modern religious "heresy" of which Mr Shaw himself is the exponent. Again, the Earl of Warwick is a purely eighteenth century nobleman; he is not even a Renaissance character. I think he is closely related to General Burgoyne. That delightful study of a common English type, Warwick's clerical secretary, is brother of our old friend Britanicus—also of our Bishop of London, and many a shell-making patriotic parson. But does all this matter? To my mind not a bit. It merely substitutes another kind of interest and one closer to the emotions of the majority of people.

Mr Shaw would jump at the definition of his St Joan as "a modern heretic". I can fancy him saying, "In trying to pick a hole in my work you

have blundered on my central point": I know I have. Twice in the course of the play Joan is defined as "a Protestant". The essence of Protestantism is that the authority of the individual's religious experience is final for him. No matter if disagreement and chaos result, it is the highest duty of everyone to obey, like Joan, his "Voices". He must listen attentively; he must live so as to sharpen his hearing; but when he is sure of what those voices say, he must obey. God does not speak through tradition or organized religions, according to the Protestant, but is resident in the hearts and minds of men. In fact what we call our hearts, our minds, are, according to Mr Shaw, God Himself; a baffled, disturbed, struggling but emerging force, and—here lies the consoling and sustaining power of this creed—a force necessarily triumphant in the end. The confusion of voices does not matter; confusion is inevitable. In so far as the voices are genuine they are efforts, some perhaps futile, of the Spirit of the Universe to find a way for itself. The first duty of man is to make himself a channel for that Spirit's passage. If he does, he is a "saint"; and though he may be burned, he will exercise strange power over even those who burn or mock him. What is the test of the "genuine" saints? That is the crux. Organized religions say—we and our traditions. The test of the statesman is, do these saints or do they not threaten the social order; of the people, are they against our tyrants; of the nationalist, do they inspire patriotism; of the soldier, do they make for victory; of the Gallios, do they produce happiness and peace?

The Church is prepared to canonize Joan once her dynamic and disruptive force has spent itself or been destroyed. The fairer of its spokesmen were prepared to admit at the time, even as they condemned her, that she might be better and more

religious than themselves. The statesman readily admits that she is far from ignoble; the soldier that she alone could put the right spirit into fighting-men, and they were ready to use her as long as desperate courage was a means to victory. *But none of these different men wanted her back.*

In the play Joan, or rather the spirit within her, is shown in conflict with each of these powers and different points of view, and this is the essence of it. I must repeat Joan is not primarily an historical play. It is, of course, the tragedy of Joan herself as well, of a real girl whom we see before our eyes, who did the things we hear of on the stage, who triumphed, failed and was burnt. But its central theme is wider, and is the struggle down the ages of religious inspiration against the world which, Mr Shaw would assert, was always essentially the same struggle, whether the world's antagonist is Jesus, Joan, Huss, Galileo, or one among many lesser men and women. It is a struggle which can never be completely won and never lost. The spiritual and intellectual anachronisms in the play are therefore in a sense merits, for they help to generalize the case. The last words are the cry of Joan when she appears after death to the King in a dream, after each of her different opponents have acknowledged in turn the beneficence of her inspiration, while willing that she shall not return to earth again: "O God, when will your world be fit for saints to live in." She is still as alone in spite of those tributes as she was in her defeat; as alone as she was, despite appearances, in her brief moments of victory.

The intellectual merit of this play lies in the force and fairness with which it allows her opponents to put their case; and the clarity with which each of them states his own, enables us to see instantaneously where he stands in relation to the

religious instinct. One of Mr Shaw's striking gifts has always been this rare generosity. It is odd, but he has never drawn a wicked character—plenty of characters who do wicked things, but not one wicked man. He has never believed in the devil, only in blindness, inertia and stupidity; faults so widely spread that he makes it seem a failure of common sense on our part to distinguish particular people by any special abhorrence.

The other extraordinary merit of the play is the intensity of its religious emotion and the grasp the dramatist shows of the human pathos of one who is filled with it, a pathos which does not ask for pity. It is probably, I think, the greatest of Shaw's plays. How these qualities were brought out, how the dramatist put his theme in perspective and how his intentions were interpreted I will discuss next week.

ST. JOAN. II

THERE is no longer any doubt about the reception of this play. Last week I reserved all discussion of its dramatic qualities and of the acting, and confined myself to an exposition of its theme. One point, however, I must repeat before adding further comments. The object of the play is to show Joan, or rather the spirit within her, in conflict with those who first make use of her and then destroy her; and although the tragedy we watch is that of a girl who bears a close resemblance to the real saint (though it is not hard to imagine a closer), the aim of the play is not the re-creation of a figure from the past, nor is its primary aim to move us to pity. The epilogue, to which several dramatic critics have objected, shows that the theme is the struggle of religious inspiration against the Churchman, the patriot, the statesman and the indifferent person—above all, against the Catholic Church, the strongest of established religions. The play can be described as an exceedingly powerful Protestant pamphlet, since the essence of Protestantism lies in reliance upon internal authority (Joan's faith in her Voices) against the authority of tradition and of a corporate religion also claiming inspiration.

Mr. Shaw states with admirable fairness the case of the Church through the mouths of the Bishop of Beauvais (well acted by Mr. Eugene Leahy), the Inquisitor and the Archbishop of Rheims (Mr. Robert Cunningham's ecclesiastical aplomb and deportment are perfect). Although the spectacle of the heresy-hunters in the trial scene is painful and

odious in the last degree, and the gentleness of the Inquisitor's address contributes a peculiarly sinister element, both the speeches of the Bishop and the Inquisitor make it quite clear that neither is actuated by cruelty. The Church itself is at stake in this argument, and Joan must submit. The impulse of the sceptic is to shout "Then so much the worse for the Church. If it can only preserve itself by torturing and burning a girl like Joan, let it crumble and fall." But, as both the Bishop and Inquisitor assert, then much worse barbarities, let alone utter confusion, would be let loose on the world. Mr. Shaw presents their case, but because the atmosphere of the play itself does not recall vividly that of the Middle Ages, its strength is hardly felt by the spectators.

The mad credulity of the times is, it is true, just suggested by the ease with which, in the first scene, the Sire de Baudricourt is convinced that Joan is inspired; that the hens should begin to lay eggs as soon as he has granted her request to send her to the Dauphin is a proof to him that her Voices must be from God. In Scene 2 her instant recognition of the Dauphin among strangers, and in Scene 3 by the bank of the Loire, a sudden wished-for change of wind, has the same convincing effect on others. What more, you may say, could Mr. Shaw do in the short time allowed on the stage?

But the effect of these incidents in the creation of atmosphere is neutralized by his own peculiar dramatic method of making each character speak with self-conscious awareness of the orientation of his own point of view, which is utterly foreign to the times. The method has enormous advantages, but here it has that drawback. Further, none of these easily accepted miracles suggested by their nature the vital importance of holding the fort of authority against heretics—they are harmless. To reinforce

emotionally (intellectually Mr. Shaw has done the Church ample justice) the case of Joan's persecutors, we should have been reminded of some of the horrors and absurdities which in the Middle Ages "inspired" men and women were perpetually sacrificing their lives to propagate. Not many years after Joan's execution Gilles de Rais (he appears in Scene 2), under whose special protection the Maid was placed, and who had won the name of a knight without fear or reproach, was attempting to get into touch with super-natural powers by cutting out the hearts of innumerable children.

In the trial scene we are reminded by the speeches that the Church is engaged in a life and death struggle with paganism, witchcraft and the State; only, alas, what has gone before has not made what was at stake as vivid as it might be. The one point, however, at which a definitely false note was struck was the moment when Joan recanted her recantation. Her submission when faced with death is very moving, but when her sentence is changed to imprisonment for life she bursts out into a speech about nature and freedom, the hills and the sky. This speech is a false note; to Joan the Mass and the Church were infinitely more important than lambs, larks and communion with nature. Mr. Shaw has made her out more of a Wordsworthian Protestant than any facts warrant. Her speech, too, lacks that verbal beauty which alone could make it dramatically moving. The substance of poetry is often present in Mr. Shaw's work (*vide* Scene 3, the kingfisher, the boy and the general), but verbal magic never.

The most admirable and perfect scenes in the play are the two which immediately precede the trial scene, magnificent as that is, in spite of this one false note. They are discussions or conversations; and they are splendid examples of the truth

that such scenes can contribute to dramatic effect as directly as scenes of action. Without them the trial scene would lose half its significance. In the first of these in the Earl of Warwick's tent, the Earl and the Bishop of Beauvais decide the Maid's fate between them. They agree, but their reasons for agreeing are bitterly antagonistic, while the all-too-simple patriotic Englishman, Chaplain de Stogumber, acts as a foil to these two subtle minds. The Bishop sees that Joan has begun to act independently of the authority of the Church; the statesman that her mystic devotion to the King is a political heresy dangerous to the aristocracy, the real rulers of the land. If the land belongs to the King, and the King is to give it to God and hold it for Him, where will the great landowners come in? At the bottom of the Maid's religious nationalism lay an appeal equivalent to "The Land for the People". In Scene 5, in the ambulatory of Rheims Cathedral, after the coronation of the Dauphin, we see the Maid among her friends, soon to become her passive enemies. The archbishop reproves her for independent pride, for she is no longer the submissive daughter of the Church; the King wants to make a treaty with the English (God's enemies in Joan's eyes); the general, Dunois (Bastard of Orleans), explains to her that he knows exactly how much of their own joint success has been due to her miraculous aid and how much to his own generalship. If she persists in rashly moving on Paris in obedience to her Voices, he will not risk a single soldier's life to help her—or to save her in defeat. The time for reckless courage, he explains, is over; he is grateful and admires her as a soldier, but she must be put aside as an instrument which has served its purpose.

We know what is going to happen, the tragedy to come, and there is therefore a fine Greek irony in these scenes, beside their being so effective in bring-

ing out the play's theme—the conflict between religious emotion and the world.

In the latter scene Miss Sybil Thorndike is at her best. She is an actress with a very definite personality. It is difficult to judge, after seeing her, what latitude of interpretation her part actually allows. All that can be said is that her personality emphasizes the energetic, almost pert traits in the Maid as Mr. Shaw conceives her. Some of the critics and some of the public have refused to accept a Joan who calls the Dauphin "Charlie", and stands in so little awe of that semi-sacred personage. Still there is an excuse for this exaggeration. We know that the Maid theed and thoued the Dauphin and addressed him as *gentil Dauphin*, but whether these peasant phrases and "angelic familiarities" expressed the attitude of mind which Mr. Shaw suggests, is highly doubtful. Still in any case his paraphrases do convey what he wanted to convey, fearlessness and complete disregard of worldly favours and ceremonies on the part of one filled with a divine mission. That the Maid sometimes answered her accusers tartly is a fact, and Miss Thorndike does so most effectively; but the sweetness and simplicity of the Maid's replies and demeanour, legible in the records of the trial, she fails to bring out. Joan's distress, her alertness, her courage, she drives home, but whether the fault lies in the part or in the interpretation, certainly "the angelic side" of the Maid is obscured. Mr. Shaw is always so anxious that our response to beauty of character should be as ascetic as possible, that I am inclined to lay the blame on him in the first place, but there is no doubt that Miss Thorndike's performance stresses this aversion to anything which might move us first by its loveliness, and only afterwards by its significance.

RICHARD AND MR. GIELGUD

RICHARD OF BORDEAUX is a play that prompts description rather than reflection. It has been, is, and is likely to continue to be, one of the most popular spectacles in London. The ingredients of its success are simple: a changing feast for the eye; Mr. John Gielgud's most attractive and arresting acting; a seriousness which is easy to assimilate. It is the sort of play which makes one wish one was a boy again. I could not help thinking how much more I should have enjoyed it at an age when I was so lost in any stage-scene that I never noticed whether dialogue was up to situation, nor, so long as the costumes were in keeping, whether the spirit of the period informed the whole play; when, in short, my imagination was "Shakespearian" with regard to the past, and anachronisms did not bother me.

As a matter of fact, the dialogue is very inferior to the dramatist's sense of situation. Gordon Daviot's conception of a situation is frequently dramatic, but (with the exception of Richard II himself) the words her characters utter never more than indicate with crude emphasis what she intends each of them to stand for. She has learnt a good deal from the methods of *St. Joan*, but she cannot, like Mr. Shaw, make her characters speak out of themselves or utter their minds with real cogency and point. This is particularly noticeable with the patriotic fire-eaters, Gloucester and Arundel, and in the debate on peace and war.

Gordon Daviot is after something interesting

in the case of "old John of Gaunt, time-honoured Lancaster", but the personality of that powerful nobleman remains not only elusive, which would not matter, but indistinct, which does. Lancaster is civilized enough to prefer his nephew to his son, the future Henry IV—we see that; but though it is obviously he who is steering Richard we never catch sight of his motives. Compare him, for example, with Warwick in *St. Joan* in this respect.

However, the dramatist has *not* failed us so far as the main character, Richard himself, is concerned. It is Richard (though in his relation to his wife he is feebly sentimentalized) who holds the play together. And what is more, Richard's character, as Miss Daviot has developed it, has the theatrical merit of giving Mr. Gielgud opportunities of acting several men in one part: Richard II, as a generous, wayward, pleasure-loving, peace-loving youth, the victim and beneficiary of an artistic temperament—running in his case too much in the direction of finery and display; Richard II, as the self-indulgent and suspicious King, capable of any duplicity and gradually turning into an erratic tyrant—though tyranny is foreign to his nature; and, lastly, Richard II, pathetic and dignified in his fall.

In Richard's first phase it is easy for an actor to please the majority, provided he has Mr. Gielgud's attractive personality, though the more exacting may be bored by an exhibition of conventional high spirits, temper, tenderness and charm. In the second, and in the third phase, Mr. Gielgud is more certain of pleasing both types of playgoer. Up to the quarrel between Mowbray and Bolingbroke Mr. Gielgud's acting is plausible and graceful. In that scene, and thenceforward, however, Mr. Gielgud was remarkable; he achieved something more striking than a handsome presence and a

sympathetic airy carelessness. In the scene we watch a Richard who has tasted blood as an autocrat and rather likes its salt flavour, and in whom the slow poison of suspicion has begun to work. There was a morbid, feline elegance about his bearing and careful movements. His expression had lost its frank gaiety and became foxy—hunted. The handsome youth, only capable of inspiring either tenderness or contempt, accordingly as he was judged as a companion or as a leader of a country in arms, had changed into a selfish, disillusioned man at bay, though for the moment victoriously at bay.

The Richard before our eyes was now a bitter artist who had lost the desire to share delightful things; the affectionate, effusive, festive youth had become one who had no longer faith in friends, but trusted only to "two thousand archers paid regularly every Friday". It was this transformation, imaginatively conceived by the dramatist and imaginatively interpreted by the actor, which animated what would have otherwise been a mere spectacle—true a fine one—and held it together. (The designers both of costumes and scenery, Mr. Motley and Mr. Harry Henby, deserve high praise.)

Mr. Gielgud acted Richard in the last phase with laudable restraint, never allowing pathos to sink into lachrymose sentiment, nor the tenderness of Richard's farewell to his page, Maudelyn, to justify that rather unfortunate surname. His aspect and attitudes during the last scene in the cold, high, dusky chamber of the Tower, where Bolingbroke and the Archbishop compelled him to sign his abdication, were striking. To look at once distinguished and crushed, to behave like a true man of sorrows and yet be savagely ironical, is not an easy task for an actor. Mr. Gielgud triumphed,

and with an economy of gesture that excited my admiration.

In my opinion he is now the first of English actors. It is far from being an age of great acting, but the range of his emotional scope, and the intelligence with which he conceives his parts, put him right at the top of his profession. He combines the histrionic temperament with interpretative intelligence; that is rare. Now his temptations will begin. He has the power to charm large audiences. Will he choose only plays which delight them? Apart from the character of Richard I think this play a poor one.

Miss Gwen Ffrangçon-Davies has won praise in her part of Anne of Bohemia, Richard's first queen. She deserves every word of the praise that has been given her; but what an empty little part it is! Anne is only a winning, pretty nonentity, and we are treated to the display of marital relations more than three years old, which are indistinguishable from idealized courtship.

Mr. Reyner Barton played the part of the Archbishop well, and Mr. Francis Lister, in the scene in which, as Robert de Vere Earl of Oxford, he has to confess that he ran away in battle, put a degree of unexaggerated miserable emotion that made the scene affecting. As the gay poet-courtier he was given nothing entertaining to say—alas!

AN HISTORICAL PLAY

HISTORICAL? What does it matter whether Gordon Daviot's portrait of Mary Queen of Scots is historical or not, as long as her conception of Mary's character holds together and is roughly consistent with events, many of which are ambiguous and most of which are unknown to those who watch the play? It bothers me because, like others, I have my own conception of Mary. Gordon Daviot's would have exasperated Swinburne less than Mr. Maurice Baring, her latest chronicler (see *In my End is my Beginning*), but the poet would have found Miss Ffrangçon-Davies lamentably unheroic —very little trace of the woman who on the way to the field of Corrichie uttered "the wish to be a man that she might know all the hardship and all the enjoyment of a soldier's life, riding forth in jack and knapscull—the woman who long afterwards was to hold her own for two days together without help of counsel against all the array of English law and English statesmanship, armed with irrefragable evidence and supported by the resentment of a nation". Yet in one respect Swinburne would have been satisfied; there is no doubt in the dramatist's mind that it was not terror but passion that drove her to Bothwell.

> . . . Some faults the gods will give, to fetter
> Man's highest intent:
> But surely you were something better
> Than innocent!
> No maid that strays with steps unwary
> Through snares unseen,

But one to live and die for; Mary,
The Queen.

One of the best contemporary accounts of her is that written by Knollys to Cecil. It is a panegyric, it enlarges (I am condensing from Swinburne) on her indifference to form and ceremony, her daring grace and openness of manner, the frankness of her desire to be avenged on her enemies, her readiness for the sake of victory to expose herself to any peril, her adoration of courage in others, her respect for valiant opponents, her contempt for cowardice in her friends, and, too, for wealth and pleasant things compared with victory. It is extremely doubtful whether such a panegyric did her service as far as the English minister was concerned. For what was to be done with such a princess?

Now in the play at the New Theatre some of these traits are certainly reflected in the dialogue and in Miss Ffrangçon-Davies's acting. But the heroic tincture of such a combination of qualities is absent. It is noteworthy, however, that almost the best moment in her skilful and delightful performance was the moment when Mary shows an unmistakable flare of courage, though it takes the form of trickery—the few minutes after the murder of Rizzio when she shams an hysterical faint to avoid signing the pardon of his murderers. That was a moment of acting, superbly well achieved by Miss Ffrangçon-Davies. And while I am at this point I should like to say a word of praise of Mr. George Howe's Rizzio, whose acting seems to have escaped the notice of most critics. He conveyed perfectly in that small part the sensitiveness, softness and wiliness combined with devotion which were calculated to exasperate most the hardy ruffians by whom the Queen was surrounded.

The part of Bothwell is played with sound

ability by Mr. Laurence Olivier, but granted a certain physical formidableness it is not a hard one to play. That of Darnley, reckless, exacting, hysterical and superficially charming, is a good deal more difficult to manage. Mr. Glen Byam Shaw's appearance is particularly suited to the part. He possesses grace and vitality, but he struck me as over-acting in the last scene of Act II, and at his best when all that was required of him was to lie, an apprehensive invalid, in bed, or in that gay return before his marriage with Mary from their expedition incognito into the streets of Edinburgh. The part of Lethington is, if we except that of Mary herself, the most striking role in the play and the one drawn by the dramatist with the most certain touch. I was not completely satisfied, however, with the mincing articulation by means of which Mr. Campbell Gullan strove to suggest an untrustworthy and cynical detachment which proved much more consistent with loyalty, though it pretended to no such virtue, than the lip-service of her other councillors. The dramatist has made very little of the part of the Earl of Moray, who appears on the stage a much more colourless person than he was in fact, and gives Mr. Felix Aylmer scanty opportunities of making himself felt.

Practically all our pleasure in the play, with the exception of that one sinister moment, Darnley's last on earth, when the Queen has said good-night to him, and Taylor is reading the Bible to him, centres upon watching Miss Ffrangçon-Davies, and her performance is of sufficient excellence, quite apart from its historical accuracy, to ensure success. Her alluring grace, her petulant assumption of dignity, her evident sensibility and response to all that is graceful and playful in manners, the fluttering and impulsive tenderness with which she clings to Bothwell as the firmest stake round which

her tendrils can climb, all these elements in the part, and they are the ingredients of which it is composed, she interpreted with feeling and graceful adroitness.

The play, apart from being an exhibition of Mary's character so conceived, can hardly be described as a good one. The first scene of the first Act is completely commonplace, and the play ends in a sentimental whimper, a scene in a rustic cottage where Mary has taken refuge in her flight towards England. The woman who shelters her is the girl who on her arrival at Leith in the opening scene had comforted her for her chilly and boorish reception by plucking for her the first rose of Scotland's spring.

The comic relief is effectively timed, as is proved by the delight with which the audience hailed it, but it is not by any means of the first quality.

MELODRAMA AND MEDIUMS

THE MURDER which preceded the events in this play (I am speaking of *The Thirteenth Chair*) must have excited sensation in New York. Clearly the victim was not a popular man, but he was a man of some wealth and social importance. He had been found stabbed between the shoulders. Why? By whom? Nobody knew. His friend, Edward Wales, was ready enough to admit the dead man had had his faults, but he was determined not to let the matter rest there. As the incidents of an exciting evening were unfolded before us it became obvious that Mr. Wales, together with the police, had been quickly following up a clue. Indeed, when he put in an appearance at Mr. and Mrs. Crosby's party, he must have been almost certain he was on the right trail; and it was with the object of testing an already strong suspicion that he had suggested that the evening should be diversified by a spiritualistic séance.

He suspected that the murderer would be one of the guests. He expected that the guilty one, unstrung by the darkness and the "psychic atmosphere" of such proceedings, would be betrayed into confirming their suspicions. He introduced the medium himself, and with the knowledge of the police (so it appeared subsequently) he had arranged beforehand to ask her a series of questions which she was to answer in the approved manner of one speaking as a voice from beyond the grave—viz., with groans, gasps and distressful contortions. He would reiterate in the thrilled darkness, "Who killed

Stephen Lee?" and finally she was to answer, "Helen".

But things turned out very differently. There were two women named "Helen" present, and one of them was the lady medium's own daughter. She has never expected to meet her daughter there, for, thinking the girl would have a better social career on her own, she had for some time past held little communication with her. Of course, now it was quite impossible to get Mme La Grange to utter the name "Helen", trance or no trance; and more and more urgent interrogations were suddenly stopped by a horrid cry! What had happened? Someone touched the quick light. There lay Edward Wales, dead, with the same kind of wound between his shoulder-blades as had marked the body of his friend!

Who had done it? The murderer who was afraid of the first crime being divulged, of course. From this point onwards the fun lies in guessing which of the guests is guilty. It must be one of them, for the doors were locked. I must say they all behaved very well. I cannot imagine a murder at an evening party being taken, I will not say in better part, but with more philosophy. Indeed, my only criticism of the production is that the *sang-froid* of the assembly is a little overdone. Mr. Crosby's perturbation as host, though not very pronounced, stood out against the background of composed faces to the extent of inducing me to put my money on him. I am not going to spoil sport to the point of revealing the true culprit, but I will tell you so much at any rate, that I lost. This is the moment to begin laying bets. It is a high compliment to the play that odds can be given and taken all through the second act and nearly to the end of the third, by which time, of course, the number in the running necessarily begins to get rather small.

Dramatically, the most important figure is

Mme La Grange, excellently played by Mrs. Patrick Campbell. Every theatregoer knows how admirable she is as the instinctive, quick-witted woman on the defence, and also the unrivalled melodiousness of her moans. Here both these talents have scope. As a medium in trance her primordial groans are thrilling; as a desperate mother defending her child against the detective, the energy of her expostulations, reasonable and unreasonable, is the making of those scenes—such as they are.

Madame La Grange is rather an interesting study of a superior specimen of that sly and sloppy class of people, inventors of electric belts and other dubious remedies, palmists, necromancers, alcove prophets of all sorts, who live precariously on fickle human credulity. She is mistress of the tricks of the trade; an adept at producing raps, getting her hands free in the dark, lifting tables and speaking in different voices. But at the back of her mind, though she knows and admits (on occasion and to the proper sort of people) that she cheats right and left, lies a feeling that she is also really the repository of mysterious quasi-sacred powers. This is a very common belief among fraudulent spiritualists. I would not give a fig for the success of one who had not got it, any more than for the prospects of a swindling company promoter who had not in his composition a considerable share of his gull's credulous optimism. Deep must call unto deep. Whatever evidence may exist in particular cases that this uncomprehended power is resident in them, it is certain that they themselves are untrustworthy witnesses to its scope. In the first place they are seldom people capable of putting to themselves and keeping distinct the two questions on which investigation depends: *What* is it that is happening? *Why* is it happening? And in

the second there is an enormous motive pushing them towards exaggeration and mystification: their self-respect depends upon their making the very most of their powers to themselves.

Walking home through the empty streets, under "a hunter's moon", I recalled from years ago my one experience of a professional séance. It was expensive (one guinea), high-class and dismal. I remembered my hostess, her lemonade in sticky pink glasses, her grubby little drawing-room, and that she gave me on parting a poem she had written, printed in gold on a piece of cardboard. Only one line came back to me now—something about "things terrene". As the inquiring, and possibly sceptical, stranger in a circle of adepts, I was deputed to tie up the medium. It is difficult to secure to a cane-bottomed chair with red tape a stout and passive lady. I saw it was hopeless. I decided to leave her considerable freedom. She had vacant grey eyes that instinctively sought the cornice of the ceiling. My treatment of her wrists was so perfunctory that for a moment her eyes fluttered down to mine; then sought the cornice again. It was only for an instant, yet something passed between us with that glance. These people are very "psychic". The curtains were drawn over the bay window in which she sat; all lights save a photographer's red lamp at the other end of the room were extinguished; we joined hands to make the magic circle.

Almost immediately hoarse sounds like those a man may make in a cold bath, "Ah, oo, ouf, ouf", proceeded from behind the curtains. These were followed by words spoken in a feminine voice, which had nevertheless about it a certain tang or roughness suggestive of the sea. "It's the Captain; her control," whispered my neighbour, "he's come very quickly to-night."

White things (declared to be hands) appeared rather surprisingly high up among the curtains, and members of the circle began to cry out excitedly that someone had slapped or touched them. The Captain was interrogated regarding dead relatives, who sent messages through him saying they were very happy. Then several voices begged him to arrange a materialization. He was rather grumpy about it, saying it was very difficult; but to my delight soon afterwards a little ghost appeared. It was about the size of a child of eight, and it came into the circle, and stood, I should think, about a yard and a half from the curtain. The room was almost dark, so I could not see round it. It was dressed rather like a nun, in black, with wavy flimsy white drapery just visible. It answered to the name of "Julie", and it knew all about the little dead daughter of a stout gentleman with a waxed moustache, whom I had noticed before the lights went out, sitting apathetic and disconsolate. I had been told he was a constant attendant.

One thing disappointed me. There was a ghost a foot or two off me and not a hair on my head was standing on end! I asked if I might catch hold of the apparition. "If you do, you will kill the medium", I was told. "It is made out of particles of her body." I was in two minds whether or not to risk it, but then remembered that the hand I held in mine on one side was her daughter's, a girl whose manner had that pathetic, over-sweet shyness which often proceeds from a chronic state of shame; and the idea of a scene became painful to me. "Julie" proved to be a mine of vague information. Then she disappeared, not instantaneously but quickly, and the séance was over. Everybody declared it was one of the most marvellous they had ever had. I felt sick and sorry; I felt I should like to walk fast through a wind.

And now, walking the streets, years afterwards and remembering all this, I looked up at the stars. How infinitely preferable seemed the universe as science and reason tend to conceive it! Emerging into that universe out of a conception of the world in which the marvellous supernatural is cherished, however mean its manifestation, and the intelligible not only accounted uninteresting and "terrene", however wonderful, but feared, was like stepping out of a dark, damp, rank-smelling bathing machine into the sea. "The Captain" no doubt had put off the corruptible and was now immortal, and little "Julie" would be no nearer the end of her somewhat trivial existence, nine hundred billion million quadrillion eons hence, than she was the day she was born. This did not seem to me to make the world more beautiful or life more noble or tolerable.

Let us investigate by all means, but if the evidence turns out to be shaky, how anybody can be distressed . . . ! "O death, where is thy sting?"

I remembered the answer of a friend of mine, "Up Mrs. Piper's sleeve".

FEAR AND FUN

THOUGH on occasion I have humbly regretted my timidity, on the whole I have got a great deal of fun out of my nerves. He who has a strong admixture of practical timidity in his composition, can enjoy the sensation of hair-breadth escapes without running any commensurate risk. Since boyhood I have been fond of taking my life in my hands, when a sound judgment of chances told me I had quite a firm grip of it. But precipices no longer allure me; what in romantic youth I called "a bit of rock-work" has now to be very easy to be tempting. Still, in other ways I occasionally seek the stimulus of a slight alarm. Abroad, at night, in strange towns, I like to lose my way among streets I fondly fancy to be sinister.

Venice, for instance, is a city in which, on foot, it is at once easy and exciting to lose completely one's sense of direction. Those black, silent canals, with here and there an old lamp throwing golden spikes into the darkness and revealing a yard or two of grim, wet, ancient wall; those pitch-black, cobwebbed, prison gratings; the violent altercations sometimes overheard while passing a little glowing curtained window (on the unaccustomed attention of a belated solitary a yelping cry will suddenly strike like the flash of a knife)—they all help to make it an excellent city for cerebral adventures, when at last the narrow, paved passages are unfrequented and distant footsteps can be heard.

I have had a good walk of this kind, too, in Derry (prepared by warnings) after a three days'

civil war had settled down into a suspicious armistice.

Paris, late on a hard moonlit night, is also good for this purpose if you wander into those purlieus of high band-box buildings, uncomfortable weedy building lots, and long, empty streets. The flat façades are fast asleep; the green shutters will be flung back too late. Thus the approach of some bloused or small black, crooked figure under the diminishing row of lamps induces a half-pleasant, half-painful tightening of the nerves.

Even in dear, safe London I have sometimes experienced thrills. The docks at night, in winter, have something awful about them: high dirty yellow-brick walls, silence, snow, sordid dwarf houses—and all so far from home. Nearer, close by Waterloo bridge, there is a tunnelled cave which, to a man of fearful temperament, is worth a visit in the small hours of the morning.

But do not think I like the sensation of fear. No one does. I value it merely as a stimulant to imagination. Under its influence the mind grasps intensely the suggestions which places, gestures, figures can carry. I have never forgotten, for instance, the eyebrowless face of an immensely tall man who, out of a thick London fog, strode at me suddenly. He was shod in rubber shoes; something short stuck out from the pocket of his ulster; he fixed me with an eye which seemed to spin like a sleeping top, and glided into the smother without a sound. Three minutes afterwards I was glad I had had that encounter. Very likely he was only a henpecked husband anxious about being late for dinner; but I, thanks to a heart-clutch of terror, had looked upon the white frightened mask of prowling Evil. You will never see that dark archway near Waterloo Bridge with the eyes of Dickens or Doré, unless you have a streak of timidity in you.

I am still afraid of crime and corpses, but the supernatural lost its hold on me soon after I was twenty. Of course I am still capable of being frightened by some uncanny and inexplicable sight or sound, but the constant dread of presently seeing or hearing something ominous has left me. I remember this being brought home to me years ago on a walk back from a country house, where I had been dining, to a farm where I was living. It was a good night for ghosts. The moon was cloud-discoloured; now and again an intermittent breath of wind set the black cedars waving to me as I passed, and the dry, winter trees beyond gently rocking, clashing, creaking; then all would be still again, while the shadows changed places on the grass. For the apprehensive, darkness beneath trees readily takes on disquieting, oblong or crouching shapes; a glint on snail-track or pebble, will even lend to them an eye, or a smile of teeth, or at any rate a most unwelcome suggestion of life. Not so for me that night. The spirit of wine, of animated conversation, still sang within me as I walked, and this perhaps was responsible for the frivolous experiment I devised. Surely I could still be frightened in a wood at night? Not a qualm? How dull! I thought I would try to upset myself a little. I began to moan, softly at first; then to hulloo, letting my voice taper mournfully away. I repeated the dismal sounds again and again; and listening to them intently I began to forget they proceeded from me.

Yes! Presently, far away in the primæval, undisafforested region of my being something had heard and stirred. It was, tiny and still domitable, a distant speck of fear. It might come nearer, spread. Recklessly into the next open glade I capered softly, crooning; and there, with fists balled above my head and upturned face, I long and plaintively behowled the moon. Then, whether it was a vision of myself

as I might appear to some late passer-by, or, as I think, some sudden, horrible confusion about my own identity which propelled me—then, with a yell that shook the foundations of consciousness, I fled, with pumping heart and freezing scalp, myself pursuer and pursued. The white, empty road, when reached at last, brought reason back, but not at once the sense of sweet security. I stopped running (badly blown), but I continued to walk home very fast.

Take warning, gentle reader, do not experiment too deeply with primitive emotions such as fear. For all I know, to experiment with love and hatred may be as risky.

Why do I write all this down? Well, partly for the fun of indulging in a little dramatic writing as a change from dramatic criticism, and partly because I would persuade you that I am a connoisseur in thrills. I want my appreciation of Mr. Jefferson Farjeon's thrilling but funny melodrama, *No.* 17 (New Theatre), to carry weight.

To tell the story would spoil your pleasure, but to hint how cunningly the dramatist contrives his thrills will whet your appetite. In the theatre I felt again at moments that impulse to clutch a friendly hand which used to seize me so deliciously as a boy at melodramas. I am confident this play will be a great success. When the curtain goes up, a thick pea-soup fog has settled down to the job of burking London town. It is early afternoon, but we can only see, within a narrow radius of the lamp-post, the outside of No. 17, a dirty, empty, little house. Behind its filthy, curtainless windows the rayless eye of a dark lantern moves, now across the top storey, now at a middle window—now the dingy fanlight above the door is dimly illuminated. Enter an agitated young man who has evidently lost a companion in the fog; he shouts, swears, stutters and

shouts again. The door of No. 17 opens and a big man with his hat pulled over his eyes darts out, bumps into the impatient young man and quickly disappears. The other follows him. Again No. 17 holds the stage; there is no sign of life within.

Presently another young man enters, clearly the lost friend. He, too, glances at No. 17 and betrays impatience. Again the door opens, and this time we see a little ragged man in mortal terror. The other instantly grips him, and in spite of his wriggling and whimpering refuses to let him go. The little man swears *he* had nothing to do with it; he swears he found it in the attic. It's an awful house; footsteps upstairs, downstairs and no one to be seen. He had taken shelter in it because it was empty, that was all. There is a corpse in the attic; nothing will induce him to go in again. But the young man is of another mind; the shivering wretch shall go in again—and with him. He is not convinced by his protestations of innocence.

In the next scene we see them mounting the stairs together by the light of a candle, with many starts, tremors and groans on the part of the tramp. Note the dramatic value of cowardice on the stage at such moments. Fear is infectious; at the same time the jibbering funk of poor "Ben", ex-merchant service man, provides a much enjoyed comic relief and throws the taut practical agitation of the young man into sympathetic relief. Mr. Leon M. Lion played "Ben" admirably. He is an actor for whom I have the greatest respect. His face and voice were most expressive and his *legs* perfect. He is one of the best movers on the stage; he can move so quickly and quietly that, as in the case of a fish, one sometimes notices with surprise that he has moved at all. (How good his pathos was in Mr. Galsworthy's *Justice*!) At last they reach the attic, a shabby, empty room with peeling walls. A low fire, kindled

by Ben, is still burning in the grate, and half-way across the threshold of a second door lies on its face, like a great doll, the corpse.

How sinister sounds draw the young man to explore the house, leaving the wretched "Ben" alone; how twice the candle goes out; how the young man from the street discovers a girl upon the roof; how "Ben" nearly kills her in his terror; how and why the corpse disappears; how nearly the man from the street loses his life; how "Ben" becomes possessed of the Duchess of Suffolk's diamonds; how and why they find a boudoir in the cellar; how the most dangerous scoundrel is thrown down into the underground railway beneath No. 17; how a pane of glass in the attic window is smashed by a friendly hand outside, just at the right moment to bring the heart into your mouth; how, just at the moment to upset you, an electric bell in the attic starts a peremptory rattle; why a party of well-dressed people come to look over the filthy house with a view to taking it; how the man from the street rescues from a career of crime a beautiful girl and presumably weds her; how he and "Ben", who admits his pluck "comes and goes", become devoted allies—all this I leave to your speculations.

One warning when you go, don't test the cogency of the plot too severely—enjoy the thrills.

DETECTIVE DRAMA

THE RINGER (Wyndham's Theatre) is a good specimen of Detective Drama. The interest of this kind of play depends upon our failing to guess which of the characters is the interesting criminal. It is quite a recent discovery that the stage can thus supply precisely the same pleasure as the detective story. The aim of the writer of detective stories is, of course, to keep the reader in the dark as long as possible; on the other hand, it used to be held as a prime law of dramatic construction that the spectator should always be enlightened. Characters on the stage might be tricked and fooled, but to take the audience in was considered a sign of dramatic incompetence. You can see this canon applied still in criticisms of other kinds of plays. You have probably read again and again such comments as this: "the defect of the third act is that nothing has prepared us for Lady Adela Skipwith's sudden *volte face*", the implication being that the playwright should have indicated long before what kind of woman she was, and that the completely unexpected is uninteresting.

Old Melodrama, again, which offered the same sort of entertainment as the contemporary sensational novel (thrills and suspense), never attempted to puzzle us. We might be puzzled to guess how the devil the hero and heroine could possibly escape from the clutches of the villain, but, from the rise of the curtain, evidence, often in superfluity, of his intentions, was in our possession. They alone, poor innocents, were blind to the diabolical plot which

was being woven, and to the net which was already closing round them. The ingenuity of the playwright was devoted to making their danger extreme and peculiar, rather than to making their rescue probable, which was usually accomplished simply by somebody brave arriving in the nick of time and pulling them out of boilers of ships or slowly filling gasometers where their too trusting natures had led them to take refuge. The criminal was as recognizable from the start as Iago.

In watching Detective Drama our fun, of course, lies in *not* being able to spot him, for when we have done so our suspense is over. He usually now turns out to be the man who is most actively engaged in catching the criminal. Thus, at the present stage of development of Detective Drama, to look for him among the police is an almost infallible tip. Mr. Edgar Wallace is aware that the public already jumps to this conclusion, so he ingeniously provides a peculiarly sinister detective as a lightning-conductor to our perspicacity. Nevertheless, he cannot ultimately think of any more effective disguise than to make the criminal a person at least affiliated to the police force.

The vein of Detective Drama is a profitable one, but it must be soon worked out. That moment will come when the only revelation, likely to cause the least surprise in the last act, will be the discovery that the dangerous criminal was really the humorous old charwoman who spoke a few kindly words in the first.

After seeing *The Ringer*, to compose myself for sleep, I began to construct in bed a scenario for a detective play: the sense of security in Bayswater had been shaken to its foundations by a series of apparently unconnected murders—I started with that. Then I settled in my mind that the real criminal should turn out to be an old conchologist of

European reputation; for a passion for shells, I said to myself, smacks decidedly of innocence.

But in the process of picturing this quiet, silver-haired, rosy old ruffian to myself, it struck me that precisely in the degree I was laying on the Cherruble-brother colours thick, so would the experienced audience incontinently conclude that Professor Coppledick *was* the criminal. That would never do.

I instantly changed his name, his aspect and his manner. He became Dr. Staveley St. Pole, a notorious eccentric, well-connected, who, owing to some ugly affair in his youth, known only to his manservant (a laconic, insolent fellow), had been for years a social pariah. I knocked out one of his eyes, and it may give you the measure of his forbidding eccentricity if I tell you that instead of wearing a glass-eye he had replaced the missing organ with a piece of oval gold. "Old Gold-eye" was not unnaturally his sobriquet in the neighbourhood, and this had been corrupted down to "Goldie". Everybody in Bayswater knew "Old Goldie", and feared him—they knew not why.

Warm in bed as I was, it made my blood run cold to watch him stroke the pale cheek of his orphan ward with two bony fingers as he lisped, "Soon the little bird will fly away from the nest. Soon she will be *no longer here.*" For Dorothy would be of age next week and inherit her own large fortune. (She was already engaged to a clean, upstanding young fellow who was nobody's enemy but his own—rather a dull part.)

"Now," I exclaimed, viewing in triumph this creation of my imagination, "no one in a Detective Drama audience could possibly suspect Dr. Staveley St. Pole! He is so unmistakably stamped with villainy that every child will see at once that he could have had nothing to do with Dorothy's disappearance. How amazed, then, they will be when

they discover that after all he did attempt to murder her to keep her income! How brilliant they will think me! (I shall have a great success, I shall be able to visit some of those pretty places I see photographs of in railway carriages.)"

Then, for I am not of a really hopeful temperament, I was touched by doubts. Might not some dense members of the audience actually conclude I had been most commonplace where, as a matter of fact, I had been most subtle; and, worse still, might not some frequenters of Detective Drama see through my device, arguing thus: "He thinks, the simpleton, that we shan't suspect that ancient man, because he is bad and sinister, but ah! ha! we do."

In that case it would be better to use dear old Professor Coppledick. But, again, how many people would then understand that they ought *not* to suspect him, because, being a kindly conchologist, it would be too obvious and exploded a surprise to make him the criminal. To avoid the obviously subtle seemed as obvious as to avoid the subtly obvious.... But my thoughts were beginning to be mixed with sleep. I record them here as throwing some light upon the construction of Detective Dramas, which, in my opinion, take as many hairpin bends as they will round the corners, must debouch upon the flat.

In *The Ringer* the comic relief (Samuel Hackitt, ex-convict, and P.C. Field) was successful, and both Mr. Leslie Faber as the Divisional Surgeon, and Mr. Franklin Dyall as the morphia-ridden victim of "the Ringer", played their parts well. I will not disclose the identity of "the Ringer" himself, for if I did I would spoil your fun. The best thing in the play was the neat double-trick during the last two minutes, by which he got off scot-free with his undoubtedly courageous wife.

You must have noticed that in Detective

Dramas the murderer is never a bad man. Only his victims are always villains. This is due to the fact that he has to exhibit such admirable qualities of courage and presence of mind in the course of the play that the public wants him to get off, so he simply mustn't be a bad man. That was the real blemish in the plot of *Old Goldie.*

VERY MUCH ON THE SPOT

WITH a little more industry Mr. Edgar Wallace might provide all the light reading the inhabitants of this island require. He already provides a considerable part of it. Nor do I see why he should not also write most of the plays. I am sure they would be different from each other. *On the Spot*, for instance, is by no means in the key of *The Ringer*. Indeed, I can imagine many of his devoted readers being not a little taken aback by it. It is thrilling but decidedly grim. There are three murders and a suicide in it, and a fine tension of suspense sustains the plot. It is exciting, sensational, surprising, and it is also a serious study of contemporary though fortunately distant aspects of modern life—life in Chicago gang-land. "If", says Mr. Wallace on the programme, "a play were a proper and suitable vehicle for such a complimentary gesture, I would dedicate this drama to my good friends William Russell, Chief Commissioner, and John Stege, Deputy Commissioner of the Chicago Police Department, who daily and hourly are dealing effectively with situations more incredible and fantastical than any I have depicted in *On the Spot*."

Well, in a sense, Mr. Wallace has made that gesture, and it proves that he has not been interested in his subject as copy for a "'tec *versus* crook" play, but interested in it in a thorough and highbrow manner. A "high-brow" writer is one who respects his subject more than his audience. Mr. Wallace's interest in racing, for instance, is so intensely high-brow that only "racing high-brows" can read him, just as no

ordinary reader of poetry can read Robert Bridges on prosody. It is not the theme but the treatment which marks the high-brow author. As a high-brow dramatic critic, I recognize in Mr. Wallace a high-brow dramatist. His dialogue is excellent, and, in spite of having splendid opportunities of engaging the sympathy of his audiences for his cool, unscrupulous crooks, he shows up the paragon of audacity among them, who in the first act has fascinated half the women in the audience, as, merely a dirty "bit of yellow mud"; bottomless in treachery and squalidly infantile in megalomania.

But the "world" he has to exhibit is so fantastically sensational that the public greedily gulps down his high-browism. Mr. Wallace does not gloss over the fact that his master bootlegger, who does "not want any tr-rouble" and to placate a rival is ready to place anyone of his comrades "on the spot" (this means sending them to a place where they can be conveniently shot), is also a brothel-keeper and white-slave dealer on a big scale. "Tony" is in the habit of sending off his discarded mistresses, however devoted, to serve in those lust-shops—and all for money. Tony Perelli is not romanticized at all, and he is such an amazing figure that if we had not heard of Al Capone we would not believe in him.

Mr. Wallace has been blessed in his interpreter, Mr. Charles Laughton, who can get into the skin of a fantastic character as well as any actor alive. I admired his performance in *The Silver Tassie.* It was hard for an English audience to understand its merits, for, O'Casey's hero being a most unfortunate man, they naturally expected him to be lovable! It is difficult for the English to understand, what is sun-clear to the Irish imagination, that a man who has lost his legs is not necessarily improved by that calamity. The English can't bear

to dislike anyone unfortunate. It is amiable of them, but silly. "Wonderful play in many ways, but the hero was so repulsive"—such was the commonest comment I heard on Mr. Laughton's remarkably vivid interpretation of that character.

In this part, however, the repulsiveness of Tony will not blind anyone to the merits of his interpreter —quite the contrary. Tony flourishes throughout like a forest of green bay-trees till the end, and by that time the audience has seen through his sordidly emotional nature, and enjoys watching him grovel in handcuffs; doomed to "The Chair" at last, but for a murder which, for once in a way, he has *not* committed.

What impresses one about this exotic slice of life is not the graft, the utter contempt for law, or the bloodshed, but the almost childlike cynicism and the *good-natured* ruthlessness of it, the business-like air of its atrocities, the innocently casual brutality of its love-affairs, the heartiness which covers depths of treachery, and the extraordinary amoral light-mindedness (moral idiocy really)—and love of excitement, which infects even the attitude of the Detective Commission towards the gangsters. Everything, however horrible, is a boy's game. *On the Spot* is certainly a remarkable study of a real state of things. But the last act is thin compared with the others—too much talk; though the easy comforting cynicism with which Angelo, Pirelli's lieutenant, lies to Maria about the fate of her ex-lover, and the blandishments with which Tony prepares Minn Lee for the brothel, are worth listening to.

It is interesting on leaving the theatre to remember that there is a murder for every day in the year in Chicago, and that, according to Mr. Edward Sullivan, a resident journalist, there are hardly any convictions ; also that the value of property stolen

in the town during 1928 was $41,967,841. It is interesting to recall the reported pronouncement of Al Capone: "A crook is a crook, and there's something healthy about his frankness in the matter. But a guy who pretends he is enforcing the law and steals on his authority is a swell snake. The worst type of these punks is the big politician who gives about half his time to covering up so that no one will know he's a thief. A hard-working crook will—and can—buy these birds by the dozen, but right down in his heart he hates the sight of them."

He also is said to have said " that it was a mistake to make a shooting gallery out of a big business", namely, the business of providing a thirsty city with drinks.

SIR JAMES BARRIE

SIR JAMES BARRIE has "a way with him"; what kind of "a way" I hope, in the course of writing, to discover. Meanwhile, let me recommend *Dear Brutus* as an amusing and riveting entertainment.

Now, it is often worth a critic's while to keep his ears pricked while jammed in the cloak-room rush after a performance. It is the laconic comments of men to each other—before they rejoin their ladies in the lobby—that I have most often found instructive, especially comments of men who never (so one guesses) analyse their impressions except for practical purposes, and even then mistrustfully. Often such remarks contain the gist of criticism, and when not, they are still apt to be useful as aids to graduating that asinometer for measuring the public intelligence which no critic or playwright should be without. What I overheard last night may not seem of much value when quoted, but I instantly recognized its value to me. The dialogue was brief.

First dull middle-aged man, waiting for his coat and hat: "Well, what did you think of it? Good?"

Second ditto: "Yes, I thought it good. Anyway, it's something new."

That's it, I thought; that's the right key, with modulations out of it into a more enthusiastic one, in which to pitch a criticism of this play. "Something new." The moment I heard those words I realized I had been reminded of what I might other-

wise have forgotten to mention, namely, Sir James Barrie's originality!

It is easy to overlook Sir James Barrie's originality, partly because it lies in front of the nose, and partly because in another way he is the least original of gifted writers. His criticism of life contains nothing new; he does not even stick up passionately for the old; he does not clear up anything, or even confuse anything. His sense of values is that of the gentle mid-nineteenth-century novel (fairly sane, but very sentimental) and of the *Boy's Own Paper*. No one ever got fresh light on ways and means, or on morals, or on human nature, from him; only delightfully odd, slight, and sometimes surprisingly penetrating, confirmations of indulgent current judgments. Nobody ever came away from a Barrie play wondering if something in human nature, which they had thought was rather beautiful before, was not, after all, rather hideous, or what they had thought hideous was not really rather fine; no one ever came away convinced he saw the Devil's horns sticking up in an unexpected quarter of human experience, or noticing for the first time in a puddle the reflection of a star.

Of course, he is much saner than many people in whose heads a few modern bees buzz in a vacuum. He would never be guilty of the silliness of some enterprising intellects now in revolt. One cannot imagine him writing a novel or a play in which a soul was saved for ever by someone surprising another bathing, or in which a man who slit his sweetheart's throat in a fit of glorious disgust was held up to admiration, while a mildly selfish, conventional old woman was hunted down for pages as a vampire. Yet he is too soft to be a sound artist. Or, to put the statement positively, as an artist, the background which his arrangements in human nature—black and white and pink—demand, in

order to justify them and set them off, is a nebulous one, implying that life is a romantic, tender, straightforward adventure, and, to be lived well, must be taken as such. It is not firmly apprehended enough, this philosophy, to be a faith in him; it is not make-believe either, but something (so I feel) betwixt and between.

The characters to whom his heart goes out are those he conceives as holding it with a more wholehearted simplicity than he can himself encompass; consequently, he writes about them at once very sentimentally and very penetratively. This is the secret of his adoration of youth (for youth has *the air* often of taking life on trust as a romantic adventure), of his capacity for drawing young creatures, of his insight into them, and of the limitations of that delightful insight—which are very marked, to my mind. It also accounts for his happy touch in drawing old people, in whom there is often not exactly a second childhood but a second innocence, and granted a certain easiness of circumstance and heart, a disposition to make of life in retrospect a pretty, simple picture. The sympathy of such old people for the young is a boundless, tender admiration—provided that the young consent to being figures in the picture and remaining in it; but woe betide if they do not!

Sir James Barrie's attitude towards youth in his writings strikes me as being a mixture between that of an old man, who no longer has any quarrel with life or his own desires, and that of a young girl. Crossjay, in *The Egoist*, is boyhood seen through Clara Middleton's eyes, and delightful Crossjay is, too. But those who have been boys themselves know that a good deal is left out of the picture, and not merely unaccommodating, harsh facts, but all sorts of virtues inextricably connected with them, almost all the growing principle, indeed, all the

sap by virtue of which the creature becomes at last a being "looking before and after". A boy is not only a right little, tight little fellow, with nothing incongruous to him but an adorable affectation of premature manliness; he is a confused creature, ready enough to accept standards from his elders, trying them on, but having to retire perpetually into reserve, like a growing crab under a rock while it sheds its small shell; and a very uncomfortable, naked, helpless creature it feels until its new, larger one is hardened.

But Sir James Barrie does not like growth. He likes best people who do not grow up, who remain—even at an advanced age—boys and girls; in the static state of harmony with the world and guilelessness he conceives as characteristic of youth. Judging him as an artist, he strikes me in general as beautifully unshockable, most wisely indulgent; but there is one thing I think would shock him artistically—a youth who did not take an enthusiastic, trusting attitude towards the world, who was discontented, though not personally persecuted, sceptical, self-withdrawn, world-questioning, disillusioned. I cannot approve Sir James Barrie as a lover of youth, because I have never yet seen in his work that sympathy with pimpled and sullen spiritual gawkiness which, it seems to me, youth's true lover must also possess. Youth is essentially the thinking time. It is an enjoying time, too; but compare the process of thinking in later life with the really anxious, sensitive, bebothered search for understanding and sympathy characteristic of early years. Why, afterwards thinking becomes, in comparison, a mere accomplishment and friendship an art, needing a little care and patience—like boiling an egg. It is no longer a crucial, personal experiment.

Sir James Barrie is pre-eminently a dramatist who deals with youth and its charm. What I miss

in him—in that capacity—is disinterested sympathy with, and interest in, the questing, crude, spring-like temper of growing beings, which has the beauty, but also drizzling, uncomfortable rawness, of actual spring-time. His magic, his great charm for the public, lies precisely in his depicting youth and age only in the light of the autumnal glow of elderly fancy. His is a world in which the most jarring note of all would be the one which hums through nearly everybody's twenties—the pathetic, bitter conflict between the young and old generation. He stops his ears to that—and the public love him for it.

Eighteenth-century critics used to praise writers for their "inventiveness"; we go on about "creative" power—a different thing. Sir James Barrie has the most surprising and easy "inventiveness". At every turn he can supply some ingenious, entertaining incident to carry on his story. This faculty works so spontaneously that it gives an air of extreme lightness to his best plays. He seems to have made a play out of nothing. But that is only because the machinery of narration is so supple that he has time to be amusing and apparently inconsequent by the way. Compare him with others who attempt the light fantastic. How stodgy and how over-solemn they appear when they introduce the playful supernatural! At the beginning of this play there is a delightful piece of inventiveness concerned with the butler, Matey; but I will not spoil pleasure by exposing the surprise.

A number of guests gathered together for midsummer week "because they all have one thing in common". What that is, they are desperately curious to know. They cannot guess. Their host is the queerest old creature, of unimaginable age and uncanny agility. He is called "Lob"—no one calls him anything else. He is not human, but he has a

comfortable little house and a butler, and there is a mischievousness in him, a *méchanceté*, which makes one doubtful if he *is* a benevolent being. He talks tenderly to his flowers (which seems amiable), but his attitude towards human beings is marked by a Puck-like detachment and, one suspects, a Puck-like contempt. This being is most admirably imagined; our credulity is amused, never strained, and the part is most admirably played by Mr. Arthur Hatherton.

It turns out that what these people have in common is the feeling that if only they had another chance they would make a better thing of life than they have. "Lob" has on midsummer night the power to give them that chance and teach them the lesson that most of them would have in any case been just the same as they are now. Only two of them had really had "bad luck"—an artist (Mr. Gerald Du Maurier) who has taken to drink, married to a wife who is harsh to him. (Mr. Gerald Du Maurier gave a perfect representation of this character, and Miss Hilda Moore was excellent.) The fault in the case of the others was not in Fate, but in themselves.

The philanderer, when in the magic wood, goes on just the same, only he is married then to his flame and makes love to his wife—while both women behave inversely just as they did before. The tender, elderly, optimistic, happily married man, whose only trouble is that he fancies he might have written a great work, does nothing but hop about in the wood playing the flute. Matey, who thought that if he had taken a clerkship in youth he would have been an honest man, appears as a robber financier, and the hard, aristocratic lady—who had been merciless to his pilfering in the house as butler—adores him in the magic wood as a superman.

The "invention" of the return to ordinary consciousness—one after the other in each other's presence—is delightful. There are fine touches—such as the fact that the only person who does not go into the wood is the affectionate, simple-hearted wife of the optimist. His proposal to her when in a half-waking state is charming, and so is her reply. He is the only one who had been faithful to a vague recollection of his love; but he had been quite happy with only that. "Yes, but it is not such a compliment as I thought it was", she says rather sadly.

The comedy of love-making outside the marriage ring is deliciously satirized in the philanderer, who becomes kinder to his wife in proportion as the temporary mistress of his heart is kind to him. In fact, though the theme is old, the play is, as the gentleman in the cloakroom said, "good, and, at any rate, something new".

THE FIRST ENEMY

THE LAST ENEMY, which was performed for the first time last week at the Fortune Theatre, deals incidentally with the nature of God, the meaning of death, the problem of evil and the destiny of man. Concurrently it deals with the daughter of a happy Hampstead home and her marriage during the war. The treatment of the large themes is inadequate—to me exasperatingly and repulsively so; to others, alas, perhaps that treatment will appear soothing.

It is not hard to read the meaning of the play's title: in the eyes of the dramatist fear, especially in that acute form, fear of death, is "the last enemy". I might have assented to that. But he also tried to persuade us that it is the *only* enemy—that there is really nothing in the world to be afraid of. There, most emphatically I do not agree. Like all Sentimentalists, he is particularly thrilled by the idea of courage. Courage is a fact he cannot take for granted as ordinary unthinking people do, often finding that they possess more of it themselves than they supposed. Nor does he understand that it is a jewel which shines in the dark; and that in a pretty-pretty Universe, imagined *ad hoc* to satisfy every day-dream of adolescence and to crown every tragedy with a comfortable "It didn't matter a bit in the end", courage does not, and cannot, tell. The Sentimentalist always wants to have it both ways. He, or she, wants to cry over calamities, but not, oh no! to think there is anything really dreadful in them. That would hurt. He, or she, therefore ig-

nores the efforts of mankind to wring at least some splendour from pain and death, all that hard-won heritage of thought and poetry laid up in religion and literature, and substitutes for it any cosy comfort that fancy may suggest. They don't mind lying; they don't know what lying is. But that is not why Sentimentalism is, to me, the *first* enemy. There is something worse about it than that. It robs sorrow of all it has, its crown of thorns; and, more effectively than any "unsympathetic" selfishness, checks the impulse to prevent pain. Why, indeed, should Sentimentalists try to prevent it? They won't look at suffering longer than just enables them to turn it to prettiness and favour.

Dear me, what attractive deaths we were asked to gaze upon in the Fortune Theatre! We watched a brave boy dying in the dark on No Man's Land, sung to sleep ("Rock-a-bye Baby" was the song) by the ghost of his Spirit Father; and two arctic explorers (one of them the Father in question) freezing in their tent, who the next moment were racing each other, chaffing in highest spirits, up the marble steps of Heaven. You see, there was nothing at all to be afraid of in these tragic incidents; it is quite easy to get the better of "the last enemy" once you understand.

The Sentimentalists' world is one in which nothing can be lost or won—if you come to examine it closely. What does it matter if another million brave boys perish among shell-holes and barbed wire? Sacrifice is only a touching phantasy; nothing can really be lost in that world. Let us wave them good-bye with a bright tear for their gallantry; for, though we know there is nothing to fear, some of the poor dears may not be quite so certain of it. They do not know, perhaps, but the Sentimentalists do, that when they are mortally wounded, Spirit Fathers will put water as sweet as nectar to their

lips and croon them to sleep, till—hey presto! they, too, are bounding up those marble steps, staring at the little stars which are really unborn babies. And they are just their larky, hearty old selves too, in the next world, boots, stockings, jerseys, all complete—that is so charming.

If they choose to stop at Heaven's first landing, they can always come back and be with us. They can, for instance, arrive just in the nick of time to prevent the girls they might have loved, had they met them, from being seduced; or they can look after the children they might have had if their lives had not been, in a sense, rather sadly short. And, since it is always nice to have a change, they can, if they choose, run up another flight of steps and meet God. This is a privilege which, it will quietly amuse Sentimentalists in the audience to observe, actually filled the elder of the arctic explorers with slight misgivings. Unlike his companion, who at twenty-two could hardly be expected to have done anything really wrong (Sentimentalists feel so sure the young are good), the elder man requires to be reassured on this point by the grave but kindly Virgil-Dante of these infernal—I beg the Sentimentalists' pardon—regions. "The Janitor", with a smile of excruciating sweetness, explains to him that there are some most mistaken notions current upon earth about God. He is not at all the sort of person to care about the things which may distress the elder of the two companions. They will feel both at once at home with Him—not at all shy. And if they like, they can later on be absorbed into the Divine Nature. This, however, does not appeal to them at the moment.

They prefer to go down and meet their would-be rescuers, who froze to death in the same blizzard as themselves, and are now arriving in happy bewilderment at the foot of Heaven's stairs. The elderly explorer, unlike God apparently, who cares

for none of these things, is glad they "played the game". But it is about the part they can still play on earth which decides them to postpone their visit to their Creator. Let me dwell on this point for a moment, for it is characteristic of the Sentimentalists' Universe. Even they cannot help noticing that in addition to death and physical sufferings, so blessedly soothed and rapidly transfigured, there are other partings in life which may be almost as bitter and privations almost as tragic as pain. That would never do. It would be quite impossible to live in a world where such events happened. "The Janitor" explains that though the person you have loved perhaps loves someone else, or though apparently you have lived a lonely and love-starved life, in reality *everyone* has a predestined mate. You need not be troubled. He or she is safely destined for you for ever though you never meet below. In short, you can miss nothing in this delightful world; everybody has everything. If the person in question has children by another, they are spiritually *your* children; you can find and guard them after death.

Thus the Sentimentalist eliminates, for his own comfort, all pain and evil from human life; except, of course, in so far as they may add a spice to the pleasure of the onlooker. Whether, in doing so, he has not also robbed life of interest and beauty, he does not stop to consider, for he has avoided all contact with life; nor does he care if this indulgence of his fancy teaches others to lie, and amounts to gross patronage of the very qualities he pretends to admire most.

I hope the jocularity with which I have described the philosophy of this play has not disguised my real hostility to it. It is destructive of all values. And the reason I have dwelt on it, in place of describing how Nancy was saved from rape by the ghost of her soul-mate walking through a locked

door, how she married the reckless young airman instead of the brave boy, and how her father dyed his hair and joined up to peel potatoes, is that this mode of thought is so characteristic of 1930, of "the incurable sloppiness" of those—and they are now millions—who neither dare to have a religion nor do without one.

THE STAGE AND THE SPIRITS

THREE matinée performances of *The World of Light* were given under the supervision of Mr. Leon M. Lion last week. The acting came near to being as good as it could be, the audience was profoundly attentive, the play most unusually interesting, and its reception by the press favourable. A few critics, whose standards must be really higher than we supposed from their praise of other plays, ran it down; but approval was louder. Encore! Mr. Huxley, more, please more! It is to those cries he should listen, for *The World of Light* shows a remarkable talent for the stage. Lest he should pay too much attention to adverse verdicts, let me remind him that in some quarters there is a tendency to scare intellectuals off the theatre, that a play, about which it is impossible to write quickly, invariably gets some bad notices, and that it is a consolation to some critics, who feel perhaps that their average reports hardly do justice to their abilities, to show that they can at any rate despise the work of an exceptionally clever man.

Mr. Aldous Huxley's play proved what an advantage it is for a playwright to possess intellectual resources. Our stage usually concerns itself with people who are a little dull in mind. If we took a census of the stage-population over the last seven years, the proportion of characters with anything approaching to an intellect, would be lower than among the same number of real people, selected presumably for the interest of their adventures in life. Now the adventures and predicaments of the think-

ing sort are not more moving than those of the mindless, but they are more various and curious. Hamlets, on the whole, are more interesting than Othellos. Smashing catastrophes and violent crises are necessary to knock something startling out of plain, unreflecting blocks of humanity, while little Hamlets can exhibit their depths in quieter contacts with life. In modern realistic drama this is an advantage. But to create such characters the dramatist must be himself intellectual; so the last thing critics should do, if they want an interesting and varied stage, is to warn intellectuals off it. The intellectuals do justice to situations which arise out of the clash between simple and complex characters. They are familiar with them in their own experience, and these clashes are often dramatically entertaining. If, too, religion, or indeed any systematic attitude towards life, political or moral, happens to be part of a subject, they alone show its many facets. Have they not spent their own lives in walking round creeds, in collating ideas and in digging at the roots of belief? In these respects they have a prodigious pull over non-intellectual dramatists. But their habits of mind lead them to distrust emotion. They learn to love the probe, but to dread the glow. They are apt to shrink from conclusions, and a play without a conclusion is, well, to put it mildly, a play with a drawback. The stream of interest in a novel may lose itself in delta-rivulets without our protesting loudly, but in a play the main current must plunge over a fall.

Mr. Huxley is, of course, an arch-intellectual. There lies the explanation of his play being absorbing, rich, pointful, superior—and also of its close shocking me. I found myself clapping till my hands tingled at the end of every scene, every act; the acting had been so invariably excellent, the situations so taut and the dialogue so true. But when the

final curtain fell I fished for my hat with a groan. "Butter-fingers! Everything prepared, led up to—and, plump, he let it drop!" I muttered indignantly, "Why in the name of common sense, proportion, art, did he let us down at the end like that? Where was the point of it? What was he afraid of? The obvious? Surely not. The obvious is the crown and glory of a work of art; subtlety only a painful necessity." Thus I soliloquized furiously. It was not until I had walked some way that I could even entertain a plausible guess at an explanation. But please note, this protesting hubble-bubble within me was a measure of the admiration and interest which the play had previously excited. No one cares a jot about mediocre work going wrong. To show why my disappointment was justified, and was at the same time a prodigious compliment to the dramatist, I must analyse rapidly a rather intricate play with about ten times as much in it as an ordinary one—and that is not easy.

Spiritualism, though there are two séances in the play, was not the theme of *The World of Light*, though some true things were said about it, and others suggested. In the first place, Mr. Aldous Huxley has science in the blood, and he is aware that the great field for new discoveries is always the unclassified residuum of phenomena; those exceptional and irregular occurrences which neighbouring sciences find it easier to ignore than absorb. In the case of spiritualism such phenomena occur in circumstances so favourable to fraud and error that they are particularly suspect; moreover ninety-nine out of a hundred books in which they are collected and commented upon are (it is obvious the moment you poke your nose into one of them) intellectually disreputable. They are mostly written by people who appear to think that anything unusual or unexplained proves their special conclusion. In *The*

World of Light the central crisis is the moment when a bereaved father and a heart-sick girl discover that the youth, son, and lover, respectively, with whom they believe they have been in communication "behind the veil", is still alive. He interrupts their séance just as the concertina, announcing the presence of his spirit, has begun to play in the dark his favourite air. This scene is not an object-lesson in complete scepticism, but it reminds us that telepathy may sometimes explain occurrences attributed to spirits. Yet the pros and cons of an open question are emphatically *not* the dramatic subject, and what Mr. Huxley was interested in was a far fitter subject for a drama: the appeal which Spiritualism makes to human nature and the type of person for whom it can be a substitute for religion.

To me that identification is profoundly repulsive. The connection between religion and survival after death is adventitious; the link is the goodness of God as interpreted by man. If God is good surely He will preserve my personality intact for ever and ever? But it is easy to envisage a universe in which human beings never died, and yet religious emotions had no place. Indeed, the glimpses of the Spiritualists' heaven, vouchsafed through trances and rappings, resemble such a world. It is so pitiably like our own that one is inclined to answer the question "O death, where is thy sting?" by replying, "Up the medium's sleeve." Such a heaven only brings comfort to those whose "immortal longings" are confined to the humble desire not to die, at any rate so soon, or to see again someone who is dead. It would be disgraceful to take a superior attitude to desires so poignant and honestly human, but it is also human to remember that there is much more in religion than the satisfaction of those desires. Mysteries make an especial appeal to matter-of-fact people, whose experience has never been lit by

poetry, romance or reflection; if you have never lived in the imagination you will welcome marvels at all costs. And to those who are approaching the end of humdrum experience, dimly but deeply conscious of having missed nearly everything, a mere prolongation of existence may seem a heavenly boon.

Mr. Aldous Huxley chose, therefore, for his central figure, for his Spiritualist, a tender-hearted, methodical, elderly man. Mr. Wenham, chartered accountant (Mr. Aubrey Mather's gestures, gait, and —to youth—exasperating sunset meekness of address were exactly right) has never taken a risk, never strayed off the asphalt path of duty, in his whole life; never, though he was made for intimacy, come close to children, friends, or wife. He is so modest that he even shrinks from the use of the first person, preferring to say "One doesn't do this" or "One doesn't do that" (a good touch). But he knows, at last, too well, that he exists alone in a monotonous world, a world in which responsibilities are the only realities and love cannot be found. What a susceptible subject for the appeal of religious Spiritualism! But there is a gentle, firm integrity in old Wenham too, which—*this* is what his creator forgot at the end of his play—does link him to those who dare, and to those in whom life's sap is rising, not subsiding; who do not feel as yet the pathetic longings of a spiritual mendicant. *The World of Light* is a remarkable play if only because it brings home poignantly the difference between youth's view of death and life, and that of age.

And this is really the main theme of the play. Spiritualism being merely a means of bringing that contrast to an issue.

Old Wenham has a son. Hugo is a Hamletish youth, much inclined to exclaim: "O, what a base and peasant slave am I", because his home educa-

tion has made him play, invariably hitherto, for safety. Thus, when his father, at the prompting of his step-mother (who represents complete contentment with the actual), persuades him to propose to Enid whom he does not love, Hugo does so. But his more honest, adventurous self, with the help of a little alcohol, is spurred to rebellion against his home-bred "conscience" by his friend, Bill Hamblin, the life-worshipper. Hamblin persuades Hugo to fly —literally—to the South Seas with him in an aeroplane; and Enid, who knows that she has trapped Hugo into a promise of marriage by showing her passion for him, is left desolate.

The report of a crash, however, opens a new avenue of comfort to the two people to whom Hugo's presumed death meant most; to his father and to the girl. Through a medium (acted to the life by Mr. Brandon) they proceed to get into touch with Hugo's spirit, and the communications are so surprising that old Wenham publishes them in a book which makes a great impression and sells by the thousand. It is after its publication that Hugo returns with his friend. The life-worshipper had fallen into a cactus bush and been blinded. (Note here Mr. Aldous Huxley's integrity; though he sympathizes with Hamblin's philosophy, he knows it cannot see a man through anything.) The gay, confident Bill Hamblin, when he reappears, is a touchy, egotistic invalid.

But what is Hugo's father to do about his book? Through that unpleasant person, the medium, he had enjoyed with his son the kind of intimacy he has missed all his life; and out of gratitude for supernatural consolations Enid has meanwhile yielded to the desires of the medium. What is the living Hugo now to them? He was everything to them while he was "dead"—but now? Enid's life is widowed. She was a maternal sort of woman always, and her

happiness lay in "mothering" men, a trait in her Hugo could never bear—perhaps she will find it in cherishing the blind, impetuous Hamblin? And old Wenham? Deep in himself he feels he must recant his book; it was misleading. Perhaps, though he has lost his faith in "the world of light", he may maintain that closeness to his son he had enjoyed while he fancied his son was a spirit? Father and son talk together. The gulf between them cannot be bridged, says the son. It is true, no doubt. But still the old man's problem remains. Is he to recant? Hugo cuts the knot by voluntarily disappearing again without a word to his father, having accepted £1,000 from the publisher, who is only too glad to avoid an exposure which would destroy further profits; and old Wenham is left alone upon the stage, peering about in a bewilderment not unlike that of the old servant at the end of *The Cherry Orchard.* His problem has not been solved, but shelved.

I trust that this brief account of the play has given some idea of its merits and interests, for only in that case will the reader understand my disappointment at its close. Mr. Huxley, at the last moment, deliberately broke a bridge which *can* unite old and young: respect for integrity of mind, however different their several needs and sense of values may be. I do not think the dramatist realized the insufferably patronizing indifference of "intellectual" youth to the problems of the simple-minded implied in Hugo's behaviour; nor did he see, or care apparently that in old Wenham's dilemma to which the whole play had led up, the basis of the intellectual was at stake.

A CONVENT PLAY

MY FIRST thought was to wait till I could discuss both the Sierra plays together, *Cradle Song* and *Take Two From One*, which began on Wednesday. Then, I reflected that runs at Everyman's Theatre are often short, and what a pity it would be if any took a hint too late to see such a charming play. It is not as if *Cradle Song* were a play that at once starts chatter. It is exquisite: the diffident might even fear it was too sentimental for exacting friends; they might enjoy it themselves and say nothing about it.

I think I know the difference between sentimentality and sentiment: go, you will not regret it.

The peculiarity of Don Sierra as a dramatist is that he has reverence for emotion and he loves human beings. This appears to be rather rare nowadays in men of talent. You cannot say that Bernard Shaw loves his characters; his attitude towards them is a critical and amused benevolence. He never hates; he sometimes admires; he always tolerates. The lenient, all-round fairness of his criticism is one of the delightful things about his drama. Ideas and points of view catch it continually, but, have you noticed? nobody is condemned in his plays. Somerset Maugham's drama thrives on bitterness. In Galsworthy there is a touch of the Sierra quality, but he is no poet—a kind magistrate. Barrie perhaps comes nearer to it, but then he is so very sentimental about the characters he loves.

The Spaniards have been interested hitherto chiefly in three things: in love, religion and some-

thing we have no unambiguous word for—call it honour. They seem now to be getting interested in politics—rather a come-down. This play is about love and religion, and still more about woman. It is divided into two acts, between which a poet discourses to us for a few minutes. All the action takes place inside a Convent of Enclosed Dominican Nuns, a strict order. The poet's verses (I thought I could detect their charm, but their music had gone) are about woman; nuns cannot be wives or have lovers, but they preserve their womanhood because nothing in their discipline destroys what, according to the poet, is still deeper in woman—her motherhood. Nuns are still mothers.

On some feast day, when presents are brought to the Convent, someone leaves a baby in a basket. It is a prostitute's child; her letter is touching, and all except one of the nuns are longing to keep the child. They debate, and the Prioress consents. And the doctor who visits the convent adopts it, leaving it there. In the second act the baby has grown into a girl of seventeen. Teresa is going to be married. The nuns have finished making her trousseau; her lover, speaking through the grille, comes to pay his respects and express his gratitude; the doctor, now quite an old man, calls to take her away. She will be married to-morrow and then she will go to America; with tears and a very happy heart she says good-bye.

That is all: a short story, but with a great deal in it, because it has been told by a poet-dramatist who contrasts in it the life of religious renunciation with the things that shine and smile outside that life, and have power to satisfy without eternity; contrasts them—this is the admirable singularity of the play—without putting them one against the other. It is the work of a man to whom the religious life has always seemed as natural and "human" as the life of the world; and yet whose view of other human

qualities besides the religious is free of contemptible Manichæism. It is in the Spanish mind hitherto that this admirable balance has most often been exhibited, making, from Don Quixote onwards, the gravity of their literature so light, its gaiety so simple.

Don Sierra is as aware as any militant protestant or agnostic of the price which has to be paid, in petty childishness and deep dragging discord, for this life of arduous abstraction and ideal devotion. Short as is the time at his disposal, the main convent types are there. And his psychological insight is all the surer because his types are seen in relation to an end which is not only not rejected, but respected. Thus, the novice who has no vocation is to the end thirsty for absent freedom, but who dreads more than suffering, failure; the rigid disciplinarian, fault-finding, loveless type; the born nurse and mother nun, for whom the child is the closest bond with life, the serene gentle Prioress, are all seen in relation to the end to which they look. The mistress of the novices, who first appears odiously, comically harsh, is seen, before the end, to have a spring of tenderness in her which her domineering asceticism towards even good emotions has not choked; and in time even the gentle little nun, who has been moved, by we know not what force, to expect her joys to come from beyond the world, will doubtless cease to sigh. Perhaps the Prioress had once been like her.

The moment when the two worlds are most poetically contrasted, without, as I said, clashing, is that in which the lover speaks outside the grille: he stands in bright daylight, they are shadows in the semi-darkness. The acting is good. But I could wish that Mr. Dornhorst, who plays the lover's part, had more dignity: it is with a respect which a touch of irony does not diminish that he addresses them, the mothers of his mistress. Miss Barbara Everest, the

Prioress, has the voice of one whose authority rests on an inward peace; Miss Mary Lindon (the domineering downright nun) delivered most beautifully her closing speech, but she must be careful not to play for laughs, and the doctor was so easily and perfectly played by Mr. Hubert Harben that—which was right—he did not seem to be acting at all.

A COMEDY OF GOOD AND EVIL

THE *COMEDY* was first performed before the Three Hundred Club in London at the Court Theatre in 1924. It was later produced at the Play House, Oxford, by Mr. J. B. Fagan, who brought it to London where the first public performance was given on 30th March, 1925. It was then that I first saw it. The theatre was empty, and my impression is that it did not run a week. I protested in the press that so odd, so original, though tantalizing, a play should have met with no public support whatever. That there was something in *The Comedy of Good and Evil* stimulating to the imagination, is shown by the fact that the Welsh Players revived it last week during their season at the Arts Theatre. It is, as the above dates show, an early work of Richard Hughes's. It exhibits imaginative originality and a lack of dramatic experience.

The scene is laid in the South Snowdon district and the main characters are the Rev. John Williams, Rector of Cylfant; Minnie, his wife; and Gladys, a blue-eyed, fair-haired child. Surrounding them are local characters: the postman, Owin Flatfish, a ragged disreputable; a Mr. Gas Jones, a retired plumber with a turn for fluent tactful speech; a Mrs. Jones Bakehouse, highly respectable; a Saxonized town-bred young man; a hoydenish simple-minded girl, granddaughter of Mrs. Bakehouse, who is going along the same path as the young man; and a Mrs. Resurrection Jones, who owes her position in small-town society to having been the subject of a "miracle". (She was laid out

in her coffin for dead and revived.) All these characters are sketched with considerable skill. The Reverend John Williams is a saintly man, whose difficulty is, not to do his Master's bidding, but to discover what it is. It is not easy to make such a character convincing on the stage or to avoid sentimentalizing the elements of which it must be composed: a perfect trust in Christian love as the key to life, and candour in recognizing the resulting perplexities (he must love his enemies but his only enemies are wicked people). John Williams is engaged in a perpetual battle against them, in which he must not *fight*. Mr. Hughes, in his brief directions to actors, says that John Williams must have great natural dignity of movement, and when he talks to himself "it is in a rapid rhythmic recitative punctuated by explosions. He talks chiefly to himself. His Welsh accent is very noticeable, but attractive. On no account must the audience be allowed to laugh at him."

Mr. Twyman went a long way last Thursday towards satisfying all these conditions completely. If we did laugh at him, it was never in a way derogatory to the spirit of the play. Minnie, his wife, is younger than he. There are no limits to her loving respect for "Mr. Williams" as a Christian, or to her loyalty as a wife. Mr. Hughes must again be congratulated; he has not sentimentalized their relations. Minnie is completely uneducated. She loves to dramatize all her emotions, and the movements of her mind are comically inconsequent. She has a wooden leg. The couple are incredibly poor, and the scene is laid in a little Welsh kitchen, ugly, and spotlessly clean. Mr. Williams is a well-educated man and a powerful preacher, and he has refused as a worldly snare an offer of a much better living. As some recompense for his wife's disappointment, he makes a little extra money by washing for the

summer-lodgers whom their poverty compels them to receive. The atmosphere in which they both live is that of the supernatural life, and it is only spiritual humility on John Williams's part, not his education, which prevents him living like his wife and parishioners in constant expectation of signs, miracles and wonders.

It is into a world of miracles and wonders that the dramatist presently introduces us. A strange visitant comes to their door in the shape of a child, apparently in a state of collapse. "Gladys" is really not a child, but a lovely little devil from Blake's Hell, a rebel angel. The Williamses soon discover this by the effect upon her of the Bible in the room, and Minnie is for turning her out at once. Not so her husband, whose charity and pity embraces even the children of the Evil One. His conversations with the bad little angel open his eyes still further to the complexities of the struggle between "good" and "evil". From her he learns that "evil" is not as he had supposed, a negative but a positive thing, something that can be believed in and as passionately championed as "good". As a step towards her intention to win over this saintly man to the holy cause of "evil", Gladys in the night restores to Minnie her lost leg. It is a gay, erratic and uncontrollable leg, exhibiting a disconcerting independence of its possessor. A great deal of the fun of the *Comedy* (perhaps too much) springs from the leg's vagaries. Minnie is much more embarrassed than delighted by the miracle. She has no wish, knowing the origin of her new leg, to compete with the honours of Mrs. Resurrection Jones.

But naturally the miracle cannot be kept hid. The curiosity of the neighbours provides the other main source of humour—comedy in which the furious jealousy of Mrs. Jones is the most successful element. The neighbours soon guess the super-

naturally suspicious source of the miracle, and when the curtain falls on Act II we expect that the last will be the spectacle of savage superstition wreaking the vengeance of fear upon Gladys. No such thing. True, Gladys is driven out, with bell, book and candle, by Owin Flatfish. He, also, presently turns out to be a supernatural being from Blake's Heaven. (The mythological spirit of the play is Blakian.) But the third Act contains a surprise, to my mind not an altogether successful one.

Time has passed and John Williams, whose sanctity in the eyes of the village has survived these strange events, lies dead upstairs. The concluding act of *A Comedy of Good and Evil* is a conversation between the voice of the dead man and the two supernatural beings who return to the kitchen to dispute about his soul. The Angel is unwilling to take him to heaven; the child-devil finds she cannot be consistently loyal to her cause. She has been so moved by Williams's goodness to her that she is even willing to forgo the triumph of securing a saint for hell. Technically, of course, Williams has damned himself for knowingly taking to his heart an evil spirit, while she discovers that she is incapable of returning evil for good and securing his damnation, though that would have been the finest jewel in her crown as a servant of Satan. In so far as I could perceive any definite philosophic conclusion in this last Act it was that there is no such thing as pure good or pure evil.

The play struck me as thoroughly interpreted, and the acting of young Miss Nicholson, in the difficult part of Gladys, as exceptionally praiseworthy. Perhaps at moments we forgot more completely than we should that she was a supernatural being, but so do the characters on the stage. And this very fact suggests to me the relation of the play itself to Mr. Hughes's later work. Gladys

struck me as the exploratory abstract projection of his conception of children as outrageously immoral creatures who, nevertheless, must never be condemned as wicked, a conception which underlies his masterly *High Wind in Jamaica.* Consciousless, merciless little devils as they are, they embody the principle of Blakian "evil", without which the world would be given over to the disastrous triumph of the purely "good". As far as I could trace an idea in this comedy that seemed to be it.

Another point interested me. It was written before Jean Cocteau's queer provocative mixtures of realism and symbolism had reached this country. Had Mr. Hughes's work been received by an intelligent audience, we might by this time have had from him a *Eurydice* or two. Well, it is not too late. He has a name now, let him try. The English stage is longing for something new, impudent, subtle and violently sincere.

MR. MAUGHAM'S NEW PLAY

YES, it is a comedy, but a comedy which borders upon drama, and even upon religious drama. It begins in the saloon of a fashionable hairdresser's shop in Jermyn Street, and it ends with a dialogue between a hairdresser's assistant and Death. In Act I and II comedy predominates, but the drama lies in contrast between the spirit of Christian charity and what passes for the Christian religion in the world. Some of the humour is grim. You could not have a much bitterer joke than a young daughter clasping her pretty little hands in an agony of supplication and imploring, "Oh God make father potty". But most of the humour lies in lines, revealing selfish snobbishness and genteel aspirations, and spoken by those who do not realize what they have betrayed. Here Mr. Maugham has always excelled.

In earlier days I would have expected that Mr. Somerset Maugham in treating such a theme would have written more out of his contempt for what he disliked than out of his sympathy for whatever contrasted with it. Contempt for human nature, and an indulgence towards it equally scornful, has hitherto been his strongest suit whenever he has deviated from comedy proper. The reason why that admirable play *For Services Rendered* did not hold the public for long (many enjoyed it and admired it—under protest), was that positive sympathy, as contrasted with satirical exposure, found in it no counterbalancing expression. For the discerning and tough-minded this did not detract from

their response to the play, but there was no character in it on which the popular imagination could rest with complete satisfaction.

Here, in this play, it is not so. The character in it which is most vividly conceived is Sheppey the barber, who is compact of natural kindliness and goodness. No qualities are more moving on the stage than these, but they are exceedingly difficult to handle without tipping over into sentiment. The dramatist must avoid showing that he is touched by them himself. Mr. Maugham has not sentimentalized Sheppey, even when his inexhaustible and spontaneous "charity" approaches the gospel ideal. Sheppey is not a saviour of souls; he cannot save the petty thief or the public-house tart. He is not interested in them because they have immortal souls, let alone as citizens, but because he cannot help liking them as they are, even when he wishes they were different. He is shocked by misery and unhappiness but he cannot be disgusted by human beings, whatever they do. As one of the characters remarks, Sheppey has no moral sense whatever. Galsworthy once drew such a character—Wellwyn in *The Pigeon*, which, to my mind, was one of his best pieces of work.

How does Mr. Maugham modulate from a fashionable hairdresser's shop to the theme of Christian charity? It is deftly done, and there are two points about the management of the transition which will excite the admiration of those who know anything about the playwright's craft.

First, the character of Sheppey, revealed to us while he is shaving customers and chatting with the other assistants, is (though at the time no such interest enters our heads) exactly the right soil out of which the flower of Christian charity might plausibly spring, granted some sudden opening, illumination or religious conversion—or whatever

you like to call it—takes place. What made Sheppey the perfect barber, and the soul of the establishment he served, was his *humility*; that old-fashioned but important virtue, and the one, oddly enough, which often makes a man trust his intuitions against the judgment of the world. Without drawing our attention to it directly, the playwright has suggested Sheppey's natural humility, by exhibiting his wholehearted devotion to his little job; and it was his quality which Mr. Richardson's masterly impersonation of every side of Sheppey's character, brought out so well. Not long ago we saw Mr. Richardson in *Wild Decembers* as the curate who wooed Charlotte Brontë—successfully at last. Once again he shows a rare understanding of human goodness, and a rare restraint in expressing it; Mr. Richardson is again a perfect interpreter of a dramatist's subtler intentions, and in a part, too, which requires a nice adjustment between humour and deep feeling.

The second point about Mr. Maugham's transition is the ingenious use of what may be described as "the red herring".

Two very important things happened to Sheppey that morning in Jermyn Street. He had had to attend the police court as the principal witness in the case of a man who stole an overcoat from a car; and while listening to his own and other cases he had been strangely upset. The criminals and outcasts of society are human beings like himself and as amiable as his customers! Hunger and misery had made them what they were; Sheppey is so disturbed by this discovery that he cannot help chatting about his amazement.

The second, is the news that he has won £8,500 in the Irish Sweepstake. When the curtain falls on the establishment drinking Sheppey's health in champagne, we are naturally left guessing how his

luck is going to affect him. I must mention that he has brought in with him a woman from the public house opposite, with whom he had often had a little friendly talk, discovering now she is hungry and exhausted; and that when he and she are left alone together, he has a slight fit—probably the result of suppressed excitement. Well, how is his sweepstake luck going to affect him and the story? I do not suppose a single person in the theatre anticipated the actual consequences. I know several alternatives, each in Mr. Maugham's vein, occurred to me, and not one of them proved right: he might be paralysed by another stroke and his "luck" turn out a curse, or his wife, whom we had not seen, might be a tiresome silly woman who would destroy the contented life he had hitherto led by her pursuit of silly social ambitions, or she might be furiously jealous of the woman who brought him home that night; or again, the money might spoil Sheppey himself—in his middle-age he might turn vulgar-gay and rush to ruin.

But Act II shows Mrs. Sheppey to be charming, sensible, steady; and, gradually, it is disclosed that Sheppey's experience in the police court, together with his fit (probably this was accompanied by some strange spiritual illumination as with Dostoievsky), have together implanted in him a very different longing. He has forgotten his day-dreams of buying a nice little house and providing a slap-up wedding for his daughter, who is engaged to a pushful young schoolmaster in a county council school; he is resolved instead to give his money to all and sundry who clearly need it more than he does.

The conflict is not between husband and wife, but between Sheppey and the young couple, who see whisked away before their eyes the blessed chance of attaining the gentility they covet. Their dismay,

their despair, are without bounds. No honeymoon trip to Paris for them; no marriage even perhaps for Sheppey's daughter (excellently played by Miss Angela Baddeley)—for she understands her Ernest, who conceals beneath the tags of a pretentious education and devotion to public service, the passions of a little arrivist. Ernest's arguments, and her violent clutch upon the money, make excellent comedy in contrast to Sheppey's buoyant insistence that the outcasts, the thief and the prostitute should come and live with them, and his determination (he only knows that this makes him happy) to scatter his fortune.

Such a sudden conversion to the ethics of the New Testament must be madness! He has failed to redeem the thief—who steals from him, or the prostitute—who runs off to the streets again, but these things matter not to Sheppey. He has obeyed his inmost impulse. If only the doctors would certify him! Mrs. Sheppey also is deeply perturbed, especially when her husband turns down an offer of a partnership in the hair-dressing business, which in old days he had coveted before all things. Her husband is certainly in a queer state. But when the doctors diagnose his case as one of religious paranoia she is dismayed. (Here Mr. Maugham indulges in some overcharged but effective satire of mental specialists.) Again we are left in doubt as to what will happen in the last act: a Strindberg ending of a loving woman fixing a straight-waistcoat on "the father" seems a possibility. But Sheppey is lucky to the last. He is saved by death, and we from a painfully sardonic ending. He dies in a nap while his wife is out buying kippers for supper. There is a black-out, and the process of death is presented as a vision interrupted at one point by the reappearance of the thief. This dialogue is moving, but if death could have been a mere voice the effect would have

been strengthened, and the confusion of one live figure and one subjective one being on the stage together, avoided.

Samuel Butler, looking back on the Christians who had surrounded him in his childhood, said that they would have been equally shocked by Christianity being denied, or taken seriously. This state of mind is the theme of the play, and it is deftly and firmly handled, and admirably interpreted, too, from the minor characters up to Sheppey himself.

HYDE PARK

I READ *Within the Gates* with admiration; I saw it with deep disappointment. I will endeavour to discover how far this was due to the production and how far to faults which had escaped me before. On the stage at The Royalty *Within the Gates* fails. I thought it grand, moving, and a step in a dramatic development which at last might enable *poets* to write for the Theatre—when I read it. When I watched it, it seemed a grandiose mixture of blatant sentiment and heart-damping unreality. Moved? I was only moved by the muffled drums of the "Down and Outs". "The Bishop", "The Prostitute", "The Dreamer", left me coldly critical; the experiments in technique struck me as danger signals rather than as finger-posts. I fancy I detect some embarrassment in the comments of even the most laudatory of my colleagues. The lively and candid Mr. Agate, however, openly confessed to his. He called to his aid the distinction of Sainte Beuve between private criticism, when one speaks giving expression to one's personal preferences and aversions, and criticism written for the public when the critic first takes account of an author's reputation, and then allows (generously) for his intentions. Mr. Agate let us know that his own impressions of *Within the Gates* were violently unfavourable, but, speaking publicly, he admitted his personal reactions were not necessarily the last word on the play.

Yet there are only two dramatists writing today of original creative force: Eugene O'Neil and Sean O'Casey! In the Royalty Theatre I looked at

my programme to be sure that such a play had indeed been written by Mr. O'Casey. True, intermittent wafts of poetry had reached me during the play, and phrases moulded out of common speech into fine literature, and words, too, of pungent and necessary brutality. But all was drowned in what appeared a pretentious pessimism; in stuff one would expect from a playwright who had chosen as protagonists (inauspicious triad!) a Bishop, a Prostitute, and a Dreamer. How I had jumped on other dramatists in the past for using a "Dreamer" or his equivalent—a "Wanderer", or what not—figures, born of an earnest imagination more impressed than inspired by its theme, as mouthpieces for the expression of ultimate wisdom! How severe I had always been on Galsworthy's youthful idealists, hard pressed by a callous world, but gaily waving the garden-city banner of liberty and joy! How, then, in the name of candour and impartiality, could I now abstain from recording the hapless impression made on me by *this* young dreamer in flannel trousers? What heavy and artificially loaded irony to make "The Bishop" the father of "The Prostitute"! How cheap! Such was the invention of Sean O'Casey—the only living master, save one, of the phantasmic method of combining profound poetry and biting realism on the stage! The true successor of Ibsen and Synge. In my distress at having to write about the play, I did what you would have done: I read it again. It appeared to me grand, moving, and a step towards a new dramatic development.

What was the explanation? Was the production an utter travesty? Or was *Within the Gates* unsuited to the stage? The answer to the first question is "To a large extent, yes." But I had seen what living actors had made of it (I am not going to criticize the acting, to praise this stroke of acting,

or regret the failure of that), and I was now conscious of the colossal demands which Mr. O'Casey had unconsciously made upon his interpreters. In the first place the author calls up visions, scenes, which require the greatest elaboration and delicacy to impress the eye on the stage as they do the imagination of the reader. In a very real sense the "subject" of the play is a place, Hyde Park. The figures are only living parts, fragments, of a whole which (what an eye Mr. O'Casey has for the essential!) is a microcosm of human-life to-day. Hyde Park is a pool into which all the torrents of modern life flow: religion, politics, lust, play, scientific thought, despair, lonely meditation. There they eddy and clash. There, too, civilization and nature mingle; prospects please and man is often vile. In the surface of that pool the poet has seen reflected the energies and lassitudes, follies, revolts and perplexities, desperations and compensations of modern life—and the terrible glorious inexplicability of the world. While crossing that love-parlour, debating hall, dormitory, and university of the people, I have felt dimly, excruciatingly, myself, what the poet-dramatist has conveyed (in print), often with the greatest skill in the use of contrasts, often with a sort of clumsy joyful force which, on paper, seems indistinguishable from success: the blue above the trees, clouds, song of birds, sparkling water; the music of the bands; the interminable wrangling and haranguing both of blind stupidity and half-educated cleverness; the indomitable persistence of man in thinking, wanting, striving; hidden instincts on the prowl; philanthropy too on the prowl; the living-corpses of civilization and of lovers glued together scattered about the green grass; the bright stable shifting surface of life, and the threat of an under-tow which may drag us away—all these things found place in the pages of this astounding

drama. The halting, steady dead-march of the defeated is heard again and again, and at last we even see the muddy edge of that drooping viscous human-flood which may yet obliterate civilization. But all these things do not find proportioned or even adequate expression upon the stage. No, not upon the stage.

Consider for a moment what it required in lavish expense in rehearsals, in enthusiastic appreciation of the play's drift, in order to represent so much as this upon the stage. The Park must be seen in spring, summer, autumn, winter—and changing too with the moods of men. To produce this play Mr. Macdermott ought to have had thousands of pounds at his disposal, expert singers, strong choruses, expert dancers—in fact the resources of the Gaiety Theatre.

And that reminds me, my colleagues have introduced the words "Strindberg", "*Spook Sonata*", in their endeavour to indicate the novel technique of Mr. O'Casey's play. I believe they have looked too far afield. What is peculiar about it is that he has endeavoured to use the technique of *musical comedy* to express philosophic tragedy. More than two critics have referred to the Gardener as coming straight out of musical comedy—with a smile. That is perfectly true. But The Bishop, The Prostitute, The Dreamer, The Old Woman, the recurring Park Keepers and Orators are technically like the figures who appear and disappear among the whirling choruses of the Gaiety stage. I said I would attempt to apportion, if I could, between author and producer, the degree of responsibility for the failure on the stage of *Within the Gates*.

Mr. O'Casey has taken for granted that when he imagines in his mind, for example, the desperate joy-dance of the Prostitute, her repeated faintings and flaggings, her mænad recoveries and realistic

pertnesses, that all these things are possible to the same interpreter and in quick succession. He has not watched enough to see the lowering effect on the stage of repeated situations. He has not foreseen the emotional confusion in the audience produced by having to regard the Bishop at one moment as a comic figure kissing babies, crudely humiliated by giggling nursery maids, and the next as a hieratic figure of retributive "mercy"; that there must be diminished effect in repeatedly introducing his sister, that stock elderly character in musical comedy, who is perpetually shocked, yet tries to save the dignity of her man from ludicrously undignified predicaments. He has fancied that a young man in flannels with a thoughtful expression can convey the impression of a sort of Loki, or fire-god of desire and of faith in defiance. He has made a psychological error in typifying the universal power of sex heavily, by making the Bishop the begetter of the Prostitute. The results of those defects lie at his door.

But his producer has made a far more pervasive mistake in neglecting the definite stage instructions that the principal figures should suggest that they are symbols as well as individuals.

The Bishop was realistic; he carried no crook, no fantastic red cross, with the white body of Christ upon it, swung from his neck; no queer hat, suggesting the mitre, was on his head. The Scarlet Woman, who is the emblem of part of the life of Hyde Park itself, and the archetype of the slightly more realistic prostitute, was omitted altogether, while the Prostitute to the eye was just an ordinary little woman. The realistic note, in spite of the play being to a large extent sardonic *opera*, was persistently reinforced, and consequently emphasized such blunders in theatrical psychology as the poet's work contained. It brought them to the surface instead of merging them in the pageantry, music and

phantasmic energy of the whole creation. In a way I am sorry that this play has been performed. For another reason I am glad. Mr. O'Casey is a man who cares so little for the effect on the public of his work and so entirely for that work itself that he is in danger of ignoring problems of communication. Having seen his play, he will have learnt something important to him as an artist.

CHARLIE'S CANE

MISS ELSIE CODD was some little time ago, and may be still for all I know, Charlie Chaplin's secretary. She has published an account of his methods of production. Eighteen hundred feet of a Chaplin film is the result of several months' hard work; "his hardest work", she tells us, "is not his own work in front of the camera." I know nothing about film-production, but everyone will be prepared to believe that planning and scrapping (he is extremely exacting) is far the heaviest part of it, especially to one who has an unerring instinct for pose and movement.

I went to see the new Chaplin film, *The Pilgrim*, and it recalled to me Miss Elsie Codd's remark that during rehearsals Chaplin is perpetually exclaiming, "Don't *act*." He means, of course, "don't *over-act*"; don't try too hard to be funny, pathetic, wicked, absurd; and his own pre-eminence is largely due to his being always, even in the most grotesque situations, in a sense, unexaggerative. I remembered, too, what he had written himself: "Still funnier is the person in a ludicrous position who, in spite of it, refuses to admit that anything out of the ordinary is happening, and is obstinate in preserving his dignity." (How exactly this describes his commonest and some of his best effects!) . . . "That is why all my films rest on the idea of getting myself into awkward situations, so as to give me the chance of being desperately serious in my attempts to look like a very normal little gentleman. That is why my chief concern, no matter how painful the posi-

tion I get myself into, is always to pick up my little cane at once, and put my bowler-hat straight, and adjust my necktie—even if I've just fallen on my head. I am so sure of this that I do not try only to get myself into these embarrassing positions, but I count on putting others also into them." In *The Pilgrim* Charlie has no "little cane"; he is an escaped convict who finds himself, by chance of course, impersonating a minister who is expected by a village community in the Far West. He has stolen the clothes of a bathing parson, the rest of his adventures follow automatically. Nevertheless, the "fun" throughout is precisely of this kind; the continual pretence, when the most extraordinary and incongruous things happen, that nothing unusual or unbecoming has occurred.

There is, however, another element which is always contributive, not so much to our relish of particular scenes as to the effect the sum of ludicrous events makes upon us: I mean the perpetual contrast between complete helplessness, feebleness and absence of forethought in "Charlie" and his indomitable adroitness in momentary crises. Here lies an opportunity for those who like to express their appreciation of this unpretentious artist in terms of refined speculation. If you want to see profundity in "Charlie"; if you want to link up his art with serious imaginative creation, here is your chance. You can even penetrate if you like, at this point, down to a philosophy behind it.

The late Dan Leno, who was brother-in-art to "Charlie", wrote his own biography. It is a sad little book, full of jokes, good and bad. In the course of it he says (I quote from memory), the Leno philosophy of life comes to this: "I see the world as a football, kicked about by the higher powers, with me clinging on by my teeth and toenails to the laces." It *is* a kind of philosophy; and

one readily understood by all. Life, for the majority, easily bears that interpretation.

It appeals especially to the poor—at times to all of us. It is the philosophy of humility. That is why, like Dan Leno, "Charlie" rouses sympathy so readily. His melancholy imperturbability, his perky recoveries, even his very transparent swagger, are, one and all, gestures expressive of a disarming humility. The famous "cane" is symbolic of an unconquerable human aspiration towards dignity. There lies the fun—the hopelessness of that aspiration. "I don't think I quite knew at first", he told us, "how true it is that, for millions of individuals, a walking-stick marks a man as rather a 'swell'. And so when I come shuffling on to the scene with my little cane and my serious air, I give the impression of an attempt at dignity, and that is exactly my object." He knows the public likes to laugh and cry all in a minute. Whatever brevity may be to wit, it is certainly the soul of pathos, and "Charlie's" pathos is conveyed in the briefest touches; a sudden fall of countenance, a shrug, a woeful attempt at a smile. Mr Chaplin knows we are in our hearts on the side of the unlucky against the lucky, of the poor against the rich, of the weak against the strong, of the kind against the unkind. "Charlie" is therefore always ill-treated, always humiliated, and always—how consolingly—indomitable.

THE ARABIAN NIGHTS

THE CINEMA inspires in me two emotions, wonder and contempt. I have little faith in the "art" of it, having very seldom felt at "The Pictures" any feeling worth having—except, of course, astonishment. Its excitements do not excite me; its pathos does not touch me—true, its humours sometimes make me laugh. I have never seen, or even heard of, tragedy on the films; for there sorrow invariably becomes as sentimental as sorrow described in bad prose. The only kind of cinema pathos which has ever come near to touching me is the desperate and comic humility of Charlie.

There is something numbing to emotions in the state of passivity, enjoyable, of course, from another point of view, like a warm bath, or rushing along in a motor, which the cinema produces in one. One sits and stares—half-hypnotized—and what one stares at vanishes after a couple of minutes or a few seconds, and one stares again at something else. I really doubt if it is possible to tell a story well by pictures and pictures alone. You can divine a whole story in one picture—some of Daumier's drawings have a whole story, and a very good story, in them; you can find a poem in a picture, but these feats require a long exposure before the mind.

Now the cinema has been with us a good many years, and our readers have probably seen hundreds of films, yet I should be surprised if they can call up before them clearly one of those stories and feel again in memory any emotion they inspired—

except, again, astonishment. It is all gone, completely gone. In the case of a play such recall is easy. Scenes from a play we have seen, or scenes from books we have read, often remain integral parts of an experience barely distinguishable from personal experience. Even when this is saying too much, we can still recall them; we can remember scenes and moments which have no permanent value or interest in the plays we saw, or in the novels we read, years ago.

I can remember scenes out of *Dr. Caligari* because it was so odd; nightmarish scenes, queer beautiful moments, though these I find it difficult to visualize; but what sheer sensationalism the whole thing was—utterly empty, just a series of shocks and thrills. I can, of course, remember too "the human fly" clinging to the cornice of a house of fifteen storeys. But the emotions such moments rouse are very cheap. I know it is said that "the art" of the cinema has not yet begun, and that the miserable poorness of the retrospect is due to so much rubbish having been performed, but I cannot help thinking that this explanation is insufficient; that there is something inherently superficial in "the art of the cinema" itself. If this is a fact, it would account for the extraordinary reluctance of film-producers to try anything outside sentiment and sensationalism, or failing those two expedients, anything which does not astonish. They know the limitations of their medium a great deal better than the people who urge them to aspire and experiment.

The cinema can only describe. Its chief glory lies in presenting marvels and rareties. To ransack Africa for gorillas and "park" them, to buy two trains and make them dash into each other at top speed, to torpedo a disused battleship before our eyes, to picture Martians and monsters and miracles

—these are its true triumphs. This is not art, but it is very entertaining.

The film which reproduces as well as it can (I think it has just been released) the attack on Zeebrugge will be a film on the right lines; so is *The Thief of Bagdad*, still to be seen at Drury Lane. The *Arabian Nights* are indeed perfect subjects for the cinema. Panorama, not drama, is its line. Its attempts at drama can never rise above the second rate, however skilfully the actors may portray emotion by their gestures and expressions; for what distinguishes a fine play from a poor one are not the situations as the eye apprehends them, lovers meeting or parting, fathers and sons quarrelling or being reconciled, people humiliating or consoling each other, but the revealing things men and women say at such moments. Abstract the words and what is left are situations which may be common to the most fatuous and the finest work of art.

A blind man would get a great deal more out of *Othello* or *The Master Builder* than a deaf one; indeed the latter would be quite unable to distinguish the merits of one from the poorest Sardou play and of the other from absurd drama of modern life. In the night all cats are grey; on the films all drama is second-rate. It is true that the expression on a film actor's face may occasionally suggest that he, or she, is saying something worth hearing, but the audience cannot supply it from their imaginations; neither can "the caption" writer—that much is generally made clear. And could anything be more fatal to the spirit of drama than being told what the characters are going to say before you see them saying it? Yet back upon this device the film is inevitably thrown whenever it attempts to tell a story in which human character enters as an important element; that is to say, every story which

does not depend for interest upon sensationalism, crude sentiment, fantasy, or scenery.

You can rag the nature of things on the film, mock the laws of gravity, exhibit human beings running impossible risks, juggle with improbabilities of every description. The result *may* be extremely exhilarating. You can unfold vast spaces and panoramas, armies marching across plains and over mountains. You can show a thousand camp fires burning, or a mob rushing about a town and sacking it; for the cinema can give the impression of things happening simultaneously in different places. But it is limited to the spectacular; the epic and not the dramatic is its proper province. Directly it attempts to deal with the personal life of the emotions it is confined to superficiality.

In an *Arabian Night* story, like *The Thief of Bagdad*, scenery and marvels are the essence of the entertainment, and therefore it is a good film. We see men climbing up wrought iron gates the height of cliffs, racing along corridors, up flights of steps, endless as the stairs and corridors of dreams. We see them flying through the air on magic carpets, an innumerable army rising by magic from the ground, submarine monsters and gigantic dragons slain—these are fine to look at, but rather poor fighters by the way. We see processions of eastern princes bringing camel loads of gorgeous gifts, Mr. Douglas Fairbanks' fine athletic chest and his soft wonderful cat-like leaps, caverns and gorges of fire, and a winged white horse, titupping too sleepily, across the night sky. This is the kind of thing the cinema, and only the cinema, can do.

SIR JOHN HARE
1844–1921

OBITUARY notices have dealt with his life which was an honourable one. He retired comparatively early, and only a protracted period of "farewell performances" (1905–1908) enabled the younger public to see him in some of his famous parts, such as Benjamin Goldfinch in *A Pair of Spectacles* (a sentimental play), and as the gay Lord Quex. His great reputation was based on far fewer parts than is usual in the case of actors of his eminence. As a manager he seemed to prefer to be out of the cast, and only once (as Touchstone) did he experiment beyond his own province. But every part he did play, if it did not add to his reputation, maintained it.

He was the most completely self-collected and cautious actor of his time. His talent was based on observation, not on imagination, and his enthusiasm for his art showed in polish and completeness. He was an excellent mimic of old age, and of the manners of men of the world.

His last new part, the judge in the trial scene of *The Adored One* (1913), was a superb piece of mimicry. Indeed, his little bursts of judicial petulance, the hesitating, dubative way in which he passed his hand across his lips while taking notes, his chirrupped jokes alternating wtih a gentle menacing mumble, were so exactly real that he helped to kill the play. For, instead of feeling that they were watching a court which might any moment turn, as in *Alice in Wonderland*, into a pack of cards,

the audience smelt blood, which was fatal to Sir James Barrie's exaggerated fantasia.

But Hare was more than a mimic; there was in him a surprising emotional trenchancy, which he held in reserve with artistic parsimony for the smashing moment. He was, as his career showed—and indeed his face—a man with a strong will. It was the husbanded energy within that prevented his Goldfinch from being insipid, and made his Quex contrast so effectively and masterfully with the passionate flutterings of Miss Irene Vanbrugh.

His success proves that care for perfection is appreciated.

SARAH BERNHARDT

THE BEST criticism of Sarah Bernhardt, and the finest tribute to her in English, is to be found in Mr. Maurice Baring's *Puppet Show of Memory*, where she has a chapter to herself. I recommend this chapter to all who wish to recall or define her genius. "The actor's art dies with him; but the rumour of it, when it is very great, lives on the tongue and sometimes in the soul of man, and forms a part of his dreams and his visions," he writes, "and we who never saw Rachel get an idea of her genius from the accounts of her contemporaries, from Théodore de Banville and Charlotte Brontë. Her genius is a fact in the dreams of mankind; just as the beauty of Helen of Troy and the charm of Mary Stuart, whom many generations of men fell in love with. So shall it be with Sarah Bernhardt. There will, it is to be hoped, be great actresses in the future—actresses filled with the Muses' madness and constrained to enlarge rather than interpret the masterpieces of the world; but Providence (so economical, so generous!) never repeats an effect; and there will never be another Sarah Bernhardt, just as there will never be another Heinrich Heine."

I only saw her act five times. On two of these occasions she walked through her part, acting with perfunctory languor and mechanical adroitness; suddenly turning on the *voix d'or*, as an organist might pull out the *vox humana*, and then letting go in a rapid exhibition of herself as tigress, tearing the words between her teeth and spitting them out again, as though we were a pack of fools (and I dare

say we were) who had paid to see her tricks. She was, in fact, on those occasions the kind of actress her admirers, like Sarcey, feared she might become while touring the globe as one of the world's wonders. Although I concealed my disappointment the first time I saw her act, for fear it should be my own sensibility that was at fault, that disappointment was deep; and I read afterwards with enthusiastic assent Mr. Shaw's criticism in *Dramatic Opinions and Essays*, in which she was compared most unfavourably with Duse.

But the next time, I saw the real Sarah—her performance as *Phèdre* shot far beyond mere excellence. Opinions were often divided about her acting in London in the 'nineties and later.

> Silver gilt will often pass
> Either for gold or else for brass,

and it happens not infrequently that the work of artists, which has value but still greater pretensions, is as much underrated by some as overrated by others. No doubt not a little of the acting Sarah Bernhardt showed us in this country was of the silver-gilt description, with the result that while the ignorant shouted "gold", some of the discriminating cried "brass". But she also gave us the purest gold. If my ear can detect the ring of true metal, I heard it that night in *Phèdre*. In *Fédora*, in passages of her performance of *Hamlet*, too, I heard it again.

Mr. Baring has recorded the significance she put into the scene in which Hamlet answers Polonius's question, "What do you read, my Lord?" Hamlet was lying in a chair reading a book. "The first '*des mots*' he spoke with an absent-minded indifference, just as anyone speaks when interrupted by a bore; in the second '*des mots*' his answer seemed to catch his own attention, and the third '*des mots*' was

accompanied by a look, and changed into an intense but fugitive attention: something

'between a smile and a smothered sigh',

with a break in the intonation that clearly said, 'Yes, it is words, words, words, and all books and everything else in life and in the whole world are only words, words, words, words.' "

I remember another moment of that performance which in imagination and intensity I never saw equalled by any other Hamlet.

When Hamlet runs his sword through the arras and, hearing a body fall, thinks he has accidentally killed the king, she stood suddenly tiptoe, like a great black exclamation mark, her sword glittering above her head, and a cry, "C'est le Roi!" rang in our ears, so expressive of final triumph and relief, that for a tingling second it seemed the play itself must be over.

The voice is the actor's most potent instrument of expression. All the papers in the world are striving now to recall Sarah Bernhardt's voice—its cooing, chanting sweetness, its feline violence, its thrilling clear whisper, its guttural cries of animal passion. She might have acted in the dark and have held us.

In addition she had a strange, frail, inhuman beauty, animated by an electric vitality; and though she could on occasion be insolently casual, offering us contemptuously "her reputation instead of first-rate acting", yet throughout her long career she slaved at her art like one who can only with the utmost effort fulfil what he has undertaken. It was a very conscious art; you may even call it artificial. In the case of Duse you forgot that Duse was *acting*. Is that a greater tribute? It depends upon the part. In some parts it certainly is; while in suggesting

beauty of character Duse was easily supreme. Sarah Bernhardt was always the actress as well as the part; at her best she was both equally. Consequently, she was at her very best in plays where the passions were expressed in a dramatic convention which does not attempt to compete with nature or to create the greatest illusion, but to interpret life on another level.

When Sarah Bernhardt began to act, Racine's tragedy was held to be cold and monotonous compared with the work of the great romantics. It is thanks to Rachel and Sarah Bernhardt, more than to any literary critic, that modern taste has come to recognize in the alexandrines of Racine inflections as simple and delicate as Verlaine's, and to perceive, if not even to exaggerate, the expression of passion in his dramas; for after all he is not a Shakespeare. Frenchmen say that no actress ever spoke Racine's verse with more subtle and varied precision, or more musically, than Sarah Bernhardt; the foreigner was at any rate conscious of her perfect balance between the conventional and the realistic in such parts as Phèdre.

In her acting at its best she achieved what modern poets long to do—to express their own personalities with spontaneous freedom without losing the dignity and definiteness of a conscious work of art.

ELEONORA DUSE

THERE is a Chinese legend that the most mellifluous of all the bells, from one end of the Celestial Kingdom to the other, owed its peculiar, sonorous sweetness to a beautiful princess who, while it was being cast, threw herself into the molten bronze. The story will serve as an apologue of the art of Duse. She fuses with every part she plays a beauty and sincerity which is herself. To the part of Paula in *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*—some will remember her in it—she lent a suggestion of a pathos and depth of spiritual loneliness, which was not in that shrewdly but narrowly conceived character. Thus, too, she transmuted the sentimental tenderness of Dumas' *Dame aux Camélias* into something so much deeper and less self-conscious, that the pathos of Marguerite's physical sufferings became subordinate. As Mr. Arthur Symons said at the time, "she was Mlle. de Lespinasse rather than Marguerite Gautier; a creature in whom ardour is as simple as breath, and devotion a part of ardour".

No one could say that the Italian Company's performance of Ibsen's *Ghosts* last Tuesday was a sound interpretation of the play. The almost perverse commonness of atmosphere in that uncomely tragedy, so necessary to the grinding harshness of its lesson, thinned away. It was irradiated by an irresistible personal presence, of a mother who was a queen among mothers; whose gestures were perfectly beautiful without ceasing to be also so natural that it was hard to believe they could ever be repeated just like that—the kind of gestures which

come from quickness of heart and yet now were moulded to the suavity of one moving to music.

The public still has some few more chances of seeing this art which seems to glide softly at its own sweet will, yet turns the touching awkwardness of natural caresses and distracted distress into gestures that an artist must long to perpetuate. It seems so little like acting that compared with it the virtuosity of other actresses is like the splendid sputtering of a stationary catherine wheel. Yet the virtuosity is there. Notice, not only what Duse expresses, but what she refrains from expressing—how passive she can be, how negative, how still, until the moment comes when her emotions are again in action.

Poets and critics have made famous the beauty of her expressive hands. Watch them while Mrs. Alving talks with Pastor Manders, how *they* talk too, conveying as clearly as the tones of her voice, shades of ironic expostulation, pity, patience, finality; how she smiles with them, pleads with them, confutes with them! It is as though she had an extra keyboard for the expression of emotion, her voice, her face—and her hands. While her face, true to nature at some moments of intense emotion, may portray only a waiting blankness, the tremor of passion already speaks through her body; so that she seems

> One, whose cleare body was so pure and thinne,
> Because it need disguise no thought within.
> 'Twas but a through-light scarfe her minde t'inroule;
> Or exhalation breath'd out from her Soule.

On Thursday afternoon she played the part of the mother in *Cosi Sia* ("Thy will be done"). No praise can overmatch that performance. It is a peasant play of piety and maternal agony. It is entirely without merit as a work of art, but so con-

structed as to exhibit the actress in extremes of tenderness, distress, humiliation, relief. It is left for Duse to transfigure the principal character into a *mater dolorosa*; her achievement was a moving feat of genius. In the first act we see her stooping distractedly over the bed of her dying child, dismissing her brutal, indifferent husband from the room, then pleading for her son's life before an image of the Madonna. The gestures, the intonations, touchingly, urgently familiar, with which she wrestled for his life, offering as a sacrifice her dearest possession, were the most direct assault on the emotions imaginable; yet possessing a lovely naturalness and beauty, they raised that appeal far above mere sentiment. Her dearest possession is not a lover—this is the one subtle touch in the text—but the memory of the man she hoped once to marry. With a cry her child recovers consciousness; her prayer has been miraculously answered.

When the curtain rises again, twenty-three years have passed. Her son has run away from home, and she has become a weary, ragged, old beggar. She meets him accidentally in the midst of gay, coarse companions. He is ashamed of her, repudiates her; then lingers behind, and when she pleads for love, tells her in language which lacks nothing in brutality, that he left her because she was unfaithful to his father. The moment when she recognized her lost son from his voice, her amazed repudiation of this charge, her desolation when he again leaves her, were wonderful moments. In the last act she climbs to a mountain shrine to pray once more for a miracle; that his heart may be softened and his soul saved. She has no offering, no sacrifice to bring the Virgin now, only her own worn, old body. She dies exhausted at the altar, murmuring, "Thy will be done".

The marvel was that sentiment was exalted

into rare beauty. So exquisite and gradual is Duse's preparation of her effects, that these never strike one as obvious, however crude the dramatic moment. When she reaches a climax, one look, one gesture is then sufficient to drive the emotion home with irresistible force. To anyone reading the bare synopsis of *Cosi Sia* it may seem an incredible feat; but she appeared to be acting without emphasis, a part which was one long appeal to pity and to tears.

DUSE AND BERNHARDT

DUSE IS dead, and this means that a unique kind of beauty has gone from the world, to live, not insecurely, but, alas! vaguely, as a tradition. Of the two great actresses of our times some preferred one, some the other. For my part I preferred the art of Duse to that of Sarah Bernhardt. It was less imposing, but more beautiful; it gave me emotions I valued more. Both actresses often transcended rather than interpreted their parts; and what they added was often more precious than the playwright's work. But the quickest way of suggesting the difference between their talents is to say that the art of Sarah Bernhardt made us first conscious of the beauty of emotions and passions, while that of Duse was a revelation of the beauty of human character. Her art was more personal; its effects more dependent upon subtleties and sincerities. When we left the theatre we felt as if we loved Duse herself, and that whatever she had been made to do and say in her part, she could not be very different from the character she had played; while in the case of Sarah Bernhardt we felt that what we had seen was the performance of a great actress.

To say this is not (heaven defend us from such stupidities!), to deny art to Duse or naturalness to Sarah, but the naturalness of the latter was that of her part under the technical conditions of representation, and the art of the former to fill the part she played with the grace of her own sensibility and the profundity of her own emotional experience. She

did it so perfectly that we ceased to be conscious of those technical conditions. Any crowd could see that Sarah was a great actress, but not every member of it could be aware of the significance of that revelation of character which Duse put into her gestures and intonations. That revelation could be either one of exquisitely light gaiety or of that pathos—the most touching pathos of all—which strives, while longing for sympathy, to shield others from realizing suffering too vividly.

A performance by Duse was apt to be a most devastating criticism of the play, for her acting suggested many more poignant and delicate things than the dramatist had put into his situations. When her part lacked depth she supplied it, while it remained of course shallow elsewhere. Sarah, on the other hand, by the energy and adroitness with which she acted up to the last limits of her part, would often redeem by sheer passion a dramatist's tinsel.

I return to my original contrast, that the difference between their talents was that the great Italian actress excelled in revealing beauty of character, the great French actress in revealing the beauty of human passions. Several interesting results might be expected to follow, and the careers of both corroborate them. Sarah Bernhardt excelled in poetic tragedy; Duse's interpretation of realistic drama was far more delicately and profoundly moving. If you saw her in plays like *La Dame aux Camélias* or *The Second Mrs Tanqueray*, you asked yourself: "What would she be in a play in which the words and the dramatist's conception of her part were worthy of such acting!" Yet authoritative criticism declares that then she was far from being her best; her "Cleopatra", for instance, was not, it is said, a great achievement. Sarah, on the other hand, was at her supremest in *Phèdre*. Such parts did not permit

of that delicate infiltration of Duse's own personality into them, which was her own fine art upon the stage, making lovely what was crude and significant what was cheap.

In London last summer we saw Duse fill the part of the mother in *Cosi Sia*, a monotonous part which could only lead the most lamblike to the fountain of easy tears, with a delicate variety of profound emotion, which changed every minute; a wind of grief which rose to despair and sank to resignation. It was a creation which suggested that, when genius interprets, the dramatist's task might be merely to provide a finger-post, leaving the actress to find her own way and to decide where to linger and where to hasten. We saw her, too, in another play in which the dramatist had been by no means content to be a finger-post—in *Ghosts*. Mrs Alving she turned into a sweet queen of sorrows, exorcizing by the very sweep of her dress and the delicious pleading of her hands, all battling, dun, northern harshness from the play.

From the nature of her talent she was free from the commonest faults of the actor—exaggeration, false emphasis. She excelled in reticence and minute fidelity; but it was always the reticence of a singularly thoughtful nature, though her part might be that of a flamboyant, thick-skinned thruster like Magda, and her fidelity was ever fidelity to herself. The nature of Sarah Bernhardt's talent, on the other hand, led her readily into the faults of the rhetorician in literature, who cares more for the forceful expression of emotion than for genuine expression. Blaze and amaze she always could in the hands of a rhetorical dramatist who did not distinguish, but for the perfect exhibition of her art she needed the work of Racine. Two things I wish I had seen. Duse when she played Juliet at an age not far in advance of Juliet's age, and her Desdemona; that part which

is a pure and empty oval, asking for that beautiful variety Duse could supply.

Doubtless it was because her parts were *part* of her that she wore herself out so soon.

CHALIAPINE

I HAVE had a rare experience; one I shall not forget. I saw Chaliapine act at the Albert Hall. Fortunately, I was near enough to follow the delicacy and variety of that acting, as well as to appreciate the sweep of its grace and its force, which no doubt carried further. The interpretative value of every change of expression upon the actor's face, of every movement of his hands and of each slight shift in his attitudes, was visible and distinct to me. I know that acting to music makes easier (if talent is there) that rhythmic smoothness of gesture which, when combined with an air of complete spontaneity—violent, if necessary—is the beauty of oratory. Sometimes I heard no music; instead its counterpart was before my eyes.

Mozart and Salieri is a little opera of which the theme is fantastic, and the story a story of the most horrible murder imaginable; the poisoning of one artist by another who feels his victim's greatness, is jealous of it, loves and loathes and dreads it. What we watched was the translation of this almost incredible complex of evil and exalted emotion, into an ever-varying and convincing drama of expression. How it was done it would take far too long to tell; it would mean unpacking in words the significance of each gesture and expression as it passed into another, satisfying the imagination as it did so, and leaving a delighted wonder behind. There was a moment near the end when, my imagination racing ahead, I wondered what gesture could possibly express the emotion to be conveyed.

Salieri has walked to the door to see his victim out, over whom the langour of mortal sickness is already beginning to creep. His back is turned to us; Mozart has disappeared. What would the murderer's face be like when he turned round? What would he *do*? Chaliapine did not move; he thrust his hands down violently in the pockets of his long-skirted coat and the resolute gesture was like a cry, "*It's done!*"; then round he wheeled to show a face distorted with grinding immitigable misgivings. One second's acting this; let it serve as an example of a series of continuous inspirations.

The next item was the inn-scene from *Boris Godounov*. (Chaliapine took the part of the vagabond monk who sings the famous song "Beneath the walls of Kazan town".) His performance was that rarest of things—an exhibition of noble comedy. There was nothing of the usual bottle-and-monk Christmas-card fun about it—no reeling, rolling, rosy, rollicking business; but something much subtler and simpler, something exhilarating, lovable, laughable, very ancient and queer.

Thus, once again, it is to the enterprise of Mr. Cochran, who gave us our last chance of seeing Duse, that lovers of acting owe an experience they will remember.

CHISWICK PRESS