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STUDIES IN
THE CONTEMPORARY THEATRE

STUDIES IN THE CONTEMPORARY THEATRE

BY

JOHN PALMER

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TO

GEORGES AND LUDMILLA PITOËFF

IN ADMIRATION AND

AFFECTION

The substance of most of these studies has already been published in The Times, The Fortnightly **Review** *and* **The Nineteenth Cen-** and After. *The author thanks the Editors for allowing him to use this material as the basis of a more comprehensive survey of certain aspects of the contemporary theatre.*

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A GLANCE at the chapter headings of this volume may fill an English reader with misgiving. Except for the Russian, M. Pitoeff, and the Italian, M. Pirandello, the book deals entirely with French authors, none of whom is as yet familiar to the English playgoer. This appears to require an explanation. A critic who twenty years ago set out to write a book about the contemporary theatre might quite reasonably have ignored Paris altogether. Take as an example the admirable *Modern Dramatists* of Mr Ashley Dukes, published in 1911. There you will find chapters on the drama in Scandinavia, Germany, England, Austria, Russia, Belgium, Holland and Italy, all devoted to showing the European importance of their principal dramatic authors. There is one brief chapter on France, and that is inserted merely to show that France was at that time internationally of small account. The chapter is dedicated to Alfred Capus, described as "an agreeable weakling," and to M. Brieux, whose claims to international importance the author vehemently denies. This, perhaps, was rather severe on a theatre which had in its repertoire the plays of Henry Becque and M. de Porto-Riche, but in substance the indictment was justified and extremely opportune.

Mr Ashley Dukes, in spite of his extreme youth—for we were really young in those days—was substantially right in his estimate of the French theatre in 1911. Before the war Paris was a city of small importance to the European theatre. It was the least affected by any of the characteristic movements of that time. Even its most intelligent and advanced manifestations, like the Theatre Libre of M. Antoine or the Th&tre de TCEuvre of M. Lugne Poe, were scarcely more

than tardy efforts to acquaint educated Parisians with ideas and authors and methods of production which were already familiar to playgoers in the leading capitals of Europe. During the first decade of the new century Berlin and Moscow were leading the way in the arts of production, and the dramatic authors who expressed that generation were from Germany, Russia, Scandinavia and England, England in those days was contributing actively to the European drama. It was hospitable to foreign genius, and not deficient in genius of its own. In 1913 I was able to write a book on the future of the theatre dealing almost exclusively with recent English developments. No one dealing at that date with the contemporary theatre could ignore the productions of Mr Granville Barker, the plays of Mr Bernard Shaw and Mr John Galsworthy, the art of Mr Gordon Craig and the adventurous activities of the younger producing societies which turned our Sundays into the most strenuous day of the week. But all that is now as ancient as the battles of the Greeks and Trojans. No critic setting out to-day to write of the contemporary theatre—by which I mean the theatre which has come into existence since the war and reflects ideas and emotions which belong peculiarly to the post-war period—would find in London any tendency either in authorship or production which could not be more profitably studied elsewhere. The London theatre to-day, so far as it is imaginatively or intellectually alive at all, is living on its pre-war achievements. Those achievements were notable, and they will keep its reputation respectable for many years to come, but they are not in any real sense contemporary. The English theatre, for the moment, may be described as a theatre with a brilliant past before it.

The object of this book is to study the effect on the

theatre of immediately contemporary ideas and tendencies. It is in form a collection of separate studies of particular authors, preceded by a brief chapter on the present revival of the Paris stage intended to explain and justify our taking the French theatre as at present the most fruitful field of inquiry. I venture to hope that its chapters will leave on the reader a cumulative impression of the vitality and diversity of the dramatic movements which they are intended to illustrate and that they will direct some of the excessive attention at present devoted to the more striking achievements of the past to the more problematic activities of the future.

We shall be concerned almost exclusively with the young authors who during the last ten years have caused the French theatre, more than any other theatre in the world, to acknowledge the pressure of the time. I shall not attempt to explain why the theatre of France, which in the years before the war resisted every innovation and was recalcitrant to every vital idea, is now the theatre in which contemporary life finds its most active and vigorous expression. Possibly the pressure of contemporary life upon the theatre immediately after the war was greater in France than elsewhere. Certainly it has been sufficiently intense during the last ten years to shatter every formula, break down every convention and sweep all obstacles away. The French theatre, which before the war was the most insular, the most traditional, the most obstinately remote from immediate realities, is now the most cosmopolitan, the most revolutionary and the most feverishly responsive to the influence of contemporary events and impulses.

I do not, of course, pretend that for me these studies are in any sense complete or final. Still less do I seek to impose any views or decisions upon the reader. He would be a

bold critic who ventured to say that he could interpret to his complete satisfaction any movement in art and letters still strictly contemporary. Most aesthetic criticism is wisdom after the event, which explains why its established professors usually spend their time in the discussion of movements which have ceased to move. It is not difficult to be wise and witty and entirely right about the art and literature of yesterday, and one naturally prefers to be wise and witty and entirely right; it is so infinitely more agreeable than to grope and fumble with tendencies which are still indefinite and symptomatic, of which few can perceive the origin and no one can predict the end. The thing* however, must be done. Criticism is like astronomy. It cannot hope to achieve the dignity of a useful science until it can predict the movement of the literary bodies. It is not the task of a critic to exclaim that Mr Galsworthy or Mr Bernard Shaw is in the ascendant to-day. He must turn from the agreeable pastime of accounting for his delight in masterpieces like *The Forsyte Saga* or the preface to *Androdes and the Lion* in order to follow Ulysses in his progress from Homer and Tennyson into the epic of Mr Bloom. You are invited in this book to ignore the work which we have all studied and admired for many years. Except to illustrate the gulf that lies between 1927 and 1913, you will find no references to Ibsen, Strindberg, Tolstoi, Gorki, Tchekov, or any living authors who may be regarded as their spiritual contemporaries, or who dominated the European theatre before the war.

We are to examine certain tendencies which are immediately contemporary as illustrated in the works of authors who are still adventurers, and I would emphasize at once, as generally as possible, a characteristic of contemporary art and letters which will be more explicitly

emphasized in dealing with particular plays. It was proclaimed of poets by a more prosperous generation that it was their privilege and justification " to see life steadily and see it whole." Perhaps it is more difficult for poets and authors, looking back on a period that includes the Great War, to preserve the steadiness and equanimity of their predecessors. At the present moment there is hardly a moral, social or aesthetic truth which has not been shaken to its foundations. All the philosophies and theogonies are shattered, and for the moment there is no great synthetic prophet, no great constructive mind, no poet or philosopher, able to piece together the fragments into any sort of significant pattern. Except for those who continue to repeat mechanically doctrines, Christian or secular, which failed utterly of their purpose when most they were needed, or those who are pitifully subdued to the childish quackeries of parlour mystics, men and women of to-day are confronted by a world without unity or design. And it is naturally the most sensitive spirits who most acutely feel its shattering diversity. In every field of art and science and speculation we have become analytic, absorbed in a piecemeal contemplation of phenomena. We hold with Ahenobarbus that " every moment serves for the matter that is then born in it," and there is little desire to give form or coherence to anything whatever. The modern author yields to the multiplicity of which he is so vividly aware, allowing himself to be led along by a merely mechanical association of ideas, by a wilfully uncontrolled introspection. Either he is borne on the stream of things that pass him objectively, or on a current of sensations and thoughts that flow subjectively. There is little attempt to confine life within formal limits, to observe the fixed boundaries of form or logic. Here we find an author

depicting for us the minute progress of a snail over a garden bed, one piece of life being as good as another. Or it is the unspeakable Milly Bloom floating resistless on the stream of her thoughts through an unfinished sentence of some twenty-five thousand words. The word that most often recurs to the reader of such pages is the word "surrender" : surrender to the world outside, in which the author becomes minutely objective, or surrender to the consciousness within, in which the unrestrained progress of images and sensations has almost the quality of hallucination. In either case there is no effort to limit or define the material in accordance with preconceived models and forms, with accepted standards or prejudices, with a professed doctrine or philosophy. Each moment and object belongs to itself, is justified of itself, and has no necessary part in a general plan.

But you will ask : Can this be art ? Is it not a negation not only of art but of human reason and human will ? What becomes of the divine discourse looking before and after in this helpless surrender to things as they are ?

Deny it the name and quality of art just as you please. But it is undoubtedly an expression of the age, and just as certainly it is a sign of life and of hope for the art of the future. An essential condition for the production of art is that the artist should be sensitive to the life of his time, free to receive its impression, intensely aware of the world and of his fellows. Art is only irremediably dead when its professors are bound by the classical tradition and when, obedient to canons devised from the study of their predecessors, they live fastidiously apart in a levitical seclusion. Better to depict with fidelity the litter in a neglected area of Pimlico than to sit in a well-appointed library inditing impeccable odes in the manner of Dryden or experiment-

ing with the Swinburnian anapaest. Hope for the near future of our literature lies precisely in the fact that the more sensitive spirits of the day were never more passionately aware of the diversity of life, its evil with its good, the ugliness with the beauty. So intimately are they engaged with this diversity that any sort of formal canon or mental inhibition seems a treason to the prevailing moment of their inspiration. This is true in the abstract realm of music as in literature. M. Stravinsky, beginning as a writer of music according to a programme, has reached the point when he cannot endure any check upon his freedom, either in form or substance. His combinations at each particular instant are designed for their particular end without reference to any literary content or harmonic scheme. It is exactly this wilful surrender to the moment which distinguishes all the younger art from the art hitherto described as modern. There is a complete break, for example, between the later Scriabin and the later works of M. Stravinsky, the method of M. Stravinsky being an entire negation of everything which his predecessors attempted or achieved. Scriabin planned vast philosophies and worked according to a musical system mathematical in its logic and precision. M. Stravinsky in his later chamber-music has no philosophy and no musical method. He produces a succession of combinations which you must follow, if you can, as you follow any other modern Ulysses. The moment exists for itself, and it is useless seeking to place it in a system.

The increasingly analytical movement in science and the breakdown of all the established syntheses in religion and philosophy appear at first sight like a counsel of despair, a purely negative recoil from the confident doctrines of the assertive evolutionists of the previous generation. But is

the movement so entirely negative as it seems ? Certainly it is destructive in appearance, but even the imperturbable old Persian recognized that it was necessary to break the sorry scheme of things entire if it should ever become necessary to mould it nearer to the heart's desire. The modern artist, feeling instinctively that modern life has been knocked into fragments, that the religious, moral, intellectual and aesthetic ideas on which the art and polity of the nineteenth century were based are, in their pre-war forms, stunned or shattered, finds himself driven to play with the pieces. Unable to contemplate an ordered system, he finds his compensation in an abnormal sensitiveness to its momentary and detached manifestations. And he yields to this impulse with an engaging confidence, with the optimism of a child, which takes each sensation and discovery as it presents itself, without favour or fear, absorbed in the interest of disparate phenomena, delighted with individual things. The new art is almost a return to that state of innocence which knew neither good nor evil, neither honour nor shame. The filth on the page is as innocent as the prettiness. There is in both a schoolboy quality which is young and vital and full of promise. This modern art has undoubted faith—a blind and wholly unsystematic faith—in the moment and the object.

Let it be granted that in such conditions great art is impossible. But let us be equally sure that the art we have is alive and that it is the necessary preliminary to a synthesis that cannot long be delayed. The conditions for a renaissance are, in fact, more favourable to-day than they were before the catastrophe of 1914. Twenty years ago art was in that peculiar state of decadence which reveals itself in excessive devotion to forms and systems, in the belief that one can achieve vital art by simply substituting new

conventions for old ones. The musical programmes, art catalogues and prefaces of those days bristled with manifestos. People discussed not so much the works of art that were offered for their delight as the theory or fashion according to which they were produced—cubism, futurism, the whole-tone scale. The new movement is almost innocent of this dreary academism. It is running to the opposite extreme, allowing form to be dictated by substance rather than forcing substance into the limits of form. This is the more healthy condition. The human imagination abhors a chaos, and the new forms will be found which are necessary to its vital needs. The important thing is that the younger artists are facing life in all its complexity, undismayed and with eyes alert for all its aspects, giving to each element an independent standing and value, almost indifferently recording its good and evil, equally sensitive to all its aspects. The spirit of the enterprise is one of confident adventure and a kind of primitive glee :

> My men like satyrs grazing on the lawns
> Shall with their goat feet dance the antic hay.

Art is trying to begin again, and the results cannot be fully known for at least another gene'ration.

Chapter One

THE PRESENT REVIVAL OF THE PARIS STAGE

I. The General Position

IN the years before the war, when the Paris theatre was internationally of small importance, when there was hardly a French dramatist who justified translation, and when French acting, apart from one or two brilliant exceptions, was an established ritual so invariable that it was possible to foretell exactly the tone of voice, gesture and position of each individual member of almost any French company at any moment of the play, it was customary to applaud the high audacity and accomplishment of the French theatrical profession. London imported French farces and comedies by the dozen, and anyone might achieve a reputation as a cosmopolitan by assuring us that, however amusing these adaptations might be in the English version, they were, of course, incomparably subtler and more brilliant in the original. And these things, so invidious for the theatres of London, were said, be it remembered, quite unblushingly at a time when the English theatre was of some account. Mr Bernard Shaw and Mr John Galsworthy were achieving an international reputation, and the theatres of London were still being run by men of the theatre.

The tables are now turned. Little is heard in England to-day of the French theatre, and comparatively few plays are taken from the French. Eulogies of French playwriting and acting, which were loud during the period of their decadence, are no longer heard. From this it might incautiously be inferred that the French stage had gone

from bad to worse. Such an inference would, however, be quite unjustified. For by a strange paradox the French stage, which was so injudiciously commended when it was internationally worthless, is now receiving considerably less attention than it deserves. There has been in Paris an extraordinary dramatic revival during the last five years, and it has proceeded without apparently exciting any very noticeable interest in London. The travelled Englishman, who was so misguidedly eloquent concerning the beauties and audacities of the French theatre in 1913, has become strangely silent since the French theatre, to use the Miltonic expression, " pulled up its socks" and began to contribute actively to dramatic progress.

The change is bewildering. Consider, first, the complete reversal of the traditional French attitude to foreign genius. From being the most insulated theatre in Europe and the most inaccessible to new methods and ideas, it has within the last three or four years become as cosmopolitan as Berlin, as enterprising as Moscow, as genially receptive as London at its best, as acquisitive as New York. Ten years ago there was almost no refuge to be had in Paris from the dreary formalities of the Comélie Fran£aise or the mechanical exploitation of the established French forms of artificial comedy at the most popular theatres. To-day you are almost dismayed by the diversity and interest of the many plays you are intelligently advised on no account to miss. During the spring season of last year, for example, you might have taken your choice of the Russian, Italian, Spanish, Dutch, British or Scandinavian theatres. You might have witnessed French revivals of plays by Ben Jonson, Goldoni, Aristophanes or Mr Bernard Shaw. You might have seen Tchekov,

Ibsen and Strindberg competing for a place in the repertoire of several companies.

The reference in the above list to authors like Ibsen, Strindberg and Mr Shaw is not, of course, intended to emphasize the contemporary character of the new developments in Paris. Reference is made to Strindberg and Mr Shaw, not because they are contemporary, but because they are from abroad. For here we meet at once one of the most striking features of the theatrical revolution in Paris, the feature on which it is necessary to insist at the outset. The Paris stage was formerly so insular that a producer like M. Gemier was able to stagger the Parisians in 1920 with tricks which had been commonplaces of the German and English stage for at least ten years. Devices like the use of the apron and the entry of characters from the auditorium were novelties in Paris years after they had become familiar in the English provinces. There was the same insularity in regard to plays. There was a French way of producing plays and a French way of writing plays, and there was scarcely a French producer or a French author who dreamed of looking abroad for inspiration or refreshment. In this respect the reversal is complete. At the present moment the younger French producers are ransacking every country and every period which has contributed permanently to the dramatic literature of the world. They range from the Greeks to the Elizabethans and away again to the seventeenth century. They are presenting plays from the Norwegian and the Italian which have not yet come the way of the most alert of our London producers. It was lately possible to see in Paris on two successive evenings a most admirable and lively version of *The Silent Woman,* a play that has been unknown to the stage of its author's own country for three hundred

years, and a production of *The Man who Met Himself*, by the Italian dramatist, M. Luigi Antonelli, whose name is as unfamiliar to the English public to-day as was the name of M. Pirandello some two or three years ago. London, along with all the other European capitals, has in the last few years lost all claim to lead either in the discovery of foreign genius or even in the exploitation of its own dramatic heritage. To take the most extreme instance of all, Shakespeare, distrusted and misunderstood in France for generations, has for the last three years received far more attention from French than from English producers. There have been twice as many Shakespeare revivals in Paris during the last five years as in London, revivals by men of the quality of M. Gemier, M. Copeau, M. Dullin and M. PitoefF, all of them as interesting and as significant as the celebrated Savoy revivals of Mr Granville Barker just before the war.

A striking proof of the cosmopolitan character of the Paris theatre to-day was the immediate success two years ago of the young Russian producer and actor, M. Georges PitoefF. We are not for the moment concerned with the intrinsic quality of his achievement, but with its extremely international character. He came from Russia. He prepared his repertoire for five years in Geneva. He played in a language that was not his own. He had no particular respect for any French school or persuasion. And he went to Paris with a list of plays drawn from the four corners of Europe. Ten years ago any such assault on the theatres of Paris, though its leader had been Thespis himself with Midas for a backer, would have been a forlorn hope. But the theatre which took ten years to discover Professor Reinhardt discovered M. PitoefF in as many months. Paris, which once tested everything by the Gallic standard,

at once accepted an artist whose acting, style of production and repertoire were from the French point of view completely exotic. The plays on which his rapid success was based were almost all of them foreign—Shakespeare, Mr Bernard Shaw (in a Belgian translation and played by a Russian actress) and M. Pirandello.

Further evidence of the change which has come over the French theatre in its attitude to foreign plays and foreign methods of production is shown by the fact that in the summer of last year the French critics were seriously discussing the possibility of founding a theatre of the nations in Paris, a sort of Comedie Étrangere to rank with the Comedie Fran9aise as a house of the immortals. Schemes for an international theatre—not the sick fancies of a dying season, but serious, practicable schemes, with distinguished names to them—were brought up and discussed by the actors, managers, authors and critics of Paris. M. Andr6 Rivoire, President of the Society of Dramatic Authors and Composers, was proposing to found a repertory theatre in Paris which would do for foreign plays precisely what the Comedie Fran^aise has done for French plays since Napoleon. It would^ that is to say, build up a repertoire of foreign classics and present every year a number of contemporary plays carefully chosen and translated as being of special interest and significance. M. Gamier, director of the Od6on, also desires an international theatre. He feels that not even yet, in spite of the many foreign plays, ancient and modern, recently performed in Paris, are foreign authors adequately represented on the French stage. He is thinking of a theatre to be devoted exclusively to foreign plays, translated into French and produced with the advice and help of foreign producers.

These schemes are no more than the natural result and conclusion of a process that has long been apparent to the close observer. The process is entirely endemic. It is a native and spontaneous movement, and has nothing to do with the foreign visitors who have recently swarmed into France. The foreign visitors have not had the slightest influence on the progress or temper of the French theatrical revival. The idea that France should build and endow in Paris a theatre in which the best foreign classical or contemporary works should be regularly performed sprang quite naturally from the national dramatic revival in France, which has stimulated curiosity in foreign works and fostered a lively appreciation of dramatic genius in all its forms. The repertoire of foreign plays performed in Paris during the last ten years is more varied and extensive than in any other city in Europe, and these plays have been produced in theatres which are never or very seldom visited by foreigners.

Meanwhile, the doctrine which M. Rivoire and M. Gamier are preaching has, in fact, been practised for the last two years by M. Pitoeff at the Theatre des Arts. M. Pitoeff looks for his repertoire to every nation and period. He has during the last ten years produced one hundred and fifty plays, belonging to twenty different countries, and he has produced these plays not only in Russia, his native land, but in France, Finland, Siberia, Switzerland, Austria, Belgium, the Netherlands, Italy and Rumania. He is the cosmopolitan theatre incarnate, and Paris is the home of his adoption.

The revolution which has made it possible for Paris to welcome and appreciate foreign genius is only the symptom of a more important revolution within the French theatre itself. For generations the most striking characteristic of

French acting was its fidelity to a school. Diction, gesture, position on the stage and movement all obeyed a tradition. Production was in the same case. The art of staging a play, in fact, had almost ceased to exist. The setting and general conduct of the scene in many of the best theatres of Paris before the war was a species of academic drill. French stage interiors were so uniform that one sometimes wondered whether they did not come from a common pool or depot indiscriminately at the disposal of all the theatres of the capital. The plays, excellent of their kind, were equally of a type or pattern, admirably constructed, dealing competently with strong situations, ingeniously with comic intrigues, resoundingly with romantic adventures, but written according to a recognized formula which prescribed exactly how these things should be done.

The position in Paris to-day, whether as regards acting, producing or playwriting, has completely altered. There has arisen a young generation of French actors who fly to the opposite extreme from the classic formality of their elders, going considerably further than our English players in the freedom and ease of their behaviour. In production, the revolution, which began in the ^smaller theatres, has swept through the *boulevards* and attained such impregnable citadels as the Comedie Franchise and the Odeon. M. Gamier, who ten years ago was a pioneer who shocked the critics of Paris by producing *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* as though it had been written only the day before yesterday, and who is still an honoured presence among the younger men, is now a director at the Odeon, a circumstance which, though it somewhat hampers his style, shows how far the contemporary spirit has prevailed. As to plays, the old position has not been so much modified as completely reversed. Paris, the home of the well-made play, limited

for generations to some half-a-dozen well-recognized types of dramatic composition, is now the city of endless experiment, in which no young author pays the slightest attention to his theatrical forbears, in which the subjects of plays are as novel as the form in which they are presented. Plays may now be of any size or shape or style. You may have a play in which the intrigue, once the beginning and end of the whole affair, is suddenly abandoned in favour of an allegorical discussion of the problem on which it is based. You may have a play in which the protagonists minutely analyse their thoughts and feelings, or a play in which you are left to deduce their inward reactions from the way in which they consult a time-table or order an *aperitif.* You may have a play in which the protagonists go to the extreme limit of an articulate spiritual intimacy or a play in which the protagonists never meet at all. Plays may be in as many acts as the author pleases ; they may be in verse, in prose, or in the language of society ; the characters may be human beings, apparitions, symbols or wild beasts ; the hero may never leave the stage or he may never enter at all, or he may suddenly become six different people. The presentation of the play may be as faithful to normal appearances as *The Voysey Inheritance^* as fantastical as *Peter Pan,* as effectively constructed as *The Walls of Jericho-,* as artificial as *The Importance of Being Earnest,* as wayward as *Belinda.* There is no type or style, whether of treatment or subject, which cannot be found in the theatrical repertoire of Paris of the last five years. Following a sterile period of conformity to type, the Paris theatre has suddenly entered upon a period of free experiment in every direction, a period in which the failures are as significant and as important as the successes, in which the doors are open to the younger

generation, in which there is an immediate welcome for any degree of audacity in thought, feeling or presentation.

Paris, in fact, has recovered her place as the dramatic capital of Europe. Before the war Moscow, Berlin and London were more important than Paris, whether for acting, dramatic authorship or the arts of production. To-day Paris is leading the theatre easily in all three respects. Moscow is sweeping up the crumbs which fell from the imperial table ; Berlin is importing plays from abroad without discrimination ; London itself is living on its brilliant past of some fifteen years ago. Nowhere in the world is there a generation of producers to compare with MM. Charles Dullin, Georges Pitoeff and Gaston Baty, or of authors to compare with MM. Jean-Jacques Bernard, Charles Vildrac, Jules Romains, Paul Geraldy, Alfred Savoir, Gabriel Marcel, H.-R. Lenormand, Denys Amiel, Paul Raynal, Jean Sarment, Michael Achard, Jean-Victor Pellerin, and a host of others that come crowding to the pen.

//. *Dramatic Authors*

The welcome accorded by the younger theatres of Paris to plays from other countries and periods tends at first to obscure the variety and quality of the native movement. But the one is only a symptom of the other. It is in periods when native talent is most abundant that producers and public alike look abroad in space and time for the best that can be found elsewhere. *Uappetit vtent en mangeant.* Good native plays provoke a demand for good foreign plays and for a reconsideration and revival of the best plays of all time. The English producers who discovered Mr Bernard Shaw and Mr John Galsworthy in the nineties

discovered also Tchekov and Strindberg, and rediscovered Shakespeare and Euripides. Similarly in Paris to-day, the producers who discovered MM. Charles Vildrac and Jean-Jacques Bernard also discovered MM. Luigi Pirandello and Knut Hamsun, and rediscovered Moliere and Aristophanes. Periods are like authors in one respect : the most creative and original know best how to borrow from their contemporaries and predecessors, and this is particularly true of revolutionary authors and periods. The successful *sansculotte* may have no breeches, but he usually has an excellent library.

Reference has already been made to the bewildering diversity and restlessness of the younger Paris authors. They are adventurers all, and their adventure is one in which for the moment everyone seems ready to participate. Even the academies have caught the infection. The Comedie Frangaise, once a refuge for honourable years and reputations grown delicate with the lapse of time, is to-day in the case of *M. le Trouhadec saist par le Debauche.* Consider, for example, the astonishing career of M. Jean Sarment, already at twenty-six years of age the author, according to his friends, of half-a-dozen " masterpieces." The Comedie Frangaise, pausing in its secular task of keeping alive the reputation of *UAventuritre* and the *Marquis de Priola,* was caught by the prevailing fever, and in March, 1924, Paris, without misgiving, witnessed on those honourable boards a *premiere* of *Je suis trop grand pour moi.* Moreover, to lend greater significance to an event already sufficiently startling, the directors went so far as to decree that this youngest of plays should be presented by its youngest actors. Is it surprising, when youth is encouraged to such a tune, that we should have in Paris a " thirty-five club," consisting, not of thirty-five members,

but of members under thirty-five, and an organization which confidently opens its doors to the public as " Le Theatre des Jeunes Auteurs."

Certainly no young author can complain of any lack of opportunity and stimulation. Almost any licence is permitted. M. Jean-Jacques Bernard amused himself the other day by writing a play in which the hero never once appeared. Encouraged by the applause which greeted this performance, he produced a play, or rather M. Pitoeff produced it for him, in which the hero and the heroine appeared but never met, and in which neither of them had any knowledge of the other. The protagonist in one of the latest plays of M. Alfred Savoir is a cage of lions, which brings the drama to a climax by eating an Englishman. One of the successes of last year in Paris was a play by M. Jean-Victor Pellerin in which the hero sets out to dine with a friend as one man and arrives as six men. You may, with M. Paul Demasy, bring on to your stage a revolutionary Joan of Arc from Soviet Russia, or with M. Andre Lang you may introduce a twentieth-century Eros with wings who plays the concertina. These quaint excesses are welcomed by the producers and condoned by the critics because they proceed, not from any conscious ambition of the author to be peculiar, but from a zeal to get his message somehow delivered, and because it is a message which the old attitudes and methods are not framed to convey. Any subject is permitted and any method whereby the subject may be suitably presented. There are young authors who specialize in things which are never said or done, dramatizing the subconscious like M. H.-R. Lenormand, or who are interested, like M. Denys Amiel, not so much in the words and actions of their people as in the implications we are asked to draw from them. There are authors like

M. Charles Vildrac, who cultivate a bleak austerity of speech and incident which reminds us of the plays which before the war used to come to us from Manchester, and there are authors, like M. Jean Sarment, who run to the opposite extreme of exuberance, putting down most of what comes into their heads, almost indecently loquacious, talking themselves into their subject without fear of irrelevance. Authors may write in verse or prose, of persons or ideas, of men and women as expressed in their actions or as revealed to themselves in fugitive impulses, of man as a political or as a domestic animal, of man as an invariable species or as the peculiar product of his generation, of man as a creature in himself or as a vehicle for theories and principles. What is perhaps most significant of all, the same author will do all or any one of these things upon occasion. M. Alfred Savoir, who writes a play like *Le BaptGme,* the study of a Jewish family in process of adapting itself to modern French society, and who for that purpose is as sober and accurate and particular as Balzac, will present us later on with a play like *Le Dompteur,* an extravagant allegory of which even M. Jules Remains, author of *Dr Krwck* and *Le Manage de le Trouhadec,* might be legitimately envious. M. Jean-Jacques Bernard, who writes a play like *Martine,* the love story of a peasant girl, a masterpiece of the new naturalism, will present us later on with a play like *UArne en Peine,* a mystical elaboration of the Platonic conception of twin souls, the unconscious endeavour of two creatures to come together, hero and heroine passing one another by, each to each unknown and undiscovered.

It is difficult in the face of such an astonishing diversity of subjects and styles to discern the more salient features and tendencies of this revival, but an endeavour will be

made in succeeding chapters to associate some of the younger authors with some of its more striking aspects. The new naturalism which has broken with the rhetorical traditions of the French stage is, somewhat arbitrarily perhaps, studied in the plays of M. Jean-Jacques Bernard, but it might equally well be illustrated from the work of M. Charles Vildrac or M. Denys Amiel. It introduces into a theatre, which has tended to rely for generations almost exclusively upon a literary appeal, methods which indicate a distrust of dramatic eloquence and which aim at the natural development of situations which speak for themselves. It further substitutes for the artificially contrived incidents and surprises of the older school a dramatic interest which is concentrated, first to last, upon the candid and inevitable development of a given theme or the portrayal of a group of characters whose relationship to one another is known and declared at the outset. One particular aspect of this development is examined in the works of M. Paul Geraldy. The new romance, which is perhaps even more significant of the time, is studied in the works of M. Jean Sarment, and the new allegorical satire, equally characteristic of the younger generatio/i, in the works of M. Jules Romains. Shadowing all these activities, helping to explain the work of authors who openly acknowledge its influence or who absorb it unawares, is that curious reversal of the philosophic and social attitude to life and the individual which I have felt it necessary to examine at the outset in the works of M. Luigi Pirandello and M. H.-R. Lenormand.

It is not suggested that these tendencies and types even begin to cover the whole field of contemporary drama, as it has sprung so abundantly to life in Paris. There are authors, in every way as alert in their response to the

moment as their apparently more revolutionary brethren, who continue to use the old forms and to adapt the old manners to new matters. One of the finest post-war plays yet written is the *Tombeau sous fArc de Triomphe* of M. Paul Raynal, and this play is in the classic tradition. It relies almost exclusively on a complete literary or rhetorical expression of the ideas and emotions of the scene. Moreover, none of the so-called revolutionaries is committed to any specific system or doctrine, and it is only by a wilful straining of their texts and intentions that we are able to identify them with a given tendency or exhibit them as representative of any definite school or persuasion. The new naturalism is often enlisted in the service of the new romance, and the author who is most fantastical in his incidents and characters may be the most soberly correct in their presentation. For the moment I would merely insist on the freedom and diversity of method that prevails. Every author adopts the style, or, one might almost say, is adopted by the style, which best suits his immediate purpose.

One would have said that such a development might have occurred anywhere sooner than in Paris. The French habit of mind, which normally detests any mingling or confusion of styles, which likes its tragedies to be very clearly distinguished from its comedies, which enumerates its authors as classics or romantics, which abhors the sublime anarchies of Shakespeare, which expects its actors to assume a suitable deportment, grave or gay, for all dramatic occasions, has suddenly given way under the pressure of contemporary life and allowed every form and shibboleth to be abandoned, or even travestied. The young author who, following his immediate inclination, endeavours somehow or anyhow to express his personal attitude to the life of the moment, or to catch some feature

of the time as it passes, is no longer required to conform to any precept or to acknowledge any master. No sooner does he appear in one of the theatres of the vanguard than he is acclaimed and welcomed in the academies and admitted to the citadels which ten or fifteen years ago could have been taken only by prolonged assault. All the authors to whom these studies particularly refer—MM. H.-R. Lenormand, Jean-Jacques Bernard, Jean Sarment—were at once adopted by the Comedie Franchise and the Odéon. The walls of Jericho were flat before any trumpet was blown.

There is one cause for everything to-day. The young theatre of Paris is a post-war theatre, and but for the war the revival would have been far otherwise. The effect of the war is not to be sought in the number of plays of which it is the subject, but in the mental and moral attitude of the younger writers. All of them are alike in their unconscious determination to take nothing for granted. The war destroyed or shook not merely the political and social framework of nations, but all the fair assumptions on which modern civilization seemed so securely to rest. Neither men nor ideas nor institutions could any longer be taken at their face value.

It must be noted, however, that, though the rapidity and intensity with which this movement prevailed were due to the great European catastrophe, the war only hastened a process for which the time was ripe. Creative evolution—soothing reconstruction by a genial philosopher of an increasing purpose — was wearing thin. The cheerful faith of the new evolutionists, brilliantly led by Mr Bernard Shaw, was beginning to be only one degree less intolerable than the philosophy of Pangloss. Science had knocked the bottom out of its own superstitions, and was

penetrating farther every day into a universe that became, with every new discovery, more mysterious and less to be trusted either by the evidence of the senses or the processes of normal intelligence. The time was at hand when only one real conviction would be left to us by the scientists, and by the even more disconcerting activities of the psychoanalysts—namely, that nothing was what it seemed. The material world was a riddle in four dimensions, and human personality a note of interrogation. Even though there had never been a war, M. Einstein's relativity and the general reaction from positivism in all its forms must have led to the Pirandellian writing on the wall of our contemporary theatre : *ciascuno a suo modo.*

Such, at any rate, is the attitude which, despite their almost infinite variety of subject and treatment, we find in the plays of the younger French authors. It accounts for the naturalists, who, taking nothing for granted, and avoiding any suggestion of doctrine or philosophy, examine and present their dramatic characters objectively and without any previous assumption. It accounts equally well for the writers of allegory, whose fantasy is rooted in a profound sense of the unreality of the social surface. It accounts, above all, for a characteristic which is shared by all the younger plays, and which distinguishes them more than anything else from the revolutionary products of the previous generation. This characteristic is the absence of any overt denunciation. There are no social or moral fisticuffs. The weapon of the younger generation is detachment, or, more often still, a jovial pretence that nothing is intended except a little fun at the expense of the false appearances of things. These younger authors do not shout a message ; they insist on no particular social or moral doctrine ; they lack the superb assurance con-

veyed by passionate belief in a formula. This, however, does not mean that they are without passion. There is, indeed, a zeal which lurks beneath their apparent tranquillity or boisterous harlequinade which is more moving and more essentially destructive than the cruder polemics which in the early nineties challenged the social arrangements and beliefs of the Victorians. *Dr Knock* and *Le Mariage de le Trouhadec* are deadlier weapons than *Widower? Houses* or *Mrs Warrerfs Profession,* all the deadlier because at first sight they do not appear to be weapons at all. M. Jules Remains is far from having the appearance or reputation of a revolutionary. He has amused Paris with a brilliant comedy which on the surface is no more than a little innocent fun at the expense of the medical profession. Do not believe too readily in that same innocence. It hides, as I hope to show in another chapter, a profoundly ironic spirit and an intelligence which is typical of the younger school, outwardly genial, seemingly a mind at play, superficially grotesque, but fundamentally none of these things. The spectators are amused ; the laughter is loud and long ; but he is a blind man who does not see, behind the carnival mask of its author, the true expression of his comedy—serious, intent and profoundly disillusioned.

It may be asked to what extent the younger authors have so far affected the French theatre as a whole. It must be admitted, of course, that it is still possible for a casual visitor to be quite unaware of the revolution which has made Paris the headquarters of the European theatre. Certain types of French play are eternal and unchanging. MM. de Flers et de Croisset succeed MM. de Flers et Caillavet. M. Henri Bernstein succeeds M. Henri Bernstein. But even the established types are modified

under the influence of the younger men. The old farce must now have a subject as well as an intrigue, and the strong play must have a theme as well as a situation. The extent of the revolution may be appreciated from a reading of the short synopses which are now given on all programmes, even though the play has no pretences to be seriously considered. These synopses amount in fact to a declaration that the interest of the play will lie, not in the complications of its plot, which are unfolded before the play begins, but in the treatment of a definite problem or situation which you are asked to consider in advance.

It is true that the older tradition survives, and will continue to survive, for certain types of play, types which have been carried to a dead perfection and which are not susceptible of any further improvement. You will not be conscious of any change as you watch the inevitable progress of L'*Animateur,* the latest achievement of M. Henry Bataille. The continued existence and success of such pieces, faultlessly effective within the limits of their formula, is, however, in no way to be deplored, and does not in any way detract from the significance of the younger movement. It is, indeed, no small advantage for the young authors of France to have before their eyes during a period of change and experiment so constant an example of how well a thing can be done if only you can believe it is worth doing. No young author or actor or producer who has seen a production of the technical quality of *UAnimateur* can permit himself to take his profession easily.

Meanwhile, as we have noted, the new spirit has invaded the academic strongholds. The directors of the Com&lie Fran^aise and the Odeon have opened their hearts and minds. In half-a-dozen theatres new styles and methods of production to meet new needs are being

developed, and the influence of these new styles and methods, and of the work of the younger authors who require them, is gradually influencing every kind and quality of play. Paris, in fact, has recovered an ascendancy in the arts of the theatre for which a parallel would have to be sought as far back as the seventeenth century, and in no other capital of Europe is it possible to discover a more dramatic expression of the form and pressure of the time.

III. Actors and Producers

In concluding this brief survey of the present revival of the Paris stage—some aspects of which will be studied in detail in succeeding chapters—it is necessary to emphasize that the pressure of contemporary life, which has so abruptly and profoundly modified the traditions of the dramatic author, and driven the younger men to find new forms and methods of expression, is revolutionizing to the same extent the arts of the actor and the producer.

The new naturalism of the dramatic authors, for example, demands and has obtained a new school of actors and producers for its effective presentation on the stage. The first impression of a visitor from London on witnessing, let us say, the production of a modern play by M. Charles Dullin at the Atelier is that the actors of the company have abandoned the formality of the old French school in favour of the more individual and natural manners of the English. But you will soon realize that these young actors, so carelessly and so personally at their ease, are obeying as strict a discipline, and are working as severely for a common effect, as any actors of the older school. They have, in fact, a definite style, to which individual temperaments

and idiosyncrasies must conform in the imperative interests of the purpose to which all alike contribute. Far from witnessing a surrender to the amateur tradition of the English theatre—in which the player relies mainly on natural gifts and personal charm, in which the really competent actor is a divine accident and not as in France the result of taking appropriate steps to produce him—you see at the Atelier the results of a training more complete and infinitely more arduous than anything suffered by the disciples of the Come'die Fran£aise. That seeming disregard of all the conventions—the nonchalance with which that young man turns his back on the audience in order to speak to his colleague up stage, the casual way in which that young woman enters the room—as you or I, who have never learned how to do so, might have entered it—is no more the result of going as you please according to nature than is the behaviour of Tchekov's people in *Uncle Vanya* or *The Cherry Orchard.* This new way of playing is a revolution, but it is not a revolution in favour of anarchy. You seldom see acting like this on a London stage, for both the qualities and the defects of the English tradition are wholly different. If, on a closer view, it reminds you of anything at all, it will remind you of M. Stanislawsky and the Russian players from Moscow.

The young actors of the Atelier, in fact, are true to the name under which they have grown into celebrity. Their theatre was founded as a " workshop " for the study of their art, for a careful analysis of its needs and purposes and the perfection of suitable methods for their fulfilment. M. Dullin, like a modern Medea, cut up and threw into the cauldron the aged body of his Muse, declaring that she should rise again with youth and vitality renewed. His company did not for a while come before the public at all.

It was learning how to move and speak, how to conduct and to deliver all forms of dramatic expression and every variety of play. Then, when the time was ripe, it opened its doors, not in the first instance to the undiscriminating, but to such friends and subscribers as were prepared to become members of its society. Finally, it came full upon the town with a repertoire of plays from the classic, foreign or contemporary theatres, astonishing in its catholic variety. Its young actors were equally at home in the passionate celebrations of M. Pirandello, the classic comedy of Moliere, the rude burlesque of Aristophanes, or the quiet naturalism of M. Jean-Jacques Bernard.

The theatre of M. Dullin, like the theatre of M. Copeau before him, presented in little the two most striking and important features of the new development in Paris. One was the movement towards an apparently more natural manner of conduct and speech, a definite break with the old rhetorical tradition. The other was a movement which seemed at first sight in the opposite direction : a movement towards a more classic conception of the actor's purpose and procedure ; a movement in favour of simplification—the presenting of types rather than individuals, the abstraction of essentials ; a movement rejoicing in dramatic characters which perpetuated the tradition of Punch and Harlequin and which corresponded with the allegorical tendencies of some of the younger authors, whose characters, as in the plays of M. Jules Romains, are typical figures in the perverted progress of a modern pilgrim. Keeping for the moment to the Atelier you have only to witness *Martlne*$_y$ or *Le Feu qui reprend mal*$_y$ of M. Jean-Jacques Bernard, for the one, and the recent revival of Ben Jonson's *The Silent Woman* for the other. *Martine* was a lesson to the young actors of France in the new naturalism, while in Ben

Jonson's play M. Dullin presented a veritable comedy of "humours" or types which exhibited the new classicism to perfection.

The coexistence of these two styles—as developed in the theatres of MM. Copeau, Dullin, Baty and Pitoeff—is only part of a more general phenomenon to which allusion has already been made. The French theatre is at present in a period of youth and experiment. It tries everything. Instinctively it holds faster to certain forms and methods than to others, but there is no very deliberate selection of ways and means, and no discomfort is felt in the existence side by side of half-a-dozen different styles seemingly at issue. The young French actor of to-day will behave so naturally that a novice among critics would swear he was not acting at all; or he will deliver us a speech of two thousand words with all the rhetorical arts of a trained comedian; or he will wear the painted mask of the *commtdia deW arte,* simplifying his gesture and emulating in his conduct the stark severity of the clown.

The producer is equally acquisitive and experimental, and here the change is even more striking. Paris remained almost entirely unaffected by any of the European movements which in Moscow, in Berlin and in London, when the century began, brought production to the level of a fine art. I remember meeting M. Gemier in 1918, just after his famous productions of *The Taming of the Shrew* and *The Merchant of Venice*—productions in which he introduced to the Parisians the device of bringing the audience into direct contact with the play by pushing forward the stage and bringing on characters from the auditorium. I found to my stupefaction that M. Gamier was discovering for himself and applying technical devices which had for years been a commonplace in half-a-dozen

cities outside Paris. The Paris theatre had remained indifferent to the ideas of Mr Gordon Craig and Professor Reinhardt, and had ignored the arts of Russia, just as it had failed to respond to the earlier reforms which in the early nineties rescued the English theatre from the careless squalor of the old stock company productions and, under the directorship of Henry Irving, Herbert Tree and George Alexander, insisted on a minimum of dignity and relevance in the staging of plays. The Paris theatre, so far as producing went, was during the whole of that period the theatre of Vincent Crummies.

To-day there is no development in craft, no technical device and no movement in the arts which is not being used and exploited by the Paris producers. In the theatres of MM. G&nier, Copeau, Dullin, Baty and Pitoeff you will see in a single season every method and style of presentation with which you are familiar, and a good deal that is entirely new to you. These men have only one working rule to which they are faithful, which is to take anything from anywhere so long as it suits their immediate purpose. M. Pitoeff, producing the *Dame aux^ Camellas^* presents you the play in a gilded oval frame and conveys to you its faded sentiment in a series of dated pictures in historical conformity with the period. Producing *St Jeanne* he gives you something which, though it suggests the religious and political framework of the Middle Ages, is in spirit and form dateless. St Jeanne lived and died in the fifteenth century, but we are to see her *sub specie aternitatis.* Pitoeff accordingly adopts a severity of outline, a simplification or abstraction of essentials, which recall the figures on the porch of St Trophinus at Aries. Every play requires and obtains its own method of production and, as every kind of play is at present being written in Paris, there is

no theatrical device from the time of Burbage to the time of Mr Craig which is not called into contribution. Fidelity to the play is the sole criterion, and this fidelity may go so far as to reproduce any confusion of style within the play itself. M. Gaston Baty, for example, recently produced a French version of *The Man of Destiny*, by Mr Bernard Shaw. He saw at once that the young officer in the play is a totally different kind of dramatic personage from Napoleon. Napoleon is the creation of a realist and a logician. The young officer is the work of an author who loves the harlequinade and can rarely refrain from introducing into his plays at least one character with the mechanical gestures of a clown. M. Baty did not hesitate. He believed sufficiently in his author to bring the clown on to the stage, heightening the colour of his cheekbones and giving to him the automatic vivacity of a puppet.

The happy opportunism of the younger actors and producers is a direct consequence of the diversity of the plays in which they act or which they are called upon to produce. Every style and method which they employ is a means to the end. You will not find anyone subjecting himself to a particular formula for its own sake ; no sacrifices are offered to the fixed idea ; there is very little of that drearily inverted academicism which wastes itself in manifestos and doctrines. If it seems at the moment to be more effective for a character to enter from the auditorium or for the scene to be lighted by projection from the front of the house, these devices are admitted, but they are not erected into a principle or applied out of season. If it is more in the nature of a character to borrow a painted mask from the *commtdia del' arte* he will do so, but this is not advanced as a reason for discouraging the natural presentation of men and women as we meet them in the Rue de la Paix,

If it better serves the purpose of a play to formalize its setting, or merely to suggest it in the Chinese manner, our young producers will not hesitate to do so, but this does not prevent them from giving us an interior to which the most literal of producers in the realistic manner would be unable to take exception.

To sum up, the acting and producing of plays in the Paris theatre, after remaining insulated from all change and being obstinately sterile to suggestions from outside for a generation, has suddenly gone forward at a rate which leaves the other theatres of Europe behind. The reason is to be found not so much in any real advance in the ancillary arts of the theatre as in a rapid revival of native dramatic authorship, which has suddenly confronted the actors and producers with new problems, and has in many cases called for a new technique. Actors and producers felt no call to go into the studio or workshop or to look abroad for ideas in order to present a new farce at the Palais Royal or an effectively constructed drama at the Renaissance. It is quite another matter when young authors come clamouring at the door with new and obviously interesting plays of a totally unexpected kind and of a kind that varies from one day to another. It became necessary to find out exactly what the theatre could do—to borrow from other countries and periods, to experiment in novel directions. And happily this necessity found the ancillary arts of decoration and lighting and chorography well and carefully prepared to stand the strain that was put upon them. The resources were all there, thanks to the pioneers of Moscow and London and Berlin. It only needed that Paris should feel the necessity of employing them.

The ease and rapidity with which this revival has

come about tends to obscure its significance. The position of the French theatre to-day is an historical and racial paradox. The city in which the theatre has most obstinately resisted any tendency to challenge its traditions, which has hitherto been content with perfect achievement along certain definite and characteristic lines, which has provided the world for generations with models of how specific types of comedy or drama should be composed, has suddenly become a field of experiment. Its producers are M. Dullin, who opens a workshop (Theatre de l'Atelier), M. Baty, who runs a studio (Théatre du Studio des Champs Elysees) and M. Pitoeff, who every season produces a new play from a strange country in a different way. Clearly the world cannot long remain indifferent to so complete and so astonishing a revolution.

Chapter Two

M. LUIGI PIRANDELLO AND THE ENIGMA OF PERSONALITY

A SERIES of studies in the contemporary theatre must inevitably begin with M. Pirandello, and the younger French authors with whom this book is chiefly concerned would be the first to admit his significance. It may in fact be claimed that M. Pirandello is better understood, and that his plays have been more faithfully presented, in Paris than in any other city. He has found in M. Benjamin Cremieux a translator and an evangelist of great ability and distinction, and in MM. Georges Pitoeff and Charles Dullin producers who have more scrupulously and effectively carried out his intentions than any of his countrymen.

Perhaps the best way in which to appreciate to what extent M. Pirandello stands, like no other dramatist of the first rank, for what is immediately contemporary is briefly to compare his philosophy with that of the leading British dramatist of a previous generation. Mr Bernard Shaw stood philosophically for the doctrine of creative evolution, or, as he termed it, of the life force. Mankind was supposed to be working out its salvation towards a godhead that lay in the future. This was not, of course, a notion peculiar to Mr Shaw. It is still professed by scores of writers, and has, in particular, continuously inspired the scientific papers and religious romances of Mr H. G. Wells. Man was presented as very clearly the master of his fate, who was in future to substitute a conscious evolution towards perfection for the unconscious evolution which had hitherto determined his progress from the ape.

It was a robust and cheerful doctrine. Men were invited to pray to the gods they would one day become. Strangely enough this belief in the perfectibility of man went together with a fine contempt for his present institutions—such as marriage and government and property—and his present passions—such as jealousy, ambition and pride of possession. Into the rights and wrongs of this attitude it is unnecessary to go. The controversy between those who held it and those who clung to a previous dispensation is in process of settlement, like all such controversies—namely, by ceasing to interest a younger generation. I am insisting here not upon any particular feature of the argument, but on its general spirit, which was a spirit of intense preoccupation with a very concrete and definite world, a spirit which was above all affirmative, a spirit of aggressive certitude. The men and women of the theatre of Mr Bernard Shaw know quite definitely for what they stand. They express and explain everything that is in them. They live, moreover, in a very substantial world which is an end unto itself. Never at any moment do we feel that the bustling and gregarious world in which they move is in the least likely to fade and leave not a wrack behind. They are dead sure of their reality and of their purpose. There are here no walking shadows, or any suggestion that these are actions which a man might play.

M. Pirandello presents a perpetual challenge to the confident spirit of his predecessors. In every play that he writes we are led clean away from the absolute and the positive. We can discover no genial pragmatism, no confident argument. There is here no bright logic to create or to destroy, no impudent repartee to bring low impostors and fools. His people, far from presenting a ready front to the world, are, on the contrary, perpetually tormented

by a sense of mystery in themselves and in the universe they inhabit, obsessed with the riddle of personality and the enigma of existence. Their logic is no more than a thin protection from the infinite, their actions and passions no more than a vague reflexive posturing before a curtain that is closed. We go back to that vision of the life of man so wonderfully likened by the old heathen of Northumbria to the swallow that flew in at the door of the great hall, fluttered a moment in the light of the torches, and flew forth again into the darkness. Where is the soul of a man ? What is his personality ? What is it in man that persists and remains identical, in spite of the inconsistencies which express it, the mechanical reflexes to which it is so often subject, the formal tyrannies of word, phrase and habit to which it is a slave ? Men model themselves on their fellows, and conform to the age in which they live. They change from day to day. They are ignorant of the reality behind their habits and gestures and yet convinced that somewhere the reality is to be found.

The souls of men—like the dyer's hand—are subdued to that in which they work. Words, actions, the whole apparatus of feeling and conduct, far from revealing the truth of personality, often obscure and defeat its expression. The manifest lives of men and women—like the phenomena of the universe—hide a persistent reality, but it lies beyond the reaches of our intelligence.

Such are the reflections forced upon us as we watch the plays of M. Pirandello. He seeks always for the hidden personality which is thus obscured. It is the sole thing which interests him. Everything else is irrelevant or obstructive. In one play he will prefer a madman for a hero, because a madman lives openly his secret life, shutting out the confusion of the world about him, remaining faithful to his

interior vision. The madman takes no account of others and is untroubled by the need to conform himself to persons or circumstances. In another play M. Pirandello will suggest that the heroes of romance or the theatre, created by the great artists, are beings more real than the men and women we see about us every day, because they are born of imagination and remain eternally faithful to the spirit in which they were created. Even when we turn from plays like *Six Characters in Search of an Author*—whose hero is a fiction—or from *Henry If.*—whose hero is a madman—to plays that, at all events, affect to be merely social, we find that M. Pirandello is always preoccupied with the real but secret personality of his creatures, shown in conflict with the idea that others may have of them, or with social conditions that impose upon them a succession of unreal attitudes, or with their own words and actions that go against the grain of their hidden selves.

It might well seem impossible to give dramatic form to such a conception of life and character, but this precisely is the miracle of M. Pirandello. He gives dramatic form and feature to ideas that have hitherto been regarded as metaphysical abstractions. His problems take to themselves legs and arms. They walk the stage, dramatic, pitiful, instantly commanding our interest and sympathy. It seems at first sight paradoxical that the school of dramatists which followed Mr Bernard Shaw in dealing closely with the material world should so often have found it necessary to abandon drama for discussion, to interrupt their plays for an exchange of ideas round a table, whereas M. Pirandello, who appears to be dealing with conceptions infinitely more abstract, should apparently be unaware of this necessity. But the paradox is only superficial. It is natural for Mr Bernard Shaw and his followers to drop from drama into

discussion. They deal with ideas which are for the most part logical, with mental gymnastics which have little bearing upon the deeper energies of life. M. Pirandello, on the other hand, is dealing with problems which, however difficult and obscure they may be, press with dramatic force sooner or later upon every human soul, quite irrespective of its mental equipment. He is dealing, in fact, with the most ancient stuff of drama, the stuff which ^Eschylus took when the drama first was born ; and, however shadowy the form or phantasmal in speech and gesture its protagonists may be, it is always a drama we are witnessing, an argument in the Miltonic and not in the Shavian sense.

M. Pirandello was born at Agrigente, in Sicily, in 1867. He came late to the theatre. Up to the age of fifty he had written only novels and romances, and was known chiefly as a humorist. It was almost impossible to foretell from his early works the author *of Henry IV.*, unless we become so extremely philosophical as to find in the humorist a general tendency towards that dissociation of ideas of which his theatre is a particular instance. Possibly he was moved to express his peculiar genius owing to a domestic tragedy, to which no further allusion shall here be made. More probably he did not come until late in life under the influence of contemporary movements in religious, scientific and psychological thought. But the historic moment, when at last it came, found him prepared to receive the impress of his time and to embody that reaction against self-assurance in all its forms which began to be so urgent and so inescapable at the beginning of the new century. The return of secular philosophy towards the mystical, the descent of psychology into the subliminal, the giddy flight of the mathematicians through the fourth dimension,

the preoccupation of the scientific world with the disintegration of the atom—in brief, all the factors which filter gradually down to the popular mind and determine the general trend of human thought had by that time become sufficiently common knowledge to affect the art of the novelist and playwright. There was everywhere a revolt against any form of positivism. The bottom was knocked out of the solid universe in which the previous generation had lived so cheerfully, so categorically, and with so engaging an audacity. Relativity, from being a conception of the recluse, was colouring the whole of life. The arts were making ready for a helpless surrender or a passionate exaltation of the instinctive and the recondite, preparing for the world of Marcel Proust and Mr James Joyce, of the later music of M. Stravinsky, and of M. Pirandello in the theatre.

No one could be more fitted by temperament than M. Pirandello for the part which he was to play in this development. By temperament a recluse, his eyes normally clouded with speculation, he had nevertheless all the exuberance and vivacity of Southern Italy. His was a mind which, though it could begin with the abstract, could never rest in abstractions. They took immediate life and form, and carried him clean away. He was in brief a poet, giving immediately to his ideas a concrete independence of their own. The truly poetic character of his work is not immediately realized, his language being cold and exact, devoid of images, almost without metaphor. But there is behind his expression a sort of cold fury of creation that forces all his ideas to take dramatic form, to strike the appropriate gesture, to become intensely objective, so that we are compelled to follow them as we follow Agamemnon or CEdipus or Hamlet.

He seems, indeed, in describing the young man who was to be the lunatic hero of *Henry IV.*, to be revealing his own peculiar temperament. This young man, we are told, was apt to be carried away by excitement, but it was a cold excitement. Whereupon someone objects that he was not in the least cold ; on the contrary, he abounded in vitality and was in fact a poet. To this the previous speaker replies:

> I am not saying that he was cold. On the contrary, he was quite often sincerely carried away, but I can assure you that on these occasions he immediately saw himself from outside as it were, and that he looked upon his own excitement as a spectator. . . . The clearness with which he thus immediately saw himself from the outside made him a stranger to his deepest feelings, and these feelings immediately appeared to him not as being false, since they were wholly sincere, but as things to which it was necessary immediately to give an independent standing and value.

Here we have a partial diagnosis of the author himself. Whenever his drama becomes intense, whenever his people are carried away, the author becomes possessed with exactly this cold fury of objective precision. Where another dramatist would lose himself in fine emotion, become inarticulate or metaphorical, M. Pirandello grows more exact, seeking to fix and define, to catch the moment as it flies, and imprison it within the phrase that alone can " give it an independent standing and value."

It is hardly possible to avoid giving some brief sketch of, at any rate, the two plays which most express his peculiar genius. His method is so entirely dramatic that it is impossible to separate his ideas from his intrigue. His conception is presented from first to last in the positions and relationships of his characters as they react passionately upon one another or in response to the situations in

which they find themselves. They seldom, as has already been pointed out, pause in their story to discuss their problems; nor do they ever suffer the author himself to intrude.

Six Characters in Search of an Author is presented upon the stage of a theatre unprepared, except for the preliminary rehearsals of a play. The audience on taking their seats would suppose that the manager had forgotten that a performance was due to begin. A producer with his company, his stage manager, electrician and prompter, etc., assemble, as though for a preliminary reading. As they make ready to start there suddenly appears an usher announcing the arrival of certain personages, who almost immediately enter. They are the six characters in search of an author. Gradually, as the Act proceeds, they explain themselves. They are the persons of a play which was never finished, nor ever produced. They are looking for an author to present them on the stage, so that they may live the life for which they were created. They beg the producer to undertake this task. The producer and his actors, at first amused and incredulous, imperceptibly begin to take an interest in the story of these strange apparitions, as unfolded to them by one of their number—subject to dispute and interruption from the rest; and by the end of the Act it is agreed that the six characters shall enact their drama, and that it shall be recorded and presented by the producer and his company.

Such is the main design of the play, a design which is used with unusual subtlety to present a perpetual comparison between reality and illusion, fiction and fact, the essence and the accidents of personality. There is first the contrast between imaginative truth, as embodied in the six characters, the creations of an author, and the truths—or are

they the illusions ?—of everyday life, as shown in the conduct and bearing of the producer and his companions. There is the further contrast between the reality of the six characters as they enact their story, and the miming of their drama by the professional actors, who repeat it as a play within a play. To go no further than this, we thus have four planes of reality or fiction : (i) the audience in the theatre ; (2) the producer and his company, presented as real persons by M. Pirandello ; (3) the six characters, presented by M. Pirandello as fictions 5 and (4) the producers and actors when they are miming the drama of the six characters.

It will be realized at once what an infinite opportunity is here afforded for the author to develop his favourite theme. It may be said that the germ of the idea is in the great soliloquy of Hamlet, when he moralizes upon the actor's grief for Hecuba—so much more ready and convincing than his own. It may be pointed out that *The Green Cockatoo* of Schnitchler, which showed us a play within a play, that turned to grim earnest at the close, was a skilful interweaving of fiction with reality. But M. Pirandello uses and develops this rudimentary idea till it embodies a whole philosophy, and he uses it with an art which is at the same time subtle and precise.

It is not proposed to touch upon the complications of the story of the *Six Characters.* Suffice it that they represent the members of a family whose various relationships are unfolded by each of the characters from his or her own particular point of view. Chief among the characters is the " father," who has varying relationships with every other member of the group. The play comes to a climax in the second Act in a scene which proceeds upon all four planes of illusion. The father begins to enact the climax

of his own personal drama, a scene which in its tragic truth, pitiful and chastening, stands unequalled in the modern theatre. He begins to present the scene as though involuntarily. He knows in advance the story that he is bound to present, but nevertheless finds himself obliged to live it through as though he were unaware of the upshot. The other five personages follow it with an agonized attention. For all of them it is real—the only reality, the moment for which they were created. For the producer and his actors, however, it is no more than raw material for the finished play they will subsequently enact. The father finishes his scene and the actors proceed to reproduce it in the professional manner. Immediately the six characters are outraged and disgusted. Everything is changed. They see their actions as no longer their own, artificially rendered, false to the feeling that moved them. For the real actors can only travesty the emotions of the fictitious characters whom they impersonate. The fourfold complexity which here obtains is further increased by the fact that the father vehemently protests that, even as a fictitious person, he is not justly and finally expressed in the shameful act in which he is surprised in this particular scene. This, he pleads, is not his reality, but an aberration. The mind of the spectator, turning from one fiction to another, each having a frustrated reality upon its own plane, confused with successive illusions, each more prevailing than the last, is finally caught up into a world completely dominated by the riddle with which M. Pirandello, as a child of his generation, is himself obsessed.

Where is the ultimate reality of life ? How shall we discover a persistent soul or personality in mankind ? We do not find it in current life, which obscures rather than reveals it. Nevertheless, it exists. " Each of us," cries the

father, from amid the phantasmagoria in which he moves, " each of us has a reality which must be respected as coming from God, even though it tortures us."

This conception of life, its phrases and habits, its procession of material accidents and its reflex emotions, as something which obscures and distorts reality, is never long absent from any play of Pirandello.

> Phrases, phrases [exclaims the father. Is it not a consolation for us all, faced with a fact which cannot be explained, or with an evil which eats into our souls, to find for them words which, though they mean nothing, can, at least, bring us a little peace?

But in the plays of M. Pirandello, who is a dramatist, it is always the scene rather than the quotation whereby he lives. His conception of men and women in their everyday lives as the creatures of environment, ruled and determined by their circumstances, by the accidents of their blood or their estate, is dramatically presented in the second Act. The six characters about to begin their story suddenly realize that an essential character, incidental to their drama, is missing. The father suggests that the stage should be set in a rude imitation of the scene in which this character played her part in the story. Ostensibly she was a dressmaker, and, in compliance with the father's suggestion, the actresses allow their hats and cloaks to be hung up in imitation of the shop in which she carried on her trade. " Drawn hither, perhaps, by the objects of her commerce, she will perhaps appear among us," says the father, almost ashamed of his own credulity. Suddenly, to the consternation of all the actors, the woman appears, evoked by the setting for which she was created, called into being, as it were, by her subject and by the demand of the moment that she should be there to act and to speak in a manner

predestined and foreordained. Her apparition, ghastly in its obedience to an unerring mechanism, proclaiming that she is the slave of the event, the helpless puppet of the life for which she was created, is perhaps the greatest thrill of the modern theatre—an apparition that sums up the whole enigma, a dreadful interrogation flung at every human soul that beholds it.

The climax of the play, as has already been said, lies in a discovery of the father in a position which, though it belongs to the normal life of tens of thousands of men every day of the week, is nevertheless shameful and humiliating. He contends in his defence that the particular act and the particular moment in which he was surprised do not represent him. From this he flies to the general idea that personality, in the ordinary accepted sense of the term, is frequently a delusion :

> With different persons, one may be quite a different individual, clinging, however, to the illusion that one remains identical for all persons and in every situation. Nothing could be more false than this illusion, as we realize when suddenly surprised in the midst of some particular action. We realize that we are not wholly committed and expressed in this action, that it would be a cruel injustice if a man were judged solely upon the strength of it, pinned down perpetually to this particular moment as if the whole of his life were thereby summarized and made manifest.

He goes even further in the third Act, boldly challenging the producer, whose reality is ostensibly nearer to life than his own, to prove that he is more real than the fictitious personages who are begging him to present their story.

> We [he argues] are characters in a story, and as such we have a life of our own and special characteristics. I am always definitely a personality, whereas a man, generally

> speaking, may in the last analysis prove to be nobody at all. Are you, for example, as you now conceive yourself to be, similar to the man you were many years ago, with all the illusions which at that time you entertained? Do you not rather, in remembering these illusions, and in realizing that those things which seemed real to you yesterday are to-day no longer the same for you as they were, feel not merely that the boards of this stage, but the solid earth itself, is crumbling beneath your feet? ... It is that which makes the difference between us. We are not changing, and we cannot change. As characters in a play, we are immutable. You should be struck with terror in approaching us, realizing as you must that your reality of to-day is conditioned by time, that it is a fugitive and passing reality which you take to be one thing to-day and something else to-morrow and which lies at the mercy of chance, of accident and of impulse.

And the obverse of this picture is never altogether out of sight—namely, that the personality which is a mystery to ourselves is a complete enigma to all other human beings. Never has the complete isolation of souls been so eloquently rendered as by M. Pirandello. All the six characters present their story, each with a savage concentration upon their own personal share in it, blind and deaf to the others, except so far as the others immediately affect themselves. The most poignant example of this idea, still further developed in *Henry IV.*, is the speech of the mother towards the close of the second Act, in which she presents her children merely as accessories to her own tragedy, thus giving the most intense expression possible to her spiritual egoism.

> These two children [she says], have you ever heard them speak? They cannot ever again utter a single word. They cling to me merely in order to perpetuate my own misfortune. In themselves they no longer exist. . . . My daughter here escaped and abandoned me. If I see her now, it is only to keep alive continually and for ever the pain which she caused me to suffer.

Henry IP., while emphasizing the ideas contained in *Six Characters,* and in many respects intensifying their expression, goes still deeper into the problem.

A company of young people, during a festival, conceive the idea of riding through the streets in a historical masquerade. They choose for their period the Middle Ages, and for their principal character the Holy Roman emperor, Henry IV. The young man who enacts Henry IV., and who, for this purpose, has conscientiously mastered every detail in the life of that tragic personage, falls from his horse during the procession, and striking his head on the pavement is made mad, and rises with the fixed idea that he is in very truth the mediaeval emperor, a belief in which he persists for many years. His friends, to humour him, lodge him in a country house, and employ a number of people to acquiesce in his fixed idea. They surround him with imperial state, and all who approach him pretend to be personages of the period.

At the moment when the play opens the masquerade has lasted for twenty years. His friends are discussing and hoping for a cure, and, in order to visit him, they assume various roles connected with the events in which the emperor figured in history. The young man enters, a madman with queer puppet-like gestures, but by the sheer intensity of his hallucination compelling everyone present to accept him as emperor and share his madness. The visitors withdraw. All of them are persons implicated in the early life of the young man—as sweetheart, rival, and the rest. Then there follows a twist to the story which is entirely characteristic of the author. For twenty years this young man has played the part of emperor. For the first twelve years he was really mad, but one day, eight years ago, he had awakened to find himself like other men.

The hallucination was destroyed. His first idea was to return to the life from which he had for twelve years been excluded, to abandon the fiction in which he had persisted, to go back to reality. Almost at once, however, he recoiled ; life had passed him by ; his sweetheart had married his rival; there was no place for him in the world. The world, for him, had become unreal. He had, therefore, deliberately chosen to remain within the limits of the fiction which for twelve years had been his sole reality, to continue in the world of the Emperor Henry IV.—a mad world, but no madder than the world outside. For the last eight years he has played with all who approached him—compelling them to share his madness, almost to credit his fiction.

The sudden intrusion of his old companions brings back to his mind the reality of his youth, the reality of twenty years ago, troubles his pretence and induces him in a moment of excitement to confess his imposture to his immediate companions. But he confesses it in such terms that we are led to doubt which is nearer to reality—the mediaeval Court, where for twenty years a logical and coherent fiction has compelled the respect even of those who doubted it, or the world outside, where living beings, claiming reality, are involuntarily under the d.ominion of ideas and emotions which lack even the dignity and authenticity of the history which he has chosen to re-enact.

Driving in this idea by dramatic means, as M. Pirandello never fails to do, our author shows us the madman, even after he has confessed that his madness is now a comedy, forcing his attendants once again to their knees before the emperor by the sheer persuasion of his assumed personality. They know now that he is not Henry IV. ; but they are still his subjects, and he is able to taunt them with

being the slaves of something which they know to be an illusion.

In thus subjecting themselves to a dead fiction, do they not show their resemblance to ordinary men and women ? The whole of life, runs the burden of this remarkable scene, is overwhelmed beneath the weight of words and the tyranny of the dead.

> You cannot seriously believe [[says the madman] that Henry IV. still lives. Nevertheless, I speak as Henry IV., and you who are living obey me. Does it seem to you a jest that the dead can thus continue to dominate present life ? If it be a jest, it is one that is played continually in the world of the living. Suppose that you leave this house and go out into the world. There you will find yourself at the dawn of another day, with time spreading before you. You say to yourself that you are going to create and determine what that day shall bring forth. But what of all the traditions by which you are bound, and all the habits by which you are controlled ? You begin to speak to one another, but it is only to repeat phrases which are invariably repeated. You believe that you are actually living your life, but you are merely living over again the life of the dead [literally, remasticating the life of the dead].

This idea is further developed at the close of the second Act, which concludes with a fine passage designed to bring into relief the certainty and constant truth of history as compared with the unreality and confusion of present-day existence. Henry has confessed himself to his attendants. He now, however, assumes once more his historic character, and he urges them to take upon themselves once more the roles which they have assumed in order that they may continue to live within the historic fiction from the midst of which they may perceive the men of their own day a prey to anxiety and agitation as to what is going to happen to them in the immediate future.

> You £ he saysj remain beside me within the tranquillity of history, wherein nothing can be any further subject to change, admiring how effects immediately follow their causes in perfect logic, contemplating an exact and coherent presentation of all the facts.

It is now midnight, and there comes knocking at the door Giovanni, the monk, who, according to the custom of the Court, comes at the close of each day to chronicle the deeds of the emperor. Henry returns to his throne, and one of his attendants observes to another that all must still go forward as though it were really true. Henry replies that this must indeed be so, adding that it is only when men act as though the comedy they play is really true that the truth is not a jest and a delusion.

He continues to claim throughout the play that there is more reality in his masquerade than in the world outside. He argues that at the very least it may be regarded as a conscious caricature of the masquerade in which all men are for ever taking part. His masquerade is deliberate, whereas other men are involuntary puppets, not even aware of their pretences but confusing them with their real personality. The passage concludes with the following description :

> I am reminded of a priest whom I once saw sleeping in the sun on a day in November, his arms stretched along the back of the bench in a public garden. He was wholly given up to an enjoyment of the warm sunshine, which for him, a man of the north, must have seemed to have been almost like summer. He had lost all idea of what, he really was, and, in fact, had ceased to be a priest. He did not even know where he was. He was dreaming, and no one would ever know what he was dreaming. A small boy passed by who had plucked a flower with its stalk, and in passing the small boy tickled the neck of the priest who was thus sunk in slumber. I saw him open his laughing eyes, and the whole

of his mouth was spread in the happy laughter of his dream. He had forgotten everything, but I assure you that in the twinkling of an eye he immediately resumed the severity of mien which was required of him by the robe he wore, and that his eyes recovered the seriousness, the gravity which you have already noted in mine.

It is impossible in a few brief quotations, and in the briefest possible summary of the play, to do more than indicate its general spirit and intention. Nor is it possible by any means except those used in the theatre by M. Pirandello himself to give any idea of the intense reality and coherence of the plot, and the crystal clarity with which the subtlest of suggestions are conveyed. At every turn we find ourselves compelled to doubt the finality, the veracity, the completeness of the physical and mental accidents of everyday existence. For reality we must look beyond, and it is precisely here that M. Pirandello breaks entirely away from the theatre hitherto described as modern. His plays begin where Mr Bernard Shaw and those of his contemporaries leave off. His predecessors dealt logically with intellectual conceptions and ideas. For M. Pirandello the whole apparatus of human logic is no more than a screen before the reality he seeks—a screen which most men regard as a protection and a shelter :

Why [Henry inquires] do we fear the madman? The madman inspires us with terror because he is not subject to ordinary human logic, and, therefore, threatens to overturn every established conception. There are certain men who, when they speak, threaten to break and destroy everything before them. The world says that such men are mad. Nevertheless, everyone listens to them with terror. You yourselves [he is speaking to his attendants] feel it at this moment when you look into my eyes, and you know that this terror may go to the limits of panic. It will give you the feeling that the solid earth is shifting under your feet,

because you are dealing with someone who is shaking to their foundations everything which you have constructed within you and about you, threatening to destroy logic itself and the logic which is inherent in all which you have made.

M. Pirandello himself inspires something of this peculiar terror. His plays are a studied affront to the self-sufficiency of the material and the obvious. We are compelled to look quite through the shows of things. The commonplaces of ordinary life lose their pride of place. In the world outside they fill the air and satisfy the eyes, but M. Pirandello takes us in an instant, as it were, to the farther side of life. He cannot show us what lies upon the farther side, but he makes us realize that it exists—a realization that for many generations had almost ceased to trouble us. He shows us, in two of his great plays, men and women who are seemingly less real than characters in a play, than the passionate obsessions of the madman, or than the tranquil figures of history. He suggests all this, not by making his men and women less real than his fictions, but by making his fictions more real than his men and women—a distinction which makes all the difference between genius and mediocrity. The old-time scorn of Mr Bernard Shaw for folk who moan that life's but a walking shadow is unanswerable when directed against those whose moaning is merely the result of an incomplete sense of the value of life. Such an attitude is mere negation, an abdication of the human intellect, a shirking of the hard, clear thinking which is necessary to the limited but useful operations of human logic. There is no such abnegation in the work of M. Pirandello. He looks at life, appreciates its diversity, keeps his mind clear and true in dealing with its normal manifestations. But he also looks behind for a deeper reality, and at once we enter, pitifully but with

a sense that we are no longer being asked to live by bread alone, a world in which the immemorial riddle is asked, the riddle which has been put in a hundred ways by a hundred philosophers since thought began, the riddle which in its briefest and starkest form was put by the distinguished magistrate who—asking " What is truth ? "—neglected to stay for an answer.

Chapter Three

M. H.-R. LENORMAND AND THE PLAY OF PSYCHO-ANALYSIS

THE attention of anyone who to-day makes even a brief survey of the Continental theatre is almost at once arrested by M. H.-R. Lenormand, author of *UHomme et ses Fantomes, Les Rates, UOmbre du Mai,* and *Le Mangeur des Rives.* Not only are these plays original in spirit and method ; they are also deeply expressive of certain tendencies in modern literature which will assume an increasing importance during the next ten or fifteen years. They bring on to the stage and give dramatic form to discoveries and conceptions which, though they have long been commonplaces of the psychologist, are only just beginning to form part of the normal mental equipment of the educated public : they deal, that is to say, with ideas which are just ripe for treatment by novelists and dramatists. It is not the business of novelists and dramatists to discover a new philosophy or to add to the sum of human knowledge. It is their business to satisfy the contemporary mind as they find it by giving form and expression to its prevailing mood and its accepted philosophy. When, therefore, we say of M. Lenormand that he is a profoundly original dramatic author, we do not mean that he is making any new discoveries in psychology, or that he is likely to give to contemporary thought a new direction. An original dramatic author is not an original thinker, but a man whose business it is to find bottles for the new wine •, and the wine must not be too new, or the bottles will burst. In other words, he will find himself arguing a case instead of creating a work of art. You will find nothing in the plays

of M. Lenormand which you have not found already in the works of Miers and Dr Freud and their successors, just as you will find nothing in the plays of Mr Shaw which you cannot find in the social and political works of a previous generation. Both dramatists are, nevertheless, in their different ways profoundly original.

The dramatic career of M. Lenormand is typical. Like so many of the younger French dramatic authors, he first appeared in the theatres of the vanguard, but almost at once the value of his plays was generally recognized, and they were accepted for production by one of the French national theatres. *Le Temps est un Songe* and *Les Rates* were produced by M. Georges Pitoeff, at the Theatre des Arts, in December 1919 and in May 1920 respectively. *Le Simoun* was produced by M. Gaston Baty, at the Com£die Montaigne-Gamier, in December 1920, with M. Gemier in the cast, and *Le Mangeur des Rfoes* by M. Pitoeff, at the Theatre Pitoeff, at Geneva, in January 1922. In October of the same year M. Gemier produced *La Dent Rouge* at the Odeon, and this was followed nearly two years later (June 1924) by the production at the Odeon of *UHomme et ses Fantomes.* M. Lenormand is still, however, faithful to the pioneers. In October 1924 *UOmbre du Mai* was produced by M. Gaston Baty at the Studio des Champs £lysees, and *Le Ldche* by M. Pitoeff, in the autumn of last year, at the Theatre des Arts.

Perhaps the most striking characteristic of the work of the younger poets, dramatists and novelists of to-day, as compared with that of their immediate predecessors, is its attitude to the problem of evil. A previous generation assumed that evil was merely a negative condition, no more than the temporary thwarting of a positive process of betterment. Wickedness was an aberration, ugliness

a deformation, the deadly sins a perversion of the capital virtues, and every sinner an unsuccessful saint. Man, set free from a few obsolete delusions, was an obviously perfectible creature. Give him as a race ten thousand years in' which to improve, or, better still, a longer life as an individual to profit from his mistakes, and he must necessarily achieve wisdom and beauty. The devil, in fact, was regarded as no more than a tolerated foil to a beneficent Providence, and should it ever become necessary for man to have a hundred arms with which to embrace his more complicated welfare, creative evolution would in its good time ensure his becoming a veritable Briareus. Evil was only a mistake and pain no more than a temporary failure in the relation of sentient life to its material environment. From this comfortable doctrine the younger authors of to-day are in full reaction. Nor have they waited for any leading in the matter from the theologians and philosophers. The doctrine of progress and the necessary triumph of virtue in all its forms is instinctively rejected by novelists and dramatists who have never listened to the passionate denials of Dean Inge or the austere reasoning of Mr Bertrand Russell. The younger generation is quite involuntarily obsessed with a sense of the positive, active and creative power of evil as forcibly as St Paul was obsessed by a conviction of the reality of sin, and none of them would affirm that in ten thousand years from now Christ was likelier to be reigning than Antichrist. Briareus may attain to a hundred arms, but the chances are even that Briareus will be a demon.

Popular criticism of art and morality in the nineteenth century was based on a conscious or unconscious assumption that the devil had ceased to exist. Evil and ugliness in art were not so much explained as explained away.

The pre-Victorian optimists were so entirely sure that the devil had ceased to exist that their whole political system was based on the assumption that it was only necessary to set men free to do as they pleased, and all would inevitably be well. When it was seen that this assumption landed society in the unspeakable horrors of the industrial revolution, and when it was realized that men did not necessarily become angels on removing their clothes, the doctrine of human perfectibility and of the purely accidental character of evil was modified. But the modification did not go very far. Confident faith in a benevolent process of natural evolution gave way to an equally confident faith in the evolutionary process if intelligently and deliberately controlled. Evil was still a purely negative conception—the fly of Beelzebub, god of flies, in the heavenly ointment of an increasing purpose.

But in the last few years the devil has come quite definitely into his own again. In the art and literature of to-day evil is not a tolerated blemish. There is no attempt to bring it into conformity with good. It is evil militant, often triumphant. The devil is no longer upon a leash. He is veritably loose again, and his name is legion. He has his dominion and his rights. To apologize or to account for him, as was the custom of a previous generation, is against the whole spirit of the movement we are describing. This modern art renders to evil the things that are evil. The devil has his empire and his devotees. Ugliness, a brooding Narcissus, dotes upon the margin of his horrid pool. It was the custom of the divine moralists to show evil momentarily victorious in order that God's victory might be the more signally exhibited. The pastime of playing cat and mouse with human souls was reserved for a benevolent Providence, and the devil himself was merely

a bigger mouse than any of the others. Now, however, it is the turn of the Prince of Darkness to be a sportsman of souls.

Almost any of the younger novels will show you the cloven hoof. In a story entitled *My Name is Legion*, recently published by Mr Charles Morgan, the devil is felt as one of the principal characters. " Don't you realize that it's over the spirit the devil, too, has power ?" is the sentence from which it springs. Or take Mr Geoffrey Dennis—a young author with two books to his name which have been loudly and justly praised by the alerter critics. His second novel, *Harvest in Poland*, is filled with black magic and infernal powers, and leads in a crescendo of spiritual horrors to a vision of human history that definitely proclaims the devil's might and puts him on equal terms with God :

> And as I listened, after many million years, I heard the voice of God saying, " Let us make man in Our image, after Our likeness," and as I watched and saw, God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him.
>
> And coevally, uttering each syllable with Him, I heard the voice of Satan saying, " Let us make man in Our image, after Our likeness," and I saw the hands of the Devil create man in His own image, in the image of Satan created He him.
>
> And two new hordes of black things crowded the planet before me.
>
> And the kindreds of God moved nearer, and the kindreds of Satan moved nearer, and joined in marriage, and made the human race: cross-breeds with the blood of God and of Devil in their veins, the breath of Devil and God in their hearts.

This sense of the active power of evil is the first characteristic to which I would draw attention in the plays of M. Lenormand. He expresses it more continuously and more forcibly than any living author, and it is this

circumstance which makes him so significant a figure. Most of his characters are under the influence of that *nostalgie de la bone* which is partly the aftermath of the war and partly an overdue reaction against the shallow optimism of the nineteenth century—of which creative evolution in its more modern forms is merely a subtle extension. When we enter the theatre of M. Lenormand we wander like the primitive savage in a jungle of malignant forces, with the added horror that the devils for whom civilization has evolved its taboos and fetishes are not external to mankind but are lurking perpetually in the subconscious depths of the human mind. We find evil, not existing as an accidental blemish or licensed imperfection, but living for its own purposes, seeking its own fulfilment, working for its own triumph and perpetuation. He takes us into the mind of the lover, the artist, even of the child, and we start back in horror from what is there revealed.

The first reaction of the normal English reader, still under the influence of a previous generation and timorous of any unexpected revelation, will be similar to the first reaction of the English readers of Ibsen in the early nineties. Of the eight plays mentioned earlier, at least four would be prohibited by the Censor, and the remainder would be regarded by the great majority of English readers as unwholesome exercises in pathology. I have already used the name of St Paul, but I might equally well have named any of the saints of Thebaid, or, indeed, any one of the long succession of eremites of whom M. Lenormand is temperamentally the successor. I shall return to this analogy later on. I refer to it now in passing merely as a warning to those who might believe themselves to be wholly orthodox in condemning the plays which we are about to examine.

There is, of course, one very easy and immediate way of dealing with literary movements that shock the taste and disturb the values established by their predecessors, and it is the way usually taken in extreme cases by most self-respecting communities. If Mr Bloom landed at Folkestone he would be arrested by the police, and his arrest would be defensible as an act of self-preservation on the part of English society and English letters as represented by the Director of Prosecutions and the more reputable publishing houses of London. Some of Mr Bloom's contemporaries, seeking admission to the English theatre, have been denied so much as the privilege of a public prosecution. The Lord Chamberlain has seen to that. And these official activities are no more than a natural expression of the attitude of the majority of decent folk when suddenly asked to realize that their accepted ideas and feelings concerning God and man are not necessarily immutable laws of nature. It is a comfortable attitude, and it completely solves the problem for those who accept it. There is no need to ask the regnant majority for an explanation, say, of Mr Huxley's *Antic Hay.* Its answer is simply to make hay of Mr Huxley.

One sometimes wishes it were as easy as all that. Mr Bloom of *Ulysses* is very obviously an indecent creature. There is filth upon the modern page unexampled since Rabelais, and sufficient blasphemy to fit out a missal for Beelzebub. Sensitive gorges would frequently be spared if we might, with so many honest and intelligent folk, simply cast these things aside as the unclean fancies of the abnormally depraved, precisely as our predecessors cast Ibsen aside, and as Jeremy Collier cast aside Congreve and his rout of Belial. The only argument against such an easy and convenient course is that it would make an end

of all art and letters within twenty years. Authors would all be reduced to imitating the classics. Musicians and painters would be obliged to give up any real attempt to express the form and spirit of their generation—which is the only thing that can keep any sort of art fertile and productive. For art cannot be reproduced by an inbreeding of masterpieces. A work of art is very like a mule: an excellent creature, but incapable of reproducing its kind.

It is by no means an easy matter to defend some of the most vital and characteristic works of contemporary art from the accusations of the majority. It is no use denying any of the major counts in the indictment. We must begin by frankly facing the facts, and making the necessary concessions. None of the accepted formulae will meet the case. The old defence of discord as a necessary preliminary to harmony, the old recognition of blemishes in detail which emphasize the beauty of the whole, the old defence of ugliness as an essential element in beauty—none of these phrases so much as scratches the surface of the problem. On the contrary, they are in flat contradiction with the works which they profess to defend and to explain. We have to admit that there is in nearly all the strictly contemporary work with which we are dealing discord, disease and ugliness which cannot by any stretch of ingenuity be brought into relation with the harmony and health and beauty which we associate traditionally with a work of art.

The older theologians defended pain and evil as necessary elements in a divine scheme, discoursing of a heavenly synthesis into which these things would be ultimately fitted. Such reasoning would be regarded by the younger spirits of to-day—if they were in the habit of listening to theologians—as merely adding God's insult to His injury.

Discord, ugliness and depravity cannot, in modern art, be regarded as elements of a larger harmony. Discords in modern music are discords, not a preparation of concords, and I defy any musical ear, however fine, that listens to M. Stravinsky's octet for wind instruments to resolve them into anything else. The evil in modern art is evil for its own sake, a positive and not a negative element, an independent and prevailing force, not an indirect process or discipline towards good.

Nor can we explain the evil in modern art as due to a passion of the satirist, a desire to hold up for execration the thing he wishes to destroy. Our modern author is not piously using his evil to point a moral or to illustrate an ethical purpose. Any attempt to explain his more characteristic performances as springing from a desire to scourge the vices of the time, as permitting evil to be done that good may come, would be wholly disingenuous and absurd.

Nor can we apply to this modern work the moral justification which almost entirely covered most of the work of Wilde and his contemporaries, who so flagrantly shocked a previous generation. These young men were moralists themselves. They denounced the virtues of their time because they believed them to be vices. Their art was a moral gesture of defiance, and they were fundamentally as ethical as the enemy with whom they were so brilliantly at issue. This is shown by the fact that their leader in the *Ballad of Reading Gaol* ended his literary career with a sermonette.

Mr Bernard Shaw wrote a play called *The Devifs Disciple,* and prefaced it with an essay on diabolian ethics. But there is not a trace of genuine diabolism in the play. His hero's cult of the devil is, in fact, no more than a

moral attitude superior to that of those who profess the cult of Christ. The whole thing is an essay in moral values. There is no idea of presenting evil for its own sake.

There is yet another point at which the old defences of art offensive to the ordinary moral sense of its contemporaries breaks down. It used to be argued that art was independent of morality, that in the achievement of the beautiful it might break every commandment in the Decalogue. There were beautiful sins, aesthetically better worth while than all the virtues of suburbia. Wit was sufficient excuse for wickedness, and purity of form was an adequate defence for impurity of substance. He would be a bold critic who set out to find a justification for the impurity of *Ulysses* in its purity of form, or for the wickedness of Mr Gumbril in the wit of his pneumatic underclothing.

It is, of course, necessary, in using words like " discord," " ugliness," and " evil," to bear in mind that they have been employed again and again by serious critics in the past as mere epithets of censure that evade the questions at issue. Beethoven and Wagner excruciated the ears of their contemporaries with progressions which now induce a pleasant day-dreaming in eupeptic merchants and languishing schoolgirls. Gauguin offended the academicians as gravely as Flaubert offended the magistrates. The normal person will qualify as discordant anything to which his ear is unaccustomed, as ugly anything which does not conform with a convention which his eye is immediately able to recognize. Harmonies finer than those they are displacing, beauty more complex or merely less fashionable than that received by the majority, have invariably been denounced as discordant and ugly by the established arbiters of taste, who frequently use injurious epithets

which signify nothing except that those employing them happened to be born, say, in 1865 instead of in 1895. Their use of words like " ugly " and " evil " is merely a chronological accident. All this contemporary art is for them something almost deliberately perverse—a deformation of life, and not an expression. This is not the attitude of the present inquiry. We are quite definitely starting from the assumption that this is art which is supremely significant.

The presence of a positive and active principle of evil is felt in every play of M. Lenormand, but there is one of them which is almost wholly concerned with the affirmation that evil exists, that it has its own logic and its own devotees, and that it is perpetually creative. The principal character in L' *Ombre du Mal* is a French resident administrator in Africa. We hear of him first in a conversation between a young subordinate official and his wife. We gather that, while these two young people are doing their utmost to encourage the better elements in the negro colony and to improve conditions generally, the administrator—from indifference or self-interest or a soured disposition—either thwarts their efforts or at least does nothing to help them. The administrator enters and discusses with his subordinate a case which has just arisen in the village. A negro potentate has complained that two of his captives have been stolen. It is clear to the young subordinate, and incidentally it becomes clear to the audience, that the captives have not been stolen at all, but that the negro potentate has sold them to a passing caravan of Moorish slave raiders. The negro alleges that they have been stolen in order to cover his breach of the law, and in order, if possible, to incriminate his enemy, a noble young chieftain, who has won the confidence and respect of the white

administrators. This young chieftain has learned to love the justice of the whites > he pleads his case, fearless and confident that his innocence will at once be recognized. For it can easily be proved that the captives were sold to the Moors. Is it not well known, moreover, that he has never lied to the white men, whose justice he has accepted ? The administrator, however, to the stupefaction of his subordinate, at once has the young chieftain arrested and flogged, who, overwhelmed more by the inexplicable injustice of this decision than by his brutal punishment, tries vainly to understand :

> Ta justice est-elle celle d'Iblis ? Ou de quelque demon blanc ? D'ou vient-elle ? Que veut-elle ? Ah si tu sais, reponds-moi. . . . Tu es la, qui me regarde sans paroles, comme ceux qui marchent en dormant. M'entends-tu ? Parle. Eveille-toi.

The riddle is answered for us in the following Act. The injustice consciously and deliberately wrought by the administrator is the result of an injustice which he had himself suffered some years previously—an inexplicable injustice which had maddened him and perverted all his finer instincts. His life for fifteen years has been no more than a reflex of the evil which had then been enforced into his consciousness. He has met again the man from whom he suffered this original injustice, even more purposeless than that which he himself has just inflicted on the young chieftain. He confronts this man and explains :

> Ces deux annees d'injustice avaient mis en moi I'amour et la volonte de Tinjustice. . . . Vengeance ? Non pas. Je me serais venge de vous . . . et j'avais depasse la haine d'un homme. C'etait quelque chose plus forte que la vengeance. ... A chaque punition que j'infligeais, c'etait comme une detente furieuse, une decharge de tout mon etre. ... Eh

bien, j'ai vecu pour ces spasmes de Tame. Je me suis nourri de ces reserves de force mauvaise. J'y ai trouve* les delices les plus sombres, les seules délices de mon existence.

The man is in fact possessed, and most of us would incline to consider him as an irresponsible madman, a fitter subject for the alienist than the dramatist. But there we should be reckoning without the genius of his author, who compels us to accept this man as the tragic instrument of an evil destiny which penetrates his intelligence and uses for its own purposes the best and worst of his nature. He is fully aware of the dreadful significance of his acts, aware also that he is doing violence to his humanity, but he is in the grip of a process which he cannot impede, whose awful logic he must continually proclaim and execute. And as we see him thus helplessly entangled and controlled by the power of evil, we realize that he is infinitely more pitiable than his victims.

The persons of the play who surround the administrator and endeavour to find a motive for his monstrous act are like the critics of Shakespeare who endeavour to find a motive for lago's destruction of Othello. Villainy, they assume, must be due to ambition, desire for revenge, some special form of self-interest or gratification. But that was never the view of those who believed in the devil. Such a view presupposes that evil is so abnormal, so contrary to the laws of life, so repulsive to the human conscience, that men must be driven to it for some easily comprehensible and obvious reason. Critics have racked their brains in trying to find adequate motives for lago's villainy, and actors have exhausted their ingenuity in drawing attention to such logical motives as appear to be expressly indicated in the text. lago, they say, was jealous of Cassio's advancement ; suspected his wife of adultery

with Cassio and the Moor ; was envious of Cassio's easy and successful gallantry. Many critics, finding these motives either monstrous or inadequate, have said that lago is a blot on the play ; that he is no more than a piece of antiquated theatrical machinery; that humanly he is impossible and even absurd. The same things are said, more or less, of Edmund in *King Lear*. Such criticism misses precisely that element in lago and his peers which has recently returned into modern literature. The whole point of lago is that his evil is evil for its own sake. It has no need of motive or excuse. It is as natural and as simple as a child at play. lago positively enjoys being a villain. It is true that in his soliloquies he gives himself reasons for his villainy, but that is only because evil, as well as good, naturally seeks to justify itself intellectually. But lago's reasons are not the cause of his villainy : they are simply an intellectual exercise. The really important thing about them is not that they seek to explain the acts to which they relate, but that they give reasons for those acts which are entirely fanciful and at the same time hideously and grotesquely evil in themselves. lago likes to play with the notion that his wife is unfaithful with Cassio. It gives him the same kind of pleasure as a devotee derives from the lives of the saints or any normally generous mind from a story of heroes. It adds to his enjoyment, to the pleasure he takes in the planning and compassing and contemplation of his wickedness. lago, like Edmund, goes to his villainy with a sol-fa-la, lighthearted as a kitten, with the zest of a spirit free to express itself without stint. The only real motive of his villainy is the one that slips out of him quite naturally towards the close. He hates Cassio because Cassio "has a daily beauty in his life"—which means that he hates Cassio because evil is antipathetic to

good. Shakespeare's audience understood lago, because at that time the devil had not yet disappeared from art and morality. The notion that a man possessed with the devil might do evil just for the fun of the thing was at that time familiar and unquestioned. Men in those days gave the devil his due, in the ancient and proper sense of allowing the devil to enjoy himself and to assert himself, and not in the eighteenth and nineteenth century sense of trying to establish on his behalf mitigating moral circumstances. It is the glory of the devil to be just as black as he is painted, and his comment on all efforts to attribute to him the " blessed condition " with which Cassio invested Desdemona would be the comment of lago himself: " Blessed condition ! Blessed fig's end ! "

Here in this play of M. Lenormand we are asked to acknowledge the sovereign power of evil existing by diabolic right, the power which the administrator embodies and proclaims in the dialogue with his original persecutor as vehemently as he denies the reality of its opposite :

> Ta justice, c'est une idee d'homme, une petite idee d'homme. Ce n'est pas une realite. . . . Voyez au contraire combien vivante et inextinguible est Tinjustice. . . . Voyez quelle lourde et longue chaine de maux a pu forger un seul acte d'injustice, le votre. Parce que cette tentation du mal vous a visite jadis, il a fallu que je subisse deux ans de tortures et qu'£ mon tour j'en inflige de pareilles a d'autres hommes, dont vous ne soupconnez l'existence. . . . Tous ceux qu'au cours de ma vie j'ai traites injustement. . . . Qui sail si, a leur tour, ils ne sont pas venges sur les autres ? Et ces autres, sur d'autres encore. . . . Allez, une fois la source d'injustice liberee parmi les hommes, nul ne peut savoir jusqu'oti elle est capable de couler.

And before the play ends another link is forged in that awful chain. For the young chieftain, understanding at

last the infernal logic of the law under which he himself has suffered, lures the wife of the administrator's subordinate into the negro village upon an errand of mercy, where she is done to death. The choice of this woman, the embodiment of Christian pity and intelligence, for victim is as inevitable as every other stage of the argument. Evil being the predominant power in the material world, it is dangerous to live for justice and charity. Those who wish to survive and prosper in an evil world must live in the shadow of evil.

The author of the play does not, of course, identify himself with this doctrine of evil. He merely gives dramatic form to the principle of evil, throwing into relief its vitality, the power of injustice to breed injustice, the perpetual challenge flung by human life and history at the just man to curse God and die. The author is no diabolist; but he continually insists, with his younger contemporaries, on giving the devil his due. His own view, if it is permissible to search a dramatist for his personal convictions, is that justice and injustice are equally the inventions of mankind, to which the universe is profoundly indifferent.

This brings us to another idea implicit in our author's work, less obvious, but seldom very far away :

> Moi aussi [says the man to whom the administrator in *L'Ombre du Mai* addresses himself] j'ai interroge la solitude. Et je sais que l'univers n'a rien a nous dire sur nous-memes. Son secret, c'est la foret d'oft je sors. C'est le fleuve et ses banes de sable . . . c'est l'immensite' sauvage et sans pensee.

Human consciousness, with its desire of self-knowledge, its conceptions of justice and injustice, is an intruder into the world of nature, which knows neither good nor evil. Here, again, we find what is in effect an old theological

conception unexpectedly recurring in the contemporary mind. This is no more than the Pauline argument that it is the law which makes the sin.

M. Lenormand has devoted a whole play to the elaboration of this idea—a play that has not yet been performed, but which throws a good deal of light retrospectively on its predecessors. *Une Vie Secrete* presents a musician of genius. His friends object that his music lacks humanity. He draws his inspiration from the desert, as directly as possible from Nature, and he reacts violently against the suggestion that his art should aim at the expression of human hopes and sufferings, replying that the artist must be as free of these solicitudes as a shark in the Pacific. He will not set to music the anxieties and heart-searchings of men and women. He expresses Nature, unconscious and unaware, and he desires to be as blind, as involuntary, as innocent of good, and perhaps of evil, as Nature. But being human he must, like the man who rode to Damascus, kick continually against the pricks. He endeavours to escape his own humanity and, in the attempt, becomes wilfully evil and destructive, but he cannot escape the scourge which came into the world with the human conscience. Could he, like the tiger, have been cruel without knowing that he was cruel, wrought evil and good without distinction, he might have sung like the birds without knowing or asking why or what he sang. At the start he made his music spontaneously. As soon, however, as his conscience is awakened, and he wilfully defies it, he ceases to create at all.

> Je creais sans savoir. Depuis que je sais, je ne créee plus. … II y a maintenant, entre la Nature et moi, un miroir ou je m'apparais, avec mes doutes, mes remords, mes craintes. . . . Je me surveille. Je suis un homme apprivoisé.

His art has been killed with explanations and confessions, the inescapable introspection which is the peculiar doom of the rational man ; and he concludes with a tirade against the tyranny of words which are strong enough to paralyse an artist but are incapable of expressing a reality. Untroubled by conscience he was able to create. Acting wilfully against his conscience he lost his power to create, because conscience, once it is awakened, cannot be safely ignored. And the solution of the riddle, like the riddle itself, is Pauline. His creative power which he temporarily destroyed, so long as with a knowledge of good and evil he pursued evil, is restored when he is confronted with the tragic consequences of the worst of his sins and is suddenly overwhelmed with remorse.

Here, perhaps, is to be found an unexpected retort to the charge that these plays are " unwholesome." For the author has in effect admitted the criticism in a deeper sense than it could ever be intended by those who might think it worth while to bring the charge. They are, he would admit, unwholesome in the sense that most literature is unwholesome. " Look into your heart and write," said the philosopher ; but that is precisely the habit which our author instinctively distrusts, even though he yields to the temptation. Words and syllables are for him the sinister little tokens whereby we affront the silent realities of Nature. Human thought is an impertinent intruder into the immense indifferent scheme of things, veiling from us the reality which at best it seeks vainly to unmask and which, more often, it seeks deliberately to evade.

M. Lenormand recently expressed his views on the literature of the romantics, and one could scarcely avoid the inference that what he said of the romantics, and

incidentally of the literature of to-day, which suffers from the same defects, he was possibly ready to affirm of literature generally. The usual explanation of the great outbursts of romantic literature is that they are an expression of the vitality and creative power which result from great historic contests and achievements. M. Lenormand finds for them a precisely contrary explanation. He looks for the origin of these literary revivals, not in the achievements themselves, but in the effort and suffering—so soon forgotten or neglected by the historians—by which these achievements were won. The romantic literature that follows such a period is not an expression of hope or vitality, but an instinctive recoil from realities too hard of acceptance. The romantic poet creates a world of illusion in which an exhausted generation seeks a refuge from things as they are. Such, argues M. Lenormand, was the inspiration of the romantics who followed the wars and revolutions of the early nineteenth century, and such will be the inspiration of the greater bulk of European literature during the next twenty or thirty years. In place of the objective truth, for which the classic writers calmly endeavour to find appropriate forms, the romantic reaches after a scheme of things which shall be nearer to his heart's desire ; he is subjective and introspective ; he seeks to discover the secret of himself rather than of the universe ; his art is optative rather than categorical. Such literature is not a sign of health, but a symptom of disease. Do you, he might ask, accuse my plays of being unwholesome ? The charge is inevitable, since I am necessarily the child of my generation. I must accept the common doom.

M. Lenormand is the child of his generation, but he is an uneasy and a recalcitrant child. He is obsessed with

the problem of evil , he is abnormally sensitive to its presence ; and he gives to it dramatic form and expression with an intensity and power unequalled in modern literature. But fundamentally he is the good moralist. This can best perhaps be appreciated in *Les Rates*, which of all his plays most forcibly and consistently presents the idea with which in various forms he is repeatedly concerned. M. Lenormand shows us in this early play a man and his wife, author and actress, mutually devoted, normally seeking happiness and fulfilment in their love for one another and in their art. Poverty and failure, however, ultimately drive them into subjecting their love and their art to every possible indignity. The action passes during a theatrical tour in which the woman appears in tenth-rate plays in a tenth-rate company. The man, abandoning his own ambitions, follows his wife, sharing her small earnings ; and finally the woman, for mere subsistence, and so that they may remain together, finds herself obliged to sell herself as well as to degrade her art. For a while they argue that this soiling of all that is most sacred to them is of no intimate or vital consequence ; all this, they contend, is external—it does not affect or alter the inviolable self, which remains intact and unblemished. They endeavour, even, to find an added significance, a momentary ecstasy in their more intimate relations as a result of the unhappiness and evil through which their love has been impelled :

> Tout trahit, tout manque ; on est enfermé dans son desespoir comme dans une cave . . . et soudain quelque chose vous saisit, vous emmene doucement. . . . Une porte s'ouvre, au plus bas de la douleur, et voila qu'il entre une lumiere, une tendresse qu'on ne connaissait pas. . . . On est tranquille . . . on ne s'inquiete plus. … II n'y a plus rien de terrible … on est arrive.

It is the woman who speaks, and the man goes on to say that in order to reach this point it is necessary to have been not only unhappy but to have sinned as well.

Evil is necessary to beauty and to happiness—such seems to be the purport of the play. But that is to reckon without the sequel. For the man who argues thus, who seeks to obtain from his degradation a more poignant sense of the beauty and the excellence to which he is so tragically sensitive, is doing perpetual violence to his conscience ; and, finally, when life on such terms becomes insupportable he kills his wife, and thus destroys himself.

The doctrine of the highest good emerging from the lowest evil, the contention that only when the mind has boxed the diabolic compass can it achieve security and understanding, is thus confounded. This unhappy pair outraged their essential instincts, and, though they could for a while satisfy themselves with a specious formula, in the end they had to pay the penalty. We have here the most logical and complete presentation of an idea which recurs continually in the plays of M. Lenormand, so many of whose characters are driven to seek in evil the source and inspiration of a more intense and complicated good which at the last moment is seen to be no more than an abominable illusion.

M. Lenormand is thus at constant issue with the impulse which he shares with his generation. Abnormally conscious of the immanence of evil, and fascinated by its secret activities, he has nevertheless, like Stevenson in the full tide of his romance, enough in him of the Shorter Catechist to trouble him in the full tide of his inspiration and to induce him to shame the devil in a final summing-up. As an artist he is attracted by the subject of evil. He gives to it a reality, a vital expression, a variety and significance of form,

which are a measure of the extent to which it inspires and dominates his imagination. As a moralist, however, he is repelled, and obliged in the last resort to furnish the play with a lesson. The devil may have all the good tunes in a world where he is apt to be master, but for all that he is most certainly damned.

There is a similar conflict of the artist and the moralist in his attitude towards the modern habit of self-analysis. We found in *Une Vie Seer tie* a suggestion that the mute insensibility of Nature is a more satisfactory state of being than the voluble and introspective consciousness of man. This may be the author's philosophic conviction, but it is obvious, notwithstanding, that it is his delight, as an artist confronted with the human mind, to analyse, to dissect, or to disclose. Though he may believe that the really blest condition is that of the brute who asks no questions of himself, and obeys his instincts unaware, he is irresistibly drawn towards the habit of inspection.

The play in which this aspect of his work is most clearly presented is *Le Mangeur des Reves.* The principal character is an amateur psychologist who interests himself in mental cases. He meets a young woman who is suffering from a complex the origin of which she ignores. The play is devoted to a gradual disentanglement of the events in her infancy which lie at the root of the distress and the inexplicable inhibitions from which she now suffers. It is discovered that as a child in a fit of instinctive jealousy she was indirectly the cause of her mother's death. The facts were concealed from her at the time, and she has apparently forgotten them, but she remembers them subconsciously, and her subconscious memory suffices to surround all her most vital instincts with a conviction of misery and guilt. The action of the play is in effect a

modern replica of the action of *CEdipus Rex,* only in place of the elaborate machinery of revelation by seers and messengers we have a gradual process of discovery by the psychologist, and in place of a doom contrived by an external fate we have a doom that lurks in the unsuspecting mind of the victim. The unfolding of this doom has the inexorable progress of tragedy, showing us in the tragic manner a human mind overcome by a destiny which it is powerless to resist, which destroys it materially, but which leaves us with a sense that essentially it is superior to the powers that have accomplished its ruin.

Those, however, who are trying to discover the author in his work will turn inevitably from the innocent victim of the tragedy to consider the character and position of the psychologist or the *mangeur des reves* who is its instrument. Here we have an embodiment of that morbid curiosity which is at once an inspiration and an offence to his creator. The *mangeur des reves* is driven, like his author, to probe into the recesses of the human mind ; and he assures himself that the instinct which prompts him to do so is that of the physician who desires only to heal his patient. This pretence, however, is completely unmasked by one of his previous victims—a woman to whom he has revealed all her secret capacity for evil. We are made to realize that the instinct which impels him to question and to scrutinize the avowed or concealed activities of a human conscience is an abominable symptom of that modern disease of introspection less explicitly execrated by his author in other plays. He is, in effect, the inescapable serpent in the contemporary Eden, creating evil where, but for the impious work of his intelligence, there would have been nothing more than the innocent, because profoundly unconscious, act of a child. The play is at the same time the work of a

genius in the analysis of human impulses and an expression of abhorrence for precisely the tendency which it conspicuously illustrates. Beside the paradox of the good moralist who is uncontrollably drawn towards exhibiting the triumphant vitality of evil, we have this further paradox of the merciless analyst of the human conscience for whom such analysis is the ultimate abomination.

It may seem at first sight extravagant to institute any sort of comparison between a contemporary author whose plays are to a large extent based on the most recent discoveries of the psycho-analyst and the author of *(Edipus Rex,* The reference to Sophocles, however, is as natural as the reference, in another connexion, to St Paul. The classical Greek drama exhibited man struggling with an evil and a complex destiny for which he was essentially unresponsible, the victim of events and processes inherited quite inexplicably or imposed without apparent justice or reason by actively malicious or indifferent powers. We get this same sense of fate as a superhuman or subhuman (the prefix is immaterial) agency in the plays of M. Lenormand. In the ancient author these agencies were the external forms given by men to beliefs and conceptions which they had outgrown. In the modern author these same agencies are the primitive immemorial processes of the human mind which lie hidden beneath the threshold of a civilized and intelligent consciousness. The difference is less material than it seems, though two thousand years of introspection and sensitizing of the human conscience lie between them. The Greek exteriorized the destructive and evil forces which blinded Œdipus and pursued Orestes. The modern author looks for them beneath the threshold of conscious life ; his victims carry their inherited fate within them unawares. The significance of the tragedy

is the same ; it has changed in form, but not in substance. The analogy may be taken even further. The doom of the Greek hero sprang from the fact that he had outgrown the gods who smote him. The doom of the modern hero springs equally from the fact that, as a conscious being of divine discourse, he has outgrown, or claims to have outgrown, the abominations which wait for him beneath the threshold.

We turn to another play for a more explicit expression of this particular idea. In *La Dent Rouge* we are introduced to a family of peasants who live in a Swiss mountain village. One of the sons of the family, a hunter of chamois, whose dearest ambition is to set foot on the mountain peak under which he has always lived, meets and marries a girl who has lately returned to the village. This girl has lived most of her life abroad with her father, in the course of which she has, in the ordinary sense of the word, been educated. The man she marries has just enough imagination to aspire after the knowledge and freedom which his wife has acquired. Fundamentally, however, he remains at one with his kindred in the gross, immemorial superstitions which still linger in the remoter Alpine valleys. His defiance of the ignorance and cruelty which is in his blood, the faith and ardour with which he takes and defends the girl who represents for him the knowledge and beauty to which he aspires, cannot overcome the instincts of generations and the environment of a lifetime. Winter falls on the village and brings with it the terrible, intimate seclusion of a primitive community cut off from every refinement of intelligent life. The girl is surrounded with the suggestions of a credulous folk who have been left virtually untouched by any civilizing faith or conception. The demons of the mountain, in whom every peasant believes, recover

their dominion. The young wife, as a stranger, is disliked by her husband's family, and the whole village assumes an attitude of mockery or hostility. Finally she is charged with witchcraft. Her husband, who had promised, in deference to his wife's alarm, to give up his perilous attempt to set his foot on the summit of the Dent Rouge, returns to his mountaineering and is killed after having achieved his ambition. The village attributes his death to the sorcery of his young wife, and the most characteristic feature of the tragedy is that she herself, affected at last by the superstitions to which she was born and in the midst of which she has returned to live, comes herself to believe that she is responsible.

Here we see a momentary defiance, the fine endeavour of two souls to win free of an evil inheritance, bringing with it the same disaster which overtook the innocent young wife of the subordinate official in L'*Ombre du Mal*. Those who seek to escape the dominion of the ancient powers expose themselves to calamity.

It is a significant tribute to the genius of M. Lenormand that he continually provokes comparison with the classics, and in one of his plays, L'*Homme et ses Fantomes,* he renders such a comparison inevitable. It is, in effect, a modern version of ***Don*** *yuan.* The hero has all the classical stigmata. He is libertine and impious, affecting to enjoy his own misdeeds. But he is gradually preparing his doom, and at the last he sups with the phantoms of his past. The author gives to the old legend a completely modern setting. His ghosts are those of the modern spiritualist; their manifestations are such as would be seriously investigated by the Psychical Research Society. These manifestations, moreover, are all of them explicable by the latest discoveries of the psycho-analyst. The fundamental inspiration of

the character is an intellectual craving which drives him to seek in the women he encounters the secret of humanity. Throughout his pilgrimage he remains utterly alone. Don Juan is a solitary. He has eliminated love from his existence. He seeks always to possess and to discover, but he gives nothing in return, and each of his victories is intimately a defeat. And though he affects to be without a conscience, and suppresses all pity and affection under the stimulus of his monstrous egoism, he is outraging unawares the secret consciousness of good and evil within himself, which is inexorably preparing its revenges. In the final scenes of the play all the suppressed instincts which he has flouted come to the surface. He is haunted by the ghosts of all the feelings and conceptions which he has deliberately outraged. The traditional Juan invited the statue to sup with him. The modern Juan invites the phantoms of his past with table-rappings and the whole apparatus of modern spiritualism, whereby his subconscious self obtains the results towards which it is helplessly driven.

He dies surrounded by the spectres which he has unconsciously carried about with him and as unconsciously evoked, and his end is as faithful to the classical legend as his career. For he dies impenitent, governed by his predominant impulse, which he recovers even in the last dialogue with the phantom of his mother.

L'HoMME: II y a quelque chose que je voulais savoir, avant de mourir . . .

LE FANTOME DE LA MeRE : Tu ne vas pas mourir. Tu vas t'endormir centre moi, comme autrefois.

L'HoMME : Je veux savoir . . .

LE FANTOMF DE LA MeRE : Ne te tourmente pas . . . ne pense a rien. . . . Dors.

L'HoMME: Savoir . . .

Savoir: it is his ruling passion, and he dies with the word on his lips !

We have dwelled in this chapter on the aspects of our author's work which are peculiarly significant of his generation, and from which we can disengage his temperament and his philosophy. This is admittedly a bad way of appreciating a dramatist, and in this particular case it may establish an impression which would be wholly unjust and which it is necessary to correct. It must not be assumed that M. Lenormand is a philosopher with a doctrine, or a specialist in mental science, or a moralist with a text. The tendencies and principles which we have discovered are not obviously on the surface, and it is only by doing violence to his work, giving undue prominence to certain aspects, and reading diligently between the lines, that it is possible to fit him with a formula. M. Lenormand is first to last a dramatist; his characters are men and women expressing themselves in conduct and speech appropriate to the event and the moment. We are interested in them as individuals and not as the embodiment of abstract ideas or the bearers of a philosophy. It might be imagined from the insistence laid upon the moral and psychological implications of the plays we have discussed that their author was didactic, explanatory, concerned rather with principles than persons. Nothing could be farther from the truth. His dramatic style is as terse, as objective, as dramatically appropriate, as theatrically lucid, as that of any of his French contemporaries. The amount of explanation and interpretation given to the characters and incidents in his plays is reduced to the minimum consonant with the nature of his peculiar achievement. Obviously an author who brings into his theatre motives and instincts of which even those who are prompted by them are often unaware, finds

it necessary on occasion to suspend the action of his play while the characters discuss and analyse their motives, and at times he is even driven to introduce the familiar *raisonneur* who interprets much that might have remained obscure in the behaviour of his characters. But such occasions are rare, and in every case the climax of the drama, with all its significant stages, is presented in an act or situation that is brought about by the play of conduct and character. M. Lenormand is a master of the small revealing incident that strikes the imagination, and gives simple and clear dramatic expression to the most subtle and complicated mental condition or process. Like most of his younger contemporaries, he has been obliged to work out his own technique, and in course of doing so he has once for all extended the dramatic field, bringing within its limits subjects which formerly lay quite outside. In this respect he cannot fail to have his imitators, and even dramatists who strictly follow their own devices will inevitably be influenced by his achievement.

His plays as individual works of art I will leave to speak for themselves. Nothing I could say of them can increase or detract from the impression which they must necessarily make upon a sensitive reader. I have wilfully preferred, in discussing an author who is as yet almost entirely unknown in London, to dissect rather than to paint the lily. It is the penalty of that decision that I have had to concentrate on one or two aspects of one or two plays, leaving the rest to speak for themselves.

And they are very well able to do so.

Chapter Four

M. JEAN-JACQUES BERNARD AND THE THEORY OF SILENCE

OF the younger French dramatists who during the last few years have contributed to the astonishing post-war revival of the Paris stage M. Jean-Jacques Bernard is certainly one of the most significant. His plays are beginning to acquire a Continental reputation ; and it will not be long, I hope, before we may see some of them on an English stage. They are, indeed, peculiarly liable to please an English public, for in style and method they represent a breach with the rhetorical French tradition which brings them nearer to ourselves and makes them immediately attractive and accessible. The English are shy of characters who have too much to say for themselves and are inclined to disbelieve in emotions which are either voluble or explicit. A French author who begins by telling us that the theatre is above all an " art of the unexpressed," who declares that it has no worse enemy than literature, and who bases his method on what the French critics describe as the " theory of silence," should be sure of welcome and sympathy among ourselves. The " theory of silence " should, so far as English playgoers are concerned, need no explanation and no defence. For us it is a sacred postulate that the more poignant emotions are too deep for words. English lovers are expected to be incoherent ; English heroes are expected to be silent ; Lord Burleigh's nod is accepted as a profounder exposition of statecraft than all the speeches of Nestor. It is true that Mr Bernard Shaw, with Wilde and Synge, lately introduced into our theatre heroes and heroines who must

be judged by what they say, but these exceptions, being Irishmen, only prove the English rule. Remember that it was also an Irishman who made fun of Lord Burleigh's nod. In the English theatre the strong silent man will never die. Demolish him in the plays of Mr Alfred Sutro (though I should be very sorry to do so) and he will reappear none the worse for your homicidal efforts in the plays of Mr John Galsworthy. We are all, in fact, thoroughly familiar with the " theory of silence " in its more obvious applications ; and, though some of us may suspect that Englishmen are often silent because they have nothing to say, it is more commonly assumed that their superior taciturnity is evidence of a deeper feeling and a profounder wisdom than can be claimed by the more loquacious races.

I propose in this chapter to take the plays of M. Jean-Jacques Bernard as typical of the present reaction in Paris against the explicit, literary and rhetorical French theatre with which we are mostly familiar. The classical theatre of France is one in which the drama is apt to culminate in a tirade, in which the characters utter in so many words everything that is in them, in which tone and gesture emphasize the written word, in which the scene serves merely to frame or to assist the recitation of a text. The theatre of M. Jean-Jacques Bernard, and of many of his young contemporaries, is in striking contrast with this tradition, and the younger producers and critics frequently proclaim, in support and encouragement of their favourite authors, conceptions which are profoundly disturbing to the older school. One of the pioneers among the producers in this kind is M. Gaston Baty, leader of the "Campagnons de la Chimere" in reference to whom M. Henry Bidou wrote recently :

> En un mot, l'homme n'est pas seulement la parole, qu'il dit. Les Campagnons de la Chimere revent un theatre ou Ton n'entendrait pas seulement cette parole, mais oil Tetoffe de la piece serait tissee des sentiments muets comme des sentiments enonces, ou le dialogue se poursuivrait tantot avec des mots et tantot sans paroles.

This quotation might be matched from a score of other sources. It serves to indicate that M. Jean-Jacques Bernard is not an isolated apparition. He is to be regarded as typical of a movement which is sensibly affecting most of the younger dramatists and which is having a very considerable influence on contemporary French acting and producing. His career, moreover, is admirably significant of the conditions now prevailing in Paris. His work is definitely of the younger school and it was first recognized by the smaller societies. But it is perhaps the most remarkable sign of the present vigorous theatrical times in Paris that the old-established houses are immediately ready to encourage any sane and promising development. The Comedie Fran^aise and the Odeon are to-day as adventurous as Sir Barry Jackson and Mr Nigel Playfair, and they have an infinitely wider field in which to give practical evidence of their enlightenment. M. Jean-Jacques Bernard, proclaiming in 1922 that the theatre was above all an art of the unexpressed, was in 1924 admitted to the Odeon. The production at that theatre of *L' Invitation au Voyage* was a signal triumph for the theory of silence. In the very citadel of the French literary tradition—a theatre in which heroes had for generations unpacked their hearts in Alexandrines without number—there was presented a play in which the hero not only failed to speak even a single word, but went so far as never to appear upon the stage.

Let us examine rather more closely this " theory of silence." The conviction that there are thoughts and feelings too deep for words does not of course take us very far. It is reflected in the irritating habit of easy writers when they tell us that an emotion is unutterable or that in idea is inexpressible. The conscientious practitioner will retort that it is the writer's business to utter emotions and to express ideas, and that for a person whose business it is to describe things to refer to them as indescribable is an obvious confession of defeat. It is the mission of the poets and dramatists to become articulate precisely at the point where words would fail their mute, inglorious fellows. A thousand Romeos will this summer evening embrace a thousand Juliets and find their feelings quite unutterable, but that is no reason why Shakespeare, invoking the theory of silence, should have refrained from saying for his lovers what they would certainly have found it quite impossible to say for themselves. We must scrupulously beware of using the theory of silence as a cover for mere literary incompetence or neglect. Used in that way it is an abdication by the author of his essential duty and privilege—which is to extend continually the scope and delicacy and power of verbal expression. " Speech is silver and silence is gold," may be an admirable proverb for statesmen, but it is obviously a most inappropriate device for a man of letters.

The theory of silence as practised by M. Jean-Jacques Bernard has no such foolish implications. He uses his words for all they are worth. He conducts us by means of a dialogue, as lucid and revealing as the apt, inevitable phrase can make it, up to a point where the situation or emotion to which we are led speaks so eloquently for itself that he has no further need of explanation or commentary. The emotion to which he is leading us, to which every

character in the play has phrase by phrase been contributing from the outset, when at last it emerges, clearly defined and intensely felt, communicates itself to us directly, without any further effort. The moment has been so thoroughly well prepared that everything is already there, and the silence in which we receive it is the sum of all that has so far been uttered and performed. The author at that point withdraws and leaves us to receive the desired impression. He must, indeed, withdraw, or he will destroy his own effect:

> Un sentiment commente perd de sa force. La logique du theatre n'admet pas les sentiments que la situation n'impose pas. Et, si la situation les impose, il n'est pas besoin de les exprimer.

Such is the sense in which we are to read his contention that the theatre has no worse enemy than literature. Far from flinching in the least degree from his verbal responsibilities in face of the inexpressible, he leads us up to the point where the inexpressible is clearly and immediately expressed in terms of the theatre—to a point, in fact, where nothing remains to be said because everything is already implicit in all that has been so firmly and adequately said before. When he describes the theatre as the art of the unexpressed he means that the most striking and significant effects should require no explicit and verbal statement at the critical moment.

There is another aspect of the theory of silence. So far we have viewed it as a protest against the explicit and rhetorical method of an older school—a reaction against a certain form of dramatic literature which relied more on explanatory or expressive declamation, on the discourse or the tirade or the lyric passage, than on a situation carefully prepared and eloquent in itself. From this point of view

the reaction would seem to be no more than a question of a form or style which may be as good or as bad as another —a question of the difference, say, between Mr Bernard Shaw, whose sentiments and situations are hardly more than an excuse for his commentaries, and Mr John Galsworthy, whose sentiments and situations are self-sufficing. The author of *Man and Superman* is happy only when he can bring his hero to the point of making an eloquent speech ; the author of *The Eldest Son* is happy only when he can bring his hero to the point of being unable to say anything at all. That is merely a question of method. Both authors, despite their very dissimilar technique, belong more or less to the same period, and in their very different ways are chronologically of the same temperament and outlook. The theory of silence, however, as it is understood by the post-war dramatists of France, is more than a mere difference of method. It represents an entirely different attitude to life. It is the result of a desire to express a wholly different order of ideas and emotions.

" Je pense," writes our author, " qu'un theatre sobre et depouille pourra faire une place de plus en plus grande aux passions inavouees ou inconsciente " ; while M. Denys Amiel, in his more violent and picturesque fashion, declares in the preface to the first volume of his plays :

> Ah ! l'admirable et poignante chose que la vie ! . . . Les minutes les plus insignificantes sont peut-etre grosses de drame interieur. . . . On voit des gens paisiblement assis qui causent avec calme, leurs gestes sont ceux de tous les autres gens polls et sociables et peut-etre que dans leurs cœurs s'agitent en remous la convoitise … la haine … la passion de la bete ancestrale. . . .

There is, in fact, a school of dramatic authors in France to-day which is peculiarly sensitive to ideas and impulses which do not necessarily come to the point of definite

expression but which are nevertheless present in every character and situation. The mass of human feeling which contrives to get itself expressed in action, or even in speech, is comparatively small. For every man who has done anything dramatic or extraordinary there are ten who have at one time or other entertained—or a half or quarter entertained—the notion. Most lives are made up of small desires, envies, rivalries and aspirations which are seldom confessed or have any sequel in action. There is even a sense in which the individual has a private life of which he is not always himself aware—*a* province which M. H.-R. Lenormand, dramatist of the subconscious, in whose theatre we behold complexes as men walking, has recently taken for his own. But, quite apart from these more abnormal signs of the present tendency, there remains the fact—hitherto almost wholly ignored by the theatre—that life, except for the positive few who in every situation contrive to leave their mark upon it, is mainly a routine, sustained or relieved by secret illusions, chequered with desires which are never fulfilled, shot with vague disappointments, made up of envies and generosities, attractions and repulsions, terrors and audacities, which remain almost entirely unexpressed. Nine-tenths, in fact, of the nervous or mental life of the normal individual never come to anything at all.

But the theatre, you will say, can deal only with emotions and ideas which are sufficiently urgent and clear to drive their subjects into action, or at least to move them to the point of being eloquently and explicitly informative. How is it possible to deal in the theatre with what our author calls the unexpressed ? How is he going to convey to us by means of action and dialogue, which are his only instruments, ideas and emotions which do not in life come to the point of action or get themselves explicitly declared ?

How is he going to dramatize the unadmitted, present a situation which shall give dramatic reality to just those elements which in life are dynamically ineffective ?

That is a problem which is greatly exercising the young dramatists of France, and of them all M. Jean-Jacques Bernard is the author who has most successfully solved it. His success is the more striking as he solves it by purely dramatic means. He does not, like so many innovators, explain how unprecedented a thing he is about to do, go on explaining how he does it, and continue to explain how thoroughly he has fulfilled his intention. There is not in any of his plays a word of comment or a syllable of exposition which is not immediately relevant to the character he is presenting or to the situation to which he is advancing ; and when at last the characters are clear, and their motives known, we discover that, in the situation in which they find themselves, the unexpressed is contriving without difficulty to express itself.

Let us look briefly at some of the more characteristic plays. Take, for example, *Le Printemps des Autres*, produced at the Theatre Femina in 1924. It is a masterpiece in the art of the unexpressed. It tells us more by the method of avoidance, tells it more completely and more truthfully, than could be achieved by the direct, explicit method of the older school. The central fact of the play is never once mentioned in so many words. Yet there is not a single line or incident which does not relate to it. Everything said or done brings the fact more surely into relief, till at last the audience and the characters themselves can no longer escape it. The fact, undefined and unconfessed, takes form and feature, and no further word is necessary. The culmination of the play is a silence in which we perceive the significance of all that has gone before.

The theme is a simple one. A woman of forty, still attractive and apt for sentiment, is suddenly addressed by a diffident young man in the garden of an hotel at Stresa. He has become acquainted secretly with her daughter, to whom he desires to become engaged. His diffidence and his anxiety to make a good impression are naturally attributed by the older woman to an interest in herself. She is touched and flattered. Her daughter enters and the young people confess to their acquaintance. The girl then explains the position to her mother. The older woman listens in silence and, though the girl's confession is a charming passage, the drama is all contained in the silence of her mother, with whose thoughts and feelings we are, owing to the dialogue that has gone before, wholly identified. As the girl confesses her secret we see the older woman reviewing her life, appreciating the fact that she is forty years old, realizing that henceforth she must live in her daughter whom she has hitherto treated as a child. That is the climax of the first Act, and the climax is reached in a silence which sums up everything that has preceded it. We have no need of any further comment or definition on the author's part, which could not fail either to restrict or to exaggerate its significance. The silence on which the curtain falls is much more than an opportunity for the actress to indicate by appropriate grimace conclusions that are foregone. It is the silence itself which brings into relief and reveals the significance of what has gone before. Not till we see this woman listening mutely to the girl, who quite unsuspectingly brings to the surface not her own but her mother's emotions and thoughts, do we realize that it was just this revelation to which the Act has been moving from the outset.

The second and third Acts similarly avoid any explicit

reference to the underlying motive of the play, which nevertheless determines its progress in every detail. The young people are married, and the result is on the surface an affectionate household of three people all equally anxious to contribute to the general content. But by a dozen small touches and indications we are made aware that the older woman is a subtly disturbing and mischievous element in this threefold relationship. We realize that her influence, which she ostensibly uses to make a success of her daughter's marriage, turns almost against her will in the contrary direction. There is no intentional malice, no conscious desire in any way to trouble the lives of the young couple. But all through these two Acts, in all that she does or neglects to do, we divine the working of what, if it were sufficiently obvious and crude, we should describe as a secret jealousy of their happiness and youth. But that is precisely where the power and delicacy of our author's method becomes apparent. It would be a gross caricature of this woman's motives and of her character to say quite bluntly that she was jealous of her daughter and consciously destructive of her daughter's happiness. If such a thing were said in so many words we should reject it as monstrously theatrical and absurd. Nevertheless all that she does is coloured by the faint envy and regret which, in her disappointed maturity, she inevitably feels in the face of their radiant youth. And at last her daughter understands. At the end of the play, as at the end of the first Act, all the implications of the situation are made clear in a moment of complete but silent revelation. The two women are face to face ; the truth is silently acknowledged. There is no need of comment, explanation or any further word between mother and daughter. The whole play is summed up and illumined by the sudden realization of the

two persons concerned of the secret motive which has been implicit in every line of the play : " Tres long regard muet, regard d'intelligence de femme a femme" —that is the dramatic climax to which we have been conducted, and the effect of it is overwhelming.

The method here used is justified by the fact that by no other means could the author's purpose be achieved. A more direct, explicit and explanatory method would have converted the play into a tale of abnormal jealousy as between mother and daughter, hardly credible, and, if credible, of very limited interest or significance. Anything which the two women might have explicitly said to one another at the close of the play must necessarily have strained and falsified the truth conveyed implicitly by the whole progress of events up to that particular moment. They must inevitably have said too much. The position, containing within itself all that has gone before, speaks for itself so completely that nothing further remains to be said. To put it in another way, if the author desired at that moment to say anything which should convey the complete and essential truth which is conveyed to us in that look of intelligence between the two women, he could do nothing less than repeat the whole of the play. The content of such a moment is too complex to be summed up in a line or phrase. We are, in fact, here confronted with a supreme example of what our author calls the " art of the unexpressed "—an art which is peculiar to the theatre and one which most clearly distinguishes it from other forms of literature.

We will take another example of the successful application of the theory of silence. *Le Printemps des dutres* is a play in which the principal motive, though always actively present, is never once referred to explicitly. In *Marttne,*

produced by les Campagnons de la Chimere in 1922, we have a play in which the theory of silence is applied to the presentment of the principal character. Martine, the most vital and comprehensible of the persons in the play, is the person who says least. Never once does she tell us explicitly what she is feeling and thinking. In spite of this —or rather because of it—she is more real to us, we divine and understand more of what is passing in her mind than we do of any of the others. The author obliges us to follow her thoughts and emotions from the things that are said to her. We are made to identify ourselves with that inarticulate figure as the people around her wound or solace her by the things they say or do. Every line is of importance in the play only so far as it touches Martine ; we think only of its effect upon *her* ; everything said or done increases our knowledge of this simple creature, who thus emerges alive and intimate from her environment.

A country girl meets on the highroad a young man returning to his home in the village. They linger by the way and talk, and for some days after his arrival they improve the sentimental relationship which has thus begun. But the young man has come home to resume acquaintance with another girl to whom he is in due course engaged— a girl who, unlike Martine, is educated and articulate, and can appreciate a quotation from the poets applied to a field of corn. The young people are married and the sentimental episode with Martine on the highway, which has never come to full maturity, remains unfinished. But to Martine it is the great event of her life. She marries, as her fate decrees, a man of the village ; she will spend the rest of her years doing the work of his house and farm and bearing his children, but the only moments of her life that will ever count are the few days in which she listened to the young wayfarer.

The author's method is so skilfully used that many will read or see the play without realizing that our intimate knowledge of Martine, one of the most attractive and poignant characters in modern drama, is acquired without any explicit declaration of her feelings. We know her almost solely from the way in which she suffers the sayings and doings of all the rest. There is, in particular, one scene in which Martine remains awkwardly in the room, while the young married people who wish to have it to themselves all but ask her to leave them. She stands silently looking upon the intimacy from which she is excluded, fascinated, unable to withdraw :

> Pendant qu'ils parlaient Martine les regardait fixement sans bouger . . . partir etait au-dessus de ses foices. . . . Elle essaye de parler mais vainement. Et tout a coup, sans un mot, elle sort.

The scene is typical. We see her throughout, mute and defenceless, caught in a net of words and actions for which she is not responsible, which she cannot name or understand. We know precisely how she feels as every word, kind or callous, wise or foolish, goes home to her simple mind, which can only accept but never grasp the complexity of human life :

> Nous ecoutons, toujours le langage de ce qui ne s'exprime pas et il y a tant de choses qui ne s'expriment pas et qu'il faut comprendre.

And gradually the play progresses to its silent conclusion in which nothing is heard but the ticking of the farmhouse clock asserting unbearably the implacable routine of common life.

Martine is so far the masterpiece of M. Jean-Jacques Bernard, one of the most significant and successful

achievements of the modern French theatre. It already has an international reputation, and it is a measure of our present neglect of the French contemporary stage that it should not yet have been performed in London and that it is usually necessary, when speaking of its author, to introduce him as the son of his father, M. Tristan Bernard, the popular and loquacious author of *English as She is Spoke.*

There is space for no more than a brief reference to two other plays.

L'Invitation au Voyage, the play which was presented at the Odeon in 1924, is a dramatic presentment of a conviction entirely natural to the author of *Martine* and *Le Printemps des Autres.* It declares in terms of the theatre that our secret thoughts and illusions about life, though they never really come to the point of expression—though, as in this particular case, they do not even correspond with any objective reality—may have nevertheless an important and even a decisive influence. We are brought to realize how great a part is played in the lives of even the least imaginative of persons by the unconfessed existence of hopes and aspirations, fugitive or abiding, which are never brought to the test in conduct or speech. We hear in this play a voice which cries for the moon and calls it down from the sky. Its heroine is the embodiment of the secret idealism of the unsatisfied. She is the wife of a prosperous manufacturer in the Vosges. Outwardly her life is not amiss. She has a charming house, an affectionate husband, a delightful child. But she is incorrigibly a dreamer and her dreams have for her more reality than the people and things about her. A young man is staying at the house. He is learning her husband's business, and apparently he is an adequate young man, but unremarkable. Our heroine

in any case finds nothing to distinguish him from other men so long as he is there. But suddenly he is called away to the Argentine, and no sooner has he departed than he begins to be associated in her mind with all that lies over the hills. She does not tell us what is in her mind, but by means of a dozen small indications we follow the insidious progress of a daydream which transforms this commonplace young man of commerce into an incarnation of the appeal that lies in distant places, in things and people unknown. The young man is away for over two years, and all this time the legend grows till, suddenly again, he returns to France and she goes at once to meet him. Whereupon she finds that he is the same wholly unremarkable young man of commerce whom she had failed to distinguish from the rest of his kind and class prior to his departure. The shock of the discovery restores her for the moment to a sense of her many domestic blessings, but we feel sure she will be dreaming again to-morrow to no better purpose than before.

It is characteristic of our author that we are not ourselves permitted to see the young man at all. During the first Act he is in the garden outside the room in which the action passes, and he never comes physically into the play. We see him only through the eyes of the woman to whom he is first commonplace, then idealized, and finallycommonplace again. His failure to appear objectively on the stage emphasizes the unreality of the romantic illusions which are so important a factor in nine lives out of ten. The theory of silence is here taken a stage further. Not only is the main motive of the play left implicit ; it does not even bear inspection.

In the last of the plays of M. Jean-Jacques Bernard so far produced we have a yet subtler suggestion of his con-

viction that perhaps the most important things in the life of an individual are those which never succeed in getting themselves objectively fulfilled. L'*Âme en Peine*, produced early last year by M. Pitoeff at the Theatre des Arts, is based on the platonic conception of twin souls. We are to imagine two lovers, each of whom is necessary to the other, but who never succeed in meeting or discovering their identity. The woman is married, and married happily as ordinary marriage goes. The man has his amative adventures. But both are dissatisfied and driven in search of something or someone unknown. Every now and then in the course of the play their paths cross for a moment. The woman has come, driven by some inexplicable whimsy, to a certain hotel. A young man enters, goes about his business and retires. How was she to know that he was the being for whom she was intended ? Or she is sitting beside the round pond in a park and a child almost falls into the water. A young man runs forward and for a moment their hands meet in the effort to save the child from falling. How was either to know that this should have been the meeting of their destinies ? Yet, though they do not themselves seem to be effectively aware of the bond between them we—the audience—can see that it is determining the whole course of their lives, for the conduct of each of them is governed by the fact that they are leading existences which are deformed and incomplete. The fact of paramount importance for each of them never gets itself expressed in terms of fact.

Drama as an art of the unexpressed is here taken as far as it can possibly go. Not only do these people fail to utter explicitly what is in them : they fail even so much as to realize what it is in them to utter. The necessity which is urging them together does not get to the point of a definite

emotion. We know, as they meet for an instant and then go their different ways, that they ought then to have recognized one another, that their affinity should then have declared itself. They themselves, however, pass on unaware, except for a faint premonition, which is not sufficiently clear to arouse in them a really dynamic impulse. Some critics have found this last play possibly a little too delicate for the stage. Personally, however, I do not see how else the idea could be conveyed than through the theatre. The climax to each scene is the moment in which the two lovers encounter, only to turn aside in ignorance and to continue their lonely progress to the end of the story. Those moments sum up everything that has gone before, and have a poignancy such as could be conveyed by no other means than those which the theatre, and the theatre alone, can provide.

The plays of M. Jean-Jacques Bernard are, of course, more than an illustration or application of the theory of silence. Our author is not confined within the limits of any formula :

> J'ai toujours proteste quand, me voyant fuir des formulas surannees, on a voulu m'enfermer dans des formules nouvelles. Prisonnier des autres ou prisonnier de soi, le danger est equivalent. Si chers que me soient ces ouvrages par tout ce que j'y ai mis de moi-meme, ils ne peuvent me faire oublier qu'il n'y a en definitive qu'une formule viable: celle du renouvellement perpetuel. C'est 1'implacable loi de notre metier.

The plays we have examined illustrate a theory, not because the author is applying to them a rigid formula, but because they are, for the moment, his natural form of expression. Sensible of the crudity of feelings and motives which can be readily and explicitly uttered, he naturally tends to bring his drama to a climax in which everything

may be implicitly inferred without any of the disastrous limitations of a purely verbal formula. He deems it the power and privilege of the theatre to be able to dispense with a purely literary effect at its moments of greatest significance and intensity. His plays, therefore, naturally suggest themselves to the critic who desires to illustrate the application of a theory which is influencing so much of the contemporary work in Paris to-day. This does not mean that the plays in question cannot be profitably examined under other aspects. *Martine,* for example, might be almost equally well taken as an example of the new dramatic naturalism which is so profoundly modifying the writing, producing and acting of plays in the more advanced theatres of Paris. I would therefore caution you, when reading these plays as an illustration of the theory of silence, that there is a good deal more to be said concerning them. I would also emphasize that a sensitive reader will need no theory or any preliminary introduction to our author. *Martine* has no need of any critical commentary. It is one of the simplest, most effective and appealing plays of the younger school. To those who are liable to despair of a perverse and unsatisfactory generation let me recommend the plays of M. Jean-Jacques Bernard : so shines a good deed in a naughty world. Here you will find sweet faith and delicate compassion : a momentary shelter from destructive commonplace and a living sense of all the finer issues.

Chapter Five

M. JEAN SARMENT AND THE NEW ROMANCE

FRANCE is preparing to celebrate this year the centenary of the great romantics, and in readiness for the event we are taking down the volumes, perhaps a little dusty, in which *Chatterton* and *Hernani* embalm a tradition whose virtues we can afford to admire because we have learned to smile upon its excesses. The romantics of the early nineteenth century have been so closely identified with this tradition that we often talk as though romance itself had existed never before or since. The substance of romance, however, is as old as the literature of Christendom, and the form of it as perpetual as the revolt of each succeeding age against the habits of its predecessors. For romance is, in effect, the literature of escape—in substance an escape from the discipline of life and in form an escape from the discipline of the academies. It is the permanent element in art and literature which substitutes for the material world an ideal freely and audaciously created as a refuge from things as they are, an adventure in quest of the Fortunate Islands. The spirit of romance is thus eternal, though it has often in history been suppressed or disfigured. We have learned to smile at the sorrows of Manfred ; we no longer dream with Emma Bovary of the knights and wizards of Walter Scott; Childe Roland may be to us a stranger and Childe Harold a mistake. But though the fashion changes the spirit remains. Punctually to the minute, in art as in life, romance, which was thought to have perished with the six-in-hand, brings up the nine-fifteen.

Critics have maintained that the romantic outburst of the early nineteenth century was the literary result of the Revolution. It is difficult to admit such a contention except in the sense that most literary and historical movements sooner or later provoke their opposites. The French romanticism of the nineteenth century was not a product of the Revolution, but a protest against the revolutionaries who had set out to create a sufficient world for a reasonable man. For those who prepared and carried out the French Revolution romance was no longer needed. It might have been necessary in the Middle Ages, when men were tormented with problems above the reach of their souls, when they were driven to seek in spiritual illusions a refuge from a shockingly uncomfortable world and had learned from generations of priests and philosophers that the soul must fulfil itself in immaterial ways. But when Robespierre had enthroned the Goddess of Reason, and when, thanks to an enlightened political system, men were about to live happily and wisely on earth, it was, they thought, quite possible to exist without illusion, to close the book of romance, to restore the classic conception of a sound mind in a sound body, to achieve in life the perfection and harmony of the great pagans. The wise men of antiquity had felt no need of ecstasy or mysticism ; they had lived with reality in the sun and looked for no fables under the moon. Brutus the doctrinaire, assassin of emperors, was a more satisfactory object of veneration than St Augustine or Thomas Aquinas. There was no longer any need to dream of an ideal world because man, politically free and intellectually emancipated, was going to bring in the millennium in flesh and in fact. So for nearly a generation romance was apparently extinguished, or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that for nearly a generation

men affected to do without it. The result was the reaction which gave us the *Meditations* of Lamartine, and the Preface to *Cromwell.* Romance, spiritually the child of Christendom—because Christendom is a kingdom not of this world, and because it continually emphasizes the antagonism of soul and sense—proved itself to be, once for all, a necessity of the human mind. The violence of the romantic reaction against the neo-classicism of the eighteenth century was a measure of the extent to which right reason and flawless logic had failed to satisfy the imaginative and spiritual cravings of the generation which had accepted them. Meanwhile, precisely the same reaction was to be noted in England, where the classic conception of life, triumphant in the eighteenth century, and resulting in a similar starvation of the spirit, was followed by a similar rebellion. Romance was born again in France when it was realized that human souls required more than a social contract, and it was born again in England when it was realized that the *Essay on Man* was not the final word on his place in the universe.

The vital energy of romance resides primarily in its reaction against the classic or Augustan spirit which seeks perfection and serenity in a reasonable balance of human faculties, and rests content with their wise and disciplined employment. It is a protest, essentially pagan and aristocratic, against a satisfied acceptance of man's estate—pagan because it allows no room for spiritual yearnings, and aristocratic because only the leisured few can practise its lofty Epicureanism with dignity and refinement. For the multitude romance, which offers an escape from present deficiencies and permits each individual imagination to be king in its own house, is essential. Without it human existence can be described only in the terms of the seventeenth-

century philosopher who so clearly saw the reverse side of the doctrines of Pangloss. " The life of man," said Hobbes," is nasty, brutish and short"—a declaration which embodies the inevitable view of the majority upon the best of all possible worlds from which romance is systematically excluded. The romance of the Middle Ages was a Christian reaction from the Augustan conception of life which perished with Rome. The romance of the nineteenth century was a reaction from the Augustan conception of life which perished with Queen Anne (though it took an inordinately long time to discover that she was dead).

Similarly, to-day, the new romance, which we are about to consider, is a reaction against the more insidious rationalism which prevailed in Europe at the beginning of the present century. The optimists of the eighteenth century sought perfection in the present (whatever is, is right), and they based it on the adequacy of reason and the unassisted flesh. The modern optimists seek perfection in the future (whatever will be, will be right), and they base it on the adequacy of instinct rationally directed, the faculties of man obeying a semi-mystical process variously described, but most familiar perhaps under the title of creative evolution. The disciples of Rousseau thought of the Golden Age as a state of innocence from which mankind had been perverted by bad laws : man is born free but everywhere he is in chains. The disciples of Mr H. G. Wells think of the Golden Age as a condition of enlightenment to which mankind will attain by means of good laws : man is for the moment a slave, but one day he will be free. The root idea is the same in both cases—namely, that man can create his own paradise on earth with the exercise of a little intelligence and by the liberating of his natural impulses towards justice and perfection.

The new rationalism is more insidious than the old because, while appealing to the intelligence, it pretends to appeal also to the imagination, and affects to satisfy the moral and mystical instincts of which Christianity is in Europe so far the highest expression. M. Bergson's creative evolution might be only another name for God Almighty ; and the Barnabas of *Back to Methuselah* more than holds his own for miracles with St Barnabas of the Acts. The new rationalism does not make the mistake of previous Augustans. It does not deliberately and flagrantly offend the Christian and romantic conception of life. Mr H. G. Wells, it is true, is personally rude to St Augustine, but Mr Bernard Shaw is extremely kind to St Joan, while the prince of all modern pagans, Anatole France, loved and understood the Christian saints and philosophers even better than many of their clerical apologists.

Fundamentally, however, the more recent form of the doctrine of the perfectibility of man on earth is as destructive of romantic idealism as the earlier and simpler variety against which the romantics of the nineteenth century so vigorously protested, and the reaction against it is bound to be proportionately more complex and more prolonged. Already the reaction was overdue when the new century began. Then came the war, overwhelming a generation which was being taught that man was equal to his own salvation, and that all would be well with him in ten thousand years. The optimism of Pangloss himself could not have survived that catastrophe, and the new romance, which would in any case have made its appearance in the first quarter of the new century, came to a rapid maturity in that dreadful incubator.

Be it observed, at once, that the new romance is in one

respect essentially different from that of which we are this year to celebrate the centenary. The great romantics of the nineteenth century were entirely sure of themselves. They had no misgivings as to the effectiveness and value of their activities. Their heroes took up a commanding position in the centre of the universe. Nature was a reflection of their moods. When they were angry, only a thunderstorm could do justice to their state of mind. When they were sublime the mountains knew of it; when they were happy the stars sang in their courses , the ocean rose and fell to their meditations. They were, as Mrs Carrol Romer observed in a recent study of the nineteenth-century romantics, interested in life only so far as they could observe it in themselves ; and nature, imposing no lesson on them, only served to give still more beautiful expression to their sorrow. Their sorrow, indeed, was immense j it filled the world. It was worth while, and they thoroughly enjoyed it. Their passions and aspirations were of enormous consequence. With a magnificent insolence they shook their fists in the face of Destiny, or with a complacency more subtle insisted that nature existed only to soothe their sadness or to make it more impressive.

This insolence of the nineteenth-century romance was at once the cause of its splendour and the measure of its limitations. It had little room for any sense of proportion and no room at all for a sense of humour. It was incapable of seeing itself objectively as a future generation would see it. And that is precisely the respect in which it differs completely from the romance which is coming to maturity at the present moment. For the most obvious and immediate characteristic of the new romance is its humility, a certain curious objectivity which, even though it restores the introspective idealism of the earlier variety, enables it

to see this idealism for exactly what it is worth. It creates an illusion, but smiles in the act of creation. It restores the romantic figures of the earlier literature, exhibiting them in the old impressive attitudes, sympathizing with their excessive sorrows, comprehending their pathetic egoism, resuscitating their pathetic fallacies ; but, at the same time, it brings to bear upon these lonely and impressive figures a charitable irony, an affectionate compassion. It restores the hero, directs our eyes to his impressive silhouette, but whispers aside to us when most we are tempted to admire : " Poor fellow!" The device of the new romantic pilgrim is written at the head of the most ambitious of the plays of M. Jean Sarment : *Je suls trop grand pour mot.* The new hero has his illusions and his ideals ; he aspires after perfection ; he is dissatisfied with the life of every day 5 he feels himself to be born to finer things, able to rise to the level of finer issues, than those which lie about him. But he is not equal to his splendid destiny. He cannot live up to his visions. He is Virgile Egrillard, whose walking-stick is the symbol of his defiance of the commonplace, and who will one day achieve greatness ; but he mislays the walking-stick and marries the good wife who is an innkeeper.

Thus, the hero of the new romance is the old hero with a difference. He has added to his former qualities the virtue of humility and the saving grace of humour, and the grace is a consequence of the virtue. The origin of this strange humility of the romantic egoist is not far to seek. The generation which has measured its strength and stature against the immense catastrophe of 1914-1918 is not likely in its art to exceed the limits of human nature. It realizes those limits only too well, having been so insistently called upon to exceed them in accepting the heroic

obligations, or in suffering the senseless and implacable routine, of modern war. The war, indeed, which hastened the reaction towards romance, also made it inevitable that the romance, when it came, should be aware of itself as an illusion. It is driven to restore illusion because without illusion life has become more than ever impossible. It is urged to play with aspirations and to recognize ideals. But its protagonists see themselves, or are revealed to the observer, as the victims of heroic desires and impulses to which they are unequal. They strike all the traditional attitudes of their romantic predecessors, but the light that plays upon their defiant heads, and their shoulders squared at destiny, is the light of irony and disillusion. *Je suis trop grand pour mot.* They assume the crown of romance, but, to quote the title of another play of M. Sarment, the crown is a "*couronne de carton"* The new romantic hero is big enough to reject the life of every day as inadequate, big enough to realize that *' to hoard and sleep and feed " is to sell his birthright, but that does not necessarily mean that he is big enough to command his destiny. It means perhaps no more than that he is too big for his boots.

M. Sarment may be taken as the typical young author of the new romance. He is not yet thirty years old, and he came of age in the theatre before he had attained his legal majority. His first play, *La Couronne de Carton,* was crowned by the French Academy in 1920, and produced in February of the same year by the Theatre de l'Œuvre. In April of the next year the Theatre de l'Œuvre produced *Le Pecheur d' Ombres.* In May 1922 the High Commissioner of the French Republic in the Rhineland was a party to the production of *Le Manage d' Hamlet* at Mayence, and the play was transferred later in the year to the Odeon. In March 1924 M. Sarment was received

at the Comedie Frantpaise, the title of the play being, most appropriately, *Je suis trop grand pour moi.* Since then he has had further successes : *Madelon,* produced at the Porte St-Martin in 1925, and *Les Plus Beaux Teux du Monde,* produced in 1926 at the Theatre du Journal de Paris, and now triumphantly on tour in France, Belgium and Switzerland. *As-tu du Cœur?*—his last play—is at present running in Paris at the Theatre de la Renaissance. Add to this list of uninterrupted successes the fact that M. Sarment is an actor whom the public likes to see in his own plays, that he is married to the most charming of his interpreters, that no living author has been more extravagantly praised by all the best critics of Paris—and we get the portrait of a fortunate youth which seems too good to be true.

Yet this is the author whose plays are full of sorrows : essays in disillusion, a dramatic world whose inhabitants are continually trying to escape the limitations of reality, but who—and this is where the new romance differs from the old—are not sufficiently confident in the illusions which they cherish either in regard to themselves or others to achieve their ideals. They are presented with charity, but never with infatuation, as pitifully secluded in a world of their own, fugitives from life and not its masters.

We will take first the play, second in order of writing, entitled *Le Manage d' Hamlet.* We take it first because it so admirably serves as an introduction. It is at the same time a study in the new romance and a gentle mockery of the old. Hamlet, like the people in *Dear Brutus,* by Sir J. M. Barrie, is here given his second chance. Seventeen years after the tragedy of Elsinore he is permitted to return to earth along with Polonius and Ophelia. The subject of the play is shown in the prologue, which may

be taken as an epitome of the new romance, embodying at the outset its peculiar spirit of audacious and tender irony. I will transcribe it here in full :

DIEU LE PERE : Quelle cause allons-nous juger aujourd'hui, Abraham ?

ABRAHAM : Celle d'un prince mort jeune, Eternel: Hamlet d'Elseneur, fils d'un des derniers rois de Danemark. II se presentera devant vous, accompagne d'un homme d'age miir et d'une vierge morte en sa fleur, qui attendent avec lui la sentence du Divin Juge. . . . II y a dix-sept ans qu'ils l'attendent.

DIEU LE PERE *(pour qui le temps n a pas de duree)* : . . . Le temps——

ABRAHAM : Eternel, il se mesure encore par anne*es terrestres aux portes du Supreme Tribunal.

DIEU LE PERE : Tu as raison, Abraham. . . . Un homme d'age miir, dis-tu ? et une vierge en sa fleur ?

ABRAHAM : Le pere et la fille, Eternel, du nom terrestre de Polonius et d'Ophelie. Polonius fut homme de politique et d'importance a la cour des rois de Danemark. II passait pour avise dans ses plans et sagace dans sa conduite. II mourut, ayant recu d'Hamlet un coup d'epee a travers une tenture, un jour qu'en sa qualite d'homme politique il ecoutait aux portes. Ophelie fut une vierge sage. On la disait belle. Hamlet enfant 1'aima. Ce fut un amour traverse. Eternel, vous n'aviez pas donne au jeune prince l'ame egale des gens heureux. Les evenements le secouerent comme des tempetes; il etait incertain comme une barque surl 'eau. La redoutable heredite pesa sur lui, tel un orage qui n'ecfate pas. Sa destinee le precedait comme un spectre, et il suivait, pleurant sur lui-meme. Ophelie, un soir, se noya, folle de voir la raison du prince aime battre l'air ainsi qu'une aile de moulin—et Hamlet, assassin pour venger un assassinat, mourut lui-meme assassine. Depuis ce jour, Eternel, pour les princes d'Elseneur tout fut silence: un roi de Norvege est venu regner sur le Danemark.

DIEU LE PeRE : Hamlet, Ophelie, Polonius. Je revois leurs vies et les vies qui furent melees a leurs vies. Un roi benin, un roi mechant, une reine adultere, des laches et des ignorants. Je vois des coleres et des rires, des epees et des masques de comediens, du sang et du poison, des prieres hypocrites et une

larme de petite fille, et ces longues series de malentendus tressed en guirlandes que les homines appellent" le Destin "… Hamlet, Ophelie, Polonius. . . . Faisons le compte de lews pensees et leurs intentions. Ophelie, d'abord. Qu'a-t-elle inscrit sur le " Livre de Marbre " ?

ABRAHAM : Rien, Eternel; elle n'a jamais songe a Pouvrir.

DIEU LE PERE : Et sur le " Livre de Sable " ?

ABRAHAM : L'empreinte de sa derniere poupe*e. La morale des fables qu'on lui apprenait et qu'elle n'avait pas bien comprises. La suite des noms et des titres qu'elle eut pone's, une fois mariee a I'heritier de la couronne. Des recettes de cuisine. Une priere que lui avait enseignee sa nourrice. Les quelques mots d'amour qu'elle recueillit d'Hamlet.

DIEU LE PERE : Au tour d'Hamlet. Que vois-tu sur le "Livre de Marbre"?

ABRAHAM : Py vois son nom en grandes lettres. Je vois qu'au-dessous, a plusieurs reprises, il voulut graver " Fils de Roi," mais le marbre etait trop dur ou la main mal assuree.

DIEU LE PERE : Et sur le " Livre de Sable " ?

ABRAHAM *(lisant) :* " J'aime mon pere . . . j'aime ma mere . . . j'aime Ophdlie. . . . J'aime moins ma mere. … II faut que je venge mon pere. . . . J'aime moins mon pere depuis que j'ai a le venger. . . . Je n'ai plus le temps d'aimer Ophelie. . . . Je voudrais n'avoir pas eu de pere. . . . Je pourrais tant aimer si ' on' me laissait tranquille." Des mots, Eternel, et des cceurs dessines de formes disparates. Une serie de cœurs : perces, couronnes, enjolives, enrubannes. Des coeurs, ou plutot un seul sous plusieurs formes.

DIEU LE P£RE : Et Polonius ?

ABRAHAM : Dans le " Livre de Marbre," rien. Dans le " Livre de Sable," rien non plus.

DIEU LE PERE : Rien ?

ABRAHAM : C'etait un homme de politique. Dois-je faire comparaitre Hamlet, Ophelie et Polonius devant Votre Toute Lumiere, Pere Eternel ?

DIEU LE PERE: Pas encore, Abraham. Us attendent, dis-tu, depuis dix-sept ans ?

ABRAHAM : Oui, Pere Eternal.

DIEU LE PERE : Que font-ils devant la porte ?

ABRAHAM: Us parlent de leur vie passee.

DIEU LE PERE : Que disent-ils ?

ABRAHAM : " Si c'etait a refaire ! Si nous savions ce que nous savons! " Us font des projets retrospectifs.

DIEU LE PERE : Lesquels ?

ABRAHAM : Celui d'oublier ce qu'ils etaient et de fuir les complications. Celui d'etre simples. Celui de vivre dans 1'isolement et la quietude. Ils revent d'une maison a la lisiere d'un bois. " Etre votre femme," dit Ophelie. ** Preparer le repas et clever nos enfants ! "—" Ne plus me meler aux grands de ce monde,ni a leurs affaires!" dit Polonius. Et Hamlet dit: "Oublier que mon pere etait roi! " Ils ajoutent e*videment bien autre chose; mais tel est le theme de leurs conversations et le motif de leurs regrets.

DIEU LE PERE : . . . Je pense, Abraham.

ABRAHAM : Votre Pensee est infinie.

DIEU LE PERE : Je pense que nul homme n'a vecu deux fois, a 1'exception de Lazare qu'a reveille mon fils Jesus.

ABRAHAM : Nul homme, Cr^ateur, a 1'exception de Lazare. Je pense qu'aux portes du Paradis oil je les ai longtemps laisses, ceux-ci ont eu tout le loisir de faire un long retour sur les vicissitudes humaines.

ABRAHAM : Que decide Votre Toute Lumiere ?

DIEU LE PERE *(du haut de son trone] :* Que la vie leur soit rendue.

ABRAHAM : Eternel ?

DIEU LE PERE : Que la vie soit rendue a Hamlet, a Ophelie, a Polonius. Qu'ils la reprennent la OL) ils 1'ont laissde, au meme point de leur age.

ABRAHAM : Sachant ce qu'ils savent ?

DIEU LE PERE : Oui.

ABRAHAM : Ah ! Eternel, votre Sagesse est infinie ! Ils vont vivre comme des Saints!

DIEU LE PERE : Nous verrons, Abraham. Tu te pencheras aux fen£tres d'or. C'est un spectacle que je t'offre. . . . Reveille les d'entre les morts. Donne-leur la maison dont ils parlent, a la lisiere d'un bois. Rends-leur les vetements qu'ils portaient. Donne a Polonius un sac d'argent. . . . Et qu'ils aillent!

ABRAHAM : Cr£ateur, votre Misericorde est infinie !

DIEU LE PERE : Qui sait, Abraham, si, tel Phomme que j'ai fait a mon image, je n'ai pas mes heures de malice, moi aussi ?

Hamlet, restored to a simple and sane existence, with no father to avenge, is for a brief moment content. But soon he misses his destiny. Polonius calculates that Hamlet and Ophelia have at least 7080 days of youthful happiness in front of them, reckoning only thirty days to the month. [46] *C'est enorme"* says Hamlet pensively. He discovers that Ophelia has one eye slightly larger than the other. At Elsinore he had not had time to notice it. He is no longer her dear lord, but simply Hamlet, like any ordinary lover. And she is a prude in her conduct, though secretly perhaps a wanton in her disposition. In fact, life promises to be very dull and undistinguished, and he begins to hanker after the fate of which at Elsinore he was the illustrious victim. And soon he is caught up in a pitiful travesty of his former life. It is the tragedy of *Hamlet.,* but with a difference. The spectre which sends him posting to Elsinore to resume his romantic role of the man with a destiny is a practical joke of the local peasantry. He discovers a new Ophelia ready to die for him, but this Ophelia is a maidservant. He cannot even kill Polonius, for in the world of fact Polonius outlives a dozen Hamlets. The utmost he can achieve is to perish with his new Ophelia. She calls him [44] lord," and he presents her as his queen to the rabble who destroy them ; but the old Ophelia, with the unequal eyes, marries the local captain, and Polonius becomes a Justice of the Peace.

Such is the doom of the new romantic hero. Like his prototype, he is too fine for common purposes, and calls imperatively for a higher destiny. His cry is answered, but that destiny for which he clamours is a grotesque illusion, and his acceptance of it is at the same time ludicrous, and yet more pitiful than the old. He is nobler in his illusions than* those who destroy him, just as Don Quixote was

nobler than Sancho Panza. But we must smile at him for all that. And our thoughts return to the saying of God in His glory, surveying the heroes of romance : "Qui sait, Abraham, si, tel rhomme que j'ai fait a mon image, je n'ai pas mes heures de malice, moi aussi."

Le Martage cTHamlet is an ironic presentation of the romantic hero in his attitude to common life. *La Couronne de Carton*, the first of the plays of M. Sarment, is a more serious treatment of the same theme. A young prince, heir to a throne, lives incognito under the name of Villiers. He discards his rank in order to discover the world. In the first Act we see him melancholy, sceptical, in association with people whom he knows to be unworthy, or who are seeking an escape from reality themselves. Among them is Mary, a young actress. She attracts him, and he is ripe for a genuine passion. But she is too sophisticated to distinguish the real man from the mask he wears. He has with her moments in which sincerity prevails, and the man himself is seen beneath the romantic hero. But Mary misunderstands these moments. She regards them not as expressions of the real man, but of the attitude he has chosen to assume. On the occasions when he is true to himself she is bored and incredulous. He is, therefore, driven to play extravagantly up to her conception of him, and the more extravagantly unreal he becomes the more she is pleased and dominated. He has among his effects some theatrical properties—a cardboard crown and a coronation robe in red velvet and imitation ermine. One evening as he is sitting with his friends (none of whom knows that he is a prince) it is seen in the newspapers that the king —his father—is dead, and that the heir is being sought to take up the succession. Villiers is genuinely moved by the news, but his friends assume that this is only another

of his many affectations. Again his sincerity is unconvincing. Suddenly he breaks away. He knows, he says, where the prince is to be found, the prince who is now to be king ; and a moment later he appears before them with the cardboard crown and the false robe, to be received with bursts of merriment as the most amusing fellow in the world.

Later that night he sees Mary and declares his love for her. But it is his doom to be convincing only when he is least himself. She who was intrigued by his attitude is not impressed by his sincerity. He leaves her, and, returning to his country, takes up his inheritance. He is now a real king, with ideals and responsibilities, believing in himself and taking seriously his great position. He sends for Mary. But he finds that just as she was not moved by the lover who sincerely declared himself, she is equally unimpressed by the king who is a king indeed. Disappointed by her failure to take him for what he is truly worth, he sends for the cardboard crown and the false robe, and becomes, for her amusement and delight, an extravagant parody of himself. Thereby he wins her at the last entirely, but destroys his love for ever. She had believed only in the parody of himself, and, henceforth, he can only smile at his absurd rival in the cardboard crown, the rival he had himself created and who had won her from the real man.

We find here the old romantic hero, misunderstood, a prince in disguise, disdainful of common life. But there is an element which is wholly new—a smile askance of the hero himself, a humility and detachment which enables him to see through and deprecate his own pretences. The new Hamlet is gentler than the old. You may take the measure of his greater charity by comparing the farewell to Ophelia of Shakespeare's Hamlet (the prototype of all

romantic heroes too fine for this world) with the final dismissal of Mary by Villiers in the modern play. There is here no savage tormented crying of " Get thee to a nunnery. Why wouldst thou be a breeder of sinners ? " Villiers is kindness itself : " Si je vous ai fait du mal que je puisse pas r^parer je vous en demande pardon, mais je ne crois pas que cela soit. . . . Adieu, ma petite Mary." And note that the new Hamlet is gentler than the old because his disillusion is more complete. There is here no room for passionate rebellion or any crying out upon the realities with which he is unable to cope. The facts are thus, and they must be accepted as becomingly as possible.

Le Pecheur cTOmbres, produced at the Theatre de l'Œuvre in 1921, is perhaps the most artistically successful of the plays of M. Sarment. It has great charm and unequalled simplicity. It is admirably lucid and has an air of being just exactly right.

Jean, the hero of the play, is a madman. He was not always mad. Not long ago he was a young man of exceptional intelligence who wrote poetry. And in those days he was unhappy. Of course he was in love, and of course, being sensitive and fastidious, he contrived to be thoroughly miserable. Finally ho imagined, on almost no grounds at all, that the girl he loved fancied somebody better than himself. And at that point he lost his memory and became charmingly and inoffensively mad. His principal amusement now that he is mad is fishing for a kind of trout, a very shy fish—in French, " *ombres* "—hence the title of the piece and a significant play on the double meaning of the word. He is an entirely amiable and happy figure, with a quaint understanding of people and life, very shrewd and utterly charming.

His mother, in an effort to restore his memory, invites to the house the young girl who was the immediate cause of the losing of his wits. He remembers her name but nothing else. An agreeable affection springs up between the two young people. He tells her that he is mad ; when he is well again, however, they will marry and remain always together. Meanwhile, they pass the time happily enough. But, suddenly, his memory returns. He recognizes the girl and recovers the details of his former relationship. At first he is overjoyed, and in a delightful scene we are asked to compare their present easy and complete comprehension of one another with the wilful distress and misunderstandings of the day when he had the full use of his mind.

Meanwhile, the brother of Jean, who has fallen in love with the girl himself, has watched with dismay the ripening of their strange affection and, at last, in order to prevent at all costs their marriage, he tells Jean, whose brain is still fighting its way back from the shadows, that the girl is not the one whom he previously knew, and to whom even in his madness he has remained unconsciously faithful, but a girl chosen by his mother to impersonate his old love, in the hope of restoring his memory. Jean, once he is driven to believe this falsehood, finds abundant reason in support of it. For this girl whom he has found so sympathetic, so candid, so unselfish and regardless of herself, cannot be the girl who made him so unhappy in the past. His awakened reason finds fresh proofs of his brother's lie in everything she says or does. He is by this time entirely sane again and altogether unhappy, unable to recognize or to grasp a reality or take the happiness which is offered him. Again he doubts and questions and despairs. He was happy and essentially he was wise as the *pecheur d'ombres,* and he

realizes that to find peace he must again return to the shadows. He escapes into death from the reality which he cannot sustain.

It is impossible to convey by analysis or comment the charm of this attractive play. It expresses all that is most tolerant and engaging in the new romance—exposing with a discerning candour the pitiful destiny of a generation which frankly confesses : " *Je suis trop grand pour mot"* At the same time it avoids false sentiment, to which it is peculiarly liable, and which its author cannot altogether avoid in *Les Plus Beaux Yeux du Monde.*

We come now to the play whose title has already served as a device for the new romance. *Je suis trop grand pour moi* is a gallery of portraits, a collection of episodes. Tiburce de Mortecroix, a wealthy young nobleman, has collected about him a retinue of friends who follow him in search of distraction. They arrive at an inn, where Tiburce falls in with his old friend Virgile Egrillard, the man with the walking-stick, always upon his guard against the impertinence of triflers, and ready, as on this summer evening, to raise his weapon against the world : a man of brave attitudes who will one day produce a great work. Tiburce also meets at the inn Helene, nineteen years old, who at once becomes for him an embodiment of that ideal for which he is seeking. The inn is near the chateau of the father of Tiburce, and the whole company settles down on the estate and remains there for several weeks. Tiburce puts a tower at the disposal of Virgile so that he may at last have the solitude and leisure he needs for his great undertaking. But Virgile rarely climbs the tower, and finally he settles down with the comfortable hostess of the inn. Tiburce pursues Helene, only to find that his idealism fails him at the critical moment and that he is incapable of

a genuine passion. He goes to meet Helene, his imagination sensitive and expecting at last to be fulfilled. Helene talks of her daily life, her relations, her common tasks, charmingly and simply. Tiburce, vaguely disappointed, loses the lyric mood, and becomes in turn melancholy and ironic. Disappointed of the reality, he begins to play with thefiction:

TIBURCE : . . . Je vais vous poser une petite question, voulez-vous?

HELENS : Oui.

TIBURCE : Si, ce soir, je vous avais parle d'amour, moi, qu'auriez-vous dit ?

HELENE: Rien.

TIBURCE : Vous ne m'auriez pas repondu ?

HELENE : Si . . . Je ne sais pas ce que je vous aurais dit. . . .

(Un temps. TIBURCE *lui caresse doucement I'epaule.J*

TIBURCE *(fermant les yeux) :* Je vous aime.

HELLNE : Oh ! Menteur !

TIBURCE : Menteur ?

HELENE : Vous ne pensez pas ce que vous dites.

TIBURCE : Si je le pensais ? (*// h regarde, voit dans les yeux de la petite une lueur de tendresse et d'espoir, voit unejeunejigure qui se tend vers lui.)* II vaut mieux que je ne pense pas.

HELENE: Pourquoi le dites-vous ?

TIBURCE : Le mot est joli.

HELENE : Ce n'est pas une raison.

TIBURCE : Pour voir le son qu'il aurait eu . . . ce soir . . .

HELENE : Qu'il aurait eu ?

TIBURCE : . . . Si je vous l'avais dit vraiment.

Tiburce, disappointed in his idealism but greedy for sensation, endeavours to force the love of Helene, and thereby only completes his disillusion with himself. But his disillusion is not one of despair—that would not be in keeping with the spirit of the new romance. Tiburce

does not ascend with Manfred the mountain peak to find a setting for his remorse. His mood is one that smiles sadly upon itself, and makes the best of a bad business. He turns from Helene, the ideal he has lost, to the mistress whom he has abandoned.

Je suis trop grand pour mot is the most ambitious of the plays of M. Sarment, and at times it goes deeper than any of the others. But it is not altogether a success. The later scenes tend to be needlessly obscure, the characters in the background are too numerous, and we are continually catching at hints and suggestions which might with advantage be developed, while we are needlessly delayed by the excessive fluency and unnecessary prolongation of other episodes. Tiburce, who stands at the centre of the play during the first three Acts, becomes, after his final disillusion, when we want him to be most explicit, little more than a recipient of other people's confidences, and the fourth Act is perhaps one of the weakest which this author has ever written. But it is an overwhelming subject for a young man under thirty—nothing less than the whole relation of man to the part he is called upon to play. Is the burden laid upon him too grievous to be borne ? The answer of the post-war romantic is in the affirmative, but it is given with an ironic smile, almost gaily, for it is above all necessary not to take too seriously either mankind or the destiny to which he is unequal.

In *Madelon,* produced at the Theatre de la Porte St-Martin in March 1925, M. Sarment presents his romantic hero in a definitely unsympathetic light. He has the same inability to be humanly happy in contact with his ordinary life, the same lack of conviction and sincerity in the ordinary human emotions, but, unlike the amiable heroes

of *Le Manage d'Hamlet* and *La Couronne de Carton,* he lacks the humour and detachment which give to his predecessors both charity and charm. He is the romantic egoist with no saving grace at all, an egoist who sacrifices the girl who loves him to his own genius and career, who takes everything from life which may enable him the more completely to express himself and gives nothing in return, as reckless of the feelings of others as he is jealously seclusive of his own.

The play is typical of the contemporary attitude to the romantic hero. Provided he does not take himself too seriously he is allowed to be attractive. When, however, he is unsmilingly acquisitive, selfishly intent on the fulfilment of himself, his author instinctively stands aside and leaves him defenceless to our reprobation.

In *Les Plus Beaux Teux du Monde,* produced at the Theatre du Journal in October 1925, M. Sarment continues the succession. The vagabond Napoleon of this play is the most accessible and attractive of all his heroes. He is the born failure, for his virtues are all against him. He is generous and, therefore, gives away his career and the girl he loves. He has a sense of humour and cannot, therefore, take himself seriously enough to impose on others. He is loyal to his friend, who is less loyal to him, and he is, therefore, always at a disadvantage. He has simple faith and has, therefore, to yield his place to the sceptics. But he remains undaunted and unembittered. While the friend of his youth achieves a great success Napoleon becomes a croupier, a waiter, anything you please. But he keeps flying the flag of their youthful idealism. He embodies the faith which his successful rival has jettisoned in his race for fame and fortune. "*Je suis ta conscience*" he tells his friend at the last. He stands

for the virtues which must needs be abandoned if a man is to succeed in the world. M. Sarment has here revived, with singular grace and a cunning appeal to the softer side of his audience, the popular and theatrical hero of romance, his own worst enemy and the friend of all the world—of all that part of it, at least, which does not achieve wealth and honour.

Incidentally, it is interesting to note that this play, which was written several years ago, was refused by several managers, and was at last produced by a newspaper. It was instantly one of the most popular plays of the season, and has held the stage from that moment without interruption. Truly the ways of managers are unaccountable. We may or may not prefer this play to those which preceded it, but it would seem obvious to any normal reader that it was bound to have a wider and more immediate appeal.

As-tu du Cœur ?—the play produced last season at the Theatre de la Renaissance—is the completed version of an earlier comedy. It began as a study of the facility with which men and women adapt their ideals to the necessities of common life and thereby forfeit their romantic inheritance. It was an early essay in romantic failure—an essay in which there were neither heroes nor heroines, even for a moment, but only a group of characters who might have had a destiny had not " facility " blunted or destroyed their qualities and taken from them any real desire to realize their dreams. As a document in the dramatic progress of its author it is extremely significant. The new romance began, like this play, as an expression of that sense of exile of the spirit in a material world which, as we have seen, lies at the root of all romance and is so closely bound up with the Christian attitude to life. But M. Sarment, who

so recently was content to leave the play as a merely negative essay in a romance thwarted and almost wholly impotent, has added a final Act to the earlier version, in which the derelict ideals of his characters are more strongly affirmed and expressed. In this final Act their defeated idealism clearly appears as the most vital thing in their lives, even though it has so pitifully fallen short of achievement.

M. Sarment may with confidence be taken as the most complete and significant expression of the new romance. He is not, however, to be regarded as an isolated apparition, and a careful study of his plays will enable a reader to understand many characteristics and tendencies in contemporary drama which would otherwise remain obscure. This new romance, moreover, is closely connected with other factors which may be more profitably studied in other dramatists. It is part of that general effort to transcend the material limitations of human personality of which the plays of M. Luigi Pirandello are a more philosophic expression, and it is closely allied with the insistence of authors like M. Jean-Jacques Bernard on the fact that nine-tenths of the more delicate and essential life of the spirit fails to be effectively expressed in speech or action. *La Couronne de Carton* belongs as obviously to the generation which has produced *Six Characters in Search of an Author* as to the generation which has produced L'*Âme en Peine* and *UInvitation au Voyage* , and in almost any play of the Theatre des Jeunes you will find evidence of many different kinds, taking every possible form and revealing the most diverse temperaments, all pointing in the same direction. The young dramatic literature is a literature of escape. It aspires to discover and to extend the field of human personality. Men and women, as they

live in society, as they express themselves in conduct and speech, as they achieve a career or secure a definite place in the world, as they adapt themselves or fail to adapt themselves to their environment, as they follow or rebel against a routine, are no longer the heroes or subjects of this contemporary theatre. In the theatre of M. Pirandello men and women seek to discover who or what they are apart from the actions and thoughts imposed on them by circumstance. In the theatre of M. Jean-Jacques Bernard they live in emotions which are often unfulfilled and have no effective results on their formal existence. In the theatre of M. Sarment they live with illusions and ideals which they are unable to bring into dynamic relation with common life. The pre-war conception of life, as an orderly process which allows full scope for a complete expression of the spirit of man in his social relationships, is being replaced by a conception of life as a tyranny and a limitation from which the spirit of man is continually urged to emancipate itself. The contemporary hero refuses to be confined to his formal actions or to be limited by the perversity he is forced to assume for the practical purposes of life. He mocks at or disregards his material confinements. One of the many forms he has assumed is the hero of *Tftes de Rechanges,* of M. Jean-Victor Pellerin, presented to us last year by M. Gaston Baty—the hero who lived only in his errant leisure, when his business could be put away and forgotten and he could identify himself in turn with every aspect of the life with which he was surrounded—who set out to dine as one man and arrived for dinner as six separate individuals.

Like Hamlet of old, this latest heir of the romantic tradition could be bounded in a nutshell and count himself king of infinite space, but that he has bad dreams. He is

the product of the new century which became suddenly a nightmare. The new romance is his awakening ; and we are witnessing now his first efforts—as yet materially ineffectual, but spiritually full of promise—to recover a lost inheritance.

Chapter Six

THE SATIRICAL PLAYS OF M. JULES ROMAINS

THIS chapter is devoted almost exclusively to two dramatic figures who may be taken as representative of the new dramatic satire. We are to Consider what is implied by the successful appearance of Dr Knock and M. le Trouhadec at the Comedie des Champs filysees, in May and December 1923. The more recent plays of M. Romains—*Le Dictateur,* produced by M. Louis Jouvet, and *Jean le Maufranc,* produced by M. Georges Pitoeff last autumn—present us with figures of a different kind, and they are not very relevant to our present purpose. The author in these plays abandons the social surface and is preoccupied with the individual. His later plays, in fact, are of a type which can better be studied in the works of other dramatists. No better representative than M. Romains could, on the other hand, be found of the new dramatic satire of which Dr Knock and M. le Trouhadec are so brilliantly the protagonists. Dr Knock hardly needs an introduction. He was presented quite recently to an English audience by Mr Dennis Eadie. M. le Trouhadec, who is unlikely to cross the Channel, is an even more characteristic figure. He is the hero of two plays—*M. le Trouhadec saisi par le Debauche* (May 1923) and *Le Manage de le Trouhadec* (January 1925).

However seriously we may inspect these plays of M. Romains as significant products of the younger generation, the most obvious and essential thing about them is that for their effective presentation we need more the

mischief of Harlequin than the devotion of Pierrot. The plays of M. Remains are satirical, but they are satirical in the manner which distinguishes most of his younger contemporaries from the dramatists of a previous generation. The generation which expressed itself in the social plays of M. Brieux, Mr Galsworthy and Mr Shaw was terribly in earnest. The lightest of the pleasant plays of the author of *Candida* is a moral sledgehammer compared with *Le Mariage de le Trouhadec.* The older play expressed ? militant generation, which was habitually indignant on behalf of its principles and ideas, and was definitely out to prove that the other fellow was in the wrong. It showed us its young people raging against what they described as the tyranny of the obsolete. It made a principle even of its naughtiness, blacking the eyes of the law in order to illustrate a doctrine. It cared immensely about everything, and everything immensely mattered. It would talk for hours on politics, religion, sex, art or morality. If it wrote an amusing play it must prove in a preface that it had done so with a serious intention. If it made a joke there must be a purpose in it. There had to be method even in its madness.

The generation which is expressed in the person of M. le Trouhadec shows an altogether contrary spirit. The author of *Candida* must be sure that he is serious before he will permit himself to be merry. The author of *Dr Knock* must be sure that he is merry before he will permit himself to be serious. M. Remains deprecates his doctrines as instinctively as Mr Shaw deprecates his jokes. The younger generation refuses to be seriously angry with troublesome institutions or stupid people. It regards them as inevitable, and it assumes that everyone will realize how absurd they are and will get as much fun out of them as

possible. It feels that society is so preposterous that it is impossible for anyone to keep a straight face about it. In cases where a previous generation set its teeth and preferred an indictment, the present generation bubbles or bursts into laughter.

Rabelais is said to have concealed his destructive purpose by artfully revelling in the grossness of a schoolboy, and to have wandered wilfully from the point in order to conceal the deadliness of his satire. M. Romains, as we shall see, seems to have adopted the same literary tactics. There are moments when this satire emerges, relevantly cruel and aimed straight into the vitals of the enemy. Then suddenly it seems as though our author realized that he was in danger of taking his theme too seriously, of becoming too systematically critical, of losing, perhaps, his equanimity or blunting his sense of humour against the perversities of the age. And that would never do. Just as we think ourselves on the point of grasping the moral of his play, and of recognizing the justice and logic with which the theme is being handled, we are unexpectedly hurried into some extravagant passage or episode which has no obvious connexion with the author's main intention. It would never^ do to be taken too seriously, to be openly suspected of a desire to reform the world, to allow oneself to be too obviously ruffled. The result of this tendency of our author to cover the tracks of his satire, and thus ward off in advance any suggestion that he takes our society seriously enough to be able to lose his temper about it or wish to reform it, is exactly the same sort of wilful incoherence and virtuosity which we find in the creator of Grangousier. It may be noted, too, that in the work of M. Romains, as in the work of Rabelais, the red herring, so resourcefully drawn across the didactic path, quite

adequately smells. The author of *Dr Knock* has the same gift of hearty and familiar grossness, without offence in it, which served Rabelais, the philosopher, for his readiest disguise.

The analogy can be taken further without being unduly strained. The satire of Rabelais was in the long run more destructive than a formal indictment. It worked upon the imagination of his generation and awakened its sense of humour, thereby appealing to faculties more universal and more profound than the deliberate intelligence—to faculties less aware of themselves and, therefore, less on their guard against the salutary but painful intrusion of a new spirit or a novel point of view. It is not without reason that the inhumanly orthodox are disposed to regard laughter in church as even more reprehensible than a deliberate blasphemy. Iniquities and abuses are seldom removed either by invective or by argument. The citadels of Philistia are too well defended to be taken by direct assault. Troy stood for ten years against the fighting Greeks, but fell in the end to the man who told her citizens an absurd story and had the genius to make them fatally ridiculous.

The plays of M. Remains may not inaptly be likened, indeed, to the wooden horse drawn with merriment into the Trojan citadel. Simonides tells the ancient tale. The fighting Greeks have gone home. The long war of the Shaws with the Mallocks is at an end. Despite the long and valiant assaults of the older revolutionary novelists and playwrights, the established order stands unshaken. Nothing remains upon the stricken field save this harmlessly intriguing effigy and a smiling little fellow who protests that it is the latest thing in mascots. Paris takes no alarm at the innocent jesting of Dr Knock, or at the wholly extravagant and seemingly pointless buffoonery of

M. le Trouhadec. None among the Trojans thought to look within the belly of the horse where the rugged Pyrrhus awaited his propitious hour, and Cassandra was known to be as mad and as safely to be disregarded as—shall we say ? —the author of this merely ingenious essay in criticism.

This lurking of a destructive satire within a seeming display of high spirits is particularly worthy of attention, because it is one of the recurring characteristics of the contemporary French dramatists. It is the natural expression of the frame of mind of the old-young generation which has come out of the war, men who have learned to correct the generosity proper to their years with the premature fruits of a bitter experience. They reveal a curious and a quite unprecedented blend of the highest spirits with the coolest cynicism ; the mischievous humour of a schoolboy with the disillusion of middle-age ; an ardent hatred of elderly vices with a shrugging acquiescence in the inevitable supremacy of things as they are ; the playfulness of young puppies with the frigid wisdom of the serpent. *Si jeunesse savait, si vieillesse pouvait*—was the sigh of their romantic forbears. But these young men already know as much as is necessary, and are determined to use their knowledge while they can ; and among the things which they know is that it is useless to run the head against a stone wall. Where the young dramatic author of 1895 would have written a play systematically exposing the dreary insincerities of modern parliamentary government, M. Romains gives us the pleasant history of M. le Trouhadec and his " *Parti des Honnetes Gens* "—an incoherent Gilbertian burlesque, innocent enough on the surface but inspired with a derision for the older statesmen so complete, so sure of itself and so spontaneous, that it can afford to be genial. The adversary is so contemptible that it would be

absurd to break a lance with him. The utmost one can do in such a case is to hit him over the head with a bladder. Take as an illustration a page from *Le Mariage de le Trouhadec.*

M. le Trouhadec is the characteristic hero of two successive plays of our author. Apparently he is the merest figure of fun—a celebrated geographer who, so far as we can discover, does not know any geography. His amative and political adventures seem to have no very deep significance. But he is a good enough stick with which to beat an entirely ridiculous community. He is, in particular, good enough to become the leader of a political party which is to supersede its rivals and conduct the affairs of the nation to a successful issue. Behold him then, the chosen leader of the " *Parti des Honnftes Gens."* The resourceful M. Benin, his principal Whip, has assembled the managing committee of this remarkable organization. Imagine for a moment what Mr Shaw, Mr Galsworthy or M. Brieux would have made of a scene which seems to have been expressly led up to and designed in order to satirize existing political methods. Reflect for a moment on the opportunities it affords for passionate ridicule, merciless exposure and reasoned invective. Consider the appeals which might be made to our humanity, sense of logic, desire for justice and equity, hatred of cant and all forms of solemn imposture. Observe, too, that the author has given many indications that he has the necessary logic and indignation for such displays. Then read the scene and measure thereby the gulf that is fixed between the old generation and the new. M. Benin is addressing his committee :

BENIN : . . . Done, au travail, messieurs. Debout! *(IIs ne bougent pas.)* Je parle sans metaphore. Je vous demande de vous lever. (IIs *se levent.*) Bon. Nous allons faire quelques exercices.

Je remarque d'abord que vous ne savez pas vous lever. II y a des circonstances dans la vie politique, oft les Honnetes Gens doivent se lever comme un seul homme. Eh bien ! vous ne vous etes pas du tout leves comme un seul homme. Recommencons. (// *leur fait signe de se rasseoir.)* Debout! *(IIs se levent.)* C'est deja un peu mieux. (// *s'essuie le front et rallume sapipe.)* Je parie aussi que vous ne savez pas penser ensemble ni parler ensemble. Essayez un peu de parler ensemble. . . . Tenez . . . sur n'importe quoi . . . sur la cherte de la vie. Aliens! *(On entend un bredouillage incomprehensible.*) C'est du propre! Je vais vous apprendre. Quelque chose de tres simple au debut. Repetez-moi, tous ensemble, la phrase que voici: " C'est nous les honnetes gens." Sans vous presser.

LE COMITE *(avec un peu a' hesitation) :* C'est nous les honnetes gens.

(// *les fait recommencer deux ou troisfois.)*

BENIN : Vous n'avez pas Pair encore bien convaincus. Maintenant un exercice un peu plus delicat. . . . Silence, messieurs, et attention. Rapprochez-vous en cercle, face en dedans. L& ! Nous allons faire un essai d'opinion en circuit ferme. Le numero I lance le debut de la phrase, un ou deux mots, pas plus. Le numero 2 trouve le mot d'apres, et ainsi de suite, sans vous arreter. Au debut, ne vous occupez pas trop du sens. Ca viendra plus tard. L'essentiel, c'est que ca ronfle. . . . Nous commencerons par un sujet qui ne vous creuse pas trop la tete: " La licence des rues." Partez, le numero i !

DE LA MOUFFIERE : Qu'est-ce que je dois faire ?

BENIN: Amoicez la«phrase que ces messieurs continueront. Et que personne ne perde de temps a reflechir. Dites n'impoite quoi, s'il le faut, mais parlez sans interruption. C'est le piincipe meme de toute discussion politique.

DE LA MOUFFIERE : La licence . . .

(BENIN *encourage le numtro 2 du geste.)*

LEPENDEUR: des rues . . .

TRESTAILLON : est affreuse . . .

JOSSELIN : pour Thonnete homme . . .

MINAERT-DupLEcoTiF: qui sort . . .

DE LA MOUFFIERE : de chez lui . . .

LEPENDEUR: avec sa femme . , .

TRESTAILLON : et ses enfants . . .
JOSSELIN : pleins d'innocence . . .
MiNAERT-DupLEcoTiF : pour aller . . .

(Temps d'arret.)

BENIN : Tres bien ! Tres bien ! Continuez, pour 1'amour de Dieu.
DE LA MOUFFIERE : quelque part . . .
LEPENDEUR: acheter . . .
TRESTAILLON : du tabac . . .
JOSSELIN : et des allumettes …

BENIN : Bon ! Bon ! Comme les raccords se font mal, nous aliens perfectionner un peu votre mecanisme. Tournez-vous, face en dehors. C'est moi, cette fois-ci, qui vais vous fournir votre texte: " Le progres dans 1'ordre et la paix dans la dignite." Un mot chacun. Quand la phrase est finie, vous recommencez et vous allez de plus en plus vite . . . vous etes prets? Marchez . . .

LE COMITK *(hesitant d'abord, mats de plus en plus <vite) :* Le-progres-dans-1'ordre-et-la-paix-dans-la-dignite. Le-progres-dans-Tordre, etc.

BENIN : Plus vite, plus vite, tonnerre de bonsoir . . . Plus vite. Plus vite!

(LE COMITE *atteint une intesse de dibit capable de sou/ever le cceur.* BENIN *a I'air de faire tourner a coups de fouet un cheval de cirque-, ou une toupie.)*

There is here no *saeva indignatio.* M. Romains takes our point of view for granted. He keeps his temper and makes fun of the other fellow. After all, these things are more a matter of taste and chronology than of doctrine, and time hastens for no man. Nobody dreams to-day of compassing the whole world to make one proselyte. The missionary spirit has abandoned the world of imagination and intelligence. It is now to be found only in the politicians who from Moscow or Rome seek to internationalize a policy or to nationalize a career.

In thus refusing to be suspected of any form of propaganda M. Romains is the child of his generation. He is none the less, in his way, a satirist, and the weapon he employs has many edges. Take, once more, the marvellous history of *Dr Knock.* At first sight this is just a merry burlesque of the medical profession. Then we perceive that it is more than that. It is also an exposure of the superstitions of modern science and of the awe with which 'its* priests are regarded by a public for whom the medical advertisements in the daily Press have all the infallibility of the papal indulgences of a more picturesque epoch. But that is only a beginning. For the satire has a more universal and a more destructive bent. The real theme of this remarkable play is not the charlatanry of a particular profession, or even of modern science in general; it is the inexhaustible credulity of mankind, its readiness to accept the prevailing suggestions of the moment, its pathetic and disastrous helplessness in the face of spiritual directors who have sufficient faith in themselves to be able to impose on the rest. Dr Knock, contemplating from his window by night the village, most of whose inhabitants he has consigned to imaginary beds of sickness by the sheer force of persuasion brought to bear on their ignorance and fear of the unknown, becomes suddenly a symbol of the wistful faith of the multitudes who in every age have been governed and led by the prevailing delusion of the hour. The real point of the satire, disguised as the satire itself is disguised, is directed not at the high priest of medicine who arouses in his converts the *esprit medical* which makes of them all imaginary invalids, but at the state of mind which renders such conversion possible. The play is an exposure of the power of priestcraft in all times and places, the priests of the modern world being all those who in the

exercise of their professions are required to impose upon the public, whether they be the politicians with their catch-words, the men of science with their formulae, or the men of commerce with their advertisements. It is an exposure of the use made by the modern leaders of society of the mystical devotion of mankind, which may take a thousand forms but remains perpetually the same. Dr Knock is a missionary with a faith which he compels the world to accept; he looks out over his small community in the mood of an apostle who looks upon his work and finds himself abundantly justified :

> C'est un paysage rude, a peine humain, que vous contem-pliez. Aujourd'hui, je vous le donne tout impregne de medecine, anime et paicouru par le feu souterrain do notre art. La premiere fois que je me suis plante ici, au lendemain de mon arrivee, je n'etais pas trop fier; je sentais que ma prdsence ne pesait pas lourd. Ce vaste terroir se passait insolemment de moi et de mes pareils. Mais maintenant, j'ai autant d'aise a me trouver ici qu'a son clavier Porganiste des grandes orgues. Dans deux cent cinquante de ces maisons . . . il y a deux cent cinquante chambres oft quelqu'un confesse la medecine, deux cent cinquante lits ou un corps etendu temoigne que la vie a un sens, et grace a moi un sens medical. La nuit, c'est encore plus beau, car il y a les lumieres. Et presque toutes les lumieres sont a moi. Les non-malades dorment avoid dans les tenebres. Ils sont supprimes. Mais les malades ont garde leur veilleuse ou leur lampe. Tout ce qui reste en marge de la medecine, la nuit m'en debarrasse, m'en derobe Pagacement et le defi. Le canton fait place a une sorte de firmament dont je suis le createur continuel. Et je ne vous parle pas des cloches. Songez que, pour tout ce monde, leur premier office est de rappeler mes prescriptions; qu'elles son la voix de mes ordonnances. Songez que, dans quelque instants, il va sonner dix heures, que pour tous mes malades dix heures, c'est la deuxieme prise de temperature rectale, e que dans quelques instants, deux cent cinquante thermometre vont penetrer a la fois. . . .

As has already been indicated, the method or form adopted by M. Romains in these plays is at times apt to disguise rather than to reveal his serious intention. Like so many of the younger French dramatists, he has broken away from the normal French traditions. His plays are what the younger contemporaries of Sir Arthur Pinero would have called " extravaganzas." To find an analogy you would have to take the libretti of W. S. Gilbert, depriving them, however, of their peculiar lucidity and coherence. There is no attempt at any kind of realism, while the classic formula is deliberately flouted. The effigy of a motor-car, in the first Act of *Dr Knock*, whose wheels revolve while it remains stationary in the middle of the scene, is typical of the complete disregard of the traditional illusions of the stage which marks the younger generation of authors and producers. These younger men will have nothing to do with any nonsense about holding up the mirror to nature. They have invented a modern type of allegory in which the fantasy of the individual author is sole arbiter of the environment and of the event. *Dr Knock* is a parable, and, though the truths it illustrates are directly applicable to life, it is in form a fairy tale.

Here, again, M. Romains is a sign of the times. Fantasy intrudes unexpectedly, and often incongruously, into the works of authors quite dissimilar in outlook and temperament. In this connexion it is significant that you will begin to find in Paris to-day Frenchmen who are ready to be charmed by the works of Sir J. M. Barrie. Ten years ago it was virtually impossible to find anyone in France who could perceive in the most inevitably popular of British dramatists anything more than a crowning instance of the studied imbecility invariably assumed by the English for the deception of their foreign rivals. Now, however, it

is possible to find plays which might have been directly inspired by the author of *The Admirable Crichton*—plays in comparison with which *A Kiss for Cinderella* might be described as an austere and pitiless essay in realism. It is not, of course, suggested that M. Romains is a typical practitioner of the new fantasy. But just as he yields to his generation in giving to his satire an appearance of careless jollity lest he should be suspected of taking too seriously a world which is incorrigibly ridiculous, he yields to it aiso in adopting extravagantly fantastic forms lest he should be suspected of having any real respect for the social surface of life.

Examples of the new fantasy, with its inclination towards abstract simplification and parable, may be found in almost any direction. Take, for example, *Le Dompteur ou l'Anglais tel qtion le Mange,* of M. Alfred Savoir. This play is precisely the type of modern allegory of which M. Romains is the most consistent and remarkable exponent. Its characters, instead of being studied for themselves, are used to suggest a conflict of principles and ideas. The hero is an English nobleman whose family has always stood for the freedom of the human will, for the perennial revolt of the spirit against all forms of tyranny. His adversary is the brutal tamer of beasts, who, entering the cage of lions with his whip, subdues these splendid creat'ures to ignoble ends by means as primitive and ridiculous as they are effective. For years the noble lord has frequented a circus in the track of his enemy, hoping that one day the beasts will turn and rend their master. But, alas ! the hope is vain. The lion tamer continues to rejoice in his dominion, and beauty fawns upon him in the shape of a lovely lady of the circus who, though she loves the noble lord, is under the thrall of his rival. Sadder still, it is finally

the noble lord and not the tamer of lions who is devoured, and we are left for consolation with the assurance that the next heir to the title is instantly prepared to carry on the tradition. He will follow the circus, like his father before him, in the splendid conviction that one day the lions will eat the other man. Here you have a picture of human society, fantastical enough, but with sufficient truth and conviction to justify its demands upon our serious attention. It introduces a curious blend of serious thought and careless absurdity which has been very generally adopted by the younger men, a zealous use of the grotesque and fanciful in the service of an idea, showing that in the hands of an author who is in earnest, and has something urgently to say, farce may be a deadlier weapon than tragedy. *Le Dompteur* stands for a host of brilliant experiments in fantasy.

There is just one other point. The works of M. Remains are of especial interest to the observer of contemporary movements because we find in them the tendencies of the moment influencing a writer who is not, fundamentally, in accord with them. It is only necessary to read *Mort de Quelqu'un*, a book in which M. Romains lets us more intimately in,to his confidence than in any of his plays, to realize that his contemporary parade of extravagance, and his fashionable refusal to be obviously a man in earnest, mask an intent preoccupation with the complex life of his time and a constant desire to find form and relevance in its endless ramifications. M. Romains is our contemporary in spite of himself. In this he reminds us of Chapman, who, living under the full pressure of Elizabethan romance, assumed the mask of his generation and gave to us, in *The Widow's Tears*, a masterpiece of satirical observation disguised as a fit of high spirits.

Thereby he has won a victory for his generation all the more dangerous and complete. Paris has pulled down its walls and drawn the wooden horse into the citadel. To-day the Com6die Franchise disputes with M. Louis Jouvet and M. Pitoeff for the privilege of producing his plays to a delighted and almost unsuspecting public. The representatives of the established order of things have for many years, with varying fortunes, met Achilles and his myrmidons in the open field. It will be interesting to see whether they will be equally successful in saving the milky head of Priam from this more formidable manoeuvre. I should be the last to utter any word of warning to save the old gentleman from a fate so long awaited and overdue if I were not quite sure that as little attention will be paid to my ingenious premonitions as was paid to Cassandra by the joyously besotted Trojans in their hour of destiny.

Chapter Seven

M. PAUL GERALDY AND THE PLAY OF SEX

A NOVEL tendency in the contemporary French theatre is the sudden ambition of its younger authors, and even of its experienced popular favourites, to write the play of sex. There is, of course, a sense in which nine-tenths of the plays, and almost as large a proportion of the books, written in France, or in any other country of the world, are devoted to this particular theme. The main business of the practising novelist or dramatist is, or must seem to be, the amative adventures of couples, male and female, appropriately assorted for comic or for sentimental purposes, and there would appear at first sight to be no place for authors in heaven, where there is neither marrying nor giving in marriage. A play, however, in which sex is merely the motive or cue, in which it serves merely to spin the plot—in which our interest is directed to the question whether A will marry B, or fail to marry C, or be unfaithful to D—is not necessarily, and is in fact only very seldom, indeed, a play of sex. The real play of sex—as distinguished from a play in which sex is no more than a device for the contriving of amusing situations or sentimental rivalries—is comparatively a rare product. Normally, it would have to start where most of the plays commonly described as sex plays invariably end, for it is only when your chosen pair have been isolated at the end of the story that the real problem of their sex relationship can begin, and it is a problem seldom undertaken or even recognized. It is roughly assumed, for ordinary human and social purposes, that sex is a simple and universal thing

which can be left to itself and taken for granted. Having set the play in motion, and brought its protagonists to the point of marriage or divorce, it has served its purpose. Only very rarely does the sex relation, so invariably used to get the play along, itself become the subject of the piece. The mystery of that strange, human relationship in which physical, mental and spiritual elements blend and react upon one another in a thousand ways, combining to produce individual relationships which are susceptible of as mary shades and variations as there are men and women in the world to give them form and substance, is a province on which very few dramatic authors ever venture to intrude very far. They prefer to write the conventional drama of three rather than the infinitely more difficult drama of two. It is astonishing how virgin is the field of sex and marriage in drama. The subject is as yet almost untouched, and there are very few authors who would not be utterly dismayed and out of countenance if we suggested that they should even attempt to write a play about a married or otherwise united pair without the introduction of the inevitable *tertium quid.*

Paradoxically enough it is only when the theatre is a sufficiently vital institution to take all life for its province, and to give us plays in which the sex .element does not intrude even as a motive—in which there is no pretence of introducing the so-called feminine interest said to be indispensable in any popular work—that it is also capable of giving us a genuine play of sex. It is authors like Mr Bernard Shaw, who write plays about doctors and armaments and slum tenements, who also write a genuine sex play like *Man and Superman.* Such authors take sex as a subject to be dealt with as seriously and as inquisitively as any other subject. Conversely, the authors who are least

likely to take sex as a subject and to write us a genuine sex play are those who habitually use it as an automatic device for the construction of farcical or romantic situations. Authors, in fact, tend to distrust sex as a subject in proportion as they use it merely for our diversion ; and their instinct in the matter is profoundly right. Once you begin to take the subject seriously and to think about it, whether as a social problem or as a personal enigma, it becomes quite impossible either to be amused by its intrigues or to be touched by the disappointments of those for whom the course of true love ingeniously fails to run smooth. The subject, once it is sincerely raised, becomes too vitally interesting, too near to " our business and our bosoms," to be used as a pawn in the theatrical game, and those authors who desire to use it in that way instinctively shrink from giving to it any reality or significance. Authors who write successful plays of amative intrigue are obeying a natural instinct of self-preservation in resolutely refusing to deal with sex as a subject, and that is one of the reasons why it remains apparently the most familiar and actually the most mysterious topic in the human repertoire.

It is accordingly not at all surprising, but the most natural thing in the world, that the present dramatic revival in France, which has resulted in plays which have no love interest at all, has resulted also in plays in which sex is the author's subject, and not merely his excuse ; in which our interest is, first to last, directed not to the question whether a certain character will finally embrace his appropriately opposite number, or be ultimately discovered embracing somebody else, but to the question of what is really implied by his embracing, or by his failure to embrace, or his ceasing to embrace, anybody at all. We are referring here not to the plays which deal with any

abnormal or startling aspects of the sex problem, but to the delicate and profound studies of the entirely normal relationships of individual men and women such as we find in plays like *Aimer,* and in *Robert et Marianne** by Paul Geraldy, or *Madame Beliard,* by Charles Vildrac.

Paul Geraldy may conveniently be taken as a typical author of the contemporary play of sex. On him has fallen the mantle of M. de Porto-Riche of a previous generation. He has set out to add systematically to that " Theatre d'Amour " to which the author of *Amoureuse* and *Le Passe'* so richly contributed. Both *Aimer* and *Robert et Marianne* are plays which deal with the relationship between a man and his wife, studied for its own sake, apart from any of the usual social or personal complications.

It is true that in *Aimer* there is a *tertium quid.* But he is introduced, not for the purpose of the intrigue—there is, indeed, none whatever—but as an element in the situation between husband and wife, a means of elucidating their problem, of enabling them the better to understand the character of their relationship. Between a couple who for ten years have lived happily together intrudes a lover who startles the imagination of one of them to a momentary sense of the richness and variety of the possibilities of life beyond the four walls of her present content. The drama, first to last, consists in the struggle in her heart between memory and habit, which bind her mentally and physically to the one man, and the passionate curiosities and aspirations, which draw her almost irresistibly to the other. All three characters are at every stage of the play fully aware of what is happening. There is no secret or mystery for anybody either on the stage or in the audience. Our interest is held exclusively by the conflict in the woman's mind and the revelation it entails of her lifelong

relationship with the man to whom she is married. We are interested not in a drama of three, but in a minute and intimate study of two—the third person being there merely to make that study more significant and more complete. Even in the scenes between the woman and the man who tries to persuade her to leave her husband, our attention is focused upon the married pair—almost everything she says to the intruder being a further revelation of her iharried life. The only point of dramatic interest, so far as the action of the play is concerned, is whether she will or will not abandon her husband, and we are interested in this question only so far as its solution will complete our knowledge and summing up of the marital relation.

In *Robert et Marianne,* produced at the Comedie Fran^aise in 1925, M. Geraldy has still further simplified his theme. In this play the married pair are face to face from start to finish. There is no third person at all. The success or failure of husband and wife depends on no outside influence or motive. There are no interlopers to complicate the problem, no disparity in education or social tradition or intelligence. Here we have a married couple confronting one another in the secluded intimacy of their married life, trying to come completely together, inveterate adversaries at many points in spite of their moments of charity and illumination. The problem is reduced to its simplest terms. The play is a prolonged duologue in which the whole drama is naturally and inevitably unfolded without the intervention of any other factor than is contained in the relationship of the two protagonists. The question is not so much whether these two people will continue to live together—though it comes almost to a final breach between them—the question in which we are interested is *how* they will continue to live together.

The author has, in fact, deliberately stripped his subject of every accidental and unnecessary complication. He leaves no room for any of the ordinary misunderstandings due to a lack of comprehension, incompatibilities of taste and temper, differences of temperament, disparity in the strength and fidelity of the love which binds them together. This couple are unusually clairvoyant; they marry with eyes wide open to all the possible disasters and difficulties of the married relationship ; they are equally devoted anfl solicitous ; they are equally able to express themselves clearly and abundantly, conveying to one another at every stage of the drama the quality and degree of the emotion and impulses by which they are moved. The problem of the sex relationship is, in fact, reduced to the ultimate question : is it possible for a man and a woman really to love one another ? And the answer to that question given at the end of the great scene in the second Act appears to be in the negative—"*Uhomme et la femme ne s'aiment pas vraiment. . . . On ne s'aime peut etre jamais"*

Such is the naked conclusion which emerges from a scene in which husband and wife, far from seeking to exasperate one another, far from being either consciously or unconsciously at cross-purposes, have been making the great effort of their lives to achieve a mutual understanding. Their momentary failure is due to an inevitable sex antagonism which makes every word that the man utters with the object of reassuring his wife only a further evidence of the gulf that lies between them. The problem stands isolated in all its severity. Is it possible for a man and woman to achieve a complete and permanently satisfying union and at the same time to keep their individual souls alive and free ? There you have the problem of the sex relation reduced to its simplest and most universal

terms ; and, in raising it and dealing with it quite normally and with an astonishing lucidity, the author has written a play of such intimate concern to us all that we inevitably wonder why the theatre so seldom ventures to take it up. We realize how strange it is that so many thousands of plays should be written, all of them dealing ostensibly with the relations of men and women, but most of them contriving to avoid dealing in any way with the subject.

* The fearless and deliberate handling of this difficult subject by some of the younger dramatic authors is one of the most promising aspects of the present revival of the Paris stage. For M. Geraldy is not alone. Even more significant, perhaps, than the deliberate isolation of the theme in plays like *Robert et Marianne* is the fact that most French authors to-day, even when they use sex as the excuse or motive for a situation, no longer take the resulting relationship for granted. Shrewdly or ironically or profoundly, it is studied incidentally, not only by the younger men, but even by the veterans who refuse to be left behind by the rising generation. For most of the younger men the point of dramatic interest in their plays is not whether certain characters are sexually attracted, but the precise quality and significance of that attraction. It is assumed that such attraction, though it be the mobt universal and in some ways the most uniform of human motives, is also the most individual and the most diverse. We perpetually find ourselves confronted with the ultimate riddle of sex, which resides precisely in the fact that it is at the same time the most impersonally promiscuous and the most individually selective of human expressions. It is nature's prime device for disregarding the individual, a passionate reflex in which the spiritual and intellectual identity of the lover is subdued

to a universal purpose and reduced to the common denominator of a species. But it is at the same time, if it is to have any human significance at all, a disarmingly personal relationship in which every faculty and characteristic of a unique individual is intimately expressed. The cynic smiles upon the declaration of the lover that no one has ever loved just in that particular way before, and he is justified in so far as all lovers are exactly alike. But that is only another way of saying that he is profoundly wrorfg in so far as no two lovers are ever possibly the same.

We will take as an example of the way in which the younger French dramatists persistently direct our attention to the personal and unique character of the sex relation the play of an author who, in many ways, represents some of the most characteristic and probably most permanently valuable qualities in the work of the younger generation. M. Charles Vildrac, in *Madame Beliard*, produced in 1925 at the Comedie des Champs Elysees, bases his play, first to last, on the assumption that as between one individual and another the quality and significance of the sex relation may vary to such a degree that though, in common terms, they love one another, it is impossible for them to achieve any sort of satisfactory union. The fact is commonplace enough. It is to be observed everywhere and every day, not necessarily, or even usually, in the conspicuous failures which cannot be concealed, but in cases where the parties may make the best of a bad business or may even be unaware of their defeat. But the fact, if commonplace in life, is almost new to the theatre as a specific subject isolated for explicit treatment. The tragedy of lovers who, in the effort to achieve the supremest intimacy, achieve only a dual loneliness, whose love merely renders their isolation more complete, who in yielding to a common passion

only succeed in affirming more completely their individual identities, often intrudes incidentally into drama and fiction ; it could hardly, indeed, be excluded. But the authors are few who consciously take it for a subject.

Madame Btliard is the story of a widow left by her husband as the proprietor of a factory. Her manager is devoting all his energy and exceptional gifts to running the business, not from any special interest in his task, but because he has for years had a secret passion for his employer's wife, now his employer. Madame Beliard has a daughter who also takes an interest in the business, acting as a sort of secretary to the manager, to whom she is as passionately attached as he is to her mother. Here, you will say, is just the ancient rule of three, and nothing to justify the proclamation of a novelty. But it is the ancient rule with a difference. For here is no theatrical exploitation of a situation, but a delicate and serious study of a passion as it affects three characters profoundly different. The older woman has deep and sensitive affections, but she is not by temperament capable of the same quality of emotion as her lover. For a moment she yields to a nature stronger than her own, and plays with the idea of a second marriage, but her yielding is due to the response of a kind heart and to no irresistible prompting of her natural instincts. It only needs the revelation of her daughter's passion to show both to herself and to her lover that their relationship is impossible, since it is founded on a profound misunderstanding. For these two people love has a different significance, and the effort to come together can only be a perpetual source of uneasiness and torment to them both. The incompatibility of their loves, each in its own way vital and sincere, is shown in a dozen subtle ways. This incompatibility is the subject of the play, which relies for its effect on no

surprising turns of intrigue. The position as between its various characters is clear to the audience from the first, and there is a continuous and perfectly natural frankness between all the parties. The play begins, that is to say, where the ordinary three-cornered play would end. It is a genuine play of sex, which the ordinary play of intrigue is not. Passion is not taken for granted as something invariable, which everyone understands, and which can be used merely as a pawn in the theatrical game. For M. Charles Vildrac a declaration of love is the beginning and not the end of a problem. Love is the subject of the play, not merely its excuse.

Even more significant, perhaps, are the plays in which the dramatists of an elder generation, yielding to the new tendency, are moved to introduce into their comedies of intrigue, or into their dramas of infidelity, passages which may be regarded as an effort to deal, as a subject, with the motive which has served them so well in the construction of more or less conventional exercises in the usual manner. One of the most amusing examples of this tendency was the revival last year of the revised version of a comedy written by M. Maurice Donnay in 1894. The original comedy, produced under the title, *Pension de Famille,* was described at the time by a distinguished French critic as : " *Une serie de ' La Vie Parhienne' hi en reussie."* It was, in fact, a trifle in which the author relied almost entirely on his gracefully malicious dialogue and a clever management of his numerous intrigues. There was one character in the play, however, rather more strongly indicated than the rest, and it is this character which in the new version becomes the hero, and gives his name to the piece. *Pension de Famille* becomes *Un Homme Leger,* and the difference between the two plays reflects in its attitude to sex the

difference between 1894 and 1925. In the former version sex was never more than the opportunity for a witty phrase or the excuse for an amusing complication. In the new version it becomes the subject of the third Act, a circumstance which is all the more remarkable in view of the fact that the situation which serves as a text is wholly conventional. A husband, himself notoriously and promiscuously unfaithful to his wife, when he is himself deceived unhesitatingly shoots his dispossessor. But the old situation is discussed in a new way. Yielding with his younger contemporaries to the spirit of the time, M. Donnay, with serious ingenuity, with all that pleasant shrewdness which makes of him so elegant a comedian, ends the play with a discussion between husband and wife of the true motives of his illogical proceedings. In the course of this discussion we are asked to distinguish what is reasonable and decent in the sex relationship from what is merely ancestral and reflexive. We are asked to consider automatism, atavism and other psychological conceptions. We come upon passages like the following :

RAYMOND : Certains philosophes pretendent que c'est Tattitude qui determine la sensation.

ELIANE : Comment ? Auriez-vous 1'obligeance de repeter ?

RAYMOND : Certaine ecole de philosophic pretend que ce n'est pas le mouvement qui correspond a Emotion, mais Pemotion au mouvement.

ELIANE : Je ne vous suis pas bien.

RAYMOND : Oui … on croit vulgairement qu'on tremble parce qu'on a peur.

ELIANE : Je partage cette croyance.

RAYMOND : Eh bien! non. II parait qu'on a peur parce qu'on tremble.

ELIANE : Ah oui!

RAYMOND : Avec cette theorie, on ne fronce pas les sourcils

parce qu'on est mecontent, mais on est mecontent parce qu'on fronce les sourcils.

ELIANE : Et alors ?

RAYMOND : J'ai pris 1'attitude, j'ai fait les gestes de la jalousie, alors, j'ai etc jaloux, mais vraiment jaloux. . . .

Husband and wife, as the consequence of a purely commonplace incident, which has no very serious results for anybody concerned (the lover is only slightly wounded and is allowed to take away the lady), have an exchange of views in the course of which we are invited to consider the character of their relationship and, incidentally, to assimilate a few elementary truths concerning the sex relationship in general. There could be no more significant evidence of the change that has come over the French theatre in its dealings with the sex motive. *Un Homme Leger* is the frank acknowledgment by an author of 1894 of the influences of 1925. It is against the spirit of the theatrical times to take sex merely as an excuse or motive, mechanical and unexplained, however charmingly and resourcefully you may have done so in the past. More than that is required to-day even of the popular practitioners.

Chapter Eight

THE PRODUCTIONS OF M. GEORGES PITOEFF

THE jump into Continental fame of M. Georges Pitoeff and his wife, Ludmilla, must seem extremely sudden to a public not accustomed to follow the art of the theatre except as illustrated in the more fashionable playhouses of Europe. It almost looks as if Paris had made up its mind in a single night to accept the producer of M. Pirandello's *Henry IV.* and of Mr Bernard Shaw's *St 'Joan* as a genius suddenly and unaccountably sent from heaven. The event, however, is less abrupt than it seems. For the last two years in Paris, and for five years before in Geneva, M. Pitoeff has been quietly building up a reputation in France and Switzerland, and at least half-a-dozen men prominent in the contemporary theatre made up their minds long ago that he was perhaps the most remarkable of theatrical apparitions among the younger generation. I was the first English critic to become aware of the fact, only because I happened to be living in Geneva, where, as a Russian exile, M. Pitoe'ff made his earlier adventurous essays. It was a fact that could scarcely be overlooked ; and Paris, usually blind and deaf to foreign genius, has been obliged to admit it at once, almost without dispute.

There are one or two facts in the earlier career of M. Pitoeff that help us better to understand the character of his productions and his ultimate success. First, he has never had a moment's doubt as to his vocation. As an undergraduate in Petrograd and in Paris he gave up most of his time—and all his interest—to amateur acting and

production. Some of those productions were given in Paris at that very Theatre des Arts in the Boulevards des Batignolles where he is now enjoying his first considerable success. The theatre was his passion, and in those days it was more the passion of an actor than a producer. At all costs he must act, and he was always perfectly certain—a certainty which he could not always persuade his manager to share—that he was entirely competent to do so. He was at one time on tour with a Russian repertory company, and his manager was convinced that the belief of M. Pitoeff that he could act was a dangerous delusion of which he must as soon as possible be cured. M. Pitoeff was given a series of parts in which there was nothing to say or to do. Typical of the rest was the part of a negro guard in a Russian version of *jfntigone.* M. Pitoeff, blacked all over, was obliged to stand immobile while the tragedy advanced to its sad conclusion. And this was the man who desired above all things to act ! It was too much, and M. Pitoeff, in desperation, was finally driven to imagine that the particular negro guard impersonated by himself nourished a secret passion for the heroine. To see her led away to death now became for him a drama which gave full scope for the indulgence of his histrionic impulses. And thus it happened that one evening the manager was amazed to behold tears and every evidence of agony and despair upon the face and form of the least of his supernumeraries.

There followed an interview in which the manager expressed himself with considerable freedom and energy. Gradually, however, he ceased to do most of the talking. He had intended to dismiss M. Pitoeff, but to his very considerable astonishment he soon found himself listening to this very fluent and persuasive young man. " The moral of the incident that has just taken place," said M. Pitoeff,

" is obvious. You have seen for yourself that I cannot refrain from acting. Then please give me an opportunity." The manager wanted to know whether M, Pitoeff had any concrete suggestions to offer. Probably this was meant to be sarcastic, but sarcasm in dealing with the young and enthusiastic is a dangerous weapon. M. Pitoeff had ready quite a number of suggestions. He wanted, for instance, to play Hamlet, Macbeth and Marjoribanks in *Candida*. Tne manager, still sarcastic, inquired of heaven why it should not be Candida, and, as heaven neglected to answer, M. Pitoe'ff promptly picked up the cue, the unfortunate manager being unable to get in another word until after *Candida* had been actually produced. He then had the satisfaction of proving to M. Pitoe'ff that he, the manager, was right, the audience being quite actively unsympathetic. M. Pitoe'ff, however, was in no way disturbed. He had greatly enjoyed the part, and he had the firm conviction, which he still retains, that he had acted it very well.

M. Pitoe'ff had need of all his conviction and all his courage during the years that followed. His career, in fact, was to be classic in its fidelity to the traditional progress of solitary genius in an indifferent world. There have been times when the rations of a Russian soldier, bread and a little sugar, were only with difficulty procured, and when the only remedy for the unkindness of a hard profession or the neglect of an apathetic public had to be sought in the indulgence of confiding tradesmen.

Nevertheless, M. Pitoe'ff has almost always had a theatre. Bread and boots might not always be of the quantity or quality desired, but these were the accidents of life. A theatre on the other hand was essential. The first of them was in Petrograd. It belonged to a syndicate of four men> and M. Pitoe'ff desired, above all things, to possess it. He

called upon the director of the syndicate, to whom he spoke of the urgency and importance of his desire. The director happened to be the sort of director one meets only in a fairy tale — or possibly in Russia. He was apparently impressed by a young man whose most urgent wish in the world was to possess a theatre when he seemed to be so much more in need of a square meal and a pair of new boots, who had begun, in fact, by declaring that he was ready to do anything to get a theatre—except, of course, to pay for it. As the director pointed out, it was a difficult situation. The syndicate, three members of it at least, would certainly expect to be paid. " Perfectly simple," said M. Pitoeff, *"you* lend me the money and /'// pay the syndicate."

This was the beginning of " Our Theatre," in Petrograd, the name given to it by " Our Actors " in despair of ever agreeing upon another. " Our Actors " presented Tchekov and Mr Bernard Shaw and Henry Becque—as a result of which they were soon even poorer than before. A wild tour into Finland finished the progress towards complete destitution, and M. Pitoe'ff seemed farther off than ever from the attainment of his ambition.

The bearing of these incidents upon the art of M. Pitoe'ff is more direct than it seems. They define him as a man possessed with enthusiasm, able to convince the most unlikely persons of his special aptitudes, destitute of material resources, and prepared to suffer any amount of hardship if only he may fulfil his vocation. It was in such conditions that his style was formed—a style necessarily austere, of a staggering simplicity and an almost infantine delight in seizing upon the most immediate device, provided only it be suitable and can be bought for a penny. M. Pitoe'ff has produced more plays for less money than any manager

who ever lived, and he has produced them without giving any impression of meanness or of conceptions thwarted by a lack of capital. On the contrary, he has come to take a positive glee in the economy that was enforced upon him in his earlier days. His productions suggest the freedom and readiness of the happy Stoic who has learned to reduce his material impedimenta to a minimum. Of necessity he was debarred from making any attempt to reproduce on the stage that elaborate counterfeit of life which allows so many of our producers to spend their money in a ratio direct to that in which they spare their brains. M. Pitoeff will suggest the magnificence of Herod with the help of a village carpenter and a few metres of cloth, the elaborate silliness of a mid-Victorian interior by means of a few *unnecessary* ornaments. One of his most audacious inspirations was to suggest a bell-tent somewhere in Africa by looping up two thin pieces of silver ribbon against a dark background. An even more insolent piece of virtuosity was his production in Geneva of the arena scene in *Androdes and the Lion.* He had taken a great fancy to this play and was determined to present it. He could spend with a good conscience about ten pounds or so on the enterprise. Anything in the nature of a practicable arena was out of the question. But did it really matter ? The effect of a play by Mr Bernard Shaw does not depend on realistic furnishings, and in this particular case there was an element of buffoonery in the scene that justified an appropriate levity in the producer. So when Androcles departed into the arena, the stage was immediately darkened and the pantomime inside was shown in a shadowgraph, as though the walls of the arena had suddenly become transparent.

These are examples picked from the series of plays which laid the foundation of his reputation in Geneva.

The experiment with "Our Theatre" was made in Petrograd before the war. The end of the war found M. Pitoeff wandering about Europe, and ultimately brought him to Geneva, to sojourn there with other exiles from Russia for the next five years. Geneva, apart from an opera-house which is the abomination of desolation, contains one good theatre under the management of the genial and accessible M. Ernest Fournier, who spends a harassed life in trying to awaken a public that has not yet emerged from the eighteen-nineties to the interests of the present day. M. PitoefF at once cast an envious eye upon this delectable house, and before many months had elapsed had successfully contrived to borrow it. The play was *Hedda Gabler*, and for quite a week the local critics talked of nothing else. But M. Fournier very naturally wanted his theatre for himself, and he probably felt that if the partnership continued for more than a fortnight he would cease to be sure to whom that excellently appointed building really belonged. It fortunately happened that round the corner there was another place of entertainment—the Communal Hall of Plainpalais. The Communal Hall contained a small theatre, with a tiny stage, seating accommodation for some six hundred people, four dressing-rooms, four sets of scenery not more than thirty years old, and a retinue of scene-shifters and electricians who in the daytime were plumbers or paperhangers—total cost, four pounds a day, with reductions for a quantity. M. Pitoeff viewed the premises, and their fate for the next few years was sealed. They were to be the "Theatre Pitoeff," found at last, and to house in rapid succession plays by Shakespeare, Ibsen, Mr Shaw, Strindberg, Wilde, Tchekov, M. Pirandello, M. Hamsun, and other dramatists too numerous to mention.

There was now only one thing lacking to the enterprise

—an an actress who could play all the most difficult parts in the most exacting plays of an international and intersecular repertory, be satisfied with almost no salary and wear dresses that, like the looped ribbons of the famous bell-tent, suggested the right effect without recourse to Paquin or Worth. It was then that M. Pitoeff had the greatest inspiration of his life. Between the failure of " Our Theatre " in Petrograd and the initiation of the " Theatre Pitoeff " in Geneva he had met and married his wife, Ludmilla. And now he was looking for an actress. Why not Ludmilla herself ? Madame Pitoeff, always ready to help, was not averse from the experiment. When and how to begin was all she desired to know. At once, said Georges, and with something really interesting—Ophelia or Salome, or Mademoiselle Julie. And in less than three weeks M. Pitoeff had the satisfaction of ascertaining that he had married a genius.

The fame of the Pitoeffs during the next two years spread westward to Paris and eastward to Vienna. More particularly Paris began to be interested. M. Pitoeff played in French, and Geneva is occasionally visited by French companies. Men like MM. Copeau, Lugne Poe, Dullin and Gemier visited from time to time the theatre of M. Ernest Fournier, and could not fail to be told of the rapid " creations " of M. Pitoeff and the remarkable series of roles assumed by his wife. Nor were the young dramatists of Paris slow to learn that a producer had arisen in the city of Calvin ready, if necessary, to be well in advance of his generation. More particularly there was M. Lenormand, dramatizing the subconscious, and M. Cremieux translating the plays of M. Pirandello.

Nevertheless, the future seemed far from promising. The Geneva public, like other publics, is quite capable

of applauding genius when it is recommended to them with authority, but wholly incapable of discovering genius for itself or of anticipating the verdict of its mentors. The "Theatre Pitoeff" in Geneva seemed likely to go the way of "Our Theatre" in Petrograd. I remember seeing *Androcles and the Lion* played on one occasion to an audience of twenty people, which meant that the gross takings did not cover the author's fee. Suddenly M. Pitoeff came to the auspicious conclusion that it* would be more interesting to starve in Paris than in Geneva. Anyhow, there were more theatres in Paris.

And within two years Paris capitulated. The swiftness and completeness of this capitulation is astonishing in view of the fact that of all theatres in the world the French theatre has hitherto been perhaps the most insular and the most faithful to traditions peculiarly national and academic. There are two contributory reasons, apart from the ingenuous, enthusiastic and accessible quality of all that M. Pitoeff undertakes. First, there was the change which had recently come over Paris herself, a change in the direction of greater liberty and a more active spirit of adventure. M. Gemier, who five years ago scandalized the critics of Paris by producing the *Bourgeois Gentilhomme* as though it had been written only yesterday, had gone to the Odeon—hitherto the palladium of the conservatives. M. Copeau, of the Vieux Colombier, from being a sensation, had become a national institution. M. Dullin of the Atelier had followed M. Lugne Poe of the Theatre de l'Œuvre in breaking clean away from the classical tradition, and introducing into the French theatre a spirit of ascetic realism more in affinity with Moscow than with the Boulevards des Italiens. Secondly, there was the fact that M. Pitoeff on his arrival in Paris acquired the exclusive right to present

in French two of the most remarkable plays of the last ten years: M. Pirandello's *Henry IV.* and Mr Bernard Shaw's *St Joan.* In both cases these productions were a natural culmination of his prescient interest in these two authors. *Candida,* in Russian, had been one of his earliest adventures, while in M. Pirandello, M. Pitoeff, when in Geneva, found a dramatist who most intimately of all modern authors appeals to him both as actor and producer.

Nothing could more clearly illustrate the catholicity of M. Pitoe'ff as a producer than the production of these two plays in a single season. They are plays which have nothing in common except that they are plays. M. Pirandello is an author for whom human personality is an enigma, for whom human logic is a mechanism that obscures the spirit, for whom the public and social life of men and women masks rather than expresses the fundamental human realities. Mr Bernard Shaw is an author whose plays are based on that very juxtaposition and conflict of logical conceptions, rationally defined and revealed in conduct and society, which for M. Pirandello is almost impertinent to his main preoccupation. Mr Bernard Shaw studies the design upon a veil beyond which M. Pirandello is for ever trying to look. There is a full generation between the authors, one standing as definitely for the passionate intellectual assertion of the period before the war as the other reaches towards the passionate spiritual interrogation of the present day. M. Pirandello takes for his hero a madman who destroys human logic and confronts us with ultimate riddles, while Mr Bernard Shaw takes an historic figure and confronts us with a reasoned explanation of the movements and forces which determined her apparition and career. To these two plays, taking us into utterly different worlds, M. Pitoe'ff gives an equally appropriate setting and atmosphere.

Here we come into touch with the most remarkable aspect of his genius. Most producers with an individual style, even the greatest, have a desolate way of making all the plays they present seem more or less alike, just as a skilled pianist will play his Mozart or his Scriabin as though one was a sequel to the other. M. Pitoeff's productions have precisely the opposite effect. His productions of Shakespeare or Mr Shaw or M. Pirandello are as different as the authors themselves. He will produce you the *Dame aux Camelias* as though Dumas were the only dramatist who had ever lived. He will present you *Salome* as though he had never heard of anything later than *The Yellow Book,* and submit you his latest experiment as though he had never seen any of his previous productions. To each work he assigns its own spirit and atmosphere, permitting any amount of variety consistent with its main idea, but presenting it as a whole, harmonious and indivisible. Each of his productions has so distinct a character that it is difficult ever to see the play again in any other way. Now it will be the morning freshness of M. Hamsun's *Le Seuil du Royaume*— youth unfolding its ingenuous agonies, every movement and object of the scene suggesting innocence and aspiration > at another time the complicated sickness of *Le Mangeur des Reves,* a dissection of immemorial instincts, showing the modern mind as a palimpsest, where, beneath the fair texts of civilization, we faintly discern the scrawlings of a vanished age. The pretty sentiment of *La Dame aux Camelias,* the morbid preciosity of *Salome**, the cruel and accurate delineation of *Mademoiselle Julie,* the rigid sequences of Ibsen, the inevitable saunterings of Tchekov, the positivism of Mr Shaw or the interogativism of M. Pirandello each receives an objective presentation, filling us with an immediate conviction that thus the play would come

to life if we could for a moment imagine it slipping down from the library shelf and enacting itself without human agency. It is on this supreme fidelity to his author's purpose that M. Pitoeff bases his sole justification as a producer. When first he produced the *Henry IV.* of M. Pirandello he was unable to consult the author until the last detail had been settled. He was sure in his own mind that he had been entirely faithful—so sure that he could not in conscience have altered it in a single particular. " There is your play," he said in effect to M. Pirandello, who saw the final rehearsal. " If it is not your play I must recognize that I have failed ; I cannot see it in any other way and if you do not see it so yourself I will cancel the production, though for me this will be nothing less than infanticide." But there was no real occasion for alarm. It seemed that evening to M. Pirandello as though his thoughts were taking to themselves arms and legs. He recovered in the theatre that sense of immediate creation which so seldom survives the first inspiration. He recognized that even the additions of the producer, within the limits of his special art, were in no way extrinsic, but rather a prolongation of the author's own conceptions. There is, in particular, a moment in the denouement of the play in which Henry breaks away for an instant from the fiction within which he has remained throughout its progress, but realizes almost at once that henceforth there is no escape, and that it must confine him for ever. M. Pitoeff in that moment shows us the whole scene in which the drama has been enacted toppling about his ears, and it is Henry himself who rushes desperately to the caving wall and pushes it back into place. There is no authority for this in the text, but M. Pirandello said at once that it ought to have been there.

M. Pitoeff is limited by no special style or formula,

either of his own or derived from his predecessors. He has no preconceived ideas as to how plays in general should be produced. He has no system, belongs to no school, acknowledges no standard or type. He will produce ninety-nine plays, but you will be quite unable to predict from seeing them how he will complete the century. Looking aside at his contemporaries, we can say roughly that M. Gaston Baty, for example, aims at blending the arts to produce a composite effect—music, form, movement, colour, light—all these are to be used in order to convey an appeal which, in his view, will reinforce the appeal of the text. M. Baty, in fact, has a theory and applies a system. Similarly, we can say of M. Gemier, that in his most striking productions he naturally adopts the methods of Professor Reinhardt, bringing the spectator as close as possible to the play and excelling in the handling of groups. M. Jacques Copeau, a poet in love with simplicity, practises a theatrical asceticism which finally sends him forth to a remote country village in Burgundy, there to renew an art which in its essentials can be offered in the market square upon a platform without any of the adventitious aids of the modern stage. M. Dullin excels in a dry, incisive naturalism which he can apply with equal success to the production of modern or of classical comedy. All these producers have a manner which affects all their productions, and views which they are ready to expound.

M. Pitoeff, on the contrary, has no such manner, and finds it impossible to expound any views. He may feel it necessary to produce *Hamlet* in one way and *Romeo and Juliet* in quite another. He takes every play on its merits, and he presents it without any reference, either deliberate or instinctive, to any principle or prejudice external to the play itself. Though he has produced over two hundred

plays, he has never repeated himself or fallen into a habit, never felt the need of formulating a principle or adopting one convention rather than another.

Compare, for example, his staging of *Hamlet* with his staging of *Measure for Measure.* The two productions might in all superficial respects be by two different men. There is no obvious family likeness such as we at once detected in the productions of Herbert Tree, or Mr Granville Barker, or Professor Reinhardt, or Mr Gordon Craig. These two productions of M. Pitoeff were wholly unlike in spirit and method, and their dissimilarity was due to the fact that the producer's sense of the difference between the two plays was strong enough to overcome any preconceived idea as to how a play by Shakespeare should be presented. He has, in fact, no preconceived idea as to how a play by Shakespeare should be presented. He has, on the other hand, a very definite idea as to how *Hamlet* or *Measure for Measure* should be presented, and he finds it impossible to present them in the same way. His impression on reading *Hamlet* is that he cannot, as a producer, add anything to the written text. He can conceive of no way in which the arts of the theatre can be applied to the embellishment or reinforcement of the tragedy. For him the tragedy of *Hamlet,* as written, is something already so complete, so self-sufficient, that the utmost any producer can do is to avoid limiting its appeal by giving to it a too obviously local habitation. *Hamlet* is the confronting of a human soul with problems of conduct and feeling that are essentially universal. There must be nothing to date the play, to fix it here or there, to distract the auditor in any way from the passion and speculation of the poet's text. His whole idea of a fitting production of *Hamlet* is accordingly one that will do no

more than give the actor a setting which he feels becoming to its delivery and provide him with the kind of stage from which he can most easily speak the lines without discomfort. Personally he feels that he can more happily and appropriately speak the great soliloquies against a background of black and silver, but that is only his personal preference. All he insists upon is that the setting should be as simple as possible, and that it should not in any way confine or embarrass or distract the attention.

Anyone who sees M. Pitoeff's *Hamlet* would naturally infer that this simplification and exclusive reliance on the text was his method of producing Shakespeare, to be applied as a matter of principle to all his plays ; and in dealing with most producers the inference would be legitimate. But M. Pitoeff, reading *Measure for Measure,* is driven to present it in quite another way. Here is no room for beautiful abstractions. The play must be brought immediately down to earth. Here is no speculation, no communing with the invisible, no questioning of the ultimate mysteries, but a play of human appetites, objective, material, a play of very common flesh and blood, a comedy in which it is as natural to have streets and houses and a real prison with a window as it would be criminal to have real castles and graveyards in the tragedy of *Hamlet.* Here the distraction of the spectator, with something to fill the eye, may be used to reinforce the appeal of the play, to bring home the reality and pressure of the common life in which it is embedded. The tissue and atmosphere of the play calls for objectivity, visible movement, for a setting and conduct of the scene which anchor it definitely in time and place. There is so complete an antithesis between the two plays that M. Pitoe'ff, approaching them with no other object than to discover the

source of their inspiration, could not fail to present them according to a wholly different formula. Hamlet may speak of the mysterious bourne from which no traveller returns before a black velvet curtain and silver screens; but the cry of Claudio, "Ay, but to die, … to lie in cold obstruction, and to rot"—a mere shrinking of human flesh from the physical horror of death—requires a solid setting of prison walls.

The impossibility of confining M. Pitoeff within any formula makes it difficult to write generally of his productions. They cannot be grouped or classified or discussed in the mass. A comprehensive view of his achievement can be gained only by a detailed appreciation of his productions taken individually. In any general account of his art we must rest content with describing his method of approach.

M. Pitoeff endeavours always to see the play from the author's point of view, to look from the text to its source —an effort which is more rare and more difficult than it seems. Before allowing himself to consider any line or incident in detail, before considering the text itself of the play from the producer's point of view, he endeavours to discover the origin of the author's inspiration, the significance of the play for the man who wrote it, the genesis of the work of art which he is being called upon to express in terms of the theatre. In a word, he tries to look at the play from the inside rather than from the outside, to grasp firmly the emotion or idea which presided over its inception. He will not consider the play as a series of situations, as a group of characters, as a sequence of dialogues, or decide how he will deal with them, until he has formed a conception of the play as a whole, until it has assumed a character of its own.

This seems to be a fairly obvious method of approach, but in practice it is seldom effectively applied. It means that, at the initial stage, when the idea of the play is beginning to shape itself in the mind of the producer, the author's text becomes, in his own interest, a secondary consideration. The importance of this point will be realized by any critic who has seen a fine play ruined by an excessive fidelity to its externals. Many producers, conscientiously anxious to interpret their author faithfully, emphasize every line of the script, render exactly every incident, give infinite pains to every detail. They have every respect for their author, but they have approached the play from the outside, assuming that a dogged fidelity in externals will effectively reveal its inspiration. Such a method usually results in destroying, or at least in obscuring, the spirit of the undertaking.

An interesting example of this was the recent production in Paris by M. Louis Jouvet of *Le Dlctateur*, by M. Jules Remains. If M. Jouvet had looked behind the text he would have realized more effectively that the real subject of the play is the development taking place in the mind of the dictator himself, the gradual process whereby he discovers that only in the exercise of power and in a vital response to the necessities of the moment can he really fulfil and express his own personality. In the production of M. Jouvet this central idea, the subject of the play itself, is smothered by the incidentals ; it is overpowered by the machinery. Every line of the text, every situation, every character is emphasized, presented for itself, given equal value. There is no grouping of effects and individuals in relation to the central idea. We see a Cabinet Minister at work during a crisis, efficiently and impressively dealing with a situation, and so much

emphasis is laid on these externals that the spectator may be pardoned for failing to realize that the real drama is, not how the dictator will settle the crisis, but what is happening to the mind of the dictator himself. There could be no better example of a play killed by excessive fidelity to the text. A producer who had based his presentation on a preliminary conception of the source or subject of the author's work would have thrown into the background all the political accidents of the situation. We should have seen in strong relief a solitary figure working out his own salvation, for whom all these external events were relatively of small account. M. Jouvet, by making the most of everything, only emphasized the original 'defect of the play—which is to be sought precisely in an unnecessary complication of its dramatic machinery—instead of moderating the consequences of this defect by emphasizing its principal motive and throwing into the background or middle distance all that was merely illustrative. Witnessing *Le Dictateur* as produced last October at the Comedie des Champs filysees it was hardly possible to realize what the play was about until almost the very end. We could then, by throwing back our minds, perceive how the various incidents fell into place and perspective in relation to the main idea. But this was precisely what the producer should have done in the first instance.

The subordination of the details of a play to its central idea is perhaps the most striking characteristic of the productions of M. Pitoeff, and it gives to them a unity and an individual character which causes them to leave a definite and uniform impression on the mind. The whole play is seen in perspective, the incidents as they occur in time taking their appropriate position in space, almost as

though the producer were thinking in four dimensions. This instinct for perspective, or sense of the events of a play proceeding, as it were, on different planes of significance, naturally expresses itself in a tendency towards simplification or abstraction, towards relieving the play of unnecessary particulars, towards securing the essential effect by the most economic means. M. Pitoeff instinctively dissociates a play as far as possible from its less significant externals. He is, in fact, perhaps the only producer who has successfully introduced into his theatre the process of simplification and abstraction which is now so active an influence in modern art. He simplifies his material and abstracts what is essential without injury to its humanity or detraction from its vivacity. The process with M. Pitoe'ff is never academic or formal, still less is it deliberately archaic or in any way perverse. It is the product of an imagination which naturally endeavours to express the universal through each particular. He will give you the priest in a single gesture, the might of Rome in the figure of a single sentinel, night in the fixed blaze of a single painted torch, the Middle Ages in the flutter of a single pennon, the Renaissance in the offer of a single cup of poisoned wine.

The actual devices used by M. Pitoe'ff in the course of production have not as yet degenerated into a habit, but are always a natural consequence of his idea of the individual play or of his method of approach. Such devices as recur are due to that sense of relativity or perspective to which I have referred. Thus M. Pitoe'ff often uses in his productions the device of varying planes or levels. It enables him to achieve in his picture a greater freedom of composition than is possible on a flat stage, and to group events and persons pictorially in their just

relation to the central idea. His most audacious employment of this device is in *Macbeth,* a play in which he finds different planes of illusion existing side by side—witches, ghosts and human beings—where even the visible world is a tormented chaos, with no level on which reality can finally assert itself. Another favourite device is to arrest for just a moment the movement of the scene in order t<? record a grouping of the players which is particularly significant, or which conveys in some striking way their mutual relations. There is not, of course, any obvious striking of an attitude, but one suddenly has the impression that, if the play were to stop then and there, the tableau would serve as a faithful and complete pictorial presentation of its author's idea. Here, again, the device is a natural result of his method of approach. Producing the play in accordance with his idea of its original intention, he instinctively handles his characters in such a way that they will at any really significant moment be grouped in relation to the central idea.

Perhaps one of the most interesting productions of M. Pitoeff from the point of view of his method of approach is the *Henry IV.* of M. Pirandello, to which reference has already been made. The hero is living as a madman, and his friends have provided him with a setting appropriate to his delusion that he is Henry IV. But he himself is no longer subject to this delusion. He knows that the setting is false, but accepts it in preference to the reality outside. M. Pitoeff, anxious to emphasize that the setting is unreal, makes it quite obviously a setting of the theatre, a setting of pasteboard that caves and trembles when the characters lean against it, a setting which, at the crisis of the play, when the hero seems driven for a moment to abandon his pretences and to acknowledge a reality beyond

them, actually, as we have said, totters and threatens to fall about his ears, so that in desperate defence of his illusions he has to rush to the wall and hold it up. There could be no completer illustration of the producer's method. His central idea of the play suggests to him in this case a scenic device which M. Pirandello himself never contemplated, but which he at once recognized to be a vivid pictorial illustration of his conception.

But it will be better, perhaps, to illustrate the style and method of M. Pitoeff from a play which is familiar to the English public. The production of *St Joan* is not only of value for itself, but interesting as showing exactly how a producer can complete his author. *St Joan,* as a text* as a sequence of ideas, as a gallery of portraits, as a series of emotions, as an appeal to the intelligence, as a succession of points in an argument, as an interesting tale, as almost anything you please, was adequately conveyed to the English public in London. But as a production it did not even begin to exist. You got from it neither more nor less than from a reading of the book. One scene followed another, intelligently acted, perfectly clear and logical, but the total effect was that of a series of charades which, put together, gave us the result—*St Joan.* Miss Thorndike, for example, presented with emphasis, with an emphasis that was like a strong wind, the traits of the heroine as indicated by her author—a peasant, a soldier, a sensible girl, an indignant woman, an inspired saint. Her colleagues presented a feudal nobleman, a dauphin, a bishop and so forth, in a way with which no possible fault could be found. There were a number of attractive sets, any one of which probably cost more than the whole Pitoe'ff production. The author's ideas were in all essential respects carried out. But never for one moment did we

have the feeling, which only the great producers give, that the play was a world in itself, that it had its own peculiar atmosphere, a unity and character which belonged to that particular play and made everything else for the moment irrelevant and unreal. We were aware, throughout the English production, of the discernment of the author and the talent of the actors, but there was never one instant of that complete illusion when the play itself has an existence and a quality that leave a permanent impression on the imagination. I can remember Mr Lyall Swete's Warwick and Mr Thesiger's Dauphin. I can remember Mr Bernard Shaw's play as I read it on a summer evening in 1924. But I cannot remember the production of the play in London, because there was nothing to remember.

St Joan at the Theatre des Arts, on the other hand, refuses to be forgotten. There have been other productions of the play,^equally valid and sufficient in themselves, but they will in no way affect the memory of the production of M. Pitoeff. M/Pitoeff had his vision of the play, complete in itself, harmonious and consistent in every detail, and inspired, even in the elements which it adds to the play, by a spirit of passionate fidelity to the author and his subject. It imposes itself, as the French critic would say.

Mr Bernard Shaw in *St Joan* gives us a human and rational explanation of a saint. But the saint remains as a miracle, however you may choose to confine the miraculous within the resources of a modern vocabulary. Miracles are, in fact, performed on the stage, and unless we recognize and accept them as miracles, whether logical or theological is neither here nor there, the play must fail of its effect. It was precisely this element of saintship and of the miraculous in which the London exposition of *St Joan* was so fatally deficient. But M. Pitoeff prepares for it from the first. His

whole conception of the play is based on the fact that Joan is a saint, recognized to be divinely inspired by the Church that repudiated her. The permanent framework of his stage is a triptych, of which the centre-piece is plumb in the middle of the stage facing the audience, and the side-pieces adjacent on either side at an angle of about a hundred-and-seventy-five degrees. Curtains suggest an interior, lattices suggest the cathedral, the open sky an exterior. Thus the play is in every scene presented within a frame that conveys continuously but without undue insistence a religious background. However rational may be the progress of events, it is a rationalism imposed upon something that is fundamentally super-rational. The imagination is prepared for a miracle. The incredulous intelligence may discuss and examine its nature, but that matters not at all. Give me the spirit of the play, says M. Pitoeff in effect, and anyone may have its brains.

The greatest of the miracles is the discovery of the Dauphin by Joan on her arrival at the Court. I cannot even remember how this was done in London. I have a vague recollection of Miss Thorndike striding into the scene, full of vitality and *nous,* picking out the prince with a bustling and instinctive competence that refused to be baffled. There was no suggestion of a miracle—nothing to explain the conversion of the unbelievers or justify the immediate leadership which it enabled the heavenly Maid to assume. There was no more character or quality in that special moment of the play than in a game of hunt-the-thimble at a children's party. Now watch the scene as produced by M. Pitoeff. The big noisy and mundane Court is there framed in the triptych and lit with painted torches. There are but few people on the stage, but you would swear it was a multitude. The Maid enters, a tiny figure,

shrinking a moment from the hall blazing with light and from the alien laughter. For a breathless instant she pauses like a child, sensitive to mockery, bewildered. Then, suddenly uplifted by her inspiration and purpose, she braves them all, and, led by the intuition with which she is suddenly illumined, goes straight to her goal. We do not see the Dauphin ourselves. She suddenly dives into the midst *pf* them and brings him forth. Then for just an instant the whole stage is immobile, as though time stood still and we were beholding this event *sub specie ceternltatis*> the scene making a picture that remains in the eye after it has broken up and the action resumed.

This conception of St Joan as a saint, obeying an inspiration and accomplishing miracles for which no rational explanation seems entirely adequate, completely dominates the progress of the play. It reaches its highest expression in the scene of recantation. In the passages which immediately precede it, St Joan does not argue with her judges. She seems only superficially aware of them. She sits in the centre of the stage looking out into the audience, away from the Court, as though living in a world of her own. Now and then she aims an answer directly at the Court, but all this is merely an intellectual byplay that cannot matter substantially one way or the other. Her body is there to be tortured, her brain to be distracted, but her spirit is away. Then comes the tragic moment when body and brain prevail over the spirit. The flesh of the child shrinks from the fire, the brain of the woman admits the flaw in the reasoning that has brought her to what the world would call destruction. She signs the paper that denies her spiritual mission. But even as she signs it, body and brain subdued and persuaded, her whole being shrinks from the act from which her spirit is entirely absent. The

revulsion is immediate, and when at last she tears the paper it is as though the spirit had returned and resumed possession of its instruments.

This brings us to Ludmilla Pitoeff. She also has a spirit of fidelity to her author and to the general conception of the play in which she is cast, which precludes her from doing anything not entirely appropriate. This is not to say that she is clay in the hands of the potter. Ludmilla, Pitoeff has a thorough knowledge of the dramatic literatures of more than half-a-dozen countries, and discusses them from a very personal and assured point of view. But the instinct to conform with an imaginative scheme of which she forms a part is fundamental, and while her performances are individual, they are always consonant.

For Ludmilla, as for M. Pitoeff, the conception of St Joan is based on the fact of her intuitive inspiration. Intellectually she may explain herself; socially she may be a peasant girl ; professionally she may be a soldier ; humanly she may be a woman with her life or freedom at stake. But these are merely accidents as compared with the fact that she is chosen by heaven to fulfil a sacred mission. Her " Voices " are more real than the folk who surround her. In the pitiful moment when she denies them we perceive that her action is a mere reflex of flesh and blood, a temporary puzzling of the intelligence—not an act which really expresses her. We are aware in every scene of the inner light by which she is guided. The more superficial traits and characteristics of the Maid are all suggested in a way that emphasizes rather than detracts from this conception. The rusticity of the peasant is suggested by an awkward gesture, a momentary pose, that troubles only for an instant the immutability of the saint. Her shrewdness and sense and capacity are qualities which

only serve to remind us that the Church Triumphant is acting through mortal agencies.

Thus the actress plays directly into the hands of her producer, and this perfect collaboration reaches a climax in the Court scene. She sits, as I have said, facing the audience, the Court behind her. The disposition of the tableau alone emphasizes that her interrogation is an " irrelevance. We see her judges, anxious to save or to convict her, moved by ideas and passions that definitely put them in another world. They are the Church Militant: they stand for political or ecclesiastical ideals, an intellectual or judicial process, or anything you please. And there, in the midst, in a world of her own, averted from them, sits the saint of God, the light of the Church Triumphant on her face, answering these others without understanding or regarding them. In the moment of recantation she is subdued for a moment to the worldly medium in which she works, but at the close, tearing up the recantation, she faces us, inspired with a complete conviction, while her judges, excommunicating and thrusting her away, stand askance, expressing, in one of those moments of arrest which M. Pitoeff uses in his productions with such immense dramatic effect, the complete dissociation of their human secularity from the divine immortality of the martyr. All this is suggested without any obscuring of the purely human elements of the scene. The actress shows us the woman who shrinks from the fire and from dark imprisonment, who in the name of common sense and common humanity is impatient with her foolish judges and anxious to convince the wise ones. But these elements are subordinated and kept within the frame of the triptych that encloses the play and keeps it, first to last, a " mystery," mediaeval in spirit though it be modern in its terms. And

though we are made aware of the pity of it there is no doubt where the real victory lies.

For the playing of such a part Ludmilla Pitoeff is peculiarly fitted. More than any actress I have ever seen she has the power of suggesting an intense secluded emotion without any of the customary gesture or grimace. Her style has a peculiar stillness. You will never catch her " making faces." Nevertheless, in every pause of the play, when she is not by word or gesture actively engaged, she makes us aware that she continues to live in and through her part. The best early example of this was in her playing of Salome, where she lives silently with her monstrous obsession, so that, when she speaks, each phrase is merely another expression of the dominant idea, a breaking into speech of the mood of which she is a veritable incarnation. This remarkable power is used to tremendous purpose in *St Joan,* for it is in the pauses of speech and action that the saint is free to listen to her "Voices," to retire for strength to her secret inspiration.

This secret inspiration is fully revealed only in the epilogue, when she stands framed in the centre of the triptych at the head of the bed of the dreaming Dauphin. This scene would never have been criticized as unnecessary if its critics had seen the production of M. Pitoe'ff. Even the gentleman from the Vatican was used to heighten the effect—the other apparitions surprised into the thin laughter of ghosts in Hades when he appeared. The scene was grotesque, but grotesque in the spirit of the mediaeval miracle play, and it draws to a natural and inevitable close with the transfiguration of the Maid. In the book I thought that the epilogue added nothing to what had gone before ; in the London production I thought it marred the effect of the preceding Act; but M. Pitoe'ff, faithful to his

author, and convinced that his author intended it for a climax, has given it a dramatic value which, *mea culpa*, I never suspected it to contain.

Paris, at any rate, was convinced. Making all allowances for the delight of a French audience in a play that occasionally mocks perfidious Albion where she is most vulnerable to the Gallic mind, and for the compliment paid to France by the selection of a French theme by a discerning foreigner, the success of this production cannot be explained away or discounted. The public was held from start to finish by a fine play produced with consummate genius, and revealing in the fullness of her powers an actress who in a single season has successfully established a European reputation.