

CLAIR DE LUNE

(From Verlaine)

A moonlit landscape is your soul intense,
Wherein do maskers, dim and delicate,
Play lutes, perchance, and dance, yet give the sense
Of subtle sadness in fantastic fête.

Strange-garbed, they celebrate in minor strain
Victorious love and purpose conquering all,
Yet seem to know that both of these are vain,
The while their pale-wrought lyrics rise and fall.

Through the still moonlight, melancholy-sweet,
Lonely the birds stand dreaming on the trees,
And in the polished basins at their feet
White fountains tall sob tremulous ecstasies.

Reginald Wright Kauffman.

SINCERITY IN THE DRAMA



THE defect of most of the bad plays that get themselves presented is not so much a lack of skill in the execution as a lack of sincerity in the undertaking. The playwright is more strongly tempted than the purely literary artist to abdicate his individuality and submit to the dictates of other minds than his own. There is an actor to suit, a manager to satisfy, a particular section of the public to amuse; and the playwright is likely to focus his attention upon them instead of fixing it upon the theme and message of his drama. The resultant play is not a creation but a fabrication; it is an exercise in mechanics instead of an adventure into life. The author says certain things, not for the simple and inherent reason that he means them, but because he thinks that, under the circumstances, they will prove effective things to say. Hence the hollowness and artificiality of many of our entertainments. In the shallow play called *Springtime*, for example, it was evident that the authors were not sincerely interested in the story they had been employed to tell. But unless the author really means what he is saying, his play will lack the atmosphere of life. Neither cleverness of invention nor dexterity of execution will give it the aroma of reality.

An insincere play, because it is written at arm's length from the author, conveys

no impression of the personality of the playwright. *Madame X*, for instance, affords no adequate indication of what manner of man M. Bisson may be. When we see a play that is insincere, we have a sense that it might have been written by anybody, and the author's name upon the programme means no more to us than so many letters of type. But a play that is sincerely conceived, though it be faulty and ineffective in execution, will at least convey a personal appeal from the author to the audience. "*None So Blind*," as we shall notice, though it failed because of technical defects, was an interesting work, because the author cared very deeply about certain things that he was trying hard to say. And since individual personality is the most appealing thing in life, even those authors who aim mainly at material success and hearken always to the dictates of expediency would do well to accept their impulse from within instead of submitting to influences external to their minds. The one contemporary dramatist in English who has made more money than any other is Mr. J. M. Barrie; and he owes his success mainly to the interest which he has awakened in his own personality—a personality which gleams through all his work, because he has always said sincerely and earnestly what he had within his soul to say, and has never written from any lesser motive than the need for self-expression.

The best comedy of the present season is *Don*, by Mr. Rudolf Besier, which has apparently won a permanent place in the repertory of the New Theatre.

"Don"

It is neat in structure, clever in characterisation, deft in dialogue; but its main merit lies in the fact that it sets forth a criticism of life which is conceived sincerely, and which is clearly indicative of the author's own engaging individuality. *Don* is a nick-name for the hero, bestowed upon him by his fiancée because of his Quixotic temperament. His is a poetic nature; and in any human complication he obeys the simple impulses of truth, without ulterior consideration of how the world about him may analyse his acts. His father is a clergyman, his mother a simple-hearted, doting woman; and he is engaged to the daughter of a gossiping mother and a grumpy and narrow-minded father. A former maid-servant of his mother's has married a tradesman named Thompsonett and by him been treated with unbearable brutality; and in the despair of her suffering, she sends for *Don*. Having heard her story, he decides at once to take her away from her husband and give her a refuge in his mother's house. Mrs. Thompsonett is very ill and weak; and it is, therefore, necessary for *Don* to stop with her overnight upon the way, and to sit up with her in her bedroom in the hotel in order to nurse her and minister to her needs. His fiancée and her parents are waiting for him at his home; and his arrival is preceded by a brief letter from Thompsonett announcing that *Don* has eloped with his wife. The atmosphere is naturally strained when *Don* enters, carrying the fainting Mrs. Thompsonett in his arms, and deposits her upon the sofa of the drawing-room. He feels, of course, no personal interest in Mrs. Thompsonett beyond the natural sympathy of a whole-some-hearted man for a fellow-being in distress; but his behaviour shocks his father and his mother, his motives are misjudged by the parents of his fiancée, and the girl herself is annoyed at *Don*'s apparent lack of consideration for her. The second act maintains the conflict between the simplicity of human right and the complexity of social convention on a

plane of high comedy, with many illuminative strokes of characterisation and brilliant sallies in the lines. In the third and last act, Mr. Thompsonett comes to claim his wife. At this point the author makes the mistake of trying for a big situation, and thereby disrupts the mood of comedy in which his play has previously been developed. Thompsonett draws and flourishes a pistol; and in the subsequent scene of excitement and suspense, the audience loses consciousness of the theme and message of the comedy. Also, at the termination of the act, the author arranges a rather arbitrary reconciliation between Mrs. Thompsonett and her husband, now indecisively deemed regenerate, in which the audience cannot easily believe. But the play as a whole is very truthful. The author cares sincerely about his theme, and writes well because he means what he is saying. *Don* wears the halo of all works that are developed from a motive that is beautiful by a person who is real.

A Man's World, by Miss Rachel Crothers, is emphatically a woman's play;

but it gains more than it loses by the earnestness with which the author insists upon a thesis which

is fundamentally unsound. This interesting work affords conclusive evidence of the compelling power of sheer sincerity. Miss Crothers actually asks that old question which is so dear to writers and readers of dime novels—"Why should there be one law for the man and another for the woman?"—and evidently believes that the question is unanswerable; yet she asks it with such earnestness that we listen to her with a patience that is almost eager. Of course, if this matter be looked at merely from the point of view of individual morality, it is entirely sound to insist that incontinence in a man is fully as evil as incontinence in a woman. But Miss Crothers loses sight of the fact that the larger question is not merely one of personal morality. The reason why there is one law for the man and another for the woman is a reason not of ethics but of sociology. The family is the economic unit of society, and the stability of society demands that this unit be maintained inviolate. As society is at