

## ART

BY CHARLES HANSON TOWNE

ART is a flaming mistress,  
 Jealous, proud, and elate;  
 Deep in her heart is heaven,  
 Deep in her mind is hate.

Never, never forsake her!  
 The ways of her love, who knows?  
 To-day, she is thine forever;  
 To-morrow, forever she goes.

Not hers the tragic ending—  
 To nobler loves she fares,  
 Nor turns for a last swift parting,  
 Remembers not, nor cares.

## IS DRAMATIC CRITICISM NECESSARY?

BY BRANDER MATTHEWS

IT IS now no longer in dispute that there has been in the past score or two of years a striking revival of the drama in the English language and that there are to-day British and American playwrights who write plays which are worth while,—plays which are both actable and readable,—plays which often deserve and which sometimes even demand serious critical consideration. This revival has necessarily resulted in calling attention to the present condition of dramatic criticism in Great Britain and in the United States. In a period of dramatic productivity dramatic criticism has an indisputable function and is charged with an undeniable duty, both to the aspiring playmakers and to the main body of the playgoing public. We cannot help asking ourselves whether our dramatic critics rightly apprehend their function and whether they properly discharge their duty; and to these pressing questions the most conflicting answers are returned.

Some there are who insist that it is

hopeless to expect the desired outflowing of dramatic literature in our language to take place so long as our dramatic criticism is as inadequate, as incompetent, and as unsatisfactory as they declare it to be. Others there are who take a more tolerant view, holding the public itself to be at fault for the existing state of things and who therefore believe that we are now getting dramatic criticism quite as good as we deserve. Few there are who venture to deny that there is room for improvement,—although no two of these agree in their suggestions for bringing about a bettering of present conditions. In the multitude of these counsellors there is darkness and confusion.

Perhaps there is a dim possibility of dissipating a little of this dark confusion by an analysis of the exact content, which we discover in the term "dramatic criticism,"—and then by a further inquiry as to whether our customary use of the term is not misleading. "Dramatic criticism" to most of us con-

notes the newspaper reviewing of the nightly spectacles in our theatres. Plainly this was the meaning of the term in the mind of Mr. Howells years ago when he declared that "our dramatic criticism is probably the most remarkable apparatus of our civilisation" and that it "surpasses that of other countries as much as our fire department. A perfectly equipped engine stands in every newspaper office, with the steam always up, which can be manned in nine seconds, and rushed to the first theatre where there is the slightest danger of drama within five minutes; and the combined efforts of these tremendous machines can pour a concentrated deluge of cold water upon a play which will put out anything of the kind at once."

There is no denying that this use of the term by Mr. Howells is supported by custom. Yet it is distinctly unfortunate, for if the newspaper comment upon the novelties of the stage is to be accepted as "dramatic criticism," then what term have we left to describe the more piercing and the more comprehensive discussion of the first principles of the art of playmaking which we find in Francisque Sarcey and in George Henry Lewes, not to go back to Lessing and to Aristotle? It is equally unfortunate that there is an equivalent inaccuracy in bestowing the title of "literary criticism" upon the newspaper comments upon the current books, for if this journalistic summarising is to be accepted as "literary criticism" then what are we to call the exquisite evaluation of favourite authors which we find in Henry James and Matthew Arnold and Sainte-Beuve?

Of course, it is always idle to protest against the popular use or misuse of words and terms and phrases. The people as a whole own the language and have a right to make it over and to modify the original meaning of words. If popular usage chooses not to distinguish between two very different things and to call both of them "dramatic criticism" there is no redress; and yet it is

impossible to discuss the problem of dramatic criticism except by trying to separate the two things thus confounded. Therefore, for the purpose of this inquiry only and without any hope of changing the accepted usage, I make bold to suggest that "play-reviewing" might be employed to describe the notices written in the office of a newspaper, notices necessarily prepared under pressure and under strict limitations of time and space.

These newspaper notices are sometimes careless, they are sometimes perfunctory, and they are sometimes cruel; and occasionally they are careful, conscientious and clever, done with a dexterity worthy of high praise when we consider all the conditions under which it is displayed. But even at its best play-reviewing cannot attain to the level of true dramatic criticism, more leisurely in its composition, larger in its scope, and more discriminating in its choice of topic. The play-reviewing of the daily journal is akin in aim to the book-reviewing which has for its purpose the swift consideration of the volume in vogue at the moment. In our morning and evening papers the book-reviewing and the play-reviewing are both of them necessarily up-to-date, in fact, up-to-the-last-minute. To be contemporaneous, instantly and imperatively and inexorably, is their special quality, and their immediate purpose; it is the reason for their existence and the excuse for their being.

Here it may be well to cite again the oft-quoted confession of the late Jules Lemaitre, writer of volume after volume, in which he adroitly discussed the leading men of letters of his own time and of his own country: "Criticism of our contemporaries is not criticism—it is conversation." Now, conversation may be a very good thing; indeed, when it is as clear and as sparkling as was Lemaitre's it is an excellent thing; yet he was right in admitting that it is not criticism since it could not but lack the touchstone of time, the perspective of distance, the assured application of the eternal standards. And play-reviewing