

Drama

The Comic Muse

IF there is a modern Molière it is Bernard Shaw; if there is one who might have been a modern Molière it is Eugène Brieux. But Brieux, unhappily, mistook the function and nature of art almost from the beginning and gave to reform what was meant for mankind. Once and once only did he work exclusively in the spirit of creative art. It was when, in 1906, he wrote "Les Hanneçons," which in the uncommonly adroit and sensitive version of Arthur Hornblow, Jr., is being presented by William Harris under the title of "Madame Pierre" (Ritz Theater).

It may be said that this play, too, has its moral. But Brieux does not tell us that a so-called free union may be as bitterly tyrannous as the most respectable marriage; he lets us see that freedom is in the self rather than in the world and its circumstances; he lets us see two of the raciest and most convincing human creatures in all literature. And because these two are not only so incomparably themselves, but because there is a Pierre in every man and a Charlotte in every woman, there is no need of defining the moral which is part and parcel of the tragi-comedy of human life itself. Like the "Amoureuse" of Porto-Riche, "Les Hanneçons" is one of that group of rare and precious writings—the line extends, regardless of form or kind, from Horace's "Ibam forte via sacra" to Maugham's "Of Human Bondage"—in which the delineation of human nature has that supreme and central rightness, that final precision of fact and impulse and gesture which more than anything else and more justly than anything else preserves literature in the memory of mankind. Brieux's little comedy is anything but lofty; it is not even, in a reflective sense, profound; it has the felicity of going straight to permanent and essential things and of drawing from these alone its easy power and poignancy and charm. It has been called a bitter comedy. Its bitterness is not that of the author's temper but of the stuff of life. Doubtless it will be called immoral. Then so are we all and the word becomes meaningless. It is the play by which Brieux will be remembered; it will sustain the memory of a period of French dramatic literature much less rich and important than is commonly assumed.

The production is worthy of the play. Estelle Winwood, who also took the part of Germaine in "Amoureuse," plays Charlotte. She plays the character from within. Her liteness and her nervousness of gesture help her. But, as in the case of Germaine, she has, whether instinctively or intellectually, grasped the creative fact and projected it in its organic totality and concrete nature. She gives one the impression of having all of Charlotte's memories and a prescience of all her future. Roland Young's Pierre is no less happy and genuine in effect though perhaps a little more dictated by the actor's personal traits and methods. Mr. Robert Milton again shows through his directing his notable sensitiveness in the matter of dramatic rhythm.

Brieux's priceless human veracity in this single instance may be easily tested by comparison with later and by no means contemptible French plays. There is "The Nest" (Forty-eighth Street Theater) by Paul Géraldy, author of "Aimer," which has been produced at the Comédie Française and been thought the best play of the current Parisian season. M. Géraldy is serious; he observes correctly and writes with both elegance and skill. But the final identification of the seer with the thing seen is not his and what he gives us is respectable writing for the theater. Or there is "Montmartre" by Pierre Frondaie (Belmont Theater). It is the story of a modern and thoroughly realistic lady of the camelias. Marie-Claire is what she has always been and wrecks her life on the unescapable level of her original character. The part is played with freshness and felicity in at least the lighter passages by Galina Kopernak, a young Russian actress who will, no doubt, be heard of on Broadway, and

produced with very agreeable pictorial effects by a cooperative group of actors whose efforts deserve the heartiest encouragement. But the final note of human authenticity is not here. Much is, again, well observed. But the groundwork is mechanical, not creative.

The spirit of the comic Muse of France, the Molièrian spirit of ultimate veracity and candor which Brieux caught once during his long and busy career, may best be savored and carried away as an inspiration and a touchstone by those who rightly hear and understand Yvette Guilbert. Her legends and her Baudelairian songs are grave and beautiful things. But listen to her song-recitations of "Pourquoi me bat mon mari?" or of "La Pauvre Innocente," and listen to her comments. "Nihil humanum!" Here are the sovereign sanity and tolerance, the raciness and wit and truthfulness and sober charm of the classical spirit of France. These qualities, so often distorted or obscured today, are revealed to us in "Amoureuse," in "Les Hanneçons," in the mind and art of Yvette Guilbert.

LUDWIG LEWISOHN

THE REPLY TO HERBERT HOOVER on Russian Relief PAXTON HIBBEN

Cap., F. A., R. C., Secretary of the American Embassy, Petrograd 1905-1906, fellow of the Royal and American Geographical Societies and Secretary of the Russian Commission of the Near East Relief.

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International Relations Section

Opening Germany's Books

WE give below, omitting a few introductory and closing remarks, the speech made by Dr. Walther Rathenau, German Minister for Industrial Reconstruction, at the Cannes Conference on January 12, after M. Briand and the French delegates had left:

Germany is determined, in its reparation payments, to go to the limits of her capacity. Germany has ever been a land of order; but Germany has gone through a lost war, through severe losses, and through a revolution. The abnormal conditions of living and of her finances, the consequence of those events, are felt by Germany herself most severely, and she wants to remove them. She does not want to demoralize the world's markets by underbidding. The two problems which Germany faces—payments abroad and restoration at home—are in conflict with each other. The case is like that of a ship-builder who tries to obtain the greatest power development and a minimum coal consumption at the same time. It is therefore difficult to say whether this or that payment represents an adequate and endurable achievement. But a sum must be found which is at once endurable and takes account of the economic position of the countries that are to receive it. We know that in your circles figures have been mentioned—500 millions as money payments and 1,450 as payments in kind, inclusive of occupation costs. I will take these figures as the basis of my calculations. If another sum, higher by 220 millions, should be adopted, the problem will become further aggravated and endangered.

I take up now Germany's payments. Germany is a land of wage-labor. She receives raw materials from abroad, works them up, and sells the manufactured products. The quantity of raw materials left in Germany at the close of the war was, with the exception of coal, inconsiderable. Potash, about which there has been much talk, is not very important. In addition to these there were very small quantities of copper and zinc. Of everything else that Germany needs for housing, clothing, and feeding her population, the greater part must be bought abroad. Germany must therefore pay cash for everything that she buys. She can only pay with the labor of her people's hands. It is therefore necessary that Germany shall have an active balance of foreign trade and payments. Our balance of trade is burdened at the start with a debit of 2,500 millions for foodstuffs and 2,500 millions for raw materials, not including manufactured products or luxuries. These latter are not of considerable volume; and they are bought for the most part not from a voluntary decision, but for the purpose of maintaining neighborly trade relations. Besides the sums mentioned we have now to meet payments of about 750 millions on foreign investments in Germany, whereas before the war we received 1,500 millions upon our investments abroad. The debit side of the balance of payments amounts therefore to 5,750 million gold marks; over against which there are exports of 3,500 million to 4,000 million marks. There arises thus a debit balance of 2,000 millions even before making any reparation payments whatever. (Answering a question by Lloyd George:) It is quite true that, in consequence of the changed price basis in the world, Germany's exports would have to reach 14,000 to 15,000 million gold marks to make them correspond to the level before the war; they have therefore been reduced to one-fourth.

There are only three possibilities for covering the deficit in the payment balance: Selling the substance of the country, large foreign loans, or selling the country's currency. The sale of the country's substance (property) we were unfortunately not able to prevent. It has taken place on a large scale; lands, businesses, stocks, bonds, even household furniture have been bought below their value by foreigners.

The flotation of a foreign loan was tried by us, but it was impossible because the burdens imposed upon Germany were, in the opinion of the City (of London), too heavy. Under these circumstances it was impossible to avoid the sale of our currency, notwithstanding the fact that our money became thereby an object of international speculation. The process of selling out Germany's money went on at first without panicky results till about the middle of 1921. It was not encouraged by Germany, but was inaugurated abroad, where the intrinsic value of the mark was rightly regarded as higher than the foreign quotations. But at the middle of 1921 something happened that was to be foreseen—the strike of buyers of the mark. At the moment when it was seen that we were compelled to get together within a short time-limit one billion gold marks, which meant the sale of 30 billion of paper marks, the buyers of marks put their hands in their pockets and waited. Thus occurred the déroute of the mark, and the dollar rose from 157 marks to 300 marks for a time.

It has been said both in Germany and abroad that this collapse of the mark was only the consequence of inflation and the use of the note press. That is a mistake. Otherwise this fall could not have occurred so suddenly and in so short a time. Moreover, the quotation improved considerably as soon as a bit of blue sky was seen. That blue sky was the news about the conferences between the British and French governments regarding an arrangement of our obligations for 1922.

And now I come to an extremely important point. As long as the currency of a country has no stability in international markets it is impossible to keep any kind of budget in order for a definite period; for every new fall of exchange abroad causes an increase of expenditures for salaries, wages, and raw materials. The budget of a state, however, consists of only these three items. At this moment our budget is in order; it even shows a certain surplus, when reparation payments are not taken account of. Every fall of the mark, however, every advance of domestic prices, will endanger this budget. . . .

What means are at hand now for restoring sound conditions? How can Germany's currency ever be restored to its normal value? One remedial measure might be seen in a reduction of consumption. But this is scarcely feasible, inasmuch as our middle classes and workingmen are living far below the pre-war standard. The only prospect therefore is to increase production and our exports. Such an increase, however, is difficult because other countries are protecting themselves against increased imports from Germany. It only remains to increase agricultural production, but that takes time owing to the reduced productivity of the soil caused by the war.

I will now speak in detail of the burdens resting upon Germany. For 1922 the budget amounts to eighty-five billions, exclusive of reparations and other payments under the peace treaty. In order to balance this burden it was necessary to double taxation. I shall not speak here on the very important subject of comparative tax burdens; we have prepared data and place them at your disposal. I am prepared to prove that henceforth the German bears a heavier burden than the citizen of any other country, especially the Englishman or the Frenchman. In order to put our public finances upon a sound basis, it will be necessary to make our national business undertakings—the railways, post, and telegraphs—show a satisfactory balance sheet. Measures have been taken to make these undertakings balance in 1922. Moreover, the next thing is to get rid of the subsidies which had to be granted hitherto for social reasons for cheapening food. I shall not go into the details. Measures have been inaugurated for gradually extinguishing these subsidies. A third question regarding the German budget has reference to the price of coal. This price is approaching very rapidly the world's market price. As soon as the price of the dollar further declines the German coal prices will exceed the world's market prices. . . .