

Mr. Galsworthy's Plays

Plays. Fourth Series. A Bit o' Love; The Foundations; The Skin Game, by John Galsworthy. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.

THE three plays here gathered together illustrate well the imperfectly mingled ingredients of Mr. Galsworthy's temperament. To the reader who revolts against the rather sickly sentiment of the first of them and who has smiled half-heartedly at the forced comedy, in which the same sentiment still appears, in the second, the virility and grasp of the third comes as a tonic. Michael Strangway, a poor curate, is the protagonist of *A Bit o' Love*. He has taken Saint Francis of Assisi as his model in life and like him he pours warm and unreasoning love upon all things around him: upon the birds and flowers and children; upon the dull-minded scandal-loving villagers; and upon his own beautiful wife who, finding the air in which he breathes too rare for her earthly spirit, has abandoned him to live with her paramour. After a brief struggle with himself he heeds her plea not to ruin the career of her lover by bringing suit against her for divorce. The villagers, being ordinary folk, do not comprehend the love that inspires this apparently cowardly resignation; and Strangway is hissed and jeered. In a final scene in which various stale theatrical devices are employed, Strangway's despair brings him close to suicide, but in the end he is on the road to comfort through loyalty to his ideal. The "average man," sympathizing somewhat with the villagers' point of view, will find the little drama flabby and wishy-washy. Mr. Galsworthy would reply that it is against this average opinion that he protests.

The *Foundations*, first produced during the war, reaches forward to the coming struggle between Capital and Labor, a problem of immense seriousness towards the solution of which no advance can be made by rather pointlessly humorous treatment even when that humor is tinged with the characteristic Galsworthian fraternalism. A harangue to a revolutionary-minded crowd by a little blighter of a plumber saves Lord William Dromondy (or Dromedary, as the blighter calls him) from having his residence plundered, for the orator tells the mob of the sandwiches and wine which Lord William's footmen are about to serve them and of the ten bob a week promised by him to the plumber's mother, an aged sweat-shop worker. This opportune speech saves the situation; but what about Lord William's numerous fellows of a less philanthropic turn of mind? And what if the Reds (so-called) do not consent to be so cheaply bought off?

After this poor stuff, *The Skin Game* (now playing, by the way, in London) brings us back to the best abilities of Galsworthy, the dramatist. Recalling in a way Gissing's *Demos*, it represents the clash between a family of the landed gentry and a new-rich manufacturer who is invading the district with his smoke-vomiting landscape-ruining chimneys. The refined instincts of Hillcrist, the country squire, protest feebly against the snobbishness of his wife; the better breeding of the manufacturer's son protests unavailingly against the vulgarity of his father. But the rivalry comes to a head in a tense and excellently devised scene in which the two men bid against each other for a parcel of land adjoining the squire's estate. New wealth triumphs over old blood; but having touched pitch the hands of the aristocrats are defiled and the squire consents reluctantly to the particularly detestable species of black-mail whereby his wife succeeds in driving the odi-

ous intruders away from the entire district. The triumph is empty and Hillcrist's last words are: "When we began this fight, we had clean hands—are they clean now? What's gentility worth if it can't stand fire?" The play has not the intense appeal that makes *Strife* and *Justice* illustrious in the contemporary drama; but in the theme there is genuinely dramatic conflict and the interest is sustained by mastery of stage-craft, by convincing dialogue, and by strong clear-cut well differentiated characterization.

S. C. C.

Limbo

Limbo, by Aldous Huxley. New York: George H. Doran Company.

MR. ALDOUS HUXLEY, a new and extremely prepossessing English writer, has just been introduced to America with two volumes, *Limbo*, a collection of prose sketches written in a vein that is, to say the least, individual, and *Leda and Other Poems*, containing verse that smacks mightily of Mr. T. S. Eliot, and yet has an intriguing appeal quite its own. It was, I believe, in 1916 that Mr. Huxley's first book, *The Burning Wheel*, was published. A slender volume of verse, bound in paper covers and forming a link in Blackwell's *Adventurers All Series*, it hardly awakened more than a passing curiosity. But there was more in it than dexterous rhyming. The influence of Jules Laforgue was faintly manifesting itself; a precocious sophistication made itself dimly evident. Mr. Huxley has progressed as a poet since those days.

But it is the prose of Mr. Huxley that has suddenly projected him into the English periodicals and induced an American publisher to bring him out over here. The seven pieces that make up the book (not all of them may be defined by the term "stories") form a delectable ensemble. Mr. Huxley possesses the insolence of youth and a sprightly sophistication that can hardly be called disillusioned, although it approaches cynicism with frequency. It is a fastidious cynicism, though. If he suggests the pessimist at times we may be very sure that it is not the false pessimism of youth. He does not fly to extremes. He has not suddenly discovered that art is short and time is fleeting or that there are more people in the world intent upon bread and cheese than lyrics and lilies. Mr. Huxley is well-bred, without suggesting it. He is debonair without any flamboyant swash-buckling. He is precise in his prose and irresistible with his epigrams. Above all, he is the City. It is the sophistication of Hyde Park that he emanates.

So I come to the one English writer with whom he appears to have a certain kinship. Behind the pages of *Limbo* (at least for me) glimmers the nonchalant phantom of Max Beerbohm. The incomparable Max, a trifle weary, yawning a bit obviously, swings a gallant cane behind the *Farcical History of Richard Greenow and Happily Ever After*. He even appears, perhaps, a trifle more poetical than his wont, in *Cynthia* and *The Bookshop*. This may be doing a grave injustice to both Max Beerbohm and Mr. Huxley, and perhaps it is wise to insist that I am not attempting to postulate that the younger writer is at all aping his elders. It is merely a kinship of mood, a likeness of general attributes. The *Farcical History of Richard Greenow* might have fitted into Max Beerbohm's *Seven Men* without disordering that adorable volume in the least, but it is equally native to *Limbo*. Both writers



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