

After the Play

THERE is no harm that I know of in dividing people into those who grow purely glorious when they take their seats after the play has started, and those others from whose glory—although they too may taste a pleasure in their conspicuousness, in the demonstrated lateness of their dinner hour, in the privilege of discommoding a few inferior strangers—the curse is partly removed by a sense of shame. How innocent and how untainted, on the other hand, is the satisfaction of arriving—unremarked in a darkened house—late at a movie melodrama! How intellectual the joy of trying to overcome one's handicap and to catch up with the plot!

The other afternoon, when we arrived at a Third Avenue movie too late for the beginning of *The Pagan God*, the words on the screen told us that meanwhile the great Mongolian tide was flowing on and on. Clearly not, as the pictures almost at once revealed, a tide too full for sound or foam. On the contrary. Somewhere in China a conspiracy was hatching, a rebellion was being fomented, innate distrust of the Foreign Devils was being stimulated, intensified, directed, disciplined. The arch-fomenters were two—Tai, a young woman of great personal and political charm, an aggressive and dominant personality, the Scion—I think—of a Noble House; and a young man, the Scion of Another Noble House, in love with Tai. Let us call him, since his name has escaped me, *The Rival*. If the rebellion should succeed Tai would rule a vast Mongolian Empire. She would need a Consort. Together they would doom to death all the intruding Foreign Devils, whom already a sinister and inscrutable and minacious hatred was beginning to circumscribe.

But stay! There is one Foreign Devil who in the eyes of one of these arch-conspirators is a Foreign Angel, and no hair of whose head she would suffer her followers to hurt. Tai loves Winship, whom she has persuaded to enter her service, and who is drilling young Chinamen against the day when the best rebel in the ranks will be he who shoots straightest. Winship does not love Tai. He loves Beryl, daughter of the Collector of Chinese Antiquities. Then why did he enter Tai's service? Why is he working for the rebel cause? Why has he, a white man, enrolled himself with those who plan to slaughter his race? Reader, you have guessed the truth. Winship is a spy. It is to spy out the rebellion, to nip it in the bud, to save his race, that he deserts a minor post, under a white chief. Months ago—we see it all in Winship's memory picture—a High Official in his own country offered him dangerous work in China. To this offer of certain danger, probable dishonor and possible death, Winship replied, in words so nobly simple that perhaps you and I have sometimes imagined ourselves uttering them, "When do I start?" The High Official had not finished. Winship might have to sever the dearest ties of affection, to act like a cad and a renegade. "When do I start?" If he got caught his Government would be forced to disown him, to leave him unprotected, to toss him to the raging wolves. "When do I start?"

Clearly a young man to put one's money on? So say we all, all except Beryl. This unsophisticated young woman, as soon as Winship announces his determination to enter Tai's service, fails him. She returns his engagement ring. Ah, Beryl, Beryl, how could you? Have you not learned, at the play or from novels, that a young fellow-countryman, a vision of manly beauty, who combines an apparent frankness about his plans with a blend of cynicism

and reticence about his motives, may be—must be—secretly motives of the highest known class? Yet you are not content to fail him once. You fail him a second time. Later, up-country, just after he has saved your life and your father's, and you are almost ready to let Winship give you that engagement ring again, and Tai, the all-seeing, essays to muss things up by more or less undressing and then strolling, illicitly at ease, into the room where you and Winship are, do you not leap to the conclusion that Tai is Winship's—no, I cannot utter the ugly word. It is not uttered in *The Pagan God*. But I ask myself, bitterly, why the purest young thing in sight can always be trusted to infer the worst, without inquiry?

How different the metal of which Tai is made! She loves, and loves hard, but she does not forget that she has a public service, from her point of view, to perform. When *The Rival* frames up Winship, accuses him of stealing a small portable Buddha, on a scroll within which the names of all the main conspirators are inscribed, Tai is visibly torn by conflicting emotions. The Rival threatens her with disaster to their rebellion unless she says that Winship stole the Buddha, unless she leaves him to his fate. And Tai, after an agonizing struggle between Love and Duty, does *The Rival's* bidding. This woman's Public Spirit, made of iron, enters the furnace of her Love, is tried there, and comes out steel. This is my idea of a noble character, with flint in it.

It is either not Winship's idea of a noble character or not his idea of marriagable young womanhood. He shoots *The Rival*, the rebellion collapses, Tai kills herself. In a garden, not too grossly lighted, Winship and Beryl renew their engagement, and a sense of flatness and desolation goes with me out of the theatre. Is it true that any young white girl, however insipid and suspicious, is to be preferred, by any young white man, before a creature so full of life and plans as Tai, so ambitious, conspiratorial, active-minded and public-spirited? I cannot believe such a rule is universally true, cannot look upon such an ending as 100 per cent happy.

How can we be certain that Winship and Tai, as Queen and Consort, might not in their vast Mongolian Empire have fleeted the time as carelessly as they did in the golden world, and as innocently? Under his influence she would have turned from opium to tea. Together they would have visited beautiful places, the Western Lake, the Yellow Springs. Together they would have journeyed to the K'un-lun range, looking for the Western Mother's Court. Listening together, albeit a little against custom, and hearing nothing but the altar-bell, they would have sought Dhyâna in some hill monastery. They would have drunk Lan-ling wine together, with borage in it. Taught by her, his senses would have been refined. Not so acutely as the Chinese hear and see, but more acutely than ever before, more acutely than all but a few occidentals, Winship would have found a growing and discriminating pleasure in sights and sounds. The mango-bird's long scream, the rain dropping from tall bamboos, shadow-patterns on the jasper terrace, the winter-plum in blossom—Tai would have taught his heart to discriminate impressions such as these. Little by little she would have given him a heart that watches and receives.

And even suppose Tai had not kept her oath—the one she swore when he promised, meaning to break his promise, to be her true and lawful Consort—suppose she had broken it and killed a few foreigners now and then? Are we never to have a hero who can live happily in sin?

Q. K.

The Surplus Woman

The Lost Girl, by D. H. Lawrence. New York: Thomas Seltzer.

SO far as love is concerned, especially sex love, our novelists may be compared to astrologers. They are handling a theme elevated by sentiment and idealism and inwound with egoism, and it seems practically impossible for them to do anything with the theme except to coddle it. They speak of an undifferentiated thing called "love" as if the word had a clear meaning; and naturally the word soaks up the color with which each reader is saturated. If there is a profound contradiction between the writer's intention and the reader's susceptibility, the reader finds that his own color won't soak, and he says he "doesn't like" the writer. But this sort of acceptance or rejection is fortuitous.

We must soon or late see the relativity of this word love, which has millions of meanings, and we must narrow the field of misconception by enlarging our vocabulary. The same word cannot intelligibly be used to cover the relations of Romeo and Juliet, Anthony and Cleopatra, Hamlet's mother and Hamlet's father, Hamlet's mother and Hamlet's uncle. When an enlarged and refined vocabulary is worked out in these matters, and a new word, for example, is found for such an experienced re-arrangement as the union of Hamlet's mother and Hamlet's uncle, the priggishness of a person like Hamlet in holding up the second choice in contrast to the first will be properly revealed. A great part of contemporary social hypocrisy in England and America is due to the implication that marriage, an arrangement largely social, is always or even usually accommodated to the variegations and necessities of love. Whatever kind of insurgence and responsiveness one means by love, it has its own laws regardless of the imperiousness of marriage; and on the far-famed continent of Europe the imperiousness of marriage has gradually been reduced both by males and females to something that suits the human disposition rather better than a strait waistcoat. The well-fed youth of England and America, incidentally, are at the present time experimenting with love in a fashion that the elder astrologers think is terrific. Perhaps it is terrific. But a generation that gave five or six out of the seven million killed in the war cannot be expected to live according to the maxims of Martin Tupper and Queen Victoria. A totally new conception of marriage and love might so be devised that we should lose all our old notions in gaining a definite understanding of what our tolerable cravings and yearnings and aspirings really are.

A novel like *The Lost Girl* is a direct incitement to these observations. For Lawrence, with certain limits, is a peculiarly unsentimental or anti-sentimental artist in the field where sentiment does preclude understanding. I do not really like most of the little I have read of Lawrence. In his report of people and their relations to one another he is extremely intense and sinewy, and he leaves out all the nice, easy, pleasant, inconsequential passages that do relieve the tension and relax the sinews. Lawrence seems to me to be always wrestling inside, and yet to have painful and distressing adhesions. He seems to me to be angular, acrid and heroic. His people always appear to need each other badly, and to miss each other by inches, and to manage life as if they were staggering blindfolded through a crazy Virginia reel. But with this slight accent on Mr. Lawrence's apparent proclivity for unhappiness and his insistence on human aberrance, it must

in substance, fascinating in background and powerful in its discernments.

The "lost girl," Alvina, is plumped down in that sour England of which *Clayhanger* and *The Mummer's Wife* have spoken—an England with which D. H. Lawrence is rather impatient. He traces the decline of the Manchester House, owned by Alvina's father, with a kind of contemptuous resentment, and yet he does not altogether deride the man responsible for it. James Houghton is a thin-spun elegant dreamer who tried to impose "robes" and fine silks on the barbarous mining town of Woodhouse. In his transition from his grand shop to half a shop remaining from the tailor and haberdasher, and later quarter of a shop remaining from the grocer, he has the presence and aid of a capable forceful woman, Miss Frost, and a deep shock-absorber, Miss Pinnegar, and his fine-grained daughter Alvina. Houghton's wife is simply his emotional pensioner, retired forever to an invalidic room over the shop. On his way down in the world he dreams wilder and wilder dreams—until he winds up with most of his resources in a cinema theatre, with Alvina playing the piano and a plump little American as manager, especially interested in clinging to the legitimacies of intermittent vaudeville.

Alvina's nature is illustrated both by her surprising excursion to become a maternity nurse in London, (where the doctors pinch her haunches, as doctors are always supposed to, in maternity hospitals), and her surprising return to the quiescence and inertia of her home town. In this town, where her father is too elegant and too unsuccessful to be in any given social set, she has practically no chance to meet marriageable men. But in a mild way she dangles an Australian, a returned South African and even the American. The man home from South Africa, with a wooden soul, she almost takes. "For the fear of being an old maid, the fear of her own virginity, was really gaining on Alvina. There was a terrible sombre futility, nothingness, in Manchester House." But deadly as her panic is, "all Alvina's desperate and profligate schemes and ideas fell to nought before the inexorable in her nature. And the inexorable in her nature was highly exclusive and selective, an inevitable negation of looseness or prostitution. Hence men were afraid of her—of her power, once they had committed themselves."

But Alvina loses herself. To the cinema theatre comes a foreign troupe of interesting youths under a clever Frenchwoman, and one of these youths is an inscrutable Italian with yellow eyes. Mr. Lawrence is old-fashioned in his portrayal of this youth's silent romantic charm. Ciccio is perilously near a standardized product of romance with his black-set, tawny eyes, his powerful body, his derisive smile, his heavy mesmeric influence. But Alvina beholds in him "the sphinx, and she between its paws." He is a despised foreigner, among these northern industrial people. He is cheap and over-dressed and strange. But she finds him dark and insidious and bewitching. With only a glance from him, and with his peasant muteness to mystify and benumb her, she submits herself to him—"she felt extinguished."

When it is certain that there is no money, no fortune, with her, Ciccio does not want particularly to marry her, and she leaves the troupe abruptly to find a happy security in an appointment as a nurse. But before she consummates her engagement to the resonant benevolent tiresome Scotch doctor, Ciccio turns up with his desire to marry her mani-