

After the Play

HAVING read Mr. Sidney Howard on the tremendous drama of modern labor, I went with real respect to see his poetic drama called *Swords*, now playing at the National Theatre. That *Swords* was not realism seemed to me, on the whole, alluring. A "costume" play, as people call it (forgetting that even bedroom plays are frequently costumed) is, in itself, an excellent medium. By leaving the present a dramatist drops the harness of actuality and on that very account is often enabled to release his audience's imagination under circumstances which favor rather than distract the heart in its pursuit of unity and beauty. Over our own time the light is clear, but likely to be too hard. With times set in the distance there is the compactness and comprehensiveness of distance. The Past, as the drama will never cease to prove, is the friend of effectiveness, of form.

But it is not self-acting. By flinging away the restraint of actuality, by taking on the picturesqueness of something not dulled by use and wont, a dramatist cannot thereby assume to succeed. He cannot do without intuition, without a knowledge of life and character, without dramatic surprise and imaginative sympathy. The picturesque is not in itself kinetic. In the lion's skin of the historic it still needs a lion to roar.

This, I regret to say, seemed to me doubly true after seeing *Swords*. One renews one's acquaintance with the literary moon, the lily in the field of night. One learns again that in an exalted hour people's feet are "on the mountains." One is told of emotions that are like "sea-gulls dancing on the waves." Breasts, hair, swords, stars, the Virgin Mary, and all sorts of other properties that go to make up romance according to the standards of the college English Course—these one gathers are still in vogue among the more expressive and romantic. But of the poetry that inheres in men and women or even in ideal emotions personally and authentically conceived—there is nothing measurable. One finds oneself in the whispering gallery of other men's visions, passions and dreams.

And the echoes are indecently fresh. Mr. Howard follows *The Jest*. If an Italian's brilliant sadism could blossom out in Mr. Sheldon's purple blotches of speech, why shouldn't Mr. Howard also spout? "I'll suck the occasion dry of what it holds." Exactly so. And if Mr. John Barrymore is out of reach, how about Mr. José Ruben to give us the pangs of cruelty? And if the intensity of the Barrymores did wonders, why not the imaginative dignity and superior air of Miss Eames? Robert Edmond Jones, fortunately, is available for both, the finest stylist in designing and producing American plays. These things, with at the end the villain's death instead of the heroine's rape, almost establish a school of sword-plays, served with poetic culture.

But, is it enough to combine with tinsel words a rhetorical anecdote of lust? Canetto (Mr. Ruben) tells us he is the villain. He wears mustard-colored tights, very sinister, and a black jumper and a cloak of smouldering red. He smells of villainy long before he opens the trap-door and sees—God help us—the rack. (Not the hat-rack but the rack on which he is to have the heroine's husband disjoined.) He is very wicked, Canetto. He faithfully serves his Master, Ugolino, while repeatedly assuring us he is malignant. From Ugolino he learns about the beautiful Fiamma (Miss Eames) who is prisoner in the old castle at which we see him arriving. "Why did you not tell me

she is beau-ti-ful?" You smell a rat? The rat is Canetto. He is embittered because a jongleur is not taken sufficiently seriously and therefore has the inferiority complex. Here he is in the castle where Fiamma is hostage, and he is about to breathe love on Fiamma in a way that almost sings her flesh.

"All must be clear as fine French glass." That is one of Mr. Sidney Howard's Tudor Reproduction lines. To make all clear is difficult, but imagine, at any rate, a great gray tower castle on an island, seen on the inside, two flights of steps at the back, the one to the left going up to a blue-sky arch that opens above the sea, the one to the right going up to the heavy door that leads to Fiamma's apartment. On the floor level a stone banquet table to the right, the rest of the floor merely an empty reception hall. Here the soldiers enter, the peasants and fishermen throng, the rescuers and defenders struggle, the Papal Nuncio stalks, the hooded priest appears (Fiamma's husband in disguise). It is unnecessary to comprehend or motivate or sympathize in any way with anything except the position of Fiamma as hostage, of Canetto as a devilish fellow determined to have her, and of Ugolino as an infatuated admirer of Fiamma but a mere blond Germanic boor.

Canetto starts out to gain Fiamma with a handicap in his favor. He has with him Fiamma's son, kidnapped from the father in Rome. He tells Ugolino that unless the beautiful Fiamma comes across, he'll reach her through the chee-ild. Of this diabolic plan he also informs Fiamma. He is in high spirits. He threatens or promises to "dance across the nations of the world." And he waves his arms, does innumerable exercises, and fills Fiamma with the kind of feeling that bachelors have when they see their first cockroach.

Into a play in which rescues, escapes, love-scenes, assault and battery, drunken sleep and human mutilation are hurriedly jumbled one can scarcely imagine that any sense of life could be imported. But that is to reckon without the acting profession. Mr. Ruben does everything with his hollow villain that the resounding drum-stick can do, while Miss Clare Eames manages to give to her part as Fiamma a degree of reality that is compelling. For some, I know, Miss Eames's restraint has no magic. She is described as chill and even prim. But on the occasion when I saw her—the sweltering matinee before Labor Day—her "primness" seemed to me to be that of a singularly expressive actress who declines to rant. She is an actress for tragedy, possibly, and possibly for parts in which there is a touch of wintriness or at least not the flashing fruitfulness of July. Her style in repose is sometimes stilly and formal, like a da Vinci painting. But there is in her the secret fire of imaginativeness, in this case the ability to convey a woman destined for high ends, cast in a noble mould. In Ibsen, I believe, one could properly measure the range and depth of her gifts, and I am certain those gifts are rare. At any rate, her icy splendor almost redeems *Swords*.

But *Swords* is not to be redeemed. Not all the visual glorifications of Mr. Jones nor all the passionate zeal of the players can give to this text any relation to anything—except *The Jest*. It is a juvenile exercise, and one which it was a pure gamble to produce. It is bound by its very pretentiousness and fustian to impress many people. At the name of Poetry every knee shall bend. But it is the outcome of pseudo-culture and is as futile as are swords themselves.

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A New World

Problems of a New World, by J. A. Hobson. New York: The Macmillan Co.

TO the historian of the future one of the most incredible facts about the war will be its surprise. He will see the forces making for it, the rise of nationalism, the combinations of capital, the extension of imperialistic ambition absorbing the world into possessions and spheres of influence, above all he will note the massive preparations for combat in alliances and armaments, and he will wonder how to reasonable beings looking before and after, the war could be anything but an expected example of the elementary relation of cause and effect. It will be difficult for him to perceive that it was precisely because of trust in reason that this relation was ignored, because of the scientific forecast of the universal and all-devouring character of modern war and of the illusory nature of victory that men somehow believed even when they were marching directly into collision that they would yet avoid the battle. With the warning fresh before us of the futility of reason to ward off evils which it can foresee, it would be rash to prophesy that the great war is the last; and yet the hope persists, and it derives its force from the knowledge of the economic causes of war, the realization of the relation between social phenomena and war, and the critical examination of the war mind, all of which have become subjects of wide discussion in the last years. Whereas before 1914 the intellect of the world was as regards such matters in an infant department of a Sunday School, with only a small adult class in theory taught by Mr. Norman Angell, at present there are scores of graduate teachers, with the war itself as clinic and laboratory. Of the elementary, and it may be hoped, popular textbooks, Mr. Hobson's *Problems of a New World* is one of the most comprehensive and lucid presentations of the subject.

Mr. Hobson begins by making a psycho-analysis of the war. He traces its origin to "perverted Nationalism and Capitalism, in their joint reactions upon foreign relations," and shows the feebleness of the safeguards in economic internationalism and democracy on which liberal and humane opinion had relied to prevent the catastrophe. He sets forth the symptoms of "the break-up of the Great Peace," in class war, and sex war, in the glorification of force in art and literature, in the decline of religious and moral sanctions in ethics and politics. Coming to the war itself he explains as a necessary condition of its carrying on, the submergence of the individual in the herd and with unsparing analysis he establishes the characteristics of the herd mind, its vain glory, credulity, intolerance, in which press, school, pulpit, and court lost their valid claim to leadership and control. He explores with penetrating exegesis the mysteries of that idealism on the part of politicians like Mr. Wilson and Mr. Lloyd George, and on the part of the peoples whom they misled, which will constitute for the future the great comic theme in the tragedy. He finds the Treaties of Versailles "one elaborate travesty of this war idealism," and the League of Nations a supreme masterpiece of burlesque. He draws an indictment of our generation which no one whose mind is not closed to reason, whose heart is not hardened to remorse, and whose conscience is not dead, can read without bitter shame. All the more because Mr. Hobson's method is not denunciatory. He eschews even satire and irony. He writes in that great tradition of English persuasive eloquence which

goes back to Hooker, with winning gentleness, reasonableness, patience.

"For," he says, "unless you can bring home the charge to a man's own conscience you can achieve nothing in his reformation, and to bring a charge which is felt to be false and is actually false strengthens the self-defence which the accused makes at the bar of his own conscience."

The second half of Mr. Hobson's book if less convincing is the more important because it is a constructive study of society in which war may be avoided. "It was a shrewd instinct of self-defence," he remarks, "which led the Governments of the belligerent States to imprison men and women of the working classes who denounced 'a Capitalist War,' for property interests, capitalistic imperialism and the profitable control of industry are at the root of international conflict. The war, he holds rightly, may be the great object lesson needed to bring home to mankind the necessity of curbing the selfish possessive forces within the state, if the state is not to be used by them in the conquest of further possessions abroad. To this end "property must be shorn of industrial control, that is to say, it must no longer be an instrument of profit." With labor, including of course that labor which is directive, in control of industry, Mr. Hobson looks for such increase of production "as to enable a decently ordered society to secure the material necessities and comforts for all its members without imposing painful toil on anyone." The new technique of business organization, with the elimination of profit, will bring the markets of the world into free response to this increased productivity. For the revolution necessary to accomplish these changes Mr. Hobson looks not to the class war, nor to political activity of a labor or socialist party, but to a change in the attitude of the possessing classes themselves. Only by a large secession of the conservatives to the ranks of the reformers can the revolution be accomplished—a revolution by consent. To the lesson of the war, and to its prophecy of the extinction of civilization Mr. Hobson looks as one great motive for this change of heart; but he has faith also in "the voice of humanity and justice reaching the conscience and the reason through the wrappings of interest and custom." And he adds in words which are the very text of liberalism: "To further this liberation of ideas and sentiments in the more sensitive and mobile minds of the possessing and ruling classes should be a primary consideration in the tactics of the revolution."

One special danger Mr. Hobson sees, one alluring false turning which may lead man far from his goal. That is the temptation offered to capital and labor to combine in exploitation of the undeveloped regions of the world, of which the inhabitants, the so called backward peoples, may be made to bear the burden of gathering the raw materials and of the simpler industrial processes, while capital and labor may share in the profits of the finished product. This support of industrialism by a return to slavery is brought nearer to realization by the mandatory provisions of the League of Nations, with their imperfect measures for the protection of the people of the mandated regions and for the restraint of mandatory nations in assuming for themselves, by preferential tariffs and prices, the complete production of the mandated areas. For once, Mr. Hobson's indignation breaks out into oburgation:

This perversion of this great ideal of a League of Nations into a present instrument for autocratic and imperialistic government will rank in history as a treason