

## Rouge et Noir

*The Truth about Blayds, by A. A. Milne. The Booth Theatre, March 14, 1922.*

*Madame Pierre, adapted from Eugène Brieux's comedy, Les Hanneçons, by Arthur Hornblow, Jr. The Ritz Theatre, February 15, 1922.*

MR. NORMAN-BEL GEDDES has given *The Truth about Blayds* a remarkable setting, a high drawing-room in varied blues, almost sentimental but based on very solid and dignified architecture. And that is exactly what the life and the people there turn out to be, old Blayds himself especially, who is weak, sentimental but—as they say in the lines—with a quality. In this room the play begins well, a little slowly at the start but full of the promise of that comedy note that English dramatists know how to get, that sense of a rambling and secure philosophy, the flavor and background of a social point-of-view.

Blayds, nearing a hundred now and famous for two generations as a poet, is the centre of the living in this house. Every word of his is set down, the world revolves about him. And now it is this great man's birthday and the younger authors of England have sent to add their tribute to the rest. Then Blayds in his armchair is rolled into the room; and though, as a matter of fact, he is carried from that moment by Mr. Heggie's remarkable performance entirely out of the room and beyond the play, we can see from his lines that he is really a person, a charming, distinguished figure. Most of the tyranny, then, and the air of folly in the house springs from the minds of the others there. What a chance for comedy!

But, alas, at this point Isobel meets Mr. Royce who—conveyed himself by the dry quietude of Mr. Gilbert Emery's acting—has come to convey the salutations of England's younger authors to England's great poet. The two have met before, and Isobel had never wedded him because her father needed her. And now at last they stand face to face again. An ominous silence then, a sacred hush. And British sentiment quietly breaks loose in our midst. Not much at first, just a few reticent and sweetish odds and ends that are only slightly disconcerting. But a moment, however, and we see clearly that the two are on their way. Love knots get into their brains. The hedgerows and the May, the long years, the might-have-beens; from this on Aunt Isobel and Mr. Royce mean to talk drivel, you can see that. The play goes ahead, fine comedy material with delightful contriving. Old Blayds dies, and Isobel comes to tell the family the secret he has told her that last day. The poems were not all his, only that one failure of a volume in '63; they had been left by a friend who had been dead these many years and had willed the poems to Blayds. And here were the laurels; here was the family, distinguished on Blayds' account; here was the son-in-law—whose portrait Mr. Gottschalk does with such exquisite finish and irony—ready to out-Boswell Boswell over his great father-in-law; what a comedy now of evasion, people believing what they want to believe; inexhaustible stores of humor for Mr. Milne, and filled by him with delicious turns and crochets. And yet the while sweets to the sweet. Isobel and her romance will gum up the wheels from this on to the very end. The last word is to be hers. And in the meantime several hundred words are hers right there in the second act; words so bad, so shameless and so maudlin

that not even her earlier sweetness has prepared us for them; words that make us squirm for sheer embarrassment and wonder where to look. "I might have had a little girl to be my friend, and we could have had secrets together about my man, our man: we could have had secrets together about his dear, foolish, manlike ways. Ah, how we would have spoilt our man, my little girl and I. He asked me to marry him and I didn't. I sent him away. I said—" and so on and on and on, hands at the sides, penserosa, with the tremolo and the voix céleste always out. And finally, "Ah, how happy we could have made our man, my little girl and I." In the last act it gets worse, for then everything has got to be settled, love needs the whole floor. Mr. Royce stands and plays with the moment. He knows quite well that after a while he will take his hands out of his manlike quiet pockets and fold her to his breast. The woman he has loved is dead and lives now in this daughter, or the daughter lives in her, and both or whichever you like is Isobel now, will she come with him? But how can she? He must be playful. He introduces one woman to the other, he is as analytical as Hiawatha's mittens with the skinside inside outside and the furside outside inside; and he thinks quite seriously that she will be happy perhaps when the primroses are out and the birds are busy.

After that of course all is well. But this is the kind of thing, nevertheless, that teaches us to value the actor's self-control in getting such stuff said and done with. And it illustrates for us the kind of sentimental drivel that thrives in Great Britain! How full of ringlet curls it is, of sashes, and silly affectation! Saccharinity, avoidance of the point, diffused sex, and unordered intelligence! No wonder Continentals are puzzled by the London stage, by this willingness to falsify, to slip and slop inanities, to welter in treacle. I remember some of those nobly cynical and distinguished brains in London. What do they think of this? But whatever they may think, they have little to say about it. How much, I wonder, do they really mind? If a man's wife calls him Prince Charming twice in public, whose fault must it be?

On the other hand at the Ritz there was *Madame Pierre*, with Miss Estelle Winwood bringing to her part an astonishing flexibility and technical facility, a secure and careless sincerity, and an effect of wit that shot the rôle beyond Brieux himself very likely. And Mr. Roland Young, with the same wit and intelligence, technique and security, an encouragement to watch. In this play the professor, somewhere around forty, has a friend living with him, a little rascal who is a perpetual nuisance to him but without whom he is unable to exist. She cares nothing for his ferns. He cares less for her former friends. And so they fight it out, every day a battle. But they love each other nevertheless. It is always more and more difficult; Charlotte has nothing to do and nobody to see. Pierre is sick of her humors and her rows. Finally a grand upheaval about ferns, excursions and infidelity—Charlotte has been false to Pierre with an old friend of his, not because she loved the man but because he was so amusing, he could make a noise like a locomotive—and Charlotte departs. In the third act she pretends to drown herself; and Pierre, though he has rejoiced in his freedom, takes her back.

*Madame Pierre* was soon over; and for two reasons, I think. First, the last act was tedious more or less and uninventive, with Pierre boasting about and all of us knowing that Charlotte would return. The foreignness of the French mind was the other reason for the failure.

Here were two people proving what Flaubert said, that adultery has all the platitudes of marriage. And here the French point-of-view was saying that after all this is life; these two people have to take their medicine. They will exasperate each other with their ways they will torment each other with their mutual passion, till everything is balanced up, everything paid. Life will burlesque them in the end; they have already their scatter-brained and plaintive little tragedy. Mais non, alors, par exemple, what more can we ask?

I am afraid we ask a good deal more.

There was a picture in *Punch* once in which, in the midst of a naval engagement, smoke, unendurable heat, two stokers come up on deck for a breath of air, stripped to the waist; one says to the other, "Well, I think he ought 'o married her." So there we are; who is going to settle this business? Charlotte will suffer of course, for she is a pathetic little sketch with her powers of love and boredom. But when? How would it have been to have them secretly married all this time? Or to let her drown? Or repent and settle down and love the country, the ducks and Pierre's children? But Brioux never even so much as bothers himself to say that the poor child had never really had a chance. At this rate how will things wind up and wind up here now? Brioux and Miss Winwood and Mr. Young seem to have the idea that we might enjoy merely the sense of wit, of observation and dexterity, of the pitiful grotesque. No. Paris may be, as

Lucian said of Rome, a school for the resistance of temptation; but on one point in the theatre we stand firm: a thoughtful tragedy may be one thing, but at least we shall not be tempted to use our brains for amusement; let Paris turn thinking into a pleasure if it likes; for us it shall be sacred.

And so this play is withdrawn, and Pierre has his trouble left on his hands, as he no doubt deserves for living in Paris. How different from the home life of Aunt Isobel and Mr. Royce! They stand there at the last side by side, neat, contained and tender, introducing each other to the woman he once loved in her now and the woman he loves in her then, and won't one of them at least be his wife? And yes indeed, both of them will, if she may only say some more of those sad things; which he permits, though he gets rather the best of it, when he hits on the idea of the primroses and the busy little birds.

For this kind of thing there is nothing to do but to go back to your stateroom and lie down and close your eyes. But what is it, you may ask yourself, that makes Mr. Milne willing to spoil good comedy with such drivel as this? And what is it, what set of concessions, what clicks in the mind, what deep power in the theatre so shameful to exploit thus, what is it that makes intelligent people accept stuff in the theatre that they would not tolerate for a moment in a book or in a friend?

STARK YOUNG.

## C O R R E S P O N D E N C E

### A Letter from Ray Stannard Baker

**SIR:** I have just read in your issue of March 29th your editorial (and Mr. Lippmann's letter) commenting on my chapter in the *New York Times* of February 26th (not 28th) relating to Mr. Wilson's knowledge of the secret treaties before his arrival in Paris.

I agree with you fully as to the importance of this subject and that it "demands honest and careful consideration." I have spent a good deal of hard work on the original documents, examining the evidence in this matter, and I have endeavored, in the chapter referred to, to put down, as candidly as I could, what my findings were.

There are only two possible positions to be taken as to the President's knowledge of the secret treaties:

1. That he lied when he said to the Senate Committee that "the whole series of understandings" were disclosed to him for the first time when he reached Paris.

2. That he was, as he says, ignorant of them.

The entire implication of the *New Republic* in its editorial is that the first is correct: in short, that the President lied. I have arrived, from a considerable study of the matter, at the conclusion that the second is true: that he was ignorant of them. The long passage of explanation from my chapter quoted in your editorial comes as near as I can attain to accounting for this state of affairs. Admitting that the President knew of and detested the general practices of the old diplomacy, even that he may have heard in a general way of these particular agreements, I stand by the conclusion which the *New Republic* saw fit to italicize—"He never, until he reached Paris, enough appreciated the critical importance of these old entanglements to impel him to make a study of them or really know about them."

I base my conclusion first upon the positive evidence of President Wilson's statement, which I confess weighs heavily with me. In the course of a pretty intimate contact with the President during many months at Paris, under most difficult conditions, where he was tested and tried in the fire of the greatest crisis, I can say honestly that I came to have for him the pro-

foundest respect not merely as a truth-teller but as an aggressive truth-teller. And certainly, among all the multitudinous charges brought against the President in America, this of deliberate prevarication, I feel sure you will admit, has not been conspicuous.

But beyond this positive evidence I have a mass of negative evidence, which I have been at much pains to test out. Some of this evidence I set forth in the chapter you mention: but some of it which weighed heavily with me you do not quote. This is it:

"The profoundly important fact is that, among all the papers Mr. Wilson has so carefully preserved, there is no document giving any definite information concerning the secret treaties."

The text upon which you base your editorial is Mr. Lippmann's letter. With two of the three propositions of this letter—that Colonel House knew of these documents, and that Secretary Lansing also knew of one of them, at least—I not only agree, but have set the facts forth even more fully in my chapter than Mr. Lippmann does: but these do not prove that the President knew. There is the best evidence that Colonel House minimized the importance of the treaties at the time. He brushed aside Mr. Balfour's explanations, for he wished to do nothing that would interfere with Allied unity. This seems to have been also the attitude of the great part of the American press and the American people so far as any notice at all was taken of the secret treaties. The public mind was upon the war, and anything that might disturb with doubts the complete unity of the Allies was impatiently regarded. And I believe also, as I said in my chapter, that this ignorance and impatience was shared by most of our diplomatic service.

As to Mr. Lippmann's second premise, that "certain of these (the fourteen) points . . . are unintelligible without reference to the secret treaty between France and Russia," I have before me as I write the original memorandum of the Inquiry (in the preparation of which Mr. Lippmann himself had a part) which the President used in formulating the Fourteen Points. It contains the President's own notations on the margins. Neither this, nor any other memorandum from the Inquiry, or from Colonel