

The man who pays always wants to laugh, and he will laugh at the joke he understands.

On the other, and avengingly optimistic, hand, it may be said that rarely is the finer thing thrown away. Somewhere in the auditorium the subtlest shaft will find its mark. Provided their sympathies are won, the audience will vibrate to the highest spiritual strain. Galleries and stalls alike are elemental in praise of pat-

riotism, noble sacrifice, the eternal triumph of virtue over vice. Provided the drama's medium of expression is Homeric in simplicity, Shakespearean in luminosity, and human as life, the best will not be found too good for the audience.

With such a boundless reciprocity uniting the two worlds, how great the mutual responsibility!

*Marguerite Merington.*

## MAETERLINCK AND THE FORBIDDEN PLAY \*

French literature, just at present, is uncommonly full of surprises. Bourget, for the time being, has abandoned the higher strata of Parisian life, the milieu of the boudoir and the cercle, in order to chronicle the annals of a peasant family; Marcel Prévost has produced a novel adapted to the standards of a newly-established Young Person's Library; and, most unexpected of all, Maurice Maeterlinck has written a play possessing a clear-cut plot and an abundance of dramatic action. Hitherto Maeterlinck's plays have confessedly not been intended for stage production. Occasionally a talent of the first order, as recently that of Mrs. Patrick Campbell, has succeeded in throwing over such a play as *Pélleas et Mélisande* the glamour of an interesting and elusive personality; but such a success is a purely individual triumph, won quite independently of the qualities of the drama. As a matter of fact, Maeterlinck is too much of a dreamer; he thinks and lives too far outside of the beaten track of human life to be able to interpret that life so as to appeal to the average normal man or woman. From *L'Intruse* and *Les Aveugles* to *Aglaveine et Sélisette* there is scarcely a character which can be pronounced wholly human, in the sense that humanity is necessarily complex and many-sided. On the contrary, they are essentially simple in construction, frail little beings from the borderland of mystery, creatures of instinct

rather than of soul, and made to vibrate in response to a single note; some one of the basic primitive emotions, such as love or hate or envy, anxiety or terror. Terror especially is a dominant quality in all of Maeterlinck's plays. It might almost be called his fundamental note—and it is such an easy, simple note to strike. It needs but the suggestion of something happening behind closed doors or a curtained window; of men groping in the darkness of physical or moral blindness, or the hint of unseen presences in the air, the sound of beating wings in the wind, or the rain tapping with its fingers, "myriads of fingers," upon the pane, in order to convey a sense of vague, undefined dread. His very style heightens the effect—short, broken, panting sentences, full of the breathlessness of fear. In a measure, it is all trick-work, but of admirable cleverness, until its artificiality is betrayed in the light of a stage production. The very atmosphere of the plays, a stage-setting of legends, a sort of No-Man's-Land beyond the boundaries of time and space, loses half its glamour when interpreted in the naked reality of paint and canvas.

It has often been said that Maeterlinck was never really understood until his *Trésor des Humbles* came as a key to his methods of thought, a sort of commentary and interpretation of the ideas symbolised in his plays. Critics who had hitherto treated him with a more or less indulgent irony discovered in his philosophy an unexpected profundity. As a matter of fact, the qualities of his plays and his essays are singularly alike. In each sphere he is equally impracticable, equally outside of ordinary life. His

\*Monna Vanna. Pièce en trois actes. Paris: E. Fasquelle.

The Buried Temple. New York: Dodd, Mead and Company.

Sister Beatrice, and Adriane and Barbe Bleue. New York: Dodd, Mead and Company.

philosophy is essentially the philosophy of a dreamer and a poet. Lyric drama, lyric philosophy, lyric agnosticism,—through all that he writes one hears the vibrant note of the lyre. Take, for instance, *The Life of the Bee*, which embodies more direct observation of physical life than all the rest of his writings put together. It is just the sort of subject which should appeal to a nature like his; for bees, so far as we know them, are singularly like the personages in Maeterlinck's dramas, curious and interesting little symbols of patience and industry and heroism. Yet the book is far less a nature-book than it is a poem, a prose-poem of singular exaltation.

Equally lyric is *The Buried Temple*, the latest collection of Maeterlinck's essays. Its opening pages recall that early play, *Les Aveugles*, in which he showed a group of blind men groping pitiably in a cavern and seeking in vain for their guide, a priest, whose voice they no longer hear. And, finally, one of the old men stumbles over the body of the priest and finds that he is dead. The symbolism is sufficiently obvious: humanity as a whole is groping in the blindness of ignorance, and religion, hitherto our guide, is dead. That Maeterlinck's view-point is still essentially the same is shown at the very outset of his opening essay on "The Mystery of Justice," which is confessedly written "for those who do not believe in the existence of a unique, all-powerful, infallible Judge." The striking note of this essay and of those which follow is, that while frankly agnostic, they are, nevertheless, imbued with a spirit of optimism, a deep-rooted faith in the higher destiny of humanity. He teaches that there is a justice beyond the makeshift justice of courts and statutes—an absolute justice, unchanging and infallible. It is not the gift of an almighty, supreme power; nor does it reside in the forces of nature, which, so far as we know, is blind and indifferent to our needs. It resides in the heart of man; as firmly rooted and clearly defined in the heart of the veriest peasant as in that of the philosopher and sage. And so from thought to thought, from height to height, he carries us upward in a long, sweeping flight of poetry and elation and faith in human destiny, and it is only when the last page is turned and the

voice is still and the fire spent that we realise how much of it all is words, words, words, and how little remains that is a permanent inspiration. In the essay on "The Past" there is, for the time being, a glamour in the thought that our past, instead of being a lasting burden, was never more wholly in our power than it is to-day; that it "depends entirely on our present, and is constantly changing with it." It is only what we ourselves remember of our past that really counts, so Maeterlinck argues; what others remember is beyond our control, and should be beyond our concern. Our own memories of our past vary every day, and "the most immutable facts, that seemed to be graven forever on the stone and bronze of the past, will assume an entirely different aspect; will return to life and leap into movement, bringing us vaster and more courageous counsels, dragging memory aloft with them in the ascent; and what was once a mass of ruin becomes a populous city whereon the sun shines again." This is the way in which the author of the *Treasure of the Humble* cradles us in illusions, and inspires us with the intoxication of his fancies. Yet, when the effervescence of his style has spent itself the burden of the past returns, not one whit the lighter for all his subtle reasoning. In spite of Maeterlinck, we cannot disregard the records that we leave behind us in the memories of other men.

In an article which was not, as a whole, characterised by his usual sympathetic understanding, the French critic, René Doumic, said one thing that was profoundly true when he found Maeterlinck guilty of "the charming error of attempting to assimilate literature to music." Looked at from this point of view, the consistency of method, the essential oneness of all he writes, becomes apparent. *The Buried Temple* is like a symphony by a great composer. He has taken a theme, the theme of justice, and elaborates it, expanding and differentiating, and introducing countless variations—new movements, different subordinate themes, but always reverting, sooner or later, to the dominant leit-motiv. His early dramas, *L'Intruse* or *La Princesse Maleine*, suggest nothing so much as a succession of minor chords on a rare old violin evoked by a master hand; wierd,

plaintive chords that thrill the hearer with involuntary shivers and make the strings sob and wail in a sort of perverse ecstasy of dread. There is still something of this spirit discernible in the recent volume of plays, *Sister Beatrice* and *Adriane and Barbe Bleue*, which the author says are really librettos for which music is being prepared, and which Mr. Bernard Miall has cleverly translated with some interesting experiments in metre. For the purpose of criticism, these little plays may be placed in the group with Maeterlinck's earliest works. As a matter of curiosity, it would be interesting to know whether they were written recently, or, what is far more likely, were early experiments. In any case, they count for little in the author's literary development.

It is far otherwise with the recent tragedy, *Monna Vanna*, which achieved something very like a triumph at the Nouveau Théâtre on the 17th of last May. In it Maeterlinck is supposed to have vindicated his claim to the title of playwright. There can be no doubt that it is a radical advance upon anything that he has hitherto done in the field of dramatic art. It is only after one has studied the play for some time that the similarity of method, the little subtle resemblances to his earlier plays, begin to appear. There are many paradoxes in *Monna Vanna*. It is paradoxical in its principal motifs, since it aims to show a case where a husband is justified in consenting to his wife's dishonour, where a son is justified in calling down curses upon the father who stands ready to sacrifice his life for that son, and where a pure, true woman is justified in bearing false witness to her own shame. Above all, it is paradoxical in its pervading atmosphere; for although not a single improper action takes place during the whole three acts, and not a single phrase is uttered that in itself is objectionable, the whole effect is that of a play of startling audacity, one that it would be difficult to think of as being tolerated in an English-speaking country.

It is this quality of conveying certain ideas without either word or action that, more than anything else, gives *Monna Vanna* the hall-mark of Maeterlinck's manner. It is always the unspoken thought, the unseen action, that really counts in his plays. His characters al-

ways have the air of expressing but half their meaning; their thoughts are not with them on the stage before us, but elsewhere, perhaps just beyond the closed door at the back, perhaps over the mystic borderland between the spiritual and the real. This is a method which has given Maeterlinck many of his most striking effects, and never more so than in *Monna Vanna*. A brief analysis will make this apparent.

Pisa, besieged by Florence, is reduced to the last extremity. Her walls are crumbling, her ammunition spent, her soldiers exhausted, her women and children starving. Guido Colonna, the commanding officer, has sent his father to arrange terms of capitulation. The father returns, the bearer of tidings which, although they offer hope, he still hesitates to divulge. Prinzivalle, captain of the Florentine mercenaries, will spare the city; he will do more: he will send herds of cattle and sheep, wagons groaning beneath the weight of corn and wine, weapons and ammunition, to place Pisa forever beyond the power of Florence's envy. In exchange he makes but one condition. But this condition means a sorrow for Guido such as should not fall to the lot of man. He demands that Guido's wife, Vanna, shall come to his tent for a single night, clad only in her mantle. The aged father, Marco, dares not take the responsibility of a decision involving the fate of thirty thousand lives. He appeals to the Pisan signoria, and they in turn have left the decision to Vanna herself. Guido, furious, yet impotent, suffering tortures of shame and grief and wounded honour, is forced to yield, and Vanna reads her duty clear and agrees to the sacrifice.

Act II takes place in Prinzivalle's tent. A mercenary, a man without a country of his own, he has been betrayed by Florence, and avenges himself by betraying her in return to the Pisans. In naming his price he scarcely knows what his real intentions are. Years before, he has known Vanna, when they were both little more than children, and ever since he has cherished her memory in his heart. Vanna, closely wrapped in her black mantle, enters the tent, calm, courageous, taciturn. Little by little he makes himself known to her, awakens her slumbering memories, recalls her early

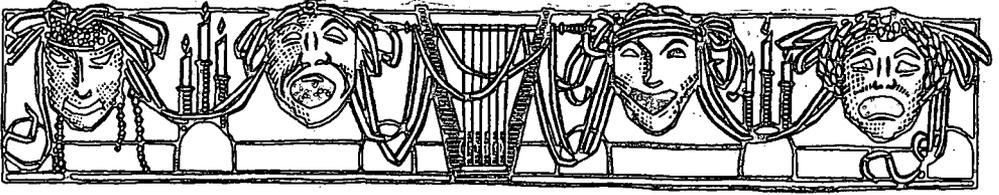
dreams of love, "those half-mad dreams that seem not meant for this human life of ours." And as they talk his wild, lawless purpose gives way to higher aims and motives. He has sent to Pisa the promised aid, the groaning loads of corn and of wine; he has fulfilled his half of the bargain; he releases her from hers. And Vanna, in a burst of recognition, insists that he shall return with her to Pisa to save him from the wrath of Florence. She herself is eager to return, to tell the glad news to Guido. It is part and parcel of Maeterlinck's method that throughout the act it is less what is happening before us that we have in mind than the vision present to the tortured imagination of the absent Guido.

Act III reverts again to Pisa. Guido, aged by the anguish of a single night, having by his inaction fulfilled his terms of the contract, is already planning vengeance. Vanna, heralded by the cheers and acclamations of the people she has saved, enters, followed by Prinzi-  
valle. But when she attempts to tell Guido the truth, that Prinzi-  
valle has spared her, that she returns as pure and inviolate as when she set forth the night before, Guido refuses to believe her. He insists upon the truth, the whole truth, every detail of the scene which his imagination has conjured up throughout the night. And Vanna, suddenly estranged by his lack of faith, and awakening to the knowledge that it is this generous stranger whom she loves rather than the husband who refuses to believe her word,—lies to save Prinzi-  
valle's life,—lies boldly and fully,—gives Guido the details he demands, the atrocious details

of what never took place. She avows that she has lured Prinzi-  
valle back with her in order to inflict a lingering death upon him, and demands as her reward that she alone shall have the keys of his jail. And here again, as the curtain falls, it is the unspoken thought which predominates, and we know that for Vanna, who holds the key of Prinzi-  
valle's prison, the sequel is not one of vengeance but of love.

Those who insist upon searching for symbols in Maeterlinck will have to look deeper than usual in *Monna Vanna*. In his earlier plays symbols are to be found at every turn of the page; they arise in be-  
lieves as thick as the swarms of bees he knows so well. In *Monna Vanna* they are more subtly concealed. There is still some of the familiar machinery of his earlier work,—his heroine still loses her ring, and other things besides, in limpid fountains. But these are trifles. To the reader who brings to *Monna Vanna* a mind still laden with memories of *The Buried Temple*, there is but one symbol, one motive, that counts, and that is the motive of justice. "On the one hand is reason, pity, justice; on the other, desire, passion, what you will;" and again: "Man, who means to be just, passes his whole life in sadly choosing between two or three unequal injustices." All things considered, it seems more reasonable to see in *Monna Vanna* a typical Maeterlinck play which by chance has approximated nearer than usual to the modern drama, than to see in it any indication of a permanent revolution in the literary methods of the author of *La Princesse Maleine*.  
*Frederic Taber Cooper.*





## A BALLADE OF THE REVIEWER

I've read critiques for many years,  
All in an easy-going way;  
The serious, that move to tears,  
The truly heartening and gay.  
And I have marvelled (as you may)  
That volumes come from every source  
Which bring this estimate in play:  
"His latest book's a *tour de force!*"

If faint praise damns, as it appears,  
To what does overpraise betray?  
'Twould seem that the reviewer fears  
Against bad writing to inveigh.  
One recently—to my dismay—  
A "maiden effort" to endorse,  
Wrote: "Here's an author come to stay;  
His *latest book's a tour de force!*"

A tale of travel in Algiers  
As prosy as the badger's grey;  
A "verse collection" hinting shears,  
A "sea romance" as dry as hay!  
Of politics a warped survey,  
A "Dissertation on Divorce"—  
I read of each in this array:  
"His latest book's a *tour de force!*"

Golf weather: Copy due to-day;  
None ready—but he plays, of course!  
Knowing 'twill be quite safe to say:  
"His latest book's a *tour de force!*"

Edward W. Barnard.

## FOUR BOOKS OF SOME IMPORTANCE

### I.

#### THE STORY OF THE MORMONS.\*

A recent anti-Mormon work was suggestive of a scene from the *Red-Cross Knight and the Dragon*: the "Mormon

\*The Story of the Mormons. From the Date of their Origin to the Year 1901. By William Alexander Linn. New York: The Macmillan Company.

Monster" appeared on the field, and piercing shrieks were raised to Heaven. It is a relief to turn from the lamentations of the sectarian and to take up a volume marked by uniform sanity and a modicum of irony. Mr. Linn's prefatory notices on the sources at his command gives initial proof of the critical value of his judgment. He relies in the main on original documents, and uses but sparingly books that either whitewash the sinners or