

more tawdry, and disgusting and cheap and unartistic than this, you had better write it—it will make a hit.

Of course I have written about the bad woman—one always does, but there was a good one. And I don't think one could sit that play through were it not for sweet little Mary Mannering, who comes in occasionally with the roses in her arms and roses in her cheeks, and youth in her pretty eyes to sweeten the air that the large odious Belle polluted. May the fates deal gently with Miss Mannering, leaving her youth and that smile always, "and send her many years of sunshine days."

And now for "The Conquerors," "Misfortunes come so fast that one doth tread upon another's heels. I will say for it that it is a brilliant piece. Its immorality is grosser, coarser, franker than that which dangles from "The Tree of Knowledge;" it is not so insidious and cloying and generally disgusting. The plays differ as a bad man and a bad woman differ. "The Conquerors" is much more shocking, but it does not poison so many things nor leave you so sick at heart as the fruit of the Tree. Its hero is a blackguard, but he is a frank blackguard and something of a man after all, a little bit like Kipling's "Love O' Women." The play is quite as brutal and barbarous as Titus Andronicus, wildly improbable and often grossly melodramatic, but it has a dash and glamour of its own and moves with tremendous energy except when the light opera choruses of peasants and village maidens intrude themselves. The local color, the echo of the Franco-Prussian war saves it, the military flavor, and all the "pomp and circumstance of glorious war."

There is no need to rehearse how Mr. Potter stole the plot of his piece from Sardou, from Maupassant and several others. Since all English plays borrow their material more or less from France, I fail to see why Mr. Potter should be blamed more severely than his contemporaries.

The first act is rather the best of the piece. It takes place in the castle de Grandpre in Britany. The German soldiers have quartered themselves in the castle. When the curtain rises one officer is banging at the piano, a second is polishing his pistols, a third is stretched out on the sofa. They are making themselves thoroughly at home. The hero, or rather the leading man of the play, is Eric von Rodenk, a sub-lieutenant, a man well born, the son of a hero, young, handsome, and most frankly a blackguard. In short, he is that figure always so inexplicable, yet obviously existing everywhere, a bad man whom everyone loves. He outrages every principle of army discipline and his superior officers would almost compromise themselves to protect him; he insults and bullies women, and they send their brothers out to be shot for his sake. He is an overgrown young savage, as deficient in manners as he is in morals, a cub who finds exquisite enjoyment in breaking furniture, smashing china and shooting the eyes out of the family portraits. He offers sacrilege to the church, violence to priests, indignities to women. He is handsome and he is not afraid of the devil himself. That is the best that can be said of him. Yet he is the most popular man in his regiment. Even in the theatre you grow fond of him and he has by no means his company manners on. The part could scarcely be played better than Mr. Faversham plays it. In New York they say it is the hit of his life. He has the face and physique for it. His face reminded me just a little of Joe Hawthorth's at times in its emotional mo-

bility and the trick of flushing violently under excitement. He plays the part with tremendous vigor, dash and fire. He fills it with boisterous virility. He throws into it a lavish vitality, he seems to be living at white heat, to be absolutely exhausting the possibilities of every minute, to drain the days and nights dry of their opportunities of revelry. Certainly Mr. Faversham has now established himself as one of the best, if not the best, leading men on our stage.

In the first act this young vandal brings in a troupe of Parisian dancing girls whom he has captured in their flight. During the dinner which follows, the officers and the nymphs become so boisterous that Yevonne de Grandpre, the daughter of the house, comes in to demand order. Eric, who is half intoxicated, cries that they will do as they please. Rising from his seat he cries: "We are the conquerors; your lands are ours, your houses are ours, your men are ours; yes, and you women are ours!"

At this Yevonne de Grandpre—Miss Viola Allen—dashes a glass of wine in his face. She does it magnificently, too, and the moment after it is done you can see that horrible weakness seize her which follows violence in women gently bred. One seldom sees as good a bit of work as that.

In the second act Yevonne is alone in an inn where she has gone to await her brother. Eric knows she is there and comes to take his vengeance. He discusses his plan with his comrades in the most cold blooded manner and takes no pains to choose his language. They tell him flatly that if he perpetrates his outrage they will never speak to him again, and leave him. He locks the doors and awaits Yevonne. The scene which follows is brutal, offensive, cold-blooded and not even dramatically effective. It is too long drawn out, and there is not even infatuation between the man and woman to condone it. It is simply a convulsion of brutal and cowardly hatred, the kind of thing that men punish by mob law. Finally the tears of the girl prevail and the man slinks out like the dog that he is. But even then Mr. Potter was not satisfied. A drunken peasant enters, and seizing Yevonne by the throat attempts to finish what Eric had begun. Eric hears her shrieks, returns and kills the peasant, leaving Yevonne unconscious. When she recovers she believes that Eric returned and fulfilled his threat, and that the peasant had lost his life in defense of her honor. This second assault can be called nothing but an anti-climax, and, as usual, what people rail at as immoral, is merely a sin against art. So long as a dramatic author is artistically true he is seldom morally false or revolting. Errors in ethics usually spring from faulty art. Immorality in art or in life, is simply bad taste.

The play from this act steadily declines. Mr. Potter pays the price of having outraged one's sensibilities.

In the third act, Yevonne takes her vengeance. Eric is sitting in the drawing room with her veil in his hands, wondering why he relented, why he, who had never feared anything before, had been afraid of this girl so entirely within his power. The only sound is the play of the fountain in the rear of the room. Miss Allen steals up behind him with a dagger—fancy Miss Allen with a dagger—and stabs him in the back. A pretty mess she makes of it. She only inflicts a flesh wound and the man begins to beg pitiously for water. Yevonne is unequal to the sight of his suffering. She runs to the fountain and their supports his head while she puts the water between his burning lips. As soon as she touches him an ancient miracle is

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wrought and hateful old nature laughs in her sleeve at the proud daughter of the Grandpres. She loves him. It is the old story of Edgar Saltus' Tristrem Varick over again.

The fourth act is the most improbable of all. Yevonne has hidden Eric in her own room so that her brother may not find and kill him. The Prussian guards surround the house and young Grandpre's only road to safety lies through the window of his sister's room. It is her lover or her brother, the brute whom she believes has outraged her; or the man who has protected and cherished her from childhood. She lies to her brother and sends him to his death, right out into the face of the picket guns. The fact that he is not killed softens the situation dramatically, but it does not affect the young lady's moral intentions. Of course there is an explanation between Eric and Yevonne and he goes out to retrieve his lost honor as a soldier.

Now Mr. Paul Potter may say that it is nature that is at fault, not he. That young men are frequently brutes and that young ladies frequently like them for being such, that women have sacrificed a noble brother to an unworthy lover before now. Mr. Wheelock, president of the Actor's Society, made very much the same argument to me the next morning. Very well, I don't dispute it, I only say that there are a number of things which actually occur which I don't care to see presented upon the stage, just as I don't care to see a surgical operation done there. It is all very well to handle such topics in literature, there the intellectual problem alone confronts you. But when the thing becomes a living and visible fact, when it is presented to you not by the entrancing language of a master, but by the actual bodies of living men and women, the effect is wholly different. The imagination is so easily outraged and deadened through the eye. Did Mr. Potter and Mr. Frohman but know it, they are cutting off their own heads. After the public taste becomes saturated and calloused by this sort of thing, do they expect it will still find anything stimulating in "Esmeralda" or "A Scrap of Paper?" Do they expect that the fine sentiment of "Romeo and Juliet" can appeal to senses dulled by such exhibitions? To a man

who drinks absinthe the nectar of the gods itself is flavorless. After one has smelled musk the odor of violets is not perceptible. If we see all the delicate distinctions of life trodden upon and outraged too often, we will no longer go to the theatre to see men and women die to defend them. Strike out the ten commandments from the canons of dramatic art and you have absolutely nothing left. Blot out the one fact of sacredness of the honor of woman and you have destroyed all artistic values, brought the whole structure of six thousand years of civilization crashing down about your head, leaving you naked and defenseless to the wrath of heaven as the brute who cowers before the thunder storm. You are Caliban on his island, you have reached chaos again. "Faust," "Othello," "La Dame Aux Camelias," "Tess of the d'Urbervilles" are meaningless, mere idle extravaganzas upon a mythical theme. That one principle is as necessary to art as to society, without it we have nothing—nothing! It is the poetry of life, the source of everything, the inspiration of everything, the goal of everything. In it lies all the triumph of the good, all the tragedy of evil. Abolish it, and the painter is without colors, the dramatist without contrasts, the poet without ideals. Art becomes as impossible as it was in decadent Rome. Let Mr. Potter and Mr. Frohman beware how they train their public, or they will soon have to turn the Empire theatre into an arena, and bull fights and gladiatorial shows and living pictures will be the only "productions" that will draw at audience.

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