

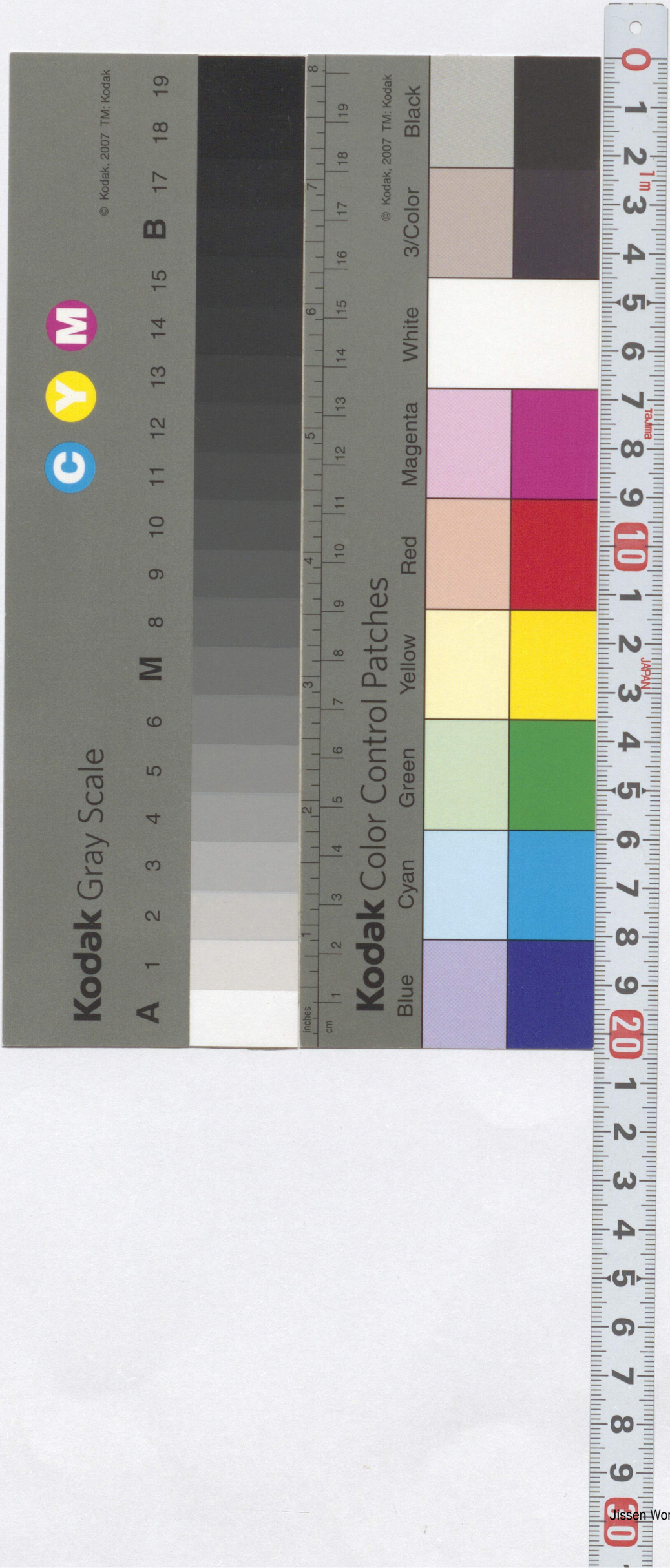


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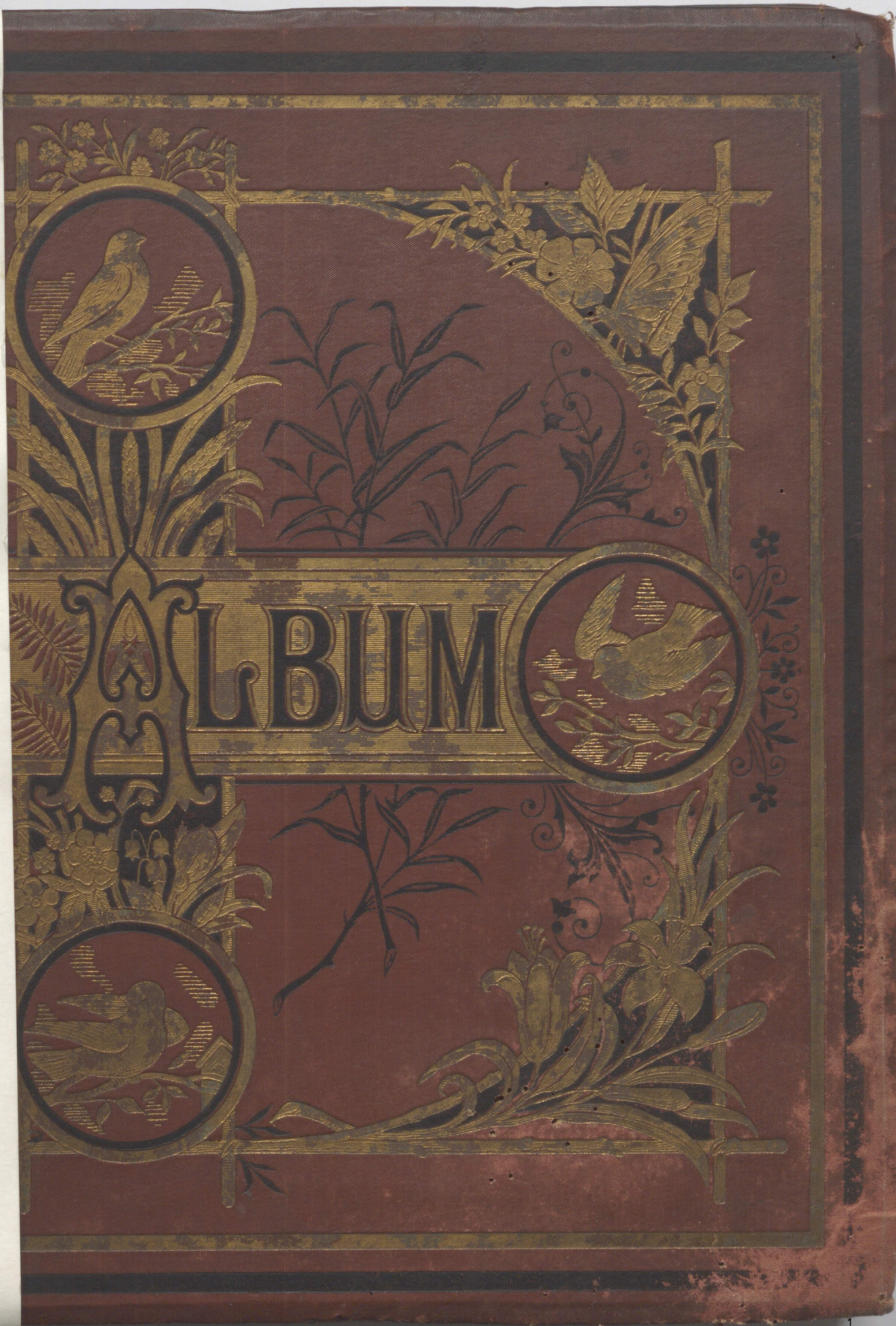
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LETTERS OF A CANDID PLAYGOER.

MY DEAR DICK,—The big excitement of the week was, of course, the first at the St. James's. Never, except at the Opera, have I seen a more brilliant audience. Amongst those present were Princess May, the Duke of York, Debrett's peerage, Burke's landed gentry, Harley-street, and the front page of the *Era*. And not only was the audience brilliant, it was also punctual and sensible. There were no irritating late arrivals; and two feeble efforts to work up "receptions" were peremptorily suppressed by imperative calls for order, and audible comments of "Rats!" That this should have occurred on such an important occasion shows that real first-nighters resented, as much as I do, a spurious and hysterical innovation which, had it not been promptly checked, would have degenerated into a general nuisance. After the emphatic demonstration at the St. James's, it will surprise me very much if we hear any more of these ridiculous "receptions."

The result of concentrating the attention of the audience on its proper object, the stage, was a welcome to Mrs. Pat Campbell and to George Alexander such as I have rarely heard. It assured them of the warmest sympathy, and no doubt encouraged and nerved them for the anxious task they had to undertake.

To tell you the plain, unvarnished truth about Jones's play, it failed altogether in psychology and satire, and it succeeded when it inclined towards popular melodrama. The characterisation puzzled me exceedingly. The majority of the figures moved about like shadows without a semblance of reality. Lord Crandover, Percy Blanchflower, Lady Shalford, the old Whip, and the rest of them loomed and vanished, that is all. Not that I grumble at it. From the Impressionist point of view, the less you insist on your background, the more you throw the principal figures of your picture into prominent relief. Besides, these secondary people were not very desirable at best. Much of their conversation in Lady Skene's drawing-room was both dull and in doubtful taste, while their conduct at the Hunt Ball in calmly sitting round the yard of the Stag Hotel while a lot of half-drunken youngsters baited the barmaid and sent up her kisses to a mock auction was at once inconceivable and vulgar. It led to a flashy finish, to a thoroughly stagy and artificial "situation," and it helped to bring down the curtain of the first act on a termination that would have done credit to a melodrama at the Adelphi. But it was altogether out of place and indefensible in a real play of real modern life. I do not hesitate to say that if there had been one real gentleman at that Hunt Ball, he would have promptly sat on the whole proceeding, and he would have told the roystering boys that they were a parcel of consummate cads. The theatrical effect and success of the incident, however, I do not for one moment deny. All this is plain enough. It is not so with the central figures. Sir Brice Skene begins with all the strength and determination of a dozen villains, and winds up with as much certainty of purpose as a performing

rabbit. Dulcie Larondie, a girl of good birth, becomes a barmaid, evinces a predilection for deftly conjuring with the hearts of men, but marries the first blatant boor who comes along, develops into a brilliant leader of fashion, and finally finishes up by propounding psychological conundrums on the top of the Maritime Alps. David Remon, the hero, is a cranky astronomer, who adores the barmaid and drinks copious draughts of Mouton Rothschild. The latter fact is particularly insisted on in the first act, but for the life of me I cannot make out why. I suppose that it has some subtle significance that escapes me. So far as I could gather, Skene loved wine, woman, and cards. Remon loved wine, woman, and sun spots. Skene had the pluck to propose to the barmaid. Remon had not. Moral: When you are in love don't drink claret. Skene, I rather fancy, proposed on brandy. Brandy, I know, was his weakness, for after four years he smells of it strongly, and his wife tells him so. All his Dutch courage has oozed, however, for when he is ruined he meanly suggests that his wife shall borrow money from Remon, who immediately adopts the proposition, but, in order that no misconception shall be placed on his motives, he, after placing his banking account at the disposal of Dulcie, retires to wrestle with sun spots in his foreign observatory.

Dulcie does not spare the cheque-book. She draws £6,000, and lets Skene have what he wants. Then she turns nasty. I am not quite clear why. I don't see why she should not have stopped at £5,000, or have gone on to £10,000. Anyhow, she does. Skene is furious, and says that if she is not reasonable he will take away her child. At this crisis Remon appears. At length he declares his love. He finds that it is returned. Dulcie falls into his arms. And at that moment Skene enters the room. He places his back against the door and folds his arms. There is an awkward pause. Dulcie goes out, and the two men are left face to face. Then, after all his posturing and scouting, what do you think the formerly ferocious Skene does? He does not kick Remon. He does not knock him down. He does not bring an action for divorce with heavy damages. Heaven defend us! he asks Remon either to lend him some money or have a game of cards!

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I have seen pictures representing Sicilian bandits drawing lots for their fair captives. I have read of buccaneers casting dice on the deck of pirate brigs to determine who shall "possess" some forlorn maiden. But I never imagined that such things were even remotely possible in plays of real modern life. Yet this situation, which was a piece of out-and-out thorough-going, blood-curdling, old-fashioned melodrama, was welcomed with as overwhelming a hurricane of applause as if it had been a brand-new heaven-sent dramatic revelation. The curtain was raised and lowered I cannot tell you how many times. Everybody was called and called again. Alexander in particular was accorded a definite ovation. The audience was stirred to its depths by the most genuine enthusiasm. Am I not right, then, in saying that the successful part of Jones's play is that which inclines to the melodramatic? You may say that in real life abnormal people will sometimes do abnormal things. Very true. But think the thing out quietly, and you will, I am sure, agree with me that no three people out or inside of Colney Hatch would do what Remon, Skene, and Dulcie did. Yet these three did it, and a besieged box-office will undoubtedly be their reward.

If *The Masqueraders* had only ended on this very remarkable cutting for a partner there would have been several fortunes in it. At present the termination is apparently weak. I say apparently, because the blaze and glare of the third act flings into the shade, more perhaps than is its due, a final gloomy scene of philo-

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"The Masqueraders".

sophic introspection, tearful partings, and suppressed emotion.

Remon takes the prize that he has won just as she stands, evening dress, baby, and all, in the dead of the night to his observatory on the top of a mountain. It must have been a weary journey, for we are distinctly told the time at the end of Act III. It is just eleven at night. When they reach the observatory dawn is breaking. Here Dulcie's early uncertainty of purpose and Remon's initial crankiness suddenly are reasserted. Dulcie says she cannot be happy with the man she loves, because she will always be thinking about the man she hates. Remon, instead of squaring Skene, letting him get a divorce, and subsequently marrying Dulcie, goes off to some deadly place in Africa to look at the transit of Venus, arranging to meet Dulcie later on in a very distant star. This was a rather lame, impotent, though possibly poetic, termination, and it did not suit the audience at all. Still, the recollection of the big card scene was so strong that immediately they recovered from the surprise of seeing the last curtain come down on nothing in particular, they renewed their enthusiastic attitude. They called for the author, they applauded everybody, and went away to discuss one of the most uneven plays I ever saw produced.

To its acting the play certainly owes a great deal. Alexander's performance was the triumph of the evening. He thoroughly deserves the highest praise. He had thought out the cranky, fitful, emotional character of Remon in its every mood and phase. Part madman, part moon-gazer, part real philosopher, Remon stood before us. It was a most difficult part to portray, but Alexander succeeded marvellously. His acting would bear volumes of analysis; to my thinking, it was simply perfect. Mrs. Pat Campbell was less successful. So far as I can judge she is a woman of one key. She can change that key, but without modulations or transitions. Paula Ray was a fine plain-sailing part. Elizabeth Cromwell was equally simple. So was Astrea. In these she succeeded. Belle Hamilton was complex. So is Dulcie. In neither of these was, and is, Mrs. Pat Campbell seen at her best. Dulcie shifts and changes just as Remon does. But Mrs. Campbell does not make the change with all the subtle care displayed by Alexander. This also is true of Herbert Waring as Skene. If drink really did sap the manhood of this masterful and determined gambler we ought to be shown some indication of the change of temperament brought about by four years' dissipation. We see nothing of the sort. He gets a little more black under the eyes, and he wears a black necktie with his evening dress. He is constantly sulky and occasionally savage in every act. That is all. He forgets that the man who bids with a defiant curse three thousand pounds for a kiss in the first act is not at all the same man who, catching his wife with her lover in the third act, cringes for money, and finally is ready to stake his very child to gratify his wild absorbing passion for the card-table. In this one big scene he acted fairly well. But his emotion was not that of the debased wretch robbed by his own depravity of the last shred of self-respect. It was merely the nervous anxiety of the ordinary gambler over his last stake. A big stake, perhaps. A last chance of "getting home." A desperate "plunge." There was none of the subtlety and insight that enabled Alexander to make this scene his own. The audience recognised this at once. And while Waring received a very proper meed of praise for a piece of good, sound, commonplace acting, the great and tumultuous cheering was reserved for Alexander.

The lesser parts were all well played. Willie Elliot, in particular, was very excellent, and young Vane-Tempest was more amusingly like young Vane-Tempest than ever. The scenery was altogether admirable, the two first scenes, the yard of the Stag Hotel and the drawing-room at Lady Skene's, being especially good.

April 30th
1894.

Daily Chronicle

At the St. James's Theatre on Saturday evening ample proof was afforded of the curiosity concerning Mr. Henry A. Jones's new play, "The Masqueraders," selected by Mr. George Alexander to take the place of the finest play of its year, "The Second Mrs. Tanqueray." The house might have been filled twice over, but the most indisputable testimony to the interest in the novelty was the fact that there were very few late-comers, so that to a less extent than usual was the opening scene interrupted by people making their way through the stalls to the annoyance of those who, by seating themselves before the curtain rose, had shown consideration for author, manager and performers, as well as for fellow-members of the audience. Among the occupants of stalls and boxes were certain representatives of Literature, Art, and Science not often seen on a first night. Lord and Lady Randolph Churchill had places just behind the orchestra, and a little in their rear was Mr. Goschen; in two boxes thrown into one on the grand tier were the Duke and Duchess of York and the Duke and Duchess of Teck; and below them sat Lord Londesborough and party. Altogether it was one of the most distinguished assemblages ever drawn to a theatre with the sole object of witnessing the play.

April 30th
1894.

"THE MASQUERADERS" AT THE ST. JAMES'S THEATRE.

To the polished art and human feeling with which the principal character was embodied, and to the power exhibited in the treatment of an incident replete with exceptional dramatic intensity may be attributed the unequivocal success at the St. James's Theatre on Saturday night of Mr. Henry Arthur Jones's new play, "The Masqueraders." As a stage production it is not so distinctive in the working out of details as the majority of its author's dramas, and the symptoms of hesitation occasionally observable are the reverse of helpful to sustained attention. Now and again there is a suspicion of Mr. Jones having halted between two opinions, and at these points the play is weak, but where there is unmistakable evidence that he has gone boldly forward and trusted simply to his dramatic instincts the play is strong, original, and full of vitality. In spirit "The Masqueraders" is romantic rather than sternly realistic. The characters are in modern attire, and two or three of the subordinate personages occasionally indulge in conversation that smacks of the music-hall, but notwithstanding this attempt to bring the period of the plot down to our own day, the spectators have to make demands upon their imagination in order to accept some of the situations. In this respect "The Masqueraders" is a contrast to "The Second Mrs. Tanqueray." It is well, perhaps, that it should be made impossible to compare the two plays, even if inclination to do so were manifest. Mr. Jones, in the first and second acts, goes out of his way, as it appears to us, to introduce types of fashionable society, in order that they may utter verbal conceits and more or less telling hits at the insincerity prevailing in what have been termed "higher circles," but for this he has not the lightness of touch of Oscar Wilde. Yet with all its air of unreality the play is interesting, and the one character, David Remon, to which we referred at the outset, is drawn with a freedom, consistency, and finish, eliciting notice whenever he comes upon the stage. The other principals in the play may be contradictory, they may act just as the author for his own purposes wishes them, and not as they would most likely

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E.C.*

MORAL RESPONSIBILITY IN THE NOVEL AND THE DRAMA.

MR. HALL CAINE'S ADDRESS, *to be delivered on opening the Session
of the Philosophical Institution, Edinburgh,
Wednesday, Nov. 7, 1894.*

ONE of my friends, a gentleman who ought to know, tells me that there is too much writing about literature by those who ought to be writing the thing itself. I agree with him. The republic of letters appears to be too rarely in session and too often in dissolution, and its lawgivers, the authors, seem in all ages to be mounting the hustings, apparently with the unamiable desire of tarring and feathering each other in the eye of the world. This spectacle may not be a very cheerful one, but we are bound to admit that it is sometimes attended by its compensating advantages. Literature, like politics, occasionally stands in need of its manifestoes, its platforms, and its policies. Times change, and with the changing times come changes of literary manners and customs. Without claiming any authority as a literary lawgiver, I should like to say something that would be helpful in the creation of a public opinion favourable to the novel and the drama in their more modern developments.

B

WHAT IS THE NOVEL FOR?

There are writers who tell us that such light forms of literature as the novel and the drama have no moral responsibility whatever. These writers are of two classes. First, there are those who think of a novel as Johnson defined it in his dictionary: "A smooth tale, generally of love." A novel to such persons is merely a piece of recreative reading. The main question about it is—did it amuse? As Sydney Smith says: "Were you, while reading it, surprised at dinner coming so soon? Did you mistake eleven o'clock for ten and twelve for eleven? Were you too late to dress, and did you sit up beyond the usual hour? If a novel produces these effects it is good. It is only meant to please, and it must do that or it does nothing." The second class are those who think too meanly of all forms of imaginative writing to allow either novel or drama a place among the works that have anything to do with serious thought or the real facts of life. Such persons are often historians, and think the man who finds his facts ready made to his hand works on a far higher plane than the man who makes them for himself. But they are sometimes grim theologians, such as Hawthorne imagined in the grey shadow of his stern old Salem forefather looking down on his degenerate son, the author of "The Scarlet Letter." "A writer of story-books! What kind of business in life, what mode of glorifying God, or being serviceable to mankind in his day and generation, may that be? Why, the degenerate fellow might as well have been a fiddler!" With regard to the first of these two classes I have only to say that, while I would not despise the art of ministering to the idle hours of busy men, I am so far at one with the second that if the writer of novels is to hold no better place in the economy of life than that of a literary merry-andrew, whose

highest usefulness, perhaps, is to beguile us of the pangs of the toothache, I had rather be a kitten, and cry "Mew!"

THE DIDACTIC NOVEL.

But there are other writers who are so far from wanting the novel and the drama to be a sugar-candy kind of literature, that they are for ever asking the remorseless German question, "To what end?" They are like the senior wrangler of immortal memory, who, upon being required to recognize the merits of "Paradise Lost," said, "Yes, yes, but what does it prove?" These people are for ever asking us to prove something, and to meet that demand there has arisen a kind of imaginative work that is sometimes a parable in the form of a play, sometimes a long lay sermon in the shape of a novel. This kind of didactic literature has had its day. It flourished in the dramas of Joanna Baillie, and it has expressed itself in works of far higher pretensions and more recent date. I would not hold up to ridicule any real literature that makes a serious answer to the question, "What can you teach me?" It has appealed to many robust and even some imaginative minds. "He teaches Fancy," said Johnson of Richardson, "to speak with the voice of Virtue." For my own part I had rather she spoke with the voice of Nature. The other day I came upon a treatise, published early in the century, which was entitled "Morality in Fiction," but ought to have been called "The whole duty of the novelist." It set forth by a series of rules the means by which a novel might be written so that it should have a proper effect on the morality of the world. The hero was to be handsome, for that was a ready way to our sympathies. He was to be thoroughly educated, for that enabled him to move in all societies. He was to be fairly rich, for that left him free to move

about in the cause of charity or philanthropy, or love, or adventure, as the story might require. In short the subject and the plot, the scenes and the characters were to be perfect, so that the lesson they were to teach might be irreproachable. Well, I am not for saying that a novel could not be written on these lines, rigid as they are; but when finished I fear it would have one fault—the fault of the famous racehorse that had every virtue, and only one disadvantage—it was dead.

HAS ART ANY MORALITY?

These writers regard the ethics of a book as the great thing, but there are other writers who so regard the æsthetics. They say the duty of a story-teller is to tell stories, not to preach sermons. A novel should not be an abstract idea put into the form of a human allegory, and, like the figures on the front of a barrel organ, ground out to slow music by the machinery inside. It should not be conspicuous branded with an aphorism. It should not even have a moral. It should be no more moral than a story in the "Arabian Nights." Art and morality have nothing to do with each other. When the novelist or dramatist presents his characters he should stand aside from them; he should disappear, he should annihilate himself. This is the attitude of many of the more notable French authors at the present moment. I think it extraordinary that the doctrine should have taken such hold in France, considering the influence on French fiction of our English Richardson, who was the first of moralists, the enormous vogue of Victor Hugo, who was for ever claiming to have put abstract ideas into concrete form; and the power of the French drama, which is always trying to put down something and to assume the right to teach a higher morality. You will find the pros and cons at full length in the correspondence

of George Sand with Gustave Flaubert. Flaubert had published "Madame Bovary," and the book that he meant for a merciless and striking lesson given to unconscientious and faithless women, had been regarded as immoral and denounced as a scandal. He was angry and down-hearted, but all that he got from George Sand was a sort of Job's comfort which amounted in effect to "serve you right." George Sand urged that Flaubert should have made his lesson plain. He ought not have withheld his own opinion of his heroine, her husband, and her lovers. Six sentences spoken in his own person would have left the reader in no uncertainty as to the opinion he should form. Without these six sentences the reader, seeing only bad people, understands that the bad people are intended for his sympathy, and he is shocked. To all this Flaubert had one answer. He would be infringing the rules of art if for a moment he disclosed his own thought and the object of his literary undertaking. Let the people find it out for themselves. That was their business.

MORAL AIM OF NOVELISTS AND DRAMATISTS.

The general practice of nearly all the great masters is against Flaubert. It is, perhaps, natural that Richardson should keep his intention to the front. He was born to be a censor of morals. His early boyish fables concocted for the amusement of his school-fellows always carried a moral lesson. With less invention Richardson would probably have been a clergyman; with more he might have been a bishop; he was bound to be a preacher. It is startling that Fielding laid claim to moral intention. He says pointedly, in a preface, that by displaying the beauty of virtue he had attempted to convince men that their true interest directed them to a pursuit of her. De Foe, too, was much given to good

sound and simple moralisings of the Benjamin Franklin kind, and Dickens's morality was, as Mr. Leslie Stephen says, as sharply cut as that of Æsop's fables. Charlotte Brontë tells us plainly that her aim was to show us Adam's son earning Adam's wages, and George Eliot held her gifts so earnestly as a minister, that she was never tired of enforcing her lesson. "Great facts," she says, "have struggled to find a voice through me, and have only been able to speak brokenly." As for the drama, the moral conscience seems to be all over it. In France the younger Dumas has been all his life tilting at what he considers abuses—the marriage law, the laws of legitimation, and even the *demi-monde*.

THE GREAT IMPARTIAL ARTISTS—SHAKESPEARE AND SCOTT.

Against this array of genius on the side of conscious moral intention we can mention two names only, but, perhaps, they are the greatest names in literature—Shakspeare and Scott. M. Taine calls them "the great impartial artists," meaning that they are the two great speakers who were unconscious of an aim in speaking. "Beyond drawing audiences to the Globe Theatre," says Carlyle, "Shakspeare contemplated no result in those plays of his. . . . Beyond earning fifteen thousand a year to buy farms with Scott contemplated no result from his novels. . . . No literary man of any generation," he continues, "had less value than Scott for the immaterial part of his mission," for that part of it which could not be looked at, handled, and buttoned up in his breeches pockets. And seeing this, that our highest literary men of the sixteenth century, as well as our highest literary men of the nineteenth century, who both immeasurably beyond all others commanded the world's ear, had either nothing to say, or preferred to be

unencumbered by an ulterior aim, the greater part of writers and readers have concluded that in a novel or a drama it is best to say nothing. Carlyle does not take this view. That Scott has nothing to say is a reproach in Carlyle's eyes. "Not profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for building up." The John Knox in Carlyle sees only the Rob Roy in Scott, and Scott descends, as a consequence, from the rank of a great man. But the ordinary work-a-day world does not carry the moral sentiment so high. "Literature," says Mr. Birrell, "exists to please, to brighten the burden of men's lives, to make them forget for a short while their sorrows and their sins, their silenced hearths, their disappointed hopes." In short, literature is a sort of intellectual soporific.

THE NOVELIST BEHIND THE NOVEL.

The truth appears to be an art question more than an ethical one. I cannot believe that British humanity, at all events, feels an opposition to morality itself, that it has any objection to being preached at. It is preached at on Sunday, and it is preached at on Monday; it is preached at from the Pulpit, and it is preached at from the Press; it is preached at when it is born, it is preached at when it is married, and it is preached over when it is dead—no, I cannot believe that it has any rooted objection to being preached at. And taking its preaching from so many mouths, I think it would take it as resignedly from the mouths of the novelist and the dramatist also, but for one fundamental difficulty. It is in terror lest the play should become as dull as the pulpit sometimes is, lest the three-volume novel should become a three-volume tract. The fact is that our western genius cannot develop a story from an idea. They say the eastern genius has that gift. I know very little Oriental

literature. The story-teller in the market-place of an eastern city seems to hold his circle of hearers by a spell, but their grinning faces have sometimes made me suspect that the centre of interest was not unlike that which brings a crowd around a print-shop in Holywell-street. However it may be with the eastern genius, certainly the western genius, when it tries to combine imagination with moral aim, is like a bear dancing in chains. It lacks freedom, spontaneity, and vitality, and these are the qualities which a novel or a drama must have first, whatever else it falls short of. Give us freedom, says the reader to the novelist; give us spontaneity, give us vitality, in a word give us nature—and we'll get the preachers to give us the sermons.

But I would say to the novelist and the dramatist, don't think that conscience has therefore no place in the novel. Though you are incapable of putting a moral idea into a work as a motive, don't suppose that your work is unmoral, and that you are free from moral responsibility. Your work is what you are. It cannot help but carry with it the moral atmosphere in which you live. The worth of it will be precisely your own worth. Tell me what manner of man you are, and I'll tell you what the moral effect of your work will be. Strip it of all moralisings, all aphorisms, all texts, all moral platitudes, but don't imagine that you are therefore stripping it of all moral effect. You cannot obliterate all trace of yourself, you cannot disappear behind your work—it is not human, it is not possible. If Shakespeare and Scott are impartial artists (of Shakespeare I don't believe it for a moment), their work is none the less moral or immoral.

It is a frightening thought that the morality of a man's book is exactly his own morality. This is most of all true in imaginative literature. Imagination is a chemical which, let a man pour it on

act beyond the walls of the theatre; but there is nothing uncertain about David Remon.

Let us explain what kind of man this David Remon is. When the audience first see him he seems little more than an idler at a country hotel where there is a lady-like barmaid. He is spoken of as "the mad gentleman who lives at Gerard's-heath," given to astronomy. Another habitué of the hotel is Sir Brice Skene, who has £20,000 a year, and is stated to be "the choicest blackguard in England." David is in love with the barmaid, Dulcie Larondie, and Skene it is clear intends to baulk him in his hopes. The difference in the social positions of Dulcie and Sir Brice is not great. She and her sister, now a nurse, are of a good family, reduced in circumstances. Sir Brice does not claim to be anything but a reprobate, whilst David believes in the purity of women, and has not altogether lost faith in the honour of men. The rivals are brought into collision at a hunt ball. Dulcie, interested in the widow and orphans of a huntsman who some time before broke his neck, thinks it a good opportunity to appeal on their behalf to the members of the hunt. A roysterer whilst standing at the hotel bar, suggests to his companions that a kiss from the pretty barmaid should be put up to auction, and the proceeds given to the distressed family. Dulcie protests, but the freak is carried out, and the bidding culminates in a contest between the wealthy Sir Brice and the comparatively poor David Remon. Hoping to relieve Dulcie from such an embarrassing position, David at length offers a thousand guineas. Then Sir Brice cries 1,500, then David 2,000, an offer immediately capped by Sir Brice with 3,000. There is no further bid, so the kiss is knocked down to him. After signing his cheque, and giving it to the mock auctioneer, Sir Brice astonishes the company with the statement that an hour ago he asked Miss Larondie to become his wife, and he now renews the offer, which she accepts.

Four years pass, and Lady Skene, formerly Dulcie Larondie, has become a leader of society, entertaining a number of cynical folk, who ridicule each other as well as their hostess. From them we learn that Sir Brice has had heavy losses on the turf, and is altogether going to the bad; whilst David Remon has distinguished himself by making some wonderful discoveries concerning the spots on the sun. Sir Brice's ruin is very much nearer than many people suppose—some say, indeed, that when David appears in Lady Skene's reception-room—and it is patent that she still thinks kindly of him—the disreputable husband proposes that she should borrow money from him to keep the establishment going. The conversation is accidentally overheard by David, who being about to start for the observatory he has set up in the south of France, places his cheque book at Dulcie's disposal.

The downward course of Sir Brice continues, and nine months afterwards he and his wife are at an hotel at Nice virtually living from hand to mouth. David, whose observatory is in the neighbourhood, asks for an interview with Dulcie as he is about to lead an expedition to the West Coast of Africa to watch the coming transit of Venus. Sir Brice has pressed his wife to draw further on David's banking account, but having already had £6,000 which her husband has spent in gambling and dissipation, she refuses to accept more. In this farewell interview David learns that she does not want him to undertake the journey from which he is never likely to return. The few words that ensue prove that she loves him. Sir Brice suddenly enters, and a scene of extraordinary dramatic vigour, follows. Sir Brice admits that he owes David £5,000. He has not a penny in the world, but he will cut cards for the £6,000 double or quits. David at first refuses, but, goaded by his opponent's sneers, says he will give him a chance of winning all he has in the world. Sir Brice replies that he is willing to play any game for any stakes. Then David, with the utmost deliberation, says, "The stakes on my side are some £200,000; the stakes on your side are your wife and child." They will play till he (David) is beggared of every farthing, and Sir Brice has lost his wife and child. The arrangement is two cuts out of three. Sir Brice becomes very excited, but David retains his coolness until the result is known. Sir Brice wins the first cut and David the second. Dulcie has entered and awaits the issue. David wins the third cut, and then, seizing the recreant husband by the throat, forces from him a promise that he will never lay claim to either wife or child. He then leads Dulcie from the room.

The furious energy of this scene is beyond description, and nothing that could accentuate its effectiveness is wanting either from Mr. George Alexander as David, or Mr. Herbert Waring as Sir Brice.

The final act is laid in David's observatory at night. David brings Dulcie into the room and dwells upon the happiness that is at length in store for them. But Dulcie does not regard the situation in quite the same light. She admits that she loves him, but to live with him under present circumstances would be more horrible to her than to go back to the brute whose roof she has just quitted. To her remonstrances are shortly added those of the faithful sister, who explains that it is impossible for David, in any sense, to become Dulcie's husband until Sir Brice has divorced her. Helen says, "You have made so many sacrifices for her, make this one last sacrifice. Keep her pure for her child." His brother enters to remind him that his fellow-travellers are awaiting him to lead them to Africa, and the curtain falls as David leaves the beloved Dulcie and goes on his self-imposed mission.

The unsatisfactory nature of this ending scarcely requires to be pointed out. David has no other guarantee than Sir Brice's word that the despicable and desperate husband will not again seek his wife when he knows his rival has left for Africa. But the parting of David and Dulcie is set forth with such tender expression by Mr. Alexander and Mrs. Patrick Campbell that the abruptness of the finale is not realised. The part of David most advantageously develops the talent of Mrs. Alexander for indicating suppressed as well as pronounced emotion. To some of the characters David is rather a fantastic being until the opportunity arrives for avenging the cruelty of Sir Brice to Dulcie. Then there is no longer need to conceal with such care the passionate love for Dulcie that did not flicker and expire when she elected to become Lady Skene. The actor cleverly contrives to let the audience into the secret, but they are nevertheless surprised at the determination shown in the card-cutting incident with Sir Brice. As already stated Messrs. Alexander and Waring get all the effect possible out of a scene that in a few days will be the talk of London, and which everybody favourably inclined to the modern drama will make a point of seeing. But it is the harmony of his impersonation throughout, and the ability with which he deals with the manifold lights and shades of the character, that entitle Mr. Alexander to the heartiest compliments. His David Remon is an embodiment destined to live in the memory of playgoers.

Mrs. Patrick Campbell, as Dulcie, finds the best scope for her command of passion in a scene in the third act, in which the wretched wife hysterically dwells upon the mistake she has committed in wedding Sir Brice. Here the actress is quite equal to the claims made upon her, whilst in the final act her manner and delivery of Dulcie's expostulations are charged with the deepest pathos. Mr. Herbert Waring shares the honours with Mr. Alexander in the great scene of the play, and elsewhere also presents a vivid picture of the vindictive and besotted gamester Sir Brice. Mr. Elliot, as an avowedly selfish retailer of scandal, rattles off his cynical utterances with considerable point, and in other parts creditable work is done by Miss Granville (the nurse, Helen Larondie), Mr. H. V. Esmond (David's eccentric brother), Mr. Ben Webster, and Miss Irene Vanbrugh. The mounting of the play is on the most liberal scale. The courtyard of the hotel, with its old-fashioned galleries solidly built, and with the crowd of fox-hunters in their scarlet coats, and elegantly-dressed ladies assembled for the ball, constitutes a particularly animated spectacle.

The reception of the play on Saturday was thoroughly satisfactory. The applause at the end of the third act—the card-cutting scene—was of the most enthusiastic description, and at the close there were hearty calls for both the author and the manager, the latter of whom in modest terms briefly thanked the audience for the kindness shown to "The Masqueraders."

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Remon takes the prize that he has won just as she stands, evening dress, baby, and all, in the dead of the night to his observatory on the top of a mountain. It must have been a weary journey, for we are distinctly told the time at the end of Act III. It is just eleven at night. When they reach the observatory dawn is breaking. Here Dulcie's early uncertainty of purpose and Remon's initial crankiness suddenly are reasserted. Dulcie says she cannot be happy with the man she loves, because she will always be thinking about the man she hates. Remon, instead of squaring Skene, letting him get a divorce, and subsequently marrying Dulcie, goes off to some deadly place in Africa to look at the transit of Venus, arranging to meet Dulcie later on in a very distant star. This was a rather lame, impotent, though possibly poetic, termination, and it did not suit the audience at all. Still, the recollection of the big card scene was so strong that immediately they recovered from the surprise of seeing the last curtain come down on nothing in particular, they renewed their enthusiastic attitude. They called for the author, they applauded everybody, and went away to discuss one of the most uneven plays I ever saw produced.

To its acting the play certainly owes a great deal. Alexander's performance was the triumph of the evening. He thoroughly deserves the highest praise. He had thought out the cranky, fitful, emotional character of Remon in its every mood and phase. Part madman, part moongazer, part real philosopher, Remon stood before us. It was a most difficult part to portray, but Alexander succeeded marvellously. His acting would bear volumes of analysis; to my thinking, it was simply perfect. Mrs. Pat Campbell was less successful. So far as I can judge she is a woman of one key. She can change that key, but without modulations or transitions. Paula Ray was a fine plain-sailing part. Elizabeth Cromwell was equally simple. So was Astrea. In these she succeeded. Belle Hamilton was complex. So is Dulcie. In neither of these was, and is, Mrs. Pat Campbell seen at her best. Dulcie shifts and changes just as Remon does. But Mrs. Campbell does not make the change with all the subtle care displayed by Alexander. This also is true of Herbert Waring as Skene. If drink really did sap the manhood of this masterful and determined gambler we ought to be shown some indication of the change of temperament brought about by four years' dissipation. We see nothing of the sort. He gets a little more black under the eyes, and he wears a black necktie with his evening dress. He is constantly sulky and occasionally savage in every act. That is all. He forgets that the man who bids with a defiant curse three thousand pounds for a kiss in the first act is not at all the same man who, catching his wife with her lover in the third act, cringes for money, and finally is ready to stake his very child to gratify his wild absorbing passion for the card-table. In this one big scene he acted fairly well. But his emotion was not that of the debased wretch robbed by his own depravity of the last shred of self-respect. It was merely the nervous anxiety of the ordinary gambler over his last stake. A big stake, perhaps. A last chance of "getting home." A desperate "plunge." There was none of the subtlety and insight that enabled Alexander to make this scene his own. The audience recognised this at once. And while Waring received a very proper meed of praise for a piece of good, sound, commonplace acting, the great and tumultuous cheering was reserved for Alexander.

The lesser parts were all well played. Willie Elliot, in particular, was very excellent, and young Vane-Tempest was more amusingly like young Vane-Tempest than ever. The scenery was altogether admirable, the two first scenes, the yard of the Stag Hotel and the drawing-room at Lady Skene's, being especially good.