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Two Plays: A Criticism

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## REVIEWS

The sex question shrieks at us from the covers of every modern novel, but there are no shrieks in Moore's pages. The modern novelist is like a naughty boy let loose in a jam cupboard, he smears himself all over with his emotions. Mr. Moore's studies of women are essays in psychology, but he has never wallowed in the grosser emotions which have made the once slim volumes of Mr. Wells obese. If Mr. Moore has a weakness for suggesting that the women about whom he writes might, could, would, or should have been in love with himself we must remember what was once said of him by the wittiest woman in Dublin : "Some men kiss and tell, Mr. Moore tells but does not kiss."

And now what of Moore himself? Every man's work in the end reveal only himself, and even Moore's voluntary nakedness cannot hide him from us. The ordinary writer who tries to lay himself bare before his readers often only succeeds in parading before them very much overdressed, but with Moore this is not so. His art is stamped with sincerity. Even Cromwell had his affectation. He insisted on the wart in his portrait, but then he had beheaded his king; the wart against the king, it was a pose. Mr. Moore has not brought down his king, and he is not aggressive over his warts, but he covers nothing. He is as sincere with his own soul as even Art, the most strait-laced lover man ever had, would have him be. He finds himself as adorable as he finds her; he kills himself with the same melting sympathy that he bestows on Gill. "A heart as shy as a wren in the hedgerow, or as a mouse trembling in the wainscot." We knew it, Moore, and we have lost you. Dublin has lost the only man who could walk her streets fashionably !

### TWO PLAYS : A CRITICISM.

AT times we are told that the glory has departed from Dublin, and that she has shrunk from a capital to a petty provincial town ; and yet in one week in December it was possible for the Dublin playgoer to see two plays, each a masterpiece of its own kind, admirably acted and perfectly put on the stage. Both plays were written by Irishmen, the players were, with one exception, all Irish amateurs, but one admits with regret that the producers were not Irish (at least I do not think I can claim Mr. Monck as a countryman), regret which is intensified by the fact that to the excellence of the stage management each performance owed much of its charm.

One play was a comedy, the other a tragedy ; but though in treatment and design they differed widely, yet the central theme of both was the same, a woman's self-sacrifice, and each play gave one a thrill such as one rarely feels in the theatre. From the Abbey we have learnt to expect high ideals, sometimes imperfectly realised ; but it is more than surprising to find a piece of real artistic achievement on the boards lately trodden by "Inconstant George" and "The Chocolate Soldier," and I can only hope that the financial results of the experiment may be satisfactory enough to tempt the Gaiety management to repeat it.

Eleanor Maxwell's self-sacrifice takes the form of leaving Kilbarron Castle

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to make her home in the Finnegans' cottage in order that she may elevate the Connaught peasant's life. The severity of the experiment is mitigated not only by the constant calls of the local doctor whose heart she has touched, but also by the fact that her uncle sends down food and linen from the castle unknown to her. In fact, the people who suffer most are the Finnegans, and Mrs. Finnegan in particular. She hears her good clothes called insanitary rags, she sees her large family given a bath every night to the ruin of their health; why, only for the food, the pound a week—and above all the goodwill she feels towards the incipient love affair—she would put up with it no longer. Unfortunately she is forced to account for the presence of the Castle china and linen in her house by saying that she has stolen them, and Eleanor, believing herself in a den of thieves, rushes away into the night. Finnegan makes his way to the Castle to suggest to the easy-going Lord Kilbarron that she is drowned in a bog-hole; but after much comic consternation Eleanor and the doctor appear together engaged, and one feels that she has met her match. The idea of the play is comic enough, but its real charm lies in its characterisation. Mr. "George Birmingham" knows every grade of Irish life, and with one exception every character is a truthful portrait. The exception is the doctor, who is simply J. J. Meldon in mufti, and though I admire him vastly I cannot believe that he ever existed. But, except for this, every one is not only entertaining but real, and the reality is enhanced by the excellence of the mounting. Everything is just right; the pictures at Kilbarron Castle are those you find in an Irish country house, the routine of the butler and footman is correct, there is nothing to jar on one anywhere. The acting is all excellent, and the whole performance is a treat which, let us hope, we may soon enjoy again.

"The Countess Cathleen" is a very different play: it moves one so that one is not sure if one wants to see it again or not. But, as acted at the Abbey, it is very beautiful. Mr. Monck has brought to this theatre a sense of beauty which has never existed there before. He has extended the stage into the auditorium till it resembles an Elizabethan stage, and at one end of this extended stage he has placed a seat, and at the other a flight of steps leading to the auditorium. He has found someone to design dresses of wonderful colour. He has made out of a few curtains two steps and a seat, a scene which is not only a perfect background for the actor, but is in itself a thing of beauty. And, above all, he has subdued the actors to the play. Though Miss Maire O'Neill lends to the Countess Cathleen her beauty, her melodious voice, the unforgettable poise of her head, yet even Miss O'Neill is subordinated to the object of the piece and sometimes stands in the shadow. As for the play, one forgets to enquire whether its philosophy is true or false, whether the Countess's sacrifice is necessary or unnecessary; one is lost in the music of the words in which it is told, and so rapt that when the curtain falls one cannot stir until the last faint sound of singing has died away. It may not be a play, but it is a very wonderful and beautiful thing, and all who love beauty should see it.

BRYAN COOPER.