

*The Plays
of Eugène Brieux*

By P. V. THOMAS



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Eugène Brieux

By P. V. Thomas

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FOREWORD

The following analysis and critique of the plays of Eugène Brieux, as originally prepared by P. V. Thomas of University College, London, retained in the original French such extracts from the plays as are included, and in most instances the same policy was pursued in regard to the quotations from French critics.

In offering this book to the American public, which so generally has evinced an interest in the work of this dramatist, it has been deemed wise to translate the passages referred to. In that connection special thanks are due to Henry M. Wing, Esq., of the Boston Bar, whose familiarity with the courts and judicial procedure of France has been of the highest service in the rendition of the important chapter devoted to *La Robe Rouge*.

As envoy of the French Academy to the annual meeting of the American Academy of Arts and Letters, 1914, Brieux, in the course of his address, with customary frankness and modesty, touched at some length on his plays.

No better understanding of the man and his purposes can be gathered than from his own words, expressed on this occasion, when he said:

“I am going to speak to you rather of what I have wished to do than of what I have done. It is in the United States that the nature of my efforts has been best understood. In Paris, I must admit it here, in the extreme Parisian circle and also among the pure artists, the moralizing form of my plays has been somewhat scorned. They call me derisively ‘Honest

Brieux,' and because I am the son of a workingman they have also dubbed me the 'Tolstoy of the Temple district.' I have not felt belittled by this.

"If one seeks to find in my work a guiding principle he will find there a constant tendency to protest against the abuse of power in its various forms. Tyrants are found not only upon thrones, but around the family hearth, and particularly in Latin countries there are humble bourgeois, modest, venerable, with kindly faces, who are really detestable despots and who hold in bondage their wives and their children. Take note that such a man is a worthy and an honest man; he sins only through a pride of which he is ignorant; he is convinced that he knows better than his children what is best suited to them.

"Besides the power of a parent, the power most to be feared that men have taken upon themselves is that of the physician and also that of the judge. Without doubt it is necessary that there should be physicians, since there are sick people, and that there should be judges, since there are criminals; but just think that, according to the saying, very often the part of the physician limits itself to forcing drugs that he knows little into a body which he does not know at all. Judges of course inflict, sometimes carelessly, very heavy punishments and condemn human beings to sufferings which they cannot understand for faults of which they do not know the origin.

"I have made a study of such a case in the play entitled 'La Robe Rouge,' just as I have studied the case of the physician in 'L'Evasion.' Other plays have condemned the abuse of paternal authority.

There is much more to be written. The abuse of the power of money, of the press, of free speech and of politics — all these should be condemned.

“I have the profound conviction that the theatre may be a valuable means of instruction. I should not limit its ambition to amusing spectators. One must admit also that the theatre has the right from time to time, at any rate, to touch upon the most serious questions and the most vital topics.

“I wish through the theatre not only to make people think, to modify habits and facts, but still more to bring about laws which appear to me desirable. I have wished that the amount of suffering upon the earth might be diminished a little because I have lived. I have the great satisfaction to have accomplished it, and I know that two of my plays, ‘Les Remplacantes’ and ‘Les Avaries’ (‘Damaged Goods’) have helped to save the lives of some and to make the lives of others less burdensome.

“I claim no credit for it. I have acted according to my instincts. I could not have done other than I did. I was born with the soul of an apostle — again let me say, I have no vanity in this, I did not make myself — but the sight of suffering in others has always been unbearable for me.”

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The Plays of Eugène Brieux

Chapter I

The Man

M. BRIEUX first received me just after his return from the East and a little before his reception at the Academy, but there was nothing exotic or pompous about him. Simple, cordial, and very accessible: tall, big, easy in manner, with a sound, practical grip of things, and a fighter — not filled with a fussy pugnacity, but still a fighter — not too hard to rouse, and a very hard hitter when roused. For the rest, simple, direct, not modest, not assertive, full of the right sort of pride, and plenty of vanity, doubtless. Capable of being very serious, but not deadly serious. Keen and interested at once, with the native curiosity and shrewdness of a peasant. Not a specialist. A very human man in every way, simple and straightforward, with the absorbing eye of an observer and the jaw of a fighter.

The details of his life are barely sufficient to piece together — he has always refused to talk about himself: “My private life,” he says, “does not concern the public.” Such a desire for privacy must be respected. He was born in Paris in 1858. His father was a working man, a carpenter in the *Quartier du Temple*, and unable to give him anything more than the ordinary schooling.

The *Ecole Primaire* and the *Ecole Primaire Supérieure* (*Ecole Turgot*) was all the education that was ever given him. He did not distinguish himself at school in any marked degree, nor did he disgrace himself. His Academician's sword was presented to him by the *Ecole Turgot*. At fifteen he began to work for his living as a clerk. It has been said that he began life as a workman, but this is incorrect. He did not, however, stop learning. Reading with him was a veritable passion. He spent not only his leisure, but all his savings on books — whatever books came to his hand; not, however, illustrated papers and popular novels, but famous masterpieces, and preferably the Classics. He was a very good customer of the popular series known as the *Bibliothèque Nationale*, which, for the sum of twenty-five centimes, places within the reach of all the masterpieces of every tongue. It was in this way that Goethe's *Faust* was revealed to him and intoxicated him. He spent night after night reading, sometimes on the public staircase of the house in which he lived, by the light of the miserable gas-jet, in order to save the cost of candles. He had, too, a passion for Chateaubriand, the influence of whose Christianity has been strong during the whole of the nineteenth century. The young Brioux was filled with religious ardour, and had serious thoughts of becoming a missionary. The ardour has remained an essential part of his temperament, though the dogma has been changed under the influence of Spencerian philosophy. Gradually he began to read in more ordered fashion, and started to learn Latin and Greek without any other aid than

that of grammar and dictionary. He soon gave up Greek, but persevered with Latin, and acquired a fair knowledge of it. Literary ambitions were not slow to follow. He began to write plays early, and continued to write them in what leisure was left to him after his day's work was done, though his success was not better than is usually the case. Manuscripts passed from manager to manager without being read. At last, in 1879, when he was just over twenty, his first play was produced at the *Théâtre Cluny*, at one of the *Matinées des Jeunes* — a one-act play in verse, in collaboration with a friend, M. Gaston Salandri, entitled *Bernard Palissy*. Only one performance was given. Meanwhile the ambitious young man had decided to throw up his employment and take to journalism, not as a career satisfactory in itself, but as a more likely road to literary success. For seven years he did newspaper work, first at Dieppe, then at Rouen. He still continued to write plays, three being produced between *Bernard Palissy* and *Blanchette*. Only one of these, *Ménages d'Artistes*, calls for remark here. This play brought its author into contact with M. Antoine. His first real hit was made, in 1892, with *Blanchette*, also produced by M. Antoine. It is to M. Antoine that we owe the discovery of M. Brieux; and, more than that, it is M. Antoine who gave him the opportunity of learning his trade, of learning how to tackle dramatic problems, and of collaborating with actors and public. *Blanchette* is the play that made M. Brieux famous. He is still referred to as the author of *Blanchette*. It was produced while he was still at Rouen, but shortly after *La Nouvelliste*, the newspaper

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of which he was editor, ceased to exist, and M. Brieux returned to Paris with the manuscript of *M. de Réboval* in his pocket. The importance of his long residence in Rouen can hardly be overestimated; not only did he thus escape being caught up in any of the literary fads and fancies of the *boulevards*, but also he was better able, in a comparatively small centre, such as Rouen, to grasp life as a whole than amid the complexities of the metropolis. At Rouen he learnt as editor to face questions of public interest. Here he acquired his experience of men and affairs. The knowledge of provincial life thus acquired was to stand him in good stead. Without his sojourn in Rouen he would never have written *L'Engrenage* or *Blanchette*. He quickly came to the front with *L'Engrenage* (1894) and *Les Trois Filles de M. Dupont* (1897). On his return to Paris he continued the profession of journalism, writing for the *Figaro* and other papers. In the exercise of his profession he must have frequently had occasion to attend the Law Courts. The fruit of his lengthy observations is to be seen in such a play as *La Robe Rouge* (1900). With this play his position as an undoubted master is assured. With the exception of *Les Remplaçantes* (1901), *Les Hannetons* (1906), and *Simone* (1908), the later plays show rather a falling off. The energy needed to get all the heavy artillery of the *Pièce Sociale* into action — into dramatic action — must be great. What wonder if even the energy of M. Brieux is sometimes insufficient. His election to the Academy in 1910 crowned his achievements with the highest honour that he could wish for and satisfied a long-cherished ambition.

Chapter II

The Plays before *Blanchette*

THE plays that precede *Blanchette*, namely, *Bernard Palissy*, *Le Bureau des Divorces*, *Ménages d'Artistes*, and *La Fille de Duramé*, are not important, but they cannot be ignored. The origins of a man are always interesting.

BERNARD PALISSY. Drama in one act in verse in collaboration with G. Salandri. Played for the first time the 21st of December, 1879, at the *Théâtre Cluny*.

The scene is at Saintes about 1560 and represents a room on the ground floor in the house of Palissy. The red light of furnaces shows in the background. There is no furniture, even the door is missing, everything made of wood having been burnt to fire the furnaces.

The wife of Palissy, Geneviève, wishes to leave him because, after years of suffering, they have been reduced to ruin. Palissy, not content with being the most esteemed of glass painters, has lost everything by trying to discover a secret which he will never find — the secret of making enamel. His daughter, Jeanne, pleads that they must not forsake him. Amid the insults and jeers of the mob Palissy enters. Etienne comes to his rescue. Etienne loves Jeanne, but his father, Gautier, who is inexorable, refuses to allow the marriage unless Palissy will give up his chimerical

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ideas and return to glass making. Etienne tries to persuade Palissy to do this, but the inspired genius cannot give up his quest, and insists upon being allowed to try once more. So the family forsake him; but soon his faithful daughter returns and persuades Palissy to give up, which he consents to do in a rage at the sacrifice asked. It is, therefore, the turn of Jeanne to sacrifice her love to her father's glory, and the grateful Palissy returns to his furnaces. Jeanne's lover returns, unable to give her up, and later the mother returns, unable to give the father up. When they are once more assembled there is a terrific explosion and Palissy enters, crying —

“Lost! All is lost! All — even my hope!”

After a mad outburst he goes despairingly towards his workshop.

“But a moment ago my faith was complete.

The secret was there. My hope was exalted;

Now nothing remains.” . . .

Going off the stage, he suddenly bursts out with —
“Have I seen? Do I dream this wonderful substance?
Great God! It is found.”

In spite of the explosion the secret of the enamel has been found. Every one asks his pardon, maxims float across the footlights to the effect that conception is good, perseverance better. Then the play ends with an exordium to the glory of France — the real glory of France, the glory that is better than military glory, the glory of her great men. “Et cela” (meaning military glory)—

“And that is not worth, although one obtain it,
A single step toward the unknown.”

It is all very high-minded. This is the only play by M. Brieux in verse. The passages quoted suffice to show that he was not misguided in choosing prose for his medium of expression.

THE DIVORCE OFFICE, published in 1880, but apparently never played, is a vaudeville in one act, satirizing the new Divorce Law which had just been passed. It is very thin stuff, stale and not amusing — cheap farce; but it indicates an interest in social questions.

La Fille de Duramé was played a few days later than *Ménages d'Artistes*, but it may be taken first for the sake of convenience.

THE DAUGHTER OF DURAMÉ. Melodrama in five acts. Played for the first time in Rouen at the *Théâtre Français*, March 25, 1890.

The titles of the five acts show what sort of play it is.

Act I. La Fête du Loupvert à Jumièges.

Act II. La Bande de Duramé.

Act III. Les Grottes de Caumont.

Act IV. Le Père et la Fille.

Act V. L'Expiation.

The time the play begins is Friday, June 23, 1797, *le jour de la Fête du Loupvert*.

It would take too long to give the entire plot, but it goes without saying that it is as various, as complicated, and as thrilling as a popular provincial audience could desire.

Duramé is a brigand, and his daughter Jeanne has been changed in the cradle by Quatre Pattes for the daughter of Déronchelle, and Duramé protects his daughter without letting her know that he, the brigand,

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is her father. The woman Berthe is therefore jealous and clandestinely carries Jeanne off with a small party of the brigands to the Grottes de Caumont. Here the jealous Berthe starves Jeanne in order to make her confess that she loves Duramé. But Duramé comes and carries Jeanne off to Rouen to the house of Déronchelle. Here Duramé is recognized as a brigand with a price upon his head, so, having to leave, he tries to persuade Jeanne to go with him; but she high-mindedly refuses to depart with a brigand. The gendarmes come and Duramé declares Jeanne to be his daughter.

“Oh, may a curse fall on her!”

Jeanne (with a shriek). Oh! (*She falls on her knees.*)
Forgive me!

In the last act Duramé is guillotined and Jeanne re-established as the daughter of Déronchelle.

All art is collaboration — great is the influence of an audience! From such a play who could foretell the author of *Blanchette*, *L'Engrenage*, and *Les Trois Filles de M. Dupont*? These three plays seem very far off. *Ménages d'Artistes* deserves more attention, for with it the real career of M. Brieux begins.

MENAGES D'ARTISTES.¹ Comedy in three acts. Played for the first time at the *Théâtre Libre*, March 21, 1890.

Jacques Tervaux, a would-be poet, has married an ordinary middle-class woman, who believes that her husband is a genius and sacrifices everything to his career. Her dowry has been swallowed up to pay for the publication of his works, her jewelry and possessions are going too. But she still believes in him — is he not idolized by the circle that surround him?

¹Artist's Households.

She does not know that the members of the circle are worthless impostors. Their symbolist jargon, their "triunionism," is impressive to her. And the beautiful Emma Vernier, the muse who inspires them all, is wonderful to Madame Tervaux; and is she not going to found a paper devoted to poetry and the arts, and to make her husband famous? But the mother of Madame Tervaux sees that Jacques is in love with Emma and turns her out of the place. Jacques follows her. In the last act the paper is founded, Jacques is the director and the beautiful Emma is his mistress. But the paper is not a success, and Emma, discovering that the poet is a bag of wind, withdraws her financial support and goes off with another man. Jacques, dishonoured and ruined, commits suicide.

The play is a "play unpleasant"—*a pièce rosse*, after the *Théâtre Libre* pattern, more or less.

It must always be remembered that M. Brieux began at the *Théâtre Libre*, that he is one of M. Antoine's men. This play was not a success. The only point worth noting is the attempt to satirize the extravagances of the Symbolist Poets, the fads and fancies of artistic Paris. It is the scorn of honest, plebeian common sense for all the poses and snobbery of the artist in splendid isolation, aloof from the contamination of ordinary virtuous life—a very legitimate subject for satire. But, in order to satirize, it is well to understand the thing satirized, and M. Brieux did not understand the Symbolist movement. The result is that the fun he makes of it is rather beside the point. It is cheap ridicule and falls flat. As Sarcey says—

"Ménages d'Artistes (Artists' Households) seems to

us a very juvenile play. It claims to draw aside the curtain and show us the world of the young poets and artists of the new *décadent-symboliste* school, among others. I have some difficulty in believing that they are such foolish and vicious little fellows as M. Eugène Brioux has made them. If the portraiture is true it has not the appearance of being so."

A small sample will serve to prove the truth of this.

Act I. Scene 8. Veule. Are not word pictures perfectly adequate for the suggestion of the tone of color, and indeed the vibrant tone of atmospheric atoms? I will convince you with a word: the resplendency of calms, the shadow-depths of cataclysms. Is it not ideal? What can you say to that?

Jacques. Nothing, it is quite evident.

D'Estombreuse. Every idea, every person, every object has a color and a musical tonality.

Veule. The bassoon is green, the violin blue, the trumpet red.

D'Estombreuse. To be sure!

Veule. The same as the infinite — the infinite —

Jacques. — How about that?

Veule. It is G natural — (*singing*) Tum-m-m! That's the infinite. And God — you know the key God is in?

Jacques. No.

Veule (shocked). Oh, oh! he doesn't know — why, in C major, my dear fellow.

The Doctor (aside). And the wonder of it is that they appear to understand each other!

Veule. Be a Triunionist, old fellow.

Jacques. I'll think it over—A drop of cognac, please?

Veule. Surely.¹

The truth is that M. Brieux has always remained aloof from the world of art, is not "a man of taste," and never had any ambition to become one. This is at once a source of strength and a limitation. It is to emphasize this fact that so much space has been given to *Ménages d'Artistes*.

This was the first play by M. Brieux produced by M. Antoine. Before going any further something should be said of the relations between the two men, if only by way of tribute to one who is undoubtedly the most remarkable *homme de théâtre* France has known in this generation. A large majority of the well-known dramatists of to-day issued from the *Théâtre Libre*, having been discovered and launched by M. Antoine just as M. Brieux was.

Ménages d'Artistes came to M. Antoine from Rouen from an entirely unknown author in the ordinary way, after the *Théâtre Libre* had been in existence for about two years and had already established itself at the *Menus Plaisirs*. Since then M. Antoine has produced six plays by M. Brieux (either at the *Théâtre Libre*, the *Théâtre Antoine*, opened in 1897, or the *Odéon*, of which M. Antoine became director in 1906), namely, *Blanchette*, *Résultat des Courses*, *Les Remplaçantes*, *Les Avariés*, *Maternité*, and *La Française*. As Père Rousset, in *Blanchette*, and Père-la-Joie, in *Résultat des Courses*, M.

¹ The irony of M. Anatole France makes the extravagance of the Symbolists infinitely more ridiculous than this scene by M. Brieux. (Cf. *Vie Littéraire*, II, p. 5.)

Antoine contributed largely to the success of the piece by his acting. The two men appreciate each other and have remained firm friends. The dedication of *Blanchette* is an eloquent document:—

“To André Antoine. My dear friend: For ten years I have hawked my manuscripts at all the theatres of Paris. Usually they have not even been read. Thanks to you, thanks to the *Théâtre Libre*, I at last had the opportunity to learn my *métier* of dramatic author, and here is the second play which you will have produced for me in only two years. It is my desire to thank you publicly,

“BRIEUX.

“February 2, 1892.”

Chapter III

From *Blanchette* to *La Robe Rouge*

1892-1900

THE plays of this decade are, in the main, attacks on various public institutions of society, all important parts of the social machinery.

Education — *Blanchette*.

Politics — *L'Engrenage*.

Charity — *Les Bienfaiteurs*.

Medicine — *L'Evasion*.

Justice — *La Robe Rouge*.

M. de Réboval, *La Couvée*, *L'Ecole des Belles-mères*, *Le Berceau*, all have a bearing on the more intimate institution of the family, and already indicate our author's preoccupation with the position of the child, attacking from this point of view the *liaison*, the fussiness of parents, the interference of mothers-in-law, and divorce. *Les Trois Filles de M. Dupont* deals with the institution of marriage.

After *Blanchette* M. Brioux was famous; with *La Robe Rouge* he reaches the top of the tree and might have rested on his laurels had he so chosen.

BLANCHETTE. Comedy in three acts in prose. First played at the *Théâtre Libre*, February 2, 1892, and proved a great success. Later it was taken on tour. As it was one of the prime favorites of all the *Théâtre*

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Libre plays and a certain draw, it was revived by M. Antoine for the opening of the *Théâtre Antoine*, September 29, 1897. In 1903 it was adopted by the *Comédie Française*, and was played there October 9, 1903. Although it had already been performed in Paris about two hundred times at the *Théâtre Libre* and *Théâtre Antoine*, it was played at the *Comédie Française* eighteen times in 1903, six times in 1904, nine times in 1905, three times in 1906, and three times in 1907. *Blanchette* is the most successful of all the plays by M. Brieux excepting *Les Remplaçantes*. It is the play that made him famous. He is still referred to as "the author of *Blanchette*."

Blanchette is the daughter of Père Rousset, who keeps a wine shop in a small country village. Her school successes had flattered the vanity of her parents, who, notwithstanding the pecuniary sacrifice, insisted upon her going on with her studies until she had obtained a teacher's certificate. And now, at eighteen, at the end of her course, she returns home, full of big ideas and with very different tastes from those of her humble parents. She is disgusted with their ignorance and vulgarity, whereas, to them and the neighbours, she is a miracle of wisdom. The parents delight in showing her off; their joy is beyond measure.

But the post of teacher "promised" by the Government is very long coming, and Père Rousset grudges bitterly the money he has spent. *Blanchette*, in putting into practice the "science" she has learnt, makes some terrific blunders, to the detriment of her father's crops. She refuses to debase herself by serving ordinary customers in the wine shop. At last Rousset gets

exasperated; there is a scene, which ends in the departure of Blanchette.

Roussel (banging his fist on the table). She will do what I told her or she will leave this house.

Blanchette. Well then! I will leave.

And then she comes into contact with the harsh realities of life, or, at any rate, with the harsh realities of life as these are understood at the *Théâtre Libre*. This part of the play has been rewritten, the harsh realities softened, a sentimental, conventional ending substituted for the original one, which had more point. According to the original third act, Blanchette becomes a governess, a companion, etc., in various places, but always has to leave on account of the men in the family. Unable to find a post as teacher, she tries to earn her living by sewing, but does not get paid enough to keep herself. Finally, in despair, she becomes a prostitute.

The moral of it all is that the State is committing a crime in preparing more teachers than are necessary, unfitting girls of humble origin for life in their own station, and giving them nothing in return.

Blanchette is said to be the first French play dealing with the problem of popular education. The grievance aired is a real one. There is no doubt that the point of the play was one well worth making.

To what extent it has influenced public opinion it is impossible to say. The author has this end in view — “My plays are designed to influence the public.” This to him is the purpose of playing.

Even granted that its influence has been nil, the play stands on its own merits, especially on the merits of the first two acts. Seldom has the life of humble folk been

rendered on the stage so truly. M. Brieux is at his best when interpreting such people; he is most at home with them; he thoroughly understands their life and their point of view. By a hundred significant little details, grouped with unobtrusive skill, he manages to convey a vivid sense of the reality of their lives, their surroundings, their soul states.

There is no singularity, no accident in the case of *Blanchette*. The close observation and skilful arrangement of details remains characteristic of the best work of M. Brieux. There is hardly a play which does not contain some humble character rendered to the life, some portrait worthy of standing beside Père Rousset; le père Guernoche, the shepherd healer of *L'Evasion*; le père-la-Joie in *Résultat des Courses*; the peasants in *La Robe Rouge* and *Les Remplaçantes* — to mention only the most notable examples. To appreciate this fully the first two acts should be read entire.

M. Brieux is at home with the people, sympathizes with them, and takes joy in interpreting their lives; whereas people in the least degree fashionable are almost foreigners to him. He is too sincere to see through the pose that hides the human insect struggling in its chrysalis. The woman of fashion is a sealed book to him,¹ he, as a rule, fails to make her live; sometimes the failure is more glaring than at others, but he never really succeeds. Human nature appeals to him most at its most human, at its most natural.

M. DE RÉBOVAL. Comedy in four acts in prose, originally called *M. le Sénateur*. First played September 15, 1892, at the *Odéon*. Not a great success, played

¹ Vide *L'Evasion* and *Les Remplaçantes*.

only twenty-two times. It has never been printed. M. Brioux said of it: "There are two acts in it that I would still stand by; as to the rest ——" (here a shrug).

The play begins at the château of M. le Sénateur, the Château de Mesnil, some distance from Paris. Mme. de Réboval is very ill — ill with grief, for she knows that her husband keeps a mistress, spends half his income on her, and has had by her one son, Paul Loindet, who passes for the natural son of a dead friend of M. de Réboval. But it must not be imagined that Réboval is a *débauché*; he is a great political figure and has a splendid public reputation for integrity — a very upright man. Mme. de Réboval is in despair at the prospect of her daughter Beatrice being ruined, for has not her husband just paid the gambling debts of Paul Loindet to the tune of 30,000 francs? Beatrice is a high-minded young lady, deeply touched by her mother's abandonment. She vows she will never marry, unless she meets an exceptional male, a veritable hero. M. de Réboval has just made a big official speech at the Senate and is expected to spend two days at the château with his wife, a thing which does not often happen. The way he greets his wife is eloquent of the man, pompous, official, correct, patronizing — the great personage to the life:—

"Good morning, my dear. Are you better? I met the doctor . . . he promised me to bring you around. Ah, by the way, I have received some fabrics from Persia which are perfectly beautiful. I am going to send you a selection from them."

The conversation continues, cold and matter-of-fact

for his part, while the women celebrate the occasion by making much of him.

This would-be agreeable family party is suddenly interrupted by a telegram calling him back to Paris — an imperative duty. Paul Loindet leaves that very night for *le Gabon*, on a special mission obtained from the minister by Réboval. It is his duty to see Loindet before he leaves, and he cannot neglect his duty.

The second act is in Paris. Loindet, as he packs his trunks, confides his regrets for his past and his hopes for his future to Mademoiselle, his mother, the mistress of Réboval. Réboval is announced; his entrance is in exactly the same tone as in the first act.

“Good morning, my dear.”

“How is Mme. de Réboval?”

“Thank you, not very well, but I have seen the doctor and he has promised to bring her around. Ah, by the way, I have been thinking of you; I have received some fabrics from Persia which are perfectly beautiful. I am going to send you a selection from them.”

Loindet says good-bye to his protector, the severe but generous friend of his father, promising to perform his duty like a man of honour in the new world to which he goes to make a fresh start, and M. de Réboval wipes the silent tear, filled with the consciousness of having performed his duty. Loindet departs and Réboval is just making himself comfortable in this his other home when a telegram comes from the château announcing that Mme. de Réboval's condition is serious. M. le Sénateur excuses himself to his mistress in the same terms as to his wife — an imperative duty, etc.

Two years intervene. Mme. de Réboval is dead. M. de Réboval has married his mistress. Loindet has returned from Africa covered with glory — a veritable hero after the heart of Beatrice. He loves her, Beatrice adores him, but M. de Réboval forbids the marriage. Why? Why? and Why? He is forced to explain that it is impossible, monstrous, that they are brother and sister. This scene is a very strong one, very well constructed, the best in the play according to some.

The last act falls flat. Loindet questions his mother: —

“I must know whether M. de Réboval lied in saying he was my father. If he did, I can marry Beatrice.”

“He told the truth.”

The children turn on their parents for hiding the truth, for ruining their lives, railing at the hypocrisy and evil behind a correct exterior. M. de Réboval pleads extenuating circumstances (and there are extenuating circumstances, but it is not worth while going into these), asks pardon of his daughter, who throws herself into his arms before fleeing to a convent.

The first two acts, couched in the form of true comedy, are universally admired; then the tone of the play changes, becomes overstrained, melodramatic, and ends in flaming rhetoric.

This play has already been referred to as having “a bearing on the more intimate institution of the family, already showing our author’s preoccupation with the position of the children, pointing out how this is affected by a *liaison*.”¹ This is only a part of the truth. The

¹ Cf. p. 13.

play is in effect an attack on the *bourgeois*; it shows the hollowness of what the *bourgeois* admires and looks up to. From one point of view (what, if we screw our imagination to the sticking-place, we might call the plebeian point of view) existing social institutions are based upon a platform, a *bourgeois* platform, made up to a large extent of compromise, for the sake of material comfort. Réboval is a type of the successful *bourgeois*, a great man, a great public man, and M. Brieux says, smiling at first — No, he is ridiculous, in an absurd position; then sharply — No, he is a dishonest, cruel man; then, at the top of his voice at last — No, he is a miserable wretch who ought to beg for pardon. The attack on the *bourgeois* is implicit rather than direct, but it must be remembered that the author of *M. de Réboval* is a *Théâtre Libre* man.¹ M. Brieux is not a socialist partisan, he appeals here for no progressive measure, rather he goes back to the nearest common point of departure, to a moral cleanliness and simplicity that has gone out of fashion, to a mode of life that fundamentally accords with the dictates of Christian morality.

LA COUVÉE. Comedy in three acts. First played in a private club in Rouen in 1893; first public performance in Paris at the *Co-opération des Idées, Université populaire du Faubourg Saint Antoine*, July 9, 1903.

This comedy is interesting as a study of life in a provincial town, such as Rouen. It is a satire on the fussy interference of parents in the lives of their children,

¹What this implies may be gathered from the description of the *Théâtre Libre* by M. Jules Lemaître, quoted p. 101.

of the hen who cannot allow "the brood" to stray from under her wing.

In the last act the respective mothers-in-law clash. After this explosion everything is made up; it is admitted that the chickens are big enough to be allowed to live:—

"The brood has grown up; the little ones are flying away."

It is agreeable and amusing enough. The clash of the mothers-in-law is repeated word for word in *L'Ecole des Belles-Mères*.¹

So far, in spite of the success of *Blanchette*, none of the plays by M. Brieux are completely satisfying, whether it is that he is working to a pattern (the *Théâtre Libre* pattern to some extent) which does not suit his talent, or whether he is not yet completely master of his means and method. The next play, *L'Engrenage*, is more satisfying.

*L'ENGRANAGE*². Comedy in three acts. Played for the first time by the *Cercle des Escholiers* (at the *Théâtre de la Comédie Parisienne*), May 16, 1894. It was so highly approved of by good judges, so many expressed a wish to see it on the public stage, that it was revived a few weeks later at the *Théâtre des Nouveautés*, June 4,² 1894, and was there performed twenty-one times.

Rémoussin, a manufacturer in a small country town, a self-made man, honest and anxious to do good, is persuaded, in spite of himself, to go into politics. After a good deal of pressure on the part of his wife, his

¹ Cf. p. 44. ²The Machine's Clutch.

² An error in the printed edition gives June 1.

daughter, and his son-in-law, and of Morin, a "Sénateur Scapin," he consents to stand for election, but on condition that the campaign is to be free from any of the usual corrupt practices, that his ideas must be respected, and that no compromise or concession is to be made for the sake of his election. The inevitable happens. He is forced to make one compromise after another, he is caught in the political machine. He undertakes to do the very opposite of what he feels to be right, and his friends go further still in what they promise for him.

He is elected. He leaves his works and his home, goes to Paris, and quickly degenerates from bad to worse. His position, his growing influence, go to his head, and the changes in the new environment are so gradual, they come about by such easy transitions, that he has not the slightest idea that he is being demoralized. He is merely changing his opinion as a wise man should; one cannot always be right, especially in a provincial town where no one ever gets things at first hand. Thus, without his knowledge, he gets more and more caught in the *engrenage*.

During his absence the works do not do so well; his expenditure, naturally enough, has increased rapidly; the well-to-do, honest man finds himself in financial difficulties before he knows it. As luck will have it there is a big deal going on. The promoters of the Simplon tunnel are getting the Government to buy them out for a mere trifle of a hundred million francs, and they must know who are their friends when it comes to the vote. The Marquis de Storn calls on Rémoussin and explains the situation,

shows him the balance sheet to be approved, and, in departing, casually leaves a cheque for 25,000 francs on the table. Rémoussin perceives it and calls him back.

“Take this back! I am not for sale.”

Mme. Rémoussin happens to come in just in time to help out the explanatory Marquis de Storn.

Storn. Come to my rescue, Madame. M. Rémoussin refuses to let me have a little share in your charities.

[And of course it is not corruption; in fact, it is the usual thing.]

Storn. What could be more proper? It is quite customary. Your colleagues have accepted.

Rémoussin. Very well, if it is customary.

It is not to buy his vote, since he has always been favorable to the deal. He accepts the money on behalf of needy charities in his *arrondissement*. Nor does he realize that he has been caught and crushed by the machine until Morin slaps him on the back as he says —

“I have just met Storn; he tells me you are in favor of buying up the Simplon interests. So, my friend, you too are in the procession!”

Punishment comes quickly; the scandal is out, lists of the “chequards” are published. Rémoussin, in his anger, accuses Morin of drawing him into the sphere of corruption.

“But for you, I should have remained what I was — an honest man.”

Morin. An honest man! Oh, no! merely a greater hypocrite than we, that’s all. Was it I who sent you

to the minister to ask for favors? Was it I who made your speech on the corn laws? Was it I who took your money?

Rémoussin is obliged to acknowledge the truth of this, recognizes his responsibility, curses the day he entered politics, and bursts into tears at the thought of what he has been brought to, so that even Morin is touched and comforts him as well as he can. Rémoussin begs his family to forgive him; he feels guilty towards them:

“There is only one way for a man to get back his self-respect and the respect of the public. I am going to take it,” and he goes out without any explanation. As soon as he has left a telegram arrives to say that the whole affair is to be hushed up by the Government, the “chequards” are not to be sued. Every one is overjoyed. Amid the universal rejoicings Rémoussin returns. He has made good, he has done his duty, he has written to *Le Reveil* to acknowledge his dishonesty, he has sent in his resignation to the President of the Chamber, he has returned the 25,000 francs to the Attorney-General. He owes no one a farthing, he can hold up his head once more, he is an honest man again.

Morin makes his escape before he can be contaminated. Rémoussin is covered with reproaches from the family; the crowd without gather beneath his windows to shout, “Robber! robber! why don’t you resign?”

Rémoussin tries to make a speech, to explain to them, but they shout him down and throw stones at him. In the distance is heard the voice of Morin:

“What I desire is the welfare of the nation, the welfare of this proud and intelligent nation.”

“Hurrah for Morin! Hurrah for Morin!”

The play ends ironically. It is an effective satire on politics as they are carried on under the present system of universal suffrage. M. Brioux has held aloof from politics, but he is not cynically indifferent. His general attitude is clearly shown in the *Discours de Réception* at the Academy sixteen years after the production of this play.

“The first part of *Criquette* also shows the sympathy which he (Halévy) felt for the people of Paris, so little understood, so slandered, whose greatest fault and the least understood, is that vanity which has been inculcated and fostered by the blandishments of politicians. So many unfulfilled promises, so many fine dreams followed by unsatisfied awakenings, so much expenditure of effort, apparently without result, have given rise to the belief among our townspeoples that universal suffrage has proved a failure, or at least that, like all political revolutions, it has been beneficial chiefly to the substantial urban classes. It is by the formation of groups, from which politics is excluded, by the power of syndicalism, strong from its beginning, portentous and disquieting as to its future, that the people, disillusioned and determined to depend upon themselves alone, and with no aid from the upper classes, propose hereafter to succeed in the conquest of their share of the earth’s fullness. Let us hope that they may not see leaders rise from their own ranks who will become their masters, and let us hope that they

may not one day discover that they have set up tyranny in another quarter while seeking for freedom."

The ironical ending of *L'Engrenage* is very different from anything the three preceding plays can show, and it can hardly be disputed that this style suits M. Brieux much better. Not that he has shaken off the *Théâtre Libre* influence for all time; it clings to him almost throughout his career, and every now and then comes into evidence; but in this play he has laid it aside and is very much his own man. He has done what he wanted to do and has thoroughly enjoyed doing it.

"Je manifeste pour influencer le public" is the truth, but it is not the whole truth. It is also true that M. Brieux takes the satirist's joy in catching and rendering human folly. It would be hard to draw up the manifesto of this play, harder to trace its influence on the public. He wrote this play because he is a playwright, rather than because he is a missionary. He has the "*don*" (pace Zola):

"I am aware how far *L'Engrenage* of M. Brieux falls short of being a great comedy of politics, but it is a wholesome and strong work which, following *Blanchette*, and *M. de Réboval*, confirms us in the estimate we had made of its author. He was born to the theatre, he is one of our chief hopes."¹

Sarcey's opinion in such matters is as good as another's. *L'Engrenage* is not a perfect play. Sarcey hints at superficiality of observation and "missing scenes" that have been left out. It is a pity that Sarcey was not more explicit. Apparently it is not a masterpiece, but it is good enough; it is one of the

¹ Francisque Sarcey. *Le Temps*, Lundi, 4 Juin, 1894.

characteristic plays of M. Brieux, more essentially a part of the man's work than anything that has preceded it and than much that is to follow it.

LA ROSE BLEUE is not one of the characteristic plays; it is a trifle, specially written to show off an infant prodigy. The subject is the "reconciliation" of an elderly couple who belong to the *grand-monde*, the infant prodigy playing gooseberry. It might have been written by anybody; it might be performed at any Academy for young ladies. As a matter of fact, it was performed at Geneva at the *Grand Théâtre*, July 20, 1895, as a comedy-vaudeville in one act.

LES BIENFAITEURS. Comedy in four acts. Played for the first time in Paris at the *Théâtre de la Porte St. Martin*, October 22, 1896, and was played only twelve times.

It is a satire on organized charity as it is carried on by people (chiefly women) who have nothing else to do. Such a subject could hardly be to the taste of a *Porte St. Martin* audience. It was not a success; M. Brieux has made his point in a way — he has raised a question rather than solved a problem.

In collaboration with Henri, *fiancé* of his little cousin Georgette, Landrécy has invented an electric accumulator. Being a generous optimist, not to say Utopian, he would like to start a factory on a co-operative basis. Wages of the workmen are to be increased, and he dreams of founding all kinds of institutions — homes, schools, etc. — if only he had the money! His wife Pauline is more charitably inclined than her husband, if that were possible — and, if only she had the money —!

Hereupon Valentin Salviat, her long-lost brother, turns up from Africa in the nick of time, as rich as Croesus. He is only too ready to empty his overloaded purse at their feet so soon as he discovers their dreams. Secretly, he promises himself some fun over their disillusioning, and he loves "*la petite Georgette*" and hopes thus to please her. (The sentimental theme is quite unimportant, no further reference will be made to it.)

And now we come to the real meat of the play — the under-side of Society charitable organizations, into which the beautiful dreams of the Landrécy's soon degenerate. The conventional charity, made up of committees, patronesses, routine and condescension to the poor, automatically substitutes itself for their generous imaginings. The machine of charity takes hold of the Landrécy's (just as the machine of politics took hold of Rémoussin), grinds all the humanity out of their aims, until nothing is left but a cold, cruel system. It is impossible to tell the story of this; there is no action in the ordinary sense of the word; scene after scene of telling satirical power — slices of life — picture the wily hypocrisy of the professional pauper, the inanity of committees, the vain folly of patronesses, the tragedy of help withheld because regulations and conditions had not been fulfilled, and (even worse) indifference to human suffering. Here are two selections, let them speak for themselves:—

Act II, Scene 16. The Committee meets. After some difficulty the usual feminine conversation is dominated sufficiently for business to proceed.

Mme. Le Catelier (standing). Mesdames, Messieurs: Thanks to the initiative of Mme. Landrécy, we have

succeeded in bringing together in a kind of friendly union all the presidents of the various charitable interests in our city. In contrast to what happens too often elsewhere, we have been able to unite these societies regardless of political or religious distinctions. We have merged a part of our different funds, and all of our good will. The results, while not being all that could be desired, are promising. Our secretary will read to you the report of our activities for our first year. Before yielding the floor to her, please allow me to thank all you ladies and gentlemen for your zeal and devotion to the cause. (*Soft applauding of gloved hands.*) The secretary now has the floor.

Mme. Destournel. Mesdames et Messieurs: In these times of scepticism and doubt, one man has been found —

(No one is listening; personal conversations are resumed, drowning the voice of Mme. Destournel during all that follows of an interminable report, bristling with figures. Realizing that no one is paying the least attention to her, Mme. Destournel gradually lowers her voice and finally reads audibly to herself, in fulfilling her duty. All are talking at once, fashions, theatres, etc.)

(It amounts to an uproar. Georgette, with a troubled look, comes in. She goes to Pauline and speaks low in her ear. Pauline in turn is disturbed and leads her to the front of the scene.)

Pauline (low to Georgette). Oh! The poor creatures! And has nobody gone to help them?

Georgette. No one.

Pauline. Come! *(She goes out at the right and returns immediately with coat and hat. They notice her.)*

"What is the matter?" "I don't know." Pauline goes to Mme. Le Catelier, speaks a few words in a low tone to her, and leaves with Georgette, who had waited near the door. There is a silence.)

Mme. Le Catelier. Mesdames, Mme. Landrécy is called away on a matter of the greatest importance.

Several voices (timidly). May we know?

Mme. Le Catelier. I know that this matter is connected with our work, and nothing more. Mme. Landrécy begs you to wait for her. The secretary will continue the reading of her report.

Mme. Destournel. I have finished, Madame.

(There is a little conference between Mme. Le Catelier and Mme. Destournel, during which the various groups become animated again.)

Mme. Le Catelier (ringing a little bell). The question comes on the acceptance of the report. (The hands go up.) Contrary? The report is accepted. (Ringing again.) Has any one any communication to lay before the meeting?

Mme. Paillencourt. Oh, yes! I almost forgot. (She searches for a letter in her reticule.) I would like to speak.

Mme. Le Catelier. Mme.' Paillencourt has the floor.

Mme. Paillencourt (searching for her letter, reads from another). "The smallest sum will be gratefully received." That is not it — One receives so many letters — Ah! here it is! It is a request for aid which was sent to us several days ago. It is worded in the usual way, with a threat of suicide. I think — (She looks it over) Yes: "If God forsakes us, we shall seek

refuge in death." Signed, "Naclette, rue aux Juifs." That is it!

Mme. Le Catelier. We will have it investigated. (*She hands the letter over to Mme. Destournel.*)

Mme. Destournel. It is only a few steps. I will go today, or tomorrow.

But the threat of suicide was no vain one, and this was why Pauline was called out: and as she comes back with her "Mesdames! Mesdames! A dreadful thing has happened, a perfectly dreadful thing—" the *bourgeois* platform cracks and reveals the yawning abyss beneath.

In order to suggest the range of the play the other selection shall be of a totally different nature—the episode of Féchain le régénéré, Act II, Scene 8, and Act III, Scene 2.

Act II, Scene 8. (*Enter Féchain, poor, but very neatly dressed.*)

Mme. Guerlot (low to Pauline). Just see how neat Féchain manages to look, with the little aid that we allow him.

Pauline (low). Isn't it wonderful? It's a fortunate thing for a charity to have a poor man who makes such a good appearance. (*Aloud*) Come here, Féchain.

Féchain. Mesdames! (*A dignified bow to each.*)

Pauline. My good man, your benefactor, M. Valentin Salviat, has expressed the wish to see you. So I sent to tell you.

Féchain. I am at your service, and at his, Mme. la Présidente. I shall have only one regret, that I shall not be able to tell him properly how very grateful I am.

Mme. Guerlot (*low to Pauline*). And he expresses himself so correctly!

Pauline (*in the same tone*). He is remarkable. (*Aloud*) M. Valentin Salviat will perhaps question you about your past life. I must ask you to excuse him. You will not mind that?

Féchain. No, madame.

Pauline. What are you going to say to him?

Féchain. I have already thought about that, *Mme. la Présidente*. I shall tell him about all my faults, and how I —

Pauline. Yes — but won't you — won't you — speak now — as if I were M. Valentin Salviat?

Féchain. Certainly, *Madame la Présidente*. (*A pause.*) As the father of five children, I had the misfortune to allow myself to be tempted by the property of others. I had a moment of forgetfulness and was condemned by the laws of my country for embezzlement and burglary. (*Glances of admiration between Mme. Guerlot and Pauline.*) After having undergone the just punishment for my crime, I should have again fallen fatally into sin, if God — (*correcting himself*) if my good star —

Mme. Guerlot. You may say "God." (*Low to Pauline*) What do you think? Do you see any objection?

Pauline. Not at all.

Féchain. If God had not led me to two lovely ladies —

Pauline (*gently*). Oh! oh!

Féchain. Mustn't I say that?

Mme. Guerlot. Why, certainly, certainly.

Féchain. Two lovely ladies who led me back to the straight path. Since then I have returned to my family and I should be living in modest, but complete happiness, if the health of my poor wife were all that it might be.

Pauline. It is perfect — Is your wife still sick?

Mme. Guerlot. You didn't speak of that.

Féchain. That was because I was ashamed to have recourse so often to your inexhaustible bounty. Ah, if only my palpitation did not forbid me to do any work! (*He wipes away a tear. Pauline, turning about, takes a coin from her purse.*)

Pauline (low, to Mme. Guerlot). Ten francs?

Mme. Guerlot. Yes.

Pauline. Take this, my good man.

Féchain. No, Mme. la Présidente! no, really!

Pauline. Oh, come now, you must!

Féchain (accepting). It's too much! It's too much!

Act III. Scene 2. Pauline. Come in! (*Féchain enters.*) Ah, it is you. (*To the servant*) Tell M. Salviat that I will see him now. (*The servant goes out.*)

Pauline. He will be here presently. You may wait.

Féchain. Will you kindly allow me to sit down? Because, I don't know whether it is my palpitation, but everything seems to be going around — you seem to be rising up to the ceiling and coming down. It makes me feel dizzy.

Pauline (astonished). Be seated. (*Aside*) If I didn't know him as I do I could take an oath that he is drunk.

Féchain (sitting down very near the table). Listen to me, Mme. la Présidente.

Pauline. Why, you smell of alcohol!

Féchain. That must be because I rubbed myself with it before coming. I was in terrible pain, and if it hadn't been for you, understand, I wouldn't have left the house. Only I heard you say to the other lady that you had only one reformed man to show to my benefactor, so I didn't want to leave you in the lurch.

Pauline. You are drunk, my good man. Go away.

Féchain (gets up). Me?—I haven't taken a drop of anything.

Pauline. You can scarcely stand on your feet; you are reeking with alcohol. I tell you to go away.

Féchain. That seem so? Honest, madame — must be the open air b'cause when I left the — the — whose its — I was as straight as a string.

Pauline. Go away!

Féchain. No. I don' want to dis'point you — get over this — I know m'self — get over this. You'll see m' ben'factor won't notice a thing. As th' father o' five children I had th' misfortune t' be tempted by the property of others —

Pauline. If you don't leave here of your own accord, I shall call Jean to put you out.

Féchain. Don't you worry. You'll see — I just don' want to dis'point you — [Enter *Salviat*].

Féchain (to himself). There he is — my benefactor. M'sieu, I'm th' r'formed man.

Salviat (laughing, to Pauline). Oh, oh! Why, why — the reformed man — is drunk.

Pauline. Oh, dear! He was so nice yésterday morning.

Féchain. As th' father o' five children — had th' misfortune t'low m'self t' b' tempted by th' prop'ty offuthers —

Salviat. You are drunk, my man.

Féchain. —By th' prop'ty offuthers — had moment of forgetfulness, and was condemned by th' laws of m' country —

Salviat. Shut up, or I'll throw you out of the window.

Féchain. Yes, my benefactor.

Pauline (to Salviat). I am really ashamed.

Salviat. Pooh! You're not going to worry about that — a drunken man — I've seen plenty of them. This one may be interesting; we will draw him out.

Féchain. As th' father o' five children — I had th' misforchun —

Salviat. You are going to have the misfortune of receiving a beating if you don't behave yourself. You are to speak when you are asked a question.

Féchain. Yes, my benefactor.

Salviat. Stand up!

Féchain. Can't stand up, my benefactor.

Salviat (laughing). And don't call me your benefactor again. If I ever was, I am so no longer — why don't you go to work?

Féchain. On 'count of my palpitation.

Salviat. Oh, ho! (*He gives him a vigorous slap on the shoulder.*) Palpitation of the heart! Come now, don't jest with me.

Féchain. I have a doctor's certificate.

Salviat (sitting down). Go on. You're doing wrong. What you are doing now is a swindle. If you don't

tell me the whole truth — you know what a prison is like, don't you?

Féchain. No, M'sieu.

Salviat. What! No, m'sieu! So you were not condemned by the laws of your country — as you said you were?

Féchain (looking towards Pauline). Yes?

Salviat. You did not serve time? (*He does not answer.*) If you don't answer I am going to have you grabbed when you leave here.

Féchain (looking at Pauline). It was —

Salviat. Come now, have you lost your tongue? It embarrasses you to tell it all before Madame because you have been lying to her?

Féchain. Yes, M'sieu.

Salviat. You did tell her that you had stolen?

Féchain. I never stole.

Pauline. You never stole! Why, I have your court record.

Féchain (weeping). 'S not mine.

Salviat. That's a good one! Now tell us all about that.

Féchain. All right; 't was this way. M' name isn't Féchain. That was the name of my wife's first husband — she was a widow. When we came here, honest, I wanted to go to work. But what could you expect; work — I — I can't stand it. It goes all right for two or three days — and then, good-night! So, when we found out there was a society for the reformed — when we found out what it was like, my wife gave me her other man's papers — and there you are!

The co-operative factory of Landrécy fares no better

than the charity organizations of his wife. In spite of all Landrécy has done for the men they threaten to strike unless he takes back a workman dismissed for insubordination. When everything has gone sufficiently wrong, Salviat turns up, preaches a sermon on the folly of it all, and retires from the position of suitor to Georgette in order that she may marry the young man she loves. The ending is very tame.

Nothing is easier to say than that M. Brioux has solved no problem;¹ it is open to question whether he thought of trying to solve one. The problem here is the greatest of all social problems, the problem of poverty. Is it not another attack on the social hypocrisy of the *Bourgeois*, with his liberal ideals in one hand and his complacency in the other, while the social problem remains untouched? The essence of his preaching is that we must understand each other, poor and rich, that we must realize the position of affairs in order to cope with them. If only we would try to realize the position and try to understand each other instead of making fools of ourselves and of each other, instead of going on in the present way, where the rich complacently dupe themselves and demoralize the poor, where the poor take a certain delight in fooling the charity-mongers, and where the real evil goes untouched.

¹ "Then Salviat takes the opportunity to read the Landrécy's a little lecture, and a not very effective one, on the familiar truth that the method of giving counts for more than what is given. Then, on my word, he has the air of instructing society that charity would be much more effective if it were applied without the aid of intermediary associations. And we had for a moment hoped that M. Brioux was going to solve this social problem. A paltry conclusion for a play so full of talent." (*Les Annales*, 1909. Article on *Les Bienfaiteurs*, pp. 190 et seq.)

Whether it has had any influence it is impossible to say, but the play, in spite of its faults, and because of its merits, is very much worth while.

L'ÉVASION¹. Comedy in three acts. Played for the first time December 7, 1896, at the *Comédie Française*; given thirteen times in December, 1896, thirty-eight times in 1897, five times in 1898; the first play by M. Brieux produced at the *Comédie Française*; crowned by the Academy.

Doctor Bertry is a successful physician, honoured and ambitious for more honours yet. Believing thoroughly in advertisement, he is busy on his biography, assisted by his assistant, La Belleuse; he writes himself down as one of the medical celebrities of the age, and especially plumes himself on his great work, "*douze volumes chez Alcan*," dealing with the subject of heredity, going beyond Lucas, Morel, Galton, in proving the invincible force of its laws. In spite of all his science he cannot cure himself. He is at heart a quack, and a tyrannical quack. Jean Belmont, his stepson, is doomed to commit suicide (according to the Bertry theory of heredity) because his father was a hypochondriac and committed suicide. Lucienne Bertry, niece to the doctor, is doomed to an immoral life because her mother was a courtesan. The romance brewing between Lucienne and Belmont has to fight its way against the imperious dictates of "science." But the two prisoners escape together; summoning up sufficient will-power, they defy "science" and marry, Jean, unconscious of the humor of it, threatening to kill himself unless Bertry consents. Bertry yields, but only to the threat, and still clings to his dogma. The test comes when Lu-

¹ The Escape.

cienne, now the wife of Belmont, is made love to by Paul de Maucourt. She is for a while fascinated by the terror of her heredity, but her love for her husband tells in the end, for Maucourt is a blackguard. Meanwhile Jean has grown fat on good food and country air and his melancholia disappears. The play closes ironically, Bertry, near the agony — pulling himself together to keep up appearances and get through a public speech.

There is some admirable satire on the medical profession,¹ there are some splendid bits of character painting (*le père Guernoche*, the shepherd-healer, is a telling part, created by Coquelin cadet), but it is not a good play. It is not well focussed. It is not satisfied with being a satire on the medical profession, it is an attempt to do what M. Curel has done better in *La Nouvelle Idole* — an attempt to dethrone science from its arrogant position as successor to religion. M. Curel is not the dramatist that M. Brieux is, but he is more the man of ideas; he can handle ideas better; he has chosen a better instance of the arrogance of science. What serious member of the medical profession would dream of maintaining the attitude of Bertry? He is only a charlatan, an imbecile, whereas the doctor in *La Nouvelle Idole* is an enthusiastic specialist, a martyr to his work. *L'Evasion* is an attack on charlatanism, it is not an attack on science. Charlatanism and science cannot be hit by the same stone.

¹ "The admirable thing about this play of M. Brieux is the vehicle, the satirical portions. I will not say that these are equal to Molière, seeing that I don't pretend to judge of that, but I believe it is the most frank and realistic satire on medicine and doctors that has appeared since Molière." (Lemaître, *Impressions*, Xme. Série, p. 52.)

L'Evasion, one of the least satisfying plays by M. Brieux, was crowned by the Academy; it is even an irritating play, irritating in the same way as *Ménages d'Artistes*. The attack on science is as puerile as the attack on the Symbolist poets; it is only an attitude taken for the moment; it is by no means part of the author's creed; indeed, it has been completely forgotten in *Les Avariés* and the second version of *Maternité*, where a medical specialist is the mouthpiece of the author.

LES TROIS FILLES DE MONSIEUR DUPONT. Comedy in four acts. Played for the first time, October 8, 1897, in Paris, at the *Théâtre du Gymnase*; played fifty-nine times in 1897.

This play ranks with *La Robe Rouge* and *Les Remplaçantes* as one of the three great plays by M. Brieux. It is one of the three plays chosen for the introductory volume of the English translations for which Mr. Shaw stands sponsor. An extract from it (Act I, Scene 5) is to be found in the *Anthologie du Théâtre Contemporain*. It is one of the plays by which M. Brieux must be judged. It is a "play unpleasant," but not after the *Théâtre Libre* pattern; the pattern is the pattern of M. Brieux.

M. Dupont is a small printer in a small provincial town. He is very anxious to marry off his daughter Julie. He has two other daughters by his first wife — Caroline, who has remained single and become *dévoté*, Angèle, who has remained single and is now a prosperous prostitute in Paris. But Julie — Julie is to be married! And M. Dupont sets about the business with all his business instincts alert, determined to

swindle the other party to the deal, the mother of Antonin Mairaut. The business duel goes on between Mairaut *mère* and Dupont *père*. Nothing could be more biting than this satire on what the institution of marriage has come to be under the system of the *dot* and paternal authority. Dupont has his eye upon the uncle of Mairaut, *l'oncle Maréchal*, a wealthy man who must leave all he has to Antonin, and who, from his official position, can flood the printer's shop of Dupont with official orders. Is Antonin the right husband for Julie? Stuff and nonsense, of course he is! The deal comes off. This first act is as fine as anything M. Brieux has ever done. I refrain from quoting only because it is accessible to English readers. M. Dupont agrees to give thirty thousand francs and his house at Saint Laurent. Antonin has only his prospects of being heir to *l'oncle Maréchal*. The union thus brought about is an abomination — the husband a heartless sensualist with an economical distaste for children, the wife a romanesque, high-spirited girl whose one hope for salvation lies in her children. She is disillusioned, demoralized, degraded, and both parties to the deal have their eyes opened. The maison de Saint Laurent is flooded and uninhabitable, while *l'oncle Maréchal* turns out to be a ruined man, having lost all his fortune in the Panama bubble. But the real centre of interest is Julie.

Things go from bad to worse, her every feeling is outraged — a pitiful story told with relentless truth — until the explosion comes brutally enough at the end of the third act and Julie leaves her husband. Nothing quite like this had been given before to the French stage.

It is not the dreary, morbid pessimism of the *Théâtre Libre* that prompts this work; it is too vitally honest, too profoundly true; only a man of strong faith could dare to paint such a picture.

And what is Julie to do? Which is the better off — Julie, Caroline, or Angèle? These questions are raised in the last act when the sisters are brought together, and Julie, submitting to her fate, returns to the man she loathes, crushed by the machine. What other possibilities are there in a woman's life under such a system?

Apart from the value of the manifesto, the play is a great play — missionary and dramatist are fused into one.

“The new play of M. Brieux, *Les Trois Filles de M. Dupont*, is a noteworthy comedy of morals. It appears to me to be, and by far, the best that he has done up to the present, the least didactic in form, the richest in observation, and the most powerful. |

“In big subjects there is a pull — the author has only to take a firm grip. But he must have both faith and strength, enough natural candor not to be afraid of being commonplace, and enough talent not to be commonplace. With a persistent faith and increasing skill M. Brieux continues at the theatre to set before us his critiques of social problems, which are also critiques of the caprices, vices, mistakes and sores of our democracy. He has shown us the misfortune of those girls who are alienated from their social class by too much educating, the corruption of the electorate and of representative bodies, the hypocrisy and inadequacy of philanthropic organizations, and the harm

that can come from scientific superstitions. All that is very important. But this time he has found a problem of still more agitating interest, if that is possible, whose appeal is even more vital. The question is what is to become of the many poor girls of the middle class of today where an abominable custom denies to them the right to marry without a dowry. The alternative is plain; they go wrong, they do not marry, or they marry badly. And fundamentally considered, those who marry badly, or those who do not marry at all, miss their proper destiny no less than those who go wrong. Such are the truths demonstrated by M. Brieux's comedy of morals.

“The last act of *Les Trois Filles de M. Dupont* is assuredly only a study in pessimism. The play would end with a deplorable effect if one were not conscious of the artificiality of this act. Here, moreover, didacticism, that species of ‘I-told-you-so,’ dear to the heart of an author, is a little too obvious. But for all that, the play in its entirety is wonderfully real and full of merit. The talent of M. Brieux increases from year to year, and it delights me because it is the talent of neither the professed humanist, nor of the Philistine; and because there is at the same time a naïve frankness and a keen insight, a sober honesty and a stinging resentment, a realism and an idealism, a touch of Poor Richard, and a touch of Schopenhauer, a certain confidence and a certain diffidence, an incertitude extremely interesting in its sincerity. And what a thorough-going type, what a splendid high comedy type truly, is M. Dupont! — not to speak of much that

has slipped from my memory." (Lemaître, *Impressions*, Xme. Série, p. 278.)

L'ÉCOLE DES BELLES-MÈRES. Comedy in one act. Played for the first time in Paris, at the *Théâtre du Gymnase*, March 25, 1898.

The subject of the play is obvious from the title. To a great extent it is a repetition of the last act of *La Couvée*. (See page 20.)

RÉSULTAT DES COURSES. Comedy in five acts and six tableaux. First played at the *Théâtre Antoine*, Paris, December 9, 1898; performed twenty-six times in 1898, twenty-seven times in 1899.

The action of this play is situated among the working classes of Paris, from which M. Brieux has risen. To gather the necessary information, to get the necessary detail and atmosphere, he disguised himself as a workman and entered an *atelier*. But he was soon discovered.

At the lunch hour he went with his fellow-workmen to the wine shop. He got up on a table:—

"My friends," said he, "I am not an engraver, I am an author of plays. My name is Eugène Brieux, and I produce plays of which perhaps you have heard—*Les Bienfaiteurs*, *Les Trois Filles de M. Dupont*, *Blanchette*."

One of the men present, a reader, exclaimed: "I should say so! Of course we know *Blanchette*!"

Brieux explained what he was there for.

"At least, you are going to invite us to the first performance——"

"You shall be there!"

When the curtain rose on the dress rehearsal the entire

shop was in the audience. It was before such a sympathetic and impressionable audience that the drama first unfolded its impressive lessons. "I felt that evening," Brioux said to me, "the finest intoxication that it has ever been granted me to experience. I love my engravers better than the subscribers of the *Comédie Française*."¹

That he never lost this sympathy with the Paris plebs is demonstrated by his expressions on several occasions, notably in his *Discours* at the Academy, May 12, 1910.

"Messieurs, I am not so lacking in modesty as to be unaware that the dream of my youth (his election to the Academy) would have remained a dream had I offered for your indulgent consideration my literary merits alone. And . . . I interpret my presence here as being due to your wish to give a proof of your sympathy, not for what I have accomplished, but for what I have aimed to do. Without doubt, again, you have especially wished to extend a friendly hand to the working class from which I came, and which has not too often heard flattering words except from those who wished to obtain from it the right to govern it."

With this play M. Brioux returns to his friend Antoine, who had performed nothing of his since *Blanchette*, which had reached in the January of that year (1898) its hundredth performance by Antoine. The chief part in *Résultat des Courses* — Arsène Chantaud, *le père la Joie*, was played with remarkable success by Antoine himself.

¹ Adolphe Brisson, *Les Prophètes*, p. 341. Flammarion et Tallandier.

Chantaud is a bronze-worker in the *atelier* of Lesterel. One day he enters, exuberant with joy; he has just won heavily at the races, stands drinks all round, and makes a present of a silver watch and a gold chain to his son Victor, who is the best workman in the place, highly favored by his employer, Lesterel, and in love with Lucie Lesterel. After his first piece of luck Chantaud gets the gambling fever; finally he uses a large sum of money — twelve hundred francs — which he had been sent to collect for M. Lesterel, and of course loses that. His employer does not prosecute him, but makes him sign a declaration of theft and dismisses him. Meanwhile the Chantaud family gets poorer and poorer, all the father's pay being lost at the races. The women slave and Victor is the dutiful son — but they are turned out of their home. Chantaud cannot get any employment because the necessary reference to his last employer would bring out the truth. He drifts from bad to worse, and is at last arrested as a loiterer. He appears before the *Commissaire* with a crowd of other wretches, the greater part of whom ask to be sent to gaol as a favor. Happily, Victor has worked hard and become the partner of Lesterel, and reconstructs the home, into which the demoralized father has to be lured.

LE BERCEAU. Comedy in three acts. First played at the *Comédie Française*, December 19, 1898. Played six times in 1898 and fifteen times in 1899.

Laurence, under pressure from her parents, has divorced her husband, Raymond Chantrel, for infidelity. She has married, again under pressure from her parents, the correct Monsieur de Girieu. There is one child of

the first union, *le petit Julien*, of whom the mother has custody, and whom the correct M. Girieu hates with the hatred only a correct man is capable of feeling. The little boy, while at the house of his grandparents, falls seriously ill, so ill that he cannot be taken home under the roof of M. Girieu. The boy's father, Raymond Chantrel, hearing of the illness, hurries to him, insists on seeing him and on staying at his bedside until he is out of danger. Girieu protests violently, but in vain.

The situation, so full of dramatic possibilities, is brought about by the most natural means. Laurence and Raymond are once more brought into close contact with one another, the natural bond between them is to test the force of the artificial power that has separated them. Three nights of the greatest anxiety are passed in silence, no words save such as have immediate bearing on the illness of the child pass between them, every effort is made to respect their artificial separation, but, at last, the force of the natural bond is too great and they fall into each other's arms. In spite of everything they love each other and are united in their child.

M. Girieu refuses to allow the boy to come under his roof again after his recovery, which means that Laurence stays away too; she cannot be separated from her child; she refuses to live with her second husband and takes leave of her first because she and Raymond are too high-minded to rebuild their happiness at the expense of another's — they owe that at least to Girieu. "*Laissez-moi seule ici avec mon père et ma mère, et toute à mon enfant.*"

The play is an attack on divorce where there are children. The parents must be sacrificed to the family;

no code can make legitimate the breaking of the natural family bond. If there are no children we may divorce, remarry, or do what we like, but the family is sacred.

"The law could declare us separated, we could inwardly swear indifference, and to forget each other; lawyers, judges, the civil code and all the laws of the world could proclaim that we were strangers; but the child remained. And nature, which is concerned only for the child, nature that wills that the father and mother shall remain united in order to insure the existence of the child, and to perpetuate life, nature took again by assault the rights of which it was proposed to rob her, and reunited the father and mother in an irresistible embrace. . . .", etc.

The idea of the sanctity of the family haunts M. Brieux. The first complete expression of it is in this play, but it is always at the back of his brain. The centre of the family is the child, fraught with all the possibilities of the future. The right to happiness, the social ambition of parents, is an abomination in so far as it interferes with the life of the family. The institution of the dowry and paternal authority falsify the family life before it begins. Away with them! *Le Berceau* helps to make clear the point of view from which *Les Trois Filles de M. Dupont* was written. The attack on the code is worth noting also. Already in *Le Bureau des Divorces*, he had made fun of the divorce law as soon as it came into force; now he returns to criticism of the code. In this way *Le Berceau* heralds *La Robe Rouge*, which, not satisfied with criticizing one particular article of the code, attacks the

institution of Justice itself. *Le Berceau* is not a bad play. It is full of sound ideas and appeals especially to sensibly sentimental mothers who have not too fastidious a taste in literary style. It has some very good scenes and the first act is an excellent piece of work. The characters belong to a world of which M. Brieux knows nothing, and he has not been able to imagine their intimate feelings. It would be as ungracious to exact from M. Brieux the subtle skill of a Donnay in handling emotion, as to exact from M. Donnay the conviction and power of a Brieux. It is excusable to situate the subject in such a *milieu*, the poor people whom M. Brieux knows best cannot afford to indulge in the luxury of divorce.

Chapter IV

La Robe Rouge

LA ROBE ROUGE. Play in four acts. Played for the first time at the *Théâtre du Vaudeville*, March 15, 1900. Revived at the *Théâtre Français*, September 23, 1909. Played sixty-four times at the *Vaudeville* and twenty-one times at the *Français* in 1909. Withdrawn by M. Brioux from the repertory of the *Théâtre Français* in July, 1911, after the departure from that theatre of the actor, M. Huguenet.

The scene of the play is at Mauléon (Basses Pyrénées) in the country of the Basques. Act I is at the house of Vagret, the *Procureur de la République*. A crime has been committed at Irrisary — *le père Goyetche*, an old man of eighty-seven, has been robbed and killed. The murderer remains undiscovered and the newspapers of the district — even the Basque newspaper — take occasion to rail at the slowness of Justice and even to attack the *Procureur de la République*, Monsieur Vagret.

Madame Vagret is in great grief. For years she has waited for the promotion of her husband to the rank of Judge.¹ Years ago she bought him his robe — the

¹The original, *conseiller*, is the title of a rank not always implying the same office in the judicial system of France, whose magistrates are graded according to the importance of their district and duties. The *conseiller* may be either a judge or the prosecuting officer of a criminal court with jury sitting in an important district. The official gown is the Red Robe. Magistrates of lesser rank wear black gowns.

red robe of a Judge — but has had to keep it in the wardrobe reeking of naphthalene to keep the moth out. And now his promotion is imminent. If only he could obtain an important crime and a reputation-making conviction his appointment would be certain. The important crime has been given to them, but — the conviction? There is the difficulty, for the culprit cannot be found. The investigating magistrate, Délorme, gives up the case in despair, the *Président des Assises* begs to be excused from the end-of-session dinner given by Mme. Vagret; as the guests assemble the future looks black indeed for the Vagrets.

But things brighten. M. le Juge Mouzon (the part played by Huguenet) is willing to accept the papers ordering investigation of the Irissary murder which his colleague, Délorme, has returned to the public prosecutor, Vagret. Mouzon has a brilliant idea; he differs entirely from Délorme, who, according to him, is on the wrong track in assuming that the murderer was a vagabond. Mouzon is convinced that the murderer is a local man, a man who had something to gain by the crime.

Vagret. That is very well argued.

Bunerat. In my opinion it is remarkably logical and convincing.

Mouzon. Take my word for it. The case is simple enough. If I were in charge of the investigation I would guarantee to have the guilty man locked up inside of three days.

Vagret. Well, my dear colleague, I have a bit of news for you. M. Délorme, who is not at all well,

returned the investigation to me this afternoon, and it falls to you. After this you will have charge of the investigation in the Irissary case.

Mouzon. I needn't tell you that I accept, my dear procureur. It is my duty to accept. I will take back nothing that I have said: within three days the murderer will be under arrest.

Bunerat. Good!

Vagret. I thank you for that assurance in behalf of all of us. I tell you frankly that you have relieved us of a great anxiety. (*To his wife*) Did you hear, my dear? M. Mouzon will take up the investigation and he assures us results within three days.

Mme. Vagret. Thank you, Monsieur Mouzon.

Mme. Bunerat. Thank you.

Vagret. Bertha! Tell them to serve dinner. And tell them to bring up some old Irrouléguy! (*To Mouzon*) I want to drink to our success, my friend.

The man-servant (enters). Dinner is served.

And, as the curtain descends, everything is well from the professional point of view, and the holders of this point of view, full of the zest of life, are conscious of being perfectly charming human beings.

Mouzon keeps his word, he finds a culprit — Etchepare. The murderer of la père Goyetche can be none other than he, a peasant, who owed the murdered man a considerable sum, and, of course, took the easiest way of getting rid of the debt. Mouzon is a terrible man, his diabolical ingenuity, his pitiless obstinacy in holding to his logical theory (as if he were dealing with

mathematical symbols and were trying to prove his point) show him to be utterly unfit to administer justice to human beings. He is not a man, he is a dehumanized specialist.

The second act takes place in his room — the office of Mouzon, investigating magistrate. Mouzon has been on the spree at Bordeaux the night before and has a “head,” but he is a keen stamp collector and can be prevented by no headache from sticking some newly arrived stamps in his album as he waits until it is time for the *instruction* to begin.

Mondoubleau, the deputy, a Gascon, turns in to see about the case of a friend of his, Labastide, one of his best electioneering agents. The deputy is a man to be cultivated; Mouzon flatters him, makes light of the newspaper attack upon himself.

Mouzon. What do you expect, Monsieur Deputy! This paper is against you, and as it doesn't trouble me to support your candidacy openly, it charges up against the magistrate the opinions of the citizen —

Mondoubleau. I am so sorry — and I thank you very much, my friend, very much indeed. But go on. However, you will — be prudent. The Minister of Justice said to me only the day before yesterday: “I depend on you to save me any embarrassment in your district. No scandals! Above all, no scandals! I ought to tell you that Eugène is being attacked a good deal just now.”

Mouzon. You and the Minister of Justice are really on terms of intimacy so —

Mondoubleau (with a slight gesture, simply). We were in the Commune together

Decidedly this is a man to be cultivated. As a deputy he was worth much to such a ferocious *arriviste* as Mouzon, but as an intimate friend of the minister of justice, a man who calls him Eugène, who thees and thous him — why — he is beyond price, he may have anything he wants without even asking. Labastide need not worry, there is no case against him.

Mouzon. Good-bye. (*The deputy goes out, leaving him alone.*) I rather think our deputy won't have too bad an opinion of me after this.

And what is a man accused of murder to a Mouzon?

“The fact is, I was pretty keen to suspect Etchepare; now the thing is to make him confess, and the sooner the better.”

And he sets to work in a hustle.

Mouzon (*seated, handing the papers in the case to the clerk*). In that Labastide case, make me out an order of “insufficient grounds” and the order for immediate release. You can do that during the examination of witnesses. Come, let's get to work! It's already two o'clock and we haven't got anything done yet. Hurry up — Let me see — What are you waiting for? — Give me the list of witnesses — Didn't you understand me? What is the matter with you today?

A witness for the defence, Bridet, is summoned, browbeaten, sent about his business in short order. And now it is the turn of Etchepare. Maître Placat, the *avocat* in charge of the defence, without whose

presence the investigating magistrate may not question the accused, steps in.¹

Act II, Scene 6. Mouzon. Good afternoon, my friend, how are you?

Placat. Very well — and how are you, my friend? I caught a glimpse of you last evening at the Grand Theatre; you were with an extremely pretty young lady.

Mouzon. Oh, yes, the fact is — I ——

Placat. I beg your pardon. By the way, I wanted to say a word to you in regard to the Etchepare case.

Mouzon. If you are at liberty now, we will proceed immediately with the examination.

Placat. That is just the point — I haven't a moment to spare ——

Mouzon. Do you want me to put it over until tomorrow?

Placat. No. I have just had a talk with the prisoner. The case is of no interest; he denies, and denies, that's all. He is willing to be examined without me (*he laughs*). And I won't deny to you, my dear friend, that I have advised him to persist in his policy. But I must be off — good-bye. If he asks for a lawyer, later on, let me know, and I will send one of my clerks.

¹ In the original version Maître Placat does not even put in an appearance.

Mouzon (to the clerk). Note in the record that M. Placat, though duly notified by the court, has not appeared, and has communicated no reason for his absence.

Etchepare (speaks up). Isn't my lawyer here?

Mouzon. Your lawyer has had notice to appear. He has not appeared. No doubt he is busy with other clients.

Etchepare. Because I'm not able to pay him enough money.

Mouzon. That does not concern me. He has been notified — he is not here. We will proceed.

Mouzon. All right. Hope to see you soon.

And the counsel for the defence (who ought, according to law, to be present at the *interrogatoire*) leaves Etchepare to the mercy of the bustling *juge d'instruction*.

The absence of Placat has been very much criticized; this point will be taken up later.

Then follows Scene 7 — the scene of the *interrogatoire*. It should be given entire to be appreciated, but it is too long to quote. It is a great scene. Mouzon plays with Etchepare as a cat with a mouse — working on his feelings, twisting him this way and that, turning on him with a quick thrust, appealing to him persuasively like a father, taking every possible advantage of his own skill and the peasant's helplessness to entrap him into confessing the crime.

In spite of all the lies and admissions of Etchepare, in spite of all the circumstantial evidence, in spite of all the logical force on the side of Mouzon, we have the feeling — a deep conviction — that Etchepare is innocent.

This is the best thing in all the dramatic work of M. Brieux.

Then follows the *interrogatoire* of the wife of the accused, Yanetta (Act II, Scene 9), a scene almost worthy to rank with the one just described. Yanetta has a history — a history recorded in her *casier judiciaire*, unknown to her husband or any one in her life, almost forgotten by herself. Ten years before, when she was a young servant girl, Yanetta was seduced by the son of the house, who stole money from his father to run away. They were caught; the son was let off; Yanetta was imprisoned for a month. Mouzon

makes use of this document to force Yanetta to incriminate Etchepare, but all she says only confirms our feelings that he is innocent. Mouzon puts all the evidence of his guilt before Yanetta and almost succeeds in making her believe that he is guilty. Then he sends for the accused; husband and wife are confronted. This scene is full of outbursts. As the man and woman fight against Mouzon the emotion rises to a high pitch. Yanetta refuses to sign her *interrogatoire* and is arrested.

Yanetta. All there is there is false! I tell you it is false. (*Screaming*) The night Père Goyetche was murdered my husband didn't leave the house — my husband didn't leave the house.

Mouzon (pale with anger). You will settle with me for that. Femme Etchepare, I place you under arrest on the charge of complicity in murder. (*To the gendarmes*) Take him to the detention room and come back and get her.

Yanetta. Oh! you are mad now, are you, because you didn't accomplish your purpose! — Oh, you have done everything, everything you possibly could, though, except to torture us with fire! — You pretended to be sympathetic — you spoke gently! You wanted to make me send my husband to the guillotine. It is your business to furnish heads to cut off — You must have guilty men; you must have them at any cost. When a man has fallen into your clutches he is a doomed man — They come in here innocent, but they must go out criminals. It satisfies your vanity to succeed in it! You put questions that don't seem to have any harm in them that can send a man to the next world,

and when you have forced a poor creature to convict himself, you feel the joy of a savage over it.

Mouzon. Take her away; we must get on.

Yanetta. Yes, of a savage. That — justice! You call that justice — You are an executioner — You are as cruel as they used to be when they broke people's bones to make them confess! — You don't even suspect it yourself and you think yourself a good man, I know it, and you are an executioner —

Mouzon. I tell you take her away! What, both of you, can't you rid me of that maniac?

Yanetta. Butcher! — Coward! — Judas! — You're pitiless! Yes, pitiless — and more false and cruel when you are dealing with poor people like us! Yes, the poorer people are, the more cruel you are! — The poorer they are, the more you —

And at last, after having clung to furniture and doors with a tenacity that defies the strength of the two gendarmes, she is carried away and the curtain falls on this outburst of rhetoric. Reading it, one is, perhaps, too conscious of the rhetoric, too conscious of the trumpet voice of the author behind Yanetta challenging the Institution of Justice. But on the stage it is effective, stirring, rousing the audience to the wildest enthusiasm. The second act of *La Robe Rouge* is M. Brieux at his best.

Act III is in the *cabinet du Procureur de la République*, off the court room, where the case is being tried. Maître Dubois, counsel for the defence, pleads so eloquently that he is applauded by the public and the acquittal of Etchepare seems certain. While the court is still sitting it becomes known that the Pro-

cureur-Général has arrived at Mauléon, obviously bringing somebody's appointment to the post of *conseiller*. Who is the lucky man? Is it Vagret? Is it Mouzon? Mouzon is sent for, the Procureur-Général wishes to have a private interview with him. Mouzon is in great glee. The Procureur comes to the point at once, demands his resignation from the magistracy. The spree at Bordeaux has resulted in an open scandal. Mouzon refuses to resign, he is not afraid of the scandal, let the Procureur do what he likes. The deputy, Mondoubleau, intervenes to save the situation; the papers are about to attack Mouzon and demand his removal, and the Minister of Justice, "Eugène," does not want any disturbance.

The Procureur-Général. Unfortunately, Coire knows all about it, and threatens to tell the whole story in his paper, unless M. Mouzon is removed from Mauléon.

Mondoubleau. The deuce! (*He laughs.*)

The Procureur-Général. What amuses you?

Mondoubleau. Nothing—a droll idea—a mere pleasantry. (*He laughs.*) Tell me then—but say, you won't be offended, will you?—It's only a jest.

The Procureur-Général. What is it?

Mondoubleau. I was thinking—as I said, it's only a droll idea—In short—in short, if you were to propose Mouzon for the place of Judge at Pau, you would be pleasing everybody——

The Procureur-Général. My dear Deputy——

Mondoubleau. As it's only for the fun of it, a mere jest—However, the amusing thing about what I said is that you would with one stroke be satisfying

the wishes of Coire, of myself, of Mouzon and of Eugène, who doesn't want any scandal —

The Procureur-Général. But that would be one —

Mondoubleau. Mistake. In politics there is never any scandal except when there is publicity —

The Procureur-Général. But then —

Mondoubleau. I agree with you. I know perfectly well all they could say — I repeat, I said it only for fun. And do you know the curious thing about it, really — when you think it over? It is that this fantastic solution is the only one that doesn't involve serious inconveniences — apparently serious — Yes, certainly — If you leave Mouzon here, Coire will print everything —

And the Procureur-Général, who has his eye on a better post in the Orleans circuit, gives Mouzon the appointment at Pau.

Meanwhile the trial of Etchepare has been going on. Vagret has replied to Dubois, upset all his arguments, made the condemnation well nigh inevitable, and is on the point of asking for judgment, when he suddenly becomes strangely moved, pulls himself up and asks that the sitting be suspended. Into the heart of the man creeps a doubt as to the guilt of the accused. While the professional mind was performing its functions at its best, a human sentiment is aroused and upsets everything. Before making known this doubt to the court Vagret wishes to consult with the President of the Assizes and the Procureur-Général. What is his duty? They will have nothing to do with his human scruples, they resent his attempts to make them re-

sponsible for his professional incapacity, and they leave him to his doubts and — his wife.

Mme. Vagret. What is the matter?

Vagret. Nothing.

Mme. Vagret. Nothing? You are depressed, and yet you have just scored a success that will help you in your career.

Vagret. It is that very success that frightens me.

Mme. Vagret. That frightens you?

Vagret. Yes, I am afraid.

Mme. Vagret. Afraid of what?

Vagret. Of having gone too far.

Mme. Vagret. Too far! — Doesn't he deserve death ten times over — that murderer?

Vagret (after a silence). You are quite sure, yourself, that he is a murderer?

Mme. Vagret. Yes.

Vagret (in a low voice). Well — I ——

Mme. Vagret. You?

Vagret. I no longer have any opinion.

Mme. Vagret. Is it possible!

Vagret. Yes. In the course of my argument a strange thing happened within me — While I, a public officer, I, the official prosecutor, was performing my duty, another self examined the evidence calmly and impartially; an inner voice reproached me for my violence and insinuated into my mind a doubt, which grew. In my soul began a struggle, painful, solemn and relentless — and the reason why, in closing, I felt the emotion the presiding judge referred to, and why I demanded the verdict in a scarcely audible voice, was that I was worn out — because in that struggle my

conscience was on the point of winning, and I hastened to finish because I was afraid that voice would burst out in spite of me. When I saw that the attorney for the defence remained seated and was not going to address the jury again to say the things that I would have wished him to say — then I was really afraid of myself — of my acts, of my words, of their terrible consequences, and I wanted to gain time.

The struggle between the man and the magistrate in *Vagret* continues to the end of the act, until he finally decides to perform his “duty of an honest man.” He informs the jury of his doubts as to the guilt of *Etchepare* and the man is acquitted. Justice has been done — but the man’s life is ruined. Evil enough befell him while under arrest — his house had been wrecked, his mother and his children turned out; but this was as nothing compared to what he learnt in open court of his wife’s early history.

Act IV takes place in the office of *Mouzon* (the scene of the second act). *Etchepare*, on his release, is to leave for America with his mother and his children. *Yanetta* is to be left behind — she shall never see them again.

Yanetta. Forgive me!

Etchepare. Never! Never!

Yanetta. Don’t say that word — only God has the right to say “never.” I will go back to your house; I will be only the first of the servants — the lowest, if you wish! — I won’t take my place at the fireside until you tell me to.

Etchepare. We no longer have a home. We no longer have a fireside. We no longer have anything!

And I tell you again it is your fault — and that it is because you came to take the place of the mother, the place of a mother like mine, you, a liar and an insult to God — that misfortune has fallen on us!

Yanetta. Even that, I swear it to you, I will help you to forget, by my humility, by my devotion and by my repentance. And no matter where you go, I will go with you. Pierre, think of it, your children still need me.

Etchepare. My children! You shall never see them again, you shall never speak to them again, you shall never kiss them again, you shall never touch them again!

Yanetta (her tone changed). Oh! Oh! That! Oh! no! Not that — The children! Not that — You are wrong! Oh! Oh! no! Take everything away from me, subject me to every humiliation — force me to beg my bread, I don't care! Refuse to look at me, refuse to speak to me except to abuse me — anything — anything you wish — But my children! — my children! — my children — they are mine — they came from my body, they are still part of me — and always, always they will be part of my very flesh and blood.

Left thus, without a home, without her husband, without her children, Yanetta has a big account to settle with Mouzon, who comes to set her provisionally at liberty and, perhaps, to withdraw his complaint against her entirely if she will apologize for her abusive language. Yanetta regrets nothing — it is she who has an account to be settled.

Yanetta. Listen to me — for the last time, I ask you what you think you are going to do to bring comfort to me, to give me back all that I have lost through

you; what you are going to do to lessen my sorrows, and how you are going to manage to give me back my children?

Mouzon. I have nothing to say to you. I owe you nothing.

Yanetta. You owe me nothing! You owe me more than my life, more than anything. My children — I shall never see them again. What you have taken from me is the happiness of every moment, it is their kisses every night, it is the pride I felt in seeing them grow up — Never! Never shall I hear them say "Mother!" It is as if they were dead! It is as if you had killed them. (*She seizes the knife from Mouzon's desk.*) Yes! That is your work, yours, the work of wicked judges. Of an innocent man you just missed making a convict, and of an honest woman, of a mother, you make a criminal! (*She stabs him; he falls.*)

This last act has been severely criticized. M. Faguet is particularly fastidious; to him it is an unworthy melodrama tacked on to a fine, strong comedy; for him the play ends with the third act. The truth is there is no fault to find with the unity of interest. M. Gustave Larroumet is nearer the mark when he says:

"In itself the act is abundantly motivated and M. Brieux has only developed the logic of his theme."¹

The fault is in the style.

"If the act drags it is because it is weakly written, lacking in conciseness and contrast. Yanetta talks a great deal; she speaks only the truth, but she does it at too great length and in an ineffective way. I hope

¹ *Le Temps*, Lundi, 19 Mars, 1900.

that this inferior last act will not be prejudicial to the success of a play the first three acts of which are of the first rank."

The hope of M. Larroumet has been amply gratified; the rhetorical finale is more acceptable to the public than to the man of letters — today the man of taste disapproves of rhetoric in the theatre, but the public does not. M. Brieux does not appeal to the man of letters, who is often unable to accept his work in the spirit in which it is meant.

A more serious issue is raised by the criticism of Scene 6 of Act II quoted on page 55.

M. de Saint Aubain accuses M. Brieux of error:

"The preliminary examination of witnesses, at the investigation of the crime, is developed in a masterly manner. The dramatic effect is powerful. There is a single error, a serious one. Since the reform of the code a suspect may not be detained a week incommunicado for examination before the investigating magistrate, and his lawyer is present at the hearing; a headache on the part of counsel for the defence (sic) by no means suffices to justify the text. The supreme court would reverse a conviction on account of Mouzon's irregular procedure."¹

One has only to read the scene in question to feel sure that M. Brieux knows all this perfectly well.

M. Larroumet attacks from a different angle:

"Unfortunately, this fine scene is had at the price of a flagrant improbability. Since a recent enactment, the accused does not appear alone before the magistrate

¹ *La Quinzaine*, 1 Avril, 1900.

conducting the investigation of the crime. It is provided that a lawyer shall be present to assist him, and thus lessen the inequality of the struggle between the prisoner and the magistrate. M. Brieux, in order not to lose the advantage of a dramatic situation, has allowed the lawyer to be absent through chance. It is a very weak device. The Etchepare case is such as to rouse keen interest. Especially in the country, where such a piece of luck would be a rare occurrence, no lawyer would let slip such a client."¹

The charge is a grave one; it makes the play depend on a subtle device and weakens the attack against justice from beginning to end. One might urge as an excuse that M. Brieux had been at work on the play for a long time, that the *loi récente* was passed after the play had taken shape, that the scene of the *instruction* was too essential a part of the play to be sacrificed, and that M. Brieux makes use of an expedient to get the advocate out of the way. The excuse will not hold; firstly, because M. Brieux is too honest; secondly, because the law was voted December 8, 1897, and came into force December 10 — too long before the production of the play (March, 1900) for this argument to be valid.

The explanation is, perhaps, much simpler. The law exists, but like so many other laws, it is not obeyed. The casual indifference of Maître Placat to his duty is just one more thrust at the professional man of law. As an explanation it would be *bien faible*, as a satirical touch it is not only quite acceptable, but it helps the

¹ *Le Temps*, Lundi, 19 Mars, 1900.

general effect of the play. For the matter of that, Etchepare is willing to be questioned alone.²

La Robe Rouge is called neither comedy nor tragedy, it is called a play — a meaningless term which gives no clue to the author's intention. Monsieur Faguet regards it as a comedy, a strong satirical comedy. It is so regarded by many others. The story of the conception of the play will serve to throw light on this point, as well as to show the way M. Brioux works.

As a journalist he frequented the law courts in Paris. He was struck by the helplessness of the uneducated poor people before all the complicated processes of Justice, and the callous indifference of the specialist who understood the technique of the business and was so absorbed in it as to become dehumanized. The play, says M. Brioux, might well bear, for second title, *La Déformation Professionnelle*. The execution of justice is further complicated by the money question, which lies behind all our social crimes. Even the honest Vagret is forced out of his normal line of conduct, while Mouzon, though not open to corruption, is an *arriviste* of the first order. M. Brioux is moved to pity at the helplessness of the poor, but to make the struggle keener and the cruelty more impressive he needs a better antagonist than the degraded pauper of Paris. He must have an uneducated man — not a demoralized man — a peasant, a peasant full of native

² "Placet. He is willing to be examined without me."

Article 9 of the law in question reads: "The accused, whether confined or free on bail, shall not be examined or arraigned, *unless he shall expressly waive the right*, except in the presence of his counsel or upon due notice to such counsel." (Vide *Recueils des Lois Décretés Circulaires*, etc., 5 Février, 1911, p. 42. Muzard et Ebin, Paris.)

pride. "I needed a man suffering a wrong — a countryman — a man of worth, uncorrupted despite his lack of education — I chose the Basque." So down he goes to the Basses Pyrénées, mixes with the people, learns a bit of their language, and finally situates his play. He was already conversant with the thousand and one details of judicial procedure. It remained for him to pit the peasant against the professional. The tone of the play is essentially serious, the last act is an important part of the original intention of the author; the amusing bits of irony are added, they do not interfere with the grimness of the struggle, rather do they heighten the effect of it; the moral of the struggle is that the specialist must obey human laws — that there are general considerations of higher import than his special considerations. It is the specialist who is killed by a human being at bay. This is different from the *Justice* of Mr. Galsworthy, which is called a tragedy, and where the hero is the victim of a grim monster which no one can control. "The chariot wheels of Justice" do not come into play in *La Robe Rouge*. An appeal is made to the higher understanding of magistrates, to their deepest human feelings, to get rid of the vice of professionalism.

"At the Palais de Justice they remember last year seeing the author of 'The Red Robe' sauntering, observantly idle, about the great halls outside the court rooms. A court house should be suspicious of the visits of a writer. M. Brioux paced the corridors, opened the door of a court room here and there, approached to the bar-enclosure, fixed in his mind's eye the judicial stage setting, chatted with lawyers, ex-

changed greetings with the prosecuting attorneys, gazed with a smile of captivated interest on Mme. Thémis, seated, or standing, in all the attitudes and all the poses enjoined by the divers awful duties of her mission. He would take out a pencil, a piece of paper, and he would jot down notes. From the notes — it should have been foreseen — was born a play whose dialogue — this, too, should have been foreseen — is not so amiable as reminiscences of days gone by. The amenities of the visitor give place to the acerbities of the author. For the author is no victim of illusions and the drama of life rouses his generous ire. His irony is not of the gentle sort; it is biting; and always in his warmth of feeling is felt the thrill of wrath. He is not amused with life, and he sees reasons to shudder.”

Monsieur de Saint Aubain has not penetrated to the depths of the author’s intention, but his opinion is worth having. Here is another passage from the same article: —

“How many striking points, how many relentless analyses! This witness for the defence who, if listened to, would clear up matters with a word, but, disconcerted, is completely stupefied by the investigating magistrate, because instead of a savior, he is regarded only as a bore; the innocent prisoner who perjures himself in the hope of escaping from his torture, and by his clumsiness brings on himself false appearances of guilt — this woman who is tripped up by her court record — alarm the philosopher. I commend such revelations to those on whom depend our honor and our interests. The heavy responsibilities of their task are never too much taken to heart. Whenever he puts

on his robe, whether to conduct the investigation of crime, to prosecute, or to judge, the magistrate should not fail to recall the words of Lamennais, 'When I remember that there are men who dare to judge other men, I am appalled, and I shudder.'"¹

¹ *La Quinzaine*, 1 Avril, 1900.

Chapter V

Plays from 1901-1909

LES REMPLACANTES. Play in three acts. First produced at the *Théâtre Antoine*, February 15, 1901. Played 116 times in 1901, ten times in 1902, five times in 1903, sixteen times in 1904.

The first act takes place at a small village from which Paris draws its supply of wet-nurses. For generations the mothers — *filles mères* and married women — have been lured away to perform that office which the fashionable *Parisienne* has too little leisure and too much vanity to perform. The result of such a system is bad for the *Parisienne*, demoralizing to the peasant, and often disastrous to the child.

The system is attacked from all three points of view, but especially from that of the peasant. The central figure of the play is Lazarette Planchot, a natural, good-hearted woman, who has no inclination to leave her baby or her husband. But the neighbors jeer at her for a fool, her father-in-law insists, and even her husband, greedy for gain like the average peasant, urges her. She is finally persuaded to accept a place in a wealthy family. The first act is full of those significant details of humble life which M. Brieux knows so well and renders so truly.

The second act takes place in the house of the Deni-

sart. Lazarette is in very good hands, well cared for, not to say spoiled. Nothing must happen to the nurse lest *le petit Guy* should suffer in the end. Having thus transferred her natural office to a *remplaçante*, the elegant Madame Denisart is able to return to the mundanities of her *salon*, to retain the affections of her husband, and even to find time to caress her offspring,—a very satisfactory arrangement. But what about the child, the husband, and the home of Lazarette? The Denisart household is suddenly upset by the arrival of a telegram for Lazarette — “The baby boy is not well.” A dilemma!—What is to be done? Withhold the telegram?—it is the simplest solution; besides, it is the “day” of Madame Denisart, nothing must be allowed to interfere with her “receiving.” Visitors arrive, conversation ensues, fatuous, stupid, until Doctor Richon, a *médecin de campagne*, replying to the questions of the ladies, expounds the thesis of the author:—

Richon. . . . If you could nurse your baby, and you would not, you have caused much harm. To yourselves, first . . . by exposing yourselves to all the illnesses which are the possible consequence of your abstaining. . . . You make your baby suck the milk of a woman . . . whose glass you would not wish to drink from. . . . If you realized that in giving your baby to a wet-nurse you were increasing the chances of seeing him die you would nurse him yourself. . . .

Mme. Denisart. We are afraid that while nursing our babies we shall lose our husbands.

Richon. Exactly. You fear for your home and you engage a wet-nurse. But the nurse is married. And

her husband is exposed to the same temptations which you fear for your own. So, to spare yourself a danger, you expose another woman to the same danger. Of course, I understand that she is a poor country woman. But have you the right to decide that your happiness deserves to be secured at the cost of hers? Have you the right to decide that to save the life of your baby justifies the possible sacrifice of her baby's life? . . . You have instilled into the hearts of our village women such a desire to earn money in this way that they abandon their little ones eagerly. Yet they know that these little ones are too often doomed to die. . . . I know about things of which you are ignorant, I assure you. If I appear zealous it is because for forty years I have witnessed the demoralization of our country women — a demoralization caused by the separation of the wife and husband — it is because for forty years I have witnessed the deaths of innocent little babies who would have lived if their mothers had not been taken from them, and whose deaths were the price paid for your happiness and ease. The mortality of infants suckled by hired nurses is frightful; three times greater than ordinary mortality. . . . Let me tell you what happens. There in the country, as soon as a woman is through her confinement, she has but one thought — to become a wet-nurse. She wants to become one as soon as possible because in Paris the nurses who have most recently been confined are the most sought after. The family wishing to employ, in order to be assured of the mother's health, wish to see her baby. So this woman doesn't delay. In any sort of weather — in midsummer, in midwinter,

she puts the poor little thing into a third class car, she is off for Paris with her pitiable, her sad little bundle. She arrives at the wet-nurse employment office, and she is obliged to wait. She must wait until one of you has need of her. Sometimes this waiting lasts a fortnight! At the wet-nurse bureau this woman can claim only a bed. She must find her own food. She is poor. You can imagine the kind of care the baby receives. At last she obtains a place. Then an employee of the bureau, male or female, another wet-nurse, or a neighbor, takes the poor baby back, in the same summer heat, or the same winter cold, in the same third class car. Usually it is taken back to the grandparents, who are good souls, no doubt, but ignorant, who, when the baby asks for its mother's breast, put into its mouth the rubber nipple of a dirty nursing bottle. (*To the audience*) So you can readily understand that these poor little ones die! You know it well!—And you know with what good reason I appeal for them to your sense of justice and your pity.

Mme. Denisart. It is horrible!

Mme. d'Alèze. But there ought to be laws to prevent it!

Richon. There is one, Madame. There is the Roussel law, an admirable one, which provides that a mother who would engage herself as wet-nurse must have suckled her own child for seven months. Well, the law is not enforced! Not only that—it is the very ones who are charged with enforcing the law that set it aside. You do not believe that? I tell you this: the prefect of police is the author of a letter, an official communication, in which he declines to enforce this

law because — these are his exact words — “because the consequence of it would be to cause a profound disturbance in the lives of the people of Paris!” . . . We should have the courage to press the matter to the logical conclusion. We should consider the mother’s duty to nurse her own child the military service of women. Before 1870 in France, the rich man had the right to dodge the tribute of blood, and to buy himself a man, as it was then said. There are now no substitute soldiers; there should no longer be substitute mothers.

In the third act Lazarette, having learnt the contents of the telegram, filled with anxiety, returns home to find her baby nearly dead after convulsions and her husband spending her earnings at the *cabaret* and carrying on with another woman. She refuses to return to the Denisart, she reclaims her man and settles down to nurse her child back to life.

The rhetoric in this play is more marked than in *La Robe Rouge*. The long quotation from the second act shows to what extent M. Brioux dares to defy all the theatrical canons, introducing in the person of Richon no mere *porte-parole* or *raisonneur* such as Dumas and Molière were wont to use, but a preacher who preaches a sermon — preaches not only to the characters in the play but to the audience. The stage direction “*to the audience*”¹ cannot be ignored. M. Brioux is making use of the stage for purposes other than dramatic. The extraordinary thing is, not that he should have done it, but that he should have succeeded in doing it without killing his play. The

¹Vide p. 74.

democratic audience in a theatre likes a certain amount of rhetoric. In the next play, *Les Avariés*, M. Brieux goes even further, ignores the dramatic needs and contents himself with didactic dialogue. The dramatic interest in *Les Remplaçantes* is strong enough to carry the rhetoric. It is the most successful of all the plays of M. Brieux, judged by the standard of the number of performances; it is also the most characteristic, filled with much of his essential virtue and by no means free from his besetting faults.

LES AVARIÉS¹. Play in three acts. Rehearsed at the *Théâtre Antoine* in November, 1901, but prohibited by the censor. Played at Liège and Brussels in 1902, but not produced in Paris till 1905, when it was put on at the *Théâtre Antoine* on February 23. Played fifty-six times in 1905, once in 1906, once in 1907, and twice at the *Odéon* in 1908.

On November 1, 1901, after the play had been prohibited, M. Brieux read the work to a specially invited audience (consisting largely of officials and doctors); it was received with enthusiasm.

Before the curtain rose on the first production of the play in Paris in 1905, M. Antoine made the following announcement: "This play has for its object the study of syphilis in its bearing on marriage. It contains no single cause for scandal, no obscene word. Is it really necessary that women should be senseless and ignorant that they may be virtuous?"

The first act takes place in the consulting-room of a specialist, and consists of one long scene between the doctor and the "*avarié*," who wishes to be cured immedi-

¹ Played in America under title of "Damaged Goods".

ately because he is about to get married. The doctor declares that the marriage must be put off for three or four years, that it would be a crime for him to marry until he is cured — a crime against his wife and children. Naturally he will not commit such a crime. But the second act shows that he has committed the crime from lack of courage to make the explanations necessary for a postponement of the marriage. Married and happy in his home, he is astonished, actually astonished, to find the doctor's predictions come true. The child is tainted and the specialist insists that it be taken from the nurse lest she also be infected. The nurse learns the truth and declares in the presence of the mother that she will not suckle a child that is "*pourri*." The wife, thus acquainted with her husband's secret, is horrified and flies to her father, who insists on a separation.

In the third act, which takes place in the office of the physician-in-chief, at the hospital, the specialist explains to her father that there is no reason for a separation, that he must persuade the wife to return to her husband.

"You can tell her that a separation would be a calamity for all; that her husband is the only one whose devotion could be great and constant enough to help her to save her baby. You can tell her that out of the ruins of her first happiness she can make for herself another that any one might envy. You will add to this all that your own good heart will inspire you to say, and we will make sure that when they are reunited their next child shall be healthy and vigorous."

An unexpected and optimistic solution. Since the father-in-law is a deputy, the doctor takes advantage

of the opportunity to acquaint him with the facts and to impress upon him the urgent need for the matter of public health to be taken up by the Chamber.

The Doctor. Ah, there it is! You didn't know about it! You are a father, and you didn't know about it! You are a Deputy, you took upon yourself the duty and the honor of making the laws, and you did not know about it! You know nothing about syphilis, just as you probably know nothing about alcoholism and tuberculosis? . . . But why do you not concern yourselves with syphilis? Some day when you have been creating offices of State for all sorts of things, why do you not create an office of State which shall protect the public health?

The Father-in-Law. My dear doctor, you are falling into the common mistake of the French, which is to attribute every ill to the government. In such cases as this it is for you men of science to show us the way, since these are matters which you understand and we do not. You must begin by pointing out such measures as you believe necessary —

The Doctor. Yes, yes, all very fine. But it is now nearly eighteen years since a scheme of that sort, worked out and unanimously approved by the Academy of Medicine, was submitted to the proper authorities. It has never been heard of since.

The Father-in-Law. Then you think that measures really can be —

The Doctor. You shall judge for yourself what measures should be taken. . . . I am going to show you proof that our greatest enemy is ignorance — you shall see for yourself. . . . (*He goes to the door.*) It

incenses me. What can we do? We cannot go about searching for the sick. (*To a woman outside the door*) Come in, please. (*To the father-in-law*) Here is a case for example. This woman is very seriously affected. I have told her so, and I have told her to come every week — (*to the woman*) have I not?

The Working Woman. Yes, Monsieur.

The Doctor. And how long is it since you came last?

The Working Woman. Three months . . . etc.

And thus, as in a later play — *Maternité* — we are introduced to a new set of characters, a working woman, a father, and daughter; the limits of the dramatic frame are ignored, the subject reaches out of the play, unending, stretching out into the world beyond.

The Doctor. You can see, Monsieur, that the only real remedy will be a change in the customary attitude. We must cease to regard syphilis as if it were a mysterious evil whose name we should not even mention —

The author's aim is expressed in the dedication to *Monsieur le Professeur A. Fournier, Membre de l'Académie de Médecine.*

“Monsieur, it is my desire to dedicate this play to you, since nearly all the scientific ideas which I have sought to bring to the lay understanding by means of it are your own. I believe, with you, that syphilis will lose some of its terrors when people shall dare to speak frankly of it as an evil which is neither necessarily a disgrace nor a punishment, and when those who are attacked by it, realizing what sorrows they might spread, shall better understand their duty to others and to themselves.”

M. Brieux makes use of the stage to popularize the

ideas of a savant, to wage war on an ignorant and lethargic public opinion.

Les Avariés is not a good play. Whether the subject be suitable or not, the author has not succeeded in making it dramatic, perhaps because such a theme had to be so carefully handled that it was impossible for him to let himself go. The characters do not live, they speak only from the dictation of a didactic author. In spite of this the play is interesting to an audience and has achieved great notoriety; it has added a new word to current speech; it has effaced the author of *Blanchette*, who is now popularly known as the author of *Les Avariés*.

LA PETITE AMIE. Play in three acts. First produced at the *Comédie Française*, May 3, 1902, and played twenty-two times.

The first act (and, indeed, the greater part of the play) takes place in the wholesale dressmakers' shop of M. Logerais, in the *quartier du Temple*; it depicts to the life the daily existence of the poor working *modiste*. The making and packing of hats, the relations between patron and employees, the discreet attitude of Madame Logerais — in a few rapid telling strokes the world ruled by Logerais is set before us, and the character of its tyrant, cruel, vain, disloyal — and successful. Apart from his business and his pleasure, the one thing that interests him is the marriage of his son André, on whose legal education it has been his pride to spend money.

It has been his pride to arrange a match for André, a match with Money, which shall justify the expensive education and establish the son of a tradesman as a

Gentleman. The inclinations of André do not fit in with the nicely calculated plans of his lord and father. He has an inclination for one of the girls in the shop — Marguerite, simple and poor, but honest — the only one of the assistants who has not fallen before the fascinations of père Logerais. The struggle that ensues between father and son, between natural inclination and parental tyranny, is the theme of the play. André cannot marry without his father's consent until he is twenty-five years old; he is dependent on his father's bounty — consent and bounty are withheld. Marguerite is dismissed. André does his best to support himself and Marguerite, but fails signally. After a rhetorical outburst against Society by André, they throw themselves into the river to end their misery before their child is born.

The play shows to what lengths M. Brioux is willing to go in his enthusiasm for the child. In his hatred of paternal tyranny he accepts all the weakness and extravagance of the boy. It is justifiable to protest vigorously against paternal tyranny and the *dot* because they render natural marriage impossible and pervert the family life from its very beginning, but *La Petite Amie* is a less effective protest than *Les Trois Filles de Monsieur Dupont*, with which it has a good deal in common.

MATERNITÉ. Play in three acts. First produced December 9, 1903, at the *Théâtre Antoine*; played twenty-eight times in 1903, forty-nine times in 1904, three times in 1905.

The play opens in the house of a *Sous-préfet* in the provinces, Julien Brignac. The atmosphere of official

provincial life is painted to show how the official political representative compromises to keep up appearances. This may be taken as symbolical of the falsification of political opinions by social hypocrisy. The play gradually concentrates on one particular problem — the problem of population. M. Brieux admits as a truth that quality is to be preferred to quantity, therefore it behooves us to admit that it would be a good thing if population could be controlled; that prolific nature is cruel; that it would be an advance in civilization if one had only the children one wants. The problem is brought painfully home to the *Sous-préfet*. Annette, the young sister of his wife, is as good as affianced to Jacques Bernin; the marriage is taken for granted. To her horror she hears that his father has arranged another match. Jacques had seduced her, but he is too weak to oppose his father, and Annette is left to her fate. When the *Sous-préfet* hears of her condition he insists on her leaving his house before the secret is out, in order to save his reputation. His wife, Lucie, leaves with her sister. They go to Paris, where Annette escapes from her self-sacrificing sister and goes to a midwife. The operation proves fatal. In the last act we are introduced to an entirely new set of characters at the trial of the midwife, Madame Thomas. She is not the only prisoner; a woman teacher, Tupin, a journeyman electrician, Madame Tupin, all are tried for child murder. The magistrate upholds the law; the evidence in the various cases is all in protest against the law, couched in varying degrees of intensity, until at last the play ends in a chaos of anarchistic outbursts. The

finale is vague and rhapsodic, not to say uproarious. The effect is obscure, the end is not a conclusion, the problem is not solved.

The truth is that M. Brieux does not know his own mind. He would like to prevent the birth of undesired children, but he is not so pitiless as to plead for the legalization of abortion. M. Brieux is not an advanced thinker; he cannot be logical at the expense of feeling. In following an advanced idea he has got out of his depth; he is more on his own ground when he reacts from an advanced idea towards a common point of departure. *Maternité* and *Les Avariés* are two out of the three plays selected by Mr. Bernard Shaw to introduce M. Brieux to the English public. *Maternité* is even given in two versions. The second version of *Maternité* is more closely woven. The chief change is in the character of *Brignac*, who is an "alcoolique"—not an habitual drunkard, but sufficiently poisoned for his children to be nervous wrecks. This the specialist makes clear to Madame Brignac. For preventing the birth of another child doomed to a life of suffering Madame Brignac is held as a criminal and comes up for trial in the last act.

LA DÉSERTEUSE. Play in four acts, in collaboration with Jean Sigaux. First produced October 15, 1904, at the *Odéon*, and played forty-one times.

La Déserteuse may be lightly passed over; it is not especially interesting and it is a variation on the same theme as *Le Berceau*, namely, the cruel position of the child of parents who have separated, a subject taken up again to some extent in *Suzette*. Madame Forjot is the "déserteuse"; she finds her husband a bore and

runs off with a musician, leaving her daughter Pascaline behind. Forjot, in order to provide a mother for his daughter, marries her governess, H el ene, who fills the office with more than exemplary devotion. The daughter ungratefully prefers her mother when the "d serteuse" returns years later to reclaim her natural place in her daughter's affections. The fight between the two mothers is ended by the intervention of Forjot, who explains that H el ene has carefully trained Pascaline to revere her mother's memory and has hidden the truth. Pascaline returns to the paternal roof.

L'ARMATURE. Play in five acts, after the novel by Paul Hervieu. First produced April 19, 1905, at the *Vaudeville*, and played nineteen times.

The dramatization is not so good as the novel. The great scene of the discovery by Exireuil of his wife's infidelity is effective, but the early part of the play is too much taken up with minor characters. Since it is only an adaptation it need not be discussed here.

LES HANNETONS. Comedy in three acts. First produced February 3, 1906, at the *Renaissance*, and played thirty-eight times.

Pierre Cotrel, who teaches natural history at a school in Paris, having no taste for the monotony and petty tyrannies of married life, lives with Charlotte, a simple work-girl, twenty years younger than himself. They do not get on very well, in spite of the freedom of their union. Pierre cannot share his life with Charlotte, she has no education. Charlotte is very whimsical, and irritating beyond human endurance; they bicker over this, they squabble over that. To make matters worse Pierre learns that she is not even faithful to him.

Brochot, an old school friend of Pierre, turns up and proves irresistible to Charlotte; he imitates a train so amusingly she can refuse him nothing. Pierre is furious. It is no mere squabble this time. Charlotte replies with a smack, but that does not pacify Pierre, so she threatens to leave. Still he does not soften, therefore Charlotte packs her things and has them put on a cab. Pierre remains inexorable. Charlotte departs, eager to be recalled, but she has gone too far; she is allowed to leave. Pierre is jubilant, once more he is free to do what he likes; he has saved two hundred francs, he will go to Brittany, he has long wanted to go to Brittany. But — Charlotte? Charlotte has written, but her letters have not even been opened; therefore Charlotte has officially informed all her friends that at a certain hour on a certain day she will put an end to her miserable existence by jumping into the Seine from the Pont Neuf. Pierre is adamant even to that. Owing to some mistake about the appointed day and hour Charlotte was not prevented from jumping into the river. She is saved, of course, and she is brought back by the *sauveteur* to the *apartement* of Pierre (of course, what other address could she give?) and the *sauveteur* of course receives a reward — 200 francs exactly. Good-bye to Brittany, good-bye to freedom, once more the *hannetons* are attached — no remedy, not even divorce.

Les Hannetons stands apart from the rest of the work of M. Brieux, which is serious and grave. *Les Hannetons* is low comedy bordering on farce, lightened by subtle irony, a surprising thing for M. Brieux to have produced, just the one thing one would have argued

he was incapable of doing, had he not done it; a most amusing, mirth-provoking play, well constructed, rapid and light in movement, racy dialogue, pointed satire. But even here at his most "*boulevardier*" M. Brieux implies a social question. From the social point of view this sort of union is an evil; for once M. Brieux laughs at an evil, and he laughs so heartily that one can only regret that he does not laugh oftener. The "*ménage*" here satirized is supposed to be essentially Parisian; much to the author's surprise the piece has proved successful in other countries, not excepting England and America.

LA FRANÇAISE. Comedy in three acts. First produced April 18, 1907, at the *Odéon*, and played forty-nine times.

The play begins at Trouville at the home of Pierre Gontier, a manufacturer. We have the picture of a real French home as it is understood by two real French women, Geneviève and Marthe, the daughter and second wife of Gontier. The picture is designed to instruct the foreigner, to correct the impression that the entire feminine population of France is composed of Zazas and Sapphos. The foreigner arrives upon the scene in the person of Bartlett, an American from the Far West, who accompanies Charles, the nephew of Gontier. Charles has been in Bartlett's charge since infancy, and is now come to France to see his father's native land and to visit his father, a sort of hermit, who has retired to live on a property of his own in the heart of the country. Bartlett and Charles are full of false ideas about France and French life and they show their ignorance, but they are well received.

Marthe cordially and frankly does her best to make them feel at home and Gontier, whose business has not been progressing, is on the lookout for a partner. Why not Bartlett, the rich and enterprising American?

The second act takes place in the country house of the elder Gontier, father of Charles. The hermit turns out to be a regular character, and the opening scenes are full of his amusing whimsicalities. A romance is brewing between Charles and Geneviève. Finally comes the scene between Bartlett and Marthe. The ranchman, mistaking the cordiality of the wife of Gontier, attempts to kiss her, and is quickly brought to his senses and begs her pardon.

¹ *Bartlett (nonplussed, in a stammering and confused monologue, as if to himself). Forgive me — je vous demande pardon — I did not know — In fact — if I had — I can only — my — I can only beg you to à m'excuser — you are such a strange people. You are vain of your faults — des vantards? Yes, vain of your faults and hypocritical about your virtues; and so, if people aren't warned — they take you at your word and make des erreurs — they make awful mistakes. And the worst thing about it is we haven't the least idea how to make up for them. I am — I am very sorry for it. I am absolutely rattled — What can I do? Must I take myself off? What is the proper thing to do when a man has done what I have? It is most perplexing — I know very well that I can't remain here? I haven't an idea in what manner to take*

¹ In the original this speech is a mixture of French and English.
—Ed.

my leave, or how I should have the courage to look you in the face again. (*He mops his face.*)

Marthe (*after a burst of laughter*). Go away quite naturally, Monsieur Bartlett, and when we meet again simply act as if nothing of the sort had happened. Your regrets are too honestly spoken not to be sincere; and besides, there were extenuating circumstances. (*She gives him her hand.*) But don't make the same mistake again, will you? (*She goes out.*)

Everything ends happily in the third act. Bartlett becomes the partner of Pierre Gontier and lends his financial support and practical business experience to the exploitation of his invention. Charles is to marry Geneviève and to settle down in the land of his fathers. An agreeable comedy on an interesting subject. The author himself admits that something is lacking.

SIMONE. Play in three acts. First produced at the *Comédie Française*, April 13, 1908, and played forty times.

The play opens at the house of Sergeac in Saintonge. Two months before Sergeac and his wife Gabrielle were found one morning swimming in blood. Gabrielle was dead, Sergeac with difficulty was brought back to life; but he could throw no light on the mysterious affair; after an attack of brain fever he can remember nothing; he still writes to his wife and cannot understand why there is no reply. The affair is to be inquired into, Maître Chaintreaux is summoned to advise; the father, the father-in-law, and the doctor discuss the situation with him.

Lorsy (*to the elder M. de Sergeac*). There seems to be no question that it is a double suicide.

M. de Sergeac. We really don't know anything about it.

Chaintreaux. Shall we not, gentlemen, first investigate such facts as there are? Then we will see what conclusions may be drawn from them.

M. de Sergeac. Maître Chaintreaux is right.

Lorsy. Yes, of course. The twentieth of last October, which is exactly two months ago, my son-in-law, M. de Sergeac, left here about eight o'clock to take the train for Royan. . . . The next morning our old woman-servant, Hermance, went to my daughter's bedroom. She found her lying on the floor in her nightgown, dead, her throat pierced by the bullet of a revolver. Her husband lay near by, apparently expiring, a bullet having entered his breast. That was the scene. . . .

M. de Sergeac. It may have been a double suicide, or it may have been a crime of jealousy.

Lorsy. Crime of jealousy! Why, that would be impossible.

Chaintreaux. Not so fast — not so fast.

M. de Sergeac. Whatever the explanation, we felt from the first that it was our duty to take every precaution to prevent Simone from knowing about the tragedy which had cost the life of her mother.

Lorsy. You will understand that it might not only have a serious effect upon her youth, but conceivably, when she is old enough to marry it might cause difficulties.

Chaintreaux. I approve your course entirely. How old is she?

M. de Sergeac. She is six. As we had to tell her

that her poor mother was no more, we told her that she had died as the result of a fall while riding horseback. We can rest easy on that score for the present. But now we are face to face with another problem, a strange, incredible and awful situation. My son, though he has recovered from his wound, has lost his memory. . . . He remembers everything up to the morning of the tragedy. From that time there is an utter blank. We had to answer his questions with some explanation as to the cause of his wound. The doctor advised that to tell him the brutal truth might jeopardize his life. So we told him that he had been accidentally shot at a hunt while they were beating up the game.

Lorsy. And he believes his wife is away on a journey.

M. de Sergeac (the father). That, then, is my son's condition! The reason we have called you in is that the specialist now thinks the sick man is in such a condition that he may be questioned. However, Dr. Vergne is still fearful of serious consequences if the terrible truth were to come to my boy first from the investigating magistrate . . . and as the time for the official investigation is very near, we decided to lay the whole matter before you today to enable you to advise him and ourselves in regard to what is likely to be brought out.

Sergeac is brought in; the doctor by his questions does all he can to awaken his memory.

The Doctor. I am going to help you by your own will to recover your memory of what has happened in consecutive order.

Sergeac. I hope I may. Help me.

The Doctor. To use your own expression, there is an "abyss" in your memory. And this abyss continues from the twentieth of last October, the day you received the wound, up to the moment you regained consciousness, on Thursday.

Sergeac. Yes, Doctor.

The Doctor. Now, take yourself back to the twentieth of October. Use your will. Call back, with as great exactness, clearness and intensity as you are capable of, the last happenings which you remember.

Sergeac. Yes, Doctor. Let me see — the day I was wounded in the boar hunt —

The Doctor. Excuse me. That is not a direct recollection. That is a recollection of something you have been told.

Sergeac. Wasn't it so? Isn't it the truth? — I distinctly remember being wounded by a shot.

The Doctor. I will repeat my question. What are your last really personal memories? . . . What did you do the morning of October twentieth? Did you lead the hunt? Do you remember such a thing as that?

Sergeac. Yes — I see the chase now. However, I can't call back the exact time when I must have been shot. (*With conviction*) Now I am sure of it, it could not have been during the beating up that I was shot.

The Doctor. Quite possibly.

Sergeac. I remember returning with Georges. . . .

The Doctor. You returned here with M. Georges de Nanchart?

Sergeac. Yes. . . . and I came into this room. We — Wait — yes — it is like recalling a dream,

We dined, then we started — George and I — in his dog cart — I was to take the train for Paris, George was going home. He is a neighbor of ours. He took me to the station, and waited with me until we heard my train coming.

The Doctor. And then?

Sergeac. After that, I can't remember. (*A long silence. All eyes are fixed on Sergeac, who remains motionless.*) I remember nothing further. It is horrible. I remember nothing further.

The Doctor. Did you take the train?

Sergeac. I don't know. . . . No, I did not take the train.

The Doctor. Why not?

Sergeac (*gravely, to himself*). Now I know why.

The Doctor. Tell us why not.

Sergeac. No. An idea suddenly came to mind which prevented me.

The Doctor. What was the idea?

Sergeac. It was a private matter.

Sergeac is overcome with terror; he falls heavily, but is soon brought round; then he asks to be told everything.

Sergeac. Where is Gabrielle? (*A silence.*) Monsieur de Lorsy, is it really true, what they have told me? Is it really for Mme. de Lorsy that you are in mourning? Tell me — it is not for your daughter? Can it be? You have seen her within a short time? Did she give you one of her sweet smiles and kiss you and talk baby-talk as she always did when you went away?

M. de Lorsy (sobbing). Oh, my child! My Gabrielle! My poor little one! My poor little one!

Sergeac. You are weeping! (*Quietly*) She is dead, is she not? Yes! It came to me back there — Gabrielle is dead. . . . (*He remains silent, trying in vain to remember, then clasping his head with both hands.*) You must help me again. . . . Doctor, you see I am calm. Now that I know she is dead, nothing can be more terrible.

The Doctor. Yes.

Sergeac. What can be?

The Doctor. Think.

Sergeac. Could it have been a violent death?

The Doctor. Yes.

Lorsy (shaken by grief). Oh! Oh! Oh!

Sergeac. She was murdered?

The Doctor. Yes.

Sergeac. By whom?

Lorsy (leaping at his throat). By you, dastard! By you! (*The doctor and M. de Sergeac, the father, separate Lorsy from Sergeac and try to calm him.*)

Sergeac (in an exalted voice). Yes! Yes! by me! It was by me! Now I see, I know — The veil has suddenly been torn aside — Yes, it was I! Yes, it was I!

Lorsy. Ah! the dastard!

Sergeac. Yes, I killed her! And it was an act of justice!

Lorsy. Justice! He says that — Oh! Oh! You let him call it justice!

The Doctor (to Sergeac, the father). Take him away. Take him away.

Lorsy (going out with the elder Sergeac). He killed my child, and he calls it an act of justice — the wretch!

Sergeac (hallucinated). Yes, justice!

Lorsy. He is a murderer!

Sergeac (pointing to the door at the left). It was there — there — they were there; she threw herself down before him —

Lorsy. He is a murderer! He is a murderer!

Sergeac. He ran away — like a dog that fears the whip. (*He makes the motion of drawing a revolver and firing.*) I — I — I did justice.

Such an act of justice is sanctioned, not only by the famous “Tue-la” of Dumas fils,¹ but also by article 324 of the Penal Code.² M. Brioux cannot accept this as justice. For him “murder is murder,” murder is not made excusable by being called “*un crime passionnel*.” “Though no crime committed in the passion of love may deserve the death penalty, none should be excused — certainly not murder.”³

After the lengthy quotation it need hardly be said that the effect of this first act is strong, not to say painful, that the case is put dramatically without a touch of didacticism. And, once more, there is the child to be thought of. What of Simone?

The second act shows Sergeac and Simone settled in a villa on the coast of the Mediterranean. Years have passed. The tragedy of the first act is apparently forgotten. Sergeac has devoted himself to the edu-

¹ Préface de *La Femme de Claude*.

² Article 324 of the Penal Code declares excusable murder of a wife by her husband, as well as murder of the lover, when surprised *en flagrant délit* in the conjugal dwelling.

³ M. Brioux — at an interview.

cation of his daughter. The memory of her mother has been kept sacred. Simone, of course, has not been told the truth. Returning, after long wanderings in the East, Sergeac lives a retired life, given up to the study of Oriental religions. Simone helps him; they are happy in a life of fellowship and collaboration. Michel Mignier and Simone have mutually declared their love, but are not yet betrothed. Michel is a young man of promise with a bent for philosophy. The two are fitly matched. All is well. Suddenly, Mignier *père* returns from Paris and abruptly breaks off all relations between the two families. He has learnt the family secret. Sergeac has to tell Simone that the marriage cannot be arranged. Naturally Simone must know why. Moved by her great sorrow, the father asks her pardon, thus inculpating himself.

Sergeac. Oh, how terribly you must suffer! Forgive me! Simone, forgive me! (*He kneels before his daughter.*)

Simone. You ask me to forgive you! Then, is it for your fault?

Sergeac. No, no! What can you mean? What will you imagine — Oh, God!

He will tell her nothing and, regaining his self-possession, succeeds in making Simone swear that she will never seek to discover the details of the drama which he admits that he is hiding from her, and of which she must always be kept in ignorance.

In the last act Simone has learnt the truth from Hermance, an old servant. Her father's crime is horrible to her; she can live with him no longer and tells him she is going away.

Sergeac. You only wish to leave me?

Simone. That is it, yes.

Sergeac. Why?

Simone. Consider!

Sergeac (after a long silence, with alarm). Oh, God! I am afraid to understand! (He goes towards his daughter with hands outstretched.) My child!

Simone (drawing back). Father!

Sergeac. I would not hurt you, my child. (*Simone looks at her father's hands, transfixed with terror.*)

Simone (in a low voice). Oh! (*Sergeac follows his daughter's look, understands, and slowly hides his hands.*)

Sergeac. Hermance — has — told you?

Simone. Yes.

Sergeac. And that is why — why you — want to leave me?

Simone. Yes. (*A long look passes between them.*)

Sergeac. Then?

Simone. Oh, wretched man! Oh, wretched man!

This painful situation was too much for the audience at the *répétition générale*; accordingly the ending was softened; Simone forgives her father.

This is the most dramatic play since *La Robe Rouge* — the thesis is completely absorbed in the action. M. Brioux is back on his own ground, reacting from an idea towards common human feeling.

SUZETTE. Play in three acts. First produced September 28, 1909, at the *Théâtre du Vaudeville*, and played fifty times in 1909.

In this play M. Brioux returns to the situation of the child of parents who have separated, a theme already treated in *Le Berceau* and *La Déserteuse*. *Suzette* is the daughter of Henri Chambert, the son of a "magis-

trat." Chambert is not a downright villain, but light, selfish, unscrupulous in pleasure and business, and weak enough to be easily influenced by his narrow-minded parents. Chambert has married Régine Guadagne, a woman of some elegance and with a taste for society frivolities, and by no means *persona grata* in the eyes of her husband's parents. They regard her as a stranger, mistrust her, and consider her no fit person to have the care of their beloved grandchild Suzette. They watch their opportunity. One day Henri Chambert, though no model of conjugal fidelity himself, is outraged at the sight of a man kissing his wife. He takes the worst for granted, makes a scene, and Régine, at bay, hurls back at him in front of the servants: "Yes, I have a lover." This is not technically true. Chambert is dissuaded by his parents from fighting a duel, but they take good care that the wife is not forgiven; he must divorce her and retain custody of the child.

In the second act Régine has carried off Suzette to the home of her own father, a retired naval officer, who lives with his two remaining daughters, Myriam and Solange. They live in a studio-apartment and everybody works. Guadagne is of an energetic disposition and does not believe that girls should be idle. The family atmosphere is in very strong contrast with that of the *famille* Chambert. Guadagne receives Régine with open arms. Chambert tracks her down. In the scene which follows Régine explains that she had certainly carried the flirtation rather far, but that she is not really guilty, and she asks his pardon. Chambert, by this time sufficiently under

his mother's influence, definitely refuses. When all her pleadings and arguments fail, Régine threatens that if they attempt to execute their plan of separating her from Suzette she will defend herself. She will make public a fraudulent act committed by her husband in the matter of a large government contract. Still Chambert is obstinate and the child is taken from the mother by a "*commissaire de police*" and a "*huissier.*" In the last act we find Suzette the victim of the conjugal dispute, tortured by her *grandmère* Chambert, who does her best to make the child think ill of her mother and compels her to write curt letters to Régine. The *avoué* and the *avocat* do all they can (for professional reasons) to keep the case going. At the end of the play Régine, worn out with the struggle, comes to give her consent to anything in order to save Suzette from being tossed about from pillar to post.

Régine. I prefer to give you my child rather than run the risk of seeing her become chronically ill, as she may if we continue to struggle for her. I must throw myself on your generosity. I ask you not to teach her to despise me. . . . You shall tell me when it is your pleasure that I may see her — I give her up — My love would cost her too dearly. I am discouraged, worn out, beaten. That is what you have done to me. Good-bye — Good-bye, Henry.

Henry. Father, speak to her —

Chambert. You have touched us both deeply — we — we — thank you for —

Régine. Oh, it is too bad that I should have been treated as a stranger here, as an intruder — I would only have wished to love you all. But it is useless to

talk of that — You will write to me, one or another of you ——

Henry. I will never consent to your going away like this!

They forgive each other, even the parents are reconciled, and the tearful play closes with a sort of benediction from Chambert père:—

“Father, mother, and their child, are a sacred trinity. Nothing must be allowed to separate them.”

Chapter VI

Brieux and the Social Play

THE social play of today, the play of M. Brieux, has a long and complicated genealogical table. To tell the story of its growth it would be necessary to go back to Becque, Augier, Dumas fils and Diderot, and to include to some extent that great body of social literature for which the name of Balzac stands.

The social play is a development of the *comédie sérieuse* and the *pièce à thèse* — it is not necessary to distinguish between a *pièce à thèse* and a *pièce sociale*; a *pièce à thèse* may be a *pièce sociale* — in fact, the social play, as M. Brieux understands it, generally is a *pièce à thèse*.

The social play was defined by Professor Lanson, at a consultation, thus: —

“When different passions are at strife within a given sphere of social interests, and attention is naturally centred upon the social interests rather than upon the individual passions, the play is a social one.”

The centre of interest shifts from the characters to the conditions. The ideal of Diderot has become the fashion of the hour; after having been forgotten for nearly a century it was taken up by Dumas fils (unwittingly), developed by Augier and Becque, and has at last become a vitally important dramatic form — nor

has it stopped developing yet. It follows from the definition given above that the characters of the social play are less clearly defined than those of a tragedy of passion of Shakespeare or a *comédie de caractère* of Molière. It seems hardly fitting to condemn the form for a vagueness which is not only a reflection of the atmosphere of our time but is also appropriate to the end aimed at. To criticize Mr. Galsworthy or M. Brieux by comparison with Shakespeare or Molière is "hitting below the intellect."

The tone of a play depends necessarily on the mind that conceives it. The high seriousness of Mr. Galsworthy's *Justice* is in keeping with Mr. Galsworthy's conception of things. To him the social machine is a pitiless monster against which the individual has no chance—no more chance than has Œdipus against destiny. For M. Brieux the social machine is not invincible—he is for revolt; he is for smashing the platform and getting back to the solid ground; he will not submit to the machine, for him man is master of the machine. The hero of *Justice* dies, but in *La Robe Rouge* the heroine kills her judge. The plays of M. Brieux do not lend themselves to a formal classification, the author's sense of form being poor. They are serious plays, but have not the high seriousness of *Justice*. What Professor Lanson says of the work of Corneille¹ is, on the whole, true of the work of M. Brieux: "It is drama of a serious and downright character, an intermediate type between high comedy and tragedy."

The moment at which M. Brieux began writing is

¹ Lanson, *Corneille*. Hachette, p. 50.

important; it shows what he reacts from. Just as he reacted towards literary craftsmanship from all the artistic twaddle of the eighties and nineties, so he reacted from the unwholesome hothouse stuff which filled most of the Parisian theatres. Coming as he did from the open air, with a keen relish for life as he knew it, it occurred to him that it might be possible to make a play out of something other than adulterous sentimentalities. For a model he went back to Augier, to *Les Effrontés* and *Le Fils de Giboyer*.

He does not really belong to the school of Henri Becque, he was too hearty a man to accept the leadership of such an embittered egoist as Becque.

He does not really belong to the *Théâtre Libre*;¹ at first he worked in the atmosphere of the *Théâtre Libre*, but he was never in his element there. He wears the coat of pessimism but he looks rather ridiculous in it, like an athlete who has slipped on a black frock coat over his "things" to hurry to a funeral. But he learnt a good deal at the *Théâtre Libre* — he learnt how to situate his characters in their *milieu*, how to make

¹ What the *Théâtre Libre* was at this time may be judged by the following passage by Lemaître apropos of *L'Honneur*, a play by M. Henri Fèvre, produced about the same time as *Ménages d'Artistes*: "I begin to see that the *Théâtre Libre* is somewhat given to repetition, and that moreover, it is too often not so true to life as it thinks itself. In the first place, they ring the changes with rather too much gusto on what is really a single topic, or nearly so: the moral depravity, the selfishness, the hypocrisy, the stupidity, and the heartlessness of the middle or business classes. . . . However ignoble, and however weak the men, the women portrayed there are generally still more unworthy and despicable. The men retain here and there some relic of conscience, some idea of right and wrong, some sentiment of justice and pity. But the women are hopelessly wicked and unmoral. The authors of the plays can forgive none but the fallen woman." (Lemaître, *Impressions*, 6me. Série.)

detail tell on the stage. He was probably always very observant, even in the most high-minded Chateaubriand days of his boyhood; his career as a journalist exercised this faculty for observation; at the *Théâtre Libre* he learnt how to make dramatic use of detail. For Dumas fils he had an innate dislike; all the brilliancy, the straining after brilliant effects, and the romantic, unsound, overheated imagination M. Brieux resents, he reacts from it. *Simone* is a definite and remarkable instance of reaction from Dumas fils, but the reaction is not restricted to this specific case, it is general all along the line. With the exception of a few plays, such as *Le Fils Naturel* and *La Question d'Argent*, Dumas fils is of no use to M. Brieux. But for Giboyer M. Brieux has all the use in the world. He embraces him with enthusiasm, takes him to his heart like a brother. Thus M. Brieux becomes the natural son of Augier.¹ *Giboyer* is the voice of the indomitable man under the platform, of the slave to the machine who serves because he must, but whose spirit is not broken, and he speaks with a directness that makes M. Brieux nod his head approvingly at every word. What M. Brieux likes above all in his master, Augier, is his simple honesty.

The social play begins with Augier. The stage usually lags behind the general literary movement. What the *roman social* had already achieved twenty years earlier in the hands of Balzac was now to be attempted in the theatre by Augier. At first he used the term *comédie politique* — a kind of play that had

¹ "For Augier I have the sentiments of a son." Augier was not an appreciative father.

been neglected since the time of Beaumarchais — but Augier soon repudiated the name for *comédie sociale*. Augier, following Balzac, fully realized the social importance of the *question d'argent*. *Les Effrontés* and *Le Fils de Giboyer* are full of it. The most notable passages is in *Les Effrontés*, where the Marquis d'Auberive says: —

“What impresses me as amusing in your Revolution is that it did not realize that in striking down the nobility it was striking down the only power that could punish wealth. The year eighty-nine was enacted to the sole profit of our business managers and of their offspring. You have substituted plutocracy for aristocracy. As to democracy, that will be an empty word until, like the good Lycurgus, you shall have adopted a money of bronze too heavy to gamble with.”

M. Brieux continues the campaign against plutocracy. To him democracy is not a word empty of meaning — he has faith in the power of democracy to fight plutocracy — he believes it can found its strength on an ideal of human fellowship working for the common good. He seeks this ideal, not in a vague dream of the future, but in the experience of humanity as it grows. He is reactionary rather than progressive; he believes in tradition, though he is no aristocrat; aristocrat and plebeian join hands.

For his stand M. Brieux generally goes back to the nearest point of departure common to his fellows.

There are many differences between M. Brieux and Augier — differences in technique, quality of dialogue, use of asides, and complexity of intrigue (M. Brieux throws over the intrigue of Scribe). But there is one

more important difference still — a fundamental difference in attitude. Augier contemplates the struggle against plutocracy with a faint heart, regretting the past, the old order that is disappearing in chaos. M. Brieux contemplates it angrily, strong in his faith for the future, bidding plutocracy begone; it, to him, is the old order or, rather, no order at all, but a thing without any ideal, a compromise full of hypocrisies, played out, effete. M. Brieux dreams of an improved society in the future, but he is willing to take men as they are if only they realize their situation and try to understand each other¹ instead of trying to make fools of each other, the result of which is that they are so afraid of being made fools of that they dare not stir. Augier and M. Brieux campaign against the same thing from different sides.

Giboyer is disguised as a *déclassé*, a Bohemian; none the less he is the voice of the Paris plebs, just as was the Spanish barber, the hero of the Revolution, Figaro, whom Giboyer so much resembles. The torch he carries has been caught up by M. Brieux. So clearly marked is this that *Blanchette* is a continuation of the tirade against education in Scene 4 of the third act of *Les Effrontés*:

Le Marquis. You don't think the benefits of education are to be despised?

Giboyer. It led me far afield.

Le Marquis. You surprise me.

Giboyer. As long as my student days lasted I was

¹ Cf. *Discours de M. Eugène Brieux* on his reception at the Academy, May 12, 1900. "But Halévy put into practice the noble motto of the great philosopher-poet, Jean Marie Guyau: 'To love all is to understand all; to understand all is to forgive all.'"

the cock of the roost. I carried off all the prizes — and all the dried-up doctors courted your humble servant as a drawing card. It was so to such an extent that having won the competitive prize in philosophy, I was given a special chamber with permission to smoke and to stay away nights. But the day after receiving my bachelor's degree I had to come down.

Le Marquis. Your benefactor left you in the lurch?

Giboyer. Oh, no! He offered me a position as teacher at six hundred francs, but he took away the special chamber, the pipe, and the ten-hour leaves. That couldn't last. I dropped teaching, and took my chances, full of confidence in my powers and never suspecting that the highway of education in which our pretty society allows so many poor devils to be swallowed up, like a blind alley, leads nowhere.

This last phrase is the very text of *Blanchette*.

It is the true *comédie sociale* that M. Brieux continues, not the *comédie politique*. The distinction between the two is marked from the first by Augier: —

“Whatever may have been said about it, this comedy is not a political play in the ordinary sense of the word. It is a social drama. It attacks and defends only ideas, drawn from all forms of government.”¹

It cannot be too emphatically stated that M. Brieux is not a socialist party politician. When he attacks the *bourgeois* ideas he does not attack them because they are *bourgeois*, he attacks them because to him they are bad ideas prevalent under the *bourgeois* régime. For all that the *bourgeois* remains a human being to him. He does not split humanity up into human beings and

¹ *Le Fils de Giboyer*. Préface de la première édition.

bourgeois. His democracy includes the *bourgeois* but not the hypocritical ideas. Nor does he put the *bourgeois* always in the wrong; he does not always give the *beau rôle* to the plebeian. There are extenuating circumstances even for a Réboval; the men of the Landrécy foundry who threaten to strike (in *Les Bienfaiteurs*) are shown up in their true light. His propaganda is neither for party nor for class; it is human propaganda, for the man against the machine.

“Monsieur Brieux, as opposed to many of our most brilliant writers, distinguishes very surely and very clearly between right and wrong, and he likes to let us know very pointedly that he does make this distinction. There is something of Poor Richard, or of a Simon of Mantua about him; for he is not a seeker after elusive or unusual subjects, he has no distrust of familiar moral questions, and in this he is right! All his plays are didactical comedies — I might almost say morality plays and sixteenth century satires. ‘Poor girls must not be so educated as to alienate them from all the social bonds of their class.’ (*Blanchette*.) ‘Pharisaism, though honest, is not a virtue.’ (*M. de Réboval*.) ‘Politics is an insidious corrupter of good morals.’ (*L’Engrenage*.) Each play is from first to last, and without interruption, a methodical demonstration of such a truth as these. Thereby he would remind one a little too much of that vexatious man, Boursault, or the laborious Destouches, if it were not that he makes us think still more, by his simplicity and by the freshness of his dramatic talent, of that admirable stone-carver, Sedaine, whom he resembles, moreover, in his want of style. But here is where he

is especially original — he is actuated by a spirit, which is not bold (that is common enough), but brave; he comes to the study of far-reaching questions, of those which concern the entire human family, in the manner of a self-appointed teacher, with hopeful spirit, an honest judgment, and a warm heart. At the same time, this honest preacher is a very true observer, very careful, and possessed of remarkable understanding of average humanity. And so he gives, in an incredible degree, to the most discouraging of subjects, the touch of light and color. His ‘morality plays’ are lifelike; and that is the wonder of it.”¹

The *prêcheur candide* and the *observateur très véridique* continue to keep each other company throughout the work of M. Brieux. The social play of M. Brieux never develops beyond the propagandist stage.

It can no longer be denied that the stage is a useful means of propagating ideas that are established as sound but which are not yet common property. M. Brieux claims the right to make use of the stage for purposes other than dramatic, for the purpose of making known to the masses ideas invented or upheld by philosophers and savants.² This is his mission, this is what prompts him to sermonize. The tendency to sermonize is constant throughout the work of M. Brieux; at times the sermon is sufficiently absorbed in the dramatic theme, at times it so dominates the

¹ Lemaître, *Impressions*, Xme. Série, p. 14. This passage, written apropos of *Les Bienfaiteurs*, is a true estimate of the author of the plays which precede *Les Trois Filles de M. Dupont*. What Lemaître thinks of the man who wrote this latter play may be seen from the quotation on pp. 42, 43, 44.

² “Herbert Spencer est le maître de mon esprit.” (M. Brieux, interview.)

dramatic theme as to reduce the play to a didactic dialogue; the latter is too often the case in the later plays, e.g., *Les Avariés*, to take the extreme example. For such plays M. Brieux has been severely censured; even by those who admit that his aims are good and his views sound, it is argued that a play is not an appropriate medium, nor the theatre the appropriate place for them; that they would be more acceptable if preached from the pulpit, or published as tracts, pamphlets, and scientific articles.

M. Brieux would not deny the claims of the pulpit and tract — *Les Avariés* itself was read from a pulpit in Geneva — but he would claim an equal right for the stage to treat such subjects, if not a superior right, because it is of greater use for propaganda work, the audience appealed to being numerically greater, and (what is more important) out of the reach of pulpit and pamphlet. The public that will not go to church and will not take the trouble to read will go to the theatre. Furthermore, it is too late to object that the theatre is primarily a place of amusement; this may be true, but it does not rule out serious plays. The stage may be only secondarily a place for a serious play, but the serious play has been a success on the stage, witness *La Robe Rouge*, ergo the stage can be used for such a purpose.

There remains one ground for criticism — that such a play as *Les Avariés* is dramatically deficient. Such criticism is just. *Les Avariés* is a poor play. But it is unjust to argue from such a play that M. Brieux is no dramatist. Time and again he has shown that he is a dramatist of great power and skill, and even among

the later plays are to be found *Les Hannetons* and *Simone*, to prove that the author of *Maternité* and *Les Avariés* has not lost his sense of dramatic values.

It is easy to refer to the influence of a contemporary writer, nothing is more difficult than to determine that influence. On the whole the influence of M. Brieux seems to be reactionary rather than progressive. He has been called the "*policeman of letters*."

"From a comprehensive viewpoint, it is in fact difficult to acknowledge any influence whatever upon the general evolution of ideas, whether in art, in philosophy, or even in morals, as proceeding from the problem plays of M. Brieux. M. Brieux does not fight in the vanguard, he does not endeavor to generalize his thought; he attacks such evils as he sees on the highway of life and regards as clearly wrong, in the present order of society. He is the guardian of law and order in letters."¹

The conclusion to this history cannot yet be written; the career of M. Brieux is not finished. Who knows what he may yet do? This study must necessarily be inconclusive. *La Foi* and *La Femme Seule* have not even been touched on. The body of work herein considered is sufficient to establish his reputation; his career is a remarkable and an honorable one; it seems perfectly safe to say that one of the plays, at least — *La Robe Rouge* — is as good as anything in the dramatic production of contemporary France.

It must be left to chance and to posterity to choose masterpieces and immortals; the plays of M. Brieux are important today, at any rate, whatever their future

¹ *Commedia Illustrée*, October 15, 1909.

may be. Whatever may be their literary worth, they certainly have theatrical value, and they furnish social documents of considerable significance.

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