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The Immoralist

I have the greatest respect and indeed liking for Ruth and Augustus Goetz, who have adapted André Gide's disturbing novel, «L'Immoraliste» for the stage. The first act of «The Immoralist» promises adroit theatrical mastery. Michel's consciousness of his weakness is dramatically and pathetically established, and the same is true of Marceline's sad and doomed proposal to him.

This opening act is largely an original work of fiction invented by the adapters; the second act which moves to Michel's illness-ridden honeymoon in Africa, follows far more closely the incidents of Gide's novel, but paradoxically departs increasingly widely from its spirit. One or two things here demand to be pointed out. Gide's story was printed, not acted; and things can be said in print which cannot be put on the stage. Moreover, Gide wrote in French, a language more outspoken than English. Yet the play is infinitely more outrageous than the novel, which indeed is not outrageous at all.

For example, Gide, unlike the dramatists, did not find it necessary or desirable to make Michel commit a physical offence at the age of thirteen, nor to make his wife discuss his sexual competence, nor to predicate an erotic dance for the boy Bachir, nor to cause Marceline to attempt vainly to seduce her husband. The reason he did not do these things is not that he was more moral than the Goetzes. On the contrary, he shouts from the housetops (or breathes in a persuasive whisper) convictions which distress them as much as they do any normal people. The reason simply is that Gide was a better artist. He knew that suggestion is more potent than statement, that the delicate touch of a dagger is more lethal than a blow on the chin. In his second act the adapters, with the conscientious precision of a medical text-book, defy the Lord Chamberlain, forgetting that in these matters he Lord Chamberlain is equally a guardian of art as of morals. They say what they have to say so plainly that one has no desire to hear it. Then, having spent two acts showing us that the leopard is a leopard, they ask us in the third to believe that he can change his spots. This is too much. We do not all take our fiction from the women's magazines.

The characters of Bachir and Moktir should not, in my opinion, appear on the stage in the light the adapters have thrown on them; they differ too radically from Gide's intentions; but the drama, in spite of all I have said against it, is more interesting than eighty per cent, of the stuff we see on the London stage. H. H.

Homosexuality

A biological homosexual's view

In pointing out some of the disabilities from which biological homosexuals (of whom I am one) suffer, I am demanding not sympathy for them, but justice.