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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.

Their main disability derives not from the law or from public opinion, but from their own nature. I am convinced, both from my own experience and from study of medical writing on the subject, that biological homosexuals have no freedom of choice at any time during their lives as to whether they will or will not so be; that they are quite incapable of normal sexual relations with women; and that their condition is incurable. They are, therefore, debarred from a permanent and publicly esteemed cohabitation with a loved and loving partner, and from the joys of parenthood, which are the happy possibilities for heterosexuals.

As if this were not enough, the present state of the law is intolerably unjust to them. Many such men are compelled to break the law, as is evident to any reader of the newspapers. They are then into an existence which is degrading, with the ever-present fear either of blackmail or of prosecution, with, in addition to penalties, all the disgrace and humiliation of having their sexual life examined in a court of law and laid open to the public in the newspapers. Their life is degrading in a general, not a sexual, sense. It is, in any case, an almost continual falsehood, as they have always to present to people other than their own kind a pretence of being normal men. If they seek satisfaction of their desires, they are driven to furtiveness and secrecy.

The law prohibits homosexual relations between men not only, as is entirely reasonable, in public, but also in private. As biological homosexuals are incapable of normal relations with women, the law demands from them a life of complete chastity. This is, I submit, intolerable injustice.

I would ask heterosexual readers to consider, honestly, what their feelings would be if the legal sanction which I have quoted, and its legal and social results, applied to their sexual relations with the opposite sex. I would also ask those who feel, and in particular those who express hatred and contempt for, and vengeful feelings against, homosexuals similarly to consider whether those sentiments are based on a tendency to

«Compound for sins they are inclin'd to,
By damning those they have no mind to.»

The desire for sexual satisfaction is one of the most powerful of human instincts, and it must be evident to any thoughtful person that most homosexuals (otherwise law-abiding and useful citizens) will be driven to break the law. If the writer of the medical article in the Spectator of December 17, 1954, is correct in stating that biological homosexuals comprise 1 to 2 per cent. of the population, they must number at least 150,000, assuming that by «population» he meant the adult male part of the people of this country. I suspect that the proportion of honest and kindly men among that number is approximately the same as in the general population. If so large a number of people, many of them intrinsically good men, are driven by their instincts to break a law, it must be a bad law.

If two adult confirmed homosexuals have sexual relations with each other, strictly in private, and are honourable in their general dealings

with each other, then surely the criminal law should not concern itself with them any more than it concerns itself with adultery.

All that is required to make the law sensible and equitable, and to remove a grave injustice, is a simple Bill amending the Act of Parliament 'the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885), which has been called «The Blackmailer's Charter,» by deleting the words «or in private» and by inserting a clause giving the same protection to young males as is given to young girls in heterosexual practices.

Finally, I wish to suggest that homosexuality is not unnatural. As well as being a form of mental illness, it may well be a natural method of eliminating bad breeding stocks, which carry undesirable genes, possibly in many cases recessive and inoperative in the afflicted individuals. If that were admitted, many more people would be able to take a dispassionate and objective a view of this distressing problem as that of the writer of the admirable medical article to which I have referred.

From «The Spectator», London.

You see, friend, I want warmth, love and decency; I want to love and to be loved. I'm not interested in the pansified, effeminate type of homo - unfortunately, as if I were, well there are a lot of those types around here. What I want is a fellow or fellows like myself; people who want to do right, to live right; people who want to treat others decently and to be treated decently in return; people who want to love and be loved in return. But where the hell can I find them over here. I just don't know where to turn.

I thought that maybe you might be able to help, and that explains why I'm writing to you. Please reply soon, as I sure would like to hear from you - regardless of your answer. Actually if I could meet people in other places, if only to correspond with, well, that would be something; it would be better than talking to yourself all day long!

But please send a plain, sealed envelope, as I live at home and it would be disastrous for me if my mother or family suspected anything - please don't overlook this point.

(From a letter to the Editors of the Circle)