

**THE CRUSADERS: AN
ORIGINAL COMEDY OF
MODERN LONDON LIFE**

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42

AN ORIGINAL COMEDY
OF MODERN LONDON LIFE

BY

HENRY ARTHUR JONES

AUTHOR OF

"THE DANCING GIRL," "JUDAH," "THE MIDDLEMAN"
"WEALTH," ETC.

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PREFACE

IN some foreign picture-galleries the visitor is provided with japanned tin "blinkers," like stereoscopes with the glass knocked out, through which to examine the pictures. I do not know what is supposed to be the effect of this device, but I fancy that in most cases it simply serves to concentrate the attention of the observer, and so to intensify his vision. That, I take it, should be the function of a critical preface. It should neither be an arraignment nor an apology, but simply an exposition. The writer's likes and dislikes, his prejudices and preferences, are neither here nor there. If they are suffered to peep out, that is only because there is a great deal of human nature in man. The work of art is there, before the reader's eyes, and, by the act of publication, submitted to his judgment. Any attempt to dictate that judgment would be a self-defeating impertinence. All one can do—all I would here attempt—is to place the reader at what seems to be the right point of view, and to aid him in discerning the author's intentions. The merit of these intentions and of their execution is entirely a matter for the jury.

First comes the question of categories: What description of play has Mr. Jones set forth to write? He calls *The Crusaders* a comedy; but from the word "comedy" we nowadays learn nothing more definite than that the stage is not drenched in gore. "Satirical romance" would perhaps fit the play as exactly as any label of equal brevity. That is to say, it is not primarily a drama of individual character, but a sketch of a social group, a study of a certain intellectual and emotional tendency in modern life. In this it differs from the most notable of Mr. Jones's previous works. *Judah* and *The Dancing Girl* were, or ought to have been, dramas of individual character. They obviously sprang from the conception of the spiritual enthusiast and the half-innocent charlatan, the reprobate duke and "the beautiful pagan." In *The Crusaders*, on the other hand, the conception of the "milieu" evidently preceded and conditioned that of the plot and characters. The germ of the play in the author's mind was not a personage or a situation, but a theme — that of social idealism. Let me illustrate this distinction — between the drama of character and the social satire — by a reference to the works of other playwrights. Dumas's *Monsieur Alphonse*, *Denise*, and *Francillon* are dramas of character; *Le Demi-Monde* is a social satire. To the former class belong Augier's *L'Aventurière* and *Les Fourchambault*; to the latter, *Les Effrontés* and *Le Fils de Giboyer*. *Frou-frou* is the portrait of a woman; *Le Monde où l'on s'ennuie* is the picture of a coterie.

Frou-frou without Gilberte would be a contradiction in terms; whereas in *Le Monde où l'on s'ennuie* no single personage, and still less the particular thread of plot on which the scenes are strung, is essential to the author's conception. Pailleron's play portrays, not a passion or a character, but a salon or a cluster of salons, a corner of society, a craze, an affectation, a foible of the hour, of the day, at most of the decade. The same description applies almost exactly to *The Crusaders*, except that the social idealism with which it deals is a phenomenon of deeper and more abiding interest than the pedantry ridiculed in the French play. I will go further and say that there is probably no larger and more fruitful theme at present open to the dramatic satirist than this on which Mr. Jones has laid hand. The banner of Social Reform serves as a rallying-point for all that is noblest and basest, wisest and foolishest, in the world of to-day. Self-less enthusiasm and self-seeking vanity, fanaticism and hypocrisy, magnanimity and pusillanimity, the profoundest science and the shallowest sciolism, earnestness and affectation, paganism, puritanism, asceticism, sensuality, worldliness and other-worldliness — these, and a hundred other phases and attributes of human nature, stand forth in their highest intensity within the sphere of our latter-day meliorism. This movement is in truth as dramatic an element in the life of the nineteenth century as were the Crusades in that of the thirteenth. It is for the jury to determine whether Mr. Jones has risen to the height of

his argument. One thing alone is certain: to wit, that he has not exhausted a theme which is compact of

Exultations, agonies,
And love, and man's unconquerable mind.

The satire of *The Crusaders*—this is a matter of fact rather than of opinion—is contemplative, not militant. Mr. Jones writes as a judicious observer, not as a partisan. “What is the use of satire,” some ardent spirits may ask, “which leaves everybody’s withers unwrung? The satirist’s weapon is the lash. Satire which hurts nobody is the merest empty persiflage.” But are contempt, hatred, and the desire to inflict pain really inherent in the idea of satire? Is there no virtue in the genial raillery which throws our foibles into relief without arousing that spirit of resentment which tempts us, in sheer defiance, to persevere in them? Mr. Jones has done his best to be fair to all parties. He has embodied—one might almost say symbolised—whole-hearted enthusiasm in Philos Ingarfield and Una Dell. The imitative idealism which arises from a potent personal influence, and vanishes with the withdrawal of that influence, finds its representative in Cynthia Greenslade. In Mrs. Campion-Blake we have the good-natured busybody who makes philanthropy subserve her social ambition, and place her on the visiting-list of “the dear Duchess.” Lord Burnham is the genial cynic who has no ideals of his own—has he not “been in Parliament since he was twenty-two”?—but who holds it a part of political sagacity to humour, and perhaps util-

ise, the idealism of others. Mr. Palsam is the narrow-minded (yet not hypocritical) moralist, who would have all the world virtuous after his own conventional pattern, and finds in scandalmongering a congenial method of making himself a terror to evil-doers, if not (and this he cares less about) a praise to such as do well. Finally, we have in Burge Jawle the necessary opposition of pessimism to mellorism, of the quietist to the radical; while his satellite, Figg, typifies the craze for co-operative hero-worship which has of late been so rampant. It would not have been easy, I think, to exhibit within the compass of three acts a more representative group of social "crusaders" and camp-followers. Whether Mr. Jones has made more than a superficial study of his types is a question for the jury; also whether he has been quite successful in resisting the temptation to inartistic extravagance of caricature. I will only remark, on this score, that the same questions force themselves with no less insistence upon the readers of *Le Monde où l'on s'ennuie*, a play which M. Sarcey is for ranking among the perennial classics of the French stage.

Now let me note a technical difference between Mr. Jones's work and M. Pailleron's. So far as story is concerned, the French play may be classed as a comedy, almost a farce; whereas the English play is a romance, almost a fairy-tale. There is nothing incredible in *Le Monde où l'on s'ennuie*. For aught we know, the incidents might have happened; their probability may be