

**THE TRIUMPH OF THE
PHILISTINES: A
COMEDY IN THREE ACTS**

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The Triumph of the Philistines: A Comedy in Three Acts by Henry Arthur Jones

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HENRY ARTHUR JONES

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THE TRIUMPH OF THE PHILISTINES

AND HOW MR. JORGAN PRESERVED THE MORALS
OF MARKET PEWBURY UNDER VERY
TRYING CIRCUMSTANCES

A COMEDY IN THREE ACTS

BY

HENRY ARTHUR JONES

AUTHOR OF

'THE TEMPTER,' 'THE CRUSADERS,' 'THE CASE OF REBELLIOUS SUSAN,'
'THE MIDDLEMAN,' 'THE DANCING GIRL,' 'JUDAH,' 'THE
MASQUERADERS,' 'THE LIARS,' 'THE ROGUE'S COMEDY,'
'THE PHYSICIAN,' 'THE GOAL,' 'THE MANOEUVRES
OF JANE,' 'MICHAEL AND HIS LOST ANGEL,'
ETC.

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PREFACE

I NOTICE, on the rare occasions when I go to church, that I roll aloft the Psalms of David with a livelier and lustier relish than any of my neighbours in the adjacent pews. I wish I could claim that this lyric ecstasy arises from a superfoetation of British godliness within me, swelling me to a proud and just conceit of my superiority to all the sinners around me. But, alas! it comes from no such praiseworthy motive, and is indeed nothing but the natural exaltation of an English dramatist on getting some clue to his countrymen's notions on the subject of morality. For these worshippers who are chanting the songs of a treacherous murderer, a liar, and an adulterer—a man after God's own heart, as the Scriptures say—a treacherous murderer, a liar, and an adulterer,—a royal man for all that,—I say, these good worshippers who are so naively employed are the same average English playgoers who in the autumn of 1894 arose in a panic of

wrathful zeal for the morality of our stage, and in a series of letters to the *Times* overwhelmed for a year or two the rising school of English drama. And it pleases me more than I can say to hear these same good folks thus sweetly discoursing the songs of the royal murderer, liar, and adulterer, in the same way that it pleases me to see the elders of the Scotch Kirk join in the national memorial to Robert Burns. And so, on the rare occasions when I go to church, I roll aloft these Psalms with a glad heart and a loud voice, for then I get a clue to the essential notions of my countrymen on morality. And what are these notions in reality but an echo of Nature's own voice? Listen to the melodious throb of her incessant chime, "Vitality is morality! Morality is vitality! Vitality is morality! Morality is vitality!"

Fortified by the possession of this clue to the essential notions of my countrymen on morality, and having duly read and pondered the letters in the *Times*, I wrote *The Triumph of the Philistines*. The ~~severe ethical purpose underlying its conception~~ was never perceived, and I may perhaps be allowed to point it out.

I had been constantly accused of preaching in my plays, and had never been able to discover on what foundation this accusation rested. Probably it

PREFACE

arose from the fact that for many years I had been reiterating a few very plain, simple rules which will have to be comprehended and acted upon before we can pretend to have anything worthy to be called an English national drama. But there is no more preaching in these rules than there would be if, in a degenerate and degraded condition of carpentry, a carpenter were to give a few simple rules in the art of making honest tables and window-sashes. But it is the habit of the Englishman to sniff for doctrine everywhere.

The late William Morris held Socialist meetings at Kelmscott House on Sunday evenings. A Hammersmith woman with a luminous notion of his peculiar tenets was seen to point out his house to a neighbour, exclaiming at the same time, "There's where the good gentleman lives that's so kind to the poor! And he has a Sunday school every Sunday evening!" With the same luminous notion of what I had been saying about the drama, the accusation of preaching in my plays was continually parroted by criticism, and was at length repeated by the venerable *Quarterly Review*.

Now no right-minded man would assault his grandmother. Nor would any right-minded man be guilty of offering an indignity or impertinence

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to a figure so appealing in its senility, and so protected by immemorial prescriptive right of uttering the wrong word in criticism, as the *Quarterly Review*.

And I hope that, however low I may henceforth be classed as a playwright, justice will at least be done to my kindness of heart and my reverent forethought for the aged, as witnessed by the fact that many months before the article in the *Quarterly Review* appeared, I studied how to justify it by informing *The Triumph of the Philistines* with the severe ethical purpose I have already mentioned.

Having thus determined to vindicate those who find a didactic purpose in my plays, I cast about me for the most suitable moral to illustrate. Looking round upon my countrymen, upon their smug and banal ideals, their smug and banal ways of living, their smug and banal forms of religion, their smug and banal terror and ignorance of art, their smug and banal haste to make the best of both worlds, I concluded that the most necessary moral to drive home to Englishmen to-day is the wholesome one contained in a verse of Ecclesiastes, "Be not righteous overmuch: why shouldest thou destroy thyself?" Considering the source of this precept, its authority will hardly be questioned by the mass

of my countrymen. The necessity for its rigid enforcement will be equally apparent, I hope.

In my strenuous endeavour to point a moral I fear I did not take care to write a good play. But thus it happens when a moral purpose is allowed to get the upper hand in a work of art. In any case, I hope the sacrifice of art to ethics which I have made in the following pages will be duly recognised and placed to my credit. And I trust my natural kindness of heart will not be again called upon to vindicate and shelter those who make the assertion that I preach in my plays. For Mr. George Alexander, who produced *The Triumph of the Philistines* with great beauty and taste and consideration for the author, tells me that he lost a hundred and thirty pounds on the run. Alas! for our gallant effort to teach the English people this excellent moral, "Be not righteous overmuch: why shouldst thou destroy thyself?"

H. A. J.

30th December 1898.