Chapter-VII

His Vision
Sir Arthur Pinero the pioneer of realistic theatre wrote most of his plays in the last decades of the nineteenth century. Being a master of the craft of playwriting, he did not limit his vision and imagination only to the form of drama, but through his farces and comedy he has touched on the most pressing problems of his age. In the words of Lord A. Nicoll “His sentimentalism and often conventional treatment of character cannot take from his significance as a pioneer who helped to build a foundation for the twentieth century realistic theatre and who pointed out to others the virtues of the play of ideas.”¹ His imagination is so sharp that he can delve into the institutions of marriage, family, men-women relationship and other esteemed institution.

Pinero was an actor in his youth, though not successful; he, however, knew all the secrets of the stage, and showed later that he knew how to make proper use of them. This perfect command of the stage is sometimes a disadvantage; it has always been one of his powers but also one of his limitations; he is very rarely undramatic, but he also very rarely frees himself from the more certain and well-tried resources of stage craft or discards them in order to attain a superior stagecraft. In comedy his

vision is never entirely free from the stamp of the French masters of the middle of the century, such as Sardou, Scribe and Augier; and in this respect he is even less personal and original than Jones, although more fertile and various in his ideas. His scheme is always the same; a comic plot rendered as plausible; which thickens until it reaches an almost dramatic tension in the penultimate act, and then unravels itself agreeably in the last acts, with a short and very happy ending. He presents little sketches from life with a certain realism often caricatured without excess. His art, to use the language of the modern painter, is anecdotal and illustrative, neither impressionistic nor expressionistic; and being incapable of reproducing profound and fundamental situations, tends to brush them by without touching them.

Pinero deservedly holds one of the chief positions in the world of what we may call pre-modern drama. His place has been taken by other playwrights more revolutionary than he, but his influence on the dramatist of the eighteen nineties of the previous century was enormous and is still exercised, on more than one present day writer. Pinero’s work, as has already been indicated, is of a very varied quality and style. His theatrical efforts are numerous, extending from his first farce of 1877 to A
Cold June of 1932. Probably however, he will be remembered most for his problem plays, The Second Mrs. Tanqueray, The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith, Iris and Midchannel. In the case of his first comedies Two Hundred a year, The Gay Lord Quex, The Magistrate, and many others, he is a Sardou who has come to closer grips with life, who has morality, and who has sometimes wider and more serious conclusions to suggest; with a vague background of melancholy, and an optimism which always has some reservation but does not reveal its characteristics, which in Pinero can perhaps be ascribed to his race. Besides these comedies or farces which depict characteristic types and environments other examples are the The School Mistress and In Chancery. He has written comedies which he defines as serious, such as His Householder and Trelawny of the Wells which are considered as models of good construction, in which characteristic figures and surroundings are presented with the additional aim of explaining a problem and a conflict of a general character.

The Second Mrs. Tanqueray, The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith, A Cold June, Iris and Midchannel are alike in dealing with the problem of social life, men and women relationship in a manner tragic or approaching to the tragic. In style they are marked by the same feature which
distinguishes all of Pinero's plays, his excellence of construction. It is a fact however, that in the world of drama, construction may be too excellent. It may rise to such a pitch of perfection that it becomes positively mechanical. French writers such as Sardou, Scribe and Augier had taught playwrights the secret of this construction. Dramas were rolled off carelessly to a set plan. Characters, incidents, exposition, climax and denouement all were governed by certain laws and once the mould was secured, plaster casts could be struck off almost indefinitely. Sir Arthur Pinero, had started his work near about 1877 but his later plays shows some baneful effects. His characters are often theatrical rather than real; his situations have an unnatural atmosphere; the development of his plots bears witness to a somewhat mechanical rigidity. The fetters of the mid-nineteenth century still bind his free progress to a more dominant art form. It is typical of this mechanical structure that The Profligate (1889) was provided with a double ending by which the curtain fell either on unmitigated tragedy or on a conventional happy ending, where the hero is forgiven and all is well. The vicious taste of late seventeenth century drama, which influenced Suckling and Howard is not seen in the plays of Pinero. He has a new modern vision in his next plays.
All these weaknesses arising out of an excellence of construction which becomes dully mechanical are paralleled by another notable trait in Sir Arthur Pinero’s more serious work. He deals with the stuff of tragedy, but rarely in a tragic manner. To understand this right we must return for a moment to the question of drama. Drama, that form of play-writing which was invented in the eighteenth century, provided a novel and perfectly legitimate sphere for the dramatist. The drama is simply a serious problem play where the emotions never rise to tragic heights and where the denouement is in harmony with the general atmosphere of the plot. Drama and tragedy can rarely, if ever, be mingled. They are distinct in their separate realms and a confusion of the two can lead only to disaster. The emotions of tragedy are those that relate primarily to terror and awe, allied to a feeling of pre-eminent majesty. If these be lacking, the play will fall into that unhappy ground inhabited by so many of the tragic dramatists of the Augustan period. It can not be too often insisted that pity and pathos are not genuinely tragic emotions. Both may appear in great tragedies, but then only as a relief to larger and more solid, consuming passions. It is rare that in Sir Arthur Pinero’s dramas, mainly on a problem, implied or stated, there is no emotion of pity.
The approach, and his most characteristic kind of achievement, had appeared already in *The Weaker Sex* (1888) and in *The Times* (1894). The former, it is true, is coloured highly by sentimentalism, and the latter aims rather at comic than at tragic appeal. In *The Times* we are introduced to a certain self-made tradesman, Percy Egerton Bompas by name, whose one object in life is to obtain an entry into society. Naturally he is delighted when he learns that his daughter Beryl has become engaged to Lord Lurgashall, but disaster comes when it is discovered that his weak and stupid son Howard has secretly married his land-lady’s daughter. An attempt is made to hush up the scandal by ‘educating’ the wife and her mother, but the secret is soon revealed, and at the close of the drama we see Bompas a broken man. The theme is one which might have provided good dramatic material, but sentimentalism is permitted over freely to intrude when Lurgashall reaffirms his desire of marrying Beryl. There seems a confusion here between a sentimentally conceived problem play and a satiric comedy; in *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* Sir Arthur Pinero was to mix in a somewhat similar manner, the moods of tragedy and of the problem drama. The famous play deals with the problem of life, the problem of a man, Aubrey Tanqueray who marries a woman, Paula whom
he loves, but whose past he knows to be deeply stained. The plot is well worked out with the aid of subsidiary characters such as Ellean, the daughter, and Cayley Drummle, the good hearted friend ending with the suicide of the unhappy Paula. Rising to a height of emotional tension is that famous "I am sorry, Aubrey" yet it fails to stir those deeper passions which the highest tragic art brings to us. The author succeeds in bringing tears to every eye, but the greatest tragedy soars to a lofty expanse where tears are useless and only dry eyed fear and awe can dwell. *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* is a well written play but, not a great tragedy. Nor can we style it a drama. It fails in the final test, striving at tragic emotions and succeeding only in the calling forth of pathos. The tragic vision of Pinero does not rise to the heights of Shakespearean tragedy.

The pathetic and superb theatrics combine similarly to mark *The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith*, a study in character spoiled by such ‘curtains’ as that at the close when the free thinking heroine, after flinging a Bible into the fire utters a loud cry.....and thrusting her arm into the fire, drags out the book. It is encouraged by John Hare. These plays have been liked by some, however ignoble the subject; others have regretted that the age in which we live required more realism. Unquestionably they have all been
popular. 'They are the outcome of an age that allows society to rule the stage and not the people'.

In Sir Arthur Pinero's work as a whole we note a sort of trusting simplicity and conventional theorizing going hand in hand; The treatment of Lady Vivash and her companions in *The Weaker Sex* gave evidence of this. Similar weakness is to be found in *Iris* and even in *Midchannel*. Although in the latter play the characters are treated with a greater firmness and sureness of touch. Nor has dream vision disappeared in Sir Arthur's last published play, *The Enchanted Cottage* (1922). The theme of this drama, the coming of beauty through love, is worked out in a distinctly unsatisfactory manner. The dream world (of Burlesque flavour) is lacking in the conviction of Cain; the theme is handled with a decided lack of strength, perhaps the particular weakness here may most effectively be realized when *The Enchanted Cottage* is compared with Mr. Charles McEvoy's. The Like of Her, in which a similar situation is dealt with, on more realistic lines.

*The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith* is not essentially tragic and there are few attempts to secure a tragic atmosphere. The gradual decline in Agnes stands in marked contrast to Paula's. Agnes of Act I called marriage 'the
choked up, seething pit', and aspired to remain with Lucas only to help, to heal and to console. She shows a marked decline in Act III. She is not her former self, strong and free, to hold on to her ideas of free marriage; she gradually sinks into a common place woman and consents to Lucas' proposal of marriage. Lucas himself shows signs of being a hopelessly weak, fickle-minded person, who in a drunken fit rejects Agnes to return to his old love of political success. Brought up under the exclusive influence of free thinking the propagandist Agnes constantly uses expressions unknown in the terminology of her class and is half afraid of her own opinions. She even records them as daring and dangerous hours. She speaks of both free thinking and socialism not as one, yet acclimatized to the technicalities of socialism.

Whatever failings Sir Arthur Pinero has, he must be acclaimed as a master of his craft and one of the most important figures in the dramatic revival of our times. His sentimentalism and sometimes conventional treatment of character do not take from him, his importance as a pioneer who brought back drama to more natural realms. Very materially did he contribute towards the intimate treatment of life's problems in the

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2 The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith. Act I.
theatre and towards the introduction of a dialogue, vivid and realistic. *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* was an epoch-making play; *Midchannel, Iris Letty* (1903) *The Thunderbolt* (1908), and even *The Mind-the paint Girl* (1912) prove that Sir Arthur was more than a pioneer, that for long he kept abreast of the movement which he himself had been so largely instrumental in inaugurating.

In *The Profligate*, he drew attention to a thing that was not as healthy and clear as the veriest farley tale. The main argument of the play was set out by Pinero thus:

> It is good soothfast saw  
> Half roasted never will be raw

*The Profligate*, produced at the Garrick theatre on 24 April 1889, brought to the surface the uglier side of sex relationship. The question is, Can a profligate live a life with a pure woman such as Leslie is? Can a dissolute man settle down to a life of innocent happiness? Once we get answers to these questions, we are led on to a swift-moving sequence of events with breathless suspense, through scenes, containing ideas, information and clash of personalities. Information is coupled with

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3 *The Profligate*, Act I.
discussion. Lord Dangars is free from the divorce court and the question of eligibility in marriage crops in:

Lord Dangars : Well, I don't see that a man's eligibility requires any further qualification than that of his being single. You differ?

Hugh Murray : May I speak honestly, Lord Dangars?

Lord Dangars : Do. I admire anything of that sort. I think your partner told me you were a Scotchman and new to London. I like to encounter a man in his honest stage.

Hugh Murray : Thank you. Then you will allow me to maintain that the man who marries a good woman knowing that his past life is not as spotless as hers grievously wrongs his wife and fools himself.

Lord Dangars : As for wronging her, that's an abstract question of sentiment. But I don't see how the man is a fool.

Hugh Murray : A man is a fool to bind himself to one who sooner or later must learn what little need there is to respect her husband.
Lord Dangars: Why, my dear Mr. Murray, you’re actually putting men on a level with ladies. Ladies, I admit, are like nations – to be happy they should have no histories.

Lord Dangars and Dunstan Renshaw are birds of a feather, alike, in their profligacy; differing, if at all, in that Renshaw had been drinking even on his wedding day. He had no qualms of conscience, being honestly convinced of his starting at even counts with Leslie.

The true significance of the play lies, not so much in its achievement as in its broad aims. The writer was writing under limitations but he sought to rise above these limitations, if only for a brief hour. “The period was not primarily a period of achievement but rather of efforts suggestive, tentative rather than formative. Its relic are moods, attitudes, experiments, fantastic attenuation of weariness, fantastic anticipation of a new vitality.”\(^4\) Judged in the context of the age, Pinero’s *The Profligate* is a play, the English theatre could be proud of.\(^5\) Cunliffe also remarks that *The Profligate* instead of being a horrible example suggested rather, “the possibility of making the best of both worlds.”

“Pinero suffered the better judgment to be overridden by the demands of

\(^5\) Fyfe, H. *Sir Arthur Pinero’s Plays and Players*, p. 106.
the actor based on the supposed taste of the public and wrenched the
denouement into a happy ending.\textsuperscript{6} The altered ending merely weakened
the effect of the dramatized sermon, a piece reinforced by incredible co-
cincidences and platitudinous speech making.

It is inevitable that the works of Sir Arthur Pinero should be
considered alongside those of H. A. Jones; both started their dramatic
career about the same time, both came to turn their energies towards a
revitalization of the theatre. Already the early \textit{Saints and Sinners} has been
considered in this connection. These studies might be regarded as a
stepping stone from the first experiment in this kind to The Triumph of
the Philistines (1895) and Michael and his Lost Angel (1896). The first
treats this subject in a mood of bitter and sardonic humour, the latter, in a
mood approaching the tragic. Jones was right in regarding Michael and his
Lost Angel as his most finely written play, yet here he too, like Sir Arthur
Pinero, is apt to fall in to a pitfall of sentimentalism. He was a magnificent
craftsman; but after 1896, he seemed to lose touch with his time and
became merely a relic of the past. Pinero's strength is seen when we

\textsuperscript{6} Cunliffe, \textit{Tendencies of Modern English Drama}, p. 36.
compare his plays of the decade 1900-10 expressive of changed conditions, with Jones' later efforts.

In his criticism of Jones, William Archer had but two or three plays on which to build a judgement; hardly more had been provided by Arthur Pinero in the year 1882.\(^7\) Available for Archer, indeed, were only a few short pieces—*The Money Spinner* (Manchester, Nov. 1880), *Imprudence* (Folly, July 1881) and *The Squire* all plays which, although they may contain work potentially interesting, can hardly be rated as masterpieces.\(^8\) In each one of these, Pinero was clearly trying his hand at dramatic composition, and the frantic touch is often painfully apparent. Even then, however, such apprentice efforts indicated a certain primitive originality, and Archer again actually recognizes him.

*Imprudence* was a farce, *The Money, Spinner* a kind of melodrama, and *The Squire* an essay in a real study of character. To select a theme which definitely posed the problem such as it is, introduced into the last

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\(^7\) Hamilton Fyfe, *Arthur Wing Pinero* (1902) and *Sir Arthur Pinero's Plays and Playwry* (1930); W. Stocker, *Pinero's Drama Studies Under Motive*, characters and technic (Marburg, 1911), Quutton Cook, the care of Mr. Pinero (The theatre, N.S.V. 1882, 202-4), R. F. Sharp, *A. W. Pinero and Farce* (Id. N.S. XX. 1992, 154-7); *Mr. Pinero and Literary Drama*.

\(^8\) Before this date Pinero had also written two hundred a year (Glo. act 1887) *Two Can Play at that Game* (Lyc. 1878), *La Comete* (Croydon, April 1878), *Daisy's Escape* (Lyc. Sept. 1878), *Hosters Mystery*, p. 277.
mentioned play indicates at once how sincere Pinero was at the start of his dramatic career and how determined he was to relate the characters of his imagination to the social life of his day. *The Squire* points forward unmistakably to *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* (1893) and *Midchannel* (1909).

Archer observed rightly in the course of the very curious and interesting controversy which raged for sometimes after the production of *The Squire*: “The notion of a young couple secretly married—the girl about to become a mother finding that a former wife is still in existence. The heroine amongst those who respect and love her. The fury of a rejected lover who believes her to be a guilty woman. Two men face to face at night time, kill the first wife.”

By this we realize the essential problem from which Pinero’s conception of plot and character was evolved. His play differs from the majority of contemporary efforts in its purpose; and he goes back to the stage which Robertson had reached, resolute to advance still further than that dramatist had done. For this he was qualifying himself excellently. Not only had he the advantage denied to Robertson of many models

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provided by the newer school of French playwrights, he also showed himself possessed of a power over both the realm of serious emotional situation and that of light comedy. Robertson was restricted on the one hand by prevailing standards in melodrama and in the sentimental play, and on the other, by lack of experience in handling light social conversation. Being a pioneer, he was forced to create his own medium; Pinero came at a time when, through the efforts of men such as Gilbert and Aubrey the requisite medium had been shaped and adjusted to dramatic requirements.

How far this medium, as it was applied to light comedy, aided Pinero is to be seen when we glance at the farces and comedies which he wrote between *The Squire* and the problem plays of the nineties. Of these *The Magistrate* proves one of the most interesting plays. Here the weakness in construction, which Archer had seen as one of his greatest faults, has disappeared. In a series of growing crises Pinero carries us onward from one ridiculous situation to another, indulging in the impossible certainty—for such is the way of farce—but retaining always a lively sense of theatrical values. *The Magistrate*, who gives the title to the play, is one Posket, married to a widow who, in order to conceal her age,
declares that her nineteen year old son Cis is really only fourteen. To her dismay the news comes that the lad’s godfather, Lukynis is arriving home from India and off she proceeds to warn him of her deception. Meanwhile, in her absence the men (Posket and Cis) decide they can safely go out. They, too, set off, on a jaunt and by farcical co-incidence all find themselves in the same hotel. Fortunately for the plot, there is a police raid, in the course of which Lukyn and Mrs Posket are arrested; this pair is then brought up in court before Posket himself, who is so utterly dazed that he permits his clerk to persuade him into giving them seven days jail. A solution is finally reached when a brother magistrate, Bellamy, reopens the case and releases the prisoners with an admonition.

Not so skillfully constructed as The Magistrate, but none the less interesting as a specimen of the work through which Pinero gained his training, The School Mistress (1886) deals with adventures in the Volumnia College for Daughters of Gentleman, managed by a certain Miss. Dyott who has married an impoverished gentleman, Queckett. To obtain money for the satisfying of his somewhat luxurious tastes, she plans to act in an opera bouffe planned for the Christmas Vacation. During her absence, the girls and Queckett decide to have a spree, the main object of
which is to celebrate the secret marriage of Dinah Rankling to Reginald Paulover. Admiral Rankling, by an error, arrives at this party and, as one may imagine, there are many confusions, until in the end Miss Dyott returns home and proceeds to exercise her authority.

One other specimen of this farce may be mentioned, *Dandy Dick* (Court, Jan. 1887), perhaps on the whole the best of them all. The Very Rev. Augustin *Jedd* is the chief figure in this who is arrested in suspicious circumstances. This poor gentleman suffers a series of doubtful adventures. Easily and with dramatic interest the plot develops, while the characters are well conceived and nicely balanced. The horsy Georgiana Tidman is thus well portrayed with the Dean and an air of liveliness is provided by means of Jedd's precocious daughters Salome and Sheba, who succeed in marrying Major Trarver and Mr. Darbey. An excellent comic butler, Blore, completes a group skillfully blended to draw the last ounce of merriment from a ridiculous situation.

The value of these farces for the development of Pinero's vision rests in the experience they gave him in the building of plot and the requirements of stage speech. That they make no pretence to mirroring
life naturalistically matters not at all; their importance is definitely theatrical; through them Pinero learned the use of the chosen instrument.

In the midst of this world of laughter, however, Pinero did not forget the serious purpose which had inspired him to write *The Squire* and in *The Hobby-Horse* (1886) he turned aside to pen a social comedy. The general atmosphere was one which he was to exploit in a number of plays—the satirizing of social follies without the vigour and intellectual passion of the pure satirist. Philanthropy in *The Hobby-House* gains Pinero’s contempt, and this he exposes in the scheme of Spencer Jermyn for a decayed jockey’s home and in that of his wife for an orphanage. In the interests of her cause Mrs. Jermyn goes off as ‘Miss Moxon’ to the East end of London and there Rev. Noel Brice falls deeply in love with her. She and her husband are shown thoroughly rid of their philanthropic predictions by the fall of the final curtain. This play well illustrates a weakness which marks much of Pinero’s work during the eighties and nineties. First of all, he often mixes his style in these plays, so that unity of impression is hopelessly lost. When Jermyn is conversing with the unregenerate Shatlock and Pews we are wholly in the realm of farce; when Brice is making love to ‘Miss Moxon’ we are in that of the
lachrymose drama. Shattock is a figure who might have appeared in *Dandy Dick*. Brice is the familiar unhappy lover who, his days of work ended, is allowed to fade away into a melancholy gloom. This in itself, however, is not the chief failing of the *Hobby-Horse*. Satire springs from an intellectual disgust at human stupidities. The satirist thus laughs at and lacerates the miser or the astrologer’s dupe because intellectually he views their action as being beneath human dignity. Pinero’s satire is not of this kind; it does not build itself out of a feeling of superiority. The true satirist nerve sneers, for a sneer implies that the object sneered at is subconsciously conceived of as a superior object. Jonson satirises follies beneath him; the lesser man simply sneers at those above. *The Hobby Horse* and some of its companion pieces might, then, more reasonably be called sneering comedies than comedies of satire. No high intellectual ideal inspires them and drives them forward.

This judgment is true of many plays of Pinero. *In the Weaker Sex* (1888) he turns on the movement for women’s right just as he had turned on philanthropy in the other plays. Technically this comedy-drama is good; but its theme is handled in a manifestly shallow manner. The story deals mainly with Lady Vivash who had loved and quarrelled with Philip
Lyster. Lyster has since made a great name for himself as Iralee the poet and after meeting Lady Vivash's daughter, Sylvia, has fallen madly in love with her. On discovering who Sylvia really is he departs from their lives. Into this circle the author thrusts Mrs. Boyle-Chewton, the leader of the women's movement, with rather futile sneering. He makes her farcically believe that a member of parliament, Mr. Burgus, is making her a proposal of marriage when in reality he is merely presenting a report. The treatment here seems like *The Hobby Horse*. The struggle for women's rights was one that might have been dealt with in an entirely farcical manner for the sake of merriment as it might provide, or in an entirely serious manner. Between these two there could be no dramatically effective middle course.

A third example of this style appears in *The Times* (Terry's Oct. 1891). The object towards which Pinero here tilts is social aspiration and again we recognize that his method is spiritually lacking in power and in sympathy. The scheming of a self-made man to enter the sacred portals of society may quite legitimately lead towards a farcical episode. Equally legitimately it may be dealt with seriously, either from the point of view of society as a whole or from that of the individual. Pinero again contents
himself with sneering at Percy Egerton-Bompas whom he presents as a man who grows wealthy, dreams of a higher social life; quite naturally this man is not overjoyed when he discovers that his son, Howard, has been inveigled into marrying his landlady’s daughter. Tremble, a social tort who, for consideration, aids him in his social advance, advises him to conceal the misalliance, to educate his son’s wife and her mother and to bring them before society under changed names. Various complications arise, and in the end Egerton-Bompas has to confess, broken heartedly, what he has lost. The treatment of this theme however, leaves Beryl and Lord Lurgashall in the air, and that of course, would never do, so after the latter has departed from the Parvenu’s house, back he comes to whisper sentimentally in Beryl’s ear that he loves her still, that he will overlook her father’s vulgarity and marry her just the same. The combination of this sneering and this sentimentality takes from *The Times* any virtue it might otherwise have possessed.

Happily, however Pinero by no means confined his attention to themes of this kind and to this atmosphere. Pure sentimentality he exploited in *Sweet Lavender* where as one reviewer enthusiastically declared: “he gave an admirable retort to the disciples of Zola and
naturalism, who think a play cannot be healthy without being inspired. In *Sweet Lavender* the dramatist introduces us to good women and honest men, and the play is as brilliant as a flash of light."\(^\text{10}\) Even if we can not share in this enthusiastic acclamation we may admit that *Sweet Lavender's* sentimentality provides more pleasing theatrical qualities than the sneers of *The Times*.

Something of the same mood he introduced into *Lady Bountiful* (1891), wherein Camilla Brent is shown maintaining her uncle Rodric Heron and his son Dennis, whom she loves. The latter thinks of nothing but hunting, and this much distresses Camilla, but when he learns that he and his father have been living on her bounty he immediately leaves the house and takes a job as riding master at the stable of honest John Veale. There Margaret Veale falls in love with him and out of pity he marries her. Later she dies and Dennis returns to find Camilla just about to wed old Sir Richard Philliter. On seeing Dennis she faints and the wedding is postponed. The plot is a trifle stupid, but Pinero's sincerity of purpose may be acknowledged.

\(^{10}\) *The Theatre*, N.S. XI May 1888, 263.
In these plays love plays a major role; love that is faithful and true and devoted, love that is tortured and misled and weak. It is dealt with sentimentally, yet the sentimentalism has a quality of its own which may be genuinely esteemed. Here Pinero was on surer ground than when he was writing his sneering comedies. And out of these sentimental pieces grew one drama of real significance—*Trelawny of the Wells* (1898). Trelawny may be viewed as a symbol of the renascent English drama. Something of the refashioned farce had gone into its making, something too of the new sentimentalism. It is a period piece in which an endeavour is made to present a picture of the young Tom Robertson and his times; Robertson is viewed partly as a figure of the past, partly as the master of the modern style. Thirty years have gone by since he was stirring theatrical audience by his revolutionary method, and those methods like many things revolutionary, have settled down to become common practice and daily convention. The people talk, not as Robertson would have made his own characters talk, but in the manner of 1890, which simply means that their dialogue is nearer to the real greenroom chatter of the sixties than to the more formal (and yet for its time naturalistic) speech put into the mouths of Robertson's own stage figures. Here the
style of Caste is seized upon, fondly analysed and made more vivacious in content.

Pinero had a gift for the writing of comedy, Trelawny amply testifies; additional testimony comes from *The Princess and the Butterfly*; or *The Fantastics* (1897) which is a truly excellent sentimentalized comedy of manner. The Princess Pannonia has here returned to London after the death of her old husband. Middle age is beginning to creep upon her and a friend of hers, Sir George Lamorant, whom she is about to marry. Suddenly, however, she falls violently in love with a serious-minded youth named Edward Oriel and Sir George experiences an equal infatuation for the princess’s adopted child, the bright spirited Fay Zuliani. Through the maze of this situation, the characters drift in a whirl of fashionable gaiety. Their artificiality and the contrast between that artificiality and natural impulse provide Pinero with material of which he makes good use. Nearly does he succeed in his attempt to enter that dream world which Charles Lamb saw in the comedy of Congreve, “Are you sane all of you—any of you?” cries lady Ringstead at the close of the play. “Are you real?” To me, you appear like dream people—fantastic creatures” and the answer to her questions comes in the form of the
Hungarian dance, Love is Ever Young. *The Princess and the Butterfly* has the theme of The Vinegar Tree, presented without the sophistication of that modern comedy and with a delicate sense of fantastic values.

Through these plays Pinero made many important contributions to the stage of his time; but their historical value becomes of minor importance when they are placed besides *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* (1893). On May 27, 1893 wrote a reviewer in the theatre “and Mr. Pinero was hailed unanimously not only as one of the greatest of living dramatists, but as the author of a play which is also a piece of literature.” With this drama The Theatre reviewer recognized the long desired union of literary excellence and from that union he prophesied not only the further cultivation of the theatre by men of letters but the arising of a new style in theatrical criticism. In the days to come when the production of a new play by a leading dramatist shall be regarded not as a theatrical fixture, but as an important event in the world of art and letters, master pieces will not be discussed soberly and thoughtfully by men of culture and intelligence. “I wonder”, wrote William Archer “if Mr. Pinero himself quite realizes what an immeasurable advance he has made in *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* on all his former works. It is not merely the seriousness of
the subject that distinguishes this play from its predecessors......Here we have a positively good play. Here without raving, we can praise almost without reservation......\textsuperscript{11} In brief, the play is modern and masterly. By modern Archer meant that this play aimed at the closest possible approach to naturalism. In it, Archer imagined, the author had “thrown to the winds all extrinsic considerations, compromises, superstitions, and ....set himself, for his own personal satisfaction, to do the best work that was in him.”\textsuperscript{12} From it Archer looked for the inauguration of a new period of creative productivity and rightly he prognosticated that after times would find it “epoch-making”.

Today, of course, we see the weaknesses of this play more clearly than its contemporaries saw them. We recognize in it certain sentimentalism; we detect a spurious literary quality in the dialogue we are not so rapturously prepared to recognize. Yet, with all this recognition of its failings, none of us may deny the fact that in \textit{The Second Mrs. Tanquerary} the English drama at the close of the nineteenth century first surely founded itself; it did not spring fully formed like Minerva out of Jove’s forehead; much work in the theatre had gone to its making. It did

\textsuperscript{11} William Archer, \textit{The Theatrical World for 1893}, p. 128.
\textsuperscript{12} \textit{Ibid.}
not face facts so boldly as many imagined. It did not even provide such a fine technical model as some other plays of the same period. To it more than to any other drama of its time, however, the English stage owed its later prevailing tendency towards the naturalism of daily life. The fantasy of Gilbert was forgotten; the artificiality of Wilde was neglected; and the strange poetic quality of Ibsen's work was interrupted in terms of common daily life.

From the beginning of the eighties of the last century to the outbreak of the 1914-18 war, Pinero ranked as the undisputed leader of English drama. He in fact, initiated the modern English social drama and established it not only as a possibility but as an actuality. He attracted serious writers back to the theatre and paved the way for the glory of Shaw, Galsworthy, Barker, Masefield, St. John Hankin and others. He may still be turned to for lessons in stagecraft due to his skill and mental approach to the social problems that he raised in his plays.

In vision, Pinero is a satirist; he is what the Romans called 'censor morun', a critic and corrector of manners, of public and private behavior. It pleases him to notice and call attention to folly, pretentiousness,
caddishness, vanity, to the miscalculations of the selfish, the squirming of the weak.\textsuperscript{13}

Pinero in his plays selects a character rather than a situation. The difference between a live play and a dead one is that in the former the character controls the plot while in the latter the plot controls the character. Pinero’s plots, therefore, are animated pictures of some broad aspect or phase of life. He does not start with a theme and incident or a series of happenings; he starts with a certain character that happens to interest him or his audience. When feminism was in the air as a result of Ibsen’s plays Pinero chose certain phases of relationship between men and women. He had no dogmatic views about sex, marriage, or divorce; but since suffragette agitation was beginning to attract attention, he wrote plays about women. Pinero’s plays makes it clear that drama is a mixture of the twin technique of the well made play and thesis play. None of his plays proves thesis nor are they as disturbing as Ibsen’s plays. In an age of democracy, Pinero made his theatre an artificial focus, dealing with artificial people involved in artificial situations; women in his plays, Paula, his Zoe, his Agnes, his Iris are strangely worked out individuals: external

\textsuperscript{13} Hamilton Fyfe, \textit{Sir Arthur Pinero’s Plays and Players}, p. 60.
circumstance and chance cause tragedy. Letters are planted and discovered at a convenient time, suspense is maintained at all cost, and the threads of the plot are firmly tied together.

"And with The Second Mrs. Tanqueray and with The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith (1895), Pinero succeeded in doing something more important that all Henry Arthur Jones had accomplished. His theatrical skill is as assured as Jones and he brings to his themes some at least of those qualities which make for tragedy: conviction, deeper thought, and fine sympathy. Here the sneering tone which vitiated the spirit of his other plays has been laid aside and he re-introduced to the stage that noble pity which had found hardly any exponent since the seventeenth century. It is a strange fact that whereas Jones brought up in the melodramatic tradition, seemed to reach his finest achievement in The Rogue’s Comedy and in The Liars, Pinero, whose training had been in farce discovered his real strength in a kind of tragic drama.

Sir Arthur Pinero must be acclaimed as a master of his craft and unquestionably one of the most important figures in the dramatic revival which came at the start of our own period. He helped to build a

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14 Shutz Wilson, The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith A Study (1895).
foundation for theatre and pointed out to others the virtues of the play of ideas.

By his side, at the end of the nineteenth century, stood a second young man eager to enrich and expand this kind of drama. During the seventies, when Pinero was first introducing himself to the theatre, Henry Arthur Jones began similarly to experiment in the writing of farces, comedies and melodramas. These reached their culmination in The Silver King of 1882, a sensational play which, although conceived in melodramatic terms, includes some powerfully written scenes and some excellently handled situation. Two years afterwards came Saints and Sinners and here Jones showed clearly his true objective. Its background is a middle-class environment in a provincial town and its chief persons are Hoggard, a ruthless small business man and Probable a mean little grocer of low mentality and hypocritical godliness. Opposed to them is Letty, daughter of Pastor Fletcher, symbolic of ideals and desires beyond those of the sordid world in which she lives. In its development, the play takes a double course. On the one hand we are presented with a set of everyday problems, the hatred of the petty shopkeeper for the larger cooperative stores, the meaninglessness of conventional puritanism, the
rapacity and poverty of soul in middle class provincial society. On the other, we are treated to a somewhat melodramatic story in which *Letty* is betrayed by a high born villain one captain Fanshawe. *Letty* dies but not before there is a scene of pathos in which her true lover, George Kingsmills, has returned to utter his most generous of sentiments. The two moods are but ill combined, and yet the fact that Jones is here dealing with subject matter which goes considerably beyond Pinero’s favourite theme of the woman with a past inclines us to accept *Saints And Sinners* as a more remarkable play in 1884 than the *Profligate* was in 1889.

The last years of the nineteenth century in which Pinero flourished, closed with a revival of both Wit and Woe in the theatre. The play of ideas dealing with social problems had arisen out of the sentimental experiments of earlier years. Where the poetic dramatists had all failed, younger literary men were now engaged in involving a new, theatrical format of farce, extravaganza, and melodrama; the public was being regaled with a fresh kind of serious realistic dialogue and an exploitation of artificiality for gaily testing purposes and the foundation of the modern stage was firmly built.
The plays of Pinero are not only related to decent construction or fine craftsmanship but behind his plots is his imaginative vision. He has taken up social and feminist problems as his themes but he is an expert in mixing the comic and the imaginative. So purely English, Pinero brings that same vague yet not better background of melancholy which we have noticed already in his comedies of Manners and “problem comedies”.\(^\text{15}\)

\(^{15}\) *English Drama, The Last Great Phase*, by Camillo Pellizzi, p. 49.