

**M. Fabre's Interesting New Play at the Comedie Francaise**  
**The New York Times, Mar. 17, 1907**

**Review of "La Maison d'Argile" (a French sequel to *A Doll's House*)**

In his new play, "La Maison d'Argile," ("House of Clay") produced at the Comedie Francaise, M. Emile Fabre has again given Paris something to talk about. English-speaking playgoers will be interested in its theme, though it may not be entirely comprehensible to any save those who are intimately acquainted with French social prejudices. According to the Paris correspondent of *The Chronicle*, the audience, always in the mass more primitive even at a Parisian dress rehearsal than any one man of the number alone, was transported with enthusiasm by a second act, which, unless one granted the same social axioms as the author, seemed monstrously unnatural. In short, the audience was as instructive as the play. This "House of Clay," he writes, is an amazing "give away" of one aspect of French national character. Madame Henri Armieres, the heroine, dolorously impersonated by the tragic Mme. Segond-Weber, is a piteous victim of the gods of French society. But neither author nor audience has the least pity for her. No one questions that she ought to go meekly to the altar, and many a spectator seemed impatient even that she wept.

In her place an Englishwoman would have rebelled in a flash and turned and rent the sacrificers. She has done nothing she should not have done by any purely human law. Twenty years ago she divorced a cruel husband and married again a man whom she loves, and who loves her. She had two children by her first marriage—a son, Jean, whom the courts intrusted to his father, and Valentine, whom she kept—and by her second she has another daughter, Marguerite. She also has money, and there is the rub. Her husband, Armieres, is in financial difficulties. He can be saved by her if she hands over to him the bulk of her fortune, of which she has sole control.

Her son, who has not even written to his mother for ten years, and whom she has not seen since he was a boy, and his sister, who has met him again in the past few months, hear of M. Armieres's difficulties, and both attack their mother. The scene is amazing. The son, who, with his penniless father, has worked as a factory hand, and is uneducated, refuses to treat his mother otherwise than as a stranger—M. Grand played the son's part with almost brutal realism—Valentine, his sister (Mlle. Lara,) who is sufficiently spiteful and envious, looking on approvingly. Between mother and children there can be now only questions of business, though the mother is in tender tears. The son has a "deal" to propose. His mother's fortune is invested in a business, and he will buy it cheap. He has a certain sum promised him by financial backers, but no more. Armieres, in difficulties which all the market knows, cannot expect a better price. It is amazing enough that a man should propose so sordid a bargain to his mother. When she refuses, the scene becomes more astounding still. Brother and sister stand on each side and bully her. Is her property her own? No it is theirs. She has no right to use it. She had no right to "break up the home." She has apparently no rights at all. She is nothing, or ought to be nothing, but a stone in the social fabric. Nor does she say one word that one wants to say for her. She feebly protests that her first husband struck her,

but the protest is brushed aside. She says naught about her own right to live, her own place in the world, the respect due to her as their mother, and as the good and devoted and intelligent woman the author means her to be. Not a word from her of her merely humble rights, or even of her rights by law. She merely laments while her children bully her. Apparently she feels that she is only getting her deserts, and the audience applauds furiously. The children stand for the dread god of society, and punish her for her crime. The crime is that, having "founded a home," she has "broken it up." Observe that she is made virtuous, tender, and the straightest of women by the author, to state the case more forcibly. Her qualities, her feelings, and her whole personality are nothing. The crime of having kept her fortune to herself, or rather, for her second home, she being utterly disinterested herself, wipes out all her virtues.

Nor are the ties of the second home, which, observe, has existed twenty years, to count for aught. The first home should have been intangible, the fortune is a "bloc" to be handed down in trust from generation to generation. Not to sacrifice happiness, love, feelings, personality to the trust of the patrimony is the one unpardonable crime, and the audience cheered w. transports after the two children had bullied their mother for half an hour. There never was a more amazing example of one particular trend of French national thought. Whatever the practice may be, the theory is that society is all and the individual nothing. Here was a pure, intelligent, noble-hearted woman tortured, rightfully according to author and audience, because she had been a person, not a wheel in the social machine, and tortured righteously by her own children. Even this intelligent woman herself accepts her punishment. She might stand up and turn her cad of a son and her vixen of a daughter out, but she bows meekly and weeps, woman of character though she is supposed to be.

Natural feeling might also alter the situation, but it has all gone from the brother and sister. Even the love of children disappears before the crime against society. The children are heartless and hard as nails in a just cause. Before the august name of society, even the love of mother and son, which generally "fetches" a French audience, is forgotten. The superficial observers who repeat that French life is based on fleeting feelings, whims, self-love, and hedonism should see this French sequel and contradiction of the "*Doll's House*," and note on what a rock of adamant French society rests and crushes those who resist it.

In the end the house of clay crumbles, of course, and the victim is buried in the ruins. She accepts at last the son's deal, then it is her husband's and her second daughter's turn to trample on her. Son and elder daughter go off triumphant. Younger daughter and father go off to console each other in their now irretrievable ruin, for he must file his petition, and her dowry is gone. The mother is left alone on the stage with only the photographs of her "little ones" to sob over. This is a French refutation of a "*Doll's House*" with a vengeance.