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By

LYNTON HUDSON B.A.

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PREFACE

IN 1942 I found myself, owing to the vicissitudes of war, teaching English Literature to boys in the post-School Certificate stage of their education. I was struck by the generality of their interest in the modern theatre. Can't we read a *modern* play, sir? I admit that at first I basely harboured the suspicion that this eagerness proceeded less from a lively curiosity about the modern drama than from the realization that to read a play is an agreeably indolent substitute for work. Eventually, however, I came to the conclusion that this interest was genuine. It seemed also reasonable that boys living in the middle of the twentieth century should want to know something about the living stage, for educationally the English drama would appear to have ended with Sheridan and Goldsmith.

To satisfy this demand was not easy. First, modern plays are expensive text-books, especially when one considers the shortness of the time it takes to read them. In war-time, of course, they were largely unobtainable. Secondly, merely to read in class such plays as were obtainable without some background knowledge seemed rather a desultory proceeding. What I felt we needed was a guide to the various changes which the modern play has undergone within the last four decades and a collection of plays, or excerpts, to illustrate these changes, and, at the same time, to give a taste of the quality of the foremost dramatists of the period.

This is what I have tried to provide: a reasonably concise and handy introduction to the English drama of the twentieth century. In selecting passages to illustrate the successive stages of my argument, I have aimed at choosing fairly representative scenes from outstanding

plays, scenes that have an authentic flavour and are complete, in so far as they are comprehensible, in themselves, and sufficiently intriguing or exciting to make the reader wish to read the whole play for himself and to make first-hand acquaintance with the dramatist.

In this connexion, some explanation for the absence of any example of Shaw's work seems necessary. Naturally, I should have liked to include a representative scene; but unfortunately the author's business arrangements forbid the appearance of such an excerpt in the present volume.

L. H.

Merchant Taylors' School
1945

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Part One

CHAPTER I

ENGLISH DRAMA IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

WILLIAM ARCHER, the Gamaliel of modern dramatic criticism, maintained that the age which began with Pinero—and perhaps ended in September 1939—will be judged by posterity to be greater than the Elizabethan age. Even if one disputes this verdict it must be conceded that it has been a period of equal efflorescence and even greater development.

Between Pinero, whose first play was produced in 1876, and Sheridan, whose last important play appeared in 1779, stretches a long gap, dramatically barren. Hardly a single play of this unfertile interim has survived except as a literary curiosity. Playwriting has never been at a lower ebb; never has the profession of playwright been so unrewarded or held in such contempt.

Not that the theatre did not flourish. It was an age of great acting; it was pre-eminently the age in which Shakespeare bestrode the English theatre. As Shakespeare, besides writing great plays, provided actors with tremendous parts, it is not surprising that the outstanding actors of the day should have been content to 'star' in his great tragedies and comedies. The public went to the theatre to see Edmund Kean as Hamlet or Macready as Macbeth, and it too was content. In an age when acting flourishes the drama is usually poor. In the last forty years of the eighteenth century and the first half of the nineteenth the orotund and stentorian Thespians of

the provincial stage gave even less encouragement than the great London actors to the contemporary dramatist. All they demanded was a hack writer capable of knocking up a vehicle for the exercise of their lusty lungs and the performance of their speciality.

In Dickens's *Nicholas Nickleby*, it will be remembered, the hero joins the troupe of Mr Vincent Crummles. Nicholas, under the pseudonym of Mr Johnson, and his companion Smike were engaged with the prospect of earning, with their salaries and Nicholas' writings, the princely sum of a pound a week! The picture Dickens gives of the production of a new play is barely an exaggeration.

> "On Monday morning we shall read a new piece," said Mr Crummles; "the name's not known yet, but everybody will have a good part. Mr Johnson will take care of that."
> "Hallo!" said Nicholas, starting, "I——"
> "On Monday morning," repeated Mr Crummles, raising his voice, to drown the unfortunate Mr Johnson's remonstrance; "that'll do, ladies and gentlemen." . . .
> "Upon my word," said Nicholas, taking the manager aside, "I don't think I can be ready by Monday."
> "Pooh, pooh," replied Mr Crummles.
> "But really I can't," returned Nicholas, "my invention is not accustomed to these demands, or possibly I might produce——"
> "Invention! What the devil's that got to do with it!" cried the manager hastily. "Do you understand French?"
> "Perfectly well."
> "Very good," said the manager, opening the table drawer, and giving a roll of paper from it to Nicholas. "There! Just turn that into English, and put your name on the title-page."

Most of the 'original' plays produced on the English stage at this time were rehashes from the French, and in them truth of characterization and probability of incident

were sacrificed to situation and the need for providing everybody with a good part. They bore no relation to real life. No audience in those days questioned the rules of melodrama. Addressing the French Academy in 1836, Scribe, the most competent French playwright of the time and the creator of the well-made play, said:

> "You go to the theatre, not for instruction or correction, but for relaxation and amusement. Now what amuses you most is not truth, but fiction. To represent what is before your eyes every day is not the way to please you; but what does not come to you in your usual life, the extraordinary, the romantic, that is what charms you, that is what one is eager to offer you."

This view of the function of the theatre prevailed in England as in France.

> The drama's laws the drama's patrons give,
> And he who writes to please must please to live.

The poor hacks who vamped and botched the fustian required by the Vincent Crummleses of the Victorian stage had to be satisfied with the few pounds this labour brought them. Invention! Pooh! These actor-managers judged a play by the opportunities it gave themselves to run through the gamut of the emotions. Naturally they would not stand for heroes fashioned out of actual, dull, everyday men, and for simple maids in gingham gowns as heroines. The professional actor was not unjustifiably afraid of realism. He feared that if the resemblance between the hero and the audience were too great the spectator would want the development of passion to stop where it would have stopped in his own heart, and consequently the big 'dramatic' opportunities —*e.g.*, murder and suicide—would seem false and thus be shorn of their effectiveness.

Nevertheless, realism was waiting in the wings of

time. The conception of a realistic drama, in which the characters should be ordinary people and their speeches the language of real life, was forming in the brain of an actor, Tom Robertson. Robertson was a natural dramatist, and after accumulating a number of unwanted manuscripts he finally found a producer. Charles Bancroft and his wife, then at the height of their popularity, had decided to open a theatre of their own, and they too had ideas of a new realism in production; of doors with handles and the furniture of ordinary life. They opened in 1865 with his play *Society*. Its instantaneous success marked the beginning of the revival of the English drama.

The distinguishing features of the new realism which Robertson initiated are briefly these:

(1) It substituted, for a representation of types, the study of individual men and women. The old stock characters—the hero and the villain, the juvenile lead, the ingénue, the heavy father, etc.—gradually gave place to mixed characters of flesh and blood.

(2) It discarded rhetoric and blank verse for natural human speech.

The two foremost dramatic authors who carried on the work begun by Robertson were Arthur Wing Pinero and Henry Arthur Jones. Pinero, an expert craftsman, introduced several advances in technique. His *The Second Mrs Tanqueray*, produced in 1893, was the first play to dispense with the soliloquy and the aside, two crutches on which earlier dramatists comfortably relied. Gradually the old stage conventions were discarded and dramatists became less dependent on the loquacity of domestic servants and the timely delivery of letters, and less defiant of social usage in bringing their puppets face to face. It was no longer considered necessary for the hero, in order to indicate suppressed emotion, to clutch

his heart, stagger back three paces, and inform the audience in a loud aside: "How can I ever tell her? What will she say when she learns the truth?"

So far, then, in the hands of Pinero and Jones the drama was coming closer to real life. But they were both too clever and too sensitive to popular taste to advance too quickly. They knew that actor-managers still wanted 'fat' acting parts. They knew that the theatre-going public still wanted an absorbing story. And so they were careful to provide theatrical excitement of the good old kind. They still sacrificed consistency of characterization to the exigencies of the plot. The catastrophe was brought about too often by coincidence; they still faked circumstance for theatrical effect. Their realism was only superficial. The actions of the persons of the play were always possible and credible, but sometimes questionably probable, and seldom inevitable. This was the criticism levelled at the drama of the nineties —for with the revival of the drama had come a renaissance of dramatic criticism—and here we may note the third tendency of the modern drama: the demand that character should determine plot.

H. A. Jones, in his preface to *Saints and Sinners* (1884), insisted that playwriting should be not merely "the art of sensational and spectacular illusion," but "mainly and chiefly the art of representing English life." His play to which he prefaced this justification gave an unsympathetic picture of Puritan and middle-class morality. It was booed on the first night and slated by the Press, although it had a run of two hundred performances. Pinero was more wary of treading on his public's corns. His plays did not attempt to represent English life outside the restricted area of Mayfair and St James's. He was clever enough to be a little daring, but not too much; to shock his audiences without offending them, as in a famous scene where he made the 'notorious' Mrs Ebbsmith

throw the Bible in the stove—and quite illogically pull it out again. They were never too scandalized to demand the play's withdrawal, and sufficiently so to give him publicity by discussing him.

In every age the dramatist must submit to certain limitations. The first are the obvious, economical limitations: not only must the playwright 'please to live,' but his play must be a commercial proposition; the outlay it will require to put it on the stage must be recoverable from the box-office within a reasonable period. The second are factual limitations imposed by his dependence on the actors, the producer, and the possibilities of stage production. In the nineties the chief of these was, as has been already noted, the paramount position of the actor-manager and his aptness to judge a play less by its dramatic quality than by the scope it gave him for the display of his peculiar talents. The third are psychological. In every age, and, indeed, with every audience, there is what has been termed a 'psychological climate' to which the playwright must conform. And it must be recognized that crowd ideas of orthodoxy and propriety are below the level of emancipation of the more intelligent and enlightened individuals who form part of it. When, as at the end of the last century, sex, politics, and religion were taboo as subjects of conversation at decent dinner-tables, it can easily be understood that their ventilation in the theatre would have raised a storm of protest. The dramatist who wishes to broach forbidden topics has to wait until the psychological climate has arrived at a certain stage of acceptance of current new ideas. That is why the theatre is never in the van of new ideas. They are always in the air before the playwright can venture to interpret them, before he dare attempt an explicit and militant social statement. When H. A. Jones claimed the dramatist's right to choose any subject he pleased and raised the cry for the New Freedom of the Stage he was

in advance of the psychological climate of the day, as the reception of his efforts to put this freedom into practice proved.

And yet this was a time when new ideas were as plentiful as blackberries. Novelists and scientists had made the new age increasingly aware of humanitarian and social problems. Mid-Victorianism had been loath to face unpalatable facts. It had preferred to sentimentalize them, shedding discreet tears over the tragic destiny of a little orphan boy in *Oliver Twist*, or a child apprentice chimney-sweep in Kingsley's *Water Babies*. But now social problems were being vehemently discussed. Now, Socialism was a creed. And the younger generation were suddenly reading, questioning, beginning to ridicule their fathers' fetishes. These were the early days of the cheap newspaper. The New Woman was in the headlines, preparatory to going into battle for her right to have a vote. Children were growing impatient of parental tyranny. Youngsters were demanding latch-keys, and girls tiring of a life made up of tea and tennis-parties. Compulsory primary education had been inaugurated, but as yet this intellectual awakening had only reached the middle class.

The psychological climate was changing. The new freedom of the stage which H. A. Jones demanded had not very long to wait. Its most effective champion was a Norwegian playwright, Henrik Ibsen, who in the eighties took this freedom to himself and thereby revolutionized not only the English but the European theatre. His plays were introduced to English audiences by a Dutchman, J. T. Grein, in 1889, and found an ardent propagandist in the dramatic critic, William Archer. He was the first modern dramatist who had a message and also the technique necessary to give it through plays that were convincingly real and came to life when acted on the stage. He was the first modern dramatist to handle

serious problems with material drawn from everyday life. His characters were ordinary people. His plays were domestic tragedies, the struggles of individuals in conflict with the forces of convention. They were pregnant with ideas.

Of course Ibsen shocked. Did he not glorify rebellion, and particularly the rebellion of the weaker and, to Victorian ideas, predestinately submissive sex? "There rose a cry of outraged propriety," wrote C. E. Montague, "as if a leading preacher had attempted to apply Christian teaching to present-day politics." But his influence was enormous. He set the seal on realism and won the decisive battle for the new freedom of the stage. The advance he stimulated can be measured by the fact that by the beginning of the twentieth century he seemed already out of date. That is the penalty of dealing with new ideas. Accepted, they become truisms and tedious; rejected, they annoy as quaint, old-fashioned paradoxes.

To recapitulate, what was the legacy of the nineteenth-century theatre to the twentieth?

(1) Realism: the study of individuals, ordinary men and women, instead of types, and naturalness of dialogue.
(2) The subordination of plot to character development.
(3) The idea of a free theatre—free of commercialism, free of the star system, free of the conventional drama.
(4) Intellectualism: the demand that a play should not be merely entertainment, but that it should traffic in ideas.

CHAPTER II

THE AUTHOR'S THEATRE: G. B. SHAW

THE play of ideas had gained a foothold in the theatre. Playwrights, under the influence of the spreading Ibsen cult, began to write around a theme instead of merely fabricating a story; to start a subject for debate instead of merely trying to amuse. A name was coined for this new type of play. They were called problem plays. At first they were not very profound. The failure of Henry Arthur Jones's efforts to enlarge the theatre had taught playwrights to tread gingerly. Their plays dealt mainly with domestic problems, though the more daring tentatively touched religion and politics. The dramatis personæ were still mostly titled people. Ibsen was suitably watered down for London audiences. Pinero, acknowledged the foremost English dramatist, annually produced what Max Beerbohm wittily described as "his latest assortment of Spring Problems (Scandinavian Gents' own materials made up. West End style and fit guaranteed)."

Alongside this change in drama another important change was taking place. The dramatist was slowly drawing level with the actor as the attraction of the theatre. Playgoers, instead of going as they were used to see Henry Irving at the Lyceum or Mr So-and-so in his newest rôle at such-and-such a theatre—just as the average cinema-goer to-day goes to see his favourite star irrespective of the film—now went to see the latest play by the most talked-of author of the moment. The dramatist had become fashionable. The author had come into his own.

When one looks back at the precarious existence of the

hack dramaturges of a few decades before one may find this rise in popular esteem surprising. It will seem less so when it is added that the playwright of the nineties, unlike his less fortunate predecessors, was making money out of his plays. The story of how this reversal came about—quite accidentally—throws an interesting sidelight on previous conditions. Pinero, in his younger days, had written a farce—at that time, with melodrama, the most saleable theatrical commodity—and had offered it for the customary sum of fifty pounds. The manager who accepted it had subsequent doubts about its prospects of success, and, hoping to save something on the fifty pounds, suggested instead a contract giving the author a percentage of the takings. Contrary to his expectation, the play turned out a huge success and made Pinero richer by several thousand pounds. Needless to say, other playwrights eagerly adopted this new basis of agreement, and for the first time dramatic authorship became a potentially lucrative profession. The passage of the American Copyright Act in 1891, protecting authors from performance of their plays without payment of royalties, further strengthened their position.

Some credit for the enhancement of the status of the playwright must also be given to the actor-managers of the period. Most of them owned their own theatres and had a regular following. They could thus afford to risk some of their profits in occasionally putting on a play in which they saw artistic merit even though there was every likelihood of its being a financial failure. Their altruism did much to raise the level of the theatre. They did something to free it from the stranglehold of mere commercialism.

But there was a long way still to go to the intellectual theatre for which the critics were doing valiant battle. This was the hey-day of dramatic criticism, and to the critics belongs the next victory in the advance of the

modern drama. William Archer was busy making the thinking public Ibsen-conscious, and in the *Saturday Review* a young, witty, fearless, and iconoclastic Irishman was weekly emptying the vials of his virulent contempt on each new example of the old school of acting and play-writing indiscriminately. His name was George Bernard Shaw. But the walls of Jericho still stood. Finally, having for three and a half years made mincemeat of the sentimentalities and essential falsities that contemporary dramatists continued to offer to their convention-ridden audiences, and seeing no sign of a regeneration, he abandoned criticism, and, more from a sense of duty than vocation, set out to show that he could do what he had upbraided Pinero and his school of drama for not doing. In its intolerance of modern views, he averred in 1896, the theatre was many years behind other institutions: "more retarded even than the Church." It was "divorced from the national life: more secluded than any modern convent and much more prudish." He was determined to blast the windows open.

Now, Shaw was before everything else a talker. He had long been a familiar figure on the Socialist platform. And he had early discovered that he saw everything differently from everybody else, and had come to the conclusion that his vision was normal whereas that of the rest of his fellow-men ranged from various conditions of astigmatism to the blindness of complete stupidity. He had already tried his hand at novel-writing. He had published four novels, showing in turn that marriage was all wrong, that the conventional appreciation of art was all wrong, that modern prize-fighting was all wrong, and lastly that everything was all wrong. "Horrid fun," wrote R. L. Stevenson to William Archer, who had sent him a copy of one of them. "Tell me more of the inimitable author."

The public found his first plays—in so far as the

Censor permitted it to see them—merely horrid. He published them under the title *Unpleasant Plays*, embellished by elaborate prefaces through which he trained the owls who lacked his normal vision to get accustomed to the daylight. He had embarked upon his mission of castigating the world into right thinking with the whip of satire; of collaring little romance-fed minds and forcibly feeding them on a hygienic diet. The stage seemed as good a place to spout from as the platform, and he attempted to make the play a self-sufficient vehicle for his ideas. And he had ideas on everything; ideas which no one had ever imagined as utterable in the theatre—ideas on slum-landlordism, on prostitution, on professional impostures, blood sports, husband-hunting, politics, and religion. When J. T. Grein, who had established the Independent Theatre in 1891, gave him his opportunity by producing *Widowers' Houses* the big fight was on: G. B. Shaw versus the Social System.

Shaw's conception of the function of the theatre postulated an entirely new type of play. In his view "a good play is essentially identical with a church service as a combination of artistic ritual, profession of faith, and sermon." He wrote:

> Though plays have neither political constitutions nor established churches, they must all, if they are to be anything more than the merest tissue of stage effects, have a philosophy, even if it be no more than an unconscious expression of the author's temperament. Your great dramatist philosophizes quite openly.

His first plays quite undisguisedly put this doctrine into practice. "I always have to preach," he admitted himself. "My plays all have a purpose."

The hostility with which the public, with the exception of the Socialists, received his dramatic sermons did not discourage him, even though they did not bring him a

penny. They did, however, bring him a considerable notoriety, and their commercial failure made him see that he would have to create his audience as well as plays. His trick of turning conventional ideas inside out and calling black white had earned him a reputation for perversity, but also for wit. He had no difficulty in making people laugh. And so he deliberately exploited this gift in order to disarm his audience. In his own words, he "adopted waggery as a medium." In his next plays he gave the philosophic pill a nice sugar coating of joyousness and fun. He even stooped to make one concession [1] to the "popular demand for fun, for fashionable dresses, for a pretty scene or two, a little music, and even for a great ordering of drinks by people with an expensive air from an—if possible—comic waiter." But the actors could not make head or tail of it, and the first production was abandoned.

Success was a long time in coming. It came in the New York season of 1903–4 when four of his plays—*Candida*, *The Man of Destiny*, *You Never Can Tell*, and *Arms and the Man*—were all running concurrently. His genius had already been recognized on the Continent. At long last he was acclaimed in England too. In three seasons, beginning in 1904, the Shavian repertoire was given seven hundred performances at the Court Theatre, and this same year started a long run of *Man and Superman*, a play he had written in 1901.

Shaw was now free to write any kind of play he wanted to. The necessity of writing pot-boilers was past. He had set out to write serious drama and had been forced to make them funny in order to get the public to listen to his ideas. Now at last he could do what came most natural to him: talk. The stage was his to talk from. And talk he did. In the plays which followed the advent of fame there is little story interest and scarcely any 'action.'

[1] *You Never Can Tell.*

Getting Married and *Misalliance* are little else but talk. When the critics complained that they were not plays at all, but "dramatized conversation," he retorted: "A play is anything which interests an audience for two hours and a half on the stage of a theatre."

Shaw's plays are a strange mixture of argument and clowning, for there was always a queer imp of mischief at the reformer's elbow. His influence on the ideas of his generation has been incalculable, but his method was too individual to effect very much the development of dramatic form. For less gifted playwrights a play must be something more than a peg to hang a treatise on. In *Cæsar and Cleopatra*, however, he did initiate a new type of historical drama in which historical characters were treated from an entirely modern angle.

What else did he achieve? He laughed out of the theatre its romantic falsities and its prudery. He immeasurably enlarged the dramatist's horizon. He threw open the doors to the new theatre of ideas; he made the author bigger than the actor, and lastly he created a new public: the intellectual middle class.

CHAPTER III

NATURALISM: GRANVILLE-BARKER AND JOHN GALSWORTHY

In *Pygmalion* Bernard Shaw made history. He put into the mouth of his heroine the words "Not bloody likely." This was the first time this vulgar asseveration had got past the watchful censorship of the Lord Chamberlain. It was a sensational, if only a minor, triumph, for this overworked epithet was at that time definitely below the dividing-line between the permissible and impermissible swear-words. Be it noted that Shaw only used it once, and then with devastatingly comic and dramatic effect. And the point is this: that only Shaw could have done it, and once he had created a precedent other playwrights used the word, purposelessly and *ad nauseam*, until it became an irritating commonplace of modern stage dialogue. This is a thumbnail illustration of what Shaw did for the theatre. He shocked it, as he did by the use of this familiar but forbidden word—to use his own expression, he "knocked solemn people off their perch" —by giving expression to ideas that were 'in the air' but not considered proper subjects for discussion. And his example emboldened other dramatists to tackle aspects of life which had never been thought of as fit material for plays.

Of course, when Shaw wrote *Pygmalion* (1912) he was already G.B.S. He had attained what he himself called "the footing of the privileged lunatic, with the licence of a jester." But to return to 1900, when he had not yet got a hearing. In that year his *You Never Can Tell*, a concession to popular taste, was put on for six matinée performances! He was then in his forty-fourth year, and

the six plays he had written had not brought him in enough to live on. It was not until 1904 that he became popular. He owed that popularity largely to Harley Granville-Barker. Barker was an experienced actor and producer, and an authority on Shakespeare. When at the end of 1903 J. E. Vedrenne, a business-man interested in the theatre, leased the Court Theatre to present a Shakespearean play he asked Barker to produce it. Barker agreed on one condition: that he should be allowed to produce as well a series of Shaw's plays. The excellence of his production and the team-work of his players helped to establish G.B.S.

Granville-Barker was, besides an ardent Shavian, himself a dramatist. He and his friend, the novelist John Galsworthy, did more than anyone—Shaw always excepted—to enlarge the outlook of the modern drama. We may consider them together. Both were intellectuals; both believed in absolute realism in matter and in form. This 'naturalism'—for we must give it a new name to differentiate it from the older realism which meant an approximate truth to human motives, character, and speech as distinct from the make-believe of romanticism—this 'naturalism' Galsworthy defined by comparing the naturalistic writer with a man going about the dark street carrying a lantern, to show wayfarers the way and to illustrate "both fair and foul, no more, no less." No more, no less! The naturalistic play should be an excerpt from life presented without partisanship or bias. In his book *The Inn of Tranquillity* (1912) Galsworthy meticulously analysed his ideas on the technique and purpose of the novel and the drama. There he says the following:

> Let me try to eliminate any bias and see the whole thing as should an umpire—one of those pure beings in white coats, purged of all prejudices, passions, and predilections of man-

> kind. Only from an impersonal point of view, if there be such a thing, am I going to get even approximately to the truth.

He questions there being such a thing as an impersonal point of view, but of course there is—the camera. And naturalism, and Galsworthy's plays, have been condemned by critics for being too photographic or cinematographic, and thus a negation of art, because the representation of life and nature becomes art only through the process of concentration and selection.

Neither Galsworthy nor Barker, however, achieved the absolute dispassionate detachment of the ideal umpire, for both wrote with a purpose. Both held strong views on the themes they chose to illustrate. Each revolted temperamentally: Barker against the repression of the individual by the intimidation of Victorian convention, Galsworthy against the crushing of the individual by society. Each had a gospel to proclaim: Barker the doctrine of self-realization, Galsworthy the doctrine of tolerance. And even if they could have achieved complete impartiality they were far too clever playwrights to overlook the fact that to dispense with all emotion is to eviscerate the drama. So, like every other instinctive dramatist, they concentrated on a certain aspect of life, and selected incident and character. But they did try to reproduce this microcosm on the stage with the utmost verisimilitude.

One thing naturalism may be said to have done. It brought the play closer to the spectator. The introduction of the proscenium arch in the Restoration period had withdrawn the play inside a picture-frame. When Robertson substituted realistic scenery for the old-time 'flats' the audience watched it through an imaginary 'fourth wall.' Naturalism did something to remove this wall by giving the spectator the feeling that he was seeing

things actually happen and even creating in him the illusion that he was actually taking part in them. For example, in *Justice* Galsworthy represented a trial on the stage. Max Beerbohm thus describes the audience's reaction at the first performance:

> The curtain rises on the second act; and presently we have forgotten the footlights and are *in* a court of law. At a crucial moment in the cross-examination of a witness, somebody at the reporters' table drops a heavy book on the floor. An angry murmur of "Sh!" runs round the court, and we ourselves have joined in it. The jury retires to consider its verdict and instantly throughout the court there is a buzz of conversation—aye, and throughout the auditorium too; we are all of us, as it were, honorary 'supers.'

Neither Barker nor Galsworthy was an imitator of Shaw. They could not say with him: "Invest me in my motley and give me leave to speak my mind." They had minds to speak, but motley is not everybody's wear. Their minds dressed naturally in correct gentlemanly attire. Furthermore, naturalism postulates a strict regard for probabilities. Shaw was indifferent to them, and would not have hesitated to drop a circus equestrienne by parachute into the middle of a tea-party of Anglican bishops if her arrival enlivened the discussion. Their plays, however, have one resemblance. They are discussion plays, but with this difference: they are unified discussions, they have a central theme and do not wander from it. Barker's method of approach is different from Galsworthy's. He picks a team of sharply differentiated types, selected by reason of their typical attitudes towards the theme to be discussed, and gives them each an innings. Galsworthy, who studied for the Bar before he gave himself to literature, uses the legal method. The prisoner at the bar is usually society: its injustice, its stupidity,

its intolerance. He states the case for the prosecution and the case for the defence. It is the difference between a Brains Trust discussion and a trial. The one leaves you open-minded, the other insists upon a verdict.

Let us compare the two.

In *The Voysey Inheritance* (1905) Granville-Barker's subject is the question of absolute honesty. Mr Voysey, senior partner of a respected and prosperous firm of family solicitors, who enjoys unquestioned control of his clients' very considerable fortunes, horrifies his son Edward by confessing that for years he has been juggling with the funds entrusted to him. Edward is something of a prig, and for this reason his father has spared him the revelation as long as he could, but the time has now come when Edward must make the choice he had to make himself, for, Mr Voysey explains, these frauds were started by his father. When he inherited the firm he had had to choose between trying to set the business on an honest basis or exposing his father's dishonesty to the world. Mr Voysey puts up a tolerably good case for the course he chose. Had he gone bankrupt, which appeared the honest thing to do, the firm's clients would have lost their money; the richer could have stood the blow, but the smaller would have been ruined. As it is, as long as no one knows that he is manipulating their funds and no one wishes to withdraw too large a sum, every one is happy. Mr Voysey has no scruples of conscience for the decision he made; in fact, he rather prides himself on the financial skill with which he has weathered certain difficult moments. Edward is shocked not so much by Mr Voysey's having chosen the filial course of standing by his father as by the realization that he could have, and indeed had once, achieved his task of putting matters straight, but had preferred—not to say enjoyed—continuing to exploit his financial genius. He is appalled to think that every penny spent on the education of

himself and his three brothers, the handsome provision which his father has made for his large family, and the lavish style in which they live has been stolen from the clients of the firm.

This is the theme: Was Mr Voysey justified or not? In the third act all the members of the family are called upon to answer this question: old Mrs Voysey; Edward's three brothers, the one a cynical, self-interested barrister, the other a major in the army, the third an artist; the wives of the two latter; two sisters, one of whom is engaged to be married with the promise of a substantial dowry; and Edward's fiancée. This third act—Barker is still so far a dramatist of the old school that knew the value of a great third-act 'situation'—is a masterpiece of ironic comedy. (This and the third act of *The Madras House* (1909) are among the finest single acts of modern drama.) Mr Voysey has died and left a hundred thousand pounds. The family have returned home from the funeral, and Edward, who has made his decision to accept the Voysey inheritance and to carry on the business, chooses this moment when they are all assembled to disclose the situation. He asks them, and makes it plain that he considers it their duty, to surrender their legacies. The struggle of the various members of the family between rectitude and self-interest, virtuous indignation with their father and proper respect for the dead, is comedy at its best. Granville-Barker presents every aspect of the problem and leaves the public to draw such moral as it pleases. He does not rub it in.

Galsworthy is more didactic. He himself defined a realist—and Galsworthy is pre-eminently a realist—as "That artist whose temperamental preoccupation is with the revelation of the actual inter-relating spirit of life, character and thought, with a view to enlighten himself and others, as distinguished from that artist—whom I call romantic—whose temperamental purpose is the in-

vention of a tale or design with a view to delight himself and others." Note the distinction between the intention to enlighten and to delight. The drama to Galsworthy was, as poetry was to Wordsworth, a means of preaching. Let us qualify that. Wordsworth saw sermons in stones and in most other things, but, for all Bernard Shaw's contention that people should go to the theatre in the same spirit as they go to church, Galsworthy was too good a playwright not to know that if the reformer is more in evidence than the artist in a play the audience will resent the abuse of the dramatic medium and dislike being preached at from the stage. Propaganda plays are rarely popular—and equally seldom are they good plays. But he did believe that the theatre should make its audiences think. He believed, with Shelley, that "it is the business of art, not to do good by moral precept, but to invigorate the imagination to behave itself better in consequence."

It was in this spirit that he criticized society. His temperamental preoccupation was with social reform. With cold objectivity his plays exposed the wrong-headedness of some traditional beliefs, class prejudices that he considered stupid and wasteful. Most of his plays are concerned with the clash of two opposing principles, both obstinately held. He presents the case for either side with equal fairness. He is scrupulously impartial. He never loads the dice. In *Strife* (1909), for example, old John Anthony, the dictatorial chairman of the board of directors of the Trenartha Tin Plate Works, believes that if he gives in to the demands of the strikers—and he is not impassive to the misery the strike has brought the men—he and his co-directors will fail in the duty they owe to Capital. Roberts, the leader of the men, believes with equal conviction that Capital is "a thing that buys the sweat of men's brows, and the tortures of their brains, at its own price"; that it is "a white-

faced, stony-hearted monster that must be fought for the sake of all those who come after throughout all time." In *The Skin Game* (1920) the conflict is between the tradition of the old landed aristocracy and the new ideal of business efficiency and push. In *Loyalties* (1922) it is between the stick-together clannishness of gentlemen and the parvenu Jew who does not recognize their code of loyalty and refuses to retract an accusation against one of them which he believes to be just. In other plays he arraigns the wrongfulness of certain current practices: the different standard of justice for the rich and for the poor (*The Silver Box* (1906)); the useless cruelty of solitary confinement (*Justice* (1910)). *Justice* was so effective on the stage that it persuaded Mr Winston Churchill, who was Home Secretary at the time, to abolish the practice of solitary confinement in our prisons.

The trouble with most dramatic writers is that, in their eagerness to prove their case, they argue from the particular to the general. They set up a ninepin and proceed to bowl it over. Galsworthy is careful never to make this mistake. His training as a barrister taught him the danger of special pleading. It may reasonably be asked what moral emerges or what conclusion is possible if both sides of a case are so dispassionately presented. Does not Galsworthy's impartiality militate against the achievement of his purpose? In a sense it is true that he diagnoses the disease rather than prescribes a remedy. But underneath the surface detachment burns a vehement pity for these victims of circumstance. He is often harrowing and the impression left is one of gloom. The stubborn fight between his opposing forces generally ends in the triumph of neither and the disgrace of both. A woman dead from starvation and the two best men broken is, in *Strife*, all the result of the long and obstinate strike which is ended ironically on the identical terms put

to both sides before the fight began. Galsworthy in his rôle of umpire counts his fighters out according to the rules, but as he does so we can hear him murmur, "What a pity! What a shame!" That seems to be the keynote of the Galsworthian drama. It is not pessimism. The rules are wrong; they can and must be changed. Human folly and fallibility is the cause of all the mischief. That is the lesson.

In his carefulness to escape the pitfalls of the propagandist he sometimes even handicaps himself by dispensing with a perfectly fair advantage. His stories are not exceptional cases; they are really typical. He tells them through characters no less typical. For instance, Falder, the young criminal who is shown as the victim of the clumsy mechanism of our penal system in *Justice*, is no hero. He is a rather uninteresting and hysterical youth who, when confronted with the cheque that he has altered, does not hesitate to let suspicion fall on an innocent colleague. There is no special vindictiveness in the young man's employer who hands him over to the police. The youth receives a perfectly fair trial. The prison officials treat him with conscientious humanity. In other plays, on the other hand, Galsworthy does tilt the scales of sympathy by introducing an emotional element outside the logic of his drama, as in the death of the strike-leader's wife in *Strife*. His dramatic instinct did not let him forget that in the theatre it is through the emotions and not through the brain that a playwright must reach his audience. He knew what Shaw knew when he said: "Any fool can make an audience laugh. I want to see how many of them, laughing or grave, are in the melting mood."

CHAPTER IV

J. M. BARRIE

THE strongest current in the theatre at the opening of the century was the new naturalism, with its paramount interest in social problems. But not every dramatist chose to sail upon the tide. Nor was the general public entirely converted to the doctrine that the message, not the play, was the thing. The drawback to naturalism, especially in a world so full of drabness and disenchantment, is that it lacks colour, poetry, beauty—those things which give delight and which the intellectual theatre of enlightenment perforce ignored. However tirelessly the new school continued to 'debunk' Romance, the average playgoer still hankered after the unusual, the romantic. He did not care tuppence whether the things that happened on the stage could possibly happen in real life. For him—or her—the height of enjoyment in the theatre was a good laugh or a good cry. They were content to let the dramatist prevaricate about life. They still lived, mentally and emotionally, in Dickens-land. A great many of us do.

Romance must always be at war with realism, whether in fiction or in the theatre. Romance is the expression of an attitude of unwillingness to accept life as it is; to the romantic life is ugly and intolerably dull. Beauty being only attainable in imagination, Romance does not attempt to understand the facts of living, but tries to escape them by inventing pleasant dreams. Ibsen called them 'vital lies.' The most popular purveyor of this brand of theatrical illusion at the beginning of the century was a Scottish novelist—J. M. Barrie. If he had never written anything else he would still be remembered as

the creator of Peter Pan, the boy who would not grow up.

Barrie was a shy, retiring person. He was as ignorant of the actual world as Shaw was omniscient about it. He only knew that it was 'a beast of a world.' His temperament shrank from the spectacle of its cruelty and injustice and sought escape in magic isles and Never Never Lands. He was an arch-romantic. He was only really at his ease with children, and he had a child's vivid fancy and delight in make-believe. The fairies, who no doubt were present at his christening, endowed him with an elfin fantasy, a poetic insight, and the knack of story-building; and finally the supreme dramatic gift of inventing charming puppets and the ability to make them move convincingly without betraying the strings that guide them. Shaw's analysis of his component parts was "nine-tenths fun and one-tenth sentimentality."

His play, *Quality Street* (1903), was a 'sweetly pretty' love story, full of his peculiar charm, humour and pathos, smiles and tears. It was conventional in form and drew tear-loving crowds. His next play, *The Admirable Crichton*, produced in the same year, broke entirely new ground. It made no pretence to realism. He took a ducal family and stranded them, together with the butler, Crichton, and the 'tweeny,' on a desert island. (This was, incidentally, a new story with a philosophical idea behind it.) There, when necessity compels him to throw off the servility which tradition and habit had made second nature to him, Crichton asserts his superiority over the helpless aristocrats, and the most supercilious of Lord Loam's daughters, Lady Mary, at last sees him as a man, and falls in love with him. Barrie's people are frankly impossible; they behave impossibly. Lord Loam gives the butler a month's notice on the island for presuming to suggest that his daughters might wear trousers. And yet—perhaps because the author does not

ask that they should be taken seriously—the characters somehow achieve reality: the reality of a fable. For *The Admirable Crichton* is, of course, like all Barrie's plays, a fable.

Barrie created a new type of play, but it is a type very difficult to imitate without his gifts. He remains unique, so much so that we have had to coin an adjective, 'Barriesque,' to describe his peculiar whimsicality. But whimsy and quaintness are not up everybody's alley; they are apt to seem suspiciously like nonsense. And though the English appreciate nonsense as no other nation does, Barrie did not always quite succeed, and with the exception of *What Every Woman Knows*, his nearest approach to realism, has significantly found no favour on the Continent. Fantasy on the stage requires a certain attunement on the part of the spectator, and it is sometimes difficult to find the key. Barrie was, like his Peter Pan, the boy who would not grow up, and childish fancy is a delicate medium for the dramatist to deal in. And sentimentality so easily slops over into mawkishness; quaintness can so easily seem merely silly. This explains his failures. His plays were always a risk. Would it come off? It is amazing how often it did. He had the great gift of raising a lump in the throat and then dissolving it in laughter. He had an instinctive knowledge of the Highest Common Factor of the human heart; a humorous tenderness to which the British, at any rate, very readily respond. He had an admitted weakness for persons who don't get on. He liked a 'homely' heroine. He played up to the eternal romantic legend that courage and solid worth inevitably become the target of rice-throwing and the smiles of fortune; that Cinderellas are ultimately claimed by their Prince Charmings. He was fond of illustrating the comforting philosophy that success and worldly wealth, so hard to come by, are dust and ashes in comparison with the treasures of the spirit.

If you half hold the nursery belief that some fairy godmother, or guardian angel, watches over you, then you will like Barrie. If you subscribe to the imposing assumption—on which democracy is based—that one man is as good as another . . . but no, even Barrie did not let Crichton marry Lady Mary!

It must not, however, be thought that Barrie was no more than a writer of pretty fairy stories. R. L. Stevenson, another Scot who had a strain of romantic fancy rather akin to Barrie's, has an interesting passage in his essay "A Gossip on Romance." "No art produces illusion," he writes.

> In the theatre we never forget that we are in the theatre; and while we read a story, we sit wavering between two minds, now merely clapping our hands at the merit of the performance, now condescending to take an active part in fancy with the characters. The last is the triumph of romantic story-telling: when the reader consciously plays at being the hero, the scene is a good scene. Now in character studies the pleasure that we take is critical; we watch, we approve, we smile at incongruities, we are moved to sudden heats of sympathy with courage, suffering or virtue. But the characters are still themselves, they are not us. . . . It is not character but incident that woos us out of our reserve. Something happens as we desire to have it happen to ourselves; some situation, that we have long dallied with in fancy, is realized in the story with enticing and appropriate details. Then we forget the characters; then we push the hero aside: then we plunge into the tale in our own person and bathe in fresh experience.

It was this self-merging in the play that Barrie was able to contrive. He knew it to be the secret of the Cinderella story. His spell is more powerful with women than with men because his heroines are more convincing than his heroes. Stevenson goes on to point out that "it is not only pleasurable things that we imagine in our day-dreams; there are lights in which we are willing even to

contemplate the idea of our own death." Quite a few modern plays have been written about death. Barrie's *Dear Brutus* and *Mary Rose* were the first to make use of the supernatural.

Barrie was technically a master of construction. For all their fantasy, his plays are developed with strict logic. He had the tricks of the theatre at his fingers' ends. He is perhaps the best study of any modern dramatist for the would-be playwright who wants to learn his craft. What was his contribution to the twentieth-century drama? He showed that naturalism was not the only way, and gave a very timely reminder that a play must do more than stimulate the brain; it must touch the heart. In an age of growing cynicism he guarded the guttering flame of Romance and kept it from being quenched by intellectualism.

CHAPTER V

THE LITTLE THEATRE: (1) THE IRISH MOVEMENT

THE foregoing outline of the way the drama was developing in the first years of the century has consciously overemphasized its 'isms.' It has been rather in the nature of an X-ray photograph. It has revealed only the bones of tendencies — anti-romanticism, naturalism, intellectualism—while the flesh and blood, the adipose tissue of the conventional and commercial theatre has been blurred. If we are to keep a proper perspective this must now be rectified. It is important that we should grasp the direction of the new currents in the theatre, but we must realize that until 1903 they were only ripples on the surface.

There is no institution more conservative than the theatre, and it would be a mistake to run away with the idea that the new intellectual drama had brought about a revolution. Plays still continued to be advertised in the newspapers—as they still are—under the heading 'Amusements.' They were still primarily entertainments: farces, light comedies, society 'problem' plays (then in the fashion), and musical comedies. This was the heyday of musical comedy. Daly's Theatre and the Gaiety had become the sanctuaries of romance and the incubators of that now much-abused product 'glamour.' *The Geisha* had created a new formula which lasted until the Great War, when it was superseded by the American formula which put the emphasis on dancing instead of on singing, and replaced melody by rhythm and a romantic love story by a farcical imbroglio. Shakespeare still held the boards in London in lavishly spectacular productions,

and had found a permanent home in the Memorial Theatre opened in 1879 at Stratford-on-Avon. The swashbuckling costume play, the romantic drama of cape and sword, was enjoying its final blaze of glory before the new realism and realistic school of acting extinguished it. And there was a new genre emerging from the shell of melodrama: the 'crook' or detective play.

Where in this picture do we find intellectualism, you ask? The intellectuals, it must be admitted, were in the minority. But they were an ardent and active minority. They wanted a new drama, they demanded serious plays which made one think, and were ready to support it, even if it meant journeying to some out-of-the-way and relatively uncomfortable theatre. The problem of the manager who wished to cater for them was a financial one. There were enough of them to ensure a short run in a little theatre for any moderately good play with ideas, but in the main they were unable to afford expensive seats, and so it was always a gamble whether the run would last long enough to recover production costs. The only hope seemed to be to revive the plays at intervals: in other words, a repertory system. This was a new idea for England, although it existed in all the State-subsidized theatres on the Continent. Failing a subsidy, the sponsor of the intellectual drama in England needed a Mæcenas: a financial backer prepared to lose the money he invested. In 1904, thanks to Vedrenne, Granville-Barker was able to start a repertory experiment at the Court Theatre which gave the impetus to other Little Theatre movements in various parts of the country. They have, perhaps more than anything, influenced the development of the modern drama both in England and in the United States, where they were copied twenty years later.

Let us deal with them.

The first was the Irish Theatre Movement. It came

into being about the same time as Barker's experiment at the Court and independently of it. As far back as 1892 a group of prominent Irish writers, foremost among whom was the poet W. B. Yeats, had founded a National Literary Society with the splendid aim of bringing culture to Ireland and "spreading a tradition of life that makes the arts a national expression of life, that permits every common man to understand good art and high thinking." The drama was to have its place in this inspiring scheme. Yeats, who had just finished a play in verse, had the idea of a travelling company to visit the country branches of the Dublin National Literary Society, and in 1903 this developed into the Irish National Theatre Society. A year later Miss A. E. Horniman, a rich Englishwoman who sympathized with Yeats' high artistic ideals, offered to provide the society with a theatre.

The policy of the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, as formulated by Yeats and his collaborators and approved by Miss Horniman, was to produce Celtic and Irish plays written with the object of "expressing the deeper thoughts and emotions of Ireland and surpassing dividing political opinions." The latter aim proved not so easy of accomplishment, for political feeling in Ireland at this time ran very high—when doesn't it?—and a theatrical performance was an excellent excuse for a pro- or anti-clerical or Unionist demonstration.

Yeats himself had very decided views on the function of the drama. "I think," he wrote in 1903, "the theatre must be reformed in its plays, its speaking, its acting, and its scenery." He had made a model of a shallow stage, with a projecting platform and steps down into the audience, where he thought realism would be impossible. His idea of drama was something akin to the medieval religious mystery play. The theatre, he believed, "in becoming secular was on the high road to becoming vulgar, and to become merely amusing, to merely tickle

the eye." He wanted a theatre of Beauty, "a place where the mind goes to be liberated as it was liberated by the theatres of Greece and England and France at certain great moments of their history." It was to be at the same time "an organ for the expression of the national consciousness."

This mystical and ambitious theory of the drama was something very different from the practical tendencies then influencing the English stage. It did not think of a play as either a sermon or a debate, not as intellectual at all, as appealing primarily to the brain. It was not intended to make people think, but to make them feel; to give them an emotional and spiritual uplifting such as they might experience at Mass in a cathedral or at the performance of a symphony. The founders of the Irish Theatre movement were men of letters; W. B. Yeats was a poet. They were fostering a Gaelic revival. The material for the new drama was ready to hand in the myths and legends of Ireland, as rich a mine for the poetic dramatist as Malory's legends of King Arthur and the Round Table.

Yeats' own contribution was a number of poetic dramatizations of these legends, remote, ideal, relying for their appeal on a return to primitive emotions and the music of words. These plays have beautiful ideas and lyrical poetry of a high order, but he lacked the power to create human character. His figures are vaguely drawn. He was a poet rather than a dramatist. We might take as an example of his method *The King's Threshold*, a parable of the conflict between the spiritual and material elements of life, the story of the poet Seachan who, because King Guaire refused him his right to sit at meat among the great councillors and warriors, threatens to starve to death on the steps of the palace unless the king grants him the honour that is the poet's due.

Alongside this symbolical and poetical national drama,

Yeats' collaborators in this Irish renaissance strove to create a new school of native comedy, dealing with Irish folklore and depicting Irish peasant life and character.

One of the merits of the Little Theatre is that it gives the unfledged playwright an opportunity to try his wings. Its reward is sometimes the discovery of genius. What the Little Theatre in Provincetown, Massachusetts, did twenty years later for the American dramatist Eugene O'Neill, the Abbey Theatre did for John Millington Synge, the outstanding playwright of the Irish Theatre movement.

Yeats met Synge, a young man of twenty-eight, in Paris in 1899, earning a meagre living as a journalist and trying to write. He persuaded him to leave the decadent atmosphere of the French capital and to seek inspiration among the unspoilt fisherfolk of the Aran Isles. There Synge studied life, not the conventional life of cities, but "the eternal life of man spent under sun and rain and in rude physical effort, scarce changed since the beginning." He watched the tragedy of the grim, fatalistic battle with the cold, grey, hungry sea, and the little sordid comedies of circumscribed, monotonous existences. He saw at first hand human nature at its best and at its worst; its spirituality and its animal savagery. And, like George Borrow among the gipsies, he imbibed the apt, short-worded, picturesque idiom of the native speech.

Among the Aran fisherfolk, and later among the peasantry of County Wicklow, where the rural idiom is nearer to the English the Elizabethan settlers left there than anything heard to-day in England, Synge realized the soundness of Yeats' belief—a belief shared by another modern poet-dramatist, John Masefield—that the strength of poetic language is in common idiom. "In these days," wrote Synge, whom Yeats had taken away from the hot-house and artificial influences of Baudelaire and Mallarmé, "poetry is usually a flower of evil or good; but it is the

timber of poetry that wears most surely, and there is no timber that has not strong roots among the clay and worms." Synge did not write in verse, but he created an individual rhythm and harmony of language entirely new, a verbal music unlike any other yet used.

It was nearly four years from the date of his settling in the Aran Isles before Synge produced a play: a little farcical comedy, *In the Shadow of the Glen.* It was produced in Dublin in 1903, and was followed in 1904 by *Riders to the Sea*, a poignant one-act tragedy. In 1905 another short comedy, *The Well of the Saints*, and in 1907 his first full-length play, *The Playboy of the Western World*, were first produced at the Abbey Theatre. In 1909, after a long illness that he knew must end fatally, Synge died at the age of thirty-eight, leaving an almost completed three-act version of an Irish legend, *Deidre of the Sorrows.* His two-act primitive folk comedy, *The Tinker's Wedding*, though completed in 1906, was not produced until 1909, after his death.

Six plays in all. A small output, it may be thought, to entitle him to a place which has been claimed for him second only to Shakespeare among British dramatists.

Wherein lay his extraordinary dramatic power? Listen to C. E. Montague, one of the most illuminating of modern critics, writing of *Riders to the Sea.*

> Synge . . . takes you straight into black tragedy; you step through one door into darkness. The play in a few moments thrills whole theatres to the kind of hush that comes when Othello approaches the sleeping Desdemona. Synge, from the first, is as terse, as exacting, as strange as he likes; yet every one sees what he means, and all of his people have always the tragic importance. You look at them as, we are told, other prisoners look at the one who is going to be hanged. "I can't tell why it is," says Maeterlinck's old man as he looks at the family, still unconscious, to whom he is now to bring word of the death of a daughter,

"that everything they are doing seems to me so strange and important." In life, say, a child is run over; a woman comes running out, hatless, from some little street, to be given the body; you see it is hers, and all at once she is momentous, poignant; how it all matters, all that she does, all that she wears! Synge has the touch that works in you that change of optics in a minute; and not at a climax only, or in some picked passages; you tingle with it from the start, as you do in *Macbeth*, and you cannot tell why, except that virtue goes out of the artist and into you.

And the author of *Riders to the Sea* could also write a piece of huge absurdity and riotous laughter, like *The Playboy of the Western World.* Synge had, like Shakespeare, not only a sure dramatic instinct and a keen insight into the motive forces of human character, but also the gift of transmuting pathos and ugliness into poetry and beauty, and the exuberance inseparable from all great genius. Like Shakespeare, he never moralizes; he is a dramatist pure and simple. He had no sympathy with the didactic school of drama. "We should not go to the theatre," he writes in one of the glimpses he has given of his views, "as we go to a chemist's or a dramshop"—the allusion is to what he terms "the drugs of seedy problems" and "the absinthe and vermouth of musical comedy"—"but as we go to a dinner where the food we need is taken with pleasure and excitement. . . . The drama, like the symphony, does not teach or prove anything." In his Preface to *The Playboy* he writes: "On the stage one must have reality and one must have joy, and that is why the intellectual modern drama has failed and people have grown sick of the false joy of musical comedy that has been given them in place of the rich joy found only in what is superb and wild in reality."

The last sentence holds the key to Synge's genius. Chris Mahon, the Playboy, is as superb and wild in his reality as Falstaff. In spite of its extravagant absurdity

this satire on the Irish character is so essentially real that it was howled down at its first performance at the Abbey Theatre in 1907 as a Unionist-inspired propaganda libel. For a long time afterwards every Irish audience from Dublin to Chicago made it the occasion for a riot. Performed in London in the summer of the same year as the Abbey Theatre production, it was acclaimed a masterpiece, a verdict since universally endorsed.

CHAPTER VI

THE LITTLE THEATRE: (2) PROVINCIAL REPERTORY

THE provincial repertory theatre in England, like the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, owed its inception to Miss Horniman. Annoyed by the political demonstrations into which so many of the Dublin performances degenerated, which she considered a breach of the agreed policy of the Irish Theatre movement, she had ceased active interest in it (although faithfully continuing her subsidy) and in 1907 started a repertory theatre of her own in Manchester, leasing a second-rate theatre which she ironically renamed the Gaiety.

Since then the provincial repertory theatre has become an important feature of both English and American theatrical life as producing centres for intellectual playwrights and training-schools for actors. Many of the best playwrights of this generation learnt their trade in them, and many famous actors graduated from these stock companies. The most noteworthy have been the Liverpool Playhouse, started in 1911 under the management of Basil Dean, and Sir Barry Jackson's Birmingham repertory, begun in 1913.

In Manchester Miss Horniman did not hitch her wagon to the star of any Lancashire renaissance. She had no Yeats at her elbow. Her policy was to provide her patrons with serious, intellectual drama, starting with Ibsen and Bernard Shaw. A later age would have classified these early repertories as 'highbrow,' which means that they maintained a certain cultural and artistic standard untainted by commercialism. If we may judge from the accounts of contemporary witnesses this determination

to take the drama seriously was quite a grim affair. "A night in a repertory theatre," wrote St John Ervine, "was almost as cheerful as a night in a morgue. People went to repertory theatres as some Dissenters formerly went to chapel, woebegonely and as if they came to atone for lamentable sins." And Somerset Maugham: "We had no patience with the quality and were interested in the proletariat only if it was vicious and starving. It was the middle class with its smug respectability and shameful secrets that offered us our best chance to be grim, ironical, sordid, and tragic." Note that both Maugham and Ervine were struck by the morbidity not of the plays but of the audiences.

Partly because these early repertory companies had no star actors, and partly because the intellectual young playwright took Galsworthy and Granville-Barker as his models, they multiplied the type of play with unheroic characters, the play in which no one takes the centre of the stage but every one gets his opportunity of letting off steam. Manchester was the centre of the then prosperous cotton industry, a city of extreme contrasts of wealth and poverty: fine residential districts with imposing mansions with conservatories and paddocks, and slums with long, squalid, smoke-grimed streets. Three classes offered material to the local dramatist: the rich merchant princes who drove daily to their offices in town in newly acquired motor-cars, the mill-hands in the suburbs with their drab and colourless lives, save for their annual week's holiday in Blackpool or the Isle of Man, and a thrifty, strait-laced middle class in which success in life meant promotion at the office and a rise in salary, an artistic profession was looked on vaguely as immoral, and if a young man walked home from church twice with the same girl her father immediately asked him his intentions. This was the milieu chosen by the young Lancashire playwright.

It is an interesting comment on the basic solidity of the

Victorian system and the English temperament that they were not inspired to copy Shaw and write Socialist propaganda drama. But Labour had not yet acquired a capital 'L,' and Manchester had just thrown out the Liberal candidate, Mr Winston Churchill, at a by-election and returned a Conservative. Theirs was a drama of rebellion, but not of political revolt. What stirred them was the repression of the individual by the conventions of a narrow-minded Puritanism. It was a rebellion against the doctrines of submission to work and duty and of the worship of material success. It was also a rebellion of youth against the tyranny of age; against the doctrines of original sin and unquestioning filial obedience. Not only boys but girls were restless and impatient. It is worth recalling that at that time Manchester was the storm-centre of the Suffragette movement.

These were the preoccupations of the young repertory playwright. They tended to restrict his interests to the narrow field of man's relationship to his social environment; they limited his horizon to four walls of the suburban parlour where the glass gaseliers, the innumerable china ornaments, the antimacassars, and wax fruit, were symbolical of the outmoded shibboleths of middle-class morality. The plays of these repertory playwrights were of course naturalistic, photographic. Many of them were astonishingly good; thought-provoking and remarkable for their wit, sharp characterization, and racy dialogue. Charles McEvoy's *David Ballard*, Stanley Houghton's *Hindle Wakes*, and St John Hankin's *Return of the Prodigal* showed their authors to be playwrights of exceptional promise. Unfortunately the last two died young: Hankin in 1909 and Houghton in 1913. McEvoy lived to fulfil his promise by writing a classic of Cockney life, *The Likes of Her*, before he died in 1929.

This repertory drama did much to popularize the

drama of ideas. It also helped create a new school of naturalistic acting which, while it was excellently adapted to the crook plays and pert comedies of the twenties, has impoverished the theatre by its inability to give the natural reticence of life the necessary expressiveness of art. Few modern actors can speak verse. If it had not been for the Stratford Memorial Theatre and the heroic efforts of Miss Lilian Bayliss, who gave Shakespeare a permanent home in London at the Old Vic, it might well have happened that one would have had to travel to Berlin to see a performance of our greatest national dramatist.

CHAPTER VII

POETIC DRAMA

EVEN before the theatre became intellectual it had become sophisticated. Yeats put his finger on the disadvantage of a play about modern educated people.

> It cannot become impassioned, that is to say, vital, without making somebody gushing and sentimental. Educated and well-bred people do not wear their hearts on their sleeves and they have no artistic and charming language, except light persiflage, and no powerful language at all, and when they are deeply moved they look silently into the fireplace.

Now it is one of the axioms of the drama that the theatre is an emotional medium. Just as the musician must communicate his ideas through the ear, and the painter his concept through the eye, so the dramatist must reach the spectator through the emotions. If he is denied the use of powerful or artistic and charming language because the modern ear rejects outpourings of the soul as sentimental gush, what can he do but leave it to his actors? And what can they do, equally inhibited by having to behave as modern well-bred people, but turn their backs on the audience and nervously light a cigarette or squirt a siphon into a glass of whisky?

The Elizabethans laboured under no such handicap. To Elizabethan audiences blank verse was the natural language of the drama. Their attention was not diverted from the play by an uneasy consciousness that they were listening to poetry. But at the beginning of the twentieth century the tradition was long dead. Attempts to revive it in the nineteenth century failed because the poets (Shelley, Tennyson, and Browning) who wrote

blank verse dramas were not playwrights. But Yeats was not alone in believing that a return to poetic drama was the only way to de-intellectualize the theatre and to give it back its full emotional scope. Yet in spite of a certain limited success due to the peculiar circumstances of the Celtic revival he failed to prove his point. The Irish Theatre Movement changed, as Yeats himself admitted, "from poetic to realistic drama, from imaginative interpretation of remote theories to objective study of what was immediately to hand."

In the first years of the century the blank verse plays of Stephen Phillips—then overpraised and perhaps since underrated—enjoyed a certain vogue, but this was largely because his historical dramas—*Herod*, *Nero*, *Ulysses*, and, the best of them, *Paolo and Francesca*—provided an opportunity for lavish spectacular production and enhanced the artistic reputation of the actor-managers who staged them. Stephen Phillips had a considerable instinct for the theatre, but was, in spite of some fine passages, only a second-rate poet. He is perhaps the nearest approach to the combination of poet and dramatist this age has produced, but his plays, though moderately successful, did not create a public demand for a revival of poetic drama. Beerbohm Tree, when he was asked what he thought of the prospects of *Ulysses*, which he was then rehearsing, replied: "It will be a very good play to go bankrupt on."

Among the modern poets who have attempted to recreate an interest in poetic drama two must be mentioned: John Drinkwater and John Masefield. Drinkwater, warned by Galsworthy that "the shadow of the man Shakespeare was across the path of all who should attempt verse drama in these days," wisely did not invite comparison by using blank verse or essaying five-act tragedies as Stephen Phillips had done. The four verse plays he wrote between 1911 and 1916 were short and

lyrical, but he finally abandoned his "attempts to find some constructional idiom whereby verse might be accepted as a natural thing by a modern audience," and turned to prose, hoping to find a way of "keeping in the sparest prose idiom something of the enthusiasm and poignancy of verse."

Masefield, like Drinkwater, first tried his hand with plays on biblical or historical subjects, using various lyric metres, even the rhymed couplet; but he too ended by seeking to evolve some poetic idiom in prose. Like Wordsworth and Yeats, he believed that the elemental passions of the human heart co-exist in a state of greater simplicity in a humble, rustic way of life. Like Synge, whose friend he was, he created a new pattern of rhythmic speech, terse, figurative, and rooted in the soil. His theory of tragedy led him to choose subjects which are essentially sordid rustic crimes. "Tragedy," he wrote in his preface to *Nan*, "at its best is a vision of the heart of life. The heart of life can only be laid bare in the agony and exaltation of dreadful acts. The vision of agony or spiritual contest, pushed beyond the limits of dying personality, is exalting and cleansing." This theory of the purging effect of terror and pity was not original, but Masefield makes the mistake of insisting upon the audience seeing the dreadful acts. *The Campden Wonder* is harrowing rather than tragic. But *Nan*, a story of peasant cruelty, has a certain tragic grandeur and survives stage production as none of his other plays has done, and though written in prose is essentially poetic.

The only other poetic play since Stephen Phillips which achieved any measure of commercial success or stands out as a memorable play was *Hassan*, by James Elroy Flecker. It was written before the war of 1914–18, but production was delayed till 1923, eight years after the poet's early death. Flecker had won a considerable reputation as a poet with the public and as a wit among his friends. *Hassan* is an Oriental fantasy, sparkling

with wit and richly visual imagery and Eastern hyperbole, comic and sadistically macabre. It is written in highly coloured prose, but is unmistakably throughout the work of a poet. It suffers from a certain lack of unity—it was a combination of three ideas worked out at different times—and veers from comedy to tragedy. Flecker was critical of it himself. "I tried to make it ecstatic," he wrote to a friend, "but it is as preachy as Bernard Shaw." On at least one estimate it is the best poetic drama since Webster. At the same time it is not at all certain that its success on the stage was due altogether to its poetic or dramatic virtues. In an attempt to assess the public taste for poetic drama it must be recorded that many people who went to see *Hassan* expected another *Chu Chin Chow*—the Oriental musical-comedy melodrama that, produced in the middle of the First World War, ran for five consecutive years—and that it owed a great deal to the gorgeousness of its production, the incidental music composed for it by Delius, and the box-office names with which the cast was studded.

Among others who have tried to resuscitate poetic drama the names of Laurence Binyon, Lord Dunsany, Gordon Bottomley, and T. S. Eliot must be mentioned. With the exception of T. S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*, a dramatization of the murder of Becket, they have failed to attract the public although they have interested the amateur. One cannot but conclude that in order to have a popular appeal to modern audiences poetic drama must rely on brilliant scenic possibilities, star acting, and a melodramatic or exuberantly romantic treatment. It will be interesting to see what effect the tastes of the present generation will have upon the theatre. No one can miss the remarkable awakening of interest in modern poetry. It may well be that *Hassan* blazed the trail for the next development of the drama.

CHAPTER VIII

COMEDY

So far our examination of the drama of the twentieth century has taken us up to the year 1914. It has been chiefly concerned with serious drama, and only incidentally has any mention been made of comedy. The war years—or more accurately the years 1914 to 1922—make a convenient dividing-point. It was on the whole a sterile interval in serious drama. The last of the great actor-managers died or retired, and the theatre became a gamble for commercial speculators who vied with one another in providing soldiers on leave with bright spectacle, feminine glamour, and an occasion for vacuous laughter. Before proceeding to consider the post-war drama this will be a good moment to bring ourselves up to date with the development of comedy, and we can perhaps see this more clearly if we include in our review the whole period from the beginning of the century to the present.

Before we do this it will be as well to have some preliminary ideas about the function of comedy. In 1877 the novelist George Meredith delivered a lecture at the London Institution *On the Idea of Comedy and the Uses of the Comic Spirit*. It was published in 1897 under the title *An Essay on Comedy*, and is one of the most subtle and illuminating pieces of criticism in the language. In the following passage he distinguished the different kinds of comedy:

> You may estimate your capacity for comic perception by being able to detect the ridicule of them you love, without loving them less: and more by being able to see yourself

somewhat ridiculous in dear eyes, and accepting the correction their image of you proposes.

If you detect the ridicule, and your kindliness is chilled by it, you are slipping into the grasp of Satire.

If instead of falling foul of the ridiculous person with a satiric rod, to make him writhe and shriek aloud, you prefer to sting him under a semi-caress, by which he shall in his anguish be rendered dubious whether indeed anything has hurt him, you are an engine of Irony.

If you laugh all round him, tumble him, roll him around, deal him a smack, and drop a tear on him, own his likeness to you and yours to your neighbour, spare him as little as you shun, pity him as much as you expose, it is the spirit of Humour that is moving you.

The Comic, which is the perceptive, is the governing spirit, awakening and giving aim to these powers of laughter, but it is not to be confounded with them: it enfolds a thinner form of them, differing from satire, in not sharply driving into the quivering sensibilities, and from humour in not comforting them and tucking them up, or indicating a broader than the range of this bustling world to them.

If we have grasped these distinctions we shall find it easier to see that the notion of comedy has changed perceptibly from the ironical to the satirical, and from the satirical to the humorous. We can divide the comedy-writers of the twentieth century (excluding Shaw and Barrie) into three broad groups: the pre-1914 playwrights, the playwrights of the period between the Peace and the economic catastrophe of 1932, and the (largely feminine) playwrights of the thirties. This is only a rough grouping, but it will serve to show how Comedy reflects the psychological climate of the times.

But first let us go back a step. During the first half of the nineteenth century Comedy has been ousted from the stage by her more boisterous sister Farce, and had found a home in fiction. In farce the fun is got out of the things

the characters do rather than from what they are. The plays of Sheridan, the last great comedy playwright before the sterile gap which closed with Robertson, were more comedies of situation than of character. The older Restoration comedy was a comedy of manners in which the playwright created types (rather than characters) to ridicule the follies of the day. It was a kind of social 'ragging.' The realistic comedy of Robertson introduced a kind new to the English stage: the comedy of character.

We can distinguish two categories of modern comedy. One has no other purpose than to be amusing; the other is an amusing commentary on life or a philosophical criticism of the actual world. The first, which we can call 'light comedy,' need not detain us. As to the second, few comedy-writers go as far as Shaw, who has defined its function as "the destruction of old-established morals." The Edwardian dramatists merely observed what was going on in the world and communicated their good-natured amusement at it. The world around them was a pretty comfortable place and their field of observation restricted to the leisured classes. They remarked the weaknesses and foibles of a complacent, opulent society, but they saw no vices that required the lash of satire. The targets of their ridicule were: selfishness and snobbery, the desire of rich Colonials to climb the social ladder and of Society mothers to find eligible husbands for their daughters, the distrust of the artist as a scallywag and the worship of material success, woman's propensity to fib and gossip and appear younger than she is. Venial, and in the main eternal, follies, deserving no severer instrument of flagellation than the gentle birch of irony.

Let us take as an example of Edwardian comedy *The Return of the Prodigal*, by St John Hankin, produced in 1905. It is a modern version of the old biblical story of

the Prodigal Son. Mr Samuel Jackson, a wealthy cotton manufacturer, has two sons, Henry and Eustace. Henry, the elder, lives at home. He is the mainstay of the business, self-satisfied, ambitious, hopeful of getting his father elected for the local constituency and of bringing off a brilliant marriage for himself. Eustace, who lacks his brother's solid middle-class virtues, had been shipped off to Australia with a thousand pounds. Suddenly he returns, a failure, having lost the thousand pounds and worked his passage home. At first he has no idea beyond obtaining temporary shelter, but on seeing the improvement in the family fortunes he makes up his mind to stay. His father naturally expects him to find a job and offers to employ him in the factory. But Henry puts his foot down. Eustace agrees with his objections. He does not like work and has already proved his inability for business. He sees no reason to do anything. Egged on by Henry, Mr Jackson refuses to support an idle son and orders him out of the house. Eustace, stung by his brother's antagonism, replies that in that case he will go straight to the nearest workhouse.

His father and Henry realize the effect that this would have upon the prospects of the former's election and the latter's matrimonial plans. Their consternation shows Eustace that he is in a position to dictate his terms. He flatly refuses his father's proposal that he shall go back to Australia with another thousand pounds, but consents to disappear in exchange for an allowance of three hundred pounds a year. In his anxiety to be rid of him Henry advises his father to accept, but Mr Jackson refuses to be blackmailed for more than two hundred and fifty pounds. He writes him out a cheque for the first quarter at this figure, telling him as he gives it that Eustace may write occasionally to let them know how he gets on. "Make it three hundred," says Eustace, "and I won't write." Mr Jackson folds his hands behind his

back and the prodigal, with a shrug, pockets the cheque and with a friendly nod departs.

Max Beerbohm wittily suggests the way Bernard Shaw would have treated this theme.

> Mr. Shaw [he says], observing a prodigal son, would have knitted his brows, outstretched his index finger, and harangued us to the effect that the prodigal was perfectly right, as a citizen, in his refusal to work under the present conditions of labour, and that these conditions are irrational, dangerous, and ought to be abolished.

Hankin takes no sides; he does not claim sympathy with either brother; he has no case to prove. This illustrates the difference between the satiric and the ironic attitude. It is the latter which characterizes pre-1914 comedy.

The world after the war presented plentiful material for comedy: the new rich (war profiteers battening blatantly on wealth undreamed of but a little while ago and trying to camouflage their origins to make the social grade); the new poor (proud families struggling, under the burden of death duties, taxation, and the collapse of all stability, to maintain their old traditions and to keep from slipping into the morass reserved hitherto only for the lower orders); the break-up of the family, the welter of divorce resulting from the imprudence of so many war marriages, the decay of manners and the increasing disrespect of young people for their elders; the extravagance of fashion; the boyishness of girls and the girlishness of young men; the craze for speed and jazz; the chain-smoking, cocktail-drinking, slangy affectations of the 'bright young things' and all the other manifestations of neuroticism. Here surely was ample material for the satirist. It might have been expected that the twenties would be an Age of Comedy. It produced Shaw's individual portrayal of the mental chaos of society,

Heartbreak House, and one brilliant comedy of manners: Somerset Maugham's *Our Betters*, a mordant satire on a certain vicious, plutocratic, cosmopolitan 'smart set.'

There was no lack of talent in the theatre. The new playwrights—Noel Coward, Van Druten, Frederick Lonsdale—were young men of singular promise. Their craftsmanship and gift for dialogue were astonishingly mature. Yet their plays, amusing and technically accomplished as they are, somehow fail to reach the highest level of comedy. Why is this?

Perhaps this is the answer. The follies of the Edwardian era were mostly harmless follies, and the writers of Edwardian comedy meetly swished them with the tolerant birch of irony. But the follies of the twenties were fundamentally vicious. They merited the full vigour of the 'satiric rod.' It was impossible to ridicule them without 'chilling kindliness.' But—and this is the point—their pathetic aspect was as obvious as their comic. This hectic scramble for money and for pleasure was a symptom of a tragic universal malady, a hysteria due to secret fear. And when a playwright attempted to probe it with the scalpel of his satire the box-office instantly reacted. The public could not take it. It touched them too much on the raw. What happened? Somerset Maugham, whose genius is essentially satirical, finally announced that he had written his last play. The rest took timely warning and exploited their versatility in forms of drama more acceptable than satire: musical comedy and revue, the newly popular crime thriller, and sentimental flippancies. One can only guess at what Noel Coward, with his uncanny sense of the theatre and gift for brilliant dialogue, might have achieved if the conditions had been more congenial to satire.

When, in 1932, the world financial crash justified the latent fear beneath the neuroticism of the twenties, and

the shadow of depression and the looming threat of war brooded over a frustrated world, comedy underwent another change. The playgoing public suddenly, spontaneously, picked on a new type of comedy: the gently humorous comedy. It seemed as if they had somehow to reassure themselves, in the face of daily evidence to the contrary, that human nature was really amiable and human, and so had determined to turn their backs upon the world and find amusement—and keep their sanity—in poking mild fun at their own and their neighbours' idiosyncracies. This new type of comedy is characteristically English. Like the tortoise-shell cat, it is also predominantly female. It disconcerts the foreigner by its utter absence of action. It is completely adramatic. It was first put on hesitatingly by puzzled managements, and the public took it to its heart. It ran interminably. What is its title? *Call It a Day, The Wind and the Rain, George and Margaret, Quiet Wedding, Quiet Week-end.* What is it about? The ditherings of ordinary people seen through the magnifying-glass of an observant sentimental humour. It is the vindication of the woman playwright, for it is usually written by a woman. It is the delight of mainly feminine audiences. It is with us still in 1945. Perhaps in a hundred years from now it will be given a place in dramatic literature similar to that which Miss Mitford occupies in fiction.[1]

[1] The French critic Taine devotes half a page in his two-volume *History of English Literature* to the 'novel of manners.' He says of these authors: "They renounce free invention, they narrow themselves to scrupulous exactitude; they paint with infinite detail costumes and places, changing nothing; they mark little shades of language; they are not disgusted with vulgarities and platitudes. Their information is authentic and precise. In short, they write like citizens for fellow-citizens, that is for well-ordered people whose imagination looks upon the earth, and sees things through a magnifying glass, unable to relish anything in the way of a picture except interiors and make believes. Ask a cook what picture she prefers in the Museum and she will point to a kitchen in which the stew-pans are so well painted that one is tempted to mix the soup in them."

CHAPTER IX

THE TWENTIES

DURING the years 1914–18, as in one period of the Second World War, the London theatre was little more than a fun-fair. The speculators who gambled on the boom in entertainment had no other connexion with the theatre and no artistic standards. The goods they traded in were tunes and legs and laughter. They firmly kept the lid on serious drama.

Let us skip this garish interlude and jump to 1918.

What was the psychological climate after the war was over? Its main characteristic was perhaps a new idealism. War had made people conscious of a new spirit of neighbourliness. It had broken down many class barriers. There was a readiness and a desire to understand the other fellow's point of view, even that of our late enemies. The generosity that mellows the victorious Briton made him all too willing to shake hands and be friends. Then there was a vast amount of talk about, and even genuine belief in, a new and more truly Christian world. Pulpit and platform resounded with optimistic slogans. The Church foresaw a great revival of religion. The League of Nations seemed a concrete expression of general goodwill. People were anxious to readjust their values and to find an inspiration in the sacrifice of life that had been made.

In the dark hours of the war they had personified their faith in victory and magnified their chosen leaders. The papers were full of the Big Three (Lloyd George, Clemenceau, and Woodrow Wilson)—or more accurately the Big Four, for even the Premier of our Italian ally was Big. What then more timely for a return of serious

drama to the theatre than the life-story of a great democratic leader? In 1918 the Birmingham Repertory, with which the poet John Drinkwater had been associated from the beginning, produced his first prose drama, *Abraham Lincoln*. It was a new departure, or rather a return to 'heroic drama.' It set the fashion for dramatized biography, a fashion which Hollywood later copied from the stage. But *Abraham Lincoln* is something more than dramatized biography; it is the dramatization of a theme. Drinkwater's object was not to present the character of the man Lincoln so much as to illustrate the problem of leadership by an historical instance. Encouraged by the success of *Abraham Lincoln*, he went on to complete a trilogy, handling the same theme again from different angles. His other heroes were Oliver Cromwell and General Robert E. Lee. They were all men who had not been born to leadership. They were just ordinary men who had leadership thrust upon them by circumstance of war. They were all inspired by a high moral ideal and an unshakable loyalty to what they believed to be their duty. These plays were pregnant sermons for the times, and the public, flushed with post-war idealism, was in the mood to listen to sermons, even in the theatre.

Four of the best plays of the next years were sermons on tolerance: Galsworthy's *The Skin Game* (1920) and *Loyalties* (1922), strong plays with violent conflicts of social pride and prejudice; Somerset Maugham's best comedy, *The Circle* (1921); and G. B. Shaw's medieval masterpiece, *St Joan* (1924). The year 1921 also made the reputation of a woman dramatist, Clemence Dane, with *A Bill of Divorcement*. In this finely contrived play she debated with a Granville-Barkerish impartiality a problem then exercising many minds, the problem of insanity as a reason for divorce.

At last brains were back in the theatre, and with them

appeared a broadened imagination. Had poetry not been driven from the theatre this was the moment when the public might have welcomed a great poet who would have explored the deeper reaches of thought and life and character. The nearest they got was Bernard Shaw's *St Joan* and Barrie's *Dear Brutus*. But prosaically *Outward Bound*, by Sutton Vane (1923), may be said to have broken new ground. It dealt with a subject that was puzzling many people: What happens to the dead? The war had made this question very actual, and the old ideas of heaven and hell no longer satisfied. Of course no playwright could attempt to answer it, but *Outward Bound* gave expression to the theory (at that time popularized by spiritualism) of a continuance of life on ascending planes of disembodied existence approaching nearer to a state of ultimate perfection. The recent conversion to spiritualism of the scientist Oliver Lodge and the novelist Conan Doyle had awakened considerable interest in its beliefs. Quite apart from this *Outward Bound* is an original and interesting play. It has served as a model for several after-life plays written since.

In 1924 the theatre suddenly went sour. Had playwrights realized so soon that we should never learn the lessons of the war? It had become increasingly evident that conservative ideas were getting the world nowhere. "Youth at the helm" was the slogan of the day. Noel Coward established a bridgehead in the theatre for the playwrights of the younger generation. His *The Young Idea*, produced in 1923, was named with his uncanny flair for timeliness, and concluded on the note: "The only thing that matters in the world is Youth." But what had youth to say? Smart wisecracks and a shallow cynicism. In 1925 four plays by Coward were running simultaneously, all "as barren of emotion," wrote James Agate, "as a moneylender is of generosity." Youth at

the dramatic helm had little to offer save a clever but depressing picture of the morals and manners of the jazz and cocktail age.

As the world outlook blackened and the general pessimism increased a few playwrights struggled against surrendering to this flippant escapism. A few serious plays emerged amidst the spate of frivolous comedies. In *The Rumour* and *Progress* C. K. Munro attempted unsuccessfully to give dramatic expression to international affairs, as Shaw did later in *The Apple Cart*, but politics are too wordy for the stage. Reginald Berkeley's *The White Château* and Sherriff's *Journey's End* recalled—the one imaginatively, the other with realism tinged by adolescent sentimentality—the horrors and tragedy of war. *Love on the Dole* painted a grim and moving picture of unemployment. But gradually the theatre became sentimental, trivial, or morbid: 'boy meets girl' plays and crime detective plays. There was nothing new except one or two interesting studies in pathological portraiture: Mordant Shairp's *The Green Bay Tree*, Sidney Howard's *The Silver Cord*, and George Kelly's *Craig's Wife*, the last two American.

As life became too sombre altogether and people's nerves too frayed to stand more harrowing in the theatre, producers yielded to the general demand for some form or other of 'escapism.'

Clearly, then, the psychological climate of the thirties was inimical to great drama. But we must ask the question: Was great drama any longer possible in view of the way the drama had developed? Had not the modern conception of naturalistic writing and acting shrunk and diminished it? The war in Europe unleashed by the Kaiser had been fought that freedom might not perish from the earth. As we know, this war was won—and lost. The war in the theatre started by Archer and Shaw had been fought that Truth might not

perish from the stage. It, too, had been won, and lost. In the world individual freedom was more restricted than before the war by all manner of interference ranging from petty, reasonless regulations to mass and racial persecution. And in the theatre Truth, after a glorious holiday of Shavian nakedness, had been corseted by naturalism with the girdle of a semi-articulate accuracy.

A great play must be a good play of its kind, and its kind must be great. The same is true of great acting. At the end of the twenties there were no great kinds of play and no grand manner of acting. The drama had dwindled both creatively and interpretatively. The kind of play most popular in the thirties was the domestic, adramatic play. Whatever its merits, if we had to class plays as we class entrants to a dog-show we should recognize at once that it belongs to the lap-dog class. We might enter it as Charivaric Comedy, or Comedy of Mannerisms, frisky, intelligent, and affectionate; but we should not expect it to compete with the great dramatic breeds. The trouble with the post-war theatre, to continue the analogy, was that it suffered from in-breeding. It had discarded most of the classic strains of great drama: verse, poetry, passion, rhetoric. The failure to produce the great plays that many expected would result from the catharsis of the war cannot be blamed on the inadequacy of playwrights or the commercialism of new managements. Still less can it be blamed on the deterioration of public taste, for the public had had a surfeit of confectionery during the war and would have welcomed some good red meat, as it showed unmistakably by its acclamation of Bernard Shaw's *St Joan*.

No, we must seek the cause in the form-limitations imposed by the development of the drama. The moth had got into the royal robes of tragedy. And just as when man, inspired by a new equalitarian notion of gentility, gave up magnificence in dress, his surrender of

the male's natural prerogative led ultimately to his acceptance of a colourless and uniform attire, so the naturalistic drama ended inevitably in a type of play so drab and uniform that it ceased almost to be entertainment. Naturalism had proved a blind alley. It ended virtually with St John Ervine's *Jane Clegg*, a play, for all its technical perfection, so much like life, so naturalistic, that it had no theatrical excitement. The astonishing thing is that it was still capable of producing a play so theatrically exciting as Sean O'Casey's *Juno and the Paycock* (1925).

Juno and the Paycock was immediately hailed as a masterpiece. It showed its author to possess dramatic genius of a high order. O'Casey, another product of the Abbey Theatre, found his material in the Dublin slums during the tragic period of the disorders that followed the setting up of the Irish Free State. When one considers that he was himself an Irishman brought up in these surroundings his detachment is amazing. He held up Galsworthy's lantern, and let it shine "on fair and foul, no more, no less." And the result was not, as might have been expected, a gloomy photograph, but a brilliantly colourful picture as fascinating as a Breughel painting. Like Synge, beside whom he took rank in the Abbey Theatre drama, O'Casey had a keen, observant humour and found a language that while true to life was heightened by a beauty of its own. Fastidious critics complained that in this play, as in *The Plough and the Stars* (1926), comedy jostles tragedy too abruptly. The whole theory of naturalism answers: So it does in life.

Here, then, at last, a potentially great dramatist had arrived. And, rare phenomenon, the instant and unqualified acclamation he met with showed an unusual receptivity on the part of critics and public. What did he do next? In *The Silver Tassie* (1929) he suddenly abandoned the objectivity which was so remarkable in

his earlier plays and attacked his subject—the story of a football player who returns from the war a hero, but paralysed from the waist downward—with a passionate bitterness. It failed in the theatre—as did Somerset Maugham's *For Services Rendered*, which deals with like bitterness with lives ruined by the war—perhaps because it breaks a fundamental law of drama—*i.e.*, that it must show action and striving, and not only suffering; perhaps because it was too cruelly true. But the play is interesting for another reason. In it O'Casey experiments with a new dramatic form. And if we accept the conclusion that the old forms were either antiquated or incapable of further development then any new experiment must be watched with curious attention. Indeed, the experimentalism of the post-war theatre is its most arresting feature. In the war scenes of *The Silver Tassie* O'Casey tried to communicate the soldier's reaction to the blood and sweat of war in a way that conveyed the universality of the experience. For this purpose he adopted a mixture of chanted verse and stylized prose put into the mouths of nameless choruses of soldiers, wounded, stretcher-bearers, and so on. Unfortunately, experimentalism seems to have atrophied his great dramatic powers.

He was not the only dramatist struggling to solve the problem of de-individualizing his characters and transmitting mass impressions by some other means than the presentation of a typical but still particular case. The use of a symbolically representative chorus (an imitation of the chorus of ancient Greek tragedy) is but one of the ways in which the post-war playwright has tried to break away from realism.

CHAPTER X

EXPRESSIONISM

THE realistic drama of the beginning of the twentieth century had made the theatre a truthful, unflattering mirror of everyday life; it had advanced from the presentation of types whose actions were arbitrarily determined by the plot to the study of individual men and women whose characters shaped the action of the play; it had discarded rhetoric and substituted the natural speech of human intercourse. It had acquired an intellectual background and was provocative of thought. But the problems it dealt with were those of human conduct; it challenged the rightness of accepted and traditional morality, the validity of current social and economic concepts. In the confusion of mind which followed the Great War of 1914–18 it was not surprising that dramatists should have been conscious of the futility of portraying the surfaces of life, that they should feel the urge to probe the deeper mysteries.

The playwright who was content to hold the mirror up to life had the alternative of depicting the futility of an amoral, hysterical society putting up a pitiful pretence of gaiety, or else some drab, hopeless individual tragedy of poverty and unemployment. But this tragedy was no longer individual; it was universal. Unemployment everywhere had risen to staggering figures. There were millions on the dole, huge armies of 'forgotten men.' And the shadow of unemployment hung, like the sword of Damocles, over the machine-slaves of the factories, shipbuilding yards, and mines, and over the white-collared clerks on their high stools in city offices. This was a new and terrifying phenomenon. It was

impossible that the dramatist should not attempt to picture in all its monstrous horror this final realization of the monster man had created in the machine.

This nightmare was most fantastic in Central Europe. All the old and stable values were meaningless. Life had become a scramble and a gamble. Thousands, speculating on the ever-fluctuating rates of exchange, were making fortunes overnight which to-morrow might not be worth the paper they were printed on. At one moment it was possible to buy a bottle of wine on the train travelling from Vienna, drink the wine, and sell the empty bottle in Switzerland for more than the full bottle cost in Austria. Fantastic things were happening. Life was no longer real, and consequently realism had become more and more impossible.

In its efforts to discover a new medium the Central European theatre moved in the direction of the artificial, the theatrical. Its aim was no longer illusion, but soul-experience. It moved backward in imitation of the mystery play; it revived classic and medieval forms. It moved forward, borrowing from the cubist and expressionist experiments of the revolutionary Russian theatre.

What exactly is expressionism? It does not mean merely novel and sensational effects. It is a point of view. In art, if an expressionist painter paints a beef-steak or a chair he tries to do more than merely portray those objects realistically, to make the person looking at the picture aware of their obvious qualities of 'beefiness' and 'chairness.' His object is so to place them in relation to their surroundings that they will carry some emotional significance. In the theatre it means a subjective instead of an objective projection of the characters. In an ordinary play they reveal themselves by what they do or say. Expressionism endeavours to project the inner workings of the mind.

This may seem a little difficult to understand. It will

become more intelligible if we study an expressionist play. Probably the best example in English is *The Adding Machine*, written by the American dramatist, Elmer Rice, and produced by the Theatre Guild in 1923. Elmer Rice was a popular and skilful writer of conventional plays when he turned to the expressionistic method. It would be unfair to take *The Adding Machine* as representative of his dramatic achievement. He is a shrewd satirist and a peculiarly clever craftsman. His dialogue is economical and vivid; his characters are flesh and blood. His *Street Scene*, which focuses the magnifying-glass on a New York tenement-house with its human and motley crowd of tenants of all nationalities, is probably the best realistic play the American theatre has produced. It is an epitome, at once humorous and compassionate, of the comedy and tragedy of modern life; a fine play. *The Adding Machine* is, as has been said, an experiment in expressionism.

CHAPTER XI

THE AMERICAN THEATRE: EUGENE O'NEILL

THE greatest experimentalist of the post-war drama was the American playwright, Eugene O'Neill.

It was not until just before the First World War that the Little Theatre movement reached America. In 1910 the New York stage remained as unaffected by modern tendencies and thought as the London stage of 1895. It believed—not altogether erroneously—that the average playgoer, in so far as he desired to see a serious play at all, paid his money to watch people on the stage involved in quandaries and misunderstandings which could not possibly happen to anybody in real life. The theatre was an institution for the relaxation of the tired business-man. The speculators who controlled the New York theatres wanted quick returns and were in no wise minded to gamble on the 'intellectual' drama.

The only way to counteract the limitations thus imposed on the drama as an art was to do in the United States what had been done in London, ten or fifteen years before, by the pioneers of the 'free' theatre. In 1913 the first independent theatres were opened. One of them—which began as the Washington Square Players—afterwards became the now famous Theatre Guild of New York and acquired a tremendous influence on the development of first-rate drama. Simultaneously self-styled Art Theatres, Little Theatres, and Theatre Guilds sprang up all over America. Ten years later, in 1925, nearly two thousand of these Little Theatres were affiliated as a Drama League. With characteristic solemnity the American universities were eager to give

due recognition to this Cinderella of the arts. Many of them established schools of drama for the study of stagecraft and dramatic authorship. It became possible to graduate in dramaturgy.

It was one of these small independent ventures—the Provincetown Players, who began their activity in 1915, later producing their plays at Greenwich Village—that gave Eugene O'Neill his first chance of production. His discovery was hailed as the beginning of the renaissance of the American drama. O'Neill, the son of a well-known actor, began life as a rolling stone. At the age of twenty he shipped on a tramp steamer and roved around the world. He was at different times a journalist, a gold prospector, an actor, and an able seaman. After some years of wandering he returned to the States and for two years attended one of the newly founded schools of drama at a university. By 1918 he had written a series of one-act plays for the Provincetown Players. They were little more than realistic sketches—mostly of sailor and waterfront life—born of his experiences at sea, but they at once revealed his force and instinct for the theatre.

His genius was quickly recognized. Here, said the critics, was a dramatist who might well prove to be one of the greatest living writers of the English drama. The success of his first Broadway productions and the award of the Pulitzer Prize in 1920 set the seal upon his growing reputation.

But after *Anna Christie* O'Neill decided to abandon realism. Perhaps he thought the possibilities of realistic drama were exhausted. (Somerset Maugham has stated his belief that it reached its utmost height in Ibsen, who "brought the realistic prose drama to such perfection as it is capable of and in the process killed it." [1]) Perhaps the roving spirit that had sent him wandering round the

[1] Preface to Vol. 6 of his plays (Heinemann).

globe urged him to explore new forms of play construction. Perhaps his studies at the university dramatic school had made him unduly conscious of the collaborative element in the theatre, not only the contribution of the actors and the producer, but of the lighting expert and novel stage devices.

Whatever the reason, after 1922 O'Neill embarked on a variety of experiments which have in the main disappointed his original admirers, but which are of extraordinary interest as pointers to the future development of the drama—for Somerset Maugham may well be right. "The desire for verisimilitude," he points out, "has resulted in an intolerable dullness." O'Neill's experiments are certainly not dull. Where he is simple and concentrated they are often gripping and exciting, but in his search for new media of expression he is too often complicated, clumsy, and confused. He has gone both back and forward; he has revived the old conventions and attempted new. He has resuscitated the aside and the soliloquy. He has employed the Chorus of the ancient classical drama. In *The Hairy Ape*—a symbolic picture of the working class, "trapped between two worlds; barred from the jungle, the home of man in his natural state of unthinking brute force, and from the world of make-believe for which it provides the foundation"—he makes use of a stylized speech. Men speak together, repeating the same words, "as if their throats were phonograph horns"—say the stage directions—"followed by a chorus of hard, barking laughter." In *Strange Interlude* he tries to reveal the workings of the subconscious mind by coupling asides indicative of what the characters are thinking to the dialogue which they are speaking. In more than one play he uses masks for which the author's instructions are often so complicated that no stage mask could possibly convey more than a fraction of what he visualizes.

And not only has O'Neill's dramatic method been influenced by the possibilities of novel tricks of presentation. He has not only let his mind be coloured by almost every trend of modern thought, but he tried to find dramatic expression for the philosophical and scientific theories of contemporary thinkers. *Mourning Becomes Electra*, his most important work and a play of Wagnerian length, is an elaborate study in the Freudian doctrine. His interest in psycho-analysis has imbued his later work, just as his interest in mysticism tinctures his post-realistic plays. "I am always trying," he wrote in 1925, "to interpret life in terms of lives, never just in terms of character. I am always acutely conscious of the Force behind."

In this introspection and search for the ultimate meaning of life, he has been led to concentrate on abnormality. Many of his chief characters are hysterical or even insane. This detracts from the universality of his appeal, but his work cannot be lightly dismissed on that account. No two persons have the same way of visualizing ideas, and any attempt to communicate them in a code more flexible and subtle than the ordinary, clumsy vehicle of words is a gamble, especially in the theatre. But "if the throw comes off," as C. E. Montague wrote of the symbolism of Ibsen's *Master Builder*,

> they give the spectator the rare and curious pleasure of tapping a new and particularly private sort of private wire between soul and soul. But if they fail, if the spectator cannot pick up the code in good time, if he will not, as anæsthetists would say, go off well under the new drug, then what a mess there is of it!

O'Neill is always venturesome, always interesting and provocative of thought. If at times we find him incomprehensible or even ludicrous we must reflect that obscurity is one of the risks attendant on the use of a new

medium. The same thing is true of many of the products of modern schools of poetry and art. The artist can do no more than attempt to convey subtle significances. At his best O'Neill displays astonishing dramatic force and emotional reality. His plays are definitely of the theatre, but they are stimulating reading. The main objections to the modern realist drama are that it lacked colour, poetry, and tragic elevation. O'Neill has tried to remedy these faults. Most of his plays will pass the final test of a great play: that besides providing an entertainment it gives its audience an experience.

CHAPTER XII

THE THIRTIES: EXPERIMENTALISM

THE two English playwrights whose experiments with new dramatic forms and methods of expression are of the greatest interest are James Bridie and J. B. Priestley.

James Bridie is a Glasgow physician. His first plays were written for the Birmingham Repertory, and we must reckon him a product of the intellectual Little Theatre. He is a curious mixture of intellectual and romantic. His dramatic ancestry derives from Shaw on the one side and from Barrie on the other. He is as fond of talk as G.B.S., and there is in his make-up something of the Boy-who-would-not-grow-up. His plays are a synthesis of dialectics and schoolboyish fantasy, but his whimsy reaches a maturer stage of growth than Barrie's. It is not uncommon for a man to remain a boy at heart; Barrie was unique in that he remained at heart a child. He halted in the nursery, in the realm of make-believe and fairy tales. Bridie—like another Scotsman, Stevenson—lingers at the age that joys in tales of derring-do, smugglers and pirates, Robin Hood and Three-fingered Jack, the Terror of Jamaica. He delights in the miraculous, and has a quaint and lurid fancy. Two of his earlier plays were dramatizations of the Biblical stories of Jonah and the whale and Tobias and the angel; in one of his more recent, *Mr Bolfry*, he conjures up the Devil in a Scottish manse, which gives occasion for an orgy of theological argument. His favourite heroes are argumentative and pugilistic. One of his most amusing plays is characteristically entitled *The Black Eye*.

Bridie's methods are original. He deliberately refuses to conform to any conventional dramatic construction.

He makes his own rules. He has a foible for extraneous prologues, for a play within a play. The result is that his plays seldom leave a single impression. They are rarely dull, because Bridie's dialogue is always entertaining, but the audience leaves the theatre with much the same feeling as one has after a rather jolly party where drinks have been plentiful and the conversation lively: the feeling that it has been quite an amusing evening, but one is a trifle hazy as to whom one has met and what all the talk has been about. He has been criticized for lack of craftsmanship. This may be so, but it seems rather that he is content to please himself. He is the true romantic artist, according to Galsworthy's definition, whose temperamental purpose is the invention of a tale with a view to delight himself and others. If the good doctor completes his prescription with a *quant. suff.* of philosophy it is not with a view to enlighten, but because, being a Scot, he cannot help it.

Perhaps because he is a doctor he is more interested in analysis of character than in strict plot development, but his boyish delight in violent incident does not help him to communicate complex states of mind across the footlights. He is conscious of the difficulty which Yeats deplored of making modern educated people reveal their thoughts naturally on the stage. In his attempts to solve this problem which must exercise the playwright of the future he has, like O'Neill, made use of that old-fashioned aid to exposition, the soliloquy. In *The Black Eye* he lets his hero, quite successfully, explain himself between the scenes directly to the audience as Shakespeare did at the beginning of *Richard III*. And he has made ingenious use of the discovery that the one occasion on which modern, educated people do talk naturally, freely, and without inhibition is when they are under the influence of drink. It can, however, scarcely be expected that intoxication should establish itself as a dramatic convention,

any more than O'Neill's device (in *Strange Interlude*) of using a double voice, the one for the spoken, the other for the unspoken thoughts of his characters. However successful these experiments may be, their use is obviously limited. They do not offer any permanent solution.

J. B. Priestley has reached a wider public than Bridie. He began by mastering the conventional technique. *Dangerous Corner* and *Eden End* are skilfully constructed plays and placed their author in the first rank of contemporary dramatists. His Yorkshire brand of humour is broader and more popular than Bridie's pawky Scottish kind. But, like Bridie, he suffers from a dual personality. This has become increasingly more evident since he began experimenting and, as James Agate has it, "fell into the slough of metaphysics and sociology." On the one hand, he is intent on edifying; he is imbued with the zeal of the reformer. His conception of the theatre is as a contribution to the regeneration of the world; a conception that, in the age we live in, may well be essential to the regeneration of theatre. On the other hand, he does not want to don the prophet's robes. Like the sporting parson, he is anxious to convince the world that he is human: just jolly Jack Priestley, a good chap who likes a bit of fun and a glass of beer as well as anybody, but solid and with plenty of common sense. These two personalities are hard to reconcile. Like Walt Disney's Flying Mouse, he wants to fly, but he is not at home among the birds, partly perhaps because he is so determined to keep his feet firmly in the local. Besides, no man can soar higher than his own ceiling, and Priestley's ceiling is limited by his lack of poetry—for fine ideas need poetry, and mateyness is not the ideal vehicle for inspiration. Yet Priestley can be inspiring. His enthusiam is infectious, even though his plebeian demon perversely dissolves in soap and water the iridescent bubbles his brave spirit blows untiringly.

At first he experimented only with ideas. As O'Neill was influenced by Freud, so Priestley was fascinated by J. W. Dunne's *An Experiment with Time*, a scientific book that starts by investigating "that curious feeling which almost every one has now and then experienced—that sudden, fleeting, disturbing conviction that something which is happening at that moment *happened before.*" He was sensible of the danger of advancing on all fronts at once, and so, when experimenting with Dunne's ideas in *Time and the Conways* and *I Have Been Here Before*, he stuck to a more or less conventional dramatic form.

Then he began experimenting with form. He had become interested, as he has told, in the theory of Bardo. Bardo, according to Tibetan belief, is the intermediate state that follows immediately after death; a state in which the dead man is unaware that he no longer has a body of flesh and blood, and mistakes his thoughts for actual realities, much as we do in dreams. Sutton Vane, without presumably knowing anything of Bardo, imagined such a state in *Outward Bound*, where he brings together on a mystery ship a number of departed souls and gradually lets them realize that they have left this earthly life behind. Priestley chose a different treatment. He conceived the idea of "giving an account, in dramatic form, of a man's life in a new way, taking an ordinary middle-class citizen of our time . . . and giving to my record of his rather commonplace life an unusual depth and poignancy"; and finally to show him, "purged by remorse and terror of his sensual, bestial, and murderous impulses, discovering his best self and those things which had quickened his mind and touched his heart."

The result of this ambitious design was *Johnson over Jordan* (1939). The story was admittedly a modern version of the Everyman motive, borrowed from the medieval mystery play. But Priestley was less interested in the material than in finding an entirely new method.

He had made efforts to "cheat realism," as he says, before; and now he was determined "to bring in everything the theatre could do for me, including some ballet and plenty of good music." His aim was to make the play a 'searching experience.' He copied O'Neill's use of masks; he borrowed all the known tricks of expressionism. And by employing a 'heightened speech,' he attempted to "break away from the flavourless patter of modern realistic dialogue."

To many it proved a deeply felt experience. It failed significantly to attract a fashionable audience. Throughout its brief run the stalls were largely empty, while the cheaper seats were packed. Employing as it did all the resources of the theatre, it was obviously expensive to produce. The Entertainment Tax added to the cost of seeing it for the public. Priestley was not unjustifiably disappointed when it had to be withdrawn. In his postscript to the published edition of the play he says: "The fate of this play has left me more firmly convinced than ever that our whole method of serious theatrical production in this country will have to be changed or very soon there will not be left us even a glimmer of dramatic art."

Where does the fault lie? Is it with the Government for refusing to subsidize the theatre or with the public for neglecting dramatic art? Max Beerbohm wrote in 1901:

> Serious plays draw the public only when they are supposed to be 'risky.' Prosperity bends her beaming face down on the music-halls and on the theatres devoted to musical comedy, and the overflow from these places of delight finds its way either to such farces as *Why Jones left Home*, or to such sentimental comedies as *When We were Twenty-one*—farces that are to art as practical jokes are to wit, sentimental comedies that are to art as the mingled sobs and chuckles of a man ejected from a public-house are to true tears and laughter.

When we look at the theatre of the war years 1942–45 we

must conclude that public taste remains for ever incorrigible. This, as they say at the cinema, is where we came in.

We need not, however, be too pessimistic about the theatre. The level of the twentieth-century drama has been high whatever the level of democratic taste. And there are many hopeful signs that this is slowly rising. The interest in the drama has spread appreciably. The British Drama League, founded in 1919, now numbers well over 3000 affiliated organizations. It is estimated that there are as many as 10,000 amateur dramatic societies scattered throughout the kingdom. Much has been done during the war to bring serious drama into the remotest villages, many of which have never seen a play before.

It is also evident that in 1945 the theatre has begun to rally from the anæmia that was sapping its vitality. The stage has made the first step to recovery. Actors, tired of being little more than tailor's dummies, bandying slangy and insipid dialogue, pouring decanters and puffing cigarettes, have notably revived the full-blooded tradition of great acting. Inevitably they have gone back to the classics: Shakespeare, Webster, Ibsen, Chekov, Shaw. They have brought back to the stage the almost forgotten arts of wearing costume, of displaying strong emotion, and of speaking verse. This change is as significant for the health of the theatre as the lifting of the blackout for civilian morale. The repertory seasons of the Old Vic company at the New Theatre and of John Gielgud's company at the Haymarket mark a turning-point. They have lifted the blackout which the naturalistic drama had imposed upon their art.

The intellectual drama taught the lesson that, in the twentieth century, a good play must be logically convincing, but whatever successes the intellectual theatre may have achieved the fact remains that the stuff of

drama, like the stuff of poetry, has its origin not in thought, but in feeling; nor can it be truly appreciated except through feeling.

The most interesting production in the London theatre in the first half of 1945 has been that of Thornton Wilder's 1942 Pulitzer Prize play, *The Skin of our Teeth*. It symbolizes Man's struggle for the survival of his civilization through the ages; after the Ice Age, the Deluge, and the First World War. The author has chosen his own convention, borrowing from expressionism and Bridie's confidential running commentary. He calls it "a history of the world in comic strip." It is a bold experiment, and it has succeeded where earlier and similar experiments have failed, not because of its eccentric form and technical novelty, but because its audiences have been genuinely moved by the eternal miracle of Man's energy and courage as well as diverted by its varied tricks of presentation.

The outlook for the future is already brighter. At all events the new dramatist will not be faced with the blank wall at the end of a *cul de sac*, even if he is still groping in the dark to find a new convention.

The evolution of every form of art—whether the drama, fiction, music, or painting—would appear to be a recurring cycle of alternating settled and chaotic periods. Dramatists (like novelists, composers, artists) first discover and then exploit a certain method, and this gradually becomes accepted as a convention by contemporary and succeeding playwrights until at length, having exhausted its possibilities, they tire of it and look instinctively for something new and different. When this point is reached there follows a reactionary period, a state of flux, a time of eager experiment, until a new convention is accepted and established. If this is true this periodical break-away from established methods of procedure and accepted rules comes about quite inde-

pendently of the pressure of the outside world. It is a spontaneous explosion of certain internal forces that have been too long suppressed. This means that the present chaotic period would have come about inevitably, once realism had reached saturation-point. The external influence of the war and its aftermath may have precipitated it, but it was in no way causal. In any case we can write Finis to the Age of Realism. It looks also as if we had outlived the Age of Individualism with its philosophy of self-realization which inspired so many realistic plays. It is not impossible that some dramatist may yet write a belated naturalistic masterpiece, but new achievement in the old vocabulary is of less interest and importance than experiment; for we may confidently anticipate that, sooner or later, these experiments will lead to the establishment of a new dramatic structure.

One can only guess what form the new drama will assume when it eventually finds its equilibrium. Priestley is not alone in thinking that it will be more closely allied with music and the ballet. One thing is sure: it must recover some of the things that it has lost, the obvious beauties of romance and poetry. It may be, as Galsworthy predicted, lyrical, and its province "to describe the elemental soul of man and the forces of Nature with beauty and the spirit of discovery." It will most likely be a swing-back of the pendulum that oscillates eternally between Romance and Realism. The fallacy of Realism, as James Branch Cabell has put it, is that it assumes our mileposts to be as worthy of consideration as our goal; and that the especial post we are now passing reveals an eternal verity.

Part Two

SIR ARTHUR WING PINERO

Mid-channel

First produced at the St James's Theatre, London, on September 2, 1909, and published by William Heinemann, Ltd.

Zoe Blundell's marriage has reached that "mid-channel" where, according to a philosophic friend of her husband's, the sea of matrimony is always choppy. There are several young men with whom she flirts, and one of them, Leonard Ferris, seeing no chance of her divorcing her husband, Peter, drifts into an engagement with Ethel Pierpoint. When, however, Zoe separates temporarily from her husband he is unable to disguise the lukewarmness of his affection from his fiancée, and Ethel in distress comes to consult Zoe. While they are together Leonard calls. Zoe gets rid of Ethel, and the scene which follows (taken from Act II) is chosen as illustrative of the way in which the old school of the nineties—for although the play was written in 1909 Pinero's manner still dates back to the nineteenth-century tradition—wrote for maximum theatrical effect. Contrary to the modern naturalism, a situation is played for every ounce of emotion that can be extracted from it.

ZOE *glances over her shoulder, to assure herself that the woman has left the room, and then with a fierce light in her eyes, goes to the nearer door on the right and throws it open.*

ZOE [*in a hard voice, speaking into the adjoining room*]. I'm alone.

[*She moves from the door as* LEONARD, *still carrying his hat and cane, enters.*

LEONARD. By George, that was a narrow squeak!

[*Closing the door*] What possessed you to be at home to the Pierpoint girl this morning?

ZOE [*coldly*]. I didn't expect you back before lunch.

LEONARD [*putting his hat and cane on the chair*]. I was talking to a man at Victoria Gate and I saw Peter driving away in a taxi. [*Facing her*] I got sick of the Park. [*Seeing that something is amiss*] Hallo! [*A pause.*] Anyone been running me down?

[*She advances to him, and drawing herself to her full height, regards him scornfully.*

ZOE [*making a motion with her hands as if she would strike him*]. You—you——! [*Dropping her hands to her side*] Oh, cruel—cruel—[*walking away from him*] cruel!

LEONARD. What's cruel? Who's cruel?

ZOE [*at the further end of the room, on the right*]. Ah—ah——!

LEONARD [*moving to the left*]. Oh, come! Let's have it out; let's have it out.

ZOE. Sssh! Don't raise your voice here.

LEONARD. Somebody's been talking against me. Ethel Pierpoint?

ZOE [*coming to the oblong table*]. You've behaved abominably to this girl.

LEONARD. Ho, it *is* Miss Pierpoint!

ZOE. No, she hasn't spoken a word against you. But she's opened her heart to me.

LEONARD [*going to* ZOE]. You've known all about me and Ethel.

ZOE. It's a lie. How much have I known? I knew that you were sizing her up, as you expressed it; but I never surmised that you'd as good as proposed marriage to her.

LEONARD. I told you months ago—admitted it—that I'd made myself a bit of an idiot over Ethel. I fancied you'd tumbled to the state o' things.

ZOE. Did you! Why, do you think—maniac as I was when you came through to me in Florence—do you think

I'd have allowed you to remain near me for five minutes if I'd known as much as I do now?

LEONARD. Look here, Zoe——

ZOE. Oh, you're a cruel fellow! You've been cruel to her and cruel to me. I believe you're capable of being cruel to any woman who comes your way. Still, *she's* the fortunate one. Her scratches'll heal; but I—[*sitting at the oblong table and hitting it with her fist*] I loathe myself more than ever—more than ever!

LEONARD [*after a pause*]. Zoe, I wish you'd try to be a little fair to me.

ZOE [*ironically*]. Fair!

LEONARD. Perhaps I did go rather further with Ethel Pierpoint than I led you to understand.

ZOE. Oh——!

LEONARD. I own up. Yes, but what prospect was there, when I was thick with her, of your being free of Blundell? None. And what was I to you? Merely a pal of yours—one of your "tame robins"—one of a dozen; and I'd come to a loose end in my life. It was simply the fact that there *was* no prospect for me with you that drove me to consider whether I hadn't better settle down to a humdrum with a decent girl of the Ethel breed. Otherwise, do you imagine I'd have crossed the street to speak to another woman? [*Leaving* ZOE] Oh, you might do me common justice! [*Hotly*] If circumstances *have* made a cad of me, am I *all* black? Can't you find *any* good in me? [*Turning to her*] What did I tell you at Perugia?

ZOE [*rising*]. Ah, don't——!

LEONARD. That I'd been in love with you from the day I first met you—from the very moment Mrs Hope-Cornish introduced me to you at Sandown! Well? Isn't there anything to my credit on that score? Didn't I keep my secret? For four years I kept it; though, with matters as they often were between you and

Blundell, many a man might have thought you ripe grapes. [*Walking across to the right*] Only once I was off my guard with you—when I laid hold of you and begged you, whatever happened, never to—never to——

ZOE [*leaning against the table, her back to him*]. Ha, ha, ha!

LEONARD. Yes, and I meant it; as God hears me, I meant it. If anybody had told me that afternoon that it was I who—oh, hang! [*Sitting upon the settee*] But what I want to impress upon you is that, if I were quite the low scoundrel you make me out to be, I shouldn't have gone through what I have gone through these past four years and more. Great Scott, it's been nothing but hell—hot hell—all the time! Four whole years of pretending I was just an ordinary friend of yours—hell! Four years of reasoning with myself—preaching to myself—hell! That awful month after Blundell left you—when you'd gone to Italy and I was in London—worse than hell! My chase after you—our little tour together—my struggle even then to play the correct game—and I *did* struggle—hell! And since then—hell! [*His elbows on his knees, digging his knuckles into his forehead*] Hell all the time! Hell all the time!

[*There is a silence, and then, with a look of settled determination, she comes to him slowly and lays her hands upon his head.*

ZOE. Poor boy! I'm sorry I blackguarded you.

SIR JAMES BARRIE

What Every Woman Knows

First produced at the Duke of York's Theatre, London, on September 3, 1908, and published by Hodder and Stoughton, Ltd.

The play opens in the house of Alick Wylie. The Wylies have risen in the world, for they are now Wylie and Sons, of the local granite quarry in which Alick was throughout his working days a mason. The family consists of the two sons, David and James, and their sister Maggie.

The room in which they are gathered is the living-room of the house, where Alick, "who will never get used to fashionable ways, can take off his collar and sit happily in his stocking-soles, and James would do so also; but catch Maggie letting him. There is one very fine chair, but, heavens, not for sitting on; just to give the room a social standing in an emergency. . . . Otherwise the furniture is homely; most of it has come from that smaller house where the Wylies began." But it contains a bookcase of pitch-pine which holds six hundred books, with glass doors to prevent your getting at them, bought by David out of "a mighty respect for education, as something that he has missed."

Her brothers—"you don't know David and James till you know how they love their sister"—are much concerned that Maggie has received no offers of marriage and are puzzled how to compensate her for the news that the local minister, whom they had thought a likely suitor, has just become engaged. The truth must be faced. Maggie is plain and undersized, and no man wants her. Her own view, with which her brothers violently disagree, is that she lacks charm, an elusive quality that she herself defines as "a sort of bloom on a woman. If you have it, you don't need to have anything else; and if you don't have it, it doesn't much matter what else you have."

That night the men are sitting up to watch for burglars, for though nothing has been stolen, a policeman has told them that he saw a man climbing out at ten past two one morning

and they have found that the catch of the window has been tampered with. A scouting expedition by James reveals that the intruder is even now lurking outside in the rhododendrons. They put out the incandescent light, and all sit down to watch.

There is a long pause during which they are lurking in the shadows. At last they hear some movement, and they steal like ghosts from the room. We see DAVID *turning out the lobby light; then the door closes and an empty room awaits the intruder with a shudder of expectancy. The window opens and shuts as softly as if this were a mother peering in to see whether her baby is asleep. Then the head of a man shows between the curtains. The remainder of him follows. He is carrying a little carpet-bag. He stands irresolute; what puzzles him evidently is that the Wylies should have retired to rest without lifting that piece of coal off the fire. He opens the door and peeps into the lobby, listening to the wag-at-the-wall clock. All seems serene, and he turns on the light. We see him clearly now. He is* JOHN SHAND, *age twenty-one, boots muddy, as an indignant carpet can testify. He wears a shabby topcoat and a cockerty bonnet; otherwise he is in the well-worn corduroys of a railway porter. His movements, at first stealthy, become almost homely as he feels that he is secure. He opens the bag and takes out a bunch of keys, a small paper parcel, and a black implement that may be a burglar's jemmy. This cool customer examines the fire and piles on more coals. With the keys he opens the door of the bookcase, selects two large volumes, and brings them to the table. He takes off his topcoat and opens his parcel, which we now see contains sheets of foolscap paper. His next action shows that the 'jemmy' is really a ruler. He knows where the pen and ink are kept. He pulls the fine chair nearer to the table, sits on it, and proceeds to write, occasionally dotting the carpet with ink as he stabs*

the air with his pen. He is so occupied that he does not see the door opening, and the Wylie family staring at him. They are armed with sticks.

ALICK [*at last*]. When you're ready, John Shand.

[JOHN *hints back, and then has the grace to rise, dogged and expressionless.*

JAMES [*like a railway porter*]. Ticket, please.

DAVID. You can't think of anything clever for to go for to say now, John.

MAGGIE. I hope you find that chair comfortable, young man.

JOHN. I have no complaint to make against the chair.

ALICK [*who is really distressed*]. A native of the town. The disgrace to your family! I feel pity for the Shands this night.

JOHN [*glowering*]. I'll thank you, Mr Wylie, not to pity my family.

JAMES. Canny, canny.

MAGGIE [*that sense of justice again*]. I think you should let the young man explain. It mayn't be so bad as we thought.

DAVID. Explain away, my billie.

JOHN. Only the uneducated would need an explanation. I'm a student [*with a little passion*], and I'm desperate for want of books. You have all I want here; no use to you but for display; well, I came here to study. I come twice weekly. [*Amazement of his hosts.*

DAVID [*who is the first to recover*]. By the window.

JOHN. Do you think a Shand would so far lower himself as to enter your door? Well, is it a case for the police?

JAMES. It is.

MAGGIE [*not so much out of the goodness of her heart as to patronize the Shands*]. It seems to me it's a case for us all to go to our beds and leave the young man to study; but not on that chair. [*And she wheels the chair away from him.*

JOHN. Thank you, Miss Maggie, but I couldn't be beholden to you.

JAMES. My opinion is that he's nobody, so out with him.

JOHN. Yes, out with me. And you'll be cheered to hear I'm likely to be a nobody for a long time to come.

DAVID [*who had been beginning to respect him*]. Are you a poor scholar?

JOHN. On the contrary, I'm a brilliant scholar.

DAVID. It's siller, then?

JOHN [*glorified by experiences he has shared with many a gallant soul*]. My first year at college I lived on a barrel of potatoes, and we had just a sofa-bed between two of us; when the one lay down the other had to get up. Do you think it was hardship? It was sublime. But this year I can't afford it. I'll have to stay on here, collecting the tickets of the illiterate, such as you, when I might be with Romulus and Remus among the stars.

JAMES [*summing up*]. Havers.

DAVID [*in whose head some design is vaguely taking shape*]. Whisht, James. I must say, young lad, I like your spirit. Now tell me, what's your professors' opinion of your future?

JOHN. They think me a young man of extraordinary promise.

DAVID. You have a name here for high moral character.

JOHN. And justly.

DAVID. Are you serious-minded?

JOHN. I never laughed in my life.

DAVID. Who do you sit under in Glasgow?

JOHN. Mr Flemister of the Sauchiehall High.

DAVID. Are you a Sabbath-school teacher?

JOHN. I am.

DAVID. One more question. Are you promised?

JOHN. To a lady?

DAVID. Yes.

JOHN. I've never given one of them a single word of encouragement. I'm too much occupied thinking about my career.

DAVID. So.

[*He reflects, and finally indicates by a jerk of the head that he wishes to talk with his father behind the door.*

JAMES [*longingly*]. Do you want me too?

[*But they go out without even answering him.*

MAGGIE. I don't know what maggot they have in their heads, but sit down, young man, till they come back.

JOHN. My name's Mr Shand, and till I'm called that I decline to sit down again in this house.

MAGGIE. Then I'm thinking, young sir, you'll have a weary wait.

[*While he waits you can see how pinched his face is. He is little more than a boy, and he seldom has enough to eat.* DAVID *and* ALICK *return presently, looking as sly as if they had been discussing some move on the dambrod, as indeed they have.*

DAVID [*suddenly become genial*]. Sit down, Mr Shand, and pull in your chair. You'll have a thimbleful of something to keep the cold out? [*Briskly*] Glasses, Maggie.

[*She wonders, but gets glasses and decanter from the sideboard, which* JAMES *calls the chiffy.* DAVID *and* ALICK, *in the most friendly manner, also draw up to the table.*

You're not a totaller, I hope?

JOHN [*guardedly*] I'm practically a totaller.

DAVID. So are we. How do you take it? Is there any hot water, Maggie?

JOHN. If I take it at all, and I haven't made up my mind yet, I'll take it cold.

DAVID. You'll take it hot, James?

JAMES [*also sitting at the table but completely befogged*]. No, I——

DAVID [*decisively*]. I think you'll take it hot, James.

JAMES [*sulking*]. I'll take it hot.

DAVID. The kettle, Maggie.

[JAMES *has evidently to take it hot so that they can get at the business now on hand, while* MAGGIE *goes kitchenward for the kettle.*

ALICK. Now, David, quick, before she comes back.

DAVID. Mr Shand, we have an offer to make you.

JOHN [*warningly*]. No patronage.

ALICK. It's strictly a business affair.

DAVID. Leave it to me, Father. It's this—— [*But to his annoyance the suspicious* MAGGIE *has already returned with the kettle.*] Maggie, don't you see that you're not wanted?

MAGGIE [*sitting down by the fire and resuming her knitting*]. I do, David.

DAVID. I have a proposition to put before Mr Shand, and women are out of place in business transactions.

[*The needles continue to click.*

ALICK [*sighing*]. We'll have to let her bide, David.

DAVID [*sternly*]. Woman. [*But even this does not budge her.*] Very well, then, sit there, but don't interfere, mind. Mr Shand, we're willing, the three of us, to lay out £300 on your education if——

JOHN. Take care.

DAVID [*slowly, which is not his wont*]. On condition that five years from now, Maggie Wylie, if still unmarried, can claim to marry you, should such be her wish; the thing to be perfectly open on her side, but you to be strictly tied down.

JAMES [*enlightened*]. So, so.

DAVID [*resuming his smart manner*]. Now, what have you to say? Decide.

JOHN [*after a pause*]. I regret to say——

MAGGIE. It doesn't matter what he regrets to say, because I decide against it. And I think it was very ill-done of you to make any such proposal.

DAVID [*without looking at her*]. Quiet, Maggie.

JOHN [*looking at her*]. I must say, Miss Maggie, I don't see what reasons *you* can have for being so set against it.

MAGGIE. If you would grow a beard, Mr Shand, the reasons wouldn't be quite so obvious.

JOHN. I'll never grow a beard.

MAGGIE. Then you're done for at the start.

ALICK. Come, come.

MAGGIE. Seeing I have refused the young man——

JOHN. Refused!

DAVID. That's no reason why we shouldn't have his friendly opinion. Your objections, Mr Shand?

JOHN. Simply, it's a one-sided bargain. I admit I'm no catch at present; but what could a man of my abilities not soar to with three hundred pounds? Something far above what she could aspire to.

MAGGIE. Oh, indeed!

DAVID. The position is that without the three hundred you can't soar.

JOHN. You have me there.

MAGGIE. Yes, but——

ALICK. You see *you're* safeguarded, Maggie; you don't need to take him unless you like, but he has to take you.

JOHN. That's an unfair arrangement also.

MAGGIE. I wouldn't dream of it without that condition.

JOHN. Then you *are* thinking of it?

MAGGIE. Poof!

DAVID. It's a good arrangement for you, Mr Shand. The chances are you'll never have to go on with it, for in all probability she'll marry soon.

JAMES. She's tremendous run after.

JOHN. Even if that's true, it's just keeping me in reserve in case she misses doing better.

DAVID [*relieved*]. That's the situation in a nutshell.

JOHN. Another thing. Supposing I was to get fond of her?

ALICK [*wistfully*]. It's very likely.

JOHN. Yes, and suppose she was to give me the go-by?

DAVID. You have to risk that.

JOHN. Or take it the other way. Supposing as I got to know her I *could not* endure her?

DAVID [*suavely*]. You have both to take risks.

JAMES [*less suavely*]. What you need, John Shand, is a clout on the head.

JOHN. Three hundred pounds is no great sum.

DAVID. You can take it or leave it.

ALICK. No great sum for a student studying for the ministry!

JOHN. Do you think that with that amount of money I would stop short at being a minister?

DAVID. That's how I like to hear you speak. A young Scotsman of your ability let loose upon the world with £300, what could he not do? It's almost appalling to think of; especially if he went among the English.

JOHN. What do you think, Miss Maggie?

MAGGIE [*who is knitting*]. I have no thoughts on the subject either way.

JOHN [*after looking her over*]. What's her age? She looks young, but they say it's the curls that does it.

DAVID [*rather happily*]. She's one of those women who are eternally young.

JOHN. I can't take that for an answer.

DAVID. She's twenty-five.

JOHN. I'm just twenty-one.

JAMES. I read in a book that about four years' difference in the ages is the ideal thing.

[*As usual he is disregarded.*

DAVID. Well, Mr. Shand?

JOHN [*where is his mother?*]. I'm willing if she's willing.

DAVID. Maggie?

MAGGIE. There can be no "if" about it. It must be an offer.

JOHN. A Shand give a Wylie such a chance to humiliate him? Never.

MAGGIE. Then all is off.

DAVID. Come, come, Mr Shand, it's just a form.

JOHN [*reluctantly*]. Miss Maggie, will you?

MAGGIE [*doggedly*]. Is it an offer?

JOHN [*dourly*]. Yes.

MAGGIE [*rising*]. Before I answer I want first to give you a chance of drawing back.

DAVID. Maggie.

MAGGIE [*bravely*]. When they said that I have been run after they were misleading you. I'm without charm; nobody has ever been after me.

JOHN. Oho!

ALICK. They will be yet.

JOHN [*the innocent*]. It shows at least that you haven't been after them.

[*His hosts exchange a self-conscious glance.*

MAGGIE. One thing more; David said I'm twenty-five, I'm twenty-six.

JOHN. Aha!

MAGGIE. Now be practical. Do you withdraw from the bargain, or do you not?

JOHN [*on reflection*]. It's a bargain.

MAGGIE. Then so be it.

DAVID [*hurriedly*]. And that's settled. Did you say you would take it hot, Mr Shand?

JOHN. I think I'll take it neat.

[*The others decide to take it hot, and there is some careful business here with the toddy ladles.*

ALICK. Here's to you, and your career.

JOHN. Thank you. To you, Miss Maggie. Had we not better draw up a legal document? Lawyer Crosbie could do it on the quiet.

DAVID. Should we do that, or should we just trust to one another's honour?

ALICK [*gallantly*]. Let Maggie decide.

MAGGIE. I think we would better have a legal document.

DAVID. We'll have it drawn up to-morrow. I was thinking the best way would be for to pay the money in five yearly instalments.

JOHN. I was thinking, better bank the whole sum in my name at once.

ALICK. I think David's plan's the best.

JOHN. I think not. Of course if it's not convenient to you——

DAVID [*touched to the quick*]. It's perfectly convenient. What do you say, Maggie?

MAGGIE. I agree with John.

DAVID [*with an odd feeling that Maggie is now on the other side*]. Very well.

JOHN. Then as that's settled I think I'll be stepping.

[*He is putting his papers back in the bag.*

ALICK [*politely*]. If you would like to sit on at your books——

JOHN. As I can come at any orra time now I think I'll be stepping. [MAGGIE *helps him into his topcoat.*

MAGGIE. Have you a muffler, John?

JOHN. I have. [*He gets it from his pocket.*

MAGGIE. You had better put it twice round.

[*She does this for him.*

DAVID. Well, good night to you, Mr Shand.

ALICK. And good luck.

JOHN. Thank you. The same to you. And I'll cry in at your office in the morning before the 6.20 is due.

DAVID. I'll have the document ready for you. [*There is the awkward pause that sometimes follows great events.*] I think, Maggie, you might see Mr Shand to the door.

MAGGIE. Certainly. [JOHN *is going by the window.*] This way, John.

[*She takes him off by the more usual exit.*

DAVID. He's a fine frank fellow; and you saw how cleverly he got the better of me about banking the money. [*As the heads of the conspirators come gleefully together*] I tell you, Father, he has a grand business head.

ALICK. Lads, he's canny. He's cannier than any of us.

JAMES. Except maybe Maggie. He has no idea what a remarkable woman Maggie is.

ALICK. Best he shouldn't know. Men are nervous of remarkable women.

JAMES. She's a long time in coming back.

DAVID [*not quite comfortable*]. It's a good sign. H'sh. What sort of a night is it, Maggie?

MAGGIE. It's a little blowy.

[*She gets a large dust-cloth which is lying folded on a shelf, and proceeds to spread it over the fine chair. The men exchange self-conscious glances.*

DAVID [*stretching himself*]. Yes—well, well, oh yes. It's getting late. What is it with you, Father?

ALICK. I'm ten forty-two.

JAMES. I'm ten forty.

DAVID. Ten forty-two.

[*They wind up their watches.*

MAGGIE. It's high time we were bedded. [*She puts her hands on their shoulders lovingly, which is the very thing they have been trying to avoid.*] You're very kind to me.

DAVID. Havers.

ALICK. Havers.

JAMES [*but this does not matter*]. Havers.

MAGGIE [*a little dolefully*]. I'm a sort of sorry for the young man, David.

DAVID. Not at all. You'll be the making of him. [*She lifts the two volumes.*] Are you taking the books to your bed, Maggie?

MAGGIE. Yes. I don't want him to know things I don't know myself.

[*She departs with the books; and* ALICK *and* DAVID, *the villains, now want to get away from each other.*

ALICK. Yes—yes. Oh yes—ay, man—it is so—umpha. You'll lift the big coals off, David.

[*He wanders away to his spring mattress.* DAVID *removes the coals.*

JAMES [*who would like to sit down and have an argy-bargy.*] It's a most romantical affair. [*But he gets no answer.*] I wonder how it'll turn out? [*No answer.*] She's queer, Maggie. I wonder how some clever writer has never noticed how queer women are. It's my belief you could write a whole book about them. [DAVID *remains obdurate.*] It was very noble of her to tell him she's twenty-six. [*Muttering as he too wanders away.*] But I thought she was twenty-seven. [DAVID *turns out the light.*

HARLEY GRANVILLE-BARKER

The Madras House

First produced at the Duke of York's Theatre, London, on March 9, 1910, and published by Sidgwick and Jackson, Ltd.

The occasion is a meeting to complete the projected sale of the Madras House, a once highly fashionable dress-shop, to an American 'hustler,' Eustace Perrin State.

Those present and financially interested are, besides Mr State, Harry Huxtable and Philip Madras, partners of a large suburban drapery establishment. A long illness has changed Mr Huxtable from the conventional type of successful shopkeeper into a rather lovable old buffer. He cherishes a permanent resentment against Constantine Madras, the founder of the Madras House, for having deserted his wife Amelia, Harry's sister and Philip's mother. He is attending the meeting against his better judgment as he dislikes meeting his brother-in-law. Constantine, who has long retired from active business, has just returned from abroad and is expected any minute.

The company is completed by Philip's friend, Major Hippisly Thomas, a married man, who is afraid that Philip's exquisite and attractive wife Jessica is leading him into a flirtation that will prove too much for him.

This act is a perfect example of the intellectual discussion play. It is in effect a debate on the status of woman: her present and her future, considered morally, æsthetically, and economically.

Some thirty years back the Madras House was established in its present premises. Decoration in those days was rather trade than art; but MR CONSTANTINE MADRAS, *ever daring, proceeded to beautify the home of his professional triumphs according to his own taste and fancy, and being a man of great force of character, produced something which, though extraordinarily wrong, was yet, since it was sincere, effective in its way.*

There have been changes since, but one room has remained untouched. This is the rotunda, a large, lofty, skylighted place, done in the Moorish style. The walls are black marble to the height of a man, and from there to the ceiling the darkest red. The ceiling is of a cerulean blue; and in the middle of the skylight a golden sun, with spiked rays proceeding from its pleasant human countenance, takes credit for some of the light it intercepts. An archway with fretted top leads from the rest of the establishment. Another has behind it a platform, a few steps high, hung with black velvet. There is also a small door, little more than head high. On the floor is a Persian carpet of some real beauty. On the walls are gas brackets (now fitted for electric light), the Oriental touch achieved in their crescent shape. Round the wall are divans, many-cushioned; in front of them little coffee stools. It is all about as Moorish as Baker Street Station used to be in the days of the old sulphurous Underground, but the general effect is humorous, pleasant, and not undignified. In the grand days of the Madras House the rotunda was the happy preserve of very special customers, those on whom the great man himself would keep an eye. If you had been there you spoke of it casually; and to be free of the rotunda was to be a well-dressed woman; moreover, to be recognized as such. Ichabod! The Madras House is old-fashioned now, and County ladies bring their daughters because it would be such a pity for dear Daphne, or Pamela, or Cynthia not to have the very latest thing for the County Ball. Not that its present management doesn't endeavour to keep in the race. Models from Paris, ladies as chiefs of the various rooms, who are real ladies, and let you know it, too, by the glassy graciousness or the off-hand civility with which they variously greet the too-ready-to-be-intimidated customer. But, since MR CONSTANTINE MADRAS *retired, the spirit of the place has faded, and a board of directors cannot revive it. For the accommodation of this same*

board, a large oval 'Moorish' table had to be imported to the rotunda, and half a dozen 'Moorish' chairs provided. They had, in fact, to be designed and made in the Tottenham Court Road; but they are at least the appropriate furniture for this scene, as it is to be, of the passing of the Madras House into alien hands.

At three o'clock on the Monday afternoon the deal is to be put through, and it is now five minutes to. MAJOR THOMAS *is there, sitting at the table; papers spread before him, racking his brain with a few final figures.* PHILIP *is there, in rather a schoolboyish mood. He is sitting on the table, swinging his legs.* MR HUXTABLE *is there, too, dressed in his best, important and nervous, and he is talking to* MR EUSTACE PERRIN STATE.

MR STATE *is an American, and if American magazine literature is anything to go by, no American is altogether unlike him. He has a rugged, blood-and-iron sort of face, utterly belied by his soft, smiling eyes; rightly belied, too, for he has made his thirty or forty millions (dollars though) in the gentlest and slickest way. You would not think of him as a money-maker. And, indeed, he has no love of money and little use for it, for his tastes are simple. But this is the honourable career in his own country, and he has the instinct for turning money over and the knack of doing so on a big scale. His shock of grey hair makes him look older than he probably is; his voice is almost childlike in its sweetness. He has some of the dignity and aptitude for command that power can give.*

From the little canopied door comes in MR WINDLESHAM, *present manager of the establishment. He is a tailor-made man; and the tailor only left off for the wax modeller and wigmaker to begin. For his clothes are too perfect to be worn by anything but a dummy, and his hair and complexion are far from human. Not that he dyes or paints them; no, they were made like that. His voice is a little inhuman, too, and as he prefers the French language, with*

which he has a more unripe acquaintance, to his own, and so speaks English as much like French as his French is like English, his conversation seems as unreal as the rest of him. Impossible to think of him in any of the ordinary relations of life. He is a functionary. Nature, the great inventor, will evolve, however roughly, what is necessary for her uses. Millinery has evolved the man-milliner. As he comes in—and he has the gait of a water-wagtail—

MR HUXTABLE *is making conversation.*

MR HUXTABLE. A perfect barometer, as you might say—when your eye gets trained to it.

WINDLESHAM [*to* PHILIP; *and with a wag of his head back to the other room*]. They're just ready.

MR STATE [*smiling benevolently at* MR HUXTABLE]. Is it really? The Crystal Palace! What a fairy sound that has!

MR HUXTABLE [*with modest pride*]. And a very ealthy locality!

PHILIP. Come along and meet State. [*He jumps off the table, capturing* WINDLESHAM'S *arm.*]

MR STATE [*enthusiastic*]. Denmark Hill. Named so for Queen Alexandra!

MR HUXTABLE [*struck by the information*]. Was it now?

MR STATE. Herne Hill . . . Herne the Hunter! That's the charm of London to an American. Association. Every spot speaks.

PHILIP [*as he joins them*]. This is Mr Windlesham . . . our manager. He's going to show us some new models.

MR STATE [*impressively extends a hand and repeats the name*]. Mr Windlesham.

WINDLESHAM. Most happy. I thought you'd like to see the very latest. . . brought them from Paris only yesterday.

MR STATE. Most opportune! [*Then with a sweeping gesture*] Mr Philip, I react very keenly to the charm and tradition of this room. Your father designed it?

PHILIP. Yes.

MR STATE. I thought so.

PHILIP. That used to be his private office.

MR STATE [*reverently*]. Indeed! Where the duchess went on her knees. An historic spot.

PHILIP. Something of a legend that.

[MR STATE, *intensely solemn, seems now to ascend the pulpit of some philosophic conventicle.*

MR STATE. Let us cling to legends, sir . . . they are the spiritual side of facts. They go to form tradition. And it is not given to man to found his institutions in security of mind except upon tradition. That is why our eyes turn eastward to you from America, Mr Huxtable.

MR HUXTABLE [*in some awe*]. Do they now?

MR STATE. Has it never struck you that while the progress of man has been in the path of the sun, his thoughts continually go back to the place of its rising? I have found that a very stimulating idea.

PHILIP [*not indecently commonplace*]. Well, have them in now, Windlesham, while we're waiting.

WINDLESHAM. You might cast your eyes over these new mannequins, Mr Philip . . . the very best I could find, I do assure you. Faces are hard enough to get, but figures . . . well, there! [*Reaching the little door, he calls through.*] Allons, Mes'moiselles! Non . . . non . . . par l'autre porte à la gauche. [*Then back again.*] You get the best effect through the big doorway. [*He further explains this by sketching one in the air.*] One, two, and four first.

[*He rapidly distributes some costume drawings he has been carrying, and then vanishes into the other room, from where his voice vibrates.*

WINDLESHAM. En avant, s'il vous plaît. Numéro un! Eh bien! . . . numéro trois. Non, Ma'moiselle, ce n'est pas commode . . . regarder ce corsage-là. . . .

MR HUXTABLE [*making a face*]. What I'm always thinking is, why not have a manly chap in charge of the place up here.

MR STATE [*with perfect justice*]. Mr Windlesham may be said to strike a note . . . and a very distinctive note! . . .

[*Through the doorway* WINDLESHAM *ushers in a costume from Paris, which is hung upon a young lady of pleasing appearance, preoccupied with its exhibition, which she achieves by swift and sinuous, never-ceasing movements. She wears a smile also.*

WINDLESHAM. One and two are both Larguillière, Mr Philip. He can't get in the Soupçon Anglais, can he? Won't . . . I tell him. Promenez et sortez, Ma'moiselle.

[*The young lady, still smiling and sinuous, begins to circle the room. She seems to be unconscious of its inhabitants, and they, in return, rather dreadfully pretend not to notice her, but only the costume.*

WINDLESHAM. Numéro deux.

[*Another costume; the young lady contained in it is as swift-moving and sinuous and as vacantly smiling.*

WINDLESHAM. Pleasant motif that, isn't it ? Promenez.

MR STATE [*in grave inquiry*]. What is the Soupçon Anglais?

PHILIP. A Frenchman will tell you that for England you must first make a design and then spoil it.

THOMAS [*whose attention has been riveted*]. Don't they speak English?

WINDLESHAM. Oh, pas un mot . . . I mean, not a word. Only came with me yesterday, these three.

THOMAS. Because this frock's a bit thick, y'know.

WINDLESHAM. Numéro trois!

[*A third costume, calculated to have an innocent effect. The accompanying young lady, with a sense of fitness, wears a pout instead of a smile.*

PHILIP. What's this? [*His eye is on the surmounting hat of straw.*]

WINDLESHAM [*with a little crow of delight*]. That's the new hat. La belle Hélène again!

MR STATE [*interested. Still grave*]. La belle Hélène. A Parisian firm?

WINDLESHAM [*turning this to waggish account*]. Well . . . dear me . . . you could almost call her that, couldn't you? [*Suddenly he dashes at the costume and brings it to a standstill.*] Oh, lala, le gilet! Quelle tracasserie!

[*He proceeds to arrange le gilet to his satisfaction, also some other matters which seem to involve a partial evisceration of the underclothing. The young lady, passive, pouts perseveringly. He is quite unconscious of her separate existence. But* THOMAS *is considerably shocked and whispers violently to* PHILIP.

THOMAS. I say, he shouldn't pull her about like that.

WINDLESHAM [*skipping back to admire the result*]. Là . . comme ça.

[*The costume continues its round; the others are still circling, veering and tacking, while* WINDLESHAM *trips admiringly around and about them. It all looks like some dance of modish dervishes.*

PHILIP [*heartlessly*]. La belle Hélène, Mr State, is a well-known Parisian cocotte . . . who sets many of the fashions which our wives and daughters afterwards assume.

MR HUXTABLE [*scandalized*]. Don't say that, Phil; it's not nice.

PHILIP. Why?

MR HUXTABLE. I'm sure no ladies are aware of it.

PHILIP. But what can be more appropriate than for the professional charmer to set the pace for the amateur!

WINDLESHAM [*pausing in the dance*]. Quite la haute cocotterie, of course.

MR STATE [*solemly*]. Do you infer, Mr Madras, a difference in degree, but not in kind?

PHILIP [*courteously echoing his tone*]. I do.

MR STATE. That is a very far-reaching observation, sir.

PHILIP. It is.

THOMAS. Do you know the lady personally, Mr Windlesham?

[WINDLESHAM *turns, with some tag of a costume in his hand, thus unconsciously detaining the occupier.*

WINDLESHAM. Oh, no . . . oh, dear me, no . . . I do assure you. There's nothing gay in Paris for me. Tout à fait au contraire. I was blasé long ago.

MR STATE. But touching that hat, Mr Windlesham?

WINDLESHAM. Oh, to be sure. Attendez, Ma'moiselle.

[*Tiptoeing, he dexterously tilts the straw hat from the elaborate head it is perched on.*

WINDLESHAM. It's not a bad story. Sortez.

[*By this two costumes have glided out. The third follows.* STATE, *who has found it hard to keep his eyes off them, knits his brows, and turns to* MR HUXTABLE.

MR STATE. Does it strike you, now, that there is something not quite natural in their behaviour?

[WINDLESHAM, *caressing the hat, takes up an attitude for his story.*

WINDLESHAM. Well . . . it appears that a while ago out at the Pré Catalan . . . there was Hélène, taking her afternoon cup of buttermilk. What should she see but Madame Erlancourt . . . one of the old guard, she is! . . . in a hat the very twin of hers . . . the very twin. Well . . . you can imagine! Some one had blundered.

MR STATE [*absorbed*]. No, I am not with you.

PHILIP. Some spy in the enemy's service had stolen the plans of the hat.

MR STATE. No . . . Madame What's-her-name might have seen it on her before and copied it.

PHILIP. Mr State, Hélène does not wear a hat twice.

MR STATE. My mistake!

WINDLESHAM. So there was a terrible scene. . . .

THOMAS. With Madame . . . ?

WINDLESHAM [*repudiating any such vulgarity*]. Oh, no. Hélène just let fly at her chaperone, she being at hand, so to speak.

MR STATE [*dazzled*]. Her what! [*Then with humorous awe*] No, go on . . . go on . . . I am with you now, I think.

WINDLESHAM. She fetched in out of the Bois the ugliest little gamine she could find . . . put her own hat on its horrid little head . . . sat it at her table and stuffed it with cakes. Then she sent to the kitchens for one of those baskets they bring the fish in. . . . [*He twirls the hat.*] . . . see! Then she ripped a bit of ribbon and a couple of these ['*these*' *being rosettes*] off her pantalettes. . . .

MR STATE [*the Puritan*]. In public?

WINDLESHAM [*professionally*]. Oh, it can be done. Besides . . . la belle France, you know . . . there is something in the atmosphere! Twisted it round the basket . . . très pratique! And that's what she wore the rest of the afternoon and back to Paris. And it's going to be all the rage.

[*Having deftly pantomimed this creation of a fashion, he hands the hat with an air to* MR STATE, *who examines it.* PHILIP *is smilingly caustic.*

PHILIP. La Belle Hélène has the audacity of genius, Mr State. She is also, I am told, thrifty, inclined to religion, a vegetarian, Vichy water her only beverage; in truth she is a credit to her profession . . . and to ours.

[MR STATE *hands back the hat with the solemnest humour.*

MR STATE. Mr Windlesham, I am much obliged to you for this illuminating anecdote.

WINDLESHAM. Not at all. Will you see another three? Which shall we have now? [*He dips into his list.*] Here's a Dinner and Dance . . . and a Grande Tenue . . . and a wrap and pyjamas . . . a Nightie-night.

MR STATE. By all means.

WINDLESHAM. They won't be long in changing . . . but one I must just pin on.

MR STATE. No hurry . . . sir.

[*He has acquired a new joy in* WINDLESHAM, *whom he watches dance away. Then a song is heard from the next room.*

WINDLESHAM. Allons . . . numéro cinq . . . numéro sept . . . numéro dix . . . Ma'moiselle Ollivier . . . vous vous mettrez. . . . [*And the door closes.*

PHILIP [*looks at his watch*]. But it's ten past three. We'd better not wait for my father.

[*They surround the table and sit down.*

MR STATE. Major Thomas, have you my memoranda?

THOMAS. Here.

[*He hands them to* STATE, *who clears his throat, refrains from spitting, and begins the customary American oration.*

MR STATE. The scheme, gentlemen, for which I desire to purchase the Madras House and add it to the interest of the Burrows enterprise, which I already control, is . . . to put it shortly . . . this. The Burrows provincial scheme . . . you are aware of its purpose . . . goes well enough as far as the shareholding by the local drapery stores is concerned. And it has interested me to discover which aspects of the Burrows scheme suit which cities . . . and why. An absorbing problem in local psychology. But in a certain number of cases the local people will not come in. Yet in Leicester, let us say, or

Norwich or Plymouth or Coventry, the unknown and somewhat uninspiring name of Burrows upon an opposition establishment might cut no ice. But I have a further and I hope not uninteresting reason to put before you gentlemen why it is in these centres that we should look to establish our Madras Houses. . . . New Edition. Is that clear so far?

[*During this* MR CONSTANTINE MADRAS *has arrived. He turned aside for a moment to the door that the mannequins came from; now he joins the group. A man of sixty and over, to whom this is still the prime of life. Tall, quite dramatically dignified, suave, a little remote; he is one of those to whom life is an art of which they have determined to be master. It is a handsome face, Eastern in type, the long beard only streaked with grey. He does not dress like the ruck of men, because he is not of them. The velvet coat, brick-red tie, shepherd's-plaid trousers, white spats, and patent boots both suit him and express him subtly and well; the mixture of originality and alien tradition which is the man.* PHILIP *is purposely casual in greeting him; he has sighted him first. But* MR STATE *gets up, impressed. It is part of his creed to recognize greatness; he insists on recognizing it.*

PHILIP. Hullo, Father!

MR STATE. Mr Madras! Proud to meet you again.

CONSTANTINE [*graciously, without emotion*]. How do you do, Mr State?

PHILIP. You know every one, Father. Oh . . . Hippisly Thomas.

CONSTANTINE [*just as graciously*]. How do you do, sir? [*Then, with a mischievous smile, he pats* HUXTABLE *on the shoulder.*] How are you, my dear Harry?

[MR HUXTABLE *had heard him coming and felt himself turn purple. This was the great meeting after thirty years! He had let it come upon him unawares; purposely let it, for indeed he had not known what to say or do. He had dreaded having the inspiration to say or do anything. Now—alas, and thank goodness!—it is too late. He is at a suitable disadvantage. He need only grunt out sulkily. . . .*

MR HUXTABLE. I'm quite well, thank you.

[CONSTANTINE, *with one more pat in pardon for the rudeness, goes to his chair.*

MR STATE. A pleasant trip?

CONSTANTINE. So, so! Don't let me interrupt business. I shall pick up the thread.

MR STATE [*serving up a little re-warmed oration*]. I was just proceeding to place on the table-cloth some preliminary details of the scheme that has been elaborating since our meeting last June to consolidate your name and fame in some of the more important cities of England. We had not got far.

[*He consults his notes.* CONSTANTINE *produces from a case a slender cigarette-holder of amber.*

CONSTANTINE. You've some new mannequins, Phil.

PHILIP. Yes.

CONSTANTINE. The tall girl looks well enough. May I smoke?

MR STATE. Allow me. [*Whipping out his cigar-case.*]

CONSTANTINE. A cigarette, thank you, of my own.

[*He proceeds to make and light one.* MR STATE *offers cigars generally and then places one to his own hand.*

MR STATE. I occasionally seek stimulus in a cold cigar. I do not for the moment enter upon the finance of the matter, because I entertain no doubt that . . . possibly with a little adjustment of the proportion of shares and cash . . . that can be fixed.

MR HUXTABLE [*in emulation of all this ease and grace*]. I'll ave a cigarette, Phil . . . if you've got one.

[PHILIP *has one. And they all make themselves comfortable, while* MR STATE *continues enjoyably . . .*

MR STATE. And I know that you are no more the bond-slave of money than I am, Mr Madras. Any one can make money, if he has capital enough. The little that I have came from lumber and canned peaches. Now there was poetry in lumber. The virgin forest! As a youth I was shy of society . . . but I could sit in silent contemplation of Nature for as much as an hour at a time. Rightly thought of there is poetry in peaches . . . even when they are canned. Do you ask then why I bought that mantle establishment in the city twelve years ago?

PHILIP [*who is only sorry that some time he must stop*]. I do, Mr State.

MR STATE. Because as the years rolled irresistibly on I came to realize that I had become a lonely man . . . and I felt the need of some communion with what Goethe calls, does he not, the Woman Spirit, which can draw us ever upward and on. Well, the Burrows business was in the market . . . and that seemed an appropriate path to the fulfilment of my desire.

CONSTANTINE. The fulfilment . . . ?

MR STATE. Sir?

CONSTANTINE. The ready-made skirt business has appeased your craving, has it, for the eternal feminine?

MR STATE. Mr Madras, that sarcasm is deserved. No, sir, it has not. For the Burrows business, I discover, has no soul. Now a business can no more live the good life without a conscious soul than a human being can. I'm sure I have you with me there, Mr Huxtable.

[*Poor* MR HUXTABLE *quite chokes at the suddenness of this summons, but shines his best.*

MR HUXTABLE. I should say so, quite.

[MR STATE *begins to glow.*

MR STATE. There was fun, mark you . . . there still is some . . . in making these old back-country stores sit up and take notice . . . telling them: Gentlemen, come in, or be froze out. That's for their good . . . and for mine. But Burrows can't answer to the call of the Woman's Movement . . . the great Modern Woman's Movement . . . which is upon us . . . though as yet we may not measure its volume. But it is upon us . . . and our choice is to be in it, to do it glad service . . . or to have it flow over us. Let me assure you so. The old-time business of selling a reel of cotton and tinging on the cash machine . . . there's no salvation left in that. Nothing personal, Mr Huxtable.

[MR HUXTABLE *is ready, this time.*

MR HUXTABLE. No, no, I'm listening to you . . . I'm not too old to learn.

MR STATE. Mind . . . Burrows has not been wholly barren soil. Here and there we have sown a seed and made two ideas to spring where but one sprang before. Now in Nottingham . . .

MR HUXTABLE. I know Nottingham . . . got a shop there?

MR STATE [*with wholesome pride.*] In two years the Burrows House in Nottingham has smashed competition. I visited the city last fall. The notion was our local manager's. Simple. The ladies' department served by gentlemen . . . the gentlemen's by ladies. Always, of course, within the bounds of delicacy. You think there is nothing in that, Mr Huxtable.

MR HUXTABLE [*round-eyed and open-mouthed.*] Oh . . . well . . . !

MR STATE. But are you a Mean Sensual Man?

MR HUXTABLE [*whose knowledge of the French language hardly assists him to this startling translation.*] No . . . I hope not.

MR STATE. Put yourself in his place. Surrounded by

pretty girls . . . good girls, mind you . . . high class . . . pay them well . . . let them live out . . . pay for their mothers and chaperones if necessary. Surrounded, then, by Gracious Womanhood, does the Sensual Man forget how much money he is spending or does he not? Does he come again? Is it a little oasis in the desert of his business day? Is it a better attraction than Alcohol, or is it not?

PHILIP [*bitingly*]. Is it?

MR STATE. Then, sir . . . Audi Alteram Partem. See our Ladies' Fancy Department at its best . . . when Summer Time brings time for sport.

PHILIP. I must certainly do so.

MR STATE. Athletes every one of 'em . . . not a man under six foot . . . bronzed, noble fellows! And no flirting allowed . . . no making eyes . . . no pandering to anything depraved. But the Courtesy of Chivalry and the Chivalry of Courtesy proffered by clean-limbed and clean-minded gentlemen to any of the Fair Sex who may step in to buy a shilling sachet or the like. And pay, sir . . . the women come in flocks!

MR HUXTABLE [*bereft of breath*]. Is this how you mean to run your Madras Houses?

MR STATE. With a difference, Mr Huxtable. I also live and learn. I bought and built up the Burrows enterprise when the Suffrage Question was nearing a solution . . . for I foresaw that with added freedom womanhood's demands upon the resources of our civilization would surely grow. But even then I saw, too, that political claims were but the narrowest, drabbest aspect of the matter. What now, urbi et orbi, is the Modern Woman's Movement? It is woman expressing herself. How? Upon what roads is she marching? What is her goal? Is it for us to say? No. Nor as yet for her, it may be. Every morning I have placed upon my table not only the newspapers that affect her interests to-day . . . and they

pile high . . . but also those of the same day and date of five and twenty years ago . . . no more than that. But the comparison is instructive. And one thing is certain. Burrows and the ready-made skirt belong to the dead past.

[WINDLESHAM, *pins in his mouth, fashion plates under his arm, and the fish-basket hat in his hand, shoots out of the other room.*

WINDLESHAM. Will you have the others in now? [*Then back through the door*] Allons, Mes'moiselles, si vous plaît. Numéro cinq le premier. [*Then he turns the hat upside down on the table.*] You see they left the handles on. But I don't know if we'd better. A bit outré . . .what?

[*There sails in now no end of a creation.*

WINDLESHAM [*as he searches for the design*]. Numéro cinq . . . number five. [THOMAS *is much struck.*

THOMAS. I say . . . by Jove!

[*But it is not meant for this cold searching light which seems to separate from the glittering pink affair the poor, pretty smiling creature exhibiting it, until she looks half naked.* MR WINDLESHAM'S *æsthetic sense is outraged.*

WINDLESHAM. Mais non, mäis non . . . pas en plein jour. C'est pour un petit souper très particulier, n'est-ce pas? Mettez-vous par là dans le . . . dans l'alcove . . . à côté du velours noir. They won't learn English; they simply won't. Lucky the lingo's like second nature to me.

[*The costume undulates towards the black velvet platform.* THOMAS *is lost in admiration.*

THOMAS. That gives her a chance. Damn pretty girl.

PHILIP [*his eyes twinkling*]. But she'll understand that, Tommy.

THOMAS [*in good faith*]. She won't mind.

MR STATE [*who has been studying the undulations*]. But what eloquence of movement!

PHILIP. Eloquence itself!

[MR WINDLESHAM *turns on the frame of lights which bear upon the velvet platform. The vision of female loveliness is now complete.*

WINDLESHAM. There . . . that's the coup d'œil.

[*The vision turns this way and that to show what curves of loveliness there may be. They watch, all but* CONSTANTINE, *who has sat silent and indifferent, rolling his second cigarette, which he now smokes serenely. At last* PHILIP'S *voice breaks in, at its coolest, its most ironic.*

PHILIP. And this also is woman expressing herself? Rather an awful thought!

THOMAS [*in protest*]. Why?

PHILIP. Does it express your view of her, Tommy?

THOMAS. It's damned smart.

MR HUXTABLE [*who is examining closely*]. No use to us, of course. We couldn't imitate this under fifteen guineas.

THOMAS [*with discretion*]. Would it spoil the effect now if you had the shiny stuff making it a bit clearer where the pink silk ends and she begins, so to speak?

MR HUXTABLE [*not to be sordid*]. But it's a beautiful thing!

MR STATE. Yes, Mr Huxtable, and the question is: Do we accept the gospel of beauty, or do we not?

WINDLESHAM. But the trouble I'll have to prevent some old hag of seventy buying a thing like that . . . you'd never believe.

[*He turns off the light. The vision becomes once more an expensive dress, with a rather thin and shivering young person half inside it, who is thus unceremoniously got rid of.*

WINDLESHAM. Numéro sept. [*Another costume.*

MR STATE. Now here again. Green velvet. Is it velvet?

WINDLESHAM. Charmeuse. Promenez, s'il vous plaît.

MR STATE. And ermine . . . Royal Ermine!

MR HUXTABLE. Good Lord . . . more ribbon!

MR STATE. And this for the adorning of some Queen of the Salons. You are doubtless acquainted with the novels of the Earl of Beaconsfield, Mr Philip?

PHILIP. I have been.

MR STATE. Now might not that costume step into or out of any one of them? A great man. A man of imagination. He brought your country to a viewpoint of Imperial . . . of Oriental splendour from which it has not receded. Yes . . . some one of your statesmen . . . some soldier of Empire will, we may hope, find repose from his cares and fresh ardour for his ambitions there!

WINDLESHAM. Numéro dix.

[*The last mannequin, attired in dressing-gown and pyjamas, now appears.*

PHILIP. Or even here.

MR STATE. Or even . . . ! No . . . at this point my judgment stands disabled. Still . . . why not be attractive en intimité? Her household motions light and free . . . Wordsworth, I think. Our human nature's daily food . . . an unromantic simile. Why now should it not be bright as well as good?

CONSTANTINE. You are something of a poet yourself, Mr State.

MR STATE. I never wrote one in my life, sir.

CONSTANTINE. How many poets would do well to change their scribbling for the living of such an epic as your purchase of the Madras House promises to be!

MR STATE [*immensely gratified*]. Sir, I shall be proud to be your successor. But you were for the Old Régime. It is the middle-class woman of England that I see waiting for me. Literature and journalism have laid the train. Beneath the surface of a workaday life her own imagination is now smouldering . . . though too often she still sits at the parlour window of her provincial villa pensively

gazing through the laurel bushes . . . as I have seen her on my solitary walks. She too must have her chance to dazzle and conquer. That is every woman's birthright . . . be she duchess in Mayfair . . . or doctor's wife or baker's daughter in the suburbs of Leicester. And remember, gentlemen, that the middle-class woman of England, as of America . . . think of her in bulk . . . is potentially the greatest money-spending machine in the world.

MR HUXTABLE [*with a wag of his head; he is more at his ease now*]. Yes . . . her husband's money.

MR STATE. A sociologist will tell you, sir, that economic freedom is the inevitable sequel to the political freedom that women have now gained. And I suggest to you that any increased demand for spending power which will urge the middle-class husband to resist the financial encroachments of your proletariat . . . for something must be made to . . . may contribute largely to the salvation of your country.

MR HUXTABLE [*overwhelmed, as well he may be*]. Oh . . . I beg pardon.

MR STATE [*soaring, ever soaring*]. But the seed sown and the soil of their sweet natures tilled . . . what mighty forest, what luxuriant, tropical, scented growth of womanhood may not spring up around? For we live in an ugly world. Look at my vest. Consider your tie, Major Thomas. [*His eye searches for those costumes and finds one.*] But here is living beauty . . . and we want more of it, much, much more! Think of the residential sections of your cities and contradict me if you can. I mean to help that poor provincial lady to burst through the laurel bushes and dash down the road . . . clad like the Rainbow.

[*For* MR WINDLESHAM *had detained this one young lady. She has been standing there, the accustomed smile hardly masking a wonder into what*

peculiar company of milliners she has fallen. But MAJOR THOMAS, *his attention called to her, now jumps up to offer his chair.*

THOMAS. I say, though . . . allow me.

WINDLESHAM. Oh, thanks no end . . . but they never sit.

MR STATE. Dear me . . . I had not intended to detain mademoiselle. [*Then, to mend his manners, and as if it were an incantation to that end.*] Bon jour.

[*The young lady departs, a real smile shaming the unreal.*

WINDLESHAM. D'you notice there hasn't been a mode you could sit in to advantage these fifteen years? But with a couch, y'know, we might get a sort of mermaid effect out of some of them.

MR STATE. I do clean forget they are there. We gave some time and money to elaborating a mechanical moving figure to take the place of . . . a real automaton, in fact. But sometimes it stuck and sometimes it ran away.

THOMAS. And the cost!

PHILIP [*finely*]. Flesh and blood is always cheaper.

MR STATE. But it would have provided every Burrows House with a complete series of the ideal figure from youth to age. Do you regret the days of the corset, Mr Windlesham, may I ask?

WINDLESHAM. Well, I'm not sure I don't. Line's my problem. And . . . oh woman, woman! . . . she'll fuss over her face by the hour . . . but her figure's up to me. And the embonpoint I have to get away with! All the really nice women seem to eat too much. Sometimes, I tell you, I could cry!

MR STATE. Did you ever delve into the psychology of the corset? A while ago I had a young historian write Burrows a little monograph on corsets . . . price one shilling. Out of date now . . . for it summed up in their favour. And we made a small museum of them

. . . at Southampton, I think . . . but it was not a success. Major Thomas, we must send Mr Windlesham a copy of that monograph. You will find it suggestive.

WINDLESHAM. Oh, thanks too awfully . . . I'm sure I shall. Send it me to the farm, will you, Thomas? I do my serious reading there, week-ends.

MR STATE. You have a farm?

WINDLESHAM. Just a toy . . . but thank God for it! I'd be a nervous wreck with my mind on this all the time. Nature's my passion. Can I assist you any further?

PHILIP. See me before you go.

WINDLESHAM. Then it's only au'voir.

[*And he flutters away. There is a pause as if they had to recollect where they were. It is broken by* PHILIP *saying meditatively* . . .

PHILIP. I sometimes wonder, though, what this fruit of all our labours, the well-dressed woman . . . what the creature really would look like to an uncorrupted eye. Costume . . . let it alone . . . may evolve in utility and beauty. A cowboy, a Swiss guide, an Arab in his burnous! But we deal in fashions . . . in hats too elaborate to stay on, or so simple that they extinguish sight and hearing . . . in shoes as useful and as dignified as stilts are . . . and in skirts that are neither bond nor free. And even fashion may not find its own salvation. Every season we must give it some new tweak that will leave last year's dresses looking dowdy. What can the result be, then . . . in either utility or beauty?

MR STATE. Mr Philip . . . that opens up a world of thought . . .

MR HUXTABLE. Don't you be too clever, Phil.

MR STATE. . . . and recalls to me a project I once entertained for the founding at one of our more conservative universities of a chair of the Philosophy of Fashion. Major Thomas, will you remind me to consider that again?

MR HUXTABLE. Talk won't bring dividends . . . that's what I say.

MR STATE. A fallacy, Mr Huxtable, if I may so far correct you. Lift your head, broaden your horizon, and you will see, I think, that all human activities are one. And what we men of business should remember is that art, philosophy, and religion can and should, in the widest sense of the term, be made to pay. And it's pay or perish, in this world.

MR HUXTABLE. A pretty frock's a pretty frock. What more is there to it?

THOMAS. A lot of English women at Ascot, Goodwood, the Eton and Harrow. . . . I'll back it for the finest sight going.

PHILIP. Have you ever seen an Eastern woman walk through the crowd at Claridge's?

THOMAS. No.

PHILIP [*forcefully*]. I did, the other day.

CONSTANTINE. Ah!

[*With one long meditative exhalation he sends a little column of smoke into the air.* MR STATE *turns to him deferentially.*

MR STATE. But we are boring you, Mr Madras, I fear. You were Facile Princeps upon all these questions so long ago. [CONSTANTINE *speaks in the smoothest of voices.*

CONSTANTINE. No, I am not bored, Mr State. Somewhat horrified.

MR STATE. Why so?

CONSTANTINE. You see . . . I am a Mahommedan . . . and this attitude towards the other sex has become loathsome to me.

[*This bombshell, so delicately exploded, affects the company very variously. It will be some time before* MR HUXTABLE *grasps its meaning at all.* THOMAS *simply opens his mouth.* MR STATE *has evidently found a new joy in life.* PHILIP,

to whom it seems no news, merely says in light protest . . .

PHILIP. My dear father!

MR STATE [*as he beams round*]. A real Mahommedan?

CONSTANTINE. I have become a Mahommedan. If you were not, it would be inconvenient to live permanently at Hit . . . a village in Mesopotamia which is my home. Besides, I was converted.

THOMAS [*having recovered enough breath*]. I didn't know you could become a Mahommedan.

CONSTANTINE [*with some severity*]. You can become a Christian, sir.

THOMAS [*a little shocked*]. Ah . . . not quite the same thing.

MR STATE [*who feels that he really is rediscovering the old world*]. But how very interesting! To a broad-minded man . . . how extraordinarily interesting! Was it a sudden conversion?

CONSTANTINE. No. . . . I had been searching for a religion . . . a common need in these times . . . and this is a very fine one, Mr State.

MR STATE. Is it? I must look it up. The Koran! Yes, I've never read the Koran . . . an oversight.

[*He makes a mental note. And slowly, slowly the full iniquity of it has sunk into* MR HUXTABLE. *His face has gone from red to white and back again to red. He becomes articulate and vehement. He thumps the table.*

MR HUXTABLE. And what about Amelia?

MR STATE [*with conciliatory calm*]. Who is Amelia?

PHILIP. Afterwards, Uncle.

MR HUXTABLE [*thumping again*]. What about your wife? No, I won't be quiet, Phil! It's illegal.

CONSTANTINE [*with a half-cold, half-kindly eye on him*]. Harry . . . I shall hate to see you make yourself ridiculous. [*Only this was needed.*

MR HUXTABLE. Who cares if I'm ridiculous? I've not spoken to you for thirty years . . . have I? That is . . . I've not taken more notice of you than I could help. And I come here to-day full of forgiveness . . . and curiosity . . . to see what you're really like now . . . and whether I've changed my mind . . . or whether I never really felt all that about you at all . . . and damned if you don't go and put up a fresh game on me! What about Amelia? Religion this time! Mahommedan, indeed . . . at your age! Can't you ever settle down? I beg your pardon, Mr State. All right, Phil, afterwards! I've not done . . . but you're quite right . . . afterwards.

[*The gust over,* MR STATE, *who is a little be-blown by it at such close quarters, says, partly with a peace-making intention, partly in curiosity* . . .

MR STATE. But do you indulge in a harem?

[MR HUXTABLE *is on his feet, righteously strepitant.*

MR HUXTABLE. If you insult my sister by answering that question . . . !

[*With a look and a gesture* CONSTANTINE *can silence him. Then with the coldest dignity he replies* . . .

CONSTANTINE. My household, sir, is that of the ordinary Eastern gentleman of my position. We do not speak of our women in public.

MR STATE. I'm sure I beg your pardon.

CONSTANTINE. Not at all. It is five years since I definitely retired from business and decided to consummate my affection for the East by settling down there. This final visit to Europe . . . though partly to see you, Mr State . . . was to confirm my judgment in the matter.

MR STATE. Has it?

CONSTANTINE. It has. I was always out of place amongst you. I have been reproached with scandalous conduct. . . . [*A slight stir from* MR HUXTABLE.] Hush,

Harry . . . hush! I do not altogether admit . . . and I never could see my way to amend it. It is therefore some slight satisfaction to me to discover now . . . with a stranger's eye . . . that Europe in its attitude towards women is mad.

MR STATE. Mad!

CONSTANTINE. Mad.

THOMAS [*who is all ears*]. I say!

CONSTANTINE. You possibly agree with me, Major Thomas.

THOMAS [*much taken aback*]. No . . . I don't think so.

CONSTANTINE. Many men do, but . . . poor fellows! . . . they dare not say so. For instance, Mr State, what can be said of a community in which five men of ability and dignity are met together to traffic in . . . what was the number of that aphrodisiac that so particularly attracted Major Thomas?

[THOMAS *is shocked even to violence.*

THOMAS. No . . . really . . . I protest . . . !

MR STATE [*utterly calm*]. Easy, Major Thomas. Let us consider the accusation philosophically. [*Then with the sweetest smile*] Surely that is a gross construction to put on the instinct of every beautiful woman to adorn herself.

CONSTANTINE. Please don't mistake me. I delight in pretty women prettily adorned. To come home after a day's work to the welcome of one's women-folk . . . to find them unharassed by notions of business or politics . . . ready to refresh one's spirit by attuning it to a sweeter, more emotional side of life . . .

THOMAS [*making hearty atonement*]. Ah, quite so . . . quite so.

CONSTANTINE. I thought you would agree with me, Major Thomas. That is the Mahommedan gentleman's domestic ideal.

THOMAS [*brought up short*]. Is it?

CONSTANTINE. But the intention of a costume is

everything . . . and that one's intention was pretty clear. If a husband found his wife wearing it . . .

THOMAS. Well . . . that was a going-out dress.

PHILIP [*greatly enjoying this contest*]. Oh . . . Tommy! Tommy!

THOMAS [*rounding for a moment upon* PHILIP]. What's the matter? I tell you . . . if a woman always kept herself smart and attractive at home a man would have no excuse for gadding about after other women.

[MR HUXTABLE *joins in the fray, suddenly, snappily.*

MR HUXTABLE. She sits looking after his children. What more does he want of her?

CONSTANTINE. Harry, now, is a born husband, Major Thomas.

MR HUXTABLE. I'm not a born libertine, I hope.

THOMAS. Oh . . . libertine be dashed!

MR STATE [*pacifically*]. Gentlemen, gentlemen . . . these are abstract propositions.

MR HUXTABLE. Gadding after another man's wife, perhaps! Though I don't think you ever did that, Constantine . . . I'll do you justice . . . I don't think you ever did.

PHILIP [*with intense mischief*]. Oh, Tommy, Tommy . . . can you say the same?

[THOMAS *is really flabbergasted at the indecency.*

THOMAS. Phil, that ain't nice . . . that ain't kind. And I wasn't thinking of that, and you know I wasn't. And . . . we ain't all so unattractive to women as you are. [MR STATE *loses himself in enjoyment of this repartee.*

MR STATE. Ah . . . sour grapes, Mr Philip. We mustn't be personal . . . but is it sour grapes?

PHILIP [*very coolly on his defence*]. Thank you, Tommy . . . I can do all the attracting I want to do.

[*That is the end of that little breeze, and* CONSTANTINE'S *voice completes the quieting.*

CONSTANTINE. My son is a cold-blooded egotist. His way with a woman is to coax her on to the intellectual

plane, where he thinks he can better her. My sympathies are with Major Thomas. I also am as susceptible as Nature means a man to be . . . and as all women must wish him to be. And I referred to these going-out dresses because, candidly, I found myself obliged to leave a country where women are let loose with money to spend and time to waste. Where the law and what is called chivalry protect them in their most shameless provocations . . . where they flaunt and flout you in the very streets, proud if they see the busmen wink . . .

MR HUXTABLE. Not busmen!

[*But he is only gently deprecating now.*

CONSTANTINE. Let him but veil his leering, my dear Harry, and the lousiest beggar's tribute is but one more coin in the pocket of their shame.

[*To* MR STATE *this might be a physical flick in the face. But* MR HUXTABLE *looks round and nods solemnly and thoughtfully.*

MR HUXTABLE. Now there's no need to put it that way . . . and I'd deny it any other time. But I've been thinking a bit lately . . . and the things you think of once you start to think! And there's something in that. [*But with great chivalry*] Only they don't know they do it. They don't know they do it. [*Then, a doubt occurring*] D'you think they know they do it, Phil?

PHILIP. Some of them may suspect, Uncle.

MR HUXTABLE [*his faith unspoiled*]. No, what I say is it's instinct . . . and we've just got to be as nice-minded about it as we can. There was Julia, this summer at Weymouth . . . that's one of my daughters. Bought herself a dress . . . not one of the Numéro sort, of course . . . but very pretty . . . orange colour, it was . . . stripes. But you could see it a mile off on the parade . . . and her sisters all with their noses out of joint. I said to myself . . . instinct.

[*Suddenly* MR STATE *rescues the discussion.*

MR STATE. Yes, sir . . . the noblest instinct of all . . . the instinct to perpetuate our race. Let us take high ground in this matter, gentlemen.

CONSTANTINE [*unstirred*]. The very highest, Mr State. If you think that to turn Weymouth for a month a year into a cockpit of haphazard love-making . . . and baulked love-making at that, most of it . . . with the various consequences this entails, is the best way of perpetuating your race . . . well, I disagree with you . . . but it's a point of view. What I ask now is why Major Thomas and myself . . . already perhaps in a creditable state of marital perpetuation . . . should have our busy London lives obsessed by . . . What is this thing?

PHILIP. La belle Hélène's new hat, Father.

CONSTANTINE. Now, that may be ugly . . . I hope I never made anything quite so ugly myself . . . but it's attractive.

PHILIP [*with a wry face*]. No, Father.

CONSTANTINE. Isn't it, Major Thomas?

THOMAS [*honestly*]. Well . . . it makes you look at 'em when you might not otherwise.

CONSTANTINE. As I say . . . it's provocative. Its intention is that the world's work shall not be done while it's about. And when it's about I honestly confess again I cannot do my share. A terrible thing to be constantly conscious of women! They have their uses . . . as you so happily phrased it, Mr State . . . their perpetual use . . . and the world's interest is best served by keeping them strictly to it. For are these provocative ladies [*he fingers the hat again*] so remarkable for perpetuation nowadays?

[*Once more* MR STATE *bursts in; this time with heartbroken eloquence.*

MR STATE. I can't bear this, sir . . . I can't bear to have you take such a view of life. It's reactionary . . . you're on the wrong tack . . . oh, believe me! Come

back to us, sir. You gave us joy and pleasure . . . can we do without such pleasure and such joy? But find yourself once more among the Loveliness you made more Lovely and you'll change your mind. How did that story of the Duchess end? When, on the appointed night, attired in her Madras Creation she swept into the Ballroom with a frou-frou of silk skirt . . . wafting perfume as she came . . . while her younger rivals paled before the splendour of her beauty, and every man in the room . . . young and old . . . struggled for a glimpse . . . for one word from her . . . one look. [*Once again he starts to soar.*] A ballroom, sir . . . one of the sweetest sights in the world! Where bright the lamps shine o'er Fair Women and Brave Men. Music arises with its Voluptuous Swell. Soft eyes look Love to eyes which speak again. And all goes merry as a Marriage Bell! Byron, gentlemen . . . taught me at my mother's knee. The poet of Love and Liberty . . . read in every school in America!

[*At the end of this recitation, which* MR HUXTABLE *barely refrains from applauding,* CONSTANTINE *goes coolly on.*

CONSTANTINE. Yes, Mr State, that is my case . . . and you plead it admirably. The whole of our upper class life, which every one with a say in the government of the country must now lead . . . is run as a ballroom is run. Men swaggering before women . . . the women ogling the men. Once a lad did have some preliminary training in manliness. But now from the very start . . . ! And in your own progressive country . . . mixed education . . . oh, my dear sir . . . mixed education!

MR STATE. A softening influence.

CONSTANTINE [*unexpectedly*]. Of course it is. And what has all education sunk to nowadays? To book-learning. Because woman's a dab at that . . . though it's of quite secondary importance to a man.

THOMAS [*feelingly*]. That's so.

CONSTANTINE. And to the exercise of moral influence . . . of woman's morality . . . the pettiest code ever framed. And now, with a new divorce law, you've given them, if you please, a legal title to jealousy. Wait a few years till their purses are fuller . . . and, by God, gentlemen, they'll make you smart for that.

PHILIP. Yes, I think they will.

CONSTANTINE. And at every university . . . what with women students, married professors and their family luncheons . . . ! Heavens above us . . . no respectable woman under sixty should be let within ten miles of any university. From seventeen to thirty-four . . . these are the years a man should consecrate to the acquiring of political virtue. Wherever he turns is he to be distracted, provoked, tantalized by the barefaced presence of women? How's he to keep a clear brain for the larger issues of life? Why do you soldiers, Major Thomas, volunteer with such alacrity for foreign service?

THOMAS [*with a jump*]. Good Lord . . . I never thought of that.

CONSTANTINE. What's the result? We view all our problems to-day . . . political, economic, religious, through the cloudy spectacles of womanly emotion . . . which has its place . . . but not, heaven help us, in the world of affairs. What wonder, then, that your labouring men, who can keep their womenkind to child-bearing and housework and gossip within doors . . . what wonder if they get the government from you? You, at your luncheon and dinner tables, the news in your newspapers dressed up as fiction, your statesmen and soldiers pursued at their work to fill picture pages, your week-ends where women out-gamble you at cards, play up to you at sport, out-do you in the ribaldry of the smoking-room! An effete empire is yours, gentlemen . . . and the barbarian

with his pick and shovel and his man's capacities is over its frontiers already. And what has been your defence against him? Soft talk and scoldings . . . coaxings and hysterics . . . and pretty dialectic trickery that your women have applauded. How they'll despise you soon for it! You four unfortunates might own the truth just for once . . . you needn't tell your wives. . . .

MR STATE. I am not married.

CONSTANTINE. I might have known that.

MR STATE [*a little astonished*]. But no matter.

CONSTANTINE [*with full appreciation of what he says*]. Women haven't morals or intellect in our sense of the words. Shut them away from public life and public exhibition. It's degrading to compete with them, or for them. I fear, I greatly fear it is too late . . . but oh, my dear sentimental Sir [*he addresses the pained though admiring* MR STATE], replant the laurel bushes, and thickly . . . and we might yet recover strength to hold our place in the world.

[*Except* PHILIP, *who sits detached and attentive, they are all rather depressed by this judgment upon them.* THOMAS *recovers sufficiently to ask* . . .

THOMAS. Are you advocating polygamy in England?

CONSTANTINE. That would be a part of the solution.

THOMAS. A pretty shocking idea, you know. [*Then with some hopeful interest*] And is it practical?

CONSTANTINE. I did not foresee even so much reform in my lifetime . . . so I left for the East.

PHILIP [*finely*]. You did quite right, Father. Why don't your many unavowed disciples do the same?

[CONSTANTINE *is ready for him.*

CONSTANTINE. Now think, Philip, think! See things as they are and not as you wish them to be. Who, Mr State, in your country, took most kindly to Mormonism,

for all its vulgarity? Not men. Think of the women who'd change the West for the East and be off with me to-morrow.

[MR HUXTABLE *wakes at last from stupefaction to say with tremendous emphasis.* . . .

MR HUXTABLE. Never.

CONSTANTINE. Wrong, Harry!

MR HUXTABLE. No, I'm not wrong just because you say so! You ought to listen to me a bit sometimes. I always listened to you.

CONSTANTINE. Bless your quick temper!

[*Who could resist* CONSTANTINE'S *smile? Not* HARRY HUXTABLE.

MR HUXTABLE. Oh . . . go on . . . tell me why I'm wrong . . . I daresay I am.

CONSTANTINE. Harry, you have six daughters, neither married, nor now with much hope to be. Even if you like that . . . do they? You'd better have drowned them at birth.

MR HUXTABLE. You must have your joke, mustn't you?

CONSTANTINE. How much pleasanter then for you . . . and how much better for them . . . if you could still find a man ready for some small consideration to marry the lot!

MR HUXTABLE [*with intense delight*]. Now if I was to tell my wife that she wouldn't see the umour of it.

CONSTANTINE. The woman emancipator's last ditch, Mr State, is the trust that women . . . their eyes open . . . will side with him. Make no mistake. This is a serious question to them . . . of health and happiness . . . if not of bread and butter. Rule out our customers here, who are kept women nearly every one of them. . . .

MR STATE [*in some alarm*]. You don't say.

CONSTANTINE [*gently lifting him from the little trap*].

Kept by their husbands. Or somehow kept . . . in return for what they are, not for what they do . . . by Society.

MR STATE. Culture demands a leisure class, you know.

CONSTANTINE. But, as I remember, we used to employ, Harry, between us . . . what? . . . two or three hundred free and independent women . . . making clothes for the others, the ladies . . . selling them finery. As free as you like . . . free to go . . . free to starve. Did they rejoice in that freedom to earn their living by ruining their health and stifling their instincts? Answer me, Harry, you monster of good-natured wickedness.

MR HUXTABLE. What's that?

CONSTANTINE. You keep an industrial seraglio.

MR HUXTABLE. A what!

CONSTANTINE. What is your Roberts and Huxtable but a harem of industry? Yet the sight of it would sicken with horror a good Mahommedan. You buy these girls in the open market . . . you keep them under lock and key. . . .

MR HUXTABLE. I do?

CONSTANTINE. Yes, Harry, and no harm's done yet. [*Then his voice sinks to the utmost seriousness.*] But you coin your profits out of them by putting on exhibition for ten hours a day their good looks, their good manners . . . hire it out to any stranger to hold as cheap for a few minutes as his good manners may allow. And then . . . then! . . . once you've worn them out you turn them out . . . forget their very names . . . wouldn't know their faces if you met them selling matches at your door. For such treatment of potential motherhood my Prophet condemns a man to Hell.

MR HUXTABLE [*breathless with amazement*]. Well, I never did in all my born days! They can marry respectably, can't they? We like 'em to marry.

PHILIP. Yes, Uncle . . . I went into that question with Miss Yates and the Brigstocks this morning.

CONSTANTINE [*completing his case*]. So I ask you . . . what is to happen to you as a nation? What of your future generations? Between the well-kept women you flatter and æstheticize till they won't give you children and the women you let labour till they can't give you children. . . .

MR HUXTABLE [*half humorously sulky*]. Miss Yates has obliged us anyhow.

PHILIP [*quickly capping him*]. And we're going to dismiss her. [MR HUXTABLE *flashes again into protestation.*

MR HUXTABLE. What else can we do? But I said you weren't to be hard on the girl. And I won't be upset like this. I like to take things as I find 'em . . . that is as I used to find 'em . . . before there was any of these ideas going around . . . and I'm sure we were happier. Stifling their instincts . . . it's a horrid way to talk. And I don't believe it. I could send for every girl in the shop and not one of 'em would hint at it to me. [*He has triumphed with himself so far; but his new-born intellectual conscience brings him down.*] Not that that proves anything, does it? I'm a fool. It's a beastly world. But I don't make it so, do I?

PHILIP. Who does?

MR HUXTABLE. Other people. [PHILIP'S *eye is on him.*] Oh, I see it coming. You're going to say we're all the other people or something. I'm getting up to you.

CONSTANTINE [*very carefully*]. What is this about a Miss Yates?

PHILIP. A little bother down at Peckham. I'll tell you about it afterwards.

CONSTANTINE. No . . . no need.

[*Something in the tone of this last makes* PHILIP *look up quickly. But* MR STATE, *with a sudden*

thought, has first dived for his watch and then at the sight of it gets up from the table.

MR STATE. Gentlemen, are you aware of the time? I may mention that I have a City appointment at four o'clock.

CONSTANTINE [*polite but leisurely*]. Are we detaining you, Mr State? Not universal or compulsory polygamy, Major Thomas. I should never advocate that. For one thing the distribution of the sexes forbids it. But its recognition in principle is a logical outcome of the aristocratic method of government. And that's the only ultimate method . . . all others are interim plans for sifting out aristocracies. The community of the future will be wise, I think, to specialize its functions, so that women may find, if they so wish, intellectual companions like my son . . . who will then be free to dedicate their emotions to municipal politics. There will still be single-hearted men like Harry, content with old-fashioned domesticity. There will be poets like you, Mr State, to dream about women and to dress them . . . their bodies in silks and their virtues in phrases. But there must also be such men as Major Thomas and myself. . . .

[THOMAS *rises, yet again, to this piece of chaff.*

THOMAS. No, no, I'm not like that . . . not in the least. Don't drag me in.

MR STATE. As stimulating a conversation as I remember. A little hard to follow at times . . . but worth the sacrifice of any mere business talk.

[CONSTANTINE *takes the hint graciously and is apt for business at once.*

CONSTANTINE. My fault! Shall we agree, Mr State, to accept as much of your offer as you have no intention of altering? We are dealing for both the shops?

MR STATE. Yes. What are we proposing to knock off their valuation, Major Thomas?

THOMAS. Eight thousand six hundred.

CONSTANTINE. Phil, what were we prepared to come down?

PHILIP. Nine thousand.

CONSTANTINE. A very creditable margin. Your offer is accepted, Mr State.

[MR STATE *feels he must really play up to such magnificent conducting of business.*

MR STATE. Sir, I should prefer to knock you down only eight thousand.

CONSTANTINE [*keeping the advantage*]. Isn't that rather too romantic of you, Mr State?

THOMAS. But the conditions?

CONSTANTINE. We accept your conditions. If they won't work you'll be only too anxious to alter them. So the business is done. [MR HUXTABLE'S *eyes are wide.*

MR HUXTABLE. But look here.

PHILIP. Uncle Harry has something to say. . . .

MR HUXTABLE [*assertively*]. Yes.

CONSTANTINE. Something different to say, Harry?

MR HUXTABLE [*after thinking it over*]. No.

[*So* CONSTANTINE *returns happily to his subject.*

CONSTANTINE. What interests me about this Woman Question . . . now that I've settled my personal share in it . . . is to wonder how Europe, hampered by such an unsolved problem, can hope to stand up against the Oriental revival.

THOMAS. Ah, there've been some newspaper articles about that lately.

CONSTANTINE. Doubtless. It has been intellectual currency for a good many years. Up from the Persian Gulf, now, to where I live we could grow enough wheat to feed the British Empire. Life there is simple and spacious . . . the air is not breathed out. All we want is a happy, hardy race of men . . . and under a government that can profit by your scientific achievements and

not be seduced by your social and political follies we shall soon beget it. But you Europeans! Is this the symbol under which you are facing the future? [*He has found again and lifts up la belle Hélène's new hat.*] A cap of slavery! You are idolaters of women . . . and they are the slaves of your idolatry.

MR STATE [*with glowing admiration*]. Mr Madras, I am proud to have met you again. My coat? Thank you, Mr Philip. I must now prepare to consider the intricacies of a new system of country house sanitation I am about to finance. No poetry there, I fear.

CONSTANTINE. Sanitation? Your great American science . . . by which you foster your conglomerate millions in health . . . with folly enough in their heads to provide for the needful catastrophe when you become overcrowded.

MR STATE. Admirable! I dispute its truth. But how stimulating! Good-bye, sir. Ah, if you'd only travel West instead of East we'd find you audiences. A lecture tour . . . why not? Good-day, Mr Huxtable. Till to-morrow, Major Thomas. No, Mr Philip, I can find my way. What a mind . . . what an imagination! America could have given it scope. . . .

PHILIP. Your car's at the George Street entrance, I expect. . . .

[MR STATE *is off for his next deal.* PHILIP, *having civilly taken him past the door, comes back.* CONSTANTINE *is keeping half a friendly eye on* HUXTABLE, *who fidgets under it.* THOMAS *takes breath and expounds a grievance.*

THOMAS. That's how he does business . . . and leaves us all the real work. I shall take the papers home. The four-thirty gets me indoors by a quarter to six. Time for a cup of tea! Phil, have you got China tea?

PHILIP. Downstairs.

MR HUXTABLE. I must be getting back.

CONSTANTINE. Running away from me, Harry?

MR HUXTABLE [*in frank amused confession*]. Yes . . . I was. Habit, y'know . . . habit.

CONSTANTINE [*with the most friendly condescension*]. I'll go with you . . . part of the way. How do you go?

MR HUXTABLE. On a bus.

CONSTANTINE. We'll go together . . . on a bus. D'you remember when the new shop opened how we loved to ride past and look at it . . . from the top of the bus?

MR HUXTABLE [*desperately cunning*]. Well . . . they won't see me. We don't close till seven.

[CONSTANTINE'S *face sours.*

CONSTANTINE. No, to be sure. Phil, I shan't be with you for dinner, I'm afraid.

PHILIP. Oh, that reminds me . . . Mother's coming. You know the tea-room, Tommy?

THOMAS [*all tact*]. Oh, quite!

PHILIP. Straight downstairs, first to the left and the second passage. I'll follow.

[THOMAS *departs.* CONSTANTINE *says indifferently . . .*

CONSTANTINE. After dinner, then.

PHILIP. But you don't mind?

CONSTANTINE. Not at all.

[*There stands* MR HUXTABLE, *first on one foot and then on the other, still desperately nervous.* CONSTANTINE *smiling at him.* PHILIP *cannot resist it. He says . . .*

PHILIP. Now's your chance, Uncle. Stand up for Denmark Hill.

[*And is off.* CONSTANTINE *still smiles. Poor* MR HUXTABLE *makes a desperate effort to do the proper thing by this reprobate. He forms his face into a frown. It's no use; an answering smile will come. He surrenders.*

MR HUXTABLE. All right! Who cares? Never mind Amelia!

CONSTANTINE. No . . . at least the past is past.

MR HUXTABLE. Still . . . what else has a chap got to think of?

CONSTANTINE. That's why you look so old.

MR HUXTABLE. Do I?

CONSTANTINE. What age are you? I forget.

MR HUXTABLE. Sixty-three.

[*The two sit down together.*

CONSTANTINE. I'm your senior. You should come and stay with me for a little at Hit . . . not far from Hillel . . . Hillel is Babylon, Harry.

MR HUXTABLE [*curious*]. What's it like there?

CONSTANTINE. The house is white and there are palm trees about it . . . and not far off flows the Euphrates.

MR HUXTABLE. Just like in the Bible. [*His face is wistful.*] Constantine.

CONSTANTINE. Yes?

MR HUXTABLE. You've said odder things this afternoon than I've ever heard you say before.

CONSTANTINE. Time was when you wouldn't listen, Harry.

MR HUXTABLE [*wondering*]. And I haven't really minded 'em. It's the first time I've ever seemed to understand you . . . and p'raps that's as well for me.

CONSTANTINE [*encouragingly*]. Oh . . . why?

MR HUXTABLE. Because . . . d'you think it's only not being very clever keeps us . . . straight?

CONSTANTINE. Has it kept you happy?

MR HUXTABLE [*impatient at the petty word*]. Anyone can be happy. What worries me is having got to my age and only just beginning to understand anything at all. And you can't learn it out of books, old man. Books don't tell you the truth . . . at least not any I can

find. I wonder now, if I'd been a bit of a dog like you . . . ! But there it is . . . you can't do things that aren't in you to do. And what's more, don't you go to think I'd have done them if I could . . . knowing them to be wrong. [*Then comes a discovery.*] But I was always a bit jealous of you, Constantine, that's the truth . . . for you seemed to get the best of everything . . . and I know people couldn't help being fond of you . . . for I was fond of you myself, whatever you did. That was odd to start with. And now here we are, both of us old chaps. . . .

CONSTANTINE [*as he throws back his head*]. I am not old.

MR HUXTABLE [*with sudden misgiving*]. You don't repent, do you?

CONSTANTINE. What of?

MR HUXTABLE. Katherine said this morning that you might have . . . but I wasn't afraid of that. But when I think how, ever since I've known you, you've had us all on the jump . . . and the games you've played . . . why, of course you ought to be ashamed of yourself. Still . . . well . . . it's like the only time I went abroad. I was sick going . . . I was orribly uncomfortable . . . I ated the cooking . . . I was sick coming back. But I wouldn't have missed it . . . !

CONSTANTINE [*in affectionate good-fellowship*]. Come to Arabia, Harry.

MR HUXTABLE [*humorously pathetic about it*]. Don't you make game of me. My time's over. What have I done with it now? Married. Brought up a family. Been master to a few hundred girls and fellows who never really cared a bit for me. I've been made a convenience of . . . that's my life. That's where I envy you. You have had your own way . . . and, for all the trouble of it, it must have been exciting . . . and you don't look now as if you'd be damned for it either.

CONSTANTINE [*in gentlemanly defiance*]. I shan't be.

[MR HUXTABLE *shakes a fist, somewhat, though unconsciously, in the direction of the ceiling.*

MR HUXTABLE. Well . . . that's not fair, and I don't care who hears me say so.

CONSTANTINE. Life isn't fair, dear Harry. And if it were it wouldn't be life.

[*As they start,* MR HUXTABLE *returns to his mundane responsible self.*

MR HUXTABLE. But you know, old man . . . it's all very well having theories and being able to talk . . . still, you did treat Amelia pretty badly . . . and those other ones too . . . say what you like! Let go my arm!

CONSTANTINE. Why?

MR HUXTABLE [*his scruples less strong than the soft touch of* CONSTANTINE'S *hand*]. Well . . . are you really going away for good this time?

CONSTANTINE. To-morrow.

MR HUXTABLE [*beaming on him*]. Then come on home and have a talk to Mother and the girls.

[MAJOR THOMAS *comes back, looking about him.*

THOMAS. Excuse me . . . I left my hat.

CONSTANTINE. Dare you, Harry, dare you?

MR HUXTABLE. Well . . . you must mind what you say, of course. But . . . I would like to have us all thinking a bit differently of you when you're gone.

CONSTANTINE. Ah . . . they'll not dare do that, I fear. [PHILIP *comes back too.*

MR HUXTABLE. Phil . . . your father's coming home to see your aunt.

PHILIP [*after one gasp at the prospect*]. Good.

CONSTANTINE. I'll be with you by nine, Phil.

[MR HUXTABLE'S *dare-devil heart fails once more.*

MR HUXTABLE. Don't be too friendly through the shop, though.

PHILIP. And Uncle Harry, by the way, can tell you

all about that Miss Yates affair. And your advice may be useful.

CONSTANTINE. He shall have it. [*Off they go.*

THOMAS [*still searching*]. Where the devil did I put . . . I shall miss that four-thirty.

PHILIP. If you do . . . take my father's place at dinner, won't you?

[THOMAS *stops and looks at him aggrievedly.*

THOMAS. Phil, stop chaffing me . . .

PHILIP. It's evident I need more light on the great Woman Question. What do my mother and Jessica really think about such men as you and my father?

[*He picks up some papers and sits to them at the table.*

THOMAS. . . . or you'll aggravate me into behaving rashly. Oh . . . here.

[*He has found his hat, and he slams it on.*

PHILIP. With Jessica?

THOMAS [*with ferocious gallantry*]. Yes . . . a damned attractive woman.

PHILIP. Well, after all . . . as an abstract proposition, Tommy . . . polyandry is as much Nature's way, in certain of her moods, as the other. We ought to have made that point with the gentle Mahommedan.

THOMAS [*after vainly considering this for a moment*]. I'd like to see you in love . . . it'd serve you right.

[*Suddenly* PHILIP *drops his mocking tone.*

PHILIP. But what do we get out of it, I ask . . . we slow-breeding, civilized folk . . . out of love-making and romance . . . beauty of women and its setting in art and culture? We pay pretty dear for it. What does it profit us?

THOMAS. Damned if I know.

PHILIP. Trot along, then, or you will miss your train.

[THOMAS *trots along.* PHILIP *gets desperately to loathed business.*

JOHN GALSWORTHY

Loyalties

First produced at the St Martin's Theatre, London, on March 8, 1922, *and published by Gerald Duckworth and Co., Ltd.*

Act I opens with an alarm caused at a house-party in the country house of Charles and Lady Adela Winsor, near Newmarket, by the report that a robbery has been committed on one of their guests. These include Lord St Erth, General Canynge, "a racing oracle," Margaret Orme, a society girl, Ronald Dancy, a retired Army captain and D.S.O., and his wife Mabel, and a rich young Jew, Ferdinand de Levis, a pushing young man who is "deathly keen to get into the Jockey Club." De Levis has been very lucky at the races that day and sold his Rosemary filly at the meeting to a bookmaker for a thousand pounds. It is this thousand which has been stolen. The filly had formerly belonged to Ronald Dancy, who, being newly married and not very well off, had given her earlier in the year to De Levis in order to save her keep. Dancy not unnaturally bears a grudge against De Levis for this mercenary transaction, especially as he is already as rich as Crœsus. Earlier that evening Dancy, who had had a bad day at the races, won ten pounds from De Levis on a bet that he, Dancy, could not jump from the floor on to the top of a bookcase four feet high.

It appears that the money was taken from under De Levis' pillow between 11.15 and 11.30 while he was in the bathroom, having locked the door of his bedroom and kept the key in his dressing-gown pocket. Winsor is indignant at his suggestion that the police should be called in. He refuses to suspect either his servants or his guests. But De Levis presses the matter, and the police are sent for. An inspector arrives and gives it as his opinion that the thief walked in before the door was locked, probably during dinner, and hid under the bed, escaping by dropping from the balcony, as he has discovered that the creeper at one corner has been violently wrenched.

After he has gone De Levis shocks his host by making a direct accusation. The following extract is taken from Act I, Scene 2; the scene is De Levis' bedroom.

DE LEVIS [*suddenly*]. General, I know who took them.

CANYNGE. The deuce you do! Are you following the Inspector's theory?

DE LEVIS [*contemptuously*]. That ass! [*Pulling the shaving papers out of the case*] No! The man who put those there was clever and cool enough to wrench the creeper off the balcony, as a blind. Come and look here, General. [*He goes to the window; the* GENERAL *follows.* DE LEVIS *points stage Right.*] See the rail of my balcony, and the rail of the next? [*He holds up the cord of his dressing-gown, stretching his arms out.*] I've measured it with this. Just over seven feet, that's all! If a man can take a standing jump on to a narrow bookcase four feet high and balance there, he'd make nothing of that. And, look here! [*He goes out on the balcony and returns with a bit of broken creeper in his hand, and holds it out into the light.*] Some one's stood on that—the stalk's crushed—the inner corner too, where he'd naturally stand when he took his jump back.

CANYNGE [*after examining it—stiffly*]. That other balcony is young Dancy's, Mr De Levis; a soldier and a gentleman. This is an extraordinary insinuation.

DE LEVIS. Accusation.

CANYNGE. What!

DE LEVIS. I have intuitions, General; it's in my blood. I see the whole thing. Dancy came up, watched me into the bathroom, tried my door, slipped back into his dressing-room, saw my window was open, took that jump, sneaked the notes, filled the case up with these, wrenched the creeper there [*He points stage Left*] for a blind, jumped back, and slipped downstairs again. It didn't take him four minutes altogether.

CANYNGE [*very gravely*]. This is outrageous, De Levis.

Dancy says he was downstairs all the time. You must either withdraw unreservedly, or I must confront you with him.

DE LEVIS. If he'll return the notes and apologize I'll do nothing—except cut him in future. He gave me that filly, you know, as a hopeless weed, and he's been pretty sick ever since that he was such a flat as not to see how good she was. Besides, he's hard up, I know.

CANYNGE [*after a vexed turn up and down the room*]. It's mad, sir, to jump to conclusions like this.

DE LEVIS. Not so mad as the conclusion Dancy jumped to when he lighted on my balcony.

CANYNGE. Nobody could have taken this money who did not know you had it.

DE LEVIS. How do you know that he didn't?

CANYNGE. Do you know that he did?

DE LEVIS. I haven't the least doubt of it.

CANYNGE. Without any proof. This is very ugly, De Levis. I must tell Winsor.

DE LEVIS [*angrily*]. Tell the whole blooming lot. You think I've no feelers, but I've felt the atmosphere here, I can tell you, General. If I were in Dancy's shoes and he in mine your tone to me would be very different.

CANYNGE [*suavely frigid*]. I'm not aware of using any tone, as you call it. But this is a private house, Mr De Levis, and something is due to our host and to the *esprit de corps* that exists among gentlemen.

DE LEVIS. Since when is a thief a gentleman? Thick as thieves—a good motto, isn't it?

CANYNGE. That's enough! [*He goes to the door, but stops before opening it.*] Now, look here! I have some knowledge of the world. Once an accusation like this passes beyond these walls no one can foresee the consequences. Captain Dancy is a gallant fellow, with a fine record as a soldier; and only just married. If he's as innocent as—Christ—mud will stick to him, unless the

real thief is found. In the old days of swords, either you or he would not have gone out of this room alive. If you persist in this absurd accusation you will *both* of you go out of this room dead in the eyes of Society: you for bringing it, he for being the object of it.

DE LEVIS. Society! Do you think I don't know that I'm only tolerated for my money? Society can't add injury to insult and have my money as well, that's all. If the notes are restored I'll keep my mouth shut; if they're not, I shan't. I'm certain I'm right. I ask nothing better than to be confronted with Dancy; but, if you prefer it, deal with him in your own way—for the sake of your *esprit de corps*.

CANYNGE. 'Pon my soul, Mr De Levis, you go too far.

DE LEVIS. Not so far as I shall go, General Canynge, if those notes aren't given back. [WINSOR *comes in.*

WINSOR. Well, De Levis, I'm afraid that's all we can do for the present. So very sorry this should have happened in my house.

CANYNGE [*after a silence*]. There's a development, Winsor. Mr De Levis accuses one of your guests.

WINSOR. What?

CANYNGE. Of jumping from his balcony to this, taking the notes, and jumping back. I've done my best to dissuade him from indulging the fancy—without success. Dancy must be told.

DE LEVIS. You can deal with Dancy in your own way. All I want is the money back.

CANYNGE [*dryly*]. Mr De Levis feels that he is only valued for his money, so that it is essential for him to have it back.

WINSOR. Damn it! This is monstrous, De Levis. I've known Ronald Dancy since he was a boy.

CANYNGE. You talk about adding injury to insult, De Levis. What do you call such treatment of a man

who gave you the mare out of which you made this thousand pounds?

DE LEVIS. I didn't want the mare; I took her as a favour.

CANYNGE. With an eye to possibilities, I venture to think—the principle guides a good many transactions.

DE LEVIS [*as if flicked on a raw spot*]. In my race, do you mean?

CANYNGE [*coldly*]. I said nothing of the sort.

DE LEVIS. No; you don't *say* these things, any of you.

CANYNGE. Nor did I think it.

DE LEVIS. Dancy does.

WINSOR. Really, De Levis, if this is the way you repay hospitality——

DE LEVIS. Hospitality that skins my feelings and costs me a thousand pounds!

CANYNGE. Go and get Dancy, Winsor; but don't say anything to him. [WINSOR *goes out.*] Perhaps you will kindly control yourself, and leave this to me.

[DE LEVIS *turns to the window and lights a cigarette.* WINSOR *comes back, followed by* DANCY.

CANYNGE. For Winsor's sake, Dancy, we don't want any scandal or fuss about this affair. We've tried to make the police understand that. To my mind the whole thing turns on our finding who knew that De Levis had this money. It's about that we want to consult you.

WINSOR. Kentman paid De Levis round the corner in the further paddock, he says.

[DE LEVIS *turns round from the window, so that he and* DANCY *are staring at each other.*

CANYNGE. Did you hear anything that throws light, Dancy? As it was your filly originally, we thought perhaps you might.

DANCY. I? No.

CANYNGE. Didn't hear of the sale on the course at all?

DANCY. No.

CANYNGE. Then you can't suggest anyone who could have known? Nothing else was taken, you see.

DANCY. De Levis is known to be rolling, as I am known to be stony.

CANYNGE. There are a good many people still rolling, besides Mr De Levis, but not many people with so large a sum in their pocket-books.

DANCY. He won two races.

DE LEVIS. Do you suggest that I bet in ready money?

DANCY. I don't know how you bet, and I don't care.

CANYNGE. You can't help us, then?

DANCY. No. I can't. Anything else?

[*He looks fixedly at* DE LEVIS.

CANYNGE [*putting his hand on* DANCY'S *arm*]. Nothing else, thank you, Dancy.

[DANCY *goes.* CANYNGE *puts his hand up to his face. A moment's silence.*

WINSOR. You see, De Levis? He didn't even know you'd got the money.

DE LEVIS. Very conclusive.

WINSOR. Well! You are——!

[*There is a knock on the door, and the* INSPECTOR *enters.*

INSPECTOR. I'm just going, gentlemen. The grounds, I'm sorry to say, have yielded nothing. It's a bit of a puzzle.

CANYNGE. You've searched thoroughly?

INSPECTOR. We have, General. I can pick up nothing near the terrace.

WINSOR [*after a look at* DE LEVIS, *whose face expresses too much*]. H'm! You'll take it up from the other end then, Inspector!

INSPECTOR. Well, we'll see what we can do with the bookmakers about the numbers, sir. Before I go,

gentlemen—you've had time to think it over—there's no one you suspect in the house, I suppose?

[DE LEVIS'S *face is alive and uncertain.* CANYNGE *is staring at him very fixedly.*

WINSOR [*emphatically*]. No.

[DE LEVIS *turns and goes out on to the balcony.*

INSPECTOR. If you're coming in to the racing to-morrow, sir, you might give us a call. I'll have seen Kentman by then.

WINSOR. Right you are, Inspector. Good night, and many thanks.

INSPECTOR. You're welcome, sir. [*He goes out.*

WINSOR. Gosh! I thought that chap [*with a nod towards the balcony*] was going to——! Look here, General, we *must* stop his tongue. Imagine it going the rounds. They may never find the real thief, you know. It's the very devil for Dancy.

CANYNGE. Winsor! Dancy's sleeve was damp.

WINSOR. How d'you mean?

CANYNGE. Quite damp. It's been raining.

[*The two look at each other.*

WINSOR. I—I don't follow——

[*His voice is hesitative and lower, showing that he does.*

CANYNGE. It was coming down hard; a minute out in it would have been enough——

[*He motions with his chin towards the balcony.*

WINSOR [*hastily*]. He must have been out on his balcony since.

CANYNGE. It stopped before I came up, half an hour ago.

WINSOR. He's been leaning on the wet stone, then.

CANYNGE. With the outside of the *upper* part of the arm?

WINSOR. Against the wall, perhaps. There may be a dozen explanations. [*Very low and with great concentration.*]

I entirely and absolutely refuse to believe anything of the sort against Ronald Dancy—in my house. Dash it, General, we must do as we'd be done by. It hits us all—it hits us all. The thing's intolerable.

CANYNGE. I agree. Intolerable. [*Raising his voice*] Mr De Levis!

[DE LEVIS *returns into view, in the centre of the open window.*

CANYNGE [*with cold decision*]. Young Dancy was an officer and is a gentleman; this insinuation is pure supposition, and you must not make it. Do you understand me?

DE LEVIS. My tongue is still mine, General, if my money isn't!

CANYNGE [*unmoved*]. Must not. You're a member of three clubs, you want to be member of a fourth. No one who makes such an insinuation against a fellow-guest in a country house, except on absolute proof, can do so without complete ostracism. Have we your word to say nothing?

DE LEVIS. Social blackmail? H'm!

CANYNGE. Not at all—simple warning. If you consider it necessary in your interests to start this scandal—no matter how, we shall consider it necessary in ours to dissociate ourselves completely from one who so recklessly disregards the unwritten code.

DE LEVIS. Do you think your code applies to me? Do you, General?

CANYNGE. To anyone who aspires to be a gentleman, sir.

DE LEVIS. Ah! But you haven't known *me* since I was a boy.

CANYNGE. Make up your mind. [*A pause.*

DE LEVIS. I'm not a fool, General. I know perfectly well that you can get me outed.

CANYNGE [*icily*]. Well?

DE LEVIS [*sullenly*]. I'll say nothing about it, unless I get more proof.

CANYNGE. Good! We have implicit faith in Dancy.

[*There is a moment's encounter of eyes; the* GENERAL'S *steady, shrewd, impassive;* WINSOR'S *angry and defiant;* DE LEVIS'S *mocking, a little triumphant, malicious. Then* CANYNGE *and* WINSOR *go to the door, and pass out.*

DE LEVIS [*to himself*]. Rats!

JOHN MILLINGTON SYNGE

The Well of the Saints

First produced at the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, on February 5, 1905, *and published by George Allen and Unwin, Ltd.*

Act I shows the miraculous healing of a weatherbeaten blind beggar, Martin Doul, and Mary Doul, his blind wife. Their sight is restored to them by a wandering friar with holy water from a well on a neighbouring island, known as the Well of the Saints.

The result is disastrous. The pair, who had imagined themselves a handsome couple, see each other as they really are: he "a little, old, shabby stump of a man" and she "an old, wretched roadwoman." They become further estranged by Martin's infatuation with the fair beauty of Molly Byrne, a girl whose voice had fascinated him in his days of blindness. Naturally Molly spurns him, and, to add to his dissatisfaction with his cure, he can no longer live by begging but is forced to work. Martin finds it a hard thing for a man to have his sight.

But at the end of Act II the miraculous cure has lost its efficacy, and Martin and his wife are blind again. The following extract is taken from Act III.

Roadside with big stones, etc., on the right; low loose wall at back with gap near centre filled with briers, or branches of some sort; at left, ruined doorway of church with bushes beside it. MARY DOUL, *blind again, gropes her way in on left, and sits. She has a few rushes with her. It is an early spring day.*

MARY DOUL [*mournfully*]. Ah, God help me . . . God help me; the blackness wasn't so black at all the other time as it this time, and it's destroyed I'll be now, and hard set to get my living working alone, when it's few

are passing and the winds are cold. [*She begins shredding rushes.*] I'm thinking short days will be long days to me from this time, and I sitting here, not seeing a blink, or hearing a word, and no thought in my mind but long prayers that Martin Doul'll get his reward in a short while for the villainy of his heart. It's great jokes the people'll be making now, I'm thinking, and they pass me by, pointing their fingers, maybe, and asking what place is himself, the way it's no quiet or decency I'll have from this day till I'm an old woman with long white hair and it twisting from my brow. [*She fumbles with her hair, and then seems to hear something. Listens for a moment.*] There's a queer, slouching step coming on the road . . . God help me, he's coming surely.

[*She stays perfectly quiet.* MARTIN DOUL *gropes in on right, blind also.*

MARTIN DOUL [*gloomily*]. The devil mend Mary Doul for putting lies on me, and letting on she was grand. The devil mend the old Saint for letting me see it was lies. [*He sits down near her.*] The devil mend Timmy the Smith for killing me with hard work, and keeping me with an empty, windy stomach in me, in the day and in the night. Ten thousand devils mend the soul of Molly Byrne [MARY DOUL *nods her head with approval*] and the bad, wicked souls is hidden in all the women of the world. [*He rocks himself, with his hand over his face.*] It's lonesome I'll be from this day, and if living people is a bad lot, yet Mary Doul, herself, and she a dirty, wrinkled-looking hag, was better maybe to be sitting along with than no one at all. I'll be getting my death now, I'm thinking, sitting alone in the cold air, hearing the night coming, and the blackbirds flying round in the briers crying to themselves, the time you'll hear one cart getting off a long way in the east, and another cart getting off a long way in the west, and a dog barking maybe, and a little wind turning the sticks. [*He listens and sighs heavily.*] I'll be

destroyed sitting alone and losing my senses this time the way I'm after losing my sight, for it'd make any person afeard to be sitting up hearing the sound of his breath [*he moves his feet on the stones*] and the noise of his feet, when it's a power of queer things do be stirring, little sticks breaking, and the grass moving [MARY DOUL *half sighs, and he turns on her in horror*] till you'd take your dying oath on sun and moon a thing was breathing on the stones. [*He listens towards her for a moment, then starts up nervously and gropes about for his stick.*] I'll be going now, I'm thinking, but I'm not sure what place my stick's in, and I'm destroyed with terror and dread. [*He touches her face as he is groping about and cries out.*] There's a thing with a cold, living face on it sitting up at my side. [*He turns to run away, but misses his path and tumbles in against the wall.*] My road is lost on me now! Oh, merciful God, set my foot on the path this day, and I'll be saying prayers morning and night, and not straining my ear after young girls, or doing any bad thing till I die——

MARY DOUL [*indignantly*]. Let you not be telling lies to the Almighty God.

MARTIN DOUL. Mary Doul, is it? [*Recovering himself with immense relief*] Is it Mary Doul, I'm saying?

MARY DOUL. There's a sweet tone in your voice I've not heard for a space. You're taking me for Molly Byrne, I'm thinking.

MARTIN DOUL [*coming towards her, wiping sweat from his face*]. Well, sight's a queer thing for upsetting a man. It's a queer thing to think I'd live to this day to be fearing the like of you; but if it's shaken I am for a short while, I'll soon be coming to myself.

MARY DOUL. You'll be grand then, and it's no lie.

MARTIN DOUL [*sitting down shyly, some way off*]. You've no call to be talking, for I've heard tell you're as blind as myself.

MARY DOUL. If I am I'm bearing in mind I'm married to a little dark stump of a fellow looks the fool of the world, and I'll be bearing in mind from this day the great hullabaloo he's after making from hearing a poor woman breathing quiet in her place.

MARTIN DOUL. And you'll be bearing in mind, I'm thinking, what you seen a while back when you looked down into a well, or a [illegible] pool, maybe, when there was no wind stirring [illegible] light in the sky.

MARY DOUL [illegible] ing that surely, for if I'm not the way the liars were s[illegible] ng below I seen a thing in them pools put joy and ble[illegible] in my heart.

[*he puts her hand to her hair again.*

MARTIN DOUL [*laughing ironically*]. Well, they were saying below I was losing my senses, but I never went any day the length of that. . . . God help you, Mary Doul, if you're not a wonder for looks, you're the maddest female woman is walking the counties of the east.

MARY DOUL [*scornfully*]. You were saying all times you'd a great ear for hearing the lies in a word. A great ear, God help you, and you think you're using it now.

MARTIN DOUL. If it's not lies you're telling would you have me think you're not a wrinkled poor woman is looking like three scores, maybe, or two scores and a half!

MARY DOUL. I would not, Martin. [*She leans forward earnestly.*] For when I seen myself in them pools, I seen my hair would be grey or white, maybe, in a short while, and I seen with it that I'd a face would be a great wonder when it'll have soft white hair falling around it, the way when I'm an old woman there won't be the like of me surely in the seven counties of the east.

MARTIN DOUL [*with real admiration*]. You're a cute thinking woman, Mary Doul, and it's no lie.

MARY DOUL [*triumphantly*]. I am, surely, and I'm telling you a beautiful white-haired woman is a grand thing to see, for I'm told when Kitty Bawn was selling

poteen below, the young men itself would never tire to be looking in her face.

MARTIN DOUL [*taking off his hat and feeling his head, speaking with hesitation*]. Did you think to look, Mary Doul, would there be a whiteness the like of that coming upon me?

MARY DOUL [*with extreme contempt*]. On you, God help you! . . . In a short while you'll have a head on you as bald as an old turnip you'll be rolling round in the muck. You need never talk [illegible] your fine looks, Martin Doul, for the day of th[illegible] talk's one for ever.

MARTIN DOUL. That's a h[illegible] word to be saying, for I was thinking if I'd a bit of comfort, the like of yourself, it's not far off we'd be from the good days went before, and that'd be a wonder surely. But I'll never rest easy, thinking you're a grey, beautiful woman, and myself a pitiful show.

MARY DOUL. I can't help your looks, Martin Doul. It wasn't myself made you with your rat's eyes, and your big ears, and your griseldy chin.

MARTIN DOUL [*rubs his chin ruefully, then beams with delight*]. There's one thing you've forgot, if you're a cute thinking woman itself.

MARY DOUL. Your slouching feet, is it? Or your hooky neck, or your two knees is black with knocking one on the other?

MARTIN DOUL [*with delighted scorn*]. There's talking for a cute woman. There's talking, surely!

MARY DOUL [*puzzled at joy of his voice*]. If you'd anything but lies to say you'd be talking yourself.

MARTIN DOUL [*bursting with excitement*]. I've this to say, Mary Doul. I'll be letting my beard grow in a short while, a beautiful, long, white, silken, streamy beard, you wouldn't see the like of in the eastern world. . . . Ah, a white beard's a grand thing on an old man, a grand thing for making the quality stop and be stretching out their

hands with good silver or gold, and a beard's a thing you'll never have, so you may be holding your tongue.

MARY DOUL [*laughing cheerfully*]. Well, we're a great pair, surely, and it's great times we'll have yet, maybe, and great talking before we die.

MARTIN DOUL. Great times from this day, with the help of the Almighty God, for a priest itself would believe the lies of an old man would have a fine white beard growing on his chin.

MARY DOUL. There's the sound of one of them twittering yellow birds do be coming in the spring-time from beyond the sea, and there'll be a fine warmth now in the sun, and a sweetness in the air, the way it'll be a grand thing to be sitting here quiet and easy, smelling the things growing up, and budding from the earth.

MARTIN DOUL. I'm smelling the furze a while back sprouting on the hill, and if you'd hold your tongue you'd hear the lambs of Grianan, though it's near drowned their crying is with the full river making noises in the glen.

MARY DOUL [*listens*]. The lambs is bleating, surely, and there's cocks and laying hens making a fine stir a mile off on the face of the hill.

ELMER RICE

The Adding Machine

First produced in 1923, *and published in England by Victor Gollancz, Ltd.*

The play is less a story than a picture of the soul of Mr Zero, of the "starved and bitter littleness and at the same time the universality of the Zero type, of the slave type, that from eternity to eternity expresses the futility and the tragedy of the mediocre spirit." [1]

In Scene 1 the audience sees no more of Mr Zero than his sallow face and partially bald head. He is lying in bed while Mrs Zero, seated in front of the mirror at her dressing-table, goes through the nightly ritual of taking down her hair. Zero does not speak throughout the scene. His wife's tongue never stops. He listens in silence to her incessant nagging and habitual complaints.

"Twenty-five years!" she apostrophizes. "An' I ain't seen nothing happen. Twenty-five years in the same job. Twenty-five years to-morrow! You're proud of it, ain't you? Twenty-five years in the same job and never missed a day! That's something to be proud of, ain't it? Sitting for twenty-five years on the same chair, addin' up figures. . . . And me at home here lookin' at the same four walls an' working my fingers to the bone to make both ends meet. Seven years since you got a raise! An' if you don't get one to-morrow I'll bet a nickel you won't have the guts to go and ask for one. I didn't pick much when I picked you, I'll tell the world. You ain't much to be proud of. . . ."

Her tongue wags on and on. Stark realism this. Only the setting of the bedroom, with its wallpaper of foolscap covered with columns of figures and the single naked bulb in the ugly electric fixture above the bed, strikes a note of caricature.

Scene 2 is the office in the department store where Mr Zero

[1] Philip Moeller, in his preface to Elmer Rice's *Plays* (*Gollancz*).

works at a desk opposite that of a plain, middle-aged woman who reads aloud from a pile of slips before her figures which Zero enters in a ledger as she reads.

As they work they both think aloud. Neither's remarks are supposed to be audible to the other, except those which concern the work in hand. The woman, Daisy, reflects on what might have been, had she attracted Mr Zero. She wishes she were dead and contemplates suicide. Zero mentally rehearses what he will say when asking the Boss for a rise.

ZERO. "Boss," I'll say, "I want to have a talk with you." "Sure," he'll say, "sit down. Have a Corona Corona." "No," I'll say, "I don't smoke." "How's that?" he'll say. "Well, boss," I'll say, "it's this way. Every time I feel like smoking I just take a nickel and put it in an old sock. A penny saved is a penny earned, that's the way I look at it." "Damn' sensible," he'll say. "You got a wise head on you, Zero."

DAISY. I can't stand the smell of gas. It makes me sick. You coulda kissed me if you'd wanted to.

ZERO. "Boss," I'll say, "I ain't quite satisfied. I been on the job twenty-five years now and if I'm gonna stay I gotta see a future ahead of me." "Zero," he'll say, "I'm glad you came in. I've had my eye on you, Zero. Nothin' gets by me." "Oh, I know that, boss," I'll say. That'll hand him a good laugh, that will. "You're a valuable man, Zero," he'll say, "and I want you right up here with me in the front office. You're done with addin' up figures. Monday morning you move up here."

[*The whistle blows and with great agility they get off their stools, remove their eyeshades and sleeve-protectors and put them on their desks.* DAISY *departs and as* ZERO *is about to leave the room the* BOSS *comes in.*

THE BOSS [*middle-aged, stoutish, bald, well dressed*]. Oh —er—Mister—er——

ZERO [*obsequiously*]. Yes, sir. Do you want me, sir?

BOSS. Yes. Just come here a moment, will you?

ZERO. Yes, sir. Right away, sir.

[*He fumbles his hat, picks it up, stumbles, recovers himself, and approaches, every fibre quivering.*

BOSS. Mister—er—er——

ZERO. Zero.

BOSS. Yes. Mr Zero. I wanted to have a little talk with you.

ZERO [*with a nervous grin*]. Yes, sir. I been kinda expectin' it.

BOSS [*staring at him*]. Oh, have you?

ZERO. Yes, sir.

BOSS. How long have you been with us, Mister—er—Mister——

ZERO. Zero.

BOSS. Yes, Mr Zero.

ZERO. Twenty-five years to-day.

BOSS. Twenty-five years! That's a long time.

ZERO. Never missed a day.

BOSS. And you've been doing the same work all the time?

ZERO. Yes, sir. Right at this desk.

BOSS. Then, in that case, a change probably won't be unwelcome to you.

ZERO. No, sir, it won't. And that's the truth.

BOSS. We've been planning a change in this department for some time.

ZERO. I kinda thought you had your eye on me.

BOSS. You were right. The fact is my efficiency experts have recommended the installation of adding machines.

ZERO [*staring at him*]. Adding machines!

BOSS. Yes, you've probably seen them. A mechanical device that adds automatically.

ZERO. Sure, I've seen them. Keys—and a handle that you pull. [*He goes through the motions in the air.*

BOSS. That's it. They do the work in half the time and a high-school girl can operate them. Now, of course, I'm sorry to lose an old and faithful employee. . . .

ZERO. Excuse me, would you mind saying that again?

BOSS. I say I'm sorry to lose an employee who's been with me for so many years.

[*Soft music is heard—the sound of the mechanical player of a distant merry-go-round. The part of the floor upon which the desk and stools are standing begins to revolve very slowly.*

But, of course, in an organization like this, efficiency must be the first consideration.

[*The music becomes gradually louder and the revolutions more rapid.*

You will draw your salary for a full month. And I'll direct my secretary to give you a letter of recommendation.

ZERO. Wait a minute, Boss. Let me get this right. You mean I'm canned?

BOSS [*barely making himself heard above the increasing volume of sound*]. I'm sorry—no other alternative—greatly regret — old employee — efficiency — economy — business—business—BUSINESS——

[*His voice is drowned by the music. The platform is revolving rapidly now.* ZERO *and the* BOSS *face each other. They are entirely motionless save for the Boss's jaws which open and shut incessantly. But the words are inaudible. The music swells and swells. To it is added every off-stage effect of the theatre: the wind, the waves, the galloping horses, the locomotive whistle, the sleigh-bells, the automobile siren, the glass crash, New Year's Eve, Election Night, Armistice Day, and the Mardi Gras. The noise is deafening, maddening, unendurable. Suddenly it culminates in a terrific peal of*

thunder. For an instant there is a flash of red, and then everything is plunged into blackness.[1]

CURTAIN

Scene 3 depicts an evening party at the Zeros'. The guests, Mr and Mrs One, Two, Three, and Four, are all dressed identically, except that the men wear wigs, and the women dresses, of different colours. They keep up a banal exchange of remarks on business, their relatives' illnesses, and the latest pictures at the cinema. They are interrupted by the arrival of a policeman, come for Zero.

"What are they taking you for?" asks Mrs Zero.

"I killed the Boss this afternoon," Zero answers calmly, as the policeman takes him away.

Scene 4, in a court of justice, takes the form of a monologue by Zero. Before a jury composed of the ciphers who were present at the party in the previous scene Zero gives a long and rambling justification of the murder. "All I was thinking about was how to break it to the wife about being canned, see? . . . He canned me after twenty-five years, see?"

Zero is dead. There are two fantastic scenes, one in a moonlit graveyard, and the other in the Elysian Fields, and then comes Scene 7.

Before the curtain rises the clicking of an adding machine is heard. The curtain rises upon an office similar in appearance to that of Scene 2, except that there is a door in the back wall through which can be seen a glimpse of the corridor outside. In the middle of the room ZERO *is seated, completely absorbed in the operation of an adding machine. He presses the keys and pulls the lever with mechanical precision. He still wears his full dress-suit, but he has added to it sleeve-protectors and a green eye-*

[1] This is an excellent instance of the possibilities of the expressionist medium. Of course Zero kills the Boss, but we are not shown the murder; only the impulse to murder is projected. It will also be observed that impressionism has to rely on the co-operation of the producer, the electrician, and the scenic artist.

shade. A strip of white paper flows steadily from the machine as ZERO *operates. The room is filled with this tape—streamers, festoons, billows of it everywhere. It covers the floor and the furniture, it climbs the walls and chokes the doorways. A few moments later* LIEUTENANT CHARLES *and* JOE *enter at the left.* LIEUTENANT CHARLES *is middle-aged and inclined to corpulence. He has an air of world-weariness. He is bare-footed, wears a Panama hat, and is dressed in bright red tights which are a very bad fit—too tight in some places, badly wrinkled in others.* JOE *is a youth with a smutty face, dressed in dirty blue overalls.*

CHARLES [*after contemplating* ZERO *for a few moments*]. All right, Zero, cease firing.

ZERO [*looking up, surprised*]. Whaddja say?

CHARLES. I said stop punching that machine.

ZERO [*bewildered*]. Stop? [*He goes on working mechanically.*

CHARLES [*impatiently*]. Yes. Can't you stop? Here, Joe, give me a hand. He can't stop.

[JOE *and* CHARLES *each take one of* ZERO'S *arms and with enormous effort detach him from the machine. He resists passively—mere inertia. Finally they succeed and swing him around on his stool.* CHARLES *and* JOE *mop their foreheads.*

ZERO [*querulously*]. What's the idea? Can't you lemme alone?

CHARLES [*ignoring the question*]. How long have you been here?

ZERO. Jes' twenty-five years. Three hundred months. Ninety-one hundred and thirty-one days, one hundred and thirty-six thousand——

CHARLES [*impatiently*]. That'll do! That'll do!

ZERO [*proudly*]. I ain't missed a day, not an hour, not a minute. Look at all I got done.

[*He points to the maze of paper.*

CHARLES. It's time to quit.

ZERO. Quit? Whaddja mean quit? I ain't going to quit!

CHARLES. You've got to.

ZERO. What for? What do I have to quit for?

CHARLES. It's time for you to go back.

ZERO. Go back where? Whaddja talkin' about?

CHARLES. Back to earth, you dub. Where do you think?

ZERO. Aw, go on, Cap, who are you kiddin'?

CHARLES. I'm not kidding anybody. And don't call me Cap. I'm a lieutenant.

ZERO. All right, Lieutenant, all right. But what's this you're trying to tell me about goin' back?

CHARLES. Your time's up, I'm telling you. You must be pretty thick. How many times do you want to be told a thing?

ZERO. This is the first time I heard about goin' back. Nobody ever said nothin' to me about it before.

CHARLES. You didn't think you were going to stay here for ever, did you?

ZERO. Sure, why not? I did my bit, didn't I? Forty-five years of it. Twenty-five years in the store. Then the boss canned me and I knocked him cold. I guess you ain't heard about that——

CHARLES [*interrupting*]. I know all about that. But what's that got to do with it?

ZERO. Well, I done my bit, didn't I? That oughta let me out.

CHARLES [*jeeringly*]. So you think you're all through, do you?

ZERO. Sure, I do. I did the best I could while I was there and then I passed out. And now I'm sitting pretty here.

CHARLES. You've got a fine idea of the way they run

things, you have. Do you think they're going to all the trouble of making a soul just to see it once?

ZERO. Once is often enough, it seems to me.

CHARLES. It seems to you, does it? Well, who are you? And what do you know about it? Why, man, they use a soul over and over again—over and over again until it's worn out.

ZERO. Nobody ever told me.

CHARLES. So you thought you were all through, did you? Well, that's a hot one, that is.

ZERO [*sullenly*]. How was I to know?

CHARLES. Use your brains! Where would we put them all? We're crowded enough as it is. Why, this place is nothing but a kind of repair and service station—a sort of cosmic laundry, you might say. We get the souls in here by the bushelful. Then we get busy and clean them up. And you ought to see some of them. The murk and the slime. Phoo! And as full of holes as a flour-sifter. But we fix them up. We disinfect them and give them a kerosene rub and mend the holes and back they go—practically as good as new.

ZERO. You mean to say I've been here before—before the last time, I mean?

CHARLES. Been here before! Why, you poor boob —you've been here thousands of times—fifty thousand at least.

ZERO [*suspiciously*]. How is it I don't remember nothing about it?

CHARLES. Well, that's partly because you're stupid. But it's mostly because that's the way they fix it. [*Musingly*] They're funny that way—every now and then they'll do something white like that—when you'd least expect it. I guess economy's at the bottom of it, though. They figure that the souls would get worn out quicker if they remembered.

ZERO. And don't any of them remember?

CHARLES. Oh, some do. You see, there's different types; there's the type that gets a little better each time it goes back—we just give them a wash and send them right through. Then there's another type—the type that gets a little worse each time. That's where you belong!

ZERO [*offended*]. Me? You mean to say I'm getting worse all the time?

CHARLES [*nodding*]. Yes. A little worse each time.

ZERO. Well—what was I when I started? Something big?—a king or somethin'?

CHARLES [*laughing derisively*]. A king! That's a good one! I'll tell you what you were the first time—if you want to know so much—a monkey!

ZERO [*shocked and offended*]. A monkey?

CHARLES [*nodding*]. Yes, sir—just a hairy, chattering, long-tailed monkey.

ZERO. That musta been a long time ago.

CHARLES. Oh, not so long. A million years or so. Seems like yesterday to me.

ZERO. Then look here, whaddja mean by sayin' I'm getting worse all the time?

CHARLES. Just what I said. You weren't so bad as a monkey. Of course, you did just what all the other monkeys did, but still it kept you out in the open air. And you weren't women-shy—there was one little red-headed monkey——Well, never mind. Yes, sir, you weren't so bad then. But even in those days there must have been some bigger and brainier monkey that you kow-towed to. The mark of the slave was on you from the start.

ZERO [*sullenly*]. You ain't very particular about what you call people, are you?

CHARLES. You wanted the truth, didn't you? If there was ever a soul in the world that was labelled slave it's yours. Why, all the bosses and kings that

there ever were have left their trademarks on your backside.

ZERO. It ain't fair, if you ask me.

CHARLES [*shrugging his shoulders*]. Don't tell me about it. I don't make the rules. All I know is you've been getting worse—worse each time. Why, even six thousand years ago you weren't so bad. That was the time you were hauling stones for one of those big pyramids in a place they call Africa. Ever hear of the Pyramids?

ZERO. Them big pointy things?

CHARLES [*nodding*]. That's it.

ZERO. I seen a picture of them in the movies.

CHARLES. Well, you helped to build them. It was a long step down from the happy days in the jungle, but it was a good job—even though you didn't know what you were doing and your back was striped by the foreman's whip. But you've been going down, down. Two thousand years ago you were a Roman galley-slave. You were on one of the triremes that knocked the Carthaginian fleet for a goal. Again the whip. But you had muscles then—chest muscles, back muscles, biceps. [*He feels* ZERO'S *arm gingerly and turns away in disgust.*] Phoo! A bunch of mush! [*He notices that* JOE *has fallen asleep. Walking over, he kicks him on the shin.*] Wake up, you mutt! Where do you think you are? [*He turns to* ZERO *again.*] And then another thousand years and you were a serf—a lump of clay digging up other lumps of clay. You wore an iron collar then—white ones hadn't been invented yet. Another long step down. But where you dug potatoes grew and that helped fatten the pigs. Which was something. And now—well, I don't want to rub it in——

ZERO. Rub it in is right! Seems to me I got a pretty healthy kick comin'. I ain't had a square deal! Hard work! That's all I've ever had.

CHARLES [*callously*]. What else were you ever good for?

ZERO. Well, that ain't the point. The point is I'm through! I had enough! Let 'em find somebody else to do the dirty work. I'm sick of bein' the goat! I quit right here and now. [*He glares about defiantly. There is a thunderclap and a bright flash of lightning.*] [*Screaming*] Ooh! What's that? [*He clings to* CHARLES.

CHARLES. It's all right. Nobody's going to hurt you. It's just their way of telling you that they don't like you to talk that way. Pull yourself together and calm down. You can't change the rules—nobody can—they've got it all fixed. It's a rotten system—but what are you going to do about it?

ZERO. Why can't they stop pickin' on me? I'm satisfied here—doin' my day's work. I don't want to go back.

CHARLES. You've got to, I tell you. There's no way out of it.

ZERO. What chance have I got—at my age? Who'll give me a job?

CHARLES. You big boob, you don't think you're going back the way you are, do you?

ZERO. Sure, how then?

CHARLES. Why, you've got to start all over.

ZERO. All over?

CHARLES [*nodding*]. You'll be a baby again—a bald, red-faced little animal, and then you'll go through it all again. There'll be millions of others like you—all with their mouths open, squawling for food. And then when you get a little older you'll begin to learn things—and you'll learn all the wrong things and learn them all the wrong way. You'll eat the wrong food and wear the wrong clothes and you'll live in swarming dens where there's no light and no air! You'll learn to be a liar and a bully and a coward and a sneak. You'll learn to fear

the sunlight and to hate beauty. By that time you'll be ready for school. There they'll tell you the truth about a great many things that you don't give a damn about and they'll tell you lies about all the things you ought to know—and about all the things you want to know they'll tell you nothing at all. When you get through you'll be equipped for your life's work. You'll be ready to take a job.

ZERO [*eagerly*]. What'll my job be? Another adding machine?

CHARLES. Yes. But not one of these antiquated adding machines. It will be a superb, super-hyper-adding machine, as far from this old piece of junk as you are from God. It will be something to make you sit up and take notice—that adding machine. It will be an adding machine which will be installed in a coal-mine and which will record the individual output of each miner. As each miner down in the lower galleries takes up a shovelful of coal, the impact of his shovel will automatically set in motion a graphite pencil in your gallery. The pencil will make a mark in white upon a blackened, sensitized drum. Then your work comes in. With the great toe of your right foot you release a lever which focuses a violet ray on the drum. The ray, playing upon and through the white mark, falls upon a selenium cell which in turn sets the keys of the adding machine in motion. In this way the individual output of each miner is recorded without any human effort except the slight pressure of the great toe of your right foot.

ZERO [*in breathless, round-eyed wonder*]. Say, that'll be some machine, won't it?

CHARLES. Some machine is right. It will be the culmination of human effort—the final triumph of the evolutionary process. For millions of years nebulous gases swirled in space. For more than millions of years the gases cooled and then through inconceivable ages

they hardened into rocks. And then came life. Floating green things on the waters that covered the earth. More millions of years and a step upward—an animate organism in the ancient slime. And so on—step by step, down through the ages—a gain here, a gain there—the mollusc, the fish, the reptile, then mammal, man! And all so that you might sit in the gallery of a coal-mine and operate the super-hyper-adding machine with the great toe of your right foot!

ZERO. Well, then—I ain't so bad after all.

CHARLES. You're a failure, Zero, a failure—a waste product. A slave to a contraption of steel and iron. The animal's instincts, but not his strength and skill. The animal's appetites, but not his unashamed indulgence of them. True, you move and eat and digest and excrete and reproduce. But any microscopic organism can do as much. Well, time's up! Back you go—back to your sunless groove—the raw material of slums and wars—the ready prey of the first jingo or demagogue or political adventurer who takes the trouble to play upon your ignorance and credulity and provincialism. You poor, spineless, brainless boob—I'm sorry for you!

ZERO [*falling to his knees*]. Then keep me here! Don't send me back! Let me stay!

CHARLES. Get up. Don't I tell you I can't do anything for you? Come on, time's up!

ZERO. I can't! I can't! I'm afraid to go through it all again.

CHARLES. You've got to, I tell you. Come on, now!

ZERO. What did you tell me so much for? Couldn't you just let me go, thinkin' everythin' was goin' to be all right?

CHARLES. You wanted to know, didn't you?

ZERO. How could I know what you were goin' to tell me? Now I can't stop thinkin' about it! I can't stop thinkin'! I'll be thinkin' about it all the time.

CHARLES. All right! I'll do the best I can for you. I'll send a girl with you to keep you company.

ZERO. A girl? What for? What good will a girl do me?

CHARLES. She'll help make you forget.

ZERO [*eagerly*]. She will? Where is she?

CHARLES. Wait a minute. I'll call her. [*He calls in a loud voice.*] Oh! Hope! You-hoo! [*He turns his head aside and says in the murmur of a ventriloquist imitating a distant feminine voice*] Ye-es. [*Then in his own voice*] Come here, will you? There's a fellow who wants you to take him back. [*Ventriloquously again*] All right. I'll be right over, Charlie dear. [*He turns to* ZERO.] Kind of familiar, isn't she? Charlie dear!

ZERO. What did you say her name is?

CHARLES. Hope. H-o-p-e.

ZERO. Is she good-lookin'?

CHARLES. Is she good-looking! Oh, boy, wait until you see her! She's a blonde with big blue eyes and red lips and little white teeth and——

ZERO. Say, that listens good to me. Will she be long?

CHARLES. She'll be here right away. There she is now! Do you see her?

ZERO. No. Where?

CHARLES. Out in the corridor. No, not there. Over farther. To the right. Didn't you see her blue dress? And the sunlight on her hair?

ZERO. Oh, sure! Now I see her! What's the matter with me anyhow? Say, she's some jane! Oh, you baby vamp!

CHARLES. She'll make you forget your troubles.

ZERO. What troubles are you talkin' about?

CHARLES. Nothing. Come. Don't keep her waiting.

ZERO. You bet I won't! Oh, Hope! Wait for me! I'll be right with you! I'm on my way!

[*He stumbles out eagerly.*

[JOE *bursts into uproarious laughter.*

CHARLES [*eyeing him in surprise and anger*]. What the hell's the matter with you?

JOE [*shaking with laughter*]. Did you get that? He thinks he saw somebody and he's following her!

[*He rocks with laughter.*

CHARLES [*punching him on the jaw*]. Shut your face!

JOE [*nursing his jaw*]. What's the idea? Can't I even laugh when I see something funny?

CHARLES. Funny! You keep your mouth shut or I'll show you something funny. Go on, hustle out of here and get something to clean up this mess with. There's another fellow moving in. Hurry now. [*He makes a threatening gesture.* JOE *exits hastily.* CHARLES *goes to chair and seats himself. He looks weary—dispirited. Shaking his head*] Hell, I'll tell the world this is a lousy job.

[*He takes a flask from his pocket, uncorks it, and slowly drains it.*

EUGENE O'NEILL

The Emperor Jones

First produced in 1920, *and published in England by Jonathan Cape, Ltd.*

The Emperor Jones, which is to many people most characteristic of O'Neill's best, belongs to his second period when he had not entirely abandoned realism and left the stricter form for technical complexity. It is a play original in form and in conception. It is, in fact, a new kind of play: a monodrama. Jones is in effect the only character in the play. Six out of the eight scenes are practically a monologue. The other persons who appear in the first and final scenes are really only the chorus to his tragedy.

The Emperor Jones is a Negro Pullman porter who, after being jailed back in the States for an argument with razors over a game of dice, has escaped to a West Indian island "as yet not self-determined by White Mariners." There, with the help of Henry Smithers, an unscrupulous Cockney trader, he has imposed himself upon the native blacks as emperor. One thing he has learnt in ten years on the Pullman cars listening to the "white quality" talk is the fact that whereas little stealing gets you, soon or late, in jail big stealing gives you power. And, being no fool, he also realizes that that power if abused is only temporary.

"I knows dis Emperor's time is sho't," he tells the Cockney. "Dat why I make hay when de sun shine. Was you thinkin' I'se aimin' to hold down dis job for life? No, suh! What good is gittin' money if you stays back in dis raggedy country? I wants action when I spends. And when I sees dese niggers gittin' up deir nerve to tu'n me out, and I'se got all de money in sight, I resigns on de spot and gets away quick."

Scene 1 is the audience chamber of the Emperor, a room "bare of furniture with the exception of one huge chair made of uncut wood . . . very apparently the Emperor's throne. It is painted a dazzling, eye-smiting scarlet." Something

funny has been going on all morning, and Smithers, guessing that the blacks are up to some devilment, comes to the palace to find out what it is. He discovers that all the palace retinue have gone off to the hills. He knows what is in the wind. Enters the Emperor Jones, "a tall, powerfully-built, full-blooded Negro of middle age. His features are typically negroid, yet there is something decidedly distinctive about his face—an underlying strength of will, a hardy, self-reliant confidence in himself that inspires respect. His eyes are alive with a keen, cunning intelligence. In manner he is shrewd, suspicious, evasive. He wears a light blue uniform coat, sprayed with brass buttons, heavy gold chevrons on his shoulders, gold braid on the collar, cuffs, etc. His trousers are bright red with a light blue stripe down the side. Patent leather laced boots with brass spurs, and a belt with a long-barrelled, pearl-handled revolver in a holster complete his attire. Yet there is something not altogether ridiculous about his grandeur. He has a way of carrying it off."

Smithers tells him that his Generals and Cabinet Ministers have left him, and it transpires that there has been a revolution before. Lem, a native chief, had hired an assassin to shoot the Emperor, but his gun missed fire and Jones had shot him dead and then spread the story that he possessed a charm so that only a silver bullet could kill him. He has actually had a silver bullet moulded and told the niggers that when the time comes he will kill himself with it because there is only one man in the world big enough to get him. Smithers suggests with a mocking grin that maybe the time has come for Jones to resign—"with that bloomin' silver bullet," and when the Emperor has rung the bell and no one answers it he quickly makes up his mind that the revolution is at the door and it is high time he was "movin' up de trail." He is not afraid of Lem nor of the big forests which he must cross to reach the sea, where he can be picked up by a French gunboat. "I could go through on dem paths wid my eyes shut," he tells the Cockney trader.

At this moment "from the distant hills comes the faint, steady thump of a tom-tom, low and vibrating. It starts at a rate exactly corresponding to normal pulse-beat—72 to the minute—and continues at a gradually accelerating rate from this point uninterruptedly to the very end of the play. Jones starts at the sound. A strange look of apprehension creeps into his face for a moment as he listens. Then gradually he regains his self-confidence when he remembers that he has

five lead bullets 'good enuff fo' common bush niggers—and after dat . . . de silver bullet left to cheat 'em out o' gittin' me.' " He reaches in under the throne and pulls out an expensive Panama hat with a bright multi-coloured band and sets it jauntily on his head.

"So long, white man!" he says with a grin. "See you in jail some time, maybe!"

The six scenes that follow depict the Emperor's growing terror as he struggles through the Forest, pursued by the insistent beating of the tom-tom, his worldly cunning and remembered beliefs of his religious teaching battling with the innate superstition of his race. Here are two of them.

SCENE TWO: NIGHTFALL

The end of the plain where the Great Forest begins. The foreground is sandy, level ground dotted by a few stones and clumps of stunted bushes cowering close against the earth to escape the buffeting of the trade wind. In the rear the forest is a wall of darkness dividing the world. Only when the eye becomes accustomed to the gloom can the outlines of separate trunks of the nearest trees be made out, enormous pillars of deeper blackness. A sombre monotone of wind lost in the leaves moans in the air. Yet this sound serves but to intensify the impression of the forest's relentless immobility, to form a background throwing into relief its brooding, implacable silence.

JONES *enters from the left, walking rapidly. He stops as he nears the edge of the forest, looks around him quickly, peering into the dark as if searching for some familiar landmark. Then, apparently satisfied that he is where he ought to be, he throws himself on the ground, dog-tired.*

Well, heah I is. In de nick o' time, too! Little mo' an' it'd be blacker'n de ace of spades heah-abouts. [*He pulls a bandana handkerchief from his hip pocket and mops off his perspiring face.*] Sho'! Gimme air! I'se done up sho' 'nuff. Dat soft Emperor job ain't no trainin' for a long dash ovah dat plain in de brilin' sun. [*Then with a chuckle*] Cheah up, nigger, de worst is yet to come. [*He*

lifts his head and stares at the forest. His chuckle peters out abruptly. In a tone of awe] My goodness, look at dem woods, will you? Dat no-count Smithers said dey'd be black an' he sho' called de turn. [*Turning away from them quickly and looking down at his feet, he snatches at a chance to change the subject—solicitously.*] Feet, you is holdin' up yo' end fine an' I sutinly hopes you ain't blisterin'. It's time you git a rest. [*He takes off his shoes, his eyes studiously avoiding the forest. He feels the soles of his feet gingerly.*] You is still in de pink—on'y a little mite feverish. Cool yo' selfs. Remember you got a long journey yit before you. [*He sits in a weary attitude, listening to the rhythmic beating of the tom-tom. He grumbles in a loud tone to cover up a growing uneasiness.*] Bush niggers! Wonder dey wouldn' git sick o' beatin' dat drum. Sounds louder, seem like. I wonder if dey's startin' after me? [*He scrambles to his feet, looking back across the plain.*] Couldn't see dem now, nohow, if dey was hundred feet away. [*Then shaking himself like a wet dog to get rid of these depressing thoughts*] Sho', dey's miles an' miles behind. What you gittin' fidgety about? [*But he sits down and begins to lace up his shoes in great haste, all the time muttering reassuringly.*] You know what? Yo' belly is empty, dat's what's de matter wid you. Come time to eat! Wid nothin' but wind on yo' stumach, o' course you feels jiggedly. Well, we eats right heah an' now soon's I gits dese here shoes laced up. [*He finishes lacing up his shoes.*] Dere! Now le's see! [*Gets on his hands and knees and searches the ground around him with his eyes.*] White stone, white stone, where are you? [*He sees the first white stone and crawls to it—with satisfaction.*] Heah you is! I knowed dis was de right place. Box of grub, come to me. [*He turns over the stone and feels in under it—in a tone of dismay.*] Ain't heah! Gorry, is I in de right place or isn't I? Dere's 'nother stone. Guess dat's it. [*He scrambles to the next stone and turns it over.*] Ain't heah,

neither! Grub, whar is you? Ain't heah. Gorry, has I got to go hungry into dem woods—all de night? [*While he is talking he scrambles from one stone to another, turning them over in frantic haste. Finally he jumps to his feet excitedly.*] Is I lost de place? Must have. But how dat happen when I was followin' de trail in broad daylight? [*Almost plaintively*] I'se hungry, I is! I gotta git my feed. Whar's my strength gonna come from if I doesn't? Gorry, I gotta find dat grub high an' low somehow! Why it come dark so quick like dat? Can't see nothin'. [*He scratches a match on his trousers and peers about him. The rate of the beat of the far-off tom-tom increases perceptibly as he does so. He mutters in a bewildered voice.*] How come all dese white stones come heah when I only remembers one? [*Suddenly, with a frightened gasp, he flings the match on the ground and stamps on it.*] Nigger, is you gone crazy mad? Is you lightin' matches to show dem whar you is? Fo' Lawd's sake, use yo' haid. Gorry, I'se got to be careful! [*He stares at the plain behind him apprehensively, his hand on his revolver.*] But how come all dese white stones? And whar's dat tin box o' grub I hid all wrapped up in oilcloth?

[*While his back is turned, the* LITTLE FORMLESS FEARS *creep out from the deeper blackness of the forest. They are black, shapeless, only their glittering little eyes can be seen. If they have any describable form at all it is that of a grubworm about the size of a creeping child. They move noiselessly, but with deliberate, painful effort, striving to raise themselves on end, failing and sinking prone again.* JONES *turns about to face the forest. He stares up at the tops of the trees, seeking vainly to discover his whereabouts by their conformation.*

Can't tell nothin' from dem trees! Gorry, nothin' 'round heah look like I evah seed it befo'. I'se gone lost de place sho' 'nuff. [*With mournful foreboding*] It's mighty queer! It's mighty queer! [*With sudden forced*

defiance—in an angry tone] Woods, is you tryin' to put somethin' ovah on me?

[*From the formless creatures on the ground in front of him comes a tiny gale of low mocking laughter like a rustling of leaves. They squirm upward towards him in twisted attitudes.* JONES *looks down, leaps backwards with a yell of terror, pulling out his revolver as he does so—in a quavering voice.*] What's dat? Who's dar? What is you? Git away from me befo' I shoots! You don't?——

[*He fires. There is a flash, a loud report, then silence broken only by the far-off quickened throb of the tom-tom. The formless creatures have scurried back into the forest.* JONES *remains fixed in his position listening intently. The sound of the shot, the reassuring feel of the revolver in his hand, have somewhat restored his shaken nerve. He addresses himself with renewed confidence.*

Dey're gone. Dat shot fix 'em. Dey was only little animals—little wild pigs, I reckon. Dey've maybe rooted out yo' grub an' eat it. Sho', you fool nigger, what you think dey is—ha'nts. [*Excitedly*] Gorry, you give de game away when you fire dat shot. Dem niggers heah dat fo' su'tin! Time you beat it in de woods widout no long waits. [*He starts for the forest—hesitates before the plunge—then urging himself in with manful resolution.*] Git in, nigger! What you skeered at? Ain't nothin' dere but de trees! Git in!

[*He plunges boldly into the forest.*

The moon rises. "Its beams, drifting through the canopy of leaves, make a barely perceptible, suffused eerie glow." Queer clicketty noises come from the massed blackness of the forest. As Jones stumbles on, more hot and tired and frightened, he has hallucinations out of the past. He sees Jeff, the nigger he killed in the argument over a dice-game with razors; he sees the chain gang from which he escaped and the white prison guard whose head he bashed in with a shovel when he escaped. "Ha'nts," he calls them. He tries to talk himself

into confidence. "Ha'nts! You fool nigger, dey ain't no such things! Don't de Baptist parson tell you dat many time? Is you civilized, or is you like dese ign'rent black niggers heah?" But these visions which he half recognizes as only born of weariness and hunger scare him nevertheless, and he cannot resist firing his precious bullets at them. At last he has none left but the silver one. He has gradually discarded his torn coat and high-fangled spurs—"dem frippety Emperor trappin's"—his trousers have been so torn away that what is left of them is no better than a loin-cloth. "The tom-tom beats louder, quicker, with a more insistent, triumphant pulsation."

SCENE SEVEN

Five o'clock. The foot of a gigantic tree by the edge of a great river. A rough structure of boulders, like an altar, is by the tree. The raised river bank is in the nearer background. Beyond this the surface of the river spreads out, brilliant and unruffled in the moonlight, blotted out and merged into a veil of bluish mist in the distance. Jones' voice is heard from the left rising and falling in the long, despairing wail of the chained slaves, to the rhythmic beat of the tom-tom. As his voice sinks to silence, he enters the open space. The expression of his face is fixed and stony, his eyes have an obsessed glare, he moves with a strange deliberation like a sleep-walker or one in a trance. He looks around at the tree, the rough stone altar, the moonlit surface of the river beyond, and passes his hand over his head with a vague gesture of puzzled bewilderment. Then, as if in obedience to some obscure impulse, he sinks into a kneeling, devotional posture before the altar. Then he seems to come to himself partly, to have an uncertain realization of what he is doing, for he straightens up and stares about him horrifiedly—in an incoherent mumble.

What—what is I doin'? What is—dis place? Seems like—seems like I know dat tree—an' dem stones—an' de river. I remember—seems like I been heah befo'.

[*Tremblingly*] Oh, Gorry, I'se skeered in dis place! I'se skeered! Oh, Lawd, pertect dis sinner!

[*Crawling away from the altar, he cowers close to the ground, his face hidden, his shoulders heaving with sobs of hysterical fright. From behind the trunk of the tree, as if he had sprung out of it, the figure of the* CONGO WITCH-DOCTOR *appears. He is wizened and old, naked except for the fur of some small animal tied about his waist, its bushy tail hanging down in front. His body is stained all over a bright red. Antelope horns are on each side of his head, branching upward. In one hand he carries a bone rattle, in the other a charm stick with a bunch of white cockatoo feathers tied to the end. A great number of glass beads and bone ornaments are about his neck, ears, wrists, and ankles. He struts noiselessly with a queer prancing step to a position in the clear ground between Jones and the altar. Then with a preliminary, summoning stamp of his foot on the earth, he begins to dance and to chant. As if in response to his summons the beating of the tom-tom grows to a fierce, exultant boom whose throbs seem to fill the air with vibrating rhythm.* JONES *looks up, starts to spring to his feet, reaches a half-kneeling, half-squatting position and remains rigidly fixed there, paralysed with awed fascination by this new apparition. The* WITCH-DOCTOR *sways, stamping with his foot, his bone rattle clicking the time. His voice rises and falls in a weird, monotonous croon, without articulate word divisions. Gradually his dance becomes clearly one of a narrative in pantomime, his croon is an incantation, a charm to allay the fierceness of some implacable deity demanding sacrifice. He flees, he is pursued by devils, he hides, he flees again. Ever wilder and wilder becomes his flight, nearer and nearer draws the pursuing evil, more and more the spirit of terror gains possession of him. His croon, rising to intensity, is punctuated by shrill cries.*

JONES *has become completely hypnotized. His voice joins in the incantation, in the cries, he beats time with his hands and sways his body to and fro from the waist. The whole spirit and meaning of the dance has entered into him, has become his spirit. Finally the theme of the pantomime halts on a howl of despair, and is taken up again in a note of savage hope. There is a salvation. The forces of evil demand sacrifice. They must be appeased. The* WITCH-DOCTOR *points with his wand to the sacred tree, to the river beyond, to the altar, and finally to* JONES *with a ferocious command.* JONES *seems to sense the meaning of this. It is he who must offer himself for sacrifice. He beats his forehead abjectly to the ground, moaning hysterically.*

Mercy, oh Lawd! Mercy! Mercy on dis po' sinner.

[*The* WITCH-DOCTOR *springs to the river bank. He stretches out his arms and calls to some god within its depths. Then he starts backward slowly, his arms remaining out. A huge head of a crocodile appears over the bank and its eyes, glittering greenly, fasten upon* JONES. *He stares into them fascinatedly. The* WITCH-DOCTOR *prances up to him, touches him with his wand, motions with hideous command towards the waiting monster.* JONES *squirms on his belly nearer and nearer, moaning continually.*

Mercy, Lawd! Mercy!

[*The crocodile heaves more of his enormous bulk on to the land.* JONES *squirms towards him. The* WITCH-DOCTOR'S *voice shrills out in furious exultation, the tom-tom beats madly.* JONES *cries out in a fierce, exhausted spasm of anguished pleading.*

Lawd, save me! Lawd Jesus, heah my prayer!

[*Immediately, in answer to his prayer, comes the thought of the one bullet left him. He snatches at his hip, shouting defiantly.*

De silver bullet! You don't git me yit!

[*He fires at the green eyes in front of him. The head of the crocodile sinks back behind the river bank, the* WITCH-DOCTOR *springs behind the sacred tree and disappears.* JONES *lies with his face to the ground, his arms outstretched, whimpering with fear as the throb of the tom-tom fills the silence about him with a sombre pulsation, a baffled but revengeful power.*

JAMES BRIDIE

The Black Eye

First produced at the Shaftesbury Theatre, London, on October 11, 1935, *and published by Constable and Co., Ltd.*

George is a younger son of a typical middle-class family. He has failed his accountancy examination and is temperamentally unfitted to hold down a steady routine job. To add to his troubles he has fallen in love at first sight with his elder brother's fiancée and has an uncomfortable feeling that she has been smitten too. In consequence he decides to leave home, go to London, and work the problem out.

The following scene takes place between George and his schoolgirl sister Connie.

CONNIE. We're a funny family.

GEORGE. Think so?

CONNIE. Yes. If I'd been born in a maternity hospital I'd think there had been a mistake.

GEORGE. You're a very ordinary sort of idiot. You might happen in every family.

CONNIE. Not in this one. They don't seem to want to talk about other people's business.

GEORGE. Quite right too.

CONNIE. But it's not *normal*, dearest.

GEORGE. Look here, Louise [the elder sister] said I was to kick you out and not let you worry me.

CONNIE. Am I worrying you?

GEORGE. Yes.

CONNIE. Not half so much as you're worrying me. You *are* a pig.

GEORGE. How?

CONNIE. You'd sit there calmly and let me bust.

GEORGE. What do you want to know?

CONNIE. All about it.

GEORGE [*after a pause*]. Right. I'll bust too if I don't tell somebody. I've fallen in love with Elspeth.

CONNIE. You've what?

GEORGE. Yes. Johnnie brought her into the morning-room last night. I was there.

CONNIE. But you can't do things like that.

GEORGE. Oh, can't I?

CONNIE. What happened?

GEORGE. Nothing much. Johnnie left us alone and she offered me a job in her father's office. I was to go there this morning, but I forgot.

CONNIE. You forgot?

GEORGE. Don't repeat things after me. I wish I hadn't told you.

CONNIE. You've got it pretty badly, I think.

GEORGE. Yes.

CONNIE. What is it about her? I mean, what do you see in her?

GEORGE. What do you see in a bomb that hits you? Don't be a fool.

CONNIE. Yes. I suppose it'll be next week before you start making inventories. What are you going to do? Johnnie's frightfully fond of her.

GEORGE. How should I know? Nothing, I suppose.

CONNIE. Nothing? You can't do nothing.

GEORGE. Why not?

CONNIE. That would be repressing a primary instinct.

GEORGE. What about Johnnie's primary instincts?

CONNIE. He hasn't any. We must think this out seriously. You see, she's in love with you too, or she wouldn't have barged in this morning the way she did. So it's one of these sudden mutual emotional crises. Against that you've got what you might call loyalty to

Johnnie, and all the heap of social considerations you've learned at your mother's knee and elsewhere. So that we've the makings of a first-rate complex. And you know what that means?

GEORGE. I don't know where you've been. You've been down the area again.

CONNIE. No, but really. I mean, you have to be frightfully careful about things like this. Now, what I'd advise you to do . . .

GEORGE. Don't you think you'd better go away and have a nice game with your dollies in the day nursery?

CONNIE. No, listen. You've got to face up to this. I know far more about these things than you do. Girls nowadays are taking all that sort of thing up very thoroughly. After all, it's their principal profession in life. And you're such a kid in sex matters. I've noticed that.

GEORGE. Oh, Gosh! . . .

CONNIE. No "Oh, Gosh" about it. You haven't spotted yet that Elspeth's batty about you; and that's elementary, my dear Watson.

GEORGE. Oh, that's rot! She isn't. She can't be. Why, she only saw me last night for the first time, and besides . . .

CONNIE. You only saw her last night for the first—I mean, you know what I mean.

GEORGE. Yes, but I'm not the sort of chap—I mean, you know what I mean.

CONNIE. Oh, yes. You haven't got a Marcel wave and a bass voice and a waisted overcoat. You fool! What kind of a man do you think a girl like Elspeth takes by the back of the neck and carries to her cave? Just a helpless rabbit with two left feet and a tuft of hair sticking up behind.

GEORGE. Rabbits don't have . . .

CONNIE. Shut up! Don't interrupt. Now, it's quite

clear that a strong silent he-man like Johnnie's no good to Elspeth. So . . .

GEORGE. But apart from all that, I've let her down, I tell you. She'll never forgive me.

CONNIE. Forgiving's her strong suit, you idiot. You're always bucking about your knowledge of character. And here I've got to teach you the blooming alphabet.

GEORGE. Oh, it's no good, Con. It's hopeless from the start. I've no job. I've no character. And she's my brother's girl.

CONNIE. She isn't.

GEORGE. She will be.

CONNIE. No, she won't. Now I'll tell you what you've got to do. You've got to cut out Johnnie. He'll get some one else. You've got to go round to Elspeth's to-day and eat mud about this morning. Then you've got to promise to pull up your socks and pass your exam. All you needed was an incentive and this is it. Then . . .

GEORGE. I'm not going to do any of these things.

CONNIE. What are you going to do?

GEORGE. I'm going to bolt.

CONNIE. Bolt where?

GEORGE. Out of this.

CONNIE. But that's cowardly.

GEORGE. Well, a living coward gets more fun than a dead hero. And I don't want to fight Johnnie. I don't want to be a chartered accountant. And I'm not sure that I want to be Elspeth's husband.

CONNIE. I thought you loved her.

GEORGE. I do, but I've a very warm regard for myself. I've known myself longer, and I'd still rather be bossed by myself than by anybody else . . . at least until I've knocked about a bit and got enough character to answer back, now and again.

CONNIE. A person who's in love never thinks of these things.

GEORGE. The more fool he.

CONNIE. I don't think much of you.

GEORGE. I'm sorry.

CONNIE. I think if you bolt you'll be back on the doorstep in a week, yapping to get in.

GEORGE. When I do you'll know I've had a damned good run for my money.

CONNIE. Won't you worry about Elspeth and all that?

GEORGE. Oh, worry, yes. But I'm used to worry, and I've my own special ways of dealing with it. . . . Con, you've been very nice. You don't think I'm ungrateful, do you?

CONNIE. No, that's all right. . . . You won't be bolting before lunch, will you?

GEORGE. Oh no, I expect I'll need a good lunch.

CONNIE. Righto then. Good luck. [CONNIE *goes out.*

[GEORGE *advances through the proscenium arch and addresses the audience confidentially.*

GEORGE. Well, that's what she wants me to do, and I wouldn't be surprised to learn that most of you would like me to do it too. All sensible people know that a wild thing is much better off in a cage. He can be kept clean and safe from guns and beasts of prey. And he's of great educational value, and you can feel generous and give him a bun now and then. Elspeth would stop my nonsense and make me work and keep me tidy and punctual. But, you see, I don't want my nonsense stopped before it's started. I've got a lot of energy bounding about inside me. I know there's something I can do. I don't know what it is, but I'm not going to have it smothered by Elspeth's or Connie's or Johnnie's views of what is right and proper; or my own damned biological necessities. You understand that, don't you?

Connie's quite right, but I'm quite right too. Reason's against me and instinct's against me, but a man has something else besides reason and instinct if he's any good at all. A sort of stable combination between the two. I'm going to follow that. I promise you it'll make me do something very definite very soon indeed. [*Telephone bell rings.*] Damn! There's the 'phone. I'd lots more to tell you, but I suppose I'd better go on living.

J. B. PRIESTLEY

Johnson over Jordan

First produced at the New Theatre, London, on February 22, 1939, and published by William Heinemann, Ltd.

Johnson has passed through the first stages of Bardo, and now, purged by terror and remorse, he reaches the Inn where he will say good-bye to everything familiar and of this life before going out to a new adventure of living.

In the previous scene in the hall of Johnson's house two days after the funeral we have seen his widow and two children. Freda, the daughter, has remarked with happy surprise that her mother seems to have shaken off her grief. To which the mother replies: "You see, I know. I suddenly saw—quite clearly—everything's all right—really all right—

As she smiles at her children, the light fades quickly, the scene goes, as we hear the music again, first rather sombre but then quickening to a delicious little tune . . .

. . . We still hear the tune softly as we look at the Inn, which seems—as we shall soon hear it is—a rum place. At one side a long staircase comes down, almost at right angles to our line of sight, and underneath this staircase, where it makes a little wall, facing us, is a kind of cosy corner, with a small dining-table and some chairs, some bookshelves let into the wall, a curtained window, and a few framed photographs and small oldish pictures. On the other side is a large window, through which light is streaming. Farther back there does not seem to be anything very much —we merely have a vague impression of a high curtain making a shadowy back wall. JOHNSON *enters, wearing a thick travelling overcoat and underneath that a country suit. He is just removing his bowler hat. Behind him*

there enters the inn PORTER, *a stalwart, pleasant-faced fellow, who is carrying* JOHNSON'S *small bag.* JOHNSON *looks about him, still bewildered but now quite pleasantly bewildered.*

PORTER. Now, sir, I'll put your bag and coat where I can lay hands on 'em the minute they're wanted.

JOHNSON [*handing over his hat and coat*]. Good!

PORTER [*who has taken the coat*]. Nice thick coat too, sir—and you're quite right, for it gets cold here late at night. High up, you see, that's what we are—high up, Mr Johnson.

JOHNSON [*surprised*]. How do you know my name?

PORTER [*smiling*]. Oh—we were expecting you.

JOHNSON. But I don't see how you could have been expecting me.

PORTER [*who is perhaps more artful than he looks*]. Why, sir, don't you like being expected?

JOHNSON. Well—yes—I suppose we all do.

PORTER [*as if that settles it*]. Well, there you are, sir.

[JOHNSON *gives him a puzzled glance, then moves down a pace or two, looking about him. Then he sees the* PORTER *is still waiting, as if for a tip, and so feels in his pockets.*

JOHNSON. Oh—er—sorry. I don't seem to have any money with me.

PORTER [*coming forward again*]. That's all right, sir. Don't take money here. No use for it. But—there's other and better ways of saying "Thank you," y'know, sir.

JOHNSON [*staring at him*]. I don't understand you. [*Then, with sudden recognition*] Here, but wait a minute! I know you.

PORTER [*pleased*]. Ah—now then, you're talking, sir. And that's what we like here. No money—but just what you did now, sir—letting your face light up.

JOHNSON [*triumphantly*]. I know—I know!

PORTER [*chuckling*]. Are you sure, sir?

JOHNSON [*triumphantly*]. Yes, of course I am. You're Jim Kirkland.

PORTER. Right, sir. Dead right!

JOHNSON [*all happy reminiscence*]. Why, Jim, you were one of my great heroes. Good Lord!—I remember my father taking me to the Lancashire match for my birthday treat—I must have been about twelve—and I saw you make a hundred and seventy-eight not out. What an innings! Comes back to me now, clear as crystal. A smoking hot morning in July. I can smell the tar on the streets. I can taste the ginger-beer I had. I can still see your bat flashing in the sun. What a day! Jim Kirkland— [*He shakes hands with boyish enthusiasm.*] This is a great moment for me.

PORTER. Proud and happy, sir, proud and happy!

JOHNSON. There's a poem about old cricketers, Jim. Did you ever read it? How did it end? "As the run-stealers flicker to and fro, to and fro—Oh—my Hornby and my Barlow long ago."

PORTER. That's it, sir. Well— [*as if about to go*].

JOHNSON. But what are *you* doing here?

PORTER [*smiling*]. Why, sir, meeting you. [*Confidentially*] It's a rum place, this, you'll see.

JOHNSON [*dropping his voice a little*]. I know. That window. Already, outside, it keeps changing.

[*He looks towards the corner under the staircase, and as soon as he does this a warm light illuminates this corner and the little pictures and photographs seem to glow.*

JOHNSON. And I'm sure some of these pictures and photographs— [*Goes to examine them.*] Why, that's the photograph we had taken at school. I haven't seen it for over thirty years. [*Sees others.*] And this used to be in my bedroom at home. It's the very same one. And that. No—this wasn't at home—it was at my grandfather's—I used to stare at it for hours—Good Lord!—

I know them all, every one. That one I bought myself, first I ever bought—cost me twelve-and-six at a little second-hand shop. You're right, Jim— [*He turns round.*] This *is* a——

[*But the* PORTER *has gone.* JOHNSON *is bewildered. We hear, very faintly, the children's prayer theme from Humperdinck's opera.* JOHNSON *sits down, and now a woman's voice is heard, as if reading to a child.*

WOMAN'S VOICE. Near a great forest there lived a poor woodcutter with his wife and his two children. The boy was called Hansel and the girl Gretel. The woodcutter was very poor indeed, and once when there was a famine in that land he could no longer give his wife and children their daily bread. . . .

JOHNSON [*sharply, unconsciously*]. Mother!

[*But the voice has stopped. A little waiter has appeared, an oldish chap with white hair and a droll, withered-apple face, and as soon as we have a good look at him we can see the old-clown look he has. He has one of those rusty Cockney voices so many of the old comedians had, and his name is* ALBERT GOOP.

ALBERT. Mr Johnson, isn't it, sir?

JOHNSON. Yes.

ALBERT [*smiling*]. You'll find everything ready, sir, when you are. The lady was in early, telling me what you liked.

JOHNSON [*surprised*]. The lady?

ALBERT. Yes, sir, *your* lady. [*Now, with deliberate comical air*] So you'll find everything in good trim. I say you'll find everything in good trim.

JOHNSON [*staring at him*]. I say—now—wait a minute——

ALBERT [*who can't wait*]. Yes, sir. Albert Goop. In pantomimes at the old Theatre Royal.

JOHNSON [*triumphantly*]. Of course!

ALBERT [*almost doing his old act now*]. Right, sir. And don't forget the little cane. [*Produces one.*] I say don't forget the little cane.

JOHNSON. You used to be the Baron in *Cinderella* and the Captain of the ship in *Robinson Crusoe*, and you always had your little cane, and said things twice. I used to spend hours and hours imitating you when I was a kid. Why, we all worshipped you, Albert Goop!

ALBERT [*completely the comedian now, doing steps and everything*]. Every Christmas at the old Theatre Royal, Longfield, there was Albert with his cane and a big red nose. Ah—happy days, sir, happy days!

JOHNSON. Lord!—I'd count the weeks to those pantomimes—and the next sight of you, Albert.

ALBERT [*doing a droll step*]. Thank you very much. [*And now* JOHNSON *says it with him and does the step too.*] I say thank you very much.

[JOHNSON *laughs, then stares in astonishment out of the window, finally grinning like a schoolboy.*

JOHNSON. Albert—I distinctly saw a stage-coach go down that road—and I'll swear Mr Pickwick was on it, with Sam Weller—and—I think—fat old Mr Weller was driving. What do you think about that, Albert?

ALBERT. Doesn't surprise me. I say it doesn't surprise me. You can see anything through that window. I once saw 'alf the bill at the old Middlesex through it—Dan Leno, R. G. Knowles, Lottie Collins, everybody—then—gone like a puff o' smoke—I say gone like a puff o' smoke.

JOHNSON. By Jove, Albert—you know, Jim Kirkland's right. It's a rummy place this.

ALBERT. Rum! It's the rummest you ever saw, this is. Why, it hasn't started on you yet. You wait—I say you wait.

JOHNSON. Wait for what, Albert?

ALBERT. Now don't ask questions, sir. Just let

things happen. That's the way to go on here, sir—just let things happen.

JOHNSON. Then I'll wait for the lady, Albert.

ALBERT. She'll appreciate it, sir. I say she'll appreciate it.

[*They are now standing together near the foot of the stairs, and from farther up the stairs we hear the sound of a boy's voice. They both look up.*

BOY'S VOICE. Well, where is he then? I want to talk to him.

JOHNSON [*startled*]. Why, that's Tom's voice.

ALBERT. Your brother, sir.

JOHNSON. Yes, but he was killed in the War——

ALBERT [*baffled*]. War? What war?

[*Tom comes running down the stairs. He is a fine-looking lad in his middle 'teens, dressed in the style of thirty-five years ago.*

TOM. Bob, you chump! Now then, Albert, buzz off—this is private. [ALBERT *goes.*] Just like you, Bob, to be so slow. You ought to have known this is the place to be in. Always keep me waiting, you old fathead.

JOHNSON [*slowly, rather painfully*]. Sorry, Tom. I didn't—well, I suppose I didn't know the way——

TOM [*indicating the window*]. Look there!

JOHNSON [*staring*]. Why—it's exactly what we used to see from our bedroom at that farm we stayed at those three summers. Look—the two haystacks—the road dipping down—the pond we had the raft on—that old cart——

TOM. The one you fell off, you ass.

JOHNSON [*a boy again*]. Well, don't forget you fell in the pond.

[*As he looks again, we hear the music that* JOHNSON *listened to in the office, and now the girl's voice comes in again, high and trailing.* JOHNSON *listens—then speaks very quietly.*

JOHNSON. I've heard that before, in the strangest places, and it never lasts long. But at least it seems to belong here, and it never did anywhere before.

TOM. What are you talking about?

JOHNSON. Didn't you hear it?

TOM. I didn't hear anything. Oh—Lord!—look who's here.

[MORRISON, *a pleasant-looking, middle-aged schoolmaster, wearing an old blazer and smoking a pipe, has just entered, in the corner by the staircase, and now the warm light comes on there.*

JOHNSON [*turning*]. Mr Morrison!

MORRISON [*coolly*]. Hello! Both Johnsons at once.

TOM. Yes, sir, but I'm pushing off. See you later, Bob.

JOHNSON [*with sudden urgency*]. Tom!

TOM [*cheerfully, in a hurry, going upstairs*]. All right, chump, I'll see you later. I want to talk to old funny-face upstairs about some bait he promised me.

JOHNSON [*going to foot of stairs and calling, distressed*]. Tom! Tom!

MORRISON [*as* JOHNSON *slowly comes nearer*]. Tom's had enough of my company. I'm afraid he doesn't like schoolmasters, even out of hours. [*Pausing, then noting* JOHNSON'S *distress*] Hello, what's worrying you, Robert?

JOHNSON [*with an effort*]. It was—only seeing Tom again—after so long a time——

MORRISON. Ah—there's none of that time here, y'know. You must have brought a bit of it with you. Odd place this, Robert. Noticed the books?

JOHNSON [*in boyish tones*]. No, sir.

MORRISON [*smiling*]. And I imagined I'd taught you to appreciate good literature. Have a look.

JOHNSON [*going up to the books*]. Why, they're all my old ones. Here's my old copy of *Don Quixote*. [*Turns*

the pages.] With all the pictures. I remember the first time I read this. It was one Christmas, a real snowy Christmas, and I'd had to go to bed with a snivelling cold—and I remember curling up in bed, very cosy, with the snow thickening on the window panes and the cold blue daylight dying—and first starting at the pictures . . .

[*As he stands there, saying this, with the book in his hand, the light in that corner fades rapidly, and a bright moonlight streams through the window opposite, and we hear a lance tapping at the sill. The next moment* DON QUIXOTE, *wearing old armour but no headpiece, is standing there, his white hair and beard and long, lined, fantastic face very sharply defined by the light, which also catches* JOHNSON'S *face in a moment or two, when he steps forward.*

DON QUIXOTE [*gravely*]. Your pardon, sirs, but this night should bring to me one of the most famous adventures that ever was seen, for this whole region abounds with wicked enchanters and there are great wrongs to be redressed. . . .

JOHNSON [*stepping forward eagerly*]. Yes, just the same. Don Quixote, you don't know me, but I remember you.

DON QUIXOTE. I seem to remember a boy in an upstairs room of a small house, far away, one winter's night——

JOHNSON [*eagerly*]. Yes, I was that boy. But I didn't think you'd remember.

DON QUIXOTE [*with a noble breadth*]. Sir, your imagination, your memory of us, your affection for us, these are our life—all that we have.

JOHNSON. Yes, I think I understand that.

DON QUIXOTE. Your great poet once said that the best of our kind are but shadows, though I think he knew

that your kind too—who appear so solid to yourselves for a little time—are also only shadows. And perhaps you too take life from the mind that beholds you and your little tale, so that you live as we must do, in another and greater being's imagination, memory and affection. [*Pauses.*] Do you notice any change in me?

JOHNSON [*gently hesitatingly*]. Only—perhaps—you seem a trifle older——

DON QUIXOTE [*sadly*]. Yes. You see, we are being forgotten. We are shadows even to shadows, and play in a dream within a dream.

JOHNSON [*with feeling*]. I am glad to have seen you, Don Quixote.

DON QUIXOTE [*in new and ringing tone*]. Sir, I take life from your remembrance. If you should see my squire, Sancho Panza, tell him to follow me instantly along the highroad. Farewell, good sirs.

[*He salutes them and disappears. The bright moonlight goes with him, and now* JOHNSON *is back in the lighted corner, looking at the books again.*

JOHNSON. Yes, yes. They're all my old ones. *Grimm's Fairy Tales.* The *Arabian Nights* I used to crayon. The Shakespeare I had at school with you.

[*As he stands there, with* MORRISON, *looking at the books, we hear voices, masculine and feminine, not coming from any one place, speaking famous lines.*

A VOICE. Daffodils,
That come before the swallow dares and take
The winds of March with beauty . . .

ANOTHER VOICE. Will no one tell me what she sings?
Perhaps the plaintive numbers flow
For old, unhappy, far-off things
And battles long ago. . . .

ANOTHER VOICE. The long day wanes: the slow moon climbs; the deep
Moans round with many voices. Come, my friends,
'Tis not too late to seek a newer world. . . .

ANOTHER VOICE. I cannot praise a fugitive and cloister'd virtue, unexercised and unbreath'd, that never sallies out and sees her adversary. . . .

ANOTHER VOICE. Or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken . . .
Men must endure
Their going hence, even as their coming hither:
Ripeness is all. . . .

ANOTHER VOICE. The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want. . . .

JOHNSON [*sitting, slowly and regretfully*]. Ever since I saw you last, these many years, I think I have been foolish and ignorant, for you taught me long ago that in these voices, which come so quickly when we call on them, I would find wisdom and beauty. Though I remembered this, and sometimes, when business was not pressing and pleasure began to pall, I heard echoes of the voices again, I did not ask them to give me their treasure. But I always felt there was a time ahead when at last I could sit by the fire and listen to them again; and now it seems there is no such time for me, only this brief last hour. . . .

MORRISON. It doesn't matter, Robert. We don't know what Time is, let alone how it shall be divided for us. And this isn't the last frontier of Beauty. [*In brisker tone*] I'm glad to have seen you again, Robert.

JOHNSON [*a boy again, shyly*]. And I you, sir. I always liked you the best, y'know, sir.

MORRISON [*smiling*]. If you hadn't I shouldn't have been here. Well—I must go.

LAURENCE HOUSMAN

Victoria Regina

First produced at the Gate Theatre, London, on May 1, 1935, *and published by Jonathan Cape, Ltd.*

The publication of Lytton Strachey's *Eminent Victorians* set a new fashion in historical biography. It inspired a general attitude of rather ribald iconoclasm towards the illustrious dead for which a new word, "debunking," had to be coined. A cynical and ineffectual age, now in the full tide of its reaction against the tyranny of a strait-laced Puritanism, with its annoying propensity for setting up "stuffed-shirt" paragons, fell gleefully to the new game of toppling great men off their pedestals; of "catching them"—to use a descriptive vulgarism which enjoyed a brief and busy vogue—"bending." Or, as the French less inelegantly put it, "en pantoufles."

The theatre could not fail to be affected. The old Romantic drama which served the utilitarian function of "painting men as they should be, not as they are"—utilitarian in that it encouraged the dynamic illusion that man has latent powers of high achievement in him—projected its historic heroes larger than life-size; 'spotlighting' them, as it were, at supreme moments of nobility. It believed the saying that no man is a hero to his own valet, and was therefore careful never to present them *en dishabille.*

The new school of biographical play discarded heroics. It preferred to peep behind the scenes. It was less concerned with the historical figure than with the man. Instead of idealizing him as an inspiring or tragic example, it brought him nearer to the common level, showing him to be possessed of common weaknesses and passions. It demonstrated that the great ones of this world have, like the rest of us, their petty vanities and tantrums, their jealousies and foibles. In thus trying to find the lowest common multiple of their humanity, this treatment dimmed their romantic halo, but by way of compensation it made them more real and lovable. Instead of a gilded statue, it offered an album of photographic

snapshots. And when—as in the case of Rudolf Besier's *The Barretts of Wimpole Street* or Laurence Housman's *Victoria Regina*—these are 'retouched' with a delicate and perceptive imagination, they can make a fascinating portrait. The naturalistic biographical play is a definite milestone on the road of modern drama.

THE QUEEN: GOD BLESS HER!

1877

A SCENE FROM HOME-LIFE IN THE HIGHLANDS

The august Lady is sitting in a garden-tent on the lawn of Balmoral Castle. Her parasol leans beside her. Writing materials are on the table before her, and a small fan, for it is hot weather; also a dish of peaches. Sunlight suffuses the tent interior, softening the round contours of the face, and caressing pleasantly the small plump hand busy at letter-writing. The even flow of her penmanship is suddenly disturbed; picking up her parasol, she indulgently beats some unseen object, lying concealed against her skirts.

QUEEN. No: don't scratch! Naughty! Naughty!

[*She then picks up a hand-bell, rings it, and continues her writing. Presently a fine figure of a man in Highland costume appears in the tent-door. He waits awhile, then speaks in the strong Doric of his native wilds.*

MR J. BROWN. Was Your Majesty wanting anything, or were you ringing only for the fun?

[*To this brusque delivery* HER MAJESTY *responds with a cosy smile, for the special function of* MR JOHN BROWN *is not to be a courtier; and knowing what is expected of him, he lives up to it.*

QUEEN. Bring another chair, Brown. And take Mop with you: he wants his walk.

MR J. B. What kind of a chair are you wanting, Ma'am? Is it to put your feet on?

QUEEN. No, no. It is to put a visitor on. Choose a nice one with a lean-back.

MR J. B. With a lean back? Ho! Ye mean one that you can lean back in. What talk folk will bring with them from up south, to be sure! Yes, I'll get it for ye, Ma'am. Come, Mop, be a braw little wee mon, and tak' your walk!

[*And while his Royal Mistress resumes her writing, taking Mop by his 'lead,' he prepares for departure.*

Have ye seen the paper this morning yet? Ma'am.

[*The address of respect is thrown in by way of afterthought, or, as it were, reluctantly. Having to be in character, his way is to tread heavily on the border-line which divides familiarity from respect.*

QUEEN. Not yet.

MR J. B. [*departing*]. I'll bring it for ye, now.

QUEEN. You had better send it.

J.B. [*turning about*]. What did ye say? . . . Ma'am.

QUEEN. "Send it," Brown, I said. Mop mustn't be hurried. Take him round by the stables.

[*He goes: and the* QUEEN, *with a soft, indulgent smile, that slowly flickers out as the labour of composition proceeds, resumes her writing. Presently enters a liveried* FOOTMAN, *who stands at attention with the paper upon a salver. Touching the table at her side as an indication, the* QUEEN *continues to write. With gingerly reverence the man lays down the paper and goes. Twice she looks at it before taking it up; then she unfolds it; then lays it down, and takes out her glasses; then begins reading. Evidently she comes on something she does not like; she pats the table impatiently, then exclaims:*

Most extraordinary!

[*A wasp settles on the peaches.*

And I wish one could kill all wicked pests as easily as you.

[*She makes a dab with the paper-knife, the wasp escapes.*

Most extraordinary!

[*Relinquishing the pursuit of wasps, she resumes her reading.*

[*In a little while* MR JOHN BROWN *returns, both hands occupied. The chair he deposits by the tent-door, and hitches Mop's 'lead' to the back of that on which the* QUEEN *is sitting. With the small beginnings of a smile she lowers the paper, and looks at him and his accompaniments.*]

QUEEN. Well, Brown? Oh, yes; that's quite a nice one. . . . I'm sure there's a wasps' nest somewhere; there are so many of them about.

J. B. Eh, don't fash yourself! Wasps have a way of being aboot this time of year. It's the fruit they're after.

QUEEN. Yes, like Adam and Eve.

J. B. That's just it, Ma'am.

QUEEN. You'd better take it away, Brown, or cover it; it's too tempting.

J. B. [*removing the fruit*]. Ah! Now if God had only done that, maybe we'd still all be running aboot naked.

QUEEN. I'm glad He didn't, then.

J. B. Ye're right, Ma'am.

QUEEN. The Fall made the human race decent, even if it did no good otherwise. Brown, I've dropped my glasses. [*He picks them up and returns them.*] Thank you, Brown.

J. B. So ye're expecting a visitor, ye say?

QUEEN. Yes. You haven't seen Lord Beaconsfield yet, I suppose?

J. B. Since he was to arrive off the train, you mean, Ma'am? No: he came early. He's in his room.

QUEEN. I hope they have given him a comfortable one.

J. B. It's the one I used to have. There's a good spring-bed in it, and a kettle-ring for the whisky.

QUEEN. Oh, that's all right, then.

J. B. Will he be staying for long, Ma'am?

QUEEN. Only for a week, I'm afraid. Why?

J. B. It's about the shooting I was thinking: whether it was the deer or the grouse he'd want to be after.

QUEEN. I don't think Lord Beaconsfield is a sportsman.

J. B. I know that, Ma'am, well enough. But there's many who are not sportsmen that think they've got to do it—when they come north of the Tweed.

QUEEN. Lord Beaconsfield will not shoot, I'm sure. You remember him, Brown, being here before?

J. B. Eh, many years ago, that was; he was no but Mr Disraeli then. But he was the real thing, Ma'am: oh, a nice gentleman.

QUEEN. He is always very nice to me.

J. B. I remember now, when he first came, he put a tip into me hand. And when I let him know the liberty he had taken, "Well, Mr Brown," he said, "I've made a mistake, but I don't take it back again!"

QUEEN. Very nice and sensible.

J. B. And indeed it was, Ma'am. Many a man would never have had the wit to leave well alone by just apologizing for it. But there was an understandingness about him, that often you don't find. After that he always talked to me like an equal—just like yourself might do. But Lord, Ma'am, his ignorance, it was surprising!

QUEEN. Most extraordinary you should think that, Brown!

J. B. Ah! You haven't talked to him as I have, Ma'am: only about politics, and poetry, and things like

that—where, maybe, he knows a bit more than I do (though he didn't know his Burns so well as a man ought that thinks to make laws for Scotland!). But to hear him talking about natural facts, you'd think he was just inventing for to amuse himself. Do you know, Ma'am, he thought stags had white tails like rabbits, and that 'twas only when they wagged them so as to show, that you could shoot them? And he thought that you pulled a salmon out o' the water as soon as you'd hooked him. And he thought that a haggis was made of a sheep's head boiled in whisky. Oh, he's very innocent, Ma'am, if you get him where he's not expecting you.

QUEEN. Well, Brown, there are some things you can teach him, I don't doubt; and there are some things he can teach you. I'm sure he has taught me a great deal.

J. B. Ay? It's a credit to ye both, then.

QUEEN. He lets me think for myself, Brown; and that's what so many of my Ministers would rather I didn't. They want me to be merely the receptacle of their own opinions. No, Brown, that's what we Stuarts are never going to do!

J. B. Nor would I, Ma'am, if I were in your shoes. But, believe me, you can do more, being a mere woman, so to speak, than many a king can do.

QUEEN. Yes; being a woman has its advantages, I know.

J. B. For you can get round 'em, Ma'am; and you can put 'em off; and you can make it very awkward for them —very awkward—to have a difference of opinion with you.

QUEEN [*good-humouredly*]. You and I have had differences of opinion sometimes, Brown.

J. B. True, Ma'am: that *has* happened; I've known it happen. And I've never regretted it, never! But the difference there is, Ma'am, that I'm not your Prime Minister. Had I been—you'd 'a been more stiff about

giving in—naturally! Now there's Mr Gladstone, Ma'am; I'm not denying he's a great man; but he's got too many ideas for my liking, far too many! I'm not against temperance any more than he is—put in its right place. But he's got that crazy notion of "local option" in his mind; he's coming to it, gradually. And he doesn't think how giving "local option," to them that don't take the wide view of things, may do harm to a locality. You must be wide in your views, else you do somebody an injustice.

QUEEN. Yes, Brown; and that is why I like being up in the hills, where the views *are* wide.

J. B. I put it this way, Ma'am. You come to a locality, and you find you can't get served as you are accustomed to be served. Well! You don't go there again, and you tell others not to go; and so the place gets a bad name. I've a brother who keeps an inn down at Aberlochy on the coach route, and he tells me that more than half his customers come from outside the locality.

QUEEN. Of course; naturally!

J. B. Well now, Ma'am, it'll be bad for the locality to have half the custom that comes to it turned away, because of local option! And believe me, Ma'am, that's what it will come to. People living in it won't see till the shoe pinches them; and by that time my brother, and others like him, will have been ruined in their business.

QUEEN. Local option is not going to come yet, Brown.

J. B. [*firmly*]. No, Ma'am, not while I vote Conservative, it won't. But I was looking ahead; I was talking about Mr Gladstone.

QUEEN. Mr Gladstone has retired from politics. At least, he is not going to take office again.

J. B. Don't you believe him, Ma'am. Mr Gladstone is not a retiring character. He's in to-day's paper again —columns of him; have ye seen?

QUEEN. Yes, quite as much as I wish to see.

J. B. And there's something in what he says, I don't deny.

QUEEN. There's a great deal in what he says I don't understand, and that I don't wish to.

J. B. Now you never said a truer thing than that in your life, Ma'am! That's just how I find him. Oh, but he's a great man; and it's wonderful how he appreciates the Scot, and looks up to his opinion.

[*But this is a line of conversation in which his Royal Mistress declines to be interested. And she is helped, at that moment, by something which really does interest her.*

QUEEN. Brown, how did you come to scratch your leg?

J. B. 'Twas not me, Ma'am; 'twas the stable-cat did that—just now while Mop was having his walk.

QUEEN. Poor dear Brown! Did she fly at you?

J. B. Well, 'twas like this, Ma'am; first Mop went for her, then she went for him. And I tell ye she'd have scraped his eyes out if I'd left it to a finish.

QUEEN. Ferocious creature! She must be mad.

J. B. Well, Ma'am, I don't know whether a cat-and-dog fight is a case of what God hath joined together; but it's the hard thing for man to put asunder! And that's the scraping I got for it, when I tried.

QUEEN. You must have it cauterized, Brown. I won't have you getting hydrophobia.

J. B. You generally get that from dogs.

QUEEN. Oh, from cats too; any cat that a mad dog has bitten.

J. B. They do say, Ma'am, that if a mad dog bites you —you have to die barking. So if it's a cat-bite I'm going to die of, you'll hear me mewing the day, maybe.

QUEEN. I don't like cats: I never did. Treacherous, deceitful creatures! Now a dog always looks up to you.

J. B. Yes, Ma'am; they are tasteful, attractive animals; and that, maybe, is the reason. They give you a good conceit of yourself, dogs do. You never have to apologize to a dog. Do him an injury—you've only to say you forgive him, and he's friends again.

[*Accepting his views with a nodding smile, she resumes her pen, and spreads paper.*

QUEEN. Now, Brown, I must get to work again. I have writing to do. See that I'm not disturbed.

J. B. Then when were you wanting to see your visitor, Ma'am? There's his chair waiting.

QUEEN. Ah, yes, to be sure. But I didn't want to worry him too soon. What is the time?

J. B. Nearly twelve, Ma'am.

QUEEN. Oh! then I think I may. Will you go and tell him: the Queen's compliments, and she would like to see him, now?

J. B. I will go and tell him, Ma'am.

QUEEN. And then I shan't want you any more—till this afternoon.

J. B. Then I'll just go across and take lunch at home, Ma'am.

QUEEN. Yes, do! That will be nice for you. And Brown, mind you have that leg seen to!

[MR JOHN BROWN *has started to go, when his step is arrested.*

J. B. His Lordship is there in the garden, Ma'am, talking to the Princess.

QUEEN. What, before he has seen *me*? Go, and take him away from the Princess, and tell him to come here!

J. B. I will, Ma'am.

QUEEN. And you had better take Mop with you. Now, dear Brown, do have your poor leg seen to, at once!

J. B. Indeed, and I will, Ma'am. Come, Mop, man! Come and tell His Lordship he's wanted.

[*Exit* MR JOHN BROWN, *nicely accompanied by Mop.*

[*Left to herself the* QUEEN *administers a feminine touch or two to dress and cap and hair; then with dignified composure she resumes her writing, and continues to write even when the shadow of her favourite Minister crosses the entrance, and he stands hat in hand before her, flawlessly arrayed in a gay frock suit suggestive of the period when male attire was still not only a fashion but an art.*

[*Despite, however, the studied correctness of his costume, face and deportment give signs of haggard fatigue; and when he bows it is the droop of a weary man, slow in the recovery. Just at the fitting moment for full acceptance of his silent salutation, the Royal Lady lays down her pen.*

QUEEN. Oh, how do you do, my dear Lord Beaconsfield! Good morning; and welcome to Balmoral.

LORD B. [*as he kisses the hand extended to him*]. That word from your Majesty brings all its charms to life! What a prospect of beauty I see around me!

QUEEN. You arrived early? I hope you are sufficiently rested.

LORD B. Refreshed, Madam; rest will come later.

QUEEN. You have had a long, tiring journey, I fear.

LORD B. It was long, Madam.

QUEEN. I hope that you slept upon the train?

LORD B. I lay upon it, Ma'am. That is all I can say truly.

QUEEN. Oh, I'm sorry!

LORD B. There were compensations, Ma'am. In my vigil I was able to look forward—to that which is now before me. The morning is beautiful! May I be permitted to inquire if your Majesty's health has benefited?

QUEEN. I'm feeling 'bonnie,' as we say in Scotland. Life out of doors suits me.

LORD B. Ah! This tent light is charming! Then my eyes had not deceived me; your Majesty is already more than better. The tempered sunlight, so tender in its reflections, gives—an interior, one may say—of almost floral delicacy; making these canvas walls like the white petals of an enfolding flower.

QUEEN. Are you writing another of your novels, Lord Beaconsfield? That sounds like composition.

LORD B. Believe me, Madam, only an impromptu.

QUEEN. Now, my dear Lord, pray sit down! I had that chair specially brought for you. Generally I sit here quite alone.

LORD B. Such kind forethought, Madam, overwhelms me! Words are inadequate. I accept, gratefully, the repose you offer me.

[*He sinks into the chair, and sits motionless and mute, in a weariness that is not the less genuine because it provides an effect. But from one seated in the Royal Presence much is expected; and so it is in a tone of sprightly expectancy that his Royal Mistress now prompts him to his task of entertaining her.*

QUEEN. Well? And how is everything?

LORD B. [*rousing himself with an effort*). Oh! Pardon! Your Majesty would have me speak on politics, and affairs of State? I was rapt away for the moment.

QUEEN. Do not be in any hurry, dear Prime Minister.

LORD B. Ah! That word from an indulgent Mistress spurs me freshly to my task. But, Madam, there is almost nothing to tell: politics, like the rest of us, have been taking holiday.

QUEEN. I thought that Mr Gladstone has been speaking.

LORD B. [*with an airy flourish of courtly disdain*]. Oh, yes! He has been—speaking.

QUEEN. In Edinburgh, quite lately.

LORD B. And in more other places than I can count. Speaking—speaking—speaking. But I have to confess, Madam, that I have not read his speeches. They are composed for brains which can find more leisure than yours, Madam—or mine.

QUEEN. I have read some of them.

LORD B. Your Majesty does him great honour—and yourself some inconvenience, I fear. Those speeches, so great a strain to understand, or even to listen to—my hard duty for now some forty years—are a far greater strain to read.

QUEEN. They annoy me intensely. I have no patience with him!

LORD B. Pardon me, Madam; if you have read *one* of his speeches, your patience has been extraordinary.

QUEEN. Can't you stop it?

LORD B. Stop?—stop what, Madam? Niagara, the Flood? That which has no beginning, no limit, has also no end: till, by the operation of nature, it runs dry.

QUEEN. But, surely, he should be stopped when he speaks on matters which may, any day, bring us into war!

LORD B. Then he would be stopped. When the British nation goes to war, Madam, it ceases to listen to reason. Then it is only the beating of its own great heart that it hears: to that goes the marching of its armies, with victory as the one goal. Then, Madam, above reason rises instinct. Against that he will be powerless.

QUEEN. You think so?

LORD B. I am sure, Madam. If we are drawn into war, his opposition becomes futile. If we are not: well,

if we are not, it will not be his doing that we escape that—dire necessity.

QUEEN. But you *do* think it necessary, don't you?

[*To the Sovereign's impetuous eagerness, so creditable to her heart, he replies with the oracular solemnity by which caution can be sublimated.*

LORD B. I hope it may not be, Madam. We must all say that—up till the last moment. It is the only thing we *can* say, to testify the pacifity of our intention when challenged by other Powers.

QUEEN [*touching the newspaper*]. This morning's news isn't good, I'm afraid. The Russians are getting nearer to Constantinople.

LORD B. They will never enter it, Madam.

QUEEN. No, they mustn't! We will not allow it.

LORD B. That, precisely, is the policy of your Majesty's Government. Russia knows that we shall not allow it; she knows that it will never be. Nevertheless, we may have to make a demonstration.

QUEEN. Do you propose to summon Parliament?

LORD B. Not Parliament; no, Madam. Your Majesty's Fleet will be sufficient.

[*This lights a spark; and the royal mind darts into strategy.*

QUEEN. If I had my way, Lord Beaconsfield, my Fleet would be in the Baltic to-morrow; and before another week was over, Petersburg would be under bombardment.

LORD B. [*considerately providing this castle in the air with its necessary foundations*]. And Cronstadt would have fallen.

QUEEN [*puzzled for a moment at this naming of a place which had not entered her calculations*]. Cronstadt? Why Cronstadt?

LORD B. Merely preliminary, Madam. When that fortified suburb has crumbled—the rest will be easy.

QUEEN. Yes! And what a good lesson it will teach them! The Crimea wasn't enough for them, I suppose.

LORD B. The Crimea! Ah, what memories — of heroism—that word evokes! "Magnificent, but not war!"

QUEEN. Oh! There is one thing, Lord Beaconsfield, on which I want your advice.

LORD B. Always at your Majesty's disposal.

QUEEN. I wish to confer upon the Sultan of Turkey my Order of the Garter.

LORD B. Ah! how generous, how generous an instinct! How like you, Madam, to wish it!

QUEEN. What I want to know is, whether, as Prime Minister, you have any objection?

LORD B. "As Prime Minister." How hard that makes it for me to answer! How willingly would I say "None!" How reluctantly, on the contrary, I have to say, "It had better wait."

QUEEN. Wait? Wait till when? I want to do it *now*.

LORD B. Yes, so do I. But can you risk, Madam, conferring that most illustrious symbol of honour, and chivalry, and power, on a defeated monarch? Your royal prestige, Madam, must be considered. Great and generous hearts need, more than most, to take prudence into their counsels.

QUEEN. But do you think, Lord Beaconsfield, that the Turks are going to be beaten?

LORD B. The Turks *are* beaten, Madam. . . . But England will never be beaten. We shall dictate terms—moderating the demands of Russia; and under your Majesty's protection the throne of the Kaliphat will be safe—once more. That, Madam, is the key to our Eastern policy: a grateful Kaliphat, claiming allegiance from the whole Mahometan world, bound to us by

instincts of self-preservation—and we hold henceforth the gorgeous East in fee with redoubled security. His power may be a declining power; but ours remains. Some day, who knows? Egypt, possibly even Syria, Arabia, may be our destined reward.

[*Like a cat over a bowl of cream, England's Majesty sits lapping all this up. But, when he has done, her commentary is shrewd and to the point.*

QUEEN. The French won't like that!

LORD B. They won't, Madam, they won't. But has it ever been England's policy, Madam, to mind what the French don't like?

QUEEN [*with relish*]. No, it never has been, has it? Ah! you are the true statesman, Lord Beaconsfield. Mr Gladstone never talked to me like that.

LORD B. [*courteously surprised at what does not at all surprise him*]. No? . . . You must have had interesting conversations with him, Madam, in the past.

QUEEN [*very emphatically*]. I have never once had a conversation with Mr Gladstone, in all my life, Lord Beaconsfield. He used to talk to me as if I were a public meeting—and one that agreed with him, too!

LORD B. Was there, then, any applause, Madam?

QUEEN. No, indeed! I was too shy to say what I thought. I used to cough sometimes.

LORD B. Rather like coughing at a balloon, I fear. I have always admired his flights—regarded as a mere *tour de force*—so buoyant, so sustained, so incalculable! But, as they never touch earth to any serviceable end, that I could discover—of what use are they? Yet if there is one man who has helped me in my career—to whom, therefore, I should owe gratitude—it is he.

QUEEN. Indeed? Now that does surprise me! Tell me, Lord Beaconsfield, how has he ever helped you?

LORD B. In our party system, Madam, we live by the

mistakes of our opponents. The balance of the popular verdict swings ever this way and that, relegating us either to victory or defeat, to office or to opposition. Many times have I trodden the road to power, or passed from it again, over ruins the origin of which I could recognize either as my own work or that of another; and most of all has it been over the disappointments, the disaffections, the disgusts, the disillusionments—chiefly among his own party—which my great opponent has left me to profit by. I have gained experience from what he has been morally blind to; what he has lacked in understanding of human nature he has left for me to discover. Only to-day I learn that he has been in the habit of addressing—as you, Madam, so wittily phrased it—of addressing, "as though she were a public meeting," that Royal Mistress, whom it has ever been my most difficult task not to address sometimes as the most charming, the most accomplished, and the most fascinating woman of the epoch which bears her name. [*He pauses, then resumes.*] How strange a fatality directs the fate of each one of us! How fortunate is he who knows the limits that destiny assigns to him: limits beyond which no word must be uttered.

[*His oratorical flight, so buoyant and sustained, having come to its calculated end, he drops to earth, encountering directly for the first time the flattered smile with which the Queen has listened to him.*

Madam, your kind silence reminds me, in the gentlest, the most considerate way possible, that I am not here to relieve the tedium of a life made lonely by a bereavement equal to your own, in conversation however beguiling, or in quest of a sympathy of which, I dare to say, I feel assured. For, in a sense, it is as to a public assembly, or rather as to a great institution, immemorially venerable and august, that I have to address myself when, obedient to your summons, I come to be consulted as your

Majesty's First Minister of State. If, therefore, your royal mind have any inquiries, any further commands to lay upon me, I am here, Madam, to give effect to them in so far as I can.

[*This time he has really finished, but with so artful an abbreviation at the point where her interest has been roused that the Queen would fain have him go on. And so the conversation continues to flow along intimate channels.*

QUEEN. No, dear Lord Beaconsfield, not to-day! Those official matters can wait. After you have said so much, and said it so beautifully, I would rather still talk with you as a friend. Of friends you and I have not many; those who make up our world, for the most part, we have to keep at a distance. But while I have many near relatives, children and descendants, I remember that you have none. So your case is the harder.

LORD B. Ah, no, Madam, indeed! I have my children —descendants who will live after me, I trust—in those policies which, for the welfare of my beloved country, I confide to the care of a Sovereign whom I revere and love. . . . I am not unhappy in my life, Madam; far less in my fortune; only, as age creeps on, I find myself so lonely, so solitary, that sometimes I have doubt whether I am really alive, or whether the voice, with which now and then I seek to reassure myself, be not the voice of a dead man.

QUEEN [*almost tearfully*]. No, no, my dear Lord Beaconsfield, you mustn't say that!

LORD B. [*gallantly*]. I won't say anything, Madam, that you forbid, or that you dislike. You invited me to speak to you as a friend; so I have done, so I do. I apologize that I have allowed sadness, even for a moment, to trouble the harmony—the sweetness—of our conversation.

QUEEN. Pray, do not apologize! It has been a very

great privilege; I beg that you will go on! Tell me—you spoke of bereavement—I wish you would tell me more—about your wife.

[*The sudden request touches some latent chord; and it is with genuine emotion that he answers.*

LORD B. Ah! My wife! To her I owed everything.

QUEEN. She was devoted to you, wasn't she?

LORD B. I never read the depth of her devotion—till after her death. Then, Madam—this I have told to nobody but yourself—then I found among her papers—addressed "to my dear husband"—a message, written only a few days before her death, with a hand shaken by that nerve-racking and fatal malady which she endured so patiently—begging me to marry again.

[*The* QUEEN *is now really crying, and finds speech difficult.*

QUEEN. And you, you—? Dear Lord Beaconsfield; did you mean—had you ever meant—?

LORD B. I did not then, Madam; nor have I ever done so. It is enough if I allow myself—to love.

QUEEN. Oh, yes, yes; I understand—better than others would. For that has always been my own feeling.

LORD B. In the history of my race, Madam, there has been a great tradition of faithfulness between husbands and wives. For the hardness of our hearts, we are told, Moses permitted us to give a writing of divorcement. But we have seldom acted on it. In my youth I became a Christian; I married a Christian. But that was no reason for me to desert the nobler traditions of my race—for they are in the blood and in the heart. When my wife died I had no thought to marry again; and when I came upon that tender wish, still I had no thought for it; my mind would not change. Circumstances that have happened since have sealed irrevocably my resolution—never to marry again.

QUEEN. Oh, I think that is so wise, so right, so noble of you!

[*The old* STATESMAN *rises, pauses, appears to hesitate, then in a voice charged with emotion says:*

LORD B. Madam, will you permit me to kiss your hand!

[*The hand graciously given, and the kiss fervently implanted, he falls back once more to a respectful distance. But the emotional excitement of the interview has told upon him, and it is in a wavering voice of weariness that he now speaks.*

You have been very forbearing with me, Madam, not to indicate that I have outstayed either my welcome or your powers of endurance. Yet so much conversation must necessarily have tired you. May I then crave permission, Madam, to withdraw? For, to speak truly, I do need some rest.

QUEEN. Yes, my dear friend, go and rest yourself! But before you go, will you not wait, and take a glass of wine with me? [*He bows and she rings.*] And there is just one other thing I wish to say before we part.

LORD B. Speak, Madam, for thy servant heareth.

[*The other* SERVANT *is now also standing to attention, awaiting orders.*

QUEEN. Bring some wine. [*The* ATTENDANT *goes.*] That Order of the Garter which I had intended to confer upon the Sultan—have you, as Prime Minister, any objection if I bestow it nearer home, on one to whom personally—I cannot say more—on yourself, I mean.

[*At that pronouncement of the royal favour the* MINISTER *stands, exhausted of energy, in an attitude of drooping humility. The eloquent silence is broken presently by the* QUEEN.

QUEEN. Dear Lord Beaconsfield, I want your answer.

LORD B. Oh, Madam! What adequate answer can these poor lips make to so magnificent an offer? Yet answer I must. We have spoken together briefly to-day of our policies in the Near East. Madam, let me come to you again when I have saved Constantinople, and secured once more upon a firm basis the peace of Europe. Then ask me again whether I have any objection, and I will own—"I have none!"

[*Re-enters* ATTENDANT. *He deposits a tray with decanter and glasses, and retires again.*

QUEEN. Very well, Lord Beaconsfield. And if you do not remind me, I shall remind you. [*She points to the tray.*] Pray, help yourself! [*He takes up the decanter.*

LORD B. I serve you, Madam?

QUEEN. Thank you.

[*He fills the two glasses; presents hers to the* QUEEN, *and takes up his own.*

LORD B. May I propose for myself—a toast, Madam?

[*The* QUEEN *sees what is coming, and bows graciously.*

The Queen! God bless her!

[*He drains the glass, then breaks it against the pole of the tent, and throws away the stem.*

An old custom, Madam, observed by loyal defenders of the House of Stuart, so that no lesser health might ever be drunk from the same glass. To my old hand came a sudden access of youthful enthusiasm—an ardour which I could not restrain. Your pardon, Madam!

QUEEN [*very gently*]. Go and lie down, Lord Beaconsfield; you need rest.

LORD B. Adieu, Madam.

QUEEN. Draw your curtains, and sleep well!

[*For a moment he stands gazing at her with a look of deep emotion; he tries to speak. Ordinary words seem to fail; he falters into poetry.*

"When pain and anguish wring the brow,
A ministering Angel, thou!"

[*It has been beautifully said, they both feel. Silent and slow, with head reverentially bowed, he backs from the Presence.*

[*The* QUEEN *sits and looks after the retreating figure, then at the broken fragments of glass. She takes up the hand-bell and rings. The* ATTENDANT *enters.*

QUEEN. Pick up that broken glass.

[*The* ATTENDANT *collects it on the hand-tray which he carries.*

Bring it to me! . . . Leave it!

[*The* ATTENDANT *deposits the tray before her, and goes. Gently the* QUEEN *handles the broken pieces. Then in a voice of tearful emotion she speaks.*

Such devotion! Most extraordinary! Oh! Albert! Albert!

[*And in the sixteenth year of her widowhood and the fortieth of her reign, the* ROYAL LADY *bends her head over the fragments of broken glass, and weeps happy tears.*

NOEL COWARD

Design for Living

First produced at the Ethel Barrymore Theatre, New York, on January 24, 1933, and published by William Heinemann, Ltd.

This short excerpt, though typical enough of Mr Coward's manner, does not convey the full flavour of his wit and brilliance at its best. It is quoted with a different intention: to illustrate the great change that stage dialogue has undergone in two decades. Compare it with the excerpt from Pinero's *Mid-channel* and note how, whereas that is consistently overwritten and emotionally charged, Noel Coward's dialogue is underwritten and emotionally constrained. The situation in the two excerpts is not dissimilar: two lovers meet after the absence of the man, who has tried unsuccessfully to forget the woman who rejected him. But how differently they are handled!

The chief characters of *Design for Living* are three artists: Otto, Leo, and Gilda. They form a trinity whose early struggles have united them in a comradeship as close as that of the Three Musketeers—except that Gilda is a woman. Consequently it is inevitable that, sooner or later, love should disturb the harmony of this triangular friendship. Both Otto and Leo discover that they love Gilda, but Gilda chooses Otto. So Leo takes his *congé*, but returns, a successful dramatist, and cuts out his painter friend.

In the following scene from Act II the situation is reversed. Gilda has begun to find that success is spoiling Leo when Otto comes back from America.

[OTTO *comes in from the hall and stands in the doorway, looking at* GILDA.

OTTO. Hallo, Gilda!

GILDA [*turning sharply and staring at him*]. It's not true!

OTTO [*coming into the room*]. Here we are again.

GILDA. Oh, Otto!

OTTO. Are you pleased?

GILDA. I don't quite know yet.

OTTO. Make up your mind, there's a dear.

GILDA. I'll try.

OTTO. Where's Leo?

GILDA. Away. He went away this afternoon.

OTTO. It seems a very nice flat.

GILDA. It is. You can see right across to the other side of the square on a clear day.

OTTO. I've only just arrived.

GILDA. Where from?

OTTO. New York. I had an exhibition there.

GILDA. Was it successful?

OTTO. Very, thank you.

GILDA. I've decided quite definitely now: I'm ecstatically pleased to see you.

OTTO. That's lovely.

GILDA. How did you get in?

OTTO. I met an odd-looking woman going out. She opened the door for me.

GILDA. That was Miss Hodge. She's had two husbands.

OTTO. I once met a woman who'd had four husbands.

GILDA. Aren't you going to take off your hat and coat?

OTTO. Don't you like them?

GILDA. Enormously. It was foolish of me to ask whether your exhibition was successful. I can see it was. Your whole personality reeks of it.

OTTO [*taking off his hat and coat*]. I'm disappointed that Leo isn't here.

GILDA. He'll be back on Monday.

OTTO. How is he, please?

GILDA. Awfully well.

OTTO. Oh dear! Oh dear, oh dear—! I feel very

funny. I feel as if I were going to cry, and I don't want to cry a bit.

GILDA. Let's both cry, just a little!

OTTO. Darling, darling Gilda.

[*They rush into each other's arms and hug each other.*