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MACMILLAN AND CO. LTD., LONDON

SHORT MODERN PLAYS

Selected by

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MAGMILLAN AND CO., LIMITED
37. MARTIN'S STREET, LONDON

1937

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First Edition 1935

Reprinted 1936, February and October 1937

**PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN
BY R. & R. CLARK, LIMITED, EDINBURGH**

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

THANKS are due to the following who have kindly given permission for the use of the plays included in this volume : The author's representatives, for *Thread o' Scarlet*, by the late J. J. Bell ; Miss Glemcnce Dane, for *Shivering Shocks* ; Mr. J. O. Francis and the Welsh Outlook Press, for *Birds of a Feather*; Lady Gilbert, for *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern* ; the executors of the late Thomas Hardy, for " Trafalgar," from *The Dynasts* ; Mr. W. W. Jacobs, for *The Boatswain's Mate* ; Messrs. John Lane, The Bodley Head, Ltd., for *The Death Trap*, from *The Square Egg*, by " Saki" ; Mr. Sean O'Casey, for *The End of the Beginning*, from *Windfalls* ; Sir John Squire, for *The Clown of Stratford*; Mr. A. Willmott, for *The Dear Departing*, by Leonid Andreyev; and Mr. W. B. Yeats, for *The Pot of Broth*.

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CONTENTS

		PAGE
Introduction		xi
The End of the Beginning	<i>Sean O'Casey</i>	I
The Death Trap	<i>Saki</i>	27
The Pot of Broth	<i>W. B. Yeats</i>	37
Thread o' Scarlet	<i>J. J. Bell</i>	51
Rosencrantz and Guilden- stern	<i>W. S. Gilbert</i>	67
Trafalgar, from "The Dynasts "	<i>Thomas Hardy</i>	85
Birds of a Feather	<i>J. O. Francis</i>	117
The Clown of Stratford	<i>Sir John Squire</i>	143
Shivering Shocks	<i>Clemence Dane</i>	155
The Boatswain's Mate	<i>W. W. Jacobs</i>	177
The Dear Departing	<i>Leonid Andreyev, translated d by Julius West</i>	201
Notes		227
Questions		241

INTRODUCTION

THE prevalent enthusiasm for amateur dramatic work, for the reading, acting, and studying of plays in schools, colleges, and societies, makes excuse unnecessary for the addition of another volume of short plays to those which exist already. Moreover special care has been taken to choose for this volume as far as possible plays which have not been assembled between the same two covers before, while most of the plays have not appeared previously at all in any similar collection. If *Thread o' Scarlet* and *The Pot of Broth* are encountered in similar volumes, one can only point out that "the best remains the best," as the anthologist remarked when he made his selection of lyrics from Palgrave's *Golden Treasury*.

It is interesting to note that it is impossible to choose any collection of first-class English plays without going out of England in all directions. First one is bound to travel west across the Irish Sea. As Mr. Bernard Shaw's O'Flaherty V.G. reports his mother : "' She says all the English poets and great men are Irish. She says the English never knew how to read their own books until we taught them." General Sir Pearce Madigan : " But have you never mentioned any famous Englishman to her and asked her what she had to say about him ? " O'Flaherty : " The only one I could think of was Shakespeare, Sir, and she says he was born in Cork." ' Mrs. O'Flaherty's national pride may have strained a point over Shakespeare, and left the claims of War-

INTRODUCTION

wickshire not entirely disproved, but when we think of Congreve and Farquhar, Goldsmith and Sheridan, Oscar Wilde, Synge, Shaw, Yeats, Lady Gregory, Lennox Robinson, Somerset Maugham, St. John Ervine, and Sean O'Casey and reflect what our theatre would have been without these names, the claim of Mrs. O'Flaherty appears hardly excessive, and that two of the plays in this volume, *The Pot of Broth* and *The End of the Beginning*, should be by Irishmen does not seem an immoderate allowance. Wales is represented by *Birds of a Feather* by J. O. Francis, and Scotland by *Thread o' Scarlet*, which, though there is nothing Scottish about it (except its efficiency), is written by the creator of the immortal "Wee Macgregor." Travel eastwards is not forgotten, Mr. Julius West having journeyed as far as Russia to bring home in English translation as delicious and original a piece of international satire in the shape of *The Dear Departing* as it is possible to desire or imagine.

"When I wants poetry, Mum, I makes it," said the washerwoman to the district visitor. John Bull can't go proudly as far as that, but he is not wholly a borrower of plays, and when he has wanted plays in addition to those little pieces by Master Shakespeare he can at least boast of having written *The Dynasts*, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern*, *The Boatswain's Mate*, *The Death Trap*, *The Clown of Stratford*, and *Shivering Shocks* : and that is no mean thing to have done with one hand while he was having to build and maintain the British Empire with the other. For that is the odd thing about John Bull. Many an Irishman may outwrite him, Welshman outwit him, Russian out-dance him, and Scot take his best jobs (in Harley Street and elsewhere), yet in the long run John makes the best all-round job of it. He has secured so much of the material globe that when

INTRODUCTION

even Irish playwrights want to make a fortune they have to put on in London those plays of theirs in which they abuse and ridicule the English. And when it comes even to the writing of the plays, the energetic John takes a breather from practical affairs occasionally and takes pen in hand, as much as to say, as Wordsworth to Lamb's amusement said of *Hamlet*, "I could write such a play *if Pd a mind to*" Only John, unlike Wordsworth, shows on those rare occasions that he *has* a mind to, so that William Shakespeare, when all has been said and done on the stage in Irish, Gaelic, or Russian, still bestrides the theatre like a Colossus, and when in this present volume we have admired the wit and craft and eloquence of Yeats and O'Casey, Francis, Bell, and Andreyev, we shall make a mistake if we do not recognise that the two most conspicuous pieces in the collection, one of humour and one of tragedy, are *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern* by Sir W. S. Gilbert, and the Trafalgar scene from *The Dynasts* by Thomas Hardy. Moreover, in *The Dynasts* we are reminded of the richness of our double heritage : that we are the descendants and compatriots not only of Hardy but of Wellington, not only of Shakespeare but of Nelson.

G. B.

THE END OF THE BEGINNING

A Comedy in One Act

By SEAN O'CASEY

CHARACTERS

Darry Bernll. About fifty-five ; stocky, obstinate, obese. He is completely bald, except for a tuft of grey hair just above the forehead.

Barry Dernll, Darry's neighbour. Same age as Darry. Thin, easy-going, big moustache, and is very near-sighted.

Lizzie Berrill, Darry's wife. About forty-five. A good woman about the house, but that's about all.

THE END OF THE BEGINNING

SCENE.—A big comfortable kitchen. Steep stairs, almost like a ladder, leading to upper room, top right. Huge fireplace, right. Some chairs, one heavy, with rubbered castors. Small settee, and table. Chest of drawers, left, on top of which stands a gramophone. Door back, and to left of door a window. To right of door, a dresser, on which is, as well as delf, a large clock of the alarm type. To right of dresser, on a nail, hangs a whip ; to the left of dresser hangs a mandolin. On table, a quantity of unwashed delf. To right of fireplace, a lumber room. The room, at night, is lighted by an electric bulb, hanging from centre of ceiling. It is a fine early autumn evening, with the sun low in the heavens. On wall, back, a large red card on which " Do It Mow " is written in white letters. A sink under the window.

Darry (at door of room above. Pie is shaving, and his chin is covered with lather). This shaving water's dead cold, woman. D'ye hear me ? This shaving water's dead cold.

Lizzie (busy about the room—quietly). Come down and heat it, then.

Darry (scornfully). Too much to do, I suppose. I'd do all that has to be done here, three times over, 'n when all was finished, I'd be sighing for something to do.

Lizzie. If you had half of what I have to do here, at the end of the evening you'd be picked up dead out of the debris.

Darry. I would ?

SHORT MODERN PLAYS

Lizzie. You would.

Darry. Sure ?

Lizzie. Certain.

Darry. If I only had half to do ?

Lizzie. Or less.

Darry. I'd be picked up out of the debris ?

Lizzie. Out of the middle of it.

Darry. Dead ?

Lizzie. As a mackerel.

Darry (fiercely). I'm always challenging you to change places for a few hours, but you won't do it. I'd show you what a sinecure of a job you had here, while I'm sweating out in the fields.

Lizzie. Go out 'n finish the mowing of the meadow. It'll take you only half an hour or so, 'n there's plenty of light in the sky still.

Darry (who has been shaving himself during this argument). The meadow'll do to be done to-morrow. Why don't you let me do what's to be done in the house, an' you go 'n mow the meadow ? Why don't you do that ? 'don't you do that ? 'you do that ? Agony to look at you ; agony to listen to you ; agony, agony to be anywhere near you.

Lizzie. I'd just like to see you doing what's to be done about the house—I'd just like to see you,

Darry. What is there to be done about the house—will you tell us that ?

Lizzie. There's the pig 'n the heifer 'n the hens to be fed 'n tended. There's ironing, cooking, washing, 'n sewing to be done.

Darry. Sewing ! An' only a button back 'n front of me so that it's next thing to a miracle that my trousers are kept from starting the neighbours talking.

Lizzie. If you say much more, I'll go 'n mow the meadow, 'n leave you to see what you can make of the house-work.

Darry (angrily). Buzz off, buzz off, then, an' I'll

THE END OF THE BEGINNING

show you how the work of a house is done. Done quietly ; done with speed, 'n without a whisper of fuss in its doing. Buzz off, if you want to, 'n I'll show you 'n all your sex how the work of a house is done !

[Lizzie violently pulls off a jazz-coloured overall she is wearing, and flings it on the floor.]

Lizzie (furiously). Put that on you, then, 'n do what remains to be done about the house, while I go an' mow the meadow. Get into it, 'n show the world an' your poor wife the wonders you can do when you're under a woman's overall.

Darry (a little frightened). Oh, I'll manage all right.

Lizzie. An' don't you let that Alice Lanigan in here while I'm away either, d'ye hear ?

Darry. What Alice Lanigan ?

Lizzie (in a temper). What Alice Lanigan ! The Alice Lanigan I caught you chattering to yesterday, when you should have been mowing the meadow. The Alice Lanigan that's setting you on to nag at me about the little I have to do in the house. The Alice Lanigan that's goading you into the idea that if you were a little slimmer, you'd be a shevaleer, an's getting you to do physical jerks. The Alice Lanigan that's on the margin of fifty, 'n assembles herself together as if she was a girl in her teens.

Darry. I don't be thinking of Alice Lanigan.

Lizzie. I've seen you, when you thought I slumbered 'n slep, with nothing at all on you, doing your physical jerks in front of the looking-glass, 'n that, too, when the lessons of a Mission were still hot in your heart—an all for Alice Lanigan.

Darry. You buzz off now, 'n I'll show how the work of a house is done.

Lizzie (while she is putting a broad-brimmed hat on her heady pulling a pair of old gloves over her hands', and taking down a whip hanging from a nail in the wall). I'm telling

SHORT MODERN PLAYS

you it's a dangerous thing to shake hands with Alice Lanigan, even with a priest giving the introduction. The day'll come soon when you'll know she's making mechanical toys of you 'n that other old fool, Barry Derrill, who's so near-sighted that he can't see the sky, unless the moon's shining in it !

Darry. Cheerio.

Lizzie (at the door). I'm going now, 'n we'll see how you do the work of the house.

Darry. Hail 'n farewell to you. An' mind you, this'll be only the beginning of things.

Lizzie. God grant that it won't be the end, an' that when I come back, I'll at least find the four walls standing.

[She goes out. Darry strolls to the door, and watches her going down the road.]

Darry (scornfully to himself). Mow the meadow ! Well, let her see her folly out.

[As he shuts the door, the clock in the distant Town Hall strikes eight, Darry returns, glances at the clock on the dresser, notices that it has stopped, takes it up, puts his ear against it, shakes it, begins to wind it, finds it difficult to turn, puts added strength into the turning, and a whirring rattle, like a strong spring breaking, comes from the inside of the clock. He hastily replaces the clock on the dresser. After a few seconds, thought, he takes it up again, removes the back, and part of a big, broken spring darts out, which he hurriedly crams in again, and puts the clock back on the dresser.]

Darry. Lizzie again !

[He catches sight of the gramophone, looks at it, thinks for a second, goes over to the chest of drawers, takes some records from behind it and fixes one on the disc of the gramophone. He takes off his waistcoat, loosens his braces, stands stiff,

THE END OF THE BEGINNING

strokes his thighs, pats his stomach, and tries to push it back a little. He starts the gramophone going, runs to the centre of the room, and lies down on the broad of his back. The gramophone begins to give directions for physical exercises, to which Darry listens and, awkwardly, clumsily, and puffingly, tries to follow the movements detailed in the woids spoken by the gramophone when the music commences.

Gramophone. Lie on back ; hands behind the head ; feet together—are you ready ? Bend the right knee ; draw it into the waistline, towards the chest—commence !

[Darry is too slow, or the gramophone is too quick, for he can't keep up with the time of the music.

When he finds that he is behind the time of the music, Darry increases his speed by partial performance of the movements, and so gets into touch with the time, but presently, blowing and panting, he is out of time again by a beat or two. He climbs stijily on to his feet, goes over to gramophone, and puts the indicator to " Slow."

Darry. Phuh. Too quick, too damn quick altogether.

[He starts the gramophone going, runs to the centre of the room, and again lies down on the broad of his back. When the music begins he goes through the movements as before ; but the music is playing so slowly now that he finds it impossible to go slowly enough to keep to the time of the tune. When he finds himself in front of a beat, he stops and puffs and waits for the beat to catch up with him before he recommences. As he is going through these movements, the door opens, and Barry Derrill comes into the room. He has a mandolin under his arm, and is wearing wide-rimmed, thick-lensed spectacles.

SHORT MODERN PLAYS

Barry (briskly). Come 'n kiss me sweet ⁵n twenty—what the hell are you trying to do ?

Darry. Can't you see what I'm trying to do ? Take off your spectacles 'n get a closer look. Keeping meself fit 'n flexible—that's what I'm trying to do.

Barry. The rhythm's too slow, man ; tense your muscles ; you're not tun'd into the movements properly, man.

Darry. The indicator must have shifted. Slip over 'n put it to the point marked Medium, 'n then get down here 'n give us a hand.

Barry. What about the prologue of playing the song we're to sing at the Town Hall concert ?

Darry. Get down 'n have five minutes of this, first ; we'll both sing the better for it.

Barry (dubiously). Never done it to music, 'n I wouldn't be able to keep in touch with the, with the measure.

Darry. The music makes it easier, man. Keep your eye on me, 'n move when I move.

[Barry reluctantly takes off his coat and waistcoat, goes over to the gramophone, puts his nose against the instrument, and puts the indicator to "Fast."

Darry. To do this thing properly you'd want to be wearing shorts. Right ; now keep in touch with the rhythm, or you'll mar everything. Start her off, and stretch yourself down.

[Barry starts the gramophone, runs over and lies down opposite to Darry, so that the soles of their feet are only a few inches apart.

Gramophone (very rapidly). Lie on back ; hands behind the head ; feet together—are you ready ? Bend the right knee ; draw it into the waistline towards the chest ; breathe out—commence !

[The tempo of the tune forces them to do the exercises in a frantic way, till it dawns on Darry, who is

THE END OF THE BEGINNING

*nearly exhausted, that there's something wrong.
He stops while Barry goes on manfully.*

Darry (*scornfully*). Eh, eh, there, wait a minute, wait a minute, man. Don't you see anything wrong ?

Barry (*stopping*). No ; what's wrong ?

Darry (*testily*). Aw, what's wrong ! We're congestin' ourselves with speed ; that's what's wrong. You must have jammed the indicator hard to Fast. (*He gets up, goes to the gramophone, and puts it right.*) We're entertainin' ourselves, Barry, an' not tryin' to say the Rosary.

[He comes back and stretches himself again on the floor. The music begins and the two men commence the exercises. After a few moments, Darry slows down a little, misses several beats, and tries to blame Barry.]

Darry (*excitedly keeping up the movements, but out of time, as he talks*). Try to keep the proper rhythm up, man. (*He hums the tune of "Coming thro" the Rye"*) Dad th' didee dah th' diddy dah th' diddy dee—that way, man. Dah th' diddy dah th' diddy (*rapidly*). Keep your eye on me. Dah th' diddy dee.

[After a few movements Darry is out of time and breathless ; he stops and sits up to complain, but he really wants to get a rest.]

Darry (*with aggravated patience*). Barry, you're spoiling the whole thing by getting out of time. Don't let your arms and legs go limber, tense your muscles. Three beats to the bar, see ? Now !

[They start again ; Darry is soon behind time, blowing and puffing out of him. Barry keeps to the beat of the tune splendidly.]

Darry (*angrily*). You're going too damn quick, altogether, now, man !

Barry. No I'm not—I'm there to the tick every time.

Darry (*violently*). There to the tick—how is it

SHORT MODERN PLAYS

you're not in the line with me, then, if you're there to the tick ? I don't know whether you're in front of me or behind me. Are you too stiff or what ?

Barry. I'm there to the second every time. It's you that's missin' a beat in the bar.

Darry (indignantly, stopping to talk, while Barry goes on). I'm missin' it because I'm trying' to foster you into the right balance 'n rhythm of the movements. That's why I'm missin' it. (*Loudly.*) An' I'm wastin' me time !

Bary (sharply). I'm doin' me best, amn't I ?

Darry (more sharply still). Your best's a hell of a way behind what's wanted. It's pitiful 'n painful to be watchin' you, man. (*He stands up and looks at Barry, who keeps going.*) Eh, eh, you'll do yourself an injury, Barry. Get up 'n we'll do the song. (*As Barry goes on.*) Oh, get up 'n we'll do the song.

[Barry gets up reluctantly, and Darry goes over and stops the gramophone.

Barry. I was doin' it well enough, if you'd let me alone.

Darry (scornfully). Yes ; like the Londonderry Air play'd in march time.

[They get their mandolins and stand side by side at the back.

Darry. Now we walk in a semicircle down to the front, 'n bow, you remember ? Ready ?

Barry. Yep.

Darry. Go !

[They both step off to the right, take a few steps, and then they halt.

Barry. Something wrong ; we don't go round the same way, do we ?

Darry (testily). Of course there's something wrong ; of course we don't go round the same way. Can't you try to remember, Barry ? You're to go to the left, to the left.

THE END OF THE BEGINNING

Barry. I remember distinctly I was to go to the right.

Darry (irritably). Oh, don't be such an egotist, Barry. Now think for a minute. (*A pause.*) Now make up your mind—d'ye want to go to the left or the right ?

Barry (testily). Oh, left, right—any way.

Darry. Left, then. Go.

[They march round, one to the right, the other to the left, meet in the front, and bow.]

Darry. You start, Barry, my boy.

Barry (singing).

One summer eve a handsome man met a handsome maiden, strolling,

Darry.

Down where the bees were hummin' an' the wild flowers gaily growing ;

Barry.

Said she we'll sit down here a while, all selfish thoughts controlling,

Darry.

Down where the bees are hummin' an' the wild flowers gaily growing :

Barry.

Said she we'll meditate on things, things high 'n edifying,

How all things live 'n have their day 'n end their day by dying.

Darry.

Down where the bees are hummin' an' the wild flowers gaily growing.

Barry.

The moon glanc'd down 'n wonder'd what the pair of them were doing,

Darry.

Down where the bees were hummin' an' the wild flowers gaily growing ;

SHORT MODERN PLAYS

Barry.

Then th' moon murmur'd, I feel hot, 'n fear a storm is brewing,

Darry.

Down where the bees are hummin' an' the wild flowers gaily growing.

Barry.

She talk'd so well of things so high, he started to reward her,

The moon ran in behind a cloud, for there was none to guard her.

I'll take that off, she said, you'd ruin the lace that's round the border,

Darry

Down where the bees are hummin' an' the wild flowers gaily growing.

Barry.

White-featur'd 'n thin goodie-goodies rush around excited,

Darry.

Down where the bees are hummin' an' the wild flowers gaily growing ;

Barry.

Proclaiming that the dignity of living has been blighted,

Darry.

Down where the bees are hummin' an' the wild flowers gaily growing.

Barry.

But when the light is soft 'n dim, discovery disarming,
The modest moon behind the clouds, young maids
are coy 'n charming.

Darry.

Down where the bees are hummin' an' the wild flowers gaily growing.

[When the song has ended, Darry cocks his ear and listens.]

THE END OF THE BEGINNING

Barry. Shall we try it once more ?

Darry. Shush, shut up, can't you ?

[Darry goes over to the door, opens it and listens intently. There is heard the rattling whirr caused by the steady and regular movement of a mowing machine. The distant Town Hall clock strikes nine.

Darry (*hastily putting the mandolin away.*) I forgot. I'll have to get going.

Barry. Get going at what ?

Darry. House-work. (*He begins to get into the overall left off by Lizzie.*) I dared her, an' she left me to do the work of the house while she was mowing the meadow. If it isn't done when she comes back, then sweet good-bye to the status I had in the home. (*He finds it difficult to get the overall on.*) Dih dih dih, where's the back 'n where's the front, 'n which is which is the bottom 'n which is the top ?

Barry. Take it quietly, take it quietly, Darry.

Darry (*resentfully*). Take it quietly? An' the time galloping by ? I can't stand up on a chair 'n say to the sun, stand thou still there, over the meadow th' missus is mowing, can I ?

Barry. I know damn well you can't, but you're not going to expedite matters by rushing around in a hurry.

Darry (*he has struggled into the overall*). Expedite matters ! It doesn't seem to strike you that when you do things quickly, things are quickly done. Expedite matters ! I suppose loitering to look at you lying on the broad of your back, jiggling your legs about, was one way of expediting matters ; an' listening to you plucking curious sounds out of a mandolin, an' singing a questionable song, was another way of expediting matters ?

Barry. You pioneered me into doing the two of them yourself.

Darry (*busy with the pot on the fire*). I pioneered you

SHORT MODERN PLAYS

into doing them ! Barry Derrill, there's such a thing in the world as a libel. You came strutting in with a mandolin under your arm, didn't you ?

Barry. I did, but——

Darry. An' you sang your song.

Barry. Yes, but——

Darry. When you waltz'd in, I was doing callisthenics, wasn't I ?

Barry. I know you were ; but all the same——

Darry. An' you flung yourself down on the floor, and got yourself into a tangle trying to do them too, didn't you ?

Barry. Hold on a second——

Darry. Now, I can't carry the conversation into a debate, for I have to get going. So if you can't give a hand, go, 'n let me do the things that have to be done, in an' orderly 'ri quiet way.

Barry. 'Course I'll give a hand——only waiting to be asked.

Darry (*looking at the clock, suddenly*). Is the clock stopped ?

Barry (*taking up clock and putting it close to his ear*). There's no ticking, 'n it's hours slow.

Darry. Lizzie again ! Forgot to wind it. Give the key a few turns, Barry, an' put the hands on to half-past nine.

[Barry starts to wind the clock. Darry goes over to table, gets a basin of water, begins to wash the delf, humming to himself the air of the song, " Down where the bees are humming ". Barry winds and winds away, but no sign is given of a tightening of the spring inside. He looks puzzled, winds again, and is about to silently put the clock back where he found it, when Darry turns and looks at him questioningly.]

Darry. You've broken the damn thing, have you ?

Barry. I didn't touch it.

THE END OF THE BEGINNING

Darry. Didn't touch it? Amn't I after looking at you twisting an' tearing at it for nearly an hour? *(He comes over to Barry.)* Show me that. *(He takes the clock from Barry and opens the back, and the spring darts out.)* Didn't touch it. Oh, for God's sake be more careful when you're handling things in this house! Dih dih dih. *(He pushes the spring back, and slaps the clock down on the dresser.)* You must have the hands of a gorilla, man. Here, come over '11 wipe while I wash.

[A slight pause while the two of them work at the delf. Darry anxiously watches Barry, who, being very near-sighted^ holds everything he wipes up to his spectacles.]

Darry (suddenly). Look out, look out, there—you're not leaving that jug on the table at all; you're depositing it in the air, man!

Barry (peering down at the table). Am I? Don't be afraid, I won't let anything drop.

Darry (humming the song). Dum dah de cle dum da dec dee dum dah dee dee dah ah dum.

Barry (swinging his arm to the tune). Down where the bees are hummin' an' the wild flowers gaily growing.

Darry. Fine swing, you know. Dum dah dee dee dum dah dee dee dum dah dee dee dah ah dum.

Barry (swinging his arm). Down where the bees are hummin'—

[Barry's arm sends the jug flying of the table on to the floor.]

Darry (yelling). You snaky-arm'd candle-power-ey'd elephant, look at what you're after doing!

Barry (heatedly). It's only a tiny jug, anyhow, 'n you can hardly see the pieces on the floor!

Darry (just as heatedly). An' if I let you do much more, they would soon be big enough to bury us! Sit down, sit down in the corner there; do nothing, say nothing, an', if I could, I'd put a safety curtain

SHORT MODERN PLAYS

round you. For God's sake, touch nothing while I run out an' give the spuds to the pig.

[*Darry dashes over to the fire, whips the pot off, and runs out. He leaves the door open, and again the rattling whirr of a mowing machine can be heard. Barry sits dejectedly in a corner. After a few moments a bump is heard outside, followed by a yell from Darry, who, a second later, comes rushing madly in, a bloody handkerchief pressed to his nose. He flings himself flat on the floor on his back, elevating his nose as much as possible.*

Darry. Get me something cold to put down the back of my neck, quick !

Barry (frightened). What the hell did you do to yourself ?

Darry. I didn't bend low enough when I was going in, 'n I gave myself such a, oh such a bang on my nose on the concrete. Get something cold, man, to shove down the back of my neck 'n stop the bleeding i

Barry. Keep the nose sticking up in the air as high as you can. I don't know where to get something cold to shove down the back of your neck. I knew this rushing round wouldn't expedite matters.

Darry (with a moan of resentment as he hears "expedite matters"). Oh, pull yourself together, man, 'n remember we're in the middle of an emergency.

Barry. A little block of ice, now, would come in handy.

Darry. A little—oh, a little block of ice ! An' will you tell us where you're going to get a little block of ice ? An', even if we had one, how could you fasten it down the back of my neck ? Eh ? Can't you answer—where are you going to get a block of ice ?

Barry. How the hell do I know where I'm going to get it ?

THE END OF THE BEGINNING

Darry. D'ye expect me to keep lying here till the winter comes ?

[During this dialogue Barry is moving round the room aimlessly, peering into drawers, rattling the delf on the dresser with his nose as he looks along the shelves.]

Darry *(as he hears the crockery rattling)*. Mind, mind, or you'll break something. I must be losing a lot of blood, Barry, an' I won't be able to keep my nose sticking up in the air much longer. Can't you find anything ?

Barry. I can see nothing.

Darry. Run upstairs 'n get the key of the big shed that's hanging on the wall, somewhere over the mantelpiece at the far end of the room. Go quick, man !

[Barry runs upstairs, goes into room, comes out again, and looks down at Darry.]

Darry *(up to him)*. Did you get it ?

Barry. Where's the switch ? It's as dark as pitch in there.

[Darry, with a moan of exasperation, sits up, but immediately plunges down on his back again.]

Darry. Starts pumping out again the minute I sit up. *(To Barry)* There's no switch in that room. We can't have a switch in every corner of the room just to suit you ! You've only got to move down the centre of the room till you come to the fireplace ; then brush your hand over the mantelpiece, along the wall, till you feel the key hanging there.

[Barry goes back into the room. After a few seconds, silence, there is a crash offalling crockery.]

Darry, after a second of silent consternation, sits up with a jerk, but immediately plunges down on his back again.

Darry *(sinking supine on the floor)*. What has he done now ; ok, what has he done now ? *(Shouting up to*

SHORT MODERN PLAYS

Barry.) Eh, you up there—what have you done now?

Barry (*sticking his head out of door above*). Nothing much—the washhand-stand fell over.

Dany (*angrily*). Nothing much. It sounded a hell of a lot, then. You're the kind of man if you're not chained up, 'll pull everything in the house asundher ! Come down, come down, 'n stop down, or that delicate little hand of yours 'll smash everything in the house !

Barry. My eyes are used to the darkness, now, 'n I can see. I'll get the key for you.

[He goes back into the room, leaving Darry speechless. After a few seconds, he comes out of the room in a sweat of fright and anger, one hand tightly clasped over the other. He tushes down the stairs, and begins to pull the things out of the chest of drawers, every other moment leaving off to clasp one hand over the other.]

Barry (*frantically*). Get your own key, get your own key. Half slaughtering myself for your sake ! Why don't you keep your razor-blades in a safe place, an' not leave them scattered about in heaps all over the mantelpiece ? Where is there a bit of old rag till I bind up my wounds ? Get your own key yourself, I'm tellin' you.

Darry. Amn't I nicely handicapped, wanting help an' having only the help of a half-blind man ?

Barry. D'ye know I'm nearly after mowing my fingers off with your razor-blades ? (*Coming near to Darry, with a handkerchief in his hand, and showing the injured fingers to him.*) Look at them, uh, look at them—one looks as if only a thin thread of flesh was keeping it on. How am I going to play the mandolin now ?

Darry. You'd play it better if all your fingers were off.

THE END OF THE BEGINNING

Barry (keeping the wounded hand in the air, and holding out the handkerchief to Darry with the other). Here, get a grip of this 'n help me to bind up me wounds.

[Barry kneels down beside the prostrate Darry, who takes the handkerchief and proceeds to tie it round Barry's wounded fingers.

Darry (keeping his nose well up in the air). You give that an unexpected honour, if you call that a wound !

[Darry ties the handkerchief round Barry's hand, who stands looking at it.

Barry (reflectively). Won't be able to do much for you with it now.

Darry. It'll limit your capacity for brcakin' things.

[A pause.

Darry. Slip out, Barry, old son, 'n see if the heifer's safe on the bank beside the house.

[Barry goes outside the door and stands looking up towards the top of the house. The light has been fading, and it is getting dark. Again can be heard the whirr of the mowing machine, and the Town Hall dock strikes ten.

Barry. I think I can hear her croppin, the grass all right, but it doesn't seem wise to leave her there 'n the dusk fallin'.

Darry (testily). I can't do anything till this bleeding stops, can I ?

Barry. The spuds are all scattered about here where you let them fall when you were runnin' in.

Darry (moaning). 'N can't you get the broom 'n sweep them up into a corner, 'n not be trampling them into the ground ; you see the state I'm in !

[Barry gets the broom and starts to sweep outside the door.

Barry (in to Darry). How's it now?

Darry (cautiously sitting up). It's nearly stopped now, but I'll have to go cautious.

[Parry, sweeping with one hand, manages to bring

SHORT MODERN PLAYS

the broom-handle into contact with the window, and breaks a pane. A silent pause.

Barry (as if he didn't know). What's that, what's that?

Darry (in an agony of anger). What's that, what's that ! Can't you see, man, that you're after thrustin' the handle of the broom through one of the windows ?

Barry (peering down at the hole in the window). That's curious, now, for I never felt the handle touchin' the Window ; but there's a hole in it, right enough.

Darry (with angry mockery). No, you wouldn't feel it touchin' it, either. A hole in it—of course there's a hole in it ! I've a destroyin' angel in the house !

Barry. Well, not much use of lookin' at it now.

Darry (vehemently). Oh, come in, come in, come in, man. Didn't you hear the clock strikin' ten? I'll have to get goin' now.

[He gets up gingerly, feeling his nose, and still keeping it at a high angle.]

Barry (introducing another subject). Hadn't you better stable the heifer before you do anything ?

Darry (violently). Haven't I to clean out the cow-house first before I stable her, man ? With your exercisin', 'n your singin', your great 'n godly gift of expeditin' matters, I haven't made a bit of headway ! I hadn't a chance to give her the graze she needs, so let her get all she can on the bank at the back of the house.

Barry. Supposing she wanders to the edge of the bank 'n tumbles off?

Darry. I don't know what to do about that.

Barry. Couldn't you tie her to something ?

Darry (angrily). There's nothing to tie her to, man.

Barry. What about putting a rope down the chimney 'n tying it to something in the room ?

Darry (after a few seconds' thought). That's a good idea, Barry. There's a rope outside, an' I'll jling one

THE END OF THE BEGINNING

end round her neck, let the other end down the chimney, an' tie it to a chair. Wait here a second 'n get it when it comes down.

[Darry rushes out. After a few moments his voice is heard faintly from above calling, "Hello, hello ! " Barry, who has his head a little up the chimney, the smoke making him cough, answers, " Righto, let her come." The rope comes down ; Barry catches the end and pulls it into the room. Darry returns, and they tie the tope to a chair.]

Barry. Put the chair at the far end of the room, an' if the heifer wanders too far, we'll see the chair moving across the room.

Darry *(with enthusiasm)*. Now you're beginnin' to use your brains at last, Barry, me boy. *(He shifts the chair to the far end of the room.)* Now we can get goin' 'n get everything ship-shape before the missus toddles back. Let's put on the light to see what we're doin'.

[He snaps down the switch, but no light comes into the bulb.]

Darry *(annoyed)*. Dih dih dih—must be the meter again.

[He hurries into the lumber room, stepping over the rope.]

Barry *(speaking in to Darry)*. I wouldn't do much tamperin' with that.

Darry *(inside room—emphatically)*. Oh, I know what I'm doin'.

[Darry rushes out again, snaps down the switch, but no light comes.]

Darry *(irritably)*. Must be the bulb. *(He rushes to a drawer.)* There's a bulb here, somewhere, we've had for a long time, 'n never used. *(He takes one from the drawer.)* Here we are. *(He pulls a chair to the centre of the room, stands on it, takes off the old bulb, and*

SHORT MODERN PLAYS

gives it to Barry.) See if you can see anything wrong with it.

Bany (holding it to his nose). Can't see anything.

Darry. Leave it down, leave it down.

Barry. Sure the one you're fixing's the right voltage?

Darry (stopping to look at Barry). Course it's the right voltage. Why wouldn't it be the right voltage?

Barry. If it wasn't, it might fuse.

Darry. Fuse. No fear of it fusing. *(He starts to work again.)*

[The chair to which the rope is tied begins to move across the floor.]

Barry (startled). Look out, look out—the heifer's moving!

Darry. Catch hold of it, catch hold of it, before she disappears up the chimney!

[Barry catches the chair, but the strain is too much, and he is pulled along. Darry jumps down off the chair, leaves the bulb on the table, catches hold of the rope, and helps Barry to tug the chair back to the far end of the room.]

Darry. You sit on the chair, 'n then she can't move without our knowledge.

[Barry sits on the chair; Darry mounts the chair again, and starts to fix the bulb. The chair begins to move with Barry sitting on it.]

Barry (excitedly). Eh, quick again, get down, the heifer's movin'!

[Darry jumps down again, and the two of them pull the chair back to its place.]

Darry. The missus'll be back 'n nothin' done but damage.

[He gets up again and fixes the bulb; there is a flash, and the room is darker than ever.]

Barry (like a prophet). I warned you, Darry; I saw it comin'.

Darry (forcibly). What are you blatherin' about?

THE END OF THE BEGINNING

We're no worse off than we were before we fixed it. There's a drum of oil in the lumber room, 'n if there's any left in it we can light the lamps. You light the one hangin' on the wall, while I see how we stand.

[He runs into the lumber room. Barry takes the lamp from the wall, removes the chimney, and tries to light the wick, but he can't see it, and holds the match anywhere but near the wick. Darry comes out of cellar.]

Darry (jubilantly). Plenty of oil in it. Aw, you're not holding the match within a mile of the wick, man. Show it to me, show it to me.

[He takes the match from Barry, and lights the lamp.]

Darry. Out with you now, 'n get one of the old lamps you'll find on one of the shelves to the right in the shed at the back of the yard.

Barry. How'll I see ?

Darry. Strike a match 'n look. You'll see them staring at you. I'll take a canful of oil from the drum to put in it when you bring it back, 'ri then we'll have lashin's of light.

Barry (going out by door). I know I won't be able to see.

[Darry, with a can that has a long snout on it, runs back into the lumber room. Barry has left the door open, and the rattling whirr of the mowing machine can be heard again. There is a slight pause. Suddenly Darry rushes out of the lumber room over to the open door.]

Darry (shouting madly). Barry, Barry, come here quick, man ! I turned the key of the tap too much, 'n it slipped out of me hand into a heap of rubbish, 'n I can't turn off the cock, 'n I can't find the key in the dark. Come quick, man, or there won't be a drop of oil left in the drum !

[He rushes wildly back into the lumber room. Another slight pause. He rushes out again, with

SHORT MODERN PLAYS

the drum in his arms, his thumb pressed to the tap outlet, and runs over to the door.

Darry (*calling madly*). Eh, Barry, Barry, d'ye hear me cailin' you, man? I won't be able to keep this oil in much longer. Have you fallen asleep, or what?

[*There is heard outside a rattle, followed by a crash of falling pots, tins, and tools; then a dead silence for a moment.*]

Darry (*staggering against the wall*). Aw, what's he after doin' now!

Barry (*outside, in a loud voice of great distress*). Darry, oh, Darry, I'm after nearly destroyin' meself! Where's the doorway?—I can't see!

Darry (*going over and standing in the doorway*). Here, here, man; no, to the left. (*As Barry staggers in dusty and frightened.*) What ruin are you after causin' now?

Bany (*moaningly*). I'm after gettin' an awful shock!

Darry (*appealmgly*). Pull yourself together, for God's sake, man, 'n tell us what's happened.

Barry (*as he sinks down on a chair*). The lamps were on top of the top shelf; there was nothing to stand on; I had to climb up on the shelves, and climbing up, the shelves 'n all that was on them came down on top of me!

[*Darry goes over and rests the drum in the sink, his hand still pressed over the outlet of the tap.*]

Darry. 'N why did you climb the shelves? What did you want to do that for? Couldn't you see, you sap, that they weren't fixed well in the wall? Why did you insist on climbing the shelves?

Barry. I was just tryin' to expedite matters.

Darry (*with a wail*). Tryin' to expedite matters. Oh, there'll be a nice panorama of ruin in front of Lizzie when she comes back!

Barry. 'N me spectacles were sent flyin' when the shelves fell.

THE END OF THE BEGINNING

Darry. 'N why didn't you grab them before they fell to the ground ?

Barry (*hotly*). How could I grab them 'n they fallin', when I was fallin' too !

Darry (*impatiently*). Well, get the lamp then, 'n look for the lost key in the lumber room.

Barry. 'N maybe let it fall, 'n set the house on fire ?

Darry (*woefully*). Oh amn't I in a nice predic—
The chair, the chair—the heifer's movin' !

[The chair to which the rope is tied begins to move across the floor. Barry catches it, tugs manfully, but he is carried on towards the fireplace.]

Barry (*anxiously*). Give us a hand, give us a hand, or I'll be up the chimney !

[Darry leaving the drum, runs over to Barry's side, grips the rope infwnt of Barry, and, to get a safer hold, takes the rope off the chair and puts it wund him under his arms. With great pulling., they get the rope a little back. The oil flows from the drum into the sink unnoticed.]

Darry (*panting*). Keep a sthrain, or we'll be up the chimney !

Barry. How'm I goin' to get home to-night without me spectacles ?

Darry (*loudly*). Keep a sthrain on her, man, keep a sthrain on her ; we have to get this straightened out first before we can brood over your spectacles !

Barry (*suddenly noticing the oil drum*). The oil, the oil.

[He lets go of the rope, and runs over to the oil drum.]

Darry disappears up the chimney.

Barry (*lifting the drum and shaking it*). Not a drop left in it, not a single drop ! What're we goin' to do n——

[He turns and sees that Darry has disappeared.]

Lizzie (*speaking outside in a voice of horror*). The heifer, the heifer !

Darry (*calling out*). Lizzie, Lizzie !

SHORT MODERN PLAYS

[*Lizzie rushes in as Darry falls down the chimney. He crawls out from the fireplace on his hands and knees, and halts there, exhausted and sooty.*

Lizzie (horrificed). What in the name of God has happened?

Darry (to *Lizzie*). Now you see the result of havin' your own way! Why the hell didn't you hold on to the rope when you took it off the heifer, so that I wouldn't come down with a bump?

Lizzie. How'd I know you were hangin' on the other end?

Darry (indignantly). You didn't know—my God, woman, can you do nothin' right?

CURTAIN

THE DEATH TRAP

By " SAKI " (H. H. MUNRO)

CHARACTERS

Dimitri, Reigning Prince of Kedaria.

Dr. Stronetz

Col. Girmtza } Officers of the Kranitzki Regiment of
Major V o n t } e f f G u a r d s .
Captain Shultz }

THE DEATH TRAP

SCENE.—*An Ante-chamber in the Prince's Castle at Tzern.*

TIME.—*The Present Day. The scene opens about ten o'clock in the evening.*

An ante-chamber, rather sparsely furnished. Some rugs of Balkan manufacture on the walls. A narrow table in centre of room, another table set with wine bottles and goblets near window, R. Some high-backed chairs set here and there round room. Tiled stove, L. Door in centre.

Girnitza, Vontieff, and Shultz are talking together as curtain rises.

Girnitza. The Prince suspects something : I can see it in his manner.

Shultz. Let him suspect. He'll know for certain in half an hour's time.

Girmitza. The moment the Andrieff Regiment has marched out of the town we are ready for him.

Shultz (*drawing revolver from case and aiming it at an imaginary person*). And then—short shrift for your Royal Highness ! I don't think many of my bullets will go astray.

Girnitza. The revolver was never a favourite weapon of mine. I shall finish the job with this.

[*Half draws his sword and sends it back into its scabbard with a click.*

Vontieff. Oh, we shall do for him right enough. It's a pity he's such a boy, though. I would rather we had a grown man to deal with.

Girnitza. We must take our chance when we can

SHORT MODERN PLAYS

find it. Grown men marry and breed heirs and then one has to massacre a whole family. When we've killed this boy we've killed the last of the dynasty, and laid the way clear for Prince Karl. As long as there was one of this brood left our good Karl could never win the throne.

Vontieff. Oh, I know this is our great chance. Still I wish the boy could be cleared out of our path by the finger of Heaven rather than by our hands.

Shultz. Hush ! *Here he comes.*

[Enter, by door, centre, Prince Dimitri, in undress cavalry uniform. He comes straight into room, begins taking cigarette out of a case, and looks coldly at the three officers.]

Dimitri. You needn't wait.

[They bow and withdraw, Shultz going last and staling insolently at the Prince. He seats himself at table, centie. As door shuts he stares for a moment at it, then suddenly bows his head on his arms in attitude of despair. ... A knock is heard at the door. Dimitri leaps to his feet. Enter Stronetz in civilian attire.]

Dimitri (eagerly). Stronetz ! My God, how glad I am to see you !

Stronetz. One wouldn't have thought so, judging by the difficulty I had in gaining admission. I had to invent a special order to see you on a matter of health. And they made me give up my revolver ; they said it was some new regulation.

Dimitri (with a short laugh). They have taken away every weapon I possess, under some pretext or another. My sword has gone to be reset, my revolver is being cleaned, my hunting-knife has been mislaid.

Stronetz (horried). My God, Dimitri ! You don't mean——?

Dimitri. Yes, I do. I am trapped. Since I came to the throne three years ago as a boy of fourteen I

THE DEATH TRAP

have been watched and guarded against this moment, but it has caught me unawares.

Stronetz- But your guards !

Dimitri. Did you notice the uniforms ? The Kranitzki Regiment. They are heart and soul for Prince Karl ; the artillery are equally disaffected. The Andrieff Regiment was the only doubtful factor in their plans, and it marches out to camp to-night. The Lonyadi Regiment comes in to relieve it an hour or so later.

Stronetz. They are loyal, surely ?

Dimitri. Yes, but their loyalty will arrive an hour or so too late.

Stronetz. Dimitri ! You mustn't stay here to be killed ! You must get out quick !

Dimitri. My dear good Stronetz, for more than a generation the Karl faction have been trying to stamp our line out of existence. I am the last of the lot ; do you suppose that they are going to let me slip out of their claws now ? They're not so damned silly.

Stronetz. But this is awful ! You sit there and talk as if it were a move in a chess game.

Dimitri (rising). Oh, Stronetz ! If you knew how I hate death ! I'm not a coward, but I do so want to live. Life is so horribly fascinating when one is young, and I've tasted so little of it yet. (*Goes to window.*) Look out of the window at that fairyland of mountains with the forest running up and down all over it. You can just see Grodovitz where I shot all last autumn, up there on the left, and far away beyond it all is Vienna. Were you ever in Vienna, Stronetz ? I've only been there once, and it seemed like a magic city to me. And there are other wonderful cities in the world that I've never seen. Oh, I do so want to live. Think of it; here I am alive and talking to you, as we've talked dozens of times in this grey old room, and to-morrow a fat stupid servant

SHORT MODERN PLAYS

will be washing up a red stain in that corner—I think it will probably be in that corner.

[He points to corner near stove, L.]

Stronetz. But you mustn't be butchered in cold blood like this, Dimitri. If they've left you nothing to fight with I can give you a drug from my case that will bring you a speedy death before they can touch you.

Dimitri. Thanks, no, old chap. You had better leave before it begins ; they won't touch you. But I won't drug myself. I've never seen anyone killed before, and I shan't get another opportunity.

Stronetz. Then I won't leave you ; you can see two men killed while you are about it.

[A band is heard in distance playing a march.]

Dimitri. The Andrieff Regiment marching out ! Now they won't waste much time ! *(He draws himself up tense in corner by stove.)* Hush, they are coming !

Stronetz, (rushing suddenly towards Dimitri). Quick ! An idea ! Tear open your tunic !

[He unfastens Dimitri's tunic and appears to be testing his heart. The door swings open and the three officers enter. Stronetz waves a hand commanding silence, and continues his testing. The officers stare at him.]

Girnitza. Dr. Stronetz, will you have the goodness to leave the room ? We have some business with His Royal Highness. Urgent business, Dr. Stronetz.

Stronetz (facing round). Gentlemen, I fear my business is more grave. I have the saddest of duties to perform. I know you would all gladly lay down your lives for your Prince, but there are some perils which even your courage cannot avert.

Girnitza (puzzled). What are you talking of, sir ?

Stronetz. The Prince sent for me to prescribe for some disquieting symptoms that have declared themselves. I have made my examination. My duty is a cruel one. ... I cannot give him six days to live !

THE DEATH TRAP

[Dimitri sinks into chair near table in pretended collapse. The officers turn to each other, non-plussed.]

Girnitza. You are certain ? It is a grave thing you are saying. You are not making any mistake ?

Stronetz (*laying his hand on Dimitri's shoulder*).
Would to God I were !

[*The officers again turn, whispering to each other.*]

Girnitza. It seems our business can wait.

Vontieff (*to Dimitri*). Sire, this is the finger of Heaven.

Dimitri (*brokenly*). Leave me.

[*They salute and slowly withdraw. Dimitri slowly raises his head, then springs to his feet, rushes to door and listens, then turns round jubilantly to Stronetz.*]

Dimitri. Spoofed them ! Ye gods, that was an idea, Stronetz !

Stronetz, (*who stands quietly looking at Dimitri*). It was not altogether an inspiration, Dimitri. A look in your eyes suggested it. I had seen men who were stricken with a mortal disease look like that.

Dimitri. Never mind what suggested it, you have saved me. The Lonyadi Regiment will be here at any moment and Girnitza's gang daren't risk anything then. You've fooled them Stronetz, you've fooled them.

Stronetz (*sadly*). Boy, I haven't fooled them. . . . (*Dimitri stares at him for a long moment.*) It was a real examination I made while those brutes were waiting there to kill you. It was a real report I made ; the malady is there.

Dimitri (*slowly*). Was it *all* true, what you told them ?

Stronetz. It was all true. You have not six days to live.

Dimitri (<*bitterly*). Death has come twice for me in

SHORT MODERN PLAYS

one evening. I'm afraid he must be in earnest. (*Passionately.*) Why didn't you let them kill me? That would have been better than this "to-be-left-till-called-for" business. (*Paces across to window, R., and looks out. Tunis suddenly.*) Stronetz! You offered me a way of escape from a cruel death just now. Let me escape now from a crueller one. I am a monarch. I won't be kept waiting by death. Give me that little bottle.

[*Stronetz hesitates, then draws out a small case, extracts bottle and gives it to him.*]

Stronetz. Four or five drops will do what you ask for.

Dimitri. Thank you. And now, old friend, good-bye. Go quickly. You've seen me just a little brave—I may not keep it up. I want you to remember me as being brave. Good-bye, best of friends, go.

[*Stronetz wrings his hand and rushes from the room with his face hidden in his arm. The door shuts. Dimitri looks for a moment after his friend. Then he goes quickly over to side table and uncorks wine bottle. He is about to pour some wine into a goblet when he pauses as if struck by a new idea. He goes to door, throws it open and listens, then calls, "Girnitza, Vontieff, Shultz!" Darting back to the table he pours the entire phial of poison into the wine bottle, and thrusts phial into his pocket. Enter the three officers.*]

Dimitri (*pouring the wine into four goblets*). The Prince is dead—long live the Prince! (*He seats himself.*) The old feud must be healed now, there is no one left of my family to keep it on. Prince Karl must succeed. Long life to Prince Karl! Gentlemen of the Kranitzki Guards, drink to your future sovereign.

[*The three officers drink after glancing at each other.*]

THE DEATH TRAP

Girnitza. Sire, we shall never serve a more gallant Prince than your Royal Highness.

Dimitri. That is true, because you will never serve another Prince. Observe, I drink fair !

[Drains goblet.

Girnitza. What do you mean, never serve another Prince ?

Dimitri (rises). I mean that I am going to march into the next world at the head of my Kranitzki Guards. You came in here to-night to kill me. *(They all start.)* You found that Death had fore-stalled you. I thought it a pity that the evening should be wasted, so I've killed you, that's all !

Shultz- The wine ! He's poisoned us !

[Vontieff seizes the bottle, and examines it. Shultz smells his empty goblet.

Girnitza. Ah ! Poisoned !

[He draws his sword and makes a step towards Dimitri, who is sitting on the edge of the centre table.

Dimitri. Oh, certainly, if you wish it. I'm due to die of disease in a few days and of poison in a minute or two, but if you like to take a little extra trouble about my end, please yourself.

[Girnitza reels and drops sword on table and falls back into chair groaning. Shultz falls across table and Vontieff staggers against wall. At that moment a lively march is heard approaching. Dimitri seizes the sword and waves it.

Dimitri. Aha ! the Lonyadi Regiment marching in I My good loyal Kranitzki Guards shall keep me company into the next world. God save the Prince ! *(Laughs wildly.)* Colonel Girnitza, I never thought death . . . could be ... so amusing.

[He falls dying to the ground.

CURTAIN

THE POT OF BROTH

By W. B. YEATS

CHARACTERS

John Coneely, an elderly man.

Sibby Coneely, a young or middle-aged woman.

A Tramp.

THE POT OF BROTH

SCENE.—A cottage kitchen. Fire on the hearth ; table with cabbage, onions, a plate of meal, etc. Half-open door. A Tramp enters, looks about.

Tramp. What sort are the people of this house, I wonder ? Was it a good place for me to come to look for my dinner, I wonder ? What's in that big pot ? (*Lifts cover.*) Nothing at all ! What's in the little pot ? (*Lifts cover.*) Nothing at all ! What's in that bottle, I wonder ? (*Takes it up excitedly and tastes.*) Milk ! Milk in a bottle ! I wonder they wouldn't afford a tin can to milk the cow into ! Not much chance for a poor man to make a living here. What's in that chest ? (*Kneels and tries to lift cover.*) Locked ! (*Smells at the keyhole.*) There's a good smell—there must be a still not far off.

[Gets up and sits on chest. A noise heard outside, shouts, footsteps, and loudfrightened cackling.

Tramp. What in the earthly world is going on outside ? Anyone would think it was the *Fiannta-h-Eireann* at their hunting !

Sibby's Voice. Stop the gap, let you stop the gap, John. Stop that old schemer of a hen flying up on the thatch like as if she was an eagle !

John's Voice. What can I do, Sibby ? I all to had my hand upon her when she flew away !

Sibby's Voice. She's out into the garden ! Follow after her ! She has the wide world before her now.

SHORT MODERN PLAYS

Tramp. Sibby he called her. I wonder is it Sibby Coneely's house I am in? If that's so it's a bad chance I have of going out heavier than I came in. I often heard of her, a regular slave-driver that would starve the rats. A niggard with her eyes on kippeens, that would skin a flea for its hide! It was the bad luck of the world brought me here, and not a house or a village between this and Tubber. And it isn't much I have left to bring me on there. (*Begins emptying out his pockets on the chest.*) There's my pipe and not a grain to fill it with! There's my handkerchief I got at the coronation dinner! There's my knife and nothing left of it but the handle. (*Shakes his pocket out.*) And there's a crust of the last dinner I got, and the last I'm likely to get till to-morrow. That's all I have in the world unless the stone I picked up to pelt at that yelping dog a while ago. (*Takes stone out of pocket and tosses it up and down.*) In the time long ago I usen't to have much trouble to find a dinner, getting over the old women and getting round the young ones! I remember the time I met the old minister on the path and sold him his own flock of turkeys. My wits used to fill my stomach then, but I'm afraid they're going from me now with all the hardship I went through.

[Cackling heard again and cries.

Sibby's Voice. Catch her, she's round the bush! Put your hands in the nettles, don't be daunted!

[A choked cackle and prolonged screech.

Tramp. There's a dinner for somebody, anyway. That it may be for myself! How will I come round her, I wonder? There is no more pity in her heart than there's a soul in a dog. If all the saints were standing barefoot before her she'd bid them to call another day. It's myself I have to trust to now, and my share of talk. (*Looks at the stone.*) I know what I'll do, I know what the tinker did with a stone,

THE POT OF BROTH

and I'm as good a man as he is, anyway. (*He jumps up and waves the stone over his head.*) Now, Sibby ! If I don't do it one way I'll do it another. My wits against the world !

" There's broth in the pot for you, old man,
There's broth in the pot for you, old man,
There's cabbage for me
And broth for you,
And beef for Jack the journeyman.
I wish you were dead, my gay old man,
I wish you were dead, my gay old man,
I wish you were dead
And a stone at your head,
So as I'd marry poor Jack the journeyman."

John's Voice (outside). Bring it in, bring it in, Sibby. You'll be late with the priest's dinner.

Sibby's Voice. Can't you wait a minute till I'll draw it ? *[Enter John.*

John. I didn't know there was anyone in the house.

Tramp. It's only this minute I came in, tired with the length of the road I am, and fasting since morning.

John (begins groping among the pots and pans). I'll see can I find anything here for you. . . . I don't see much . . . maybe there's something in the chest.

[He takes key from a hiding-place at back of hearth, opens chest, takes out bottle, takes out ham-bone, and is cutting a bit from it when Sibby enters, carrying chicken by the neck. John drops the ham-bone on a bench.

Sibby. Hurry now, John, after ail the time you have wasted. Why didn't you steal up on the old hen that time she was scratching in the dust ?

John. Sure I thought one of the chickens would be the tenderest.

Sibby. Cock you up with tenderness ! All the ex-

SHORT MODERN PLAYS

pense I'm put to ! My grand hen I've been feeding these five years ! Wouldn't that have been enough to part with ? Indeed I wouldn't have thought of parting with her itself, but she had got tired of laying since Easter.

John. Well, I thought we ought to give his Reverence something that would have a little good in it.

Sibby. What does the age of it matter ? A hen's a hen when it's on the table. (*Sitting down to pluck chicken*). Why couldn't the Kernans have given the priest his dinner the way they always do ? What did it matter their mother's brother to have died ? It is an excuse they had made up to put the expense of the dinner on me.

John. Well, I hope you have a good bit of bacon to put in the pot along with the chicken.

Sibby. Let me alone. The taste of meat on the knife is all that high-up people like the clergy care for, nice genteel people, no way greedy like potato-diggers or harvest-men.

John. Well, I never saw the man, gentle or simple, wouldn't be glad of his fill of bacon and he hungry.

Sibby. Let me alone, I'll show the Kernans what I can do. I have what is better than bacon, a nice bit of a ham I am keeping in the chest this good while, thinking we might want it for company. (*She catches sight of Tramp and calls out.*) Who is there ? A beggar-man is it ? Then you may quit this house if you please. We have nothing for you.

[She gets up and opens the door.

Tramp (comes forward). It is a mistake you are making, ma'am, it is not asking anything I am. It is giving I am more used to. I was never in a house yet, but there would be a welcome for me in it again.

Sibby. Well, you have the appearance of a beggar, and if it isn't begging you are what way do you make your living ?

THE POT OF BROTH

Tramp. If I was a beggar, ma'am, it is to common people I would be going and not to a nice grand woman like yourself, that is only used to be talking with high-up noble people.

Sibby. Well, what is it you are asking ? If it's a bit to eat you want, I can't give it to you, for I have company coming that will clear all before them.

Tramp. Is it me ask anything to eat ? (*Holds up stone.*) I have here what is better than beef and mutton, and currant cakes and sacks of flour.

Sibby. What is it at all ?

Tramp (*mysteriously*). Those that gave it to me wouldn't like me to tell that.

Sibby (*to John*). Do you think is he a man that has friends among the Sidhe ?

John. Your mind is always running on the Sidhe since the time they made John Molloy find buried gold on the bridge of Limerick. I see nothing in it but a stone.

Tramp. What can you see in it, you that never saw what it can do ?

John. What is it it can do ?

Tramp. It can do many things, and what it's going to do now is to make me a drop of broth for my dinner.

Sibby. I'd like to have a stone that could make broth.

Tramp. No one in the world but myself has one, ma'am, and no other stone in the world has the same power, for it has enchantment on it. All I'll ask of you now, ma'am, is the loan of a pot with a drop of boiling water in it.

Sibby. You're welcome to that much. John, fill the small pot with water. (*John Jills the pot from a kettle.*)

Tramp (*putting in stone*). There now, that's all I have to do but to put it on the fire to boil, and it's a grand pot of broth will be before me then.

SHORT MODERN PLAYS

Sibby. And is that all you have to put in it ?

Tramp. Nothing at all but that—only, maybe, a bit of an herb for fear the enchantment might slip away from it. You wouldn't have a bit of Slanus in the house, ma'am, that was cut with a black-handled knife ?

Sibby. No, indeed, I have none of that in the house.

Tramp. Or a bit of the Fearavan that was picked when the wind was from the north ?

Sibby. No, indeed, I'm sorry there's none.

Tramp. Or a sprig of the Athair-talav, the father of herbs ?

John. There's plenty of it by the hedge. I'll go out and get it for you.

Tramp. Oh, don't mind taking so much trouble ; those leaves beside me will do well enough.

[He takes a couple of good handfuls of the cabbage and onions and puts them in.]

Sibby. But where at all did you get the stone ?

Tramp. Well, it is how it happened. I was out one time, and a grand greyhound with me, and it followed a hare, and I went after it. And I came up at last to the edge of a gravel-pit where there were a few withered furze-bushes, and there was my fine hound sitting up, and it shivering, and a little old man sitting before it, and he taking off a hare-skin coat. *(Looking round at the ham-bone.)* Give me the loan of a kippeen to stir the pot with. . . .

[He takes the ham-bone and puts it into the pot.]

John. Oh ! the ham-bone !

Tramp. I didn't say a ham-bone, I said a hare-skin coat.

Sibby. Hold your tongue, John, if it's deaf you are getting.

Tramp (stirring the pot with the ham-bone). Well, as I was telling you he was sitting up, and one time I thought he was as small as a nut, and the next minute

THE POT OF BROTH

I thought his head to be in the stars. Frightened I was.

Sibby. No wonder, no wonder at all in that.

Tramp. He took the little stone then—that stone I have with me—out of the side pocket of his coat, and he showed it to me. "Call off your dog," says he, "and I'll give you that stone, and if ever you want a good drop of broth or a bit of stirabout, or a drop of poteen itself, all you have to do is to put it down in a pot with a drop of water and stir it awhile, and you'll have the thing you were wanting ready before you."

Sibby. Poteen ! Would it make that ?

Tramp. It would, ma'am ; and wine, the same as the Clare Militia uses.

Sibby. Let me see what does it look like now.

[Is bending forward.]

Tramp. Don't look at it for your life, ma'am. It might bring bad luck on anyone that would look at it, and it boiling. I must put a cover on the pot, or I must colour the water some way. Give me a handful of that meal.

[Sibby holds out a plate of meal and he puts in a handful or two.]

John. Well, he is a gifted man !

Sibby. It would be a great comfort to have a stone like that.

[She has finished plucking the chicken, which lies in her lap.]

Tramp. And there's another thing it does, ma'am, since it came into Catholic hands. If you put it into a pot of a Friday with a bit of the whitest meat in Ireland in it, it would turn it as black as black.

Sibby. That is no less than a miracle. I must tell Father John about that.

Tramp. But to put a bit of meat with it any other day of the week, it would do it no harm at all but ~~all~~ but

SHORT MODERN PLAYS

good. Look here now, ma'am, I'll put that nice little hen you have in your lap in the pot for a minute till you'll see. *[Takes it and puts it in.]*

John (sarcastically). It's a good job this is not a Friday !

Sibby. Keep yourself quiet, John, and don't be interrupting the talk or you'll get a knock on the head like the King of Lochlarm's grandmother.

John. Go on, go on, I'll say no more.

Tramp. If I'm passing this way some time of a Friday, I'll bring a nice bit of mutton, or the breast of a turkey, and you'll see how it will be no better in two minutes than a fistful of bog mould.

Sibby (getting up). Let me take the chicken out now.

Tramp. Stop till I'll help you, ma'am, you might scald your hand. I'll show it to you in a minute as white as your own skin, where the lily and the rose are fighting for mastery. Did you ever hear what the boys in your own parish were singing after you being married from them—such of them that had any voice at all and not choked with crying, or senseless with the drop of drink they took to comfort them and to keep their wits from going, with the loss of you ?

[Sibby sits down again complacently.]

Sibby. Did they do that indeed ?

Tramp. They did, ma'am, this is what they used to be singing :

" Philomel, I've listened oft

To thy lay, near weeping willow "—

No, that's not it—it's a queer thing the memory is—

" 'Twas at the dance at Dermody's that first I
caught a sight of her."

No, that's not it either—ah, now I have it.

" My pretty Paistin is my heart's desire,
Yet I am shrunken to skin and bone,"

THE POT OF BROTH

Sibby. Why would they call me Paistin ?

Tramp. And why wouldn't they ? Would you wish them to put your right name in a song, and your man ready to knock the brains of any man will as much as look your side of the road ?

Sibby. Well, maybe so.

Tramp. I was standing by the man that made the song, and he writing it with an old bit of a carpenter's pencil, and the tears running down—

" My pretty Paistin is my heart's desire,
Yet am I shrunken to skin and bone
For all my toil has had for its hire
Is drinking her health when lone, alone "—

[Sibby takes a fork and rises to take out the chicken.

Tramp puts his hand to stop her and goes on :

" What is the good of a man and he
Drinking alone with a speckled shin ?
O could I drink, my love on my knee,
Between two barrels at the inn."

[Sibby half rises again. Tramp puts his hand upon her hand.

Tramp. Wait now till you hear the end (*sings*) :

" Nine nights I lay and in longing sore
Between two bushes under the rain ;
I had thought to have called her out to the door,
But there I lay and I whistled in vain.

[He repeats the verse, Sibby singing too and beating time with fork.

Sibby (to John). I always knew I was too good for you ! *[She goes on humming.*

John. Well, he has the poor woman bewitched.

Sibby (suddenly coming to her wits). Did you take the chicken oat yet ?

SHORT MODERN PLAYS

Tramp (taking it out and giving it a good squeeze into the pot). I did, ma'am, Look at it there.

[He takes it and lays on table.]

John. How is the broth getting on ?

Tramp (tasting it with a spoon). It's grand. It's always grand.

Sibby. Give me a taste of it.

Tramp (takes the pot of and slips the ham-bone behind him). Give me some vessel till I'll give this sky-woman a taste of it.

[John gives him an egg-cup, which he Jills and gives to Sibby. John gives him a mug, and he Jills this for himself, pouring it back and forward from the mug to a bowl that is on the table, and drinking gulps now and again. Sibby blows hers and smells it.]

Sibby. There's a good smell on it, anyway. (*Tasting*) It's lovely. Oh, I'd give the world and all to have the stone that made that !

Tramp. The world and all wouldn't buy it, ma'am. If I was inclined to sell it the Lord-Lieutenant would have given me Dublin Castle and all that's in it long ago.

Sibby. Oh, couldn't we coax it out of you any way at all ?

Tramp (drinking more soup). The whole world wouldn't coax it out of me except maybe for one thing . . . (*looks depressed.*) Now I think of it there's only one reason I might think of parting it at all.

Sibby (eagerly). What reason is that ?

Tramp. It's a misfortune that overtakes me, ma'am, every time I make an attempt to keep a pot of my own to boil it in, and I don't like to be always under a compliment to the neighbours, asking the loan of one. But whatever way it is, I never can keep a pot with me. I had a right to ask one of the little man that gave me the stone. The last one I

THE POT OF BROTH

bought got the bottom burned out of it one night I was giving a hand to a friend that keeps a still, and the one before that I hid under a bush one time I was going into Ennis for the night, and some boys in the town dreamed about it and went looking for treasure in it, and they found nothing but eggshells, but they brought it away for all that. And another one. . . .

Sibby. Give me the loan of the stone itself, and I'll engage I'll keep a pot for it. . . . Wait now till I'll make some offer to you. . . .

Tramp (aside). I'd best not be stopping to bargain, the priest might be coming in on me. *(Gets up.)* Well, ma'am, I'm sorry I can't oblige you. *(Goes to door, shades his eyes and looks out, turns suddenly.)* I have no time to lose, ma'am, I'm off. *(Comes to table and takes his hat.)* Well, ma'am, what offer will you make?

John. You might as well leave it for a day on trial first.

Tramp (to John). I think it likely I'll not be passing this way again. *(To Sibby.)* Well, now, ma'am, as you were so kind, and for the sake of the good treatment you gave me I'll ask nothing at all for it. Here it is for you and welcome, and that you may live long to use it. But I'll just take a little bit in my bag that'll do for my supper, for fear I mightn't be in Tubber before night. *(He takes up the chicken.)* And you won't begrudge me a drop of whisky when you can make plenty for yourself from this out.

[Takes the bottle.]

John. You deserve it, you deserve it indeed. You are a very gifted man. Don't forget the kippeen !

Tramp. It's here !

[Slaps his pocket and exit. John follows him.]

Sibby (looking at the stone in her hand). Broth of the best, stirabout, poteen, wine itself, he said ! And the

SHORT MODERN PLAYS

people that will be coming, to see the miracle ! I'll be as rich as Biddy Early before I die !

[*John comes back.*]

Sibby. Where were you, John ?

John. I just went out to shake him by the hand. He's a very gifted man.

Sibby. He is so indeed.

John. And the priest's at the top of the breen coming for his dinner. Maybe you'd best put the stone in the pot again.

CURTAIN

THREAD O' SCARLET

By J. J. BELL

CHARACTERS

Migswort }
Smith } large tradesmen.
Butters }
Landlord } Inn
Breen, an odd-job man
A Traveller

THREAD O' SCARLET

SCENE.—*Smoke-room of a small village inn, some eight miles from the county town. Low ceiling. Broad window with screens L. Fire R., ruddy embers. Door opening on passage at back. Barely furnished. Several small tables with their complements of chairs. Crude old-fashioned oleographs on walls. Bell-rope at side offueplace. An evening in February, about twenty minutes from closing time. A bitter wind is blowing outside, coming in squalls, with blatters of sleet against the window.*

TIME.—*The present.*

Migsworth, Smith, and Butters are seated at a table, tankards before them. Migsworth, who fancies himself a bit superior intellectually, and Smith, a genial, rather stupid person, are interested in what is passing at back. Butters appears sunk in his own thoughts ; he is a big, heavy man ; throughout the play he has a semi-dazed look. The door is open ; the Landlord is standing in the entrance as if to block it, and Breen is seen in the passage beyond.

Landlord (in tone of finality). No, Mr. Breen, I can't serve ye, and my advice to you is to go home, and to bed !

Breen. Haven't I told ye, ye'll get the money in the mornin' ?

Landlord. Quite so. But that's not my point. I've got a licence to lose. In other words——

Breen. Come on, gimme a bottle o' whisky !

Landlord. No ! Ye've had enough.

Breen. Damn ye !

[Goes out.]

SHORT MODERN PLAYS

[His footfalls are heard going down passage, steadily, and then the slam of the front door. The Landlord, wiping his brow, comes into the room.]

Migsworth. Quite right, Mr. Flett. He's had more'n enough.

Smith. Queer, though, how steady he walks ! Don't he, Butters ?

Butters (as one awakening). Who ? Oh, Breen ! I'm sick o' Breen. Never out o' my shop spyin' around and tryin' to get somethin'⁵ for nothin'. Was there to-night when I was closin'. Had to turn him out.

[Relapses.]

Landlord. ⁵Tis his head, not his legs, that takes it all. To tell the truth, gentlemen, I'm afraid—not of, but for him. Trade's rotten bad, the Lord knows, but I swear I'd sooner be without Breen's custom. He's been hard at it for a solid month, and gettiii' worse every day. Can't think when or where he earns the money.—But you rang, gentlemen.

Migsworth (with a wave towards tankards). Same again, please. *[Landlord makes to collect tankards.]*

Butters (as if waking). No more for me. Must be goin' home.

Migsworth. Tut ! ye need another. We all do, after what we've gone through to-day.

[Butters lets his tankard go.]

And mind ye, Mr. Flett, I don't wonder at Breen goin' it hard after all *he's* gone through—lost his only friend. Both shiftless chaps, but——

Landlord. True, true, Mr. Migsworth. Still, I prefer to see a man drownin' his sorrows in moderation.

[Goes out with tankards.]

Migsworth. Ah, what a day. Longest I've ever known.

Smith. Not so long as last night must ha⁵ been to Jacob Forge.

THREAD O' SCARLET

Butters (without raising his head). Last night—oh, my soul ! *[His friends glance at him.]*

Smith. Aye, ye must ha' felt it, Butters, havin' been on the jury. Always wondered why ye didn't get out o' that. I believe ye could. *(More cheerfully.)* And yet, here's the three o' us, sittin' round this table for close on three hours, chattin' about 'most everything but the thing we're thinkin' on.

Migsworth. Well, as two single men and a widower without offspring *(nods at Butters)*, 'twouldn't be natural to sit alone in our houses, dumb, and thinkin' o' Jacob Forge, our neighbour—that was. I couldn't do it.

Smith (in a burst of emotion). Oh, oh, to think that at eight o'clock this blessed—I mean cursed—morriin' Jacob Forge was hanged by—by the neck until he was———*[Butters makes a fluttering gesture of protest.]*

Migsworth. 'Sh ! No need for to go into details, Mr. Smith. Forge has paid the penalty o' his crime, havin' been found guilty by a jury o' 'good men and true, includin' our friend arid neighbour here, William Butters, who——

Butters (sitting up.) I must be gettin' home. 'Tis on my mind that I left the keys o' my safe on the counter and didn't lock up anything properly. Was too upset. *[Half rises and subsides.]*

Migsworth. Don't you worry, Mr. Butters. Your property's all right. Aye, we may pity Jacob Forge, though none o' us liked him ; but we know he had a *fair* trial and full justice. Not that I'd ever ha' dreamed o' him bein' a murd——

Butters. Don't say it ! 'Tis too awful. Jacob was a strange man, and yet———*(Pause.)* And, of course, we found him guilty because o' the evidence.

Smith. Of course! Because o' the evidence ! But, this ruornin', when I see the black flag goin' up—they did hoist it slow !—I says to myself——

SHORT MODERN PLAYS

Migsworth. Was you there ?

Smith. Aye ; I saw ye, too, all muffled up. 'Twas a cold mornin', though. Was muffled up myself. And you, Mr. Butters—I *thought* I saw ye, too.

Butters (bowing his head). I went—to pray—to pray that the black flag—might never go up. Oh, my soul !

Migsworth. Now, what do ye mean by that ?

[*Landlord enters. There is a short pause while he sets the tankards on the table.*]

We're talkin' o' the melancholy episode o' this mornin', Mr. Flett. [*Lays money on table.*]

Landlord. Ah, yes, yes. Very shockin' to be sure, very shockin'. (*Taking money*) Thank 'ee, sir. I understood from his remarks that Mr. Breen had been there.

Smith. What ? Him ?

Migsworth. How could he ?—his only friend bein' hanged !

Landlord. He was talkin' o' puttin' a knife in the judge that sentenced Forge—and poisonin' all the jury !

Smith. That's awful ! He must be goin' crazy.

Migsworth (sagely). When a man takes to Scotch, he's done !

Smith (with an attempt at humour). Beggin' your pardon—but judgin' from Mister Breen's case, I should say he's never done !

Migsworth. Oh, very good, very good !

[*Laughs discreetly.*]

Butters (shuddering). What if Breen is right ?

Migsworth. Right ?

Butters. About the judge. And what—what's to happen to the judge and jury, if we was all wrong ?

Landlord (puzzled). What's all this, Mr. Butters ?

[*Butters relapses without response.*]

Migsworth (confidentially). Nerves, Mr. Flett, just nerves.

THREAD O' SCARLET

Landlord. I see, I see ! And I knows a little about 'em, too. Fact is, I'm a bit that way at the moment.

Smith. How so ? (*Eager to drink, nods to Migsworth.*) Good health ! [*Drinks.*]

Landlord. I've got a notion—a preminotion, if ye understand what I mean, gentlemen—that our unfortunate friend Breen'll come back to-night ; and I don't like it.

Migsworth. Ye'll have our support, Mr. Flett—our moral support—in refusin' him refreshment.

Landlord. Thank 'ee, sir, thank 'ee. I'm bound to refuse him. There's my conscience to be considered——

Smith. And your licence. Besides, most likely he's got no money.

Landlord. True, Mr. Smith. [*Goes out.*]

Smith. Come away, Butters ! This is real good beer—make ye sleep sound.

Butters (as if awakening). I saw Breen there this mornin'. Our mufflin's was nothin' to his. But I spied his face—my God, shall I ever forget his face when the flag was goin' up and——

Smith (eagerly). What was it like ?

Migsworth. 'Sh ! Mr. Smith. Supposed with grief, no doubt !

Butters. 'Twas like a—a soul in torments.

Migsworth. Seems to have some decent feelin's after all, though I *have* doubted it when seein' him sittin' there (*points towards corner*) night after night, drinkin' on his own. (*Drinks.*) Shows how careful we should be in judgin' our neighbours.

Smith (after a long pull). Ah, well, maybe there was more real friendship 'twixt him and Forge than we thought. They was both such terrible close chaps.

[*Motor horn is heard.*]

Hullo, goin'⁵ to stop here. (*Rises and goes to window.*)

SHORT MODERN PLAYS

My ! I don't envy any man his car on a night like this ! Black as hell ; sleet drivin' well-nigh level ! Ugh ! (*Shivers.*) Glad I haven't far to go.

[Starts back from a vivid flare of lightning, which is followed quickly by a frightful thunder-clap.]

[Butters, with a cry, leaps and subsides trembling.]

Migsworth (with feigned coolness). Bit unexpected at this season, wasn't it ? Why, Mr. Butters, ye're lookin' sickish ! No danger, ye know.

Butters (with emotion). Oh, there's somethin' wrong in the world this night—some awful wickedness abroad—I'm feared to take the road now——

Smith (returning to table). Come, come, this won't do at all ! Take a good sup o' your beer. Give ye comfort. Ye should never ha' gone to the hangin' this mornin'.

Butters (still trembling). I tell ye—in yon flash I saw Jacob Forge, and he was hung—hung on a scarlet thread.

[Migsworth and Smith look at each other.]

Migsworth. Tut ! Tut !

Butters (frantically). Nothin' but a scarlet thread—and he was dead and starin' and his head all sideways—sorter smilin' to himself as if——

Smith (in a gasp). Smilin' !

Migsworth. Hush !

[Door opens. Traveller enters followed by Landlord.]

Traveller (impatiently as he removes dripping wraps). Oh, this will do. Have a bedroom fired for me, and another for my man. But let me have a double Scotch, some boiling water, sugar and lemon.

[Goes to fire and stands chafing his hands.]

Landlord. Yes, sir.

[Goes out.]

[A pause, during which Migsworth and Smith glance at the Traveller and at each other.]

Butters, chin on chest, takes no notice. There has

THREAD O' SCARLET

been a lull in the storm, but now comes a blast of wind with a violent blatter of hail.

Smith (starting). Lord, what's that?

Migsworth. Only hail. The thunder's brought it down. *[Is about to address Traveller.]*

Butters (dreamily). Hung by a scarlet thread and smilin'—smilin' the smile o' (*voice almost fails*) an innocent man——

Smith (under his breath). Oh, I say !

Migsworth (leaning over and patting Butters's shoulder). Don't you worry about it, old man. (*Winking to Smith.*) I doubt he must ha' been loadin' up before he came here. (*Clears throat and addresses Traveller.*) Terrible night, sir.

Traveller (turning). Horrible ! (*Drily yet courteously.*) I hope I am not intruding here. Only place with a fire going.

Migsworth. Not at all, sir. 'Tis a public room, and, if 'twas private, ye'd be welcome on such a night.

Traveller. Much obliged, I'm sure. (*Jakes chair at hearth. Yawns. Produces case and selects a cigarette. Lights up while Migsworth and Smith watch him with interest.*) There's a village about here, isn't there ?

Migsworth. Two, sir. Lower Ashley and Upper Ashley. This inn is midway betwixt thern.

Traveller. If you reside here, perhaps you can tell me whether the population includes a person—a man—who is stone,deaf—possibly dumb also.

Migsworth. Oh, no, sir.

Smith (hopefully). But we've got a paralytic, sir.

Traveller. H'm ! This man was apparently bound for one of the Ashleys, and he gave my chauffeur and me the nerve-shock of our lives.

[Landlord enters with tray ; sets it on small table which he places conveniently for the Traveller.]

Migsworth (respectfully). How was that, sir ?

Traveller (to Landlord). Thanks. (*While he mixes*

SHORT MODERN PLAYS

toddy.) Well, in the midst of a blizzard, the lamps showed him walking in the middle of the road. We kept sounding the horn, but he paid no attention. We slowed and my man was going to risk the ditch, when the fellow stepped aside, and we carried on. Next moment he was back in the middle of the road.

[The Landlord, who has moved to the door, halts, listening.]

It was the nearest thing ! Of course we braked hard, but I swear the bonnet touched him when the car stopped with a jerk that, I thought, had finished her—and then the fellow walked on without so much as turning his head.

[Sips toddy.]

Migsworth. My gracious ! did ever one hear the like o' that ? What did ye do, sir ?

Traveller. Shouted on him to stop, but he paid no attention. I think he must have left the road soon after, for when we got going again—the car had suffered, you understand—there was no sign of him. *(Savagely.)* I'd like very much to get a word with him !

Migsworth. Sounds like a lunatic, sir. And ye never saw his face ?

Traveller. Nothing but his back. *(Sips.)* A biggish man, in a long tarpaulin coat and a soft felt hat.

Smith. Plenty o' tarpaulins and soft felts—old ones—hereabouts.

Traveller. He had a heavy muffler coming above the coat-collar as if to shield the back of his head. I noted it in the lamp-light—a scarlet muffler—

[Smith starts as if shot.]

Migsworth (in a screech). A what ! ! !

Landlord (clutching edge of door, mutters). A scarlet muffler !

[Slowly Butters comes out of a dream.]

Traveller. Yes. Odd taste, no doubt, but so it was—I sav[?] what's the matter with your friend ?

[Indicates Butters.]

THREAD O' SCARLET

Migsworth. Kindly excuse him, sir ; he's had rather much.

Butters (muttering). Hung on a scarlet thread, he was, and smilin'—

Migsworth (soothingly). Come, come, old man !

Butters (as though not hearing., turns slowly to Traveller and extends shaking forefinger). 'Twas a ghost ye saw this night—the ghost o' Jacob Forge that was hung for murder this mornin' at Lakeford Jail. And he was hung on a thread o' that same scarlet muffler—God rest his soul !
[Relapses into dream.]

Traveller (to Migsworth). I'm afraid all this is beyond me. Incidentally, I should say your friend is not suffering from any over-indulgence, but from some severe mental and nervous strain.

Smith (anticipating Migsworth). 'Tis like enough, sir. William Butters is a good man, and as honest as any grocer could be, in these hard times. Had his difficulties, he had. But he should never ha⁵ gone to see the black flag hoisted this mornin'. Ye see, sir, he had the ill luck to be one o' the jury that sent Jacob Forge, our neighbour, though not our friend, to the gallows, and he's never got over it. Now he's started sayin' to himself: " What if me and the judge was wrong ? "

Traveller (nodding sympathetically). And this Jacob Forge—and the scarlet muffler ?

Smith. Why, sir—

Migsworth (interposing). In the winter-time Jacob Forge always wore the scarlet muffler—he was well known by it, for there was nothin' like it in Ashley. And on a dark night, on the high road, he murdered an old farmer comin' home from market wi' a bag o' money—near four hundred pounds—beat in his head wi' a hammer, he did !

Smith. \ know that money-bag ! Seen it often in my shop.

SHORT MODERN PLAYS

Landlord. Same here ! Farmer Jukes never passed my door——

Smith. And they found the hammer hid in Forge's tool-house wi' blood and a grey hair or two on it. And they found three cheques belongin' to the farmer there also ; but the bag o' notes and cash they never found ; he must ha' hid it too safe. And 'twas proved that he was needin' money at the time. We all was, for that matter. Of course at the trial he denied everything ; said he was sleepin' in his bed when it happened.

Migsworth. But it was the muffler did for him ! Though there was other evidence. He must ha' hid it, too, or burned it, for 'twas never found—he swore he had lost it ; thought he had dropped it in one o' the village shops, but couldn't say which——

Smith. But in the farmer's nails they got a thread of it. The old man would be clawin' at his enemy, ye understand. So 'tis true enough that Jacob Forge was hung on a thread o' scarlet.

Landlord (taking a step forward and clearing his throat). It should be told, sir, that, even after he was condemned, Forge always believed—or pretended he believed—that something would happen to save him. But *(shaking his head)* the black flag went up, sure enough, this mornin' ! I didn't know Forge—he never came here—but I allow it has been a sorrowful day. *[A clock is heard striking ten.*

Traveller. Bound to cast a gloom over the place. Was this Forge married ?

Migsworth (getting in first). No, sir ; and he had no friends exceptin' a chap called Breen—another solitudinarian like himself—who has unfortunately been tryin' to drown his grief ever since—as Mr. Flett there will confirm.

Landlord. Too true, sir, though I do my best to check him. *(Takes out watch; to the three.)* Well,

THREAD O' SCARLET

gentlemen, Pm real sorry, but the law must be obeyed. *[Migsworth empties his tankard.]*

Smith. Your clock's fast. Considerin⁵ the day it's been and considerin' the night it is—hark to that blast !—Mr. Migsworth and me ought to have one more. We'll take it standin' if ye like.

[Empties his tankard.]

Landlord (holding up watch). Correct time's here, gentlemen. Sorry, very sorry, indeed !

[They rise reluctantly. Migsworth is about to arouse Butters.]

Traveller. Perhaps you gentlemen will give me your company for a little longer. *[They smile delightedly.]* Right ! Two pints, Landlord.

Landlord. Very good, sir. If ye'll excuse me, I'll lock up first. *[Goes out.]*

Smith. 'Tis too kind.

Migsworth (in his best manner). I am deeply obliged. *[They sit.]*

Traveller. Not at all. But what about your friend ?

Migsworth. Best not disturb him, sir. Mr. Smith and me will see him home in due season. He should never ha' been on the jury.

Traveller (lighting fresh cigarette). What do you two gentlemen think about your friend's ghost theory ?

Migsworth. Well, sir, personally, I don't believe in ghosts as a general rule——

Smith. Nor me——ever !

Migsworth. All the same, I'd swear there's not a livin' man within twenty miles o' Ashley would wear a scarlet muffler now——

Smith. Hadn't thought o' that. *(Suddenly listening, holds up hand.)* I say, there's somebody comin' in.

[Disturbance outside ; altercation. Landlord's voice : " No, no, I can't have it. After ten, you khOW I "

SHORT MODERN PLAYS

Migsworth. Oh, Lord ! I do believe 'tis Breen come back.

Traveller. Breen ?—the friend of the murd—the dead man ?

Migsworth. Yes, sir ; and I'm afraid it means trouble for Flett. Of course Flett *can't* serve him now.

[Altercation sounds nearer. Breen cursing ; Landlord protesting or trying to soothe.

Oh, damn it all, he's comin' in ! Hope he won't be unpleasant, sir.

Landlord (outside). Now, now, Mr. Breen, don't ye be unkind. Ye wouldn't like me to lose my licence. It's after hours and if anyone saw ye coming in—
Oh, why didn't I lock the door on the stroke ?

Breen (outside). Lemrrie pass ! Fetch a bottle o' whisky. I've got the money. Hear that ? All right, fetch it !

Landlord. Stop, stop, for the Lord's sake !

[Sounds of a struggle.

Well, well, if I let ye in for a minute, will ye promise not to— ? Oh, dear !

[Breen enters, flinging the door back on its hinges, followed by dismayed and dishevelled Landlord. He wears a tarpaulin coat buttoned to the chin and streaming wet. He is hatless. His face is dead white ; his eyes fixed and staring. He walks in a steady, mechanical fashion to a chair in the corner, his usual place. Takes no notice of other occupants. Sits.

Landlord (halting just inside door, apologetically). Gentlemen, I couldn't stop him.

Traveller (under his breath). Heavens, what a case !
[Beckons Landlord.

Breen (staring at vacancy ; in a sing-song voice). A knife for the silly old judge and a bottle o' whisky for me !

[Landlord comes on tiptoe.

Traveller (whispering). Whatever happens, not a drop!

THREAD O' SCARLET

Landlord. Oh, never ! (*Whispering*) But is he—is he drunk, sir ?

Traveller. Worse ! He's on the verge of—never mind. Go back to the door. Wait. Be ready.

Breen (*without moving*). Poison for the daft jury, and a bottle o' whisky for me !

The Traveller, gripping the arms of his chair, leans forward, alert, watchful. Smith stares stupidly. Butters seems to be coming out of his dream.

Migsworth (*with a cough, behind his hand*). What about givin' him some strong coffee, sir ?

Traveller makes a sign for silence. All is still in the loom ; but outside the wind rises to a shriek, and a gust of hail strikes the window.

Breen (*as before*). Bottle o' whisky——

[*Butters realises presence of Breen and sits quietly, gazing. There comes a flash of lightning, a crackle of thunder. All stait save Breen. The wind falls with a sob. Silence.*

Breen (*as before*). Bottle o' whisky. (*Then his expression changes as though another idea had entered his brain.*) Money !—ye want money——! (*Like an automaton he stands up. The two lowest buttons of the tarpaulin are undone, and drawing aside the skirt he gets at a pocket. Withdraws his fist, stands rigid for a moment or two.*) Money ! (*Flings handful of coins on the floor.*) Money !—Whisky !

[*No one stirs.*
Not enough money ? Eh ? (*Goes to pocket again. Fetches forth good-sized canvas bag.*) Bottle o' whisky ! (*Flings bag with a crash at Landlord's feet.*) There !

Landlord (*recoiling in horror*). Oh, my good God ! The farmer's money-bag !

[*Smith, clutching Migsworth's arm, points at bag, Butters, his eyes starting, rises slowly and stands grasping chair-back. His lips move soundlessly.*

SHORT MODERN PLAYS

Breen (his gaze fixed again.) Bottle o'—(Pause.)
Bottle o'—(Longer pause.) Black flag—black flag—
black—

[Slowly his mouth opens and shuts like that of a gaspingfish.

[Traveller rises softly, signalling to Landlord.

The gasping stops abruptly, the mouth remaining open. Breen takes two mechanical steps forward.

[The Traveller slips nearer. Breen tises on his toes.

Traveller (to Landlord). Quick !

[Breen pitches forward. The Traveller and Landlord catch him.

Here !—in my chair. Get off his coat. (Undoes coat, throws it open, exposing scarlet muffler round neck and across chest.) Why, it's the man I nearly—

Smith (in a highfalsetto). Oh, oh, oh !—the farmer's money-bag—and the scarlet muffler, too !

[Migsworth puts his hands to his face.

Traveller. Quiet !

[Lays his ear to Breen's heart—a pause—lifts a grave countenance.

[A silence. Migsworth uncovers his face.

Butters (staggers forward, one hand to fas head, the other pointing shakily). Breen, ye damned thief, ye've been burglin' my safe.

[Realises the significance of his words and stands petrified.

[First the Traveller, then Migsworth, then Smith and Landlord recoil from him.

CURTAIN

ROSENCRANTZ AND GUILDENSTERN

A Tragic Episode in Three Tableaux,
founded on an Old Irish Legend

By W. S. GILBERT

CHARACTERS

King Claudius, of Denmark.

Queen Gertrude, of Denmark.

Hamlet, Queen Gertrude's Son—betrothed to *Ophelia*.

Rosencrantz, a Courtier, in love with *Ophelia*.

Gmldenstern, a Courtier.

First Player.

Second Player.

Ophelia.

Courtiers, Pages, etc.

ARGUMENT

King Claudius, when a young man, wrote a Jive-act tragedy which was damned, and all reference to it forbidden under penalty of death. The King has a son—Hamlet—whose tendency to soliloquy has so alarmed his mother, Queen Gertrude, that she has sent for Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, to devise some Court revels for his entertainment. Rosencrantz is a former lover of Ophelia (to whom Hamlet is betrothed), and they lay their heads together to devise a plan by which Hamlet may be put out of the way. Some Court theatricals are in preparation. Ophelia and Rosencrantz persuade Hamlet to play his father's tragedy before the King and Court. Hamlet, who is unaware of the proscription, does so, and he is banished, and Rosencrantz happily united to Ophelia.

ROSENCRANTZ AND GUILDENSTERN

FIRST TABLEAU

Interior of King Claudius's Palace. Claudius discouraged seated in a gloomy attitude. Queen Gertrude on a stool at his feet, consoling him.

Queen. Nay, be not sad, my lord !

Claudius. Sad, loved Queen ?

If by an effort of the will I could
Annul the ever-present Past—disperse
The gaunt and gloomy ghosts of bygone deeds,
Or bind them with imperishable chains
In caverns of the past incarcerate,
Then could I smile again—but not till then !

Queen. Oh, my dear lord !
If aught there be that gives thy soul unrest,
Tell it to me.

Claudius. Well-loved and faithful wife,
Tender companion of my faltering life,
Yes ; I *can* trust thee ! Listen, then, to me :
Many years since—when but a headstrong lad—
I wrote a five-act tragedy.

Queen (interested). Indeed ?

Claudius. A play, writ by a king—

Queen. And such a King !—

Claudius. Finds ready market. It was read at
once,

But ere 'twas read, accepted. Then the Press
Teemed with portentous import. Elsinore

SHORT MODERN PLAYS

Was duly placarded by willing hands ;
We know that walls have ears—I gave them tongues—
And they were eloquent with promises.

Queen. Even the *dead* walls ?

Claudius (*solemnly*). Ay, the deader they,
The louder they proclaimed !

Queen (*appalled*). Oh, marvellous !

Claudius. The day approached—all Denmark stood
agape.

Arrangements were devised at once by which
Seats might be booked a twelvemonth in advance.
The first night came.

Qimn. And did the play succeed ?

Claudius. In one sense, yes.

Queen. Oh, I was sure of it !

Claudius. A farce was given to play the people in—
My tragedy succeeded that. That's all !

Queen. And how long did it run ?

Claudius. About ten minutes.
Ere the first act had traced one-half its course
The curtain fell, never to rise again !

Ojjeen. And did the people hiss ?

Claudius. No—worse than that—
They laughed. Sick with the shame that covered me,
I knelt down, palsied, in my private box,
And prayed the hearsed and catacombed dead
Might quit their vaults, and claim me for their own !
But it was not to be.

Queen. Oh, my good lord,
The house was surely packed !

Claudius. It was—by me.
My favourite courtiers crowded every place—
From floor to floor the house was peopled by
The sycophantic crew. My tragedy
Was more than even sycophants could stand !

Queen. Was it, my lord, so very, very bad ?

Claudius. Not to deceive my trusting Queen, it was.

ROSENGRANTZ AND GUILDENSTERN

Queen. And when the play failed, didst thou take
no steps
To set thyself right with the world ?

Claudius. I did.
The acts were five—though by five acts too long,
I wrote an Act by way of epilogue—
An act by which the penalty of death
Was meted out to all who sneered at it.
The play was not good—but the punishment
Of those that laughed at it was capital.

Queen. Think on't no more, my lord. Now, mark
me well :
To cheer our son, whose solitary tastes
And tendency to long soliloquy
Have much alarmed us, I, unknown to thee,
Have sent for Rosecrantz and Guildenstern—
Two merry knaves, kin to Polonius,
Who will devise such revels in our Court—
Such antic schemes of harmless merriment—
As shall abstract his meditative mind
From sad employment. Claudius, who can tell
But that they may divert my lord as well ?
Ah, they are here !

Enter Guildenstern.

Guildenstern. My homage to the Queen !

Enter Rosencrantz.

Rosencrantz (kneeling). In hot obedience to the
Royal 'hest
We have arrived, prepared to do our best.

Queen. We welcome you to Court. Our Chamber-
lain
Shall see that you are suitably disposed.
Here is his daughter. She will hear your will
And see that it receives fair countenance.

[Exeunt King and Queen, lovingly.]

SHORT MODERN PLAYS

Enter Ophelia.

Rosencrantz. Ophelia ! *[Both embrace her.*
Ophelia (delighted and surprised). Rosericrantz and
Guildenstern !

This meeting likes me much. We have not met
Since we were babies !

Rosencrantz. The Queen hath summoned
us,

And I have come in a half-hearted hope
That I may claim once more my baby-love !

Ophelia. Alas, I am betrothed !

Rosericrantz. Betrothed ? To whom ?

Ophelia. To Hamlet ?

Rosencrantz. Oh, incomprehensible !

Thou lovest Hamlet ?

Ophelia (demurely). Nay, I said not so—

I said we were betrothed.

Guildenstern. And what's he like ?

Ophelia. Alike for no two seasons at a time.

Sometimes he's tall—sometimes he's very short—
Now with black hair—now with a flaxen wig—
Sometimes an English accent—then a French—
Xhen English with a strong provincial " burr "—
Once an American, and once a Jew—

But Danish never, take him how you will !

And strange to say, whate'er his tongue may be,
Whether he's dark or flaxen—English—French—
Though we're in Denmark, A.D., ten—six—two—
He always dresses as King James the First !

Guildenstern. Oh, he is surely mad !

Ophelia. Well, there again

Opinion is divided. Some men hold
That he's the sanest, far, of all sane men—
Some that he's really sane, but shamming mad—
Some that he's really mad, but shamming sane—
Some that he will be mad, some that he was—

ROSENCRANTZ AND GUILDENSTERN

Some that he couldn't be. But on the whole
(As far as I can make out what they mean)
The favourite theory's somewhat like this :

Hamlet is idiotically sane
With lucid intervals of lunacy.

Rosencrantz. We must devise some plan to stop this
match !

Guildestern. Stay ! Many years ago, King Claudius
Was guilty of a five-act tragedy.

The play was damned, and none may mention it
Under the pain of death. We might contrive
To make him play this piece before the King,
And take the consequence.

Rosencrantz. Impossible !
For every copy was destroyed.

Ophelia. But one—
My father's !

Rosencrantz. Eh ?

Ophelia. In his capacity
As our Lord Chamberlain, he has *one* copy. I
This night, when all the Court is drowned in sleep,
Will creep with stealthy foot into his den
And there abstract the precious manuscript !

Guildestern. The plan is well conceived ! but take
good heed,
Your father may detect you.

Ophelia. Oh, dear, *no*,
My father spends his long official days
In reading all the rubbishing new plays.
From ten to four at work he may be found :
And then—my father sleeps exceeding sound !

[*Picture. Ophelia, Rosencrantz and Guilden-*
stern, grouped.

, All bow reverentially at mention of this functionary.

SHORT MODERN PLAYS

SECOND TABLEAU

Enter Queen, meeting Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.

Queen. Have you as yet planned aught that may relieve

Our poor afflicted son's despondency ?

Rosencrantz. Madam, we've lost no time. Already we

Are getting up some Court theatricals

In which the Prince will play a leading part.

Queen. That's well-bethought—it will divert his mind.

But soft—he comes.

Rosencrantz. How gloomily he stalks,
As one o'erwhelmed with weight of anxious care.
He thrusts his hand into his bosom—thus—
Starts—looks around—then, as if reassured,
Rumples his hair and rolls his glassy eyes !

Queen (appalled). That means—he's going to solilo-
quise !

Prevent this, gentlemen, by any means !

Guildenstern. We will, but how ?

Queen. Anticipate his points,
And follow out his argument for him ;
Thus will you cut the ground from 'neath his feet
And leave him nought to say.

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. We will !—we will !

[They kneel.]

Queen. A mother's blessing be upon you, sirs !

[Exit.]

Rosencrantz (both rising). Now, Guildenstern, apply
thee to this task.

Music. Enter Hamlet. He stalks to chair,
throws himself into it.

Hamlet. To be—or not to be !

Rosencrantz. Yes—that's the question—

ROSENCRANTZ AND GUILDENSTERN

Whether he's bravest who will cut his throat
Rather than suffer all——

Guildenstern. Or suffer all
Rather than cut his throat ?

Hamlet (annoyed at interruption, says, " Go away—go away ! " then resumes). To die—to sleep——

Rosencrantz. It's nothing more—Death is but sleep
spun out——

Why hesitate ? *{Offers him a dagger.*

Guildenstern. The only question is
Between the choice of deaths, which death to choose.
[Offers a revolver.

Hamlet (in great terror}. Do take those dreadful
things away. They make
My blood run cold. Go away—go away ! *(They
turn aside. Hamlet resumes).* To sleep, per-
chance to——

Rosencrantz. Dream.
That's very true. I never dream myself,
But Guildenstern. dreams all night long out loud.
Guildenstern (coming down and kneeling). With blushes,
sir, I do confess it true !

Hamlet. This question, gentlemen, concerns me
not.
(Resumes.) For who \ould bear the whips and scorns
of time——

Rosencrantz (as guessing a riddle). Who'd bear the
whips and scorns ? Now, let me see.
Who'd bear them, eh ?

Guildenstern (same business). Who'd bear the scorns
of time ?

Rosencrantz (correcting him). The whips and scorns.
Guildenstern. The whips and scorns, of course.
[Hamlet about to protest.

Don't tell us—let us guess—the whips of time ?

Hamlet. Oh, sirs, this interruption likes us not.
I pray you give it up.

SHORT MODERN PLAYS

Rosencrantz. My lord, we do.
We cannot tell *who* bears these whips and scorns ;
Hamlet (not heeding them, resumes). But that the
dread of something *after* death——
Rosencrantz. That's true—*post mortem* and the
coroner——

Felo-de-se—cross roads at twelve P.M.—

And then the forfeited life policy—

Exceedingly unpleasant.

Hamlet (really angry). Gentlemen,
It must be patent to the merest dunce
Three persons can't soliloquise at once !

[*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern retire, Guildenstern goes off.*]

(*Aside.*) They're playing on me ! Playing upon
me

Who am not fashioned to be played upon !

Show them a pipe—a thing of holes and stops

Made to be played on—and they'll shrink abashed

And swear they have not skill on *that* \ Now mark——

(*Aloud.*) *Rosencrantz ! Here !*

[*Producing a flute as Rosencrantz comes.*]

This is a well-toned flute ;

Play me an air upon it. Do not say

You know not *how* ! (*Sneeringly.*)

Rosencrantz. Nay, but I *do* know how.
I'm *rather* good upon the flute—Observe——

[*Plays eight bars of hornpipe, then politely returns
flute to Hamlet.*]

Hamlet (peevishly). Oh, thankye. (*Aside.*) Every-
thing goes wrong !

[*Retires, and throws himself on dais, as if buried in
soliloquy.*]

Enter Ophelia, white with terror, holding a heavy MS.

Ophelia. *Rosencrantz !*

Rosencrantz.

Well ?

ROSENGRANTZ AND GUILDENSTERN

Ophelia (in a stage-whisper). I've found the manuscript,

But never put me to such work again !

Rosencrantz. Why, what has happened that you tremble so ?

Ophelia. Last night I stole down from my room alone

And sought my father's den. I entered it !

The clock struck twelve, and then—oh, horrible !—

From chest and cabinet there issued forth

The mouldy spectres of five thousand plays,

All dead and gone—and many of them damned !

I shook with horror ! They encompassed me,

Chattering forth the scenes and parts of scenes

Which my poor father wisely had cut out.

Oh, horrible—oh, 'twas most horrible !

[Covering her face.]

Rosencrantz- What was't they uttered ?

Ophelia (severely). I decline to say.

The more I heard the more convinced was I

My father acted *most judiciously* ;

Let that suffice thee.

Rosencrantz. Give me, then, the play,
And I'll submit it to the Prince.

Ophelia (crossing to him). But stay,
Do not appear to urge him—hold him back,
Or he'll decline to play the piece—I know him.

Hamlet (who has been soliloquising under his breath).
And lose the name of action ! *(Rises and comes down.)*

Why, what's that ?

Rosencrantz. We have been looking through some dozen plays

To find one suited to our company.

This is, my lord, a five-act tragedy.

'Tis called " Gonzago "—but it will not serve—

'Tis very long.

SHORT MODERN PLAYS

Hamlet. Is there a part for *me* ?

Ophelia. There is, my lord, a most important part—
A mad Archbishop who becomes a Jew
To spite his diocese.

Hamlet. That's very good !

Rosencrantz (*turning over the pages*). Here you go
mad—and then, soliloquise :
Here you are sane again—and then you don't :
Then, later on, you stab your aunt, because——
Well, I can't tell you *why* you stab your aunt,
But still—you stab her.

Hamlet. That is quite enough.

Rosencrantz' Then you become the leader of a
troop
Of Greek banditti—and soliloquise——
After a long and undisturbed career
Of murder (tempered by soliloquy)
You see the sin and folly of your ways
And offer to resume your diocese ;
But, just too late—for, terrible to tell,
As you're repenting (in soliloquy)
The Bench of Bishops seize you unawares
And blow you from a gun !

[*During this Hamlet has acted in pantomime the
scenes described.*]

Hamlet (*excitedly*). That's excellent.
That's very good indeed—we'll play this piece !

[*Taking MS. from Rosencrantz.*]

Ophelia. But, pray consider—all the other parts
Are insignificant.

Hamlet. What matters that ?
We'll play this piece.

Rosencrantz. The plot's impossible,
And all the dialogue bombastic stuff.

Hamlet. I tell you, sir, that we will play this piece.
Bestir yourselves about it, and engage
All the most fairly famed tragedians

ROSENCRANTZ AND GUILDENSTERN

To play the small parts—as tragedians should.
A mad Archbishop ! Yes, that's very good !

[Picture. Hamlet, reading the MS., with lime-light on him. Rosencrantz at entrance, Ophelia at entrance.]

THIRDTABLEAU

March. Enter procession. First, two Pages, who place themselves on each side of the platform ; then Rosencrantz and Ophelia ; then Guilderistern and a Lady ; then other Courtiers ; then Polonius, hacking before the King and Queen. The King sits, the Queen, on his left, Ophelia on his right, Rosencrantz stands above her, Guildenstern and Polonius behind the King and Queen ; the Courtiers right and left.

Queen. A fair good morrow to you, Rosencrantz.
How march the Royal revels ?

Rosencrantz. Lamely, madam, lamely, like a one-legged duck. The Prince has discovered a strange play. He hath called it, "A Right Reckoning Long Delayed."

Claudius. And of what fashion is the Prince's play ?

Rosencrantz. 'Tis an excellent poor tragedy, my lord—a thing of shreds and patches welded into a form that hath mass without consistency, like an ill-built villa.

Queen. But, sir, you should have used your best endeavours
To wean his phantasy from such a play.

Rosencrantz. Madam, I did, and with some success, for he now seeth the absurdity of its tragical catastrophes, and laughs at it as freely as we do. So, albeit the poor author had hoped to have drawn tears of sympathy, the Prince has resolved to present it as a piece of pompous folly intended to excite no

SHORT MODERN PLAYS

loftier emotion than laughter and surprise. Here comes the Royal Tragedian with his troop.

Enter Hamlet and Players

Hamlet. Good morrow, sir. This is our company of players. They have come to town to do honour and add completeness to our revels.

Claudius. Good sirs, we welcome you to Elsinore. Prepare you now—we are agog to taste The intellectual treat in store for us.

Hamlet. We are ready, sir. But, before we begin, I would speak a word to you who are to play this piece. I have chosen this play in the face of sturdy opposition from my well-esteemed friends, who were for playing a piece with less bombastick fury and more frolick. (*Addressing King.*) But I have thought this a fit play to be presented by reason of that very pedaritical bombast and windy obtrusive rhetorick that they do rightly despise. For I hold that there is no such antick fellow as your bombastical hero who doth so earnestly spout forth his folly as to make his hearers believe that he is unconscious of all incongruity ; whereas, he who doth so mark, label, and underscore his antick speeches as to show that he is alive to their absurdity scemeth to utter them under protest, and to take part with his audience against himself. (*Turning to Players.*) For which reason, I pray you, let there be no huge red noses, nor extravagant monstrous wigs, nor coarse men garbed as women, in this comi-tragedy ; for such things are as much as to say, " I am a comick fellow—I pray you laugh at me, and hold what I say to be cleverly ridiculous." Such labelling of humour is an impertinence to your audience, for it seemeth to imply that they are unable to recognise a joke unless it be pointed out to them. I pray you avoid it.

[Slight applause, which Hamlet acknowledges.]

ROSENCRANTZ AND GUILDENSTERN

First Player. Sir, we are beholden to you for your good counsels. But we would urge upon your consideration that we are accomplished players, who have spent many years in learning our profession ; and we would venture to suggest that it would better befit your lordship to confine yourself to such matters as your lordship may be likely to understand. We, on our part, may have our own ideas as to the duties of heirs-apparent ; but it would ill become us to air them before your lordship, who may be reasonably supposed to understand such matters more perfectly than your very humble servants.

[All applaud vigorously. Hamlet about to explode in anger. King interrupts him. Hamlet thinks better of it, and angrily beckons Players to follow him. Pie and they exeunt.]

Claudius. Gome, let us take our places. Gather round

That all may see this fooling. Here's a chair
In which I shall find room to roll about
When laughter takes possession of my soul.
Now we are ready.

Enter on platform a Loving Couple. Applause.

She. Shouldst thou prove faithless ?

He.

If I do

Then let the world forget to woo *(kneeling)*,
The mountain tops bow down in fears,
The midday sun dissolve in tears,
And outraged nature, pale and bent,
Fall prostrate in bewilderment !

[All titter through this—breaking into a laugh at the end, the King enjoying it more than any one.]

Ophelia. Truly, sir, I hope he will prove faithful, lest we should all be involved in this catastrophe !

Claudius (laughing). Much, indeed, depends upon his constancy. I am sure he hath all our prayers,

SHORT MODERN PLAYS

gentlemen ! (To Rosencrantz.) Is this play well known ?

Rosencrantz (advancing). It is not, my lord.

[Turns back to Ophelia.

Claudius. Ha ! I seem to have met with these lines before.

Go on.

She. Hark, dost thou hear those trumpets and those drums ?

Thy hated rival, stern Gonzago, comes !

[Exeunt Loving Couple. Laughter, as before.

Queen. And wherefore cometh Gonzago ?

Rosencrantz. He cometh here to woo !

Queen. Gannot he woo without an orchestra at his elbow ? A fico for such a wooing, say I !

Claudius (rather alarmed—aside to Rosencrantz,. Who is Gonzago ?

Rosencrantz. He's a mad Archbishop of Elsinore. 'Tis a most ridiculous and mirthful character—and the more so for that the poor author had hoped to have appalled you with his tragcdical end !

[Returns to Ophelia.

[During this the King has shown that he has recognised his tragedy. He is horrified at the discovery.

Enter Hamlet, as Archbishop, with a robe and mitre.

All laugh and applaud except the King, who is miserable.

Hamlet. Free from the cares of Church and State I come to wreak my love arid hate.

Love whirls me to the lofty skies—

Hate drags me where dark Pluto lies !

[All laugh except King.

Queen. Marry, but he must have a nice time of it between them ! Oh, sir, this passeth the bounds of ridicule, and to think that these lines were to have drawn our tears !

ROSENCRANTZ AND GUILDENSTERN

Ophelia. Truly mine eyes run with tears, but they are begotten of laughter !

Hamlet. Gently, gently. Spare your ridicule, lest you have none left for the later scenes. The tragedy is full of such windy fooling. You shall hear more anon. There are five acts of this ! (*All groan*).

(*Resumes*) For two great ends I daily fume—

The altar and the deadly tornb.

How can I live in such a state

And hold my Arch-Episcopate ? "

Rosencrantz (exhausted with laughter). Oh, my lord—I pray you end this, or I shall die with laughter !

Queen (ditto). Did mortal ever hear such metrical folly ! Stop it, my good lord, or I shall assuredly do myself some injury.

Ophelia (ditto). Oh, sir—prythee have mercy on us •—we have laughed till we can laugh no more !

Hamlet. The drollest scene is coming now. Listen.

Claudius (rises). Stop ! *\Allstait.*

Stop, I say—cast off those mummeries !

Come hither, Hamlet !

Hamlet (takes off robes). Why, what ails you, sir ?

Claudius (with suppressed fury). Know'st thou who wrote this play ?

Hamlet. Not I, indeed.

Nor do I care to know !

Claudius. I wrote this play—

To mention it is death, by Denmark's law !

Queen (kneeling). Oh, spare him, for he is thine only "child !

Claudius. No—I have two (*Queen horrified*)—my son—my play—both worthless !

Both shall together perish !

[*Draws dagger; Queen endeavours to restrain him.*

Hamlet (on his knees). Hold thine hand !

I can't bear death—I'm a philosopher !

SHORT MODERN PLAYS

Claudius. That's true. But how shall we dispose of him ? *[All puzzled.]*

Ophelia (suddenly). A thought !

There is a certain isle beyond the sea
Where dwell a cultured race—compared with whom
We are but poor brain-blind barbarians ;
'Tis known as Engle-land. Oh, send him there !
If but the half I've heard of them be true
They will enshrine him on their great good hearts,
And men will rise or sink in good esteem
According as they worship him, or slight him !

Claudius. Well, we're dull dogs in Denmark. It may be

That we've misjudged him. If such race there be—
(There may be—I am not a well-read man)

They're welcome to his philosophic brain—

So, Hamlet, get thee gone—and don't come back again !

[Claudius crosses to R. Hamlet, who is delighted at the suggestion, crosses to Queen and embraces her. He then embraces Ophelia, who receives his kiss with marked coldness. Then he turns up on to platform, and strikes an attitude, exclaiming, " To Engle-land ! " At the same moment Rosencrantz embraces Ophelia. Picture.]

CURTAIN

TRAFALGAR, FROM
" THE DYNASTS "

By THOMAS HARDY

CHARACTERS

Phantom Intelligences.

First Recording Angel.
Second Recording Angel.
Chorus of the Years.
Chorus of the Pities.
The Ancient Spirit of the Years.
The Spirit of the Pities.

Persons.

Flag-Captain Magendie.
Villeneuve, Napoleon's Admiral.
A French Naval Officer.
A French Petty Officer.
Lieutenant Daudignon.
Nelson.
Secretary Scott.
Hardy.
An English Naval Officer.
An English Lieutenant.
Pollard, a Midshipman.
Lieutenant Fournier.
Dr. Magrath.
Dr. Beatty.
Another Midshipman.
Burke, a Purser.
Dr. Alexander Scott, a Chaplain.
First Citizen of London.
Second Citizen.
A Boy.
Third Citizen.
Fourth Citizen.
William Pitt.
First Burgher of Budmouth.
First Boatman.
Second Boatman.
Second Burgher.

*English and French Naval Officers and Men, Citizens of
London, City Magnates, Lords and Ministers.*

TRAFALGAR, FROM "THE DYNASTS"

SCENE I—OFF CAPE TRAFALGAR

A bird's-eye view of the sea discloses itself. It is day-break, and the broad face of the ocean is fringed on its eastern edge by the Cape and the Spanish shore. On the rolling surface immediately beneath the eye, ranged more or less in two parallel lines running north and south, one group from the twain standing off somewhat, are the vessels of the combined French and Spanish navies, whose canvases, as the sun edges upward, shine in its rays like satin.

On the western horizon two columns of ships appear in full sail, small as moths to the aerial vision. They are bearing down towards the combined squadrons.

RECORDING ANGEL I (intoning from his book)

*At last Villeneuve accepts the sea and fate,
Despite the Cadiz council called of late,
Whereat his stoutest captains—men the fast
 To do all mortals durst—
Willing to sail, and bleed, and bear the worst,
Short of cold suicide, did yet opine
That plunging mid those teeth of treble line
 In jaws of oaken wood
Held open by the English navarchy
With suasive breadth and artful modesty,
Would smack of purposeless foolhardihood.*

RECORDING ANGEL II

*But word came, writ in mandatory mood,
To put from Cadiz, gain Toulon, and straight*

SHORT MODERN PLAYS

*At a said sign on Italy operate.
Moreover that Villeneuve, arrived as planned,
Would find Rosily in supreme command.—
Gloomy Villeneuve grows rash, and, darkly brave,
Leaps to meet war, storm, Nelson—even the grave.*

SEMICHORUS I OF THE YEARS (aerial music)

*Ere the concussion hurtle, draw abreast
Of the sea.*

SEMICHORUS II

*Where Nelson's hulls are rising from the west,
Silently.*

SEMICHORUS I

*Each linen wing outspread, each man and lad
Sworn to be*

SEMICHORUS II

*Amid the vanmost, or for Death, or glad
Victory !*

*[The point of sight descends till it is near the deck
of the Bucentaure, the flag-ship of Villeneuve.
Present thereon are the Admiral, his Flag-
Captain Magendie, Lieutenant Daudignon,
other naval officers and seamen.*

Magendie. All night we have read their signals in
the air,

Whereby the peering frigates of their van
Have told them of our trend.

Villeneuve.

The enemy

Makes threat as though to throw him on our stern :
Signal the fleet to wear ; bid Gravina

TRAFALGAR, FROM " THE DYNASTS "

To come in from manoeuvring with his twelve,
And range himself in line. *[Officers murmur.*

I say again
Bid Gravina draw hither with his twelve,
And signal all to wear !—and come upon
The larboard tack with every bow anorth !—
So we make Cadiz in the worst event,
And patch our rags up there. As we head now
Our only practicable thoroughfare
Is through Gibraltar Strait—a fatal door !
Signal to close the line and leave no gaps.
Remember, too, what I have already told :
Remind them of it now. They must not pause
For signalings from me amid a strife
Whose chaos may prevent my clear discernment,
Or may forbid my signalling at all,
The voice of honour then becomes the chief's ;
Listen they thereto, and set every stitch
To heave them on into the fiercest fight.
Now I will sum up all : heed well the charge ;
EACH CAPTAIN, PETTY OFFICER, AND MAN
Is ONLY AT HIS POST WHEN UNDER FIRE.

[The ships of the whole fleet turn their bows from south to north as directed, and close up in two parallel curved columns, the concave side of each column being towards the enemy, and the inter-spaces of the fast column being, in general, opposite the hulls of the second.

An Officer (straining his eyes towards the English fleet).

How they skip on ! Their overcrowded sails
Bulge like blown bladders in a tripeman's shop
The market-morning after slaughterday !

Petty Officer (aside). It's morning before slaughter-day with us,
I make so bold to bode !

[The English Admiral is seen to be signalling to his fleet. The signal is: " ENGLAND EXPECTS

SHORT MODERN PLAYS

EVERY MAN wLL DO HIS DUTY." A loud cheering from all the English ships comes undulating on the wind when the signal is read.

Villeneuve. They are signalling too.—Well, business soon begins !

You will reserve your fire. And be it known
That we display no admiral's flags at all
Until the action's past. 'Twill puzzle them,
And work to our advantage when we close.—
Yes, they are double-ranked, I think, like us ;
But we shall see anon.

Magendie. The foremost one
Makes for the *Santa Ana*. In such case
The *Fougueux* might assist her.

Villeneuve. Be it so—
There's time enough.—Our ships will be in place,
And ready to speak back in iron words
When theirs cry Hail ! in the same sort of voice.

[*They prepare to receive the northernmost column of the enemy's ships headed by the Victory, trying the distance by an occasional single shot. During their suspense a discharge is heard southward, and turning they behold Collingwood at the head of his column in the Royal Sovereign, just engaging with the Spanish Santa Ana. Meanwhile the Victory draws still nearer, preserving silence with brazen sang-froid. At a concerted moment full broadsides are discharged into her simultaneously from the Bucentaure, the Santissima Trinidad, and the Redoutable.*

When the smoke clears the Victory's mizzen-topmast, with spars and a quantity of rigging, is seen to have fallen, her wheel to be shot away, and her deck encumbered with dead and wounded men.

Villeneuve. 'Tis well! But see ; their course is undelayed,
And still they near in clenched audacity !

TRAFALGAR, FROM " THE DYNASTS "

Daudignon. This northmost column bears upon our beam.

Their prows will pierce us thwartwise. That's the aim.

Magendie. Which aim deft Lucas o' the *Redoutable* Most gallantly bestirs him to outscheme.—

See, how he strains, that on his timbers fall

Blows that were destined for his Admiral !

[During this the French ship Redoutable is moving forward to interpose itself between the approaching Victory and the Bucentaure.]

Villeneuve. Now comes it ! The *Santisima Trinidad*,
The old *Redoutable's* hard sides, and ours,
Will take the touse of this bombastic blow.
Your grapnels and your boarding-hatchets—ready !
We'll dash our eagle on the English deck,
And swear to fetch it !

Crew. Aye ! We swear. Huzza !
Long live the Emperor !

[But the Victory suddenly swerves to the rear of the Bucentaure, and crossing her stern-waters, discharges a broadside into her and the Redoutable endwise, wrapping the scene in folds of smoke.]

The point of view changes.

SCENE II

THE SAME. THE QUARTER-DECK OF THE " VICTORY "

The van of each division of the English fleet has drawn to the windward side of the combined fleets of the enemy, and broken their order, the Victory being now parallel to and alongside the Redoutable, the Temeraire taking up a station on the other side of that ship. The Bucentaure and the Santisima Trinidad become jammed together a

SHORT MODERN PLAYS

little way ahead. A smoke and din of cannonading prevail, amid which the studding-sail booms are shot away.

Nelson, Hardy, Blackwood, Secretary Scott, Lieutenant Pasco, Burke *the Purser*, Captain Adair *of the Marines*, and other officers are on or near the quarter-deck.

Nelson. See, there, that noble fellow Collingwood, How straight he helms his ship into the fire !— Now you'll haste back to yours (*to Blackwood*).

—We must henceforth

Trust to the Great Disposer of events,
And justice of our cause ! . . .

[Blackwood leaves.

The battle grows hotter. A double-headed shot cuts down seven or eight marines on the Victory's poop.

Captain Adair, part those marines of yours,
And hasten to disperse them round the ship.—
Your place is down below, Burke, not up here ;
Ah, yes ; like David you would see the battle !

[A heavy discharge of musket-shot comes from the tops of the *Santisima Trinidad*. Adair and Pasco fall. Another swathe of marines is mowed down by chain-shot.

Scott. My lord, I use to you the utmost prayers
That I have privilege to shape in words :
Remove your stars and orders, I would beg ;
That shot was aimed at you.

Nelson. They were awarded to me as an honour,
And shall I do despite to those who prize me,
And slight their gifts ? No, I will die with them,
If die I must. [*He walks up and down with Hardy.*

Hardy. At least let's put you on
Your old greatcoat, my lord—(the air is keen).—
'Twill cover all. So while you still retain
Your dignities, you baulk these deadly aims.

Nelson. Thank 'ee, good friend. But no,—I
haven't time,

TRAFALGAR, FROM "THE DYNASTS"

I do assure you—not a trice to spare,
As you well see.

[A few minutes later Scott falls dead, a bullet having pierced his skull. Immediately after a shot passes between the Admiral and the Captain, tearing the instep of Hardy's shoe, and striking away the buckle. They shake off the dust and splinters it has scattered over them. Nelson glances round, and perceives what has happened to his secretary.]

Nelson. Poor Scott, too, carried off ! Warm work this, Hardy ;

Too warm to go on long.

Hardy. I think so, too ;

Their lower ports are blocked against our hull,
And our charge now is less. Each knock so near
Sets their old wood on fire.

Nelson. Ay, rotten as peat.

What's that ? I think she has struck, or pretty nigh !

[A cracking of musketry.]

Hardy. Not yet.—Those small-arm men there, in
her tops,

Thin our crew fearfully. Now, too, our guns
Have to be dipped full down, or they would rake
The *Timer air e* there on the other side.

Nelson. True.—While you deal good measure out
to these,

Keep slapping at those giants over here—
The *Trinidad*, I mean, and the *Bucentaure*,
To win'ard—swelling up so pompously.

Hardy. I'll see no slackness shall be shown that way.

[They part and go in their respective directions. Gunners, naked to the waist and reeking with sweat, are now in swift action on the several decks, and firemen carry buckets of water hither and thither. The killed and wounded thicken around and are being lifted and examined by the surgeons. Nelson and Hardy meet again.]

SHORT MODERN PLAYS

Nelson. Bid still the firemen bring more bucketfuls,
And dash the water into each new hole
Our guns have gouged in the *Redoutable*,
Or we shall all be set ablaze together.

Hardy. Let me once more advise, entreat, my lord,
That you do not expose yourself so clearly.
Those fellows in the mizzen-top up there
Are peppering round you quite perceptibly.

Nelson. Now, Hardy, don't offend me. They can't
aim;
They only set their own rent sails on fire.—
But if they could, I would not hide a button
To save ten lives like mine. I have no cause
To prize it, I assure 'ee.—Ah, look there,
One of the women hit,—and badly, too.
Poor wench ! Let some one shift her quickly down.

Hardy. My lord, each humblest sojourner on the
seas,
Dock-labourer, lame longshore-man, bowed bargee,
Sees it as policy to shield his life
For those dependent on him. Much more, then,
Should one upon whose priceless presence here
Such issues hang, so many strivers lean,
Use average circumspection at an hour
So critical for us all.

Nelson. Ay, ay. Yes, yes ;
I know your meaning, Hardy ; and I know
That you disguise as frigid policy
What really is your honest love of me.
But, faith, I have had my day. My work's nigh done ;
I serve all interests best by chancing it
Here with the commonest.—Ah, their heavy guns
Are silenced every one ! Thank God for that.

Hardy. 'Tis so. They only use their small arms now.
[He goes to larboard to see what is progressing on
that side between his ship and the Santisima
Trinidad.]

TRAFALGAR, FROM " THE DYNASTS "

Officer (to a seaman). Swab down these stairs. The mess of blood about

Makes 'em so slippery that one's like to fall

In carrying the wounded men below.

[While Captain Hardy is still a little way off, Lord Nelson turns to walk aft, when a ball from one of the muskets in the mizzen-top of the Redoubtable enters his left shoulder. He falls upon his face on the deck. Hardy looks round, and sees what has happened.]

Hardy (hastily). Ah—what I feared, and strove to hide I feared ! . . .

[He goes towards Nelson, who in the meantime has been lifted by Sergeant-Major Seeker and two seamen.]

Nelson. Hardy, I think they've done for me at last !

Hardy. I hope not !

Nelson. Yes. My backbone is shot through.

I have not long to live.

[The men proceed to carry him below.]

Those tiller ropes

They've torn away, get instantly repaired !

[At sight of him borne along wounded there is great agitation among the crew.]

Cover my face. There will no good be done

By drawing their attention off to me.

Bear me along, good fellows ; I am but one

Among the many darkened here to-day !

[He is carried on to the cockpit over the crowd of dead and wounded.]

(To the Chaplain). Doctor, I'm gone. I am waste o' time to you.

Hardy (remaining behind). Hills, go to Collingwood and let him know

That we've no Admiral here. *[He passes on.]*

A Lieutenant. Now quick and pick him off who did the deed—

SHORT MODERN PLAYS

That white-bloused man there in the mizzen-top.

Pollard, a midshipman (shooting). No sooner said than done. A pretty aim !

[The Frenchman falls dead upon the poop.

The spectacle seems now to become enveloped in smoke, and the point of view changes.

SCENE III

THE SAME. On BOARD THE " BUCENTAURE "

The bowsprit of the French Admiral's ship is stuck fast in the stern-gallery of the Santissima Trinidad, the starboard side of the Bucentaure being shattered by shots from two English three-deckers which are pounding her on that hand. The poop is also reduced to ruin by two other English ships that are attacking her from behind.

On the quarter-deck are Admiral Villeneuve, the Flag-Captain Magendie, Lieutenants Daudignon, Fournier, and others, anxiously occupied. The whole crew is in desperate action of battle and stumbling among the dead and dying, who have fallen too rapidly to be carried below.

Villeneuve. We shall be crushed if matters go on thus.—

Direct the *Trinidad* to let her drive.

That this foul tangle may be loosened clear !

Daudignon. It has been tried, sir ; but she cannot move.

Villeneuve. Then signal to the *Hero* that she strive

Once more to drop this way.

Magendie.

We may make signs,

But in the thickened air what signal's marked ?—

'Tis done, however.

Villeneuve.

The *Redoutable*

And *Victory* there,—they grip in dying throes !

TRAFALGAR, FROM " THE DYNASTS "

Something's amiss on board the English ship.
Surely the Admiral's fallen ?

A Petty Officer. Sir, they say
That he was shot some hour, or half, ago.—
With dandyism raised to godlike pitch
He stalked the deck in all his jewellery,
And so was hit.

Magendie. Then Fortune shows her face !
We have scotched England in dispatching him.

[He watches.

Yes ! He commands no more ; and Lucas, joying,
Has taken steps to board. Look, spars are laid,
And his best men are mounting at his heels.

A crash is heard.

Villeneuve. Ah, God—he is too late ! Whence
came that hurl
Of heavy grape ? The smoke prevents my seeing
But at brief whiles.—The boarding band has fallen,
Fallen almost to a man.—'Twas well assayed !

Magendie. That's from their *Temeraire*, whose
vicious broadside
Has cleared poor Lucas' decks.

Villeneuve. And Lucas, too.
I see him no more there. His red planks show
Three hundred dead if one. Now for ourselves !

*[Four of the English three-deckers have gradually
closed round the Bucentaure, whose bowsprit
still sticks fast in the gallery of the Santissima
Trinidad. A broadside comes from one of the
English, resulting in worse havoc on the Bucen-
taure. The main and mizzen masts of the
latter fall, and the boats are beaten to pieces. A
raking fire of musketry follows from the attacking
ships, to which the Bucentaure heroically con-
tinues still to keep up a reply.*

*[Captain Magendie falls wounded. His place is
taken by Lieutenant Daudignon.*

SHORT MODERN PLAYS

Villeneuve. Now that the fume has lessened, code
my biddance

Upon our only mast, and tell the van
At once to wear, and come into the fire.
(*Aside*) If it be true that, as *he* sneers, success
Demands of me but cool audacity,
To-day shall leave him nothing to desire !

[*Musketry continues. Daudignon falls. He is removed, his post being taken by Lieutenant Fournier. Another crash comes, and the deck is suddenly encumbered with rigging.*

Fournier. There goes our foremast ! How for
signalling now ?

Villeneuve. To try that longer, Fournier, is in vain
Upon this haggard, scorched, and ravaged hulk,
Her decks all reeking with such gory shows,
Her starboard side in rents, her stern nigh gone !
How does she keep afloat ?—

Bucentaure, O unlucky good old ship !
My part in you is played. Ay—I must go ;
I must tempt Fate elsewhere,—if but a boat
Can bear me through this wreckage to the van.

Fournier. Our boats are stove in, or as full of holes
As the cook's skimmer, from their cursed balls !

[*Musketry. Villeneuve's Head-of-Staff, de Prigny, falls wounded, and many additional men. Villeneuve glances troublously from ship to ship of his fleet.*

Villeneuve. How hideous are the waves, so pure this
dawn !—
Red-frothed ; and friends and foes all mixed therein.—
Can we in some way hail the *Trinidad*
And get a boat from her ?

[*They attempt to attract the attention of the Santisima Trinidad by shouting.*

Impossible ;
Amid the loud combustion of this strife

TRAFALGAR, FROM " THE DYNASTS "

As well try holloing to the antipodes ! . . .
So here I am. The bliss of Nelson's end
Will not be mine ; his full refulgent eve
Becomes my midnight ! Well ; the fleets shall see
That I can yield my cause with dignity.

[The Bucentaure strikes her flag.

A boat then puts off from the English ship Conqueror, and Villeneuve, having surrendered his sword, is taken out from the Bucentaure. But being unable to regain her own ship, the boat is picked up by the Mars, and the French Admiral is received aboard her.

The point of view changes.

SCENE IV

THE SAME. THE COCKPIT OF THE " VICTORY "

A din of trampling and dragging overhead, which is accompanied by a continuous ground-bass roar from the guns of the warring fleets, culminating at times in loud concussions. The wounded are lying around in rows for treatment, some groaning, some silently dying, some dead. The gloomy atmosphere of the low-beamed deck is pervaded by a thick haze of smoke, powdered wood, and other dust, and is heavy with the fumes of gunpowder and candle-grease, the odour of drugs and cordials, and the smell from abdominal wounds.

Nelson, his face now pinched and wan with suffering, is lying undressed in a midshipman's berth, dimly lit by a lantern. Dr. Beatty, Dr. Magrath, the Rev. Dr. Scott the Chaplain, Burke the Purser, the Steward, and a few others stand around.

Magrath (in a low voice). Poor Ram, and poor Tom Whipple, have just gone.

Beatty. There was no hope for them.

Nelson (brokenly). Who have just died ?

SHORT MODERN PLAYS

Beatty. Two who were badly hit by now, my lord ;
Lieutenant Ram and Mr. Whipple.

Nelson.

Ah !—

So many lives—in such a glorious cause. . . .

I join them soon, soon, soon !—O where is Hardy ?

Will nobody bring Hardy to me—none ?

He must be killed, too. Surely Hardy's dead ?

A Midshipman. He's coming soon, my lord. The
constant call

On his full heed of this most mortal fight

Keeps him from hastening hither as he would.

Nelson. I'll wait, I'll wait. I should have thought
of it.

[*Presently Hardy comes down. Nelson and he grasp
hands.*]

Hardy, how goes the day with us and England ?

Hardy. Well ; very well, thank God for't, my dear
lord.

Villeneuve their Admiral has this moment struck.

And put himself aboard the *Conqueror*.

Some fourteen of their first-rates, or about,

Thus far we've got. The said *Bucentaure* chief:

The *Santa Ana*, the *Redoutable*,

The *Fougueux*, the *Santisima Trinidad*,

San Augustino, *San Francisco*, *Aigle* ;

And our old *Swiftsure*, too, we've grappled back,

To every seaman's joy. But now their van

Has tacked to bear round on the *Victory*

And crush her by sheer weight of wood and brass :

Three of our best I am therefore calling up,

And make no doubt of worsting theirs, and France.

Nelson. That's well. I swore for twenty.—But it's
well.

Hardy. We'll have 'em yet ! But without you, my
lord,

We have to make slow plodding do the deeds

That sprung by inspiration ere you fell ;

TRAFALGAR, FROM " THE DYNASTS "

And on this ship the more particularly.

Nelson. No, Hardy.—Ever 'twas your settled fault
So modestly to whittle down your worth.
But I saw stuff in you which admirals need
When, taking thought, I chose the *Victory's* keel
To do my business with these braggarts in.
A business finished now, for me !—Good friend,
Slow shades are creeping on me. . . . I scarce see
you.

Hardy. The smoke from ships upon our win'ard
side,
And the dust raised by their worm-eaten hulks,
When our balls touch 'em, blind the eyes, in truth.

Nelson. No ; it is not that dust ; 'tis dust of death
That darkens me.

[*A shock overhead. Hardy goes up. One or two
other officers go up, and by and by return.*

What was that extra noise ?

Officer. The *Formidable* passed us by, my lord,
And thumped a stunning broadside into us.—
But, on their side, the *Hero's* captain's fallen ;
The *Algeciras* has been boarded, too,
By Captain Tyler, and the captain shot :
Admiral Gravina desperately holds out ;
They say he's lost an arm.

Nelson. And we ourselves—
Who have we lost on board here ? Nay, but tell me !

Beatty. Besides poor Scott, my lord, and Charles
Adair,
Lieutenant Ram, and Whipple, captain's clerk,
There's Smith, and Palmer, midshipmen, just killed,
And fifty odd of seamen and marines.

Nelson. Poor youngsters ! Scarred old Nelson
joins you soon.

Beatty. And wounded : Bligh, lieutenant ; Pasco,
too,
And Reeves, and Peake, lieutenants of marines,

SHORT MODERN PLAYS

And Rivers, Westphall, Bulkeley, midshipmen,
With, of the crew, a hundred odd just now,
Unreckoning those late fallen not brought below.

Burke. That fellow in the mizzen-top, my lord,
Who made it his affair to wing you thus,
We took good care to settle ; and he fell
Like an old rook, smack from his perch, stone dead.

Nelson. 'Twas not worth while !—He was, no
doubt, a man
Who in simplicity and sheer good faith
Strove but to serve his country. Rest be to him !
And may his wife, his friends, his little ones,
If such he had, be tided through their loss,
And soothed amid the sorrow brought by me.

[*Hardy re-enters.*

Who's that ? Ah—here you come ! How, Hardy,
now ?

Hardy. The Spanish Admiral's rumoured to be
wounded,
We know not with what truth. But, be as 'twill,
He sheers away with all he could call round,
And some few frigates, straight to Cadiz port.

[*A violent explosion is heard above the confused
noises on deck. A midshipman goes above and
returns.*

Midshipman (in the background). It is the enemy's
first-rate, the *Achille*,
Blown to a thousand atoms !—While on fire,
Before she burst, the captain's woman there,
Desperate for life, climbed from the gunroom port
Upon the rudder-chains ; stripped herself stark,
And swam for the Pickle's boat. Our men in charge,
Seeing her great breasts bulging on the brine,
Sang out, " A mermaid 'tis, by God ! "—then rowed
And hauled her in,—

Burke. Such unbid sights obtrude
On death's dyed stage !

TRAFALGAR, FROM " THE DYNASTS "

Midshipman. Meantime the *Achille* fought on,
Even while the ship was blazing, knowing well
The fire must reach their powder ; which it did.
The spot is covered now with floating men,
Some whole, the main in parts ; arms, legs, trunks,
heads,

Bobbing with tons of timber on the waves,
And splinters looped with entrails of the crew.

Nelson (arousing). Our course will be to anchor.
Let them know.

Hardy. But let me ask, my lord, as needs I must,
Seeing your state, and that our work's not done,
Shall I, from you, bid Admiral Collingwood
Take full on him the conduct of affairs ?

Nelson (trying to raise himself). Not while I live, I
hope ! No, Hardy ; no.

Give Collingwood my order. Anchor all !

Hardy (hesitating). You mean the signal's to be
made forthwith ?

Nelson. I do !—By God, if but our carpenter
Could rig me up a jury-backbone now,
To last one hour—until the battle's done,
I'd see to it ! But here I am—stove in—
Broken—all logged and done for ! Done, ay done !

Beatty (returning from the other wounded). My lord, I
must implore you to lie calm !

You shorten what at best may not be long.

Nelson (exhausted). I know, I know, good Beatty !
Thank you well.

Hardy, I was impatient. Now I am still.

Sit here a moment, if you have time to spare ?

[*Beatty and the others retire, and the two abide in
silence, except for the trampling overhead and the
moans from adjoining berths. Nelson is ap-
parently in less pain, seeming to doze.*]

Nelson (suddenly). What are you thinking, that you
speak no word ?

SHORT MODERN PLAYS

Hardy (waking from a short reverie). Thoughts all
confused, my lord :—their needs on deck,
Your own sad state, and your unrivalled past ;
Mixed up with flashes of old things afar—
Old childish things at home, down Wessex way,
In the snug village under Blackdon Hill
Where I was born. The tumbling stream, the
garden,
The placid look of the grey dial there,
Marking unconsciously this bloody hour,
And the red apples on my father's trees,
Just now full ripe.

Nelson Ay, thus do little things
Steal into my mind, too. But ah, my heart
Knows not your calm philosophy !—There's one—
Come nearer to me, Hardy.—One of all,
As you well guess, pervades my memory now ;
She, and my daughter—I speak freely to you.
'Twas good I made that codicil this morning
That you and Blackwood witnessed. Now she rests
Safe on the nation's honour. . . . Let her have
My hair, and the small treasured things I owned,
And take care of her, as you care for me !

[*Hardy promises.*]

Nelson (resuming in a murmur). Does love die with
our frame's decease, I wonder,
Or does it live on ever ? . . .

[*A silence. Beatty reapproaches.*]

Hardy. Now I'll leave,
See if your order's gone, and then return.

Nelson (symptoms of death beginning to change his face).

Yes, Hardy ; yes ; I know it. You must go.—
Here we shall meet no more ; since Heaven forbend
That care for me should keep you idle now,
When all the ship demands you. Beatty, too,
Go to the others who lie bleeding there ;
Them you can aid. Me you can render none !

TRAFALGAR, FROM " THE DYNASTS "

My time here is the briefest.—If I live
But long enough I'll anchor. . . . But—too late—
My anchoring's elsewhere ordered ! . . . Kiss me,
Hardy : [Hardy *bends over him.*

I'm satisfied. Thank God, I have done my duty !
[Hardy *brushes his eyes with his hand, and with-
draws to go above, pausing to look back before he
finally disappears.*

Beatty (*watching Nelson*). Ah !—Hush around ! . . .
He's sinking. It is but a trifle now
Of minutes with him. Stand you, please, aside,
And give him air.

[Beatty, *the Chaplain, Magrath, the Steward, and
attendants continue to regard Nelson, Beatty
looks at his watch.*

Beatty. Two hours and fifty minutes since he
fell,
And now he's going [They wait. Nelson dies.
Chaplain. Yes. . . . He has homed to where
There's no more sea.

Beatty. We'll let the Captain know,
Who will confer with Collingwood at once.
I must now turn to these.

[He goes to another part of the cockpit, a midship-
man ascends to the deck, and the scene overclouds.

CHORUS OF THE PITIES (aerial music)

His thread was cut too slowly ! When he fell,
And bade his fame farewell,
He might have passed, and shunned his long-drawn pain
Endured in vain, in vain !

SPIRIT OF THE YEARS

Young Spirits, be not critical of That
Which was oefore, and shall be after you I

SHORT MODERN PLAYS

SPIRIT OF THE PITIES

*But out of tune the Mode and meritless
That quickens sense in shapes whom, thou hast said,
Necessitation sways I A life there was
Among the self-same frail ones—Sophocles—
Who visioned it too clearly, even the while
He dubbed the Will " the gods." Truly said he,
" Such gross injustice to their own creation
Burdens the time with mournfulness for us,
And for themselves with shame.",—Things mechanised
By coils and pivots set to foreframed codes
Would, in a thorough-sphered melodic rule.
And governance of sweet consistency,
Be cessed no pain, whose burnings would abide
With That Which holds responsibility,
Or inexist.*

CHORUS OF THE PITIES (aerial music)

*Tea, yea, yea !
Thus would the Mover pay
The score each puppet owes,
The Reaper reap what his contrivance sows !
Why make Life debtor when it did not buy ?
Why wound so keenly Right that it would die ?*

SPIRIT OF THE YEARS

*Nay, blame not ! For what judgment can ye blame ?—
In that immense unweeting Mind is shown
One far above forethinking ; purposive,
Tet superconscious ; a Clairvoyancy
That knows not what It knows, yet works therewith.—
The cognizance ye mourn, Life's doom to feel,
If I report it meetly, came unmeant,
Emerging with blind gropes from impercipience
By listless sequence—luckless, tragic Chance,
In your more human tongue.*

, Soph. Track. 1266-1272.

TRAFALGAR, FROM " THE DYNASTS "

SPIRIT OF THE PITIES

And hence unneeded

*In the economy of Vitality,
Which might have ever kept a sealed cognition
As doth the Will Itself.*

CHORUS OF THE YEARS (aerial music)

*Nay, nay, nay ;
Tour hasty judgments stay.
Until the topmost cyme
Have crowned the last entablature of Time.
O heap not blame on that in-brooding Will;
O pause, till all things all their days fulfil !*

SCENE V

LONDON. THE GUILDHALL

A crowd of citizens has gathered outside to watch the carriages as they drive up and deposit guests invited to the Lord Mayor's banquet, for which event the Hall is brilliantly lit within. A cheer rises when the equipage of any popular personage arrives at the door.

First Citizen. Well, well ! Nelson is the man who ought to have been banqueted to-night. But he is coming to Town in a coach different from these !

Second Citizen. Will they bring his poor splintered body home ?

First Citizen. Yes. They say he's to be tombed in marble, at St. Paul's or Westminster. We shall see him if he lays in state. It will make a patriotic spectacle for a fine day.

Boy. How can you see a dead man, father, after so long ?

SHORT MODERN PLAYS

First Citizen. They'll embalm him, my boy, as they did all the great Egyptian admirals.

Boy. His lady will be handy for that, won't she ?

First Citizen. Don't ye ask awkward questions.

Second Citizen. Here's another coming !

First Citizen. That's my Lord Chancellor Eldon. Wot he'll say, and wot he'll look !—Mr. Pitt will be here soon.

Boy. I don't like Billy. He killed Uncle John's parrot.

Second Citizen. How may ye make that out, youngster ?

Boy. Mr. Pitt made the war, and the war made us want sailors ; and Uncle John went for a walk down Wapping High Street to talk to the pretty ladies one evening ; and there was a press all along the river that night—a regular hot one—and Uncle John was carried on board a man-of-war to fight under Nelson ; and nobody minded Uncle John's parrot, and it talked itself to death. So Mr. Pitt killed Uncle John's parrot ; see it, sir ?

Second Citizen. You had better have a care of this boy, friend. His brain is too precious for the common risks of Cheapside. Not but what he might as well have said Boney killed the parrot when he was about it. And as for Nelson—who's now sailing shinier seas than ours, if they've rubbed Her off his slate where he's gone to, —the French papers say that our loss in him is greater than our gain in ships ; so that logically the victory is theirs. Gad, sir, it's almost true !

[A hurraing is heard from Cheapside, and the crowd in that direction begins to hustle and show excitement.]

First Citizen. He's coming, he's coming ! Here, let me lift you up, my boy.—Why, they have taken out the horses, as I am man alive !

TRAFALGAR, FROM " THE DYNASTS "

Second Citizen. Pitt for ever !—Why, here's a blade opening and shutting his mouth like the rest, but never a sound does he raise !

Third Citizen. I've not too much breath to carry me through my day's work, so I can't afford to waste it in such luxuries as crying Hurrah to aristocrats. If ye was ten yards off y'd think I was shouting as loud as any.

Second Citizen. It's a very mean practice of ye to husband yourself at such a time, and gape in dumb-show like a frog in Plaistow Marshes.

Third Citizen. No, sir ; it's economy ; a very necessary instinct in these days of ghastly taxations to pay half the armies in Europe ! In short, in the words of the Ancients, it is scarcely compass-mentas to do otherwise ! Somebody must save something, or the country will be as bankrupt as Mr. Pitt himself is, by all account ; though he don't look it just now.

[Pitt's coach passes, drawn by a troop of running men and boys. The Prime Minister is seen within, a thin, erect, up-nosed figure, with a flush of excitement on his usually pale face. The vehicle reaches the doorway to the Guildhall and halts with a jolt. Pitt gets out shakily, and amid cheers enters the building.]

Fourth Citizen. Quite a triumphal entry. Such is power ;
Now worshipped, now accursed ! The overthrow
Of all Pitt's European policy
When his hired army and his chosen general
Surrendered them at Ulm a month ago,
Is now forgotten ! Ay ; this Trafalgar
Will botch up many a ragged old repute,
Make Nelson figure as domestic saint
No less than country's saviour, Pitt exalt
As zenith-star of England's firmament,

SHORT MODERN PLAYS

And uncure all the bogglers of her weal
At this adventurous time.

Third Citizen. Talk of Pitt being ill. He looks hearty as a buck.

First Citizen. It's the news—no more. His spirits are up like a rocket for the moment.

Boy. Is it because Trafalgar is near Portingal that he loves Port wine ?

Second Citizen. Ah, as I said, friend ; this boy must go home and be carefully put to bed !

First Citizen. Well, 'whatever William's faults, it is a triumph for his virtues to-night !

[*Pitt having disappeared, the Guildhall doors are closed, and the crowd slowly disperses, till in the course of an hour the street shows itself empty and dark, only a few oil lamps burning.*

The SCENE opens, revealing the interior of the Guildhall, and the brilliant assembly of City magnates, Lords, and Ministers seated there, Mr. Pitt occupying a chair of honour by the Lord Mayor. His health has been proposed as that of the Saviour of England, and drunk with acclamations.

Pitt (standing up after repeated calls). My lords and gentlemen :—You have toasted me
As one who has saved England and her cause.
I thank you, gentlemen, unfeignedly.
But—no man has saved England, let me say :
England has saved herself, by her exertions :
She will, I trust, save Europe by her example !

[*Loud applause, during which he sits down, rises, and sits down again. The scene then shuts, and the night without has place.*

SPIRIT OF THE YEARS

*Those words of this man Pitt—his last large words,
As I may prophesy—that ring to-night*

TRAFALGAR, FROM " THE DYNASTS "

*In their first mintage to the fcasters here,
Will spread with ageing, lodge, and crystallise,
And stand embedded in the English tongue
Till it grow thin, outworn, and cease to be.—
So is't ordained by That Which all ordains ;
For words were never winged with apter grace,
Or blent with happier choice of time and place,
To hold the imagination of this strenuous race.*

SCENE VI, AN INN AT RENNES

Night. A sleeping-chamber. Two candles are burning near a bed in an alcove, and writing-materials are on the table.

The French admiral, Villeneuve, partly undressed, is pacing up and down the room.

Villeneuve. These hauntings have at last nigh
proved to me
That this thing must be done. Illustrious foe
And teacher, Nelson : blest and over blest
In thy outgoing at the noon of strife
When glory clasped thee round ; while wayward
Death
Refused my coaxings for the like-timed call !
Yet I did press where thickest missiles fell,
And both by precept and example showed
Where lay the line of duty, patriotism,
And honour, in that combat of despair.

[He sees himself in the glass as he passes.
Unfortunate Villeneuve !—whom fate has marked

, This scene is a little antedated, to include it in the Act to which it essentially belongs.

SHORT MODERN PLAYS

To suffer for too firm a faithfulness.—
An Emperor's chide is a command to die.—
By him accursed, forsaken by my friend.
Awhile stern England's prisoner, then unloosed
Like some poor dolt unworth captivity.
Time serves me now for ceasing. Why not cease ? . .
When, as Shades whisper in the chasml night,
" Better, far better, no percipience here."—
O happy lack, that I should have no child
To come into my hideous heritage,
And groan beneath the burden of my name ! ,

SPIRIT OF THE YEARS

,",", " speak. *His mood is ripe for such a park.*
[Sending a voice into Villeneuve's ear.
Thou dost divine the hour I
Villeneuve. But those stern Nays,
That heretofore were audible to me
At each unhappy time I strove to pass ?

SPIRIT OF THE YEARS

Have been annulled. The Will grants exitfeely ;
Tea, It says " Now." Therefore make now thy time.

SPIRIT OF THE PITIES

May his sad sunken soul merge into nought
Meekly and gently as a breeze at eve !
Villeneuve. From skies above me and the air
around
Those callings which so long have circled me
At last do whisper " Now." Now it shall be !

, " Quel bonheur que je n'aie aucun enfant pour recueillir
mon horrible hditage et qui soit charge du poids de mon nom ! "
—(Extract from the poignant letter to his wife written on this
night.—See Lanfrey iu. 374.

TRAFALGAR, FROM " THE DYNASTS "

[He seals a letter, and addresses it to his wife ; then takes a dagger from his accoutrements that are hanging alongside, and, lying down upon his back on the bed, stabs himself determinedly in many places, leaving the weapon in the last wound.

Ungrateful master ; generous foes ; Farewell !

[Villeneuve dies ; and the scene darkens.

SCENE VII

KING GEORGE'S WATERING-PLACE, SOUTH WESSEX

The interior of the " Old Rooms " Inn. Boatmen and burghers are sitting on settles round the fire, smoking and drinking.

First Burgher. So they've brought him home at last, hey ? And he's to be solemnised with a roaring funeral ?

First Boatman. Yes, thank God. . . . 'Tis better to lie dry than wet, if canst do it without stinking on the road gravewards. And they took care that he shouldn't.

Second Boatman. 'Tis to be at Paul's ; so they say that know. And the crew of the *Victory* have to walk in front, and Captain Hardy is to carry his stars and garters on a great velvet pincushion.

First Burgher. Where's the Captain now ?

Second Boatman *(nodding in the direction of Captain Hardys house)*. Down at home here biding with his own folk a bit. I zid en walking with them on the Esplanade yesterday. He looks ten years older than he did when he went. Ay—he brought the galliant hero home !

SHORT MODERN PLAYS

Second Burgher. Now how did they bring him home so that he could lie in state afterwards to the naked eye !

First Boatman. Well, as they always do,—in a cask of sperrits.

Second Burgher. Really, now !

First Boatman (*lowering his voice*). But what happened was this. They were a long time coming, owing to contrary winds, and the *Victory* being little more than a wreck. And grog ran short, because they'd used near all they had to peckle his body in. So—they broached the Adm'l !

Second Burgher. How ?

First Boatman. Well ; the plain calendar of it is, that when he came to be unhooped, it was found that the crew had drunk him dry. What was the men to do ? Broke down by the battle, and hardly able to keep afloat, 'twas a most defendable thing, and it fairly saved their lives. So he was their salvation after death as he had been in the fight. If he could have knowed it, 'twould have pleased him down to the ground ! How 'a would have laughed through the spigot-hole : " Draw on, my hearties ! Better I shrivel than you famish," Ha-ha !

Second Burgher. It may be defendable afloat ; but it seems queer ashore.

First Boatman. Well, that's as I had it from one that knows—Bob Loveday of Overcombe—one of the *Victory* men that's going to walk in the funeral. However, let's touch a livelier string. Peter Green, strike up that new ballet that they've lately had prented here, and were hawking about town last market-day.

Second Boatman. With all my heart. Though my wyndpipe's a bit clogged since the wars have made beer so mortal small !

TRAFALGAR, FROM " THE DYNASTS "

SONG

THE NIGHT OF TRAFALGAR

I

In the wild October night-time, when the wind raved
round the land,
And the Back-sea, met the Front-sea, and our doors
were blocked with sand,
And we heard the drub of Dead-man's Bay, where
bones of thousands are,
We knew not what the day had done for us at Tra-
falgar.

(All) Had done,
Had done,
For us at Trafalgar !

II

" Pull hard, and make the Nothe, or down we go ! "
one says, says he.
We pulled ; and bedtime brought the storm ; but
snug at home slept we.
Yet all the while our gallants after fighting through
the day,
Were beating up and down the dark, sou'-west of
Cadiz Bay.

The dark,
The dark,
Sou'-west of Cadiz Bay !

m

The victors and the vanquished then the storm it
tossed and tore,
As hard they strove, those worn-out men, upon that
surly shore ;
, In those days the hind-part of the harbour adjoining this
scene was so ,amed, and at high tides the waves washed across
the isthmus at a point called " The Narrows."

SHORT MODERN PLAYS

Dead Nelson and his half-dead crew, his foes from
near and far,
Were rolled together on the deep that night at
Trafalgar !

The deep
The deep,
That night at Trafalgar !
[The Cloud-curtain draws.]

CHORUS OF THE YEARS (aerial music)

*Meanwhile the month moves on to counter-deeds
Vast as the vainest needs•,
And fiercely the predestined plot proceeds.*

CURTAIN

BIRDS OF A FEATHER

A Welsh Wayside Comedy

By JOHN OSWALD FRANCIS

CHARACTERS

Twm Tinker.
Dicky Bach Dwl
Jenkins the Keeper.
The Bishop of Mid-Wales.

" And fast concerning rivers; there be so many wonders reported and written of them, and of the several creatures that be bred and live in them, and those by authors of so good credit, that we need not to deny them an historical faith."—Isaak Walton in The Compleat Angler.

BIRDS OF A FEATHER

SCENE.—A roadside in rural Wales.

TIME.—About ten o'clock at night.

Throughout the play, the stage directions are to be taken from the view-point of an audience.

The foreground of the stage is a country road. At the back are trees in summer foliage. Between the trees and the road is a low grassy bank which, half-way across the stage, is broken by a gap from which a pathway runs through the trees to the river near-by. Moonlight is seen amidst the trees and in the further parts of the stage.

There is a woodfire in the foreground. To the right and to the left of the fire are boxes, both serving as seats. Near by is a third box, used as a store-table. On it are plates, knives, forks, a couple of tin drinking-mugs, packets of condiments and a hurricane lamp. On the ground, near the fire, is another hurricane lamp ; also, a frying-pan containing steak and onions. This part of the stage is lit by two lamps and the glow of the fire.

The rise of the curtain shows Twm Tinker seated upon the box to the right, eating his supper with a plate balanced on his knees. Twm is a middle-aged man, weather-beaten and poorly clad. From his doleful examination of his empty cup, it is clear that his meal lacks drink. Putting down the cup with a sigh of resignation, he cleans his plate by wiping it round with a handful of grass from the bank and polishes it with some paper. Then, lighting his pipe, he settles down for an after-supper smoke.

[Dicky Bach Dwl begins to sing on the road to the left.

SHORT MODERN PLAYS

Twm. Hullo, Dicky ?

Dicky (*without*). Hullo, Twm ?

Twm. Got the beer ?

Dicky. Yes.

Twm. Then hurry up, my boy, hurry up !

[Dicky Bach Dwl comes in from the left, carrying a loaf of bread and a gallon jar. He is a young fellow dressed in ragged rustic clothing, with a battered soft hat set on his mop of unkempt hair. His facial expression shows a mind a little awry. There is, however, nothing unpleasant about him, but, rather, something pitiful and appealing.]

Dicky (*sniffing the air*). Jawch, Twm, there's a grand smell on that steak and onions.

Twm. Your share is in the frying-pan. Hand over that jar, Dicky.

[Dicky puts the loaf with the other stores and gives the jar to Twm, who pours out a mugful of ale and drinks with large appreciation. Dicky holds the frying-pan over the fae, enjoying the odour.]

Dicky. A-a-h ! H'm ! Lovely ! Have you set the nightlines, Twm ?

Twm. Yes. (*With a gesture towards the back of the stage.*) They're tied to that willow-tree at the bottom end o' the pool.

[A dog whimpers on the road to the right.]

Dicky (*concerned*). There's the little bitch crying.

Twm. Yes. I put her in the cart out o' the way. If Jenkins the Keeper or Powell the Policeman should come along, it's best they don't see the dog.

Dicky (*consolingly, as if to a fellow-creature*). Lie you still, Floss fach. It will be safer for us. (*The dog begins to bark happily, hearing his voice.*) Quiet ! (*The dog stops at once.*) Where's the donkey ?

Twm. I tethered him down by the bridge. Give him a call to be sure he's there.

BIRDS OF A FEATHER

Dicky (*calling on a special note*). Ned-dy !

[*The donkey brays a friendly reply from the right.*]

Twm. Hark at him—yes, answering you back like a Christian in a pair of trousers. The understanding you've got for animals—well, boy, it's beyond me quite.

Dicky (*beginning to transfer the viands from the frying-pan to his plate*). Aay, and I've got a pretty tidy understanding for a bit o' steak and onions, too.

Twm. Here—steady, my lad ! Take half and leave half.

Dicky (*reluctant*). Leave ?

Twm. Yes, just for safety. You know the character we've got for poaching. Well, if anybody dangerous comes along—(*suiting the action to the word*)—then I pop the frying-pan over the fire—like this—and here we are, Twm Tinker and Dicky Bach Dwl, a proper picture o' two law-abiding tinkers eating their bit of honest supper.

Dicky (*doubtful*). Well, p'raps people would believe it. They *might*.

[*The raucous note of a corn-crake is heard from the distance on the left.*]

Twm. The old corn-crake there doesn't seem to think much of it either. Did you sec Price when you fetched the beer ?

Dicky. Yes. (*Producing a note.*) Oh ! He asked me to give you this.

Twm. About that salmon, I expect. (*Reading by the light of one of the lamps.*) "Castle Hotel, Pontewyn. Private and Confidential. Dear Twm Tinker, this is to let you know that everything is arranged now about the luncheon-party that Mr. Venerbey-Jones is giving to-morrow to the clergymen who are coming for the opening of the new schoolroom at St. David's Church." (*With a fierce air of grievance.*) Venerbey-Jones ? I wish that bunch of parsons would give him

SHORT MODERN PLAYS

a lunch—and begin by pouring half a pint o' prussic acid down the old devil's throat !

Dicky. Hear, hear, Twm ! I've only got three-ha'-pence ; but I'd pay it willing just to hold the bottle to his lips.

Twm (reading again). " The party will be given here in this hotel, so please don't forget that I am relying on you for a salmon and will pay you tenpence a pound for it. Sincerely yours, Robert Price."

Dicky. Tenpence a pound ? Jawch, Twm, there's money for you !

Twm (putting the letter in his pocket). I'll keep this in case o' dispute. We promised him a salmon, Dicky, and a salmon he shall have. This pool of Venerbey-Jones's has always got the pick o' the river. (*Pointing away.*) Look, Dicky. There's banks of cloud coming up. Good ! We shall have a bit o' dark for the water. The wind's gone round sou'-west.

[There is a rustling in the trees.

Dicky. Aay, sou'-west. D'you hear her ? A grand wind she is, Twm—a dark old wind. Come on, wind. Send up the clouds. That's right—up and up, to shut the eyes o' the moon. Let's go to the river, Twm. I can't wait any longer.

Twm. Yes. We'd better get ready. Swaller down your vit'ls, Dicky.

Dicky (hastily polishing off his supper). I'm swallering, Twm. I'm swallering. Have you got the things to make a torch ?

Twm. Yes. I hid them behind this bank. (*Producing the articles.*) Stick, rag, paraffin-oil. (*Producing a trident.*) And here's my spear.

Dicky (suddenly tense). H'sh !

[He bends forward listening.

Twm. What is it ?

Dicky. Footsteps.

BIRDS OF A FEATHER

Twm. Where ?

Dicky (*pointing to the left*). In the wood. Twm, it's Jenkins the Keeper.

Twm. Him ? Mawredd Moses ! Let's get these out o' sight. (*He hides the poaching implements.*) Tell the little bitch to lie still.

Dicky. Right.

[He whistles a low warning note.]

Twm. Seems to me, Dicky, you can smell a keeper or a policeman a mile off. Where's that blessed frying-pan ? Ah ! (*He picks up the frying-pan and sits down, holding it over the fire.*) Sit down, Dicky, and put on a look as mild as milk.

[Sitting peacefully by the fire, they compose their faces to an expression of seraphic virtue.]

Dicky (*whispering*). Here he is.

Twm (*loudly*). Yes, Dicky, you're quite right. Davies Ty Isna ought to have offered more than six-pence for mending that bucket.

[Jenkins the Keeper comes in from the left. He is a stalwart, middle-aged man, dressed in clothes appropriate to his calling.]

Twm (*with a start of pretended surprise*). Oh, Jenkins the Keeper ! Good evening, Jenkins.

Dicky. Good evening, Mister Jenkins.

Twm (*genially*). Taking a stroll after supper ?

Jenkins. I don't want any soft soap from you two. What are you doing here, Twm Tinker ?

Twm. Frying steak and onions.

Jenkins. Whose onions, I wonder ?

Twm (*angrily*). Whose onions ? My onions. Dicky's onions. Our onions !

Jenkins (*sarcastically*). Indeed !

Twm. What d'you mean, Jenkins ! What are you hinting at ?

Jenkins. I'm not hinting at anything. What I've got to say I'm going to say straight out : I want to see

SHORT MODERN PLAYS

you and this Dicky Bach Dwl off Mr. Venerbey-Jones's land.

Twm. Who's on Venerbey-Jones's land ?

Dicky. Aay, who's on it ?

Twm. Is this the public road, or is it not ?

Jenkins. Public road it may be ; but the land on either side of it is Mr. Venerbey-Jones's land. The game on it is Mr. Venerbey-Jones's game.

Twm. That's as may be.

Jenkins. The fish for a mile and a half of that river are Mr. Venerbey-Jones's fish.

Twm. So you say.

Jenkins. Yes, on this estate, fur, fin, and feather, everything is Mr. Venerbey-Jones's. And don't you forget it.

Twm. I know what this means, Jenkins. That boss o' yours has been complaining that you haven't got enough pluck for your job.

Jenkins. What ?

Twm. Oh yes—I've heard ! So you're beginning to stir things up by persecuting two peaceful, hard-working tinkers.

Jenkins. Yes, a bright pair of beauties you are. The police don't know one tenth of the mischief you do—sleeping out in that cart like a lot of thieving gypsies.

Twm (highly indignant). Gypsies ? Gypsies, you say ?

Dicky. Too bad, Twm. And you a Galvinistic Methodist too.

Jenkins. In the workhouse you ought to be, you young vagabond

Dicky. No. No walls for me—never.

Jenkins. And, as for you, Twm Tinker, your proper place is the County Gaol—and a great pleasure to me it will be to get you there.

Twm. You never will, Jenkins, though you've been trying hard for twenty years.

Jenkins. I'll have you one of these days—the pair

BIRDS OF A FEATHER

of you. And now, before I go home, I want to see you off this estate.

Twm. We'll move from this spot just when we like, Jenkins, and not a moment sooner.

Dicky. Not a moment, *Twm.*

Twm. If anybody had better be moving, it's you, Jenkins, for fear I should happen to let fly with this frying-pan.

Jenkins. Well, remember : I've told you.

Twm. Thank you for nothing, Jenkins. Good night and sweet repose to you.

Jenkins. Trash—rodneys—pah !

[He goes away to the left.]

Dicky (watching Jenkins go). If there's one thing on earth worse than a weasel, it's a keeper.

Twm. We promised a salmon to Price—Jenkins or no Jenkins.

Dicky. He said he was going home. H'sh ! Yes—he's walking back through the wood. Come on, *Twm.* Let's chance it. I can't wait now. Don't you feel the old river drawing you—aay, drawing and drawing ? The moon's going, *Twm.*

Twm. Very well, we'll chance it. I'll get the things out again.

[He produces the poaching-tackle. The moonlight begins to fade into darkness as the clouds cover the sky.]

Dicky (moving to and fro excitedly and laughing with delight). Ha, ha, ha ! So long, old Man in the Moon. Good-bye, you little white stars. And, if you should happen to be peeping, I hope you won't see anything short of a sixteen pounder. Ha, ha ! Ho, ho !

Twm (giving the things to Dicky). Here you are—stick, rag, paraffin-oil. Make yourself a torch.

[Twm practises a few movements with his spear, while Dicky improvises a torch by wrapping the rag around the end of the stick.]

SHORT MODERN PLAYS

Dicky (*pouring oil over the rag*). Now the paraffin.

Twm. Got matches ?

Dicky (*rattling a match-box*). Yes, plenty.

Twm. Good.

Dicky. Ha, ha, ha ! Spear and torch once again—
aay, this is the time when I'm happy. Happy ?
Darro, Twm—I can't tell you. It's—it's—oh, it's like
as if there's a lot o' little birds all singing inside me.
(*Dancing a few steps.*) I can't keep still—no, not I.
(*Suddenly downcast.*) But, Twm—that talk o' me being
put in the workhouse—it comes over me something
dreadful on times. If I was in the workhouse, Twm,
and somebody was to come to me on a night like this
and whisper the word "salmons"—only just whisper
it—O mawredd, Twm, I think I'd lie down and die
broken-hearted !

Twm. Well, my lad, let's hope we're neither of us
in gaol before to-morrow's breakfast. (*Moving to-
wards the back of the stage.*) Come along.

Dicky (*turning to the right*). Wait. There's some-
body else coming now.

Twm. Damn the people ! Isn't a man ever to
have peace to get on with his business ? (*Once again
he puts the poaching-tackle into hiding.*) Where's that
frying-pan ? (*He resumes his former position at the Jire.*)
Who is it this time, Dicky ?

Dicky (*listening*). I don't know that step. It's a
stranger. (*He peers into the darkness.*) Aay, there he is.
Jawh, Twm, it's a curate !

Twm. Curate ?

Dicky. Aay, with a top hat and leggings on
him.

Twm. Curate ? At this time o' night ? Any
danger, I wonder ? Sit down, Dicky, and try to look
as if it was Sunday.

[*They again assume the role of blameless tinkers
cooking supper by the roadside. to meet the*

BIRDS OF A FEATHER

special occasion., Twm begins to hum a Welsh hymn-tune, with which he is but loosely acquainted. Dicky joins in.

[The Bishop of Mid-Wales comes in from the right, carrying a suit-case and trudging wearily. He is dressed in episcopal attire, his gaiters being stained with dust. He is a benign, white-haired old gentleman of a very friendly disposition. For a moment he pauses, blinking through and over his glasses in the manner of a very shott-sighted person.

Bishop. What's this ? Ah yes, thank Heaven-humanity at last ! Good evening, friends.

Twm (non-committally). Good evening.

Dicky (touching his forehead). Good evening, sir.

Bishop. Can you tell me, please, if I am anywhere near the vicarage ?

Twm. You mean Mr. Owen Matthews's place ?

Bishop. No. Mr. Lewis Pugh's.

Twm. Pugh ? But that's in the next valley.

Bishop (horrified). What ?

Dicky. Yes, sir—four miles away.

Bishop. Four miles ? O dear, dear, dear ! I can't do it.

Dicky. Lost your way you have, sir ?

Bishop. Yes. I reached Pontewyn on the last train, and I've been wandering about for over two hours. (*Mopping his brow.*) I'm quite worn out.

Twm (putting down the frying-pan, assured that the Bishop is harmless). But didn't anybody meet you at the station ?

Bishop. No. You see I wrote to my friend Pugh. (*Producing a letter.*) But I've just found that I've had the letter in my pocket all the time.

[The Bishop's sad plight and his obvious good nature begin to win over Twm and Dicky.

SHORT MODERN PLAYS

Dicky. Twm, p'raps the gentleman would like to sit down ?

Twm. Sit you down, mister, and welcome.

Bishop. Thank you very much. I feel rather faint.

Dicky (offering his box). Here you are, sir. Rest your poor feet.

[*The Bishop sits down with a sigh of relief.*

Bishop (sniffing the air). I seem to——Do I ? Or do I not ? Yes, a pleasant aroma.

Dicky. It's the frying-pan, sir—steak and onions.

Bishop (in a spasm of desire). Steak and—did you say steak and onions ? (*Sighing longingly.*) O dear !

Twm. Two hours walking, with that heavy bag ? (*Suddenly magnanimous.*) Dicky, he must have what's left o' the steak and onions.

Dicky (heartily). Aay, Twm, so he must.

Bishop (in polite but feeble demurral). No, really—er—no. I oughtn't to deprive you of——

Twm. That's all right, sir. We've had our supper. Dicky, pass that plate.

[*Dicky holds out a plate on to which Twm tips the contents of the frying-pan.*

Dicky. That's it, Twm, gravy an' all. (*Giving the plate to the Bishop.*) There you are, sir. Now, a chunk o' bread.

Bishop. Thank you. I really am most grateful. The fact is I'm quite famished.

[*He begins to eat hungrily.*

Dicky. Would you like a nice drop o' beer, sir ?

Bishop (with an anticipatory smile). Beer ?

Twm (aside, doubtful as to their guest's views on total abstinence). Er—Dicky——

Dicky. That's all right, Twm. Church the gentleman is, not chapel. [*He pours out a mugful of ale.*

Bishop. Precisely ! The older institution, the more catholic outlook, the more tolerant philosophy.

BIRDS OF A FEATHER

(*Taking the mug from Dicky.*) Thank you, my boy. Well, iechyd da !

Twm and Dicky. lachi da, sir.

Bishop (growing expansive). Ah—h'm—excellent ! Yes, most refreshing. And now—may I ask your names, my good friends ?

Twm. Twin Tinker I'm known as.

Dicky. And Dicky Bach Dwl they're calling me.

Bishop. Dicky Bach D——? (*Catching Twm's informative gesture towards his head.*) Er, yes—quite so ! Well, I shan't forget this little roadside party.

Twm. I wouldn't boast of it, mister, if I was you.

Dicky. No. You see, sir, we've got a bad name—somehow.

Bishop. A bad name ?

Dicky. Yes, for poaching.

Twm (warmngly). Er—h'm——

Dicky. Don't be afraid, Twm. You can tell from the gentleman's face there's a kind heart in him.

Twm. P'raps I ought to say one thing to you, sir, as man to man : it won't do you any good as a parson to be seen sitting here, chatting with me and Dicky.

Bishop. But I enjoy sitting here, chatting with you and Dicky.

Dicky (surprised). Enjoy it, sir ?

Bishop. Yes. I must explain that I've just come straight from a Conference at Llandrindod.

Dicky. What do they do at a Conf'rence, sir ?

Bishop (with gloomy recollections). Make speeches, my boy—and usually long ones ! Admirable people, of course ; irreproachable people ; people for whom I have the highest respect. But now, after four whole days with the saints, it's quite a pleasant change to sit down and talk to a couple of sinners. (*Looking around.*) After the crowded Conference, it's rather strange to me to be here, just three of us alone.

Dicky. Alone, sir ? Oh no ! We ain't alone.

SHORT MODERN PLAYS

Bishop (*peering here and there*). Not alone ? But——

Dicky. All round us, sir—they're watching.

Bishop. Watching ?

Dicky. Aay, eyes in the dark.

Bishop. Eyes in the dark ? Dear me !

Dicky. There's rabbits by the score.

Bishop (*beginning to grow interested*). Yes, of course—the rabbits.

Dicky (*with a shout*). Hyp ! B-r-r-r ! Hop it, rabbits ! (*With his low, chuckling laugh.*) Now, it's tails up, sir, and they're all scurrying off, as if the Day o' Judgment had come on 'em sudden.

[*A fox barks in the distance on the left.*]

Bishop. There's a dog.

Dicky. Dog ? That's a fox.

Bishop. Really ? A fox ?

Dicky. Aay, slipping along the top edge o' that wood—and thinking hard, I expect, o' somebody's chickens.

Bishop. Eyes in the dark—I never thought of them before. (*Kindling.*) This isn't merely pleasant; it's—it's quite exciting. [*The corn-crake is heard.*]

Dicky. There's that old corn-crake down on the marsh. Very often when he begins, there's no hope o' stopping him.

Bishop. It reminds me of Llandrindod.

Dicky. On that slope, there'll be a couple of hedge-hogs nosing about for sure ; and here, in this field o' corn, there's the little squeaky fellers.

Bishop. And who are the little squeaky fellows ?

Dicky. The mice, o' course ; and they're nibbling, nibbling, nibbling. Aay, I've got a great feeling for them little squeaky fellers. I'm a bit of a nibbler myself. [*An owl hoots near by.*]

Bishop. I know what that is : an owl.

Dicky. Yes. (*Calling loudly and clapping his hands.*) Look out, all you little fellers. There's owls after you. I like to warn 'ern, sir.

BIRDS OF A FEATHER

Bishop. Quite right, my boy. (*Concerned and clapping his hands also.*) Look out there.

Dicky. Ach y fi, them old owls ! They're no better than Jenkins the Keeper and Powell the Policeman.

Bishop (*a lure beginning to grip him*). Those watching eyes ! The thought of them stirs me—yes, most strangely.

Dicky (*eager and joyous*). Ha, ha, ha ! You feel it, too ? It's the way o' the night, sir. It's the wind and the dark getting hold of you.

Bishop (*uneasy under his pleasure*). Well, something's getting hold of me ; that's certain.

Dicky. Ha, ha ! Wait you, sir—just wait.

Twm. Curate or not, mister, take care how you listen to Dicky Bach Dwl. There's times when he'd make a gang o' poachers out of the Twelve Apostles themselves.

Dicky. Are you fond of a bit o' sport, sir ?

Bishop. Sport ? Well, I was something of a sportsman up at Oxford.

[*Dicky goes to the Bishop. His silent, swift-footed motion is now, in itself, a fascination. He is a-quiver with an eager, joyous stealth, and his voice is low and seductive.*

Dicky. P'raps you'd like a bit o' sport in the river to-night ?

Twm (*aside, anxiously*). Dicky, Dicky !

Dicky. But, Twm, don't you understand ? He's half one of us already. Listen, sir. I'll just whisper. (*Into the Bishop's ear.*) Twm and me are going after a salmon.

Bishop. A salmon ?

Dicky. Yes, there in Venerbey-Jones's pool. (*Producing the spear and the torch.*) Here are the things. (*Offering the sbear to the Bishop.*) Now, you take the spear.

SHORT MODERN PLAYS

Bishop. But, my boy——

Dicky. It's only pretending. Take it.

Bishop (*the old Adam waking in him, as he grasps the spear*). What do I do with it ?

Dicky. Suppose we're going into the water.

Bishop (*his diocese forgotten*). Right in ? Dear me !

Dicky. There's only the torch in the darkness and the big, big shadders all popping about. And you're waiting—like this—h'sh !—as quiet as a stone. And then—there's the salmon.

Bishop. Yes, the salmon.

Dicky. Just you think of it, curate or not. Can't you picture his nose coming up towards the light ?

Bishop. His nose—yes ! And then ?

Dicky. Then you lift up the spear—(*showing the movement*)—slow and careful, like this.

Bishop (*imitating the movement*). Like this ? I see. Well ?

Dicky (*dropping his voice*). Up he comes—nearer, nearer. Then you can see his back. It's all shiny in the water. And you take your aim—just behind his head. (*Aloud*) Now ! (*With a swift stroke.*) Swish ! Down comes the spear.

Bishop (*again imitating*). Swish !

Dicky (*making another illustrative movement*). And then, with a twist, you throw him out on the bank.

Bishop (*with a similar movement*). You throw him ? So !

Dicky. Oh, there's fun it is ! Fun, sir ? Aay, fit for the kings o' the world. You'll come along ?

Bishop. I ? Well, really, perhaps I——

Dicky. Yes, you must come, if it's only to watch us.

Bishop. Of course, if it's only to watch—yes. The spear goes this way, you say ? (*With the appropriate movement.*) Swish !

[*The corn-crake is heard again.*

BIRDS OF A FEATHER

Bishop (suddenly dashed). Ah—the voice of conscience and Llandrindod !

Dicky. You're coming with us ? You *are* coming ?

Bishop. No, Dicky, certainly not. (*He puts down the spear.*) How could you suggest such a thing ? And to a clergyman of all people.

Twm (judicially). Still, he pretty nearly had you, sir.

Dicky. Trying to show kindness I was. If you won't come after a salmon, sir—well, p'raps you're fond of a feed o' trout ?

Bishop. Trout ? Yes, a pleasant dish at breakfast.

Dicky. Twm, those night-lines—fast to the willows, you said ? Wait you a minute, sir, if you like trout.

[He hurries away through the trees at the back.]

Twm. A tidy little feller is Dicky, sir, though, o, course, he's counted a bit daft in the head.

Bishop. Daft ? And who amongst us shall say that he knows all the ways of God's wisdom ? Poor Dicky ! I like him—yes, very much.

Twm. He's terrible afraid o' being caught red-handed one o' these nights. There's talk o' putting him in the workhouse. (*Hesitating and uneasy.*) O' course, sir, after all he's told you, you know enough now to set the police on our track.

Bishop. Don't be alarmed, my friend. I know enough to do that for people whose names would surprise you. [*Dicky comes back, bringing a few trout.*]

Dicky. Here you are, sir. Look -at these trout. Beauties they are, sir—fresh off the hook. For you, sir. Take 'em.

Bishop. I'm afraid they're stolen goods, Dicky.

Dicky. You won't take 'em, sir ?

Bishop. I'd—I'd—er—better not.

Twm. Don't you understand, Dicky ? The gentleman is in t,e Church. Hand me them fish, Dicky. I'll find a good use for 'em.

SHORT MODERN PLAYS

[He takes the trout and puts them in his pocket.]

Dicky. Excuse me offering 'em, sir. I thought p'raps you wouldn't be so religious on a week-night. Curate you are, sir, of course ?

Bishop. Well, I was once.

Dicky. You was once? (*Sympathetically.*) Did they give you the chuck-out ?

Bishop. Not exactly, Dicky.

Twm. A vicar now, maybe ?

Bishop. I've been a vicar, too.

Dicky. Well, what are you *now*, sir ?

Bishop. At present, I'm a Bishop.

Twm and Dicky (*staggered*). Eh ? What ?

Dicky. A bishop ?

Twm. Well, I'll be d——

Bishop (*hastily*). H'm—er—yes. I'm the Bishop of Mid-Wales.

Twm. But a bishop can't go wandering about the roads like a stray cat. Why don't you go to Mr. Venerbey-Jones's, sir ? He's the big man in these parts.

Bishop. Venerbey-Jones ? I don't like him—a man of wrath. No. I'm going on to Mr. Lewis Pugh's place. I thank you for all your kindness.

Twm. Oh, that's nothing ! The road you want is the second after crossing the bridge down there.

Bishop. Thank you. Well, my friends, good night to you both.

Twm and Dicky. Good night, sir.

[The Bishop, carrying his bag, begins to move away.]

Dicky. And mind you don't fall into the river, sir.

Bishop. If there's a river about, I shan't be surprised to find myself in it. Good night to you. Good night.

Twm and Dicky. Good night.

[The Bishop goes off on the right.]

BIRDS OF A FEATHER

Dicky. Mawredd, Twm, we've got something to tell 'em in the blacksmith-shop to-morrow ! What do they say for a bishop, Twm ? Your Worship ?

Twm. Even an ordinary mayor gets that much.

Dicky. I know what to call him.

Twm. What ?

Dicky. His Holy Highness.

Twm. Very right and proper it sounds, too.

Dicky (eagerly). And now, Twm, what about that salmon ?

Twm (taking up the spear and the torch, giving the latter to Dicky.) Yes. Here's your torch. *(Looking to the right.)* What's that noise ?

Dicky. Only His Holy Highness. He frightened the donkey.

Twm. I hope the old chap hasn't gone into the river. Now, Dicky.

Dicky (in great delight). Ha, ha, ha ! Spear and torch and the river once again ! *(Beginning to cut capers.)* Ha, ha ! O darro, Twm—I feel I want to go there dancing.

Twm. Steady, my lad, steady. Come along.

[They go of through the trees at the back, Dicky laughing to himself.]

[There is a short pause.]

[Jenkins the Keeper comes in from the left, moving stealthily.]

Jenkins (whispering, with a gesture to people without). H'sh ! Stay there, all four of you. Don't show yourselves till I blow my whistle.

A Voice (without, in a whisper). Righto, Jenkins.

Jenkins (advancing and noting the things near the fire). Ah ! *(Returning to talk to his companions.)* They mean to come back here—and with fish or game, you can be sure. *(Suddenly crouching and looking to the right)* H'sh ! Who's that on the road ? He—yes, he's carrying a bag. One of Twm Tinker's poaching pals,

SHORT MODERN PLAYS

I've no doubt. I'll tackle this fellow myself. Get to your places.

[There is a brief murmur without, then silence. Jenkins, bending low, moves round in the shadows to a position from which he can pounce upon the newcomer.]

The Bishop comes in again from the right, and, struggling along, loaded up with his bag and odd items of attire, he makes a sorry spectacle. His clothes are wet; his collar is limp and stained; his hat is gone. He has taken off his coat and is carrying it on his arm. He has also removed his gaiters, and a few inches of underpants are to be seen above his old-fashioned grey socks.

Bishop (muttering as he comes in) Dear, dear, dear !
(Aloud) Excuse me. *(To himself)* Gone !

Jenkins (springing upon him). I've got you, you rascal !

Bishop (startled and dropping his things). Oh !
(Struggling!) Let go ' How dare you ?

Jenkins Let go indeed ? *(Tightening his grip)*
Not of your sort—you thieving scoundrel !

Bishop Scoundrel ? Thieving ? I ? *(Wriggling hard.)* I've never heard such a——

Jenkins. Keep still, I tell you.

Bishop. I will not keep still.

Jenkins. Then I'll make you. *(Striking him.)*
Now !

Bishop (angry). A blow ! Heavens above—a blow !
(He wrenches himself free and faces Jenkins with fists raised in good boxing style) Don't think I can't defend myself. I'm not afraid of any village hooligan—not I !

Jenkins (trying to seize him again). You've got to——

Bishop (beating him off). Ah ! You would, would you ? *(Exchanging blows, not without credit.)* Take that,

BIRDS OF A FEATHER

you blackguard—yes, and that. Don't think you can frighten me—just because I'm a clergyman.

Jenkins (with a shout of surprise). What ? (*Drawing back.*) Clergyman ? Did you say " clergyman " ?

Bishop. Yes, clergyman. Can't you see ? No, perhaps you can't. I fell into the river. But here—look at my collar.

Jenkins. Yes—your collar ; your way of speaking, too——

Bishop. And who are you to dare to carry on in this fashion ? What's your name ?

Jenkins. Jenkins. I'm head keeper to Mr. Venerbey-Jones.

Bishop (snorting). Oh—him ?

Jenkins. A clergyman ? Well, well, well ! (*Still a little suspicious.*) But what are you doing in such a state——

Bishop (sharply). State?

Jenkins. And at this time of night, too ?

Bishop (who thoroughly dislikes Jenkins now). That's no business of yours, my man.

Jenkins. P'raps not. Well, I'd better move along. I'm sorry for laying hands on you, sir.

Bishop (preening himself a little). You got as good as you gave, I think.

Jenkins. Good night, sir.

Bishop (curtly). Good night.

[*Jenkins goes away on the left.*

[*The Bishop shakes the water from his coat and puts it on. He sets his gaiters by the fire to dry. Opening his bag, he takes out his night-shirt, which is soaking wet, wrings it and spreads it upon one of the boxes by the fire. As he begins to recover from his ducking and from the exertion of his fisticuffs, his native cheerfulness comes back to him. A breeze stirs the leafage. He listens with a smile of pleasure. An owl hoots near-by.*

SHORT MODERN PLAYS

Bishop (*clapping his hands and shouting*). Look out, you little fellows ! (*Smiling and murmuring to himself*.) Poor Dicky ! Where are——(*Turning towards the trees.*) Yes, I suppose so—the river. (*Recalling the allurements of Dicky's talk, he stirs uneasily.*) How does it——(*He raises his hand and brings it down in the movement of spearing.*) Swish ! (*A smile flits over his face and he sighs—enviously.*) Ah well ! (*He gets up and paces to and fro, fighting down the subversive appeal.*) I ? No, no, no—NO ! (*His pace slackens and he pauses to peer through the trees.*) Still, just to watch——(*With another movement*) Swish !

[*The corn-crake sounds its note.*

(*Starting violently*) No, certainly not—not for a moment !

[*He falls to pacing to and fro again.*

[*Dicky and Twm come back. Dicky carries a large salmon. Twm has the spear and the Bishop's hat, which he has recovered from the river. For a moment the newcomers do not see the Bishop, whose march of self-conquest has carried him into a patch of shadow. Dicky reaches a position near the fire before the Bishop is aware of their return.*

Bishop (*delighted*). Ah—my hat !

Dicky (*frightened*). Oh !

[*He drops the salmon near the fire.*

Twm (*promptly getting rid of the spear*). Darro !

Dicky (*relieved*). It's only His Holy Highness.

Bishop. I'm sorry to trouble you again, but I walked into the water. (*Noticing the salmon.*) What's this, Dicky ? Still more fish ?

Dicky (*smiling and at ease*). Well, you see, sir—we'd had an offer of——(*Starting in alarm.*) Twm ?

Twm. Well ?

Dicky. Over there—it's Jenkins the Keeper.

Twm. Jenkins ?

BIRDS OF A FEATHER

Bishop (annoyed]. That fellow again ?

Dicky. And there's a man in that gateway. It's Powell the Policeman.

Twm. Somebody behind us, too. Dicky—we're surrounded.

Dicky. I'll pick up the salmon.

Twm (stopping him}. No, P'raps they haven't seen it yet.

Dicky. What shall we do ?

Twm. I don't know.

Dicky. They're moving. Yes—there's Jenkins.

Bishop. I detest that man.

Twm. Blazes, Dicky—here's my pocketfull o' trout!

Bishop. T-t-t !

Twm. Yes, and Price's letter on me somewhere.

Dicky. They're closing in on us.

Twm. It's gaol for me, boy ; workhouse for you.

Dicky. Workhouse ? Oh, no, no, no ! (To the Bishop.) Can't you help us ?

Bishop. I ?

Dicky. O sir, them walls all round !

Bishop (in sudden resolve). One moment ! The evidence against you is this fish ?

Dicky. Yes.

Bishop (going to the box near the fish). If you have sinned with your hands, I've sinned also in my heart ; so I may as well see this through.

Twm. What are you going to do ?

Bishop. Suppress the evidence ! Now. (Suiting his action to his words.) If I sit down and take my night-shirt—so.

Dicky. Well ?

Bishop. I can hold it to the fire—so.

Dicky. Well ?

Bishop. And drop it on to the fish—so.

Twm. And then ?

Bishop. Then I wrap it round the fish—so.

SHORT MODERN PLAYS

Twm (joyfully). Dicky !

Bishop. And I put the lot in my bag—so.

[He locks salmon and night-shirt in his bag.]

Dicky. Safe in his bag—well, I'll be blowed !

Bishop. No keeper would dare to search a bishop.

Twm (in a whisper). Here's Jenkins. *(Aloud.)*
Yes, sir, we'll take you up to Mr. Lewis Pugh's place
with pleasure. With pleasure, sir.

[Jenkins comes in from the left.]

Bishop. So you're here again, are you ?

Jenkins. What were you doing in the river just
now, Twm Tinker ?

Twm (for a moment at a loss). The river ?

Jenkins. Yes. You had a light there. What were
you doing ?

Twm (holding out the Bishop's hat as an answer comes).
Fetching this gentleman's hat.

Jenkins. Hat? *(To the Bishop.)* Did you lose
your hat ?

Bishop. I certainly did lose my hat.

Jenkins. Don't think, Twm Tinker, that you can
put me off with a tale of a hat. *(To the Bishop.)*
So you're a friend of this pair, after all ? Yes, a fine
sort of clergyman, I'll be bound. We'll take charge of
the lot of you. *[He raises his whistle to his lips.]*

Bishop. If you blow that whistle, you'll regret it.

Jenkins. Regret it ? Shall I, indeed ? And who
are you I'd like to know ?

Dicky (sonorously). His Holy Highness, the Bishop
of Mid-Wales.

Jenkins (taken aback). Bishop ?

Bishop. Precisely ! If you doubt it, let me see
what I have in my pockets. *(Producing envelopes.)*
Look at these. They're addressed to me.

Jenkins (reading). " The Right Reverend the Lord
Bishop of Mid-Wales."

Dicky (aside). Mawredd, Twm—a lord !

BIRDS OF A FEATHER

Jenkins (forced to acceptance). So you really are a bishop ?

Bishop (taking back the envelopes). I know your employer. In fact, one of these letters is an invitation from him to a luncheon to-morrow.

Dicky. What ? Ha, ha, ha ! Twm, it's the Castle Hotel. From what I hear said, they're buying a grand big salmon for that party. (*To Twm, aside, looking towards the bag.*) Twm, ha, ha, ha ! The salmon !

Bishop. I daresay you'll be glad to earn an honest shilling, Dicky. (*Significantly.*) Take charge of my bag, will you ?

Dicky. Take charge ? (*Gleefully seizing the bag.*) Oh yes, I'll take charge of the bag !

Twm (picking up the lamps). Our things will be safe enough till we come back, Dicky. Now, my lord, we'll have the donkey harnessed up in half a jiffy ; and then, my lord, we'll drive you over to Mr. Lewis Pugh's, my lord.

Bishop. Thank you, Twm. (*Coldly.*) Good night, keeper.

Jenkins (sullenly, helpless though still a little suspicious). Good night.

Dicky (with sly malice). Good night, Mister Jenkins.

Twm. Good night, Jenkins. And, in the way o' kindness, let me tell you this : you're one o' those that's up and doing a bit too soon.

[*He moves off to the right.*]

Bishop (following Twm). Yes, too soon, my good man—too soon !

[*The corn-crake is heard on a violent note.*]

Bishop (pausing, with a wave of the hand). Too late, my good bird—too late !

[*Twm, the Bishop, and Dicky go out on the right,*]

CURTAIN

THE CLOWN OF STRATFORD

A Comedy in One Act

By SIR JOHN SQUIRE

CHARACTERS

Lord Verulam
Lady Verulam
Shakespeare
Servant

THE CLOWN OF STRATFORD

[Written on the very unlikely assumption that Bacon did
write Shakespeare]

Lord Verulam's *Study*. Bacon *is discovered at desk writing, with his back nearly turned to the audience.*

Bacon (*scratching his head*). It may be playing to the gallery rather. Anyhow, nobody knows it is I. . . . Damn ! It's a beautiful bit, but I suppose it will have to go. It does hold the action up. But, by Gad, this *is* a good bit. How magnificently it will sound. [*Comes forward and reads.*

⁶¹ These our actors,
As I foretold you, were all spirits, and
Are melted into air, into thin air :
And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,
The cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve
And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff
As dreams are——"

[A knock. Bacon runs to the desk and hides the MS. Sits down as though writing. Enter Lady Verulam.

Lady Verulam. I'm sorry to interrupt you, darling.
What are you writing ?

Bacon. Oh, one of my essays.

Lady Verulam. But I thought you told me you'd

SHORT MODERN PLAYS

never write an essay again. You said they were trifles. I *told* you you couldn't help yourself.

Bacon. Oh, well, this isn't quite an ordinary essay. It isn't one of those short things all about Honour, Vice, Virtue, Gardens, and so on. It's much longer and much more learned. It's going to be called the *Novum Organum*.

Lady Verulam. The what ?

Bacon. The *Novum Organum*.

Lady Verulam. Is that French ?

Bacon. No, Latin.

Lady Verulam. I do wish you wouldn't give your things those Latin titles. It's so affected of you, I think. It's only done, I'm sure, to show that you know Latin. Hardly anybody understands it now ; and indeed I don't see why they should.

Bacon. But the whole thing is in Latin.

Lady Verulam. What ! I shan't be able to read a word of it.

Bacon. I'm not sure that you'll want to, anyhow.

Lady Verulam (*offended*). I trust I can understand anything you write.

Bacon. I'm sorry, my sweetheart. It's a compliment that you should want to. I tell you what : I'll produce an English version as well.

Lady Verulam. Promise !

Bacon. I promise.

Lady Verulam (*after a pause*). What's it all about ?

Bacon. Oh, I don't know. . . . Things in general.

Lady Verulam. That's a nice answer. I wish you knew how secretive you are sometimes.

Bacon. I'm not secretive !

Lady Verulam. You are ; you never tell me anything.

Bacon. It's perfectly monstrous of you ! I don't do a *thing* you don't know about. You know every

THE CLOWN OF STRATFORD

thought I have, and my whole public career has been as open as it could be.

Lady Verulam. I'm sorry, Francis. I didn't mean to annoy you. I *do* think you're honest. But you often *don't* know when you're not telling me things.

Bacon. Thank you, darling, I'm so sorry. I know I'm forgetful sometimes. But you do know that I wouldn't keep anything from you deliberately, don't you ?

Lady Verulam. Of course I do, darling. (*Kisses him.*) And now what was it I came to ask you about ? I can't remember.

Bacon. It doesn't matter. It was extremely nice to see you anyhow.

Lady Verulam. Well, if I can't remember it, I suppose I shall have to go away without telling you. I have the shopping to do. *[A knock.*

Bacon. Come in. *[Enter Servant.*

Servant. There is a man downstairs who says he wants to see your lordship.

Bacon. Did he give his name ?

Servant. It sounded like Shaxpur, my lord.

Lady Verulam. Who can he be, Francis ? Did he say what his business was ?

Servant. He said it was very important, my lady. He said something about seeing his lordship about a dog.

Lady Verulam. A dog, Francis ! Surely you're not buying a dog ? You *know* the trouble we had with Pat. I swore I'd never have another dog again.

Bacon. He's got it wrong, Alice, I'm sure. He can't have heard what the man said. It's about something else. ... In fact, I think I can guess what it is about. . . . I'm almost certain. Yes, I'm sure.

Lady Verulam. But do you know him, Francis ?

Bacon. Yes. I know who he is. I've had business dealings with him. It's not about anything much.

SHORT MODERN PLAYS

Just clearing up an ambiguous point, I've no doubt.
. . . Well, Alice, I'll see you later.

Lady Verulam. But I think I'd like to stay. I'm curious about this man.

Bacon. I shouldn't if I were you, I really shouldn't. Of course I'd like you to stay. But the fellow's a little crude.

Lady Verulam. Francis, if I thought you were *keeping* anything from me, you would hear something. I suppose it's all right. I'll go if you want me to. But I can tell from your face there's something odd about this. I shall come back in ten minutes.

[Exit Lady Verulam. Bacon walks up and down distracted. Re-enter Servant.

Servant. Mr. Shaxpur, my lord.

[Enter Shakespeare, a coarse version of the Stratford bust) slightly drunk, and very affable. Exit Servant.

Bacon. How do you do, Shakespeare ?

Shakespeare. How do you, my lord ? I was just up from Stratford for a day or two, and I thought I'd like to drop up and see you.

Bacon (heartily). Nothing wrong, I hope ? All going well with the farm ?

Shakespeare. Not so bad. A quarrelsome lot of neighbours. But what I wanted to see you about was this. I'm on the rocks. I've got to have some money.

Bacon. But, my good fellow, it's impossible. You had five hundred out of me only six months ago. And there's all the royalties on the plays, too. It's ridiculous. I'm sure you have more money than I have.

Shakespeare. Look you here, my lord. I say I'm hard up, and I *am* hard up. I've got a position to keep up now.

Bacon. What position ?

Shakespeare. I'm squire of New Place. I've got to cut a figure. It's expected of me.

THE CLOWN OF STRATFORD

Bacon. And so have I, I suppose.

Shakespeare. I'm very sorry, my lord, but I can't help your troubles. A man's own affairs are his first consideration. I must ask you to look this matter straight in the face. I've *got* to have some money.

Bacon. It's preposterous. Not a penny !

Shakespeare. I've got to have some money. Money. Five hundred pounds !

Bacon. In that case, I don't think there's any point in prolonging this interview. I'm quite prepared to give you the periodical sums I've been giving you, and the usual bonus on each new play. But I simply can't be victimised incessantly like this, you know, and I won't.

Shakespeare. Perhaps you think I've had too much to drink, eh ?

Bacon. Well, if you put it to me like that, I don't mind saying that it *had* occurred to me.

Shakespeare. Well, I haven't. Not enough to stop me knowing what I'm doing, anyhow. I came up from Stratford for some money ; and some money I'm going to get. If not——

Bacon. You simply *can't* suggest that. You don't mean to say that, after I've kept you for twenty years and more, you'd break our agreement ?

Shakespeare. Never mind what I'd do. I want five hundred pounds.

Bacon. But you simply must wait. Listen. I've got another play finished. It may be my last——

Shakespeare. Your last, eh ? Is that the idea ? All the more reason. It's a *thousand* pounds or—— Well, you know.

Bacon. I didn't really mean my last. *Of course*, I shan't be able to stop writing. No real poet ever can. But, do wait, there's a gentleman. It'll be finished in a few days. Burbage will probably have it on at the Globe within two months. There'll be quite a lot in

SHORT MODERN PLAYS

it for you. It's called *The Tempest*. It's one of the best I've ever done.

Shakespeare. Nice cheerful title. What about a happy ending ?

Bacon. Yes, it *has* a happy ending. It has really. I *did* take some notice of what you said before. You will wait, won't you ?

Shakespeare. Well, I'll come down to five hundred pounds. I must have it to-day, though. (*Bacon hesitates.*) I've the Stratford coach to catch. I'll give you five minutes, my lord.

Bacon. But, man, have some sense. It's grotesque! Think what I've done for you. I found you an illiterate boy, doing walking-on parts : I've made you a rich man. Your future is guaranteed, and yet you come here and blackmail me.

Shakespeare. That ain't a nice word.

Bacon. I didn't mean any offence. But it is silly, isn't it, to kill the goose that lays the golden eggs ? Besides, what about your pride ? You'll go down to posterity as the author of the greatest masterpieces the world has ever seen. Isn't *that* worth having ?

Shakespeare. I don't know anything about masterpieces. You don't seem anxious to claim them yourself.

Bacon. I simply can't.

Shakespeare. No, and you had to find somebody who would. You got me. And what about me ? Don't it cost me something ? I've got to shoulder every piece of rubbish you write. What about all that stuff about " To be or not to be " ? How would you like to have " Atheist ! " shouted after you in the streets of Stratford ? And all those dirty words, too. I wonder you aren't ashamed of yourself! I've got to stand the racket of all this. And I'm entitled to my pay ; so put that in your pipe and smoke it.

THE CLOWN OF STRATFORD

Bacon. You impertinent dog ! I refuse. (*Makes to ring.*) I'll have you kicked out of the house.

Shakespeare. Very well, my Lord Verulam, my Lord High Chancellor, by this afternoon all London will know that you wrote those plays. I've given you every chance. I'm sorry. [*Goes towards the door.*]

Bacon. For heaven's sake, Shakespeare, come back ! I tell you honestly, man, I haven't got it.

Shakespeare (meaningly). Get it, then.

Bacon. But I can't produce it from nowhere on the spot.

Shakespeare. Well, you're talking more reasonable. I tell you what. Ann'll be wondering what's happened to me, but I'll stay over till the next coach. Give me your promise and I'll take your word.

Bacon. I haven't the ghost of a notion what to do. You can't imagine how broke I am.

Shakespeare. Well—(*looking round*)—I should think some of these things was worth a pretty penny. Still, that isn't my affair. I leave ways and means to you, my lord. Good morning.

Bacon. Good morning.

Shakespeare. Good morning. Remember, seven hundred and fifty pounds—or else the whole show comes out.

[*Exit Shakespeare. Bacon sits on a chair down stage facing the audience and buries his face in his hands. Enter Lady Verulam, very white.*]

Lady Verulam. Francis ! (*Bacon does not stir.*) Francis ! Get up, you fool !

Bacon. Don't, Alice, I can't bear it. You can't imagine what's happened. I'm done.

Lady Verulam. What nonsense you're talking ! Get up.

Bacon. It's no good. Let me alone.

Lady Verulam. I won't let you alone. How can you be such a baby ? Get up.

SHORT MODERN PLAYS

Bacon. I'm ruined, Alice. Oh, that I should have brought this on you. I don't know how I can tell you. *[Weeps.]*

Lady Verulam. Oh, for heaven's sake, get up, you great lump. You've got to do something, that's all.

[Bacon springs up.]

Bacon. How do you know? Has that beast broken his promise? Is it all over the place already?

Lady Verulam. If you had your deserts, Francis, you should be kept in suspense. I've never had such a shock in my life. To think that all these years when I thought I was married to a respectable lawyer, my husband was really manufacturing vulgar plays for——

Bacon. Alice, Alice, I can't bear it. How do you know? Tell me.

Lady Verulam. Well, if you want to know, I was listening at the keyhole.

Bacon (relieved). Oh! Thank God for that! But, Alice, what can I do? Don't curse me now. You can do it as much as you like later on. How *am* I to get out of this hole? I can't see anything but suicide. *Imagine* the King's face.

Lady Verulam. I'm not going to imagine anything of the sort. If this man won't give way, you've got to find the money for him, that's all. How much did he say he wanted?

Bacon. He said five hundred.

Lady Verulam. I thought it was seven-fifty.

Bacon. He did say that too. And a thousand. . . . I dare say he'd take five hundred. But I haven't got *Jive*. We're up to the neck in debt as it is. Oh, if only I'd been able to put something by; if only the household expenses weren't so heavy!

Lady Verulam. That's right; blame me.

Bacon. Darling, I didn't mean to. I'm simply distracted. There isn't a soul in the world who'd lend

THE CLOWN OF STRATFORD

me five hundred. I've borrowed right up to the hilt. Everybody knows it.

Lady Verulam. Francis !

Bacon. Yes.

Lady Verulam. Are there no important cases being heard by you at this moment ?

Bacon. Of course there are. There always are ; and I flatter myself I deal with them pretty well.

Lady Verulam. Never mind your merits, Francis. We'd better stick to the point. Are there any *rich* suitors involved in these law cases ?

Bacon. Of course there are. There always are. How could they go to law if they weren't rich ?

Lady Verulam. Well, Francis!

Bacon. What, Alice ?

Lady Verulam. You are extraordinarily dense sometimes. I suppose I shall have to be downright about it. Haven't any of these suitors offered you money ?

Bacon. Bribes, do you mean ?

Lady Verulam. I think you once remarked, Francis, under your delightful alias, that a rose by any other name would smell as sweet. But have your own way. Are there no bribes available, Francis ?

Bacon. Alice, I simply can't.

Lady Verulam. Isn't the alternative a little disagreeable ?

Bacon. But I've always been above suspicion.

Lady Verulam. If you are as successful at keeping this dark as you were with your plays, you may be pretty sure still of dying in the odour of sanctity. Is there a suitor before you who's good for five hundred ?

Bacon. I dare say ; but oh, Alice !

Lady Verulam. Oh, fiddlesticks ! What's his name ?

Bacon. Oh, there are lots of them. There's that man Robinson for instance. He's simply stinking of

SHORT MODERN PLAYS

money. He tried to bribe me yesterday. He put it delicately, of course, but there it was.

Lady Verulam. You will manage to meet him behind the court to-morrow, Francis, and you will take five hundred off him on the spot.

Bacon. I can't bear to do it.

Lady Verulam. If you don't, I may say you won't see me again.

Bacon. Well ... all right, Alice. But you can't imagine what a tug it is.

Lady Verulam. I don't want to. To-morrow. Arid (*going*) you had better make it seven-fifty. I can do with a few pounds for the bills.

[Exit Lady Verulam.]

Bacon (walking up and down). I suppose what must be must be. It will be all the same a hundred years hence. To-morrow and to-morrow and to-morrow Caesar's dust stops a bunghole. Patience on a monument . . . no, I don't think she's much like that. Well, well, it can't be helped. It's a holiday. I mustn't waste time. I suppose I'd better get on with that damned play. Why did I ever begin writing poetry? Now I don't see how I'm ever going to stop. Unless that blackguard will die.

CURTAIN

SHIVERING SHOCKS
OR, THE HIDING-PLACE

By CLEMENCE DANE

CHARACTERS

Captain Dallas, V.C., D.S.O.

Kysh, his servant.

Granville Hughes, B.Sc., an inventor.

Dawson

" The Shepherd "crooks-

Inspector James Pollock, alias " Rowley",

SHIVERING SHOCKS

SCENE.—A small, comfortable-looking cottage sitting-room. At the back is a window, with heavy curtains, looking out on a snowy lawn. On the R. is a curtained outer door. On the L. at the back is a small door opening on a passage and a hearth with a fire burning low. Between the hearth and a small table is a big invalid's chair, with arm-rests and cushions. In it lies Captain Robert Dallas, clean-shaven, bronzed, still young in expression, though his hair is going grey. He is broad-chested, with powerful shoulders and big hands. His legs are hidden by a striped rug. He is reading by the light of a small electric lamp placed on the mantelpiece behind him. The other bulbs, hanging from the ceiling, are unlighted.

TIME—A winter's evening.

As he turns a page there is a gentle knock.

Dallas (not looking up). Come in.

[The door opens and Kysh enters, carrying a tray with a glass, a bottle of whisky and a soda-syphon. He is about Dallas's age, small and wiry, and carries himself like a man who has been in the army. He has bright twinkling eyes and a blustering self-important manner, always at war with his obvious respect for his master. He speaks with a strong cockney accent. He draws the small table closer to the chair and a little behind it, and puts down the tray. Then, as Dallas does not look up, he coughs.

Eh?

SHORT MODERN PLAYS

Kysh. Anything more this evening, sir ?

Dallas (reading). No, I think not. At least, not for half an hour or so.

[*Kysh coughs again.* *Dallas looks up.*
Don't cough all over me like that, *Kysh*. I'm not a jujube. What's the matter ?

Kysh. My evenin' out, sir.

Dallas. Well, trot along !

Kysh. I wanted to be sure you 'ad everything requisite——

Dallas. I can ring for Mrs. Poison.

Kysh. If you rekilect, sir, you kindly give Mrs. Poison permission to be out too, sir.

Dallas. Oh yes, I remember. A funeral, wasn't it?

Kysh. Yes, sir, this afternoon. A' aunt. As she said, sir, she don't 'ave many relaxations. It's a quiet life, sir, ten miles from nowhere, so to speak—except for Mr. Hughes across the way—and 'e 'as 'is stinks to amuse 'isself with. But Mrs. Poison, she finds it as quiet as—as I dessay you do, sir.

Dallas. A lame duck must stay where Providence dumps him, *Kysh*.

Kysh. If you call a Hun whizzbang " Providence," sir—well, I calls it blarsphemy.

Dallas. Now, *Kysh* !

Kysh. Sorry, sir.

Dallas. Besides, I meant—all this. (*He gestures to the room.*) It's snug, if it is a lonely neighbourhood,

Kysh. A gawd-forsaken 'ole wivout a cinema——

Dallas. Well, you must blame my aunt, *Kysh*. She left it me.

Kysh. Ah, you 'ad a' aunt, too, sir. Yes, they come in handy at times. Good night, sir !

Dallas. Enjoy yourself!

Kysh. You bet, sir ! (*He goes to the door.*) Thank you, sir.

SHIVERING SHOCKS

[He goes out whistling the "Dead March in Saul" very cheerfully. As Dallas takes up his book again, smiling, the telephone bell rings.]

Dallas (shouting). Kysh ! (Kysh comes back.) Answer it, will you ? Lucky you're still here.

Kysh (at the 'phone). 'Ullo ! 'Ullo ! Yes. This is Captain Dallas's. No, it ain't the Captain—spcakin' for 'im. No, 'e can't come 'isself. Why not ? (Irritably.) Cause if you must know 'c lost the use of 'is legs in a blow-up in the war—same time 'e found 'is V.C. See ?

Dallas. Now, Kysh, don't be a fool !

Kysh. Sorry, sir ! What ? No, and I can't bring the receiver to 'im, because they won't put us on a cord. Why won't they ? Ask Kellaway !

Dallas (impatiently). Take the message, Kysh—take the message !

Kysh. 'Ere, 'old on ! Shall I take a message ? What ? What ? Orl right, then. Co to—— ! (He checks himself and slams down the receiver, then turns, much injured, to Dallas.) Says 'e can't trust the rest of the message to no one but yourself, sir. 'Aven't I been with you ten years ?

Dallas. Look here, Kysh, if you make an ass of yourself I won't take my medicine.

Kysh. Sorry, sir !

Dallas. You've done it, anyway—ringing off like that. Who were they ?

Kysh. Police-station, sir.

Dallas. What in the name of thunder do the police want with me ?

Kysh. That's just what they wouldn't tell me, sir. Brasted——Sorry, sir !

Dallas. What did they say ?

Kysh. That if Mr. Hughes come over, would you kindly tell 'im their man 'ad started.

Dallas. Well, you'd better ring up Mr. Hughes and

SHORT MODERN PLAYS

pass it on. He's not likely to be round a snowy day like this.

Kysh. Right, sir ! (*He takes up the receiver.*) 'Ullo ! Gi'me Hoe 37. Hoe ! H for 'ell. That's it !

Dallas. I wonder why they didn't ring him up direct.

Kysh. They said 'is number was engaged, sir.

Dallas. I thought he was going up to town this week ?

Kysh. Oh, 'e did, sir. But 'e come back yesterday. I understand 'e's going away again, sir.

Dallas. Oh !

Kysh (*into the ,phone*). I say, can't you get me 37 ? (*To Dallas.*) Yes, sir ! Saw old Rowley in the village this morning, an' 'e told me 'is cab 'ad been ordered for to-night.

Dallas. Is old Rowley about again ? Thought he'd drunk himself into the workhouse long ago.

Kysh. Well, I was surprised to see 'im. All wrapped up, 'e was, and didn't 'ardly seem to know me. (*Into the 'phone.*) I say, carit you get me that——What ? Oh ! Oh, orl right ! (*He hangs up the receiver.*) Line out of order. They think it's the snow. Shall I wait a bit, sir, and try again ?

Dallas. No, no, *Kysh.* It may be wrong for days. You get off.

Kysh. Thank you, sir ! [*He goes out.*]

Dallas (*looking after him*). Good old *Kysh* ! (*He settles himself anew, opens his book, pulls out his cigarette-case and takes a cigarette, and is about to light it when he changes his mind, lays it down and stretches out his hand to the bottle of whisky. He pours out a little, then holds it up to the light, frowns and calls.*) *Kysh* ! *Kysh*, you old owl, the bottle's nearly empty. *Kysh* ! (*A door bangs in the distance.*) Blow ! Oh, well, I must spin it out. (*He adds some soda-water and is about to drink when there sounds a tap at the window.*) Hallo !

SHIVERING SHOCKS

What's that? (*The window is thrown up.*) Who's that? Who the devil—Hughes! (*A man clambers over the sill, stumbles into the room and turns instantly to draw the heavy curtains together. He stands holding himself upright by them as if he were utterly exhausted.*) Lord, man, I thought it was a burglar. Why can't you come in by the door like a Christian? You know the trick of the handle. (*Suddenly realising that something is wrong.*) Why, Hughes, old man—what is it?

Hughes (*he is a thin, spectacled, pleasant-faced creature, with nervous gestures and untidy hair thatching a big forehead. He speaks in breathless jerks, very quickly, glancing behind him as he does so, obviously unnerved.*) They were watching the door. I saw Kysh go out just now. He drew 'em off for a moment. That gave me my chance. I've been skulking in the woods all day, dodging 'em. (*He comes towards Dallas; then, seeing the syphon, etc.*) Ah, that's what I want! I'm chilled to the bone. (*He drinks off Dallas's untouched glass.*) Ah, that's better! Sorry I startled you. I—I——(*He drinks again.*) You—you see—it's been a pretty strenuous twenty-four hours. They've been dogging me for days, and last night, when I found the wires cut—(*then, hysterically*)—I say, do you think I've done it? Do you think I've diddled 'em? Hey, diddle diddle, eh? Hey, diddle——

Dallas (*soothing him*). Look here, old thing, hadn't you better sit down and tell me all about it?

Hughes (*half seating himself*). Yes, yes, you're right, Dallas! I'll tell you——Hark!

[*He tiptoes to the window and peers between the join of the curtains, listening.*]

Dallas. Anyone there?

Hughes. No, all quiet. (*With a long-drawn breath of relief.*) With any luck they've missed me. (*Then,*

SHORT MODERN PLAYS

half to himself) If I could only get back unseen—the way I came—it would about do the trick. Through the laurels—yes—that's the way.

Dallas (sharply). Hughes ! *(Then, as Hughes goes on talking to himself, in a parade voice)* Hughes !

Hughes (jumping). Eh ?

Dallas. No more nonsense, now ! Pull yourself together, even if you are a scientific genius. What's the trouble ? What's been happening ? Why are you bolting through windows like a scared rabbit ? Why do the police send you mysterious messages by me ?

Hughes. What's that ? What about a message ?

Dallas. I was to tell Mr. Hughes that their man was on the way.

Hughes. Pollock—on the way, is he ? Thank God !
[He leans back with a look of relief.]

Dallas. That's all very well for you, you know—breaking up my happy home and drinking up my last drop of whisky and thanking God and gibbering ; but where do I come in ? You know I can't get up and shake sense into you.

Hughes (he has got back his self-control). I say, Dallas—I'm awfully sorry. But I—I'm a man of peace, you know—and I've had rather a dose—didn't mean to make such an ass of myself.

Dallas. Cut the cackle, old man ! What's up ?

Hughes (pulling closer, confidentially). You know what I've been working at the last year ?

Dallas. The new explosive ?

Hughes (glancing hastily round him). That's it ! *(Kindling.)* Man, I tell you, it's the last word—the greatest thing since Roger Bacon blew himself up with his own gunpowder. It's going to abolish war. It's going to revolutionise creation. The country that owns my formula can crumple up the armies of the earth like a gardener spraying green fly. And simple—simple as making toffee ! And almost as

SHIVERING SHOCKS

cheap. The War Office has gone mad over it. I saw the Prime Minister yesterday. They'll give me anything I like to ask for it—(*with a change of tone*)—in theory.

Dallas. Good for you, old man !

Hughes (grimly). Sounds all right, doesn't it? And yet—the fools—they wouldn't give me the one thing I did ask of 'em.

Dallas. And that's——

Hughes. Silence.

Dallas. Do you mean there's been a leakage ?

Hughes. Not my end, that I'll swear. I've not opened my mouth to a living soul. You know I tell you most things, but—I swear to you, Dallas, I've been afraid of the flies on the wall—of my own shadow on the ground. And yet——

Dallas. Well ?

Hughes. I was twice jostled, and my pockets picked on the way up. I was attacked in the carriage coming down ; but there was a cord in the compartment, fortunately, and the brute jumped from the train as I pulled it—and got away. When I got home they'd been there before me. The place was ransacked.

Dallas. But they didn't find the formula ?

Hughes. It doesn't exist.

Dallas. What ?

Hughes. Not on paper. I'm not such a fool. But I know it by heart. That's the whole point. That's why I'm so scared of getting knocked out. You thought I was in a funk. Well, so I was—so I am—but not in the way you thought. You see, I'm not a fighting man like you, Dallas—I'm 03 and all that, I know, but—well, I've worked for England in my own way, and I'm damned if she's going to lose what I've got to give her.

Dallas. Well, there are two of us now, old thing.

Hughes. Yes, and Pollock's on the way.

SHORT MODERN PLAYS

Dallas. Pollock ?

Hughes. Inspector Pollock—the man the Yard promised me. Their best man. I 'phoned them at once, you see, and he spoke himself—began giving me instructions—password, and so on——

Dallas. Password ?

Hughes. So that I'd know him, as he put it, " in any company." He asked what was the nearest house and if you were reliable, and then in the middle of a sentence—cut off! They'd cut the wires, of course.

Dallas. That accounts for the message to me.

Hughes. Thank God, there's brains at that end. It's a question of hanging on till he gets here. But I confess—alone in that house, barricaded in my study—I—I got the wind up.

Dallas. I wonder they didn't try to rush you.

Hughes. They wanted me to pull the chestnuts out of the fire for 'em. They thought the formula was hidden in the house and I'd come back for it—obviously.

Dallas. So if they've spotted that you've done a bolt——?

Hughes. They'll be convinced the paper's on me. That's why I want to get back, if I can, unseen. That reminds me—give me a pencil.

[He draws a paper from his pocket and scribbles.]

Dallas (watching him). I suppose that paper's worth a million pounds a letter.

Hughes. A million lives a letter—besides ours., Dallas. There ! *(He hands it over to Dallas.)* Now, if they get me, that goes to the War Office with my love, eh ?

Dallas. I'm a lame dog, Hughes, but I promise you this—if the War Office doesn't get it, no one else shall.

Hughes. Good enough ! Well, I'm off to diddle

SHIVERING SHOCKS

'em—with any luck. But God help you, Dallas, if they guess you've got it here !

Dallas. They ? Is it Germany ?

Hughes (with an ugly laugh). Farther east, my boy. Farther east !

Dallas. Not———(*Hughes leans over his shoulder and whispers.*) You don't mean it.

Hughes. Very much I do ! Well—so long ! (*As he turns to the window a shot rings out that shatters the bulb of the lamp. In the dull glow of the fire a dark figure is seen to part the curtains and leap upon Hughes. There is a shout from him ; the noise of two men struggling ; then :)* Dallas ! Dallas ! A light ! Strike a light ! damn you ! (*Then Hughes's voice screaming.*) Aaah !

[*A man's figure disappears through the window.*]

Dallas (as he gets the candle alight). Hughes ! Are you hurt ?

Hughes (staggering towards the window). Got away !

Dallas. Did you hit——?

Hughes (swaying). He—did—the—hitting. (*He moves blindly forward, staggers and falls headlong a little above Dallas's chair.*)

Dallas. If I could only move —could only move.

Hughes (crawling closer). Take—pistol. They know, you see—they know——

[*There is a loud knocking at the door,*

Dallas. Pray God it's the Yard !

Hughes. Don't give up paper—except—except——

Dallas (struggling to reach him). Yes, old man ? Yes?

Hughes. The word is—flowers—he'll talk about flowers.

[*As he faints and Dallas grasps and hides the pistol, the outer door is burst open and two men rush into the room. One, small, ferret-faced, is dressed as a police-sergeant; the other, obviously the leader, is in plain clothes. He is a smooth,*

SHORT MODERN PLAYS

ingratiating personality, with an exaggerated and uneven brogue.

First Man (the bigger). Now, I'm sorry to be forcing an entrance this way, sir, but hearing shooting—
(Apparently only then seeing Hughes.) Ah ! Dead ?
(He uncovers reverently.)

Second Man (the smaller} kneeling and loosening his collar). His heart's beating.

[Dallas gives a gesture of relief.

First Man (looking up as he helps his companion to raise Hughes). This is a bad business, sir !

Dallas. A murderous business, sir !

Second Man (in a low voice). You can leave him to me, Inspector. It's only a flesh wound. (He makes a great show of folding a large handkerchief as a bandage.)
The fall's stunned him.

First Man (rising). Ah, the black divils ! If we'd been here ten minutes sooner. I'm from Scotland Yard, Mr.—

Dallas. Dallas. Captain Dallas.

First Man. My name's Pollock.

[He opens his coat and shows his badge.

Dallas (non-committally). I've heard of Inspector Pollock.

First Man. Mr. Hughes rang us up yesterday in the matter of a paper, a State paper. Finding his house empty we drove here——

Dallas. Surely, Inspector, that can wait. Mr. Hughes——

First Man. True for you. We must doctor him first. If ye'll allow my man to go through to prepare a bed, Captain——

Dallas (suspiciously). How do you know the house is empty, Inspector ?

First Man (sunnily). Sure, no one didn't answer the door. (To the Second Man) And ye might well shut it, Dawson. It's a cold wind on the sick man.

SHIVERING SHOCKS

[Dawson goes to the door, but as he swings it to it is flung open and a voice is heard stammering.

The Voice. 'Alf a m-mo, g-guvnor ! 'Alf a m'mo !

First Man. The cabby ! Ah, then, get rid of him, Dawson !

Dallas (glad to be of use). I'll attend to that, Inspector. He's an old acquaintance. You look after my friend. There's a linen cupboard in the next room. You'll want bandages. (*Dawson nods and goes out.*) Well, Rowley, what do you want ?

[*For a fat figure has appeared in the doorway in a chauffeur's overcoat and a peaked cap. Under the cap, which is pulled low over the forehead, is a twinkling, crinkling, jolly countenance, with a red nose and double chin, much muffled in huge comforter. It speaks in a rich, husky voice.*

Rowley. W-what do I want, C-captng ? Why, I want my f-fare. T-ten an' t-tenpence, and the t-taxi still t-ticking.

Dallas. Ten and——(*He searches in vain for his pocket-book.*) You must wait a moment, Rowley. There's been an accident.

[*He turns to watch the First Man, who by this time has ripped off Hughes's coat. Whenever Dallas speaks to Rowley he lets Hughes's head drop back and begins feeling over his pockets.*

Rowley (advancing into the room). D-don't you mind me, g-guvnor. M-many's the time I've w-waited in your g-good aunt's days, and m-many's the c-cowslip-and-bitters I've 'ad, too—to screw up me c-courage on a frosty n-night—for when I'm t-temperate me t-tongue's t-tied up, g-guvnor, t-tight, but when I'm t-tight I'm t-talkative.

Dallas. Oh, is that the trouble, Rowley ? Well, help yourself.

[*Rowley makes a pretence of doing so, though it is obvious to the audience that the bottle is empty.*

SHORT MODERN PLAYS

Rowley. A g-gent, sir, that's what you are—like your aunt a-f-fore you.

First Man (to Dallas). We'll carry him through when Dawson comes back.

Rowley. 'Ere, I'll take an end, g-guvnor. J-just an-nother n-nip f-fust.

[He pours, or pretends to pour, more whisky into his glass.]

First Man. You, you drunken swine ? Don't let him have any more, sir ! He was drunk before we started or we'd have been here sooner.

Rowley. D-drunk ? 'Oo are you calling d-drunk ? I'll drunk you, police or no police !

First Man (darkly). Shut up, you fool, when a man's dying——

Rowley (*tipsily truculent*). I'll die before 'e does, unless you 'ave the nursing of 'im. Drunk ! Gi' me my ten an' t-tenpence.

First Man. Look here, you——

Dallas. Better pay him, Inspector ! We don't want a row.

First Man (*gives him money*). Here you are. Now get out !

Rowley. All right, cocky, it's the Captain's 'ouse, an' 'e ast me as one gent to anover to 'ave a drink. (*He drinks again.*) 'E don't call 'is betters drunk. 'E's a gent, 'e is—if 'e 'as got a floor that slides like a ship at shea——

(*Singing*)

For here she goes up, up, up,
And then she goes down, down, down,
Where the mermaidsh shwim
In their garden trim,
With the whales a-blowing
And the shea-flowers growing,
And the—hie !

Dallas. That's enough, Rowley, that's enough !

SHIVERING SHOCKS

Rowley. Why, didn't you ever see a mermaid, sir, with a posy in 'er 'and? Oh, Lord! (*He staggers.*)

Dallas. Now, Rowley!

Rowley. Shea-shick, sir, jus' a li'P bit shea-shick—s'hat's all, sure 'you! (*Staggering towards the fireplace.*) Nothing sh' matter, but s'hink I'll lie down, sir, till the shtorm's over.

[*He trips and falls in a heap by Dallas's chair, still hugging the bottle, as Dawson re-enters muttering to the other man as he stoops over Hughes.*]

Dawson. Not a trace of it.

Dallas. Trace of what, Inspector?

First Man (*hastily*). Ah, sure, he was hunting bandages. But we'll tear a shirt. Take his feet, Dawson! So! (*They lift Hughes. To Dallas.*) I'll stay with you and the gentleman, sir, when we've settled him, and Dawson shall go for help and take that drunken fella with him. (*To Dawson.*) Easy now—so—mind the step!

[*They carry Hughes out. The door swings to behind them.*]

Dallas (*twisting in his chair and clenching his fist*). Oh, God, if I could only walk! (*He sinks back, his hand falls in his lap, it opens and he stares at the paper crushed in his palm. He mutters hoarsely.*) The formula!

A Voice from the Floor. I think you'd better give that to me.

Dallas (*slewing round*). Eh? What? What's that? Rowley!

[*The figure on the floor sits up, perfectly steady and cool, and lifts a large wig like a man lifting a hat. He is seen, under his wrinkles and make-up, to be youngish, slightly bald, with a quick self-possessed manner and a grin like an Irish terrier. He is, if not quite a gentleman, at least sure of his*]

SHORT MODERN PLAYS

itches and himself. But we will continue to call him Rowley.

Rowley. Rowley's at home and in bed.

Dallas. What? Who are you, then? His twin?

Rowley. Well, I'm known in the profession as "Nippy Jim"—but my name's Pollock, at your service—Inspector James Pollock. Come now, Captain, give me that paper before those rogues come back. It'll be safer with me.

Dallas (deliberately). I'm to ask for proof—Inspector.

Rowley. Proof? Haven't I been talking of roses and nosegays and cowslip wine ever since I got in? You'd be precious little use in our profession, Captain, if you couldn't tumble to it quicker than that.

Dallas. Then those two——?

Rowley. The smartest crooks in Europe—with a No. 1 power behind them. Now listen. I've my own men coming along—only waiting for me. Can you hold that big scoundrel——?

Dallas. The Irishman?

Rowley. Pooh! He's no more Irish than I am. Can't you hear his brogue's a fake? He's any nationality you please—or pay for. Well, can you hold him for—say, ten minutes, while I drive off with Dawson? Diddle him—make him think the papers are here?

Dallas. I'll try.

Rowley. Hark! They're coming back. The formula—quick!

[He pulls down his wig and crams on his peaked cap.]

Dallas. Here—here! *(He hands it over.)* How'll you hide it?

Rowley. You'd better not know. So! Now, act up!

[He rolls over on his face, snoring drunkenly, as the

First Man enters followed by Dawson.]

Dallas (anxiously). Well, gentlemen?

SHIVERING SHOCKS

First Man (reassuringly). Ah, he'll do. But we must get a doctor to him. Here—you ! Wake up !
(*Kicking Rowley, who grunts and clutches his bottle.*)
What's your name—Rowson—Rowley ?

Rowley (singing.)

Roley, poley, pudd'n an' pie,
Kished the girls an'——

My name's Bacchush, an' I don't stir wishout my bottle.

[*He rises unsteadily. The man tries to take it from him. Rowley dodges.*

Dawson. Oh, let him have it.

First Man. You don't mind, sir ? Dawson can't drive, you see.

Dallas. Anything to save time.

Dawson. Come on, then !

Rowley (bowing and backing). Ladiesh firsh !

First Man (humouring him). Go ahead, Dawson !

[*Dawson goes towards the outlet door.*

Rowley (shocked, stopping him). No, no, allow me !
Pleash ! (*He offers his arm, then, pointing his toe*)
One, two, three !

[*He forces Dawson into a sort of barn-dance measure and prances out with him singing :*

" The flowers that bloom in she shpring, tra-la."

[*The door bangs on them.*

First Man (leaning his back against it). Ah ! (*Then, with a note of triumph.*) And now, Captain Dallas, that paper, please !

Dallas (steadily). What paper's that ?

First Man (wheedling). Ah, Captain, dear, ye needn't be afraid of me. I know well ye have it safe. Didn't Mr. Hughes be telling me over the 'phone ?

Dallas. Although the wires were cut ?

First Man. Before—before——

Dallas. Before, eh ? You're quite sure you're from Scotland Yard, Inspector ?

SHORT MODERN PLAYS

First Man. From where else would I be ?

Dallas. Don't ask me. Ask your employers, you hired thief!

First Man (with an instant furious change of tone). So that's your game, is it? (*Whipping out a pistol.*) Hands up, then ! (*As Dallas makes a movement to the pistol in his own pocket*) Up, I say !

[*Dallas obeys with a shrug. (Recovering himself, suavely.)* Well, well, Captain, you're a bright lad for a Saxon. Not from Scotland Yard ? Ah, don't let a little thing like that worry ye at all. I can relieve ye of the burden of that paper just as well. (*Dallas's hands lower themselves angrily!*) Up, will ye ?

Dallas. Afraid of a crippled man, eh ?

First Man. I am that—or rather of what I see under his pillow. (*He draws out and pockets the pistol.*) So—now ye lie easier—(*tying up his hands*)—with a bit of string round yer two wrists first, Captain dear ! Ah, don't try to snap it—it's pre-war twine and t'will bite ye to the bone. I always use it—it's as strong as the bracelets and less noisy. And now ye're easy, me dear man, what about that paper ?

Dallas. I tell you, Mr. Hughes brought no paper with him.

First Man. An' I tell you it's a black lie ! I saw the paper in his hand in the minute I shot him.

Dallas. So it was you, was it ? I thought as much.

First Man. Ah, ye're too clever to live, Captain. Come now—I've no time to be triflin'. Where is it?

Dallas. You can search me. I can't stop you.

First Man. Ah, ye big man, ye take me for a little boy at school. Will Mr. Hughes be leaving such a thing with a man that can't move ? No, no ! Sure ye'll be owning some safe hiding-place or other that he well knew, close here in the room.

SHIVERING SHOCKS

Dallas. Then you'd better hunt about till you find it.

First Man. Ah, but that's where you come in, Captain. I'll be searching all day, but you know where it is. Now, ye're a wise man, Captain, and ye won't be annoying me with your hid knowledge when ye consider——

Dallas. Nothing to consider, my man !

First Man. Ye're a helpless man, Captain. It's easy to make a helpless man speak—if one knows the choice way. Ever been in Russia, Captain ? Ye learn many a choice way in a Russian prison. Ah, come now, be reasonable !

Dallas. Inspector—or whatever you call yourself——

First Man. The Shepherd they call me——It's no matter.

Dallas. Well, you shepherd of black sheep——

First Man. Is it an English joke, Captain ?

Dallas. I tell you once and for all—believe it or not—I don't know the whereabouts of the paper—the formula—that you're after.

First Man. Ah, ye liar ! And but now ye said there was no paper.

Dallas. I said he brought none. You said he did. If he did I don't know where it is.

First Man (softly). But ye will, Captain darling, ye will ! *[He stands, arms crossed, brooding.]*

Dallas. Searching your Russian past for an inspiration, eh, Shepherd ?

First Man (deadly). I'm not wondering how will I make you talk. I can do that twenty ways. I'm wondering what'll make ye talk quickest.

Dallas. Did you leave your pocket thumb-screw at home, Shepherd ? Tut ! How careless !

First Man (turning savage). I'll " tut " ye ! *(He seizes the candlestick.)* If ye don't give me that paper

SHORT MODERN PLAYS

before the clock strikes I—I'll burn you alive where you lie. (Dallas *laughs aloud*.) Ye can laugh. (*Subsiding into a silky whisper*.) Ah, sure, it's the snug way—regrettable accident ! Invalid sets his clothes alight ! Sympathy with the relatives——! (*Between his teeth*.) But it'll hurt ye, Captain, believe me ! Feel that ! [*He holds the candle very close to his cheek*.

Dallas (*writhing his head aside*). Oh ! Is that the idea ! Neat !

First Man. That's but the start. Ah, ye'll talk right enough ! (*The telephone bell rings. He turns*.) 'Twill be Dawson. (*He sets down the candle on the arm-rest of Dallas's chair*.) The drunken fella will have served his turn. (*He crosses to the stand*.) Ye can think things over while I speak with him, Captain ! It's your last chance. (*Then, unhooking the receiver*.) Hallo ! That yourself, Dawson ? Speak plain, can't ye. Eh ? Ah, clear the line, me darling girl ! That's better ! Is that——? No, me dear—they've rung me. Ah, don't part us ! Hallo ! That yourself, Dawson ? It's the Shepherd speaking. Well ? Not yet, but I have him tied. Ah, tight enough. Ah, stop it, will ye ? None of your refinements. A match between his fingers will do the trick. What ? Then why the devil did ye not say so ? I'll be with ye directly. With the papers ? Why not ? When have I failed ye ? Well, then ! Right ! (*He hangs up the receiver. While he has been speaking, Dallas, at first staring about him with hunted eyes, glances by chance at the candle. An idea strikes him. Noiselessly he holds out his bound hands over it so that the candle flame sets the string between his wrists alight. It smoulders a few moments, then, with a jerk, he parts it. With a look of triumph he lies back with his hands held in the same position as before, as the other man comes down to him*.) No time to lose, Captain ! Your Scotland Yard friends are on the way. Will ye speak ? Ye will not ? (*He lifts*

SHIVERING SHOCKS

the candle and bends over him.} Right, then ! (Dallas's hands shoot out and catch him by the throat.) A-a-ah ! !

[*There is a terrific struggle ; the other man, clawing and choking, almost black in the face, is forced to his knees.*

Rowley's Voice (at the window, singing)—

" The flowers that bloom in the spring, tra-la——"

Want a little help, Captain ? (*He vaults lightly into the room and overpowers the First Man.*)

Dallas (*sinking back exhausted*). Only just in time, Inspector ! He was almost too much for me.

Rowley (*pulling the First Man to his feet*). Or you for him. That's it, man ! Quietly ! (*He snaps on the handcuffs as the door opens and a couple of police with Dawson between them appear in the doorway.*) I arrest you in the King's name and warn you——(*The man reels.*) Here, he'd better have a drink. (*He sets him a chair and stretches out his hand for a glass ; then, comically*) I forgot—I ran off with it.

[*He takes the bottle out of his pocket.*

Dallas. It was empty, anyway. But you'll find——[*He points to the cupboard.*

Rowley. Empty ? Oh no, Captain ! Not quite.

[*He tips the bottle and a neat spill slides out. He presents it to Dallas with a bow.*

Dallas (*unrolling it*). The formula !

First Man. What ? What ? What, you tricked me ? You tricked——

Dallas. Well, I'm damned !

Rowley (*blandly*). W-well, I had to put it s-some-where, d-didn't I ?

[*Before there is time to answer him, the CURTAIN falls.*

THE BOATSWAIN'S MATE
By W. W. JACOBS AND H. C. SARGENT

ADAPTED FROM W. W. JACOBS'S
STORY OF THAT TITLE

CHARACTERS

Mrs. Waters, landlady at "The Beehive."⁵⁹

George Benn, an ex-boatswain.

Ned Travers, retired soldier.

THE BOATSWAIN'S MATE

SCENE.—*The bar at " The Beehive " inn. On the left is a counter, behind which is a door opening into sitting-room. There is a wide, low window and a door which, when open, discloses a view of a garden. On the right is a door opening on to the road. There is a large cupboard and a table.*

TIME.—10 P.M.

Mrs. Waters is discovered behind the counter. Benn is standing in front of the counter. Mrs. Waters is a pretty, buxom woman of thirty. Benn is a short, thick-set man of over fifty.

Benn. There's one thing, Mrs. Waters, that I've told you times out of number, and I tells you again, solemn and emphatic, and that is, no matter'ow many times you refuse me *my feelings'll never change.*

Mrs. Waters (significantly). Nor mine either.

Benn. Can't you give me any 'ope ?

[Pushing empty mug towards her.

Mrs. Waters (petulantly, pushing mug back). No, nor beer either. It's a strange thing, Mr. Benn, but you always ask me to marry you after the third mug.

Benn. It's only to get my courage up. Next time I'll do it, afore I 'ave a drop ; *that'll prove to you I'm in earnest p'raps.* *(He moves towards door. Brokenly)* Good-night, Mrs. Waters. I'm pained and 'urt at your insinuation that three mugs, or *thirty* for the matter o' that, could alter my feelings towards you. Good-night, ma'am.

SHORT MODERN PLAYS

Mrs. Waters. Stop a moment, Mr. Benn.

Benn (coming back quickly). Then there is 'ope ?

Mrs. Waters. No, but you can do me a favour.

Benn. Anything for you.

Mn. Waters. My girl's gone to stop the night at her mother's, so there's no one to mind the bar while I get my supper. P'raps you——

Benn. Is *that* all, I 'oped it was something that'd give me a hopportunity to show you how much I——

Mrs. Waters (cutting him short). There ! I want my supper. Help yourself, Mr. Benn, while I'm gone. I shan't be long.

[Exit into sitting-room.

[Benn kisses his hand to the closed door. He sighs loudly, then lifts flap of counter, and takes up his position behind the counter.

Benn. 'Elp myself! (*Sighs.*) I don't want any beer ; I've lost the relish for it. (*He draws a mug of beer while he is talking, in an absent-minded manner.*) Some'ow it seems to choke me. I suppose it's love. If I could only show 'er somehow what a chance she's missing. (*He gazes at the mug of beer with a surprised expression.*) Mind's wanderin', I suppose. Any'ow it's a pity to waste it.

[Raises it to his lips as Ned Travers enters.

Travers is a tall erect man of about thirty-eight.

He betrays his military training in his carriage.

He carries a small bundle.

Travers. Evening, guv'nor.

Benn. Evenin' !

Travers. Pint o' four, please.

[Benn draws the beer, and hands it to Travers, who pays for it.

Benn. Fine night.

Travers. Yes, but dry. (*Drinks beer.*) Here's luck.

Benn (drinking). Same to you.

Travers (looking round). Cosy little place you've got.

THE BOATSWAIN'S MATE

Benn. Cosy enough, but it ain't mine.

Travers. Aren't you the boss ?

Benn. No, friend o' mine. A widder. She's the boss. I'm on'y minding the bar for 'er.

Travers. Sly dog.

Benn (annoyed). Eh ?

Travers. No offence, no offence.

Benn. Granted, but there is subjects that—

Travers. I understand. 'Ave you such a thing as a pipe o' baccy, mate ?

Benn (handing him a metal box). 'Elp yourself.

Travers. Thanks.

Benn. Lobster, ain't you ?

Ttavers. Was. Now Fin my own commander-in-chief.

Benn (taking box and filing his own pipe). Padding it?

Travers. That looks like it ?

[Holding up afoot encased in a dilapidated boot.

Benn (pointing to a chair by the table in bar). 'Ave a rest.

Travers (sitting). I've got plenty of time.

Benn (looking at Travers from behind the counter', aside). Wonder if 'e'd do it ? 'E looks a likely chap, and 'e's down on his luck. I'll try 'im, any'ow. *(To Travers)* Have another ? *(Travers hesitates.)* With me.

Travers. Don't mind if I do. *(Benn draws two mugs of beer, and carries them to the table.)* You seem quite at home here.

Benn (sighs). Wish I was. *(Drinks.)* 'Ere's another kind love.

Travers (drinks). And many of'em.

Benn. Lookin' for a job, mate ?

Travers. Been lookin' for one till my eyes ache.

Benn. Ain't over and above fond o' work, I s'pose ?

Travers. I love it, but we can't have all we want in this world ; *(primly)* it wouldn't be good for us.

SHORT MODERN PLAYS

Benn. Would—would 'arf a quid be any good to you ?

Travers (sternly, rising). Look here, just because I asked you for a pipe o' baccy—

Benn. No offence, no offence, I mean if you earned it?

Travers. What's the job? (*Resignedly.*) Gardening and windows I suppose ?

Benn (stealthily, and looking at door behind bar). No.

Travers (sitting down again). Scrubbing, p'raps ? Last house I scrubbed out I did it so thoroughly they accused me of pinching the soap. Damn 'em.

Benn. And you didn't ?

Travers (rising and knocking the ashes out of his pipe). I can't give it back to you, because I've smoked some of it, and I can't pay you for it, because I've only got twopence, and that I want for myself. (*Goes towards door.*) So long, matey, and next time a poor devil asks you for a pipe, be civil.

Benn (running after him, and taking his arm). I never see such a man for taking offence in all my born days. I 'ad my reasons for that remark, mate. Good reasons they was.

Travers (picking up his bundle). I dare say.

Benn. 'Ear me out.

Travers (reseating himself). Oh, all right. Fire away !

Benn (glancing towards door again, and leaning towards him). I spoke of 'arf a sovereign just now, and when I tell you that I offer it to you to do a bit o' burgling, you'll see 'ow necessary it is for me to be certain of your honesty.

Travers. Burgling ? Honesty ? 'Struth ; are you drunk or am I ?

Benn. Meaning, for you to *pretend* to be a burglar.

Travers (resignedly). We're *both* drunk, that's what it is,

THE BOATSWAIN'S MATE

Benn. If you don't agree, mum's the word and no 'arm done.

[Offering his hand to Travers, who takes it.]

Travers. Mum's the word. My name's Ned Travers, and barring cells for a spree now and again, there's nothing against it. Mind that.

Benn. Might 'appen to anybody. *(Offers tobacco box.)* Now fill your pipe, and don't go chucking good tobacco away agin *(scraping floor with foot)*.

Travers (picks up the plug which he had thrown away, and puts it in pipe, before refilling it from the box). Let's hear what you want done.

Benn. I ain't got it all ship-shape and proper yet, but it's in my mind's eye. It's been there off and on like for some time.

Travers. Kind of hatching.

Benn. That's it, 'atching. *(Shakes hands.)* Now listen. This 'ere little public-'ouse, *The Beehive*, is kept by a lady——

Travers. A widow ; you told me.

Benn. So I did. Well, to cut it short, she's the lady wot I've got my eye on.

Travers. I thought as much.

Benn. She won't 'ave me.

[Looks at him in mournful surprise.]

Travers. She's got no taste.

Benn (thoughtfully). S'pose that's what it is. She's a lone widder, and *The Beehive* is in a lonely place. Why, it's 'arf a mile to the nearest 'ouse from 'ere.

Travers. Silly place for a pub.

Benn. I've been telling her 'ow unsafe it is.

Travers. Wants a man on the premises to protect her—or a dog.

Benn. 'A dog's no good.

Travers. You're right, it's a man she ought to have.

Benn. So, 've told her.

Travers. What does she say ?

SHORT MODERN PLAYS

Benn. Nothing. She laughs. She don't believe it, d'ye see? Likewise I'm a small man—small, but stiff. She likes tall men.

Travers (*twisting his moustache*). Most of 'em do. When I was in South Africa——

Benn (*interrupting him, rising*). My idea is to kill two birds with one stone—prove to 'er that she *does* want being protected, and that I'm the man to protect her. D'ye take my meaning, mate?

Travers. Rather. (*Feels Benn's biceps.*) Like a lump o' wood.

Benn (*sitting down again*). My opinion is, that she loves me without knowing it.

Travers. They often do. When I was in South——

Benn (*interrupting*). Consequently I don't want 'er to be disappointed.

Travers. It does you credit.

Benn. Mind you, I've got a good head, else I shouldn't 'ave got my rating as boatswain as soon as I did; and I've been turning it over in my mind, over and over again, till my brain-pan fair aches with it.

Travers. P'raps *thafs* the beer.

Benn. Beer? No, it's the thinkin': I'm used to beer.

Travers. Well, what's the plan of campaign?

Benn. If you do what I want you to to-night, and it comes off all right, damme, I'll make it a quid.

Travers. Go on, Vanderbilt, I'm listening.

Benn (*rising*). You clear out of this before she comes in and sees you.

Travers (*rising*). Why, d'you think she might take a fancy to me?

Benn. Not likely.

Travers. I don't see why not. When I was in South Africa——

Benn. P'raps you don't, but stick to the point.

THE BOATSWAIN'S MATE

As I was saying, you wait outside for me. Directly I come out, she'll shut up and go to bed. Then we wait a bit and——

Travers. Not me. I've a chance of a job to-morrow at Luton ; that means a twelve-mile tramp. I can't hang about here.

Benn (continuing). We wait a bit, and——

Travers. What's the use ? We can't get a drink if she's shut up.

Benn (sharply). I wish you'd shut up ; and listen. We wait a bit then I take you round the back there—*(pointing at window)*—and put you through that winder.

Travers (starting). Eh ! Oh, do you though ?

Benn. You goes upstairs and alarms her, and she screams like—er—screams for help.

Travers. Screams for help ? Look here——

Benn. I'm watching the house, faithful like, and hear 'er scream. I dashes in at the winder, knocks you down, and rescues her. *(Smiling and shaking his head tenderly.)* She clings to me, in her gratitood, and proud of my strength and pluck she marries me.

Travers. An' I get a five-years' honeymoon. Good-night, mate. Good-night.

Benn (pulls Travers back). Don't be so 'asty. I've arranged for all that.

Travers. That was thoughtful of you.

Benn. In the excitement of the moment you spring up and escape. You can run much faster than I can ; anyways you will. The nearest 'ouse is 'arf a mile off, and her servant's staying till to-morrow at 'er mother's, ten miles away.

Travers. Well, so long, mate ; thanks for amusing me.

Benn (blankly). You won't do it ?

Travers. No, I'm hanged if I do. Accidents will happen, even in the best regulated burglaries ; then where should I be ?

SHORT MODERN PLAYS

Benn. If they did, I'd own up and clear you.

Travers. You might, and then again you mightn't. So long, mate.

Benn (eagerly). I—I'll make it two quid. I've took a fancy to you ; you're just the man for the job.

Travers (doubtfully). Thanks.

Benn (taking him by the arm). Look 'ere. I'll give it you in writing. Come, you ain't faint-hearted ? Why a bluejacket 'ud do it for the fun of the thing.

Travers. Then get one to do it. Good-night.

Benn (pulling Travers back). If I give it to you in writing, and there should be an accident, it's worse for me than it is for you, ain't it ?

Travers. I wasn't worrying about you.

Benn. I give you the two quid afore you come into the house. I'd give 'em to you now if I'd got 'em with me. That's my confidence in you ; I likes the look of you. Soldier or sailor, when there's a man's work to be done, give 'em to me before anybody.

Travers. But where can you get the money from if you haven't got it on you ?

Benn. Don't you worry. I'll manage that. I've got a wonderful 'ead. *[Removing hat.]*

Travers (looking at him). You have. *(Seating himself.)* Go on, write it out fair and square and sign it, and I'm your man.

Benn (sitting down and clapping him on the shoulder). Bravo, matey. *(Taking a bundle of papers from his pocket.)* There's letters there with my name and address on 'em. It's all fair, square, and above-board. When you've cast your eyes over them I'll give you the writing.

Travers. That's what I call business-like *(Turns over the envelopes. Benn takes a pencil from his pocket and writes laboriously.)* 'Ullo ! no stamp on this one. You had to pay twopence. Careless girl that. I should talk to her.

THE BOATSWAIN'S MATE

Benn (glancing up). Wasn't a girl.

Travers. Oh ! Now, judging by the writing——

Benn (looking up, in a very worried manner). No, no, it wasn't a girl, but for 'Eaven's sake don't interrupt, you've made me spell notice with only one ' t ' as it is.

Travers. Sorry, mate, I won't say another word.

Benn (after writing a few words). 'Ow many w's in burglar ?

Travers. It's either one or two, but I ain't certain which.

Benn. I've put two, so I'm on the safe side.

Travers (walking over to window and looking out). Yes, you'll be on the safe side all through this job. That'll be the outside.

[Pointing to the window.

Benn (looking up from his writing). Eh, what? Were you speaking to me ?

Travers. No, only thinking out loud.

Benn. I've finished. *(Hands paper to Travers with a complacent air.)* There. Read that.

Travers (reads and places the paper in his pocket). Seems all right. You ought to have been a lawyer.

Benn. Not bad for a amateur, eh ?

Travers. No, it's——

Benn (listening). 'Ush !

Travers. Eh ?

Benn. I can 'ear her moving. Clear out quick, and wait for me round the corner. She mustn't see you.

Travers. Right you are. *(Takes up bundle.)* I'm off. *(Goes out. He closes door, then reopens it and puts his head in.)* You won't forget to fetch that two quid.

Benn (anxiously). No, no ; get out !

[Travers closes door as Mrs. Waters enters.

Mrs. Waters. I hope you're not tired of waiting, Mr. Benn. Has anyone been in ? I thought I heard voices.

SHORT MODERN PLAYS

Benn (takes mugs off table and puts them on counter). Yes, one chap ; sort of tramp, looked a wrong 'un.

Mrs. Waters. We get plenty of tramps along here, poor fellers.

Benn. And you're unprotected.

Mrs. Waters. I'm not nervous.

Benn. Supposin' that chap who was 'ere just now took it into his head to break in to-night; what's to prevent 'im ?

Mrs. Waters. I do believe you're trying to frighten me. Good-night, Mr. Benn, I must shut up now.

Benn. I'll help you. I'll fasten the window. (*Pretends to fasten the window, but, unseen by Mrs. Waters, opens it so that Travers can get in. He pulls down the blind over the open window.*) Er—er—could you oblige me with a loan of two pounds for a day or two, Mrs. Waters ? I've 'ad a rather sudden——

Mrs. Waters. Certainly !

[Takes a cash-box from behind the counter.

Benn. I'll give you an IOU for it.

Mrs. Waters. Nonsense ; I can trust you with anything, Mr. Benn.

Benn (sighs}. Except yourself.

[Leaning over counter.

Mrs. Waters (laughing). Now don't start again. (*Gives him the money.*) Here's the money. I hope it's for a good object.

Benn. The best object in the world.

Mrs. Waters. Well, good-night, it's very late.

Benn. Good-night, Mrs. Waters, and thank you. Don't forget I'm always ready, if you *do* alter your mind. *[Exit.*

[Mrs. Waters locks both doors. Takes cash-box from behind the counter.

Mrs. Waters. I suppose some women *would* be afraid to be left in this lonely house. Thank goodness I don't suffer from nerves. I wonder what Mr. Benn

THE BOATSWAIN'S MATE

wanted that two pounds for ? I hope he's not going to buy an engagement ring on the chance of me changing my mind. (*Laughs, takes lamp from table.*) I shall be glad to get to bed, I can hardly keep my eyes open.

[She goes out, taking the lamp with her.]

[The stage is in darkness for a few moments. Then the heads of Benn and Travers are seen silhouetted against the white blind over window. It is a bright moonlight night so that all their movements can be clearly seen. Travers pulls the blind aside, and peers cautiously into the room. When the blind is pulled back, the stage is lighted by the moon shining in at the window.]

Travers. Seems quiet. (*Climbing half-way into the room. He turns to Benn, who is pushing him from behind.*) Not so hard, I don't want to dive in.

[He cautiously climbs into the room. Benn puts his head in at the window.]

Benn (*hoarsely*). How do you feel ?

Travers. I'm all right. I feel as if I'd been burgling all my life. How about you ?

Benn. Nervous.

Travers. What, a bo'sun nervous ? Buck up, mate.

Benn (*handing him two sovereigns*). Here's the two quids.

Travers. Where did you get 'em ? Why !—you don't mean to say you borrowed 'em from *her* ?

Benn. No. I don't mean to say nothing of the sort. You've got 'em, that's good enough *for you*.

Travers (*making a movement to climb back out of the window*). If I thought——

Benn. Well, don't. I'll do all the thinking in this job.

Travers. All right, I'm in for it now, and I'll see it through.

SHORT MODERN PLAYS

Benn (patting him on the back through the window).
Spoke like a Briton. All you've got to do is to frighten 'er enough, but not too much, mind. When she screams I'll come in.

Travers. And you punch me enough, but not too much, mind, or I might——

Benn. All right—I'll be gentle with you.

Travers. Won't she think it funny you should be so handy ?

Benn. No ; it's my faithful 'eart keeping watch over her every night. *[Winks.*

Travers (removing his boots). Well, your faithful 'eart can keep watch over my boots while I'm inside. *(Hands boots to Benn).* Put 'em outside, handy for me to pick up. We don't want her to hear me till I'm upstairs.

Benn. Aye, aye, mate.

Travers. Good-bye. Now for it ; death or victory.

[Benn moves away from the window.
(Replacing blind over window.) Don't want to be seen by anyone passing. Better reconnoitre a bit. Where's the door I came in by ?—locked. What's this ?—A cupboard. *(Creeps round the room, stopping every few paces to listen. He is obviously nervous.)* I don't 'arf like the job, but two quid's two quid, and———*(Starts.)* Good Lor' ! What's that ? *(Benn puts head round blind.)* Why don't you keep quiet ? You gave me quite a start. *[At window.*

Benn. Haven't you done it yet ? I thought you'd 'ave been upstairs by this time.

Travers. Not me, not before reconnoitring a bit. When I was in South Africa——

Benn (impatiently). We'll 'ave the yarn some other time, mate. Come, 'urry up and get this over, it's upsettin' my narves.

Travers. There's no hurry. Slow and sure's my motto.

THE BOATSWAIN'S MATE

Benn. You're acting up to the fust part of it any-'ow.

Travers. If you stop chattering there, and wag-gling my boots about, how can I get on with it ?

Benn. I'm off. I don't want to interfere. I'll wait at the bottom of the garden. You're doing this job, not me.

[Goes away from window.]

Travers. I am, and I wish I wasn't. Don't want him hanging about. *(Pulls down blind.)* But here goes. I *do* hope she won't have a fit. *(He goes towards the door.)* I suppose I go through here to get to the stairs. *(In opening the flap in the counter he upsets a mug, which falls to the floor.)* Deuce take it! I've done it now. *(He stands listening for a moment.)* I don't hear nothing. Heavy sleeper, perhaps *(He goes to the door and opens it.)* Benn'll think I'm lost if I don't——By Jove ! she coming ! And she's got a gun.

[Makes a half run to window, then crouches and runs to table. Then he gets into the cupboard as Mrs. Waters enters. She carries a candle and a double-barrelled gun. She is in her night-dress. She looks round the room, then slowly walks towards the cupboard in a casual manner.]

Mrs. Waters. Must have been my fancy, I suppose, or a rat perhaps. *(She edges towards the cupboard as she speaks and turns the key.)* Got you ! Keep still ; if you try and break out, I shall shoot you.

Travers (hastily). All right ; Don't shoot ! I won't move.

Mrs. Waters. Better not. Mind, I've got a gun pointing straight at you.

Travers. Point it downwards, there a good girl, and take your finger off the trigger. If anything happened to me, you'd never forgive yourself.

Mrs. Waters. It's all right so long as you don't move, and I'm *not* a girl.

SHORT MODERN PLAYS

Travers. Yes, you are. I saw you. I thought it was an angel at first. I saw your bare ankles and——

Mrs. Waters. How—how dare you !

Travers. You'll catch cold.

Mrs. Waters. Don't trouble about me.

Travers. I won't give you any trouble. I'll go quiet. Why don't you call for help ?

Mrs. Waters. I don't want your advice. I know what to do. Now, don't you try and break out. I'm going to fire one barrel out of the window, but I've got the other one for you if you move.

Travers. My dear *girl*, you'll alarm the neighbourhood.

Mrs. Waters. Just what I want to do. (*Rattles the door.*) Keep still, mind ! If you move——

Travers. Stop ! Don't do anything rash. Don't do anything you'd be sorry for afterwards. I'm not a burglar ; I'm doing this for a friend of yours—Mr. Benn.

Mrs. Waters. Mr. Benn !

Travers. True as I stand here. Here, I'll show you my instructions. I'll put 'em through the door.

[Pushes the paper through the door.

[Mrs. Waters puts gun on table and goes round table to door. She seizes the paper and reads aloud.

Mrs. Waters. " This is to give notice that I, George Benn, being of sound mind and body, have told Ned Travers to pretend to be a burglar at Mrs. Waters. He ain't a burglar, and I shall be outside all the time. It's all above-board, and ship-shape. Signed, George Benn."

Travers. Nicely worded, ain't it ?

Mrs. Waters. Sound mind—above-board—ship-shape. Where is he ?

Travers. Out at the back. If you go to the window you can see him. Blow out the candle first, or he'll see you.

THE BOATSWAIN'S MATE

[She goes up to window, and back to table. She blows out candle.]

[Mrs. Waters goes to window, and lifts a corner of the blind.]

Mrs. Waters. I see him ; standing right on my carnations.

Travers. The coward !

Mrs. Waters. You both ought to be ashamed of yourselves. You ought to be punished.

Travers. There is a clothes peg sticking into my back.

Mrs. Waters. I hope it'll be a lesson to you.

Travers. It will. A hard one. What are you going to do ?

Mrs. Waters. Oh !

[She hastily wraps herself in a macintosh that is hanging on a peg behind door.]

Travers. Yes. You ought to have done that before. It's enough to give you your death of cold.

Mrs. Waters (*sharply*). Mind your business. (*Walks up and down in thought.*) Now if I let you out, will you promise to do exactly as I tell you ?

Travers. Honour bright.

Mrs. Waters. Fin going to give Mr. Benn a lesson he won't forget in a hurry. I'm going to fire off this gun, and then run and tell him I've killed you.

Travers. Eh ? (*Laughing*) Oh Lord !

Mrs. Waters. Hsh ! stop that laughing. He'll hear you. Do you hear ? Be quiet.

Travers. Well, let me out !

Mrs. Waters. Wait a moment. (*She unties her hair which is tied in a plait. She shakes it over her shoulders, and arranges it with her hands. Before doing this she moves to the side of the cupboard so that Travers shall not see her.*) Now you can come out.

[Unlocks the door. Travers comes out. She holds the gun ready.]

SHORT MODERN PLAYS

Travers (stretching himself). I say, that was a tight fit.

Mrs. Waters. That's your fault, you needn't have gone in there.

Travers. It was the only—For Heaven's sake do point that gun away. If you knew as much about guns as I do——

Mrs. Waters. All right. I'm going into the parlour. I'll fire the gun off in there. It'll sound too loud here.

Travers. Yes. Fire into a cushion or something. We don't want anybody else to hear. (*She goes into the sitting-room.*) Poor old Benn ! This'll upset his "nerves."

[*The sound of the explosion is heard.*]

[*Mrs. Waters enters and runs across to the door. She unfastens it and throws it open and totters into the arms of Benn, who enters. She utters a shriek. Travers conceals himself in room on left.*]

Benn. What—what's the matter ? I—I 'eard a gun.

Mrs. Waters (in a tragic whisper). A burglar; But it's all right ; I've killed him.

Benn. You've kill—kill—*killed* him ?

Mrs. Waters. Yes. First shot.

Benn (moving to door). Poor fellow—poor——

Mrs. Waters (seizing his coat). Come back !

Benn. I was going to see—whether I could do anything for 'im. Poor fellow.

[*Moving to door.*]

Mrs. Waters (pushing him back). You stay where you are. I don't want any witnesses. I don't want this house to have a bad name. I'm going to keep it quiet.

Benn. Quiet ? How ?

Mrs. Waters (pondering and biting finger). First thing to do is to get rid of the body, I suppose.

Benn. Where—where—is he—it?

THE BOATSWAIN'S MATE

Mrs. Waters (*pointing at the ceiling*). Just over where we're standing. I must move it soon, or it will spoil my ceiling.

[Benn hastily moves a few feet, and looks at the ceiling apprehensively.]

I'll bury him in the garden, I think. (*Crosses to window.*) There's a good piece of ground just outside. It's nice and handy, and it'll save trouble.

Benn. Ugh !

Mrs. Waters. What's the matter ?

Benn (*wiping his head*). Nothing ! [*Shivers.*]

Mrs. Waters. You're cold. It's the night air, I suppose. A little digging will warm you beautifully. Come, get to work ; you'll find a spade in the tool-house.

Benn (*absently*). A—a spade—in the tool-house ?

Mrs. Waters. And while you're digging the grave, I'll go and clean up the mess.

Benn (*in a dazed condition, fumbles at his collar*). Poor fellow !

Mrs. Waters (*crosses and opens door*). Come along, I'll fetch the spade.

Benn (*nervously*). I—I'll come with you. (*As they go out*) Poor—fellow ! [*Exeunt.*]

[Travers cautiously looks out at door.]

Travers. She's a marvel, s'elp me, a marvel ! Poor old Benn ! It's fair knocked him over. They're coming back. He mustn't see the corpse.

[Goes back into room as Mrs. Waters and Benn are seen outside window. They have a pick and spade. There is a full moon, so that they can be seen clearly.]

Mrs. Waters. This is the spot. It'll spoil my flowers, but it can't be helped, and perhaps they will be better next year.

[Benn stands spellbound.]

He was a tall man, so the hole must be pretty big.

SHORT MODERN PLAYS

Thank goodness, he wasn't very fat. Come, don't waste time.

Benn. P—poor fellow !

Mrs. Waters. I'll bring the body down when you've gone.

Benn. How are you going to get—it down ?

Mrs. Waters. Drag it downstairs—do you think I'm going to throw it out of the window ?

[Travers comes out of room.]

Benn. Suppose he isn't dead ?

Mrs. Waters. Fiddlesticks ! Do you think I don't know ? Now, don't waste time talking ; it needn't be very deep. I'll put a few cabbages on top ; Fve got more than I want.

[During the foregoing dialogue, Travers has cautiously made his way from the room to the window. By peering round the curtain he has seen what was passing in the garden.]

Benn (commencing to dig). Poor chap !

Mrs. Waters. Do be quick, you seem quite upset ! You said you'd do *anything* for me.

Benn. So—so I will, but I—I—am a bit taken aback, and Fm not used to diggin' g—graves.

Mrs. Waters. It's quite easy. Now I'm going in. I'll be back soon. *(She comes in and closes door. She walks across to room and looks in.)* Gone ! *(Looks round and sees Travers at the window.)* Ah !

Travers. Come and look at him. You're a wonder, that's what you are. I've been watching from here. Come and look at him.

[She goes to the window. Travers struggles to get a view.]

Mrs. Waters. Get back, he'll see you.

Benn. Is—is that you, Mrs. Waters ?

Mrs. Waters. Yes, of course it is. Who else should it be, do you think ? Go on. What are you stopping for ?

THE BOATSWAIN'S MATE

[Travers stands behind Mrs. Waters and peers over her shoulder,

Travers. Fine exercise digging.

Mrs. Waters (suddenly). Look out, he'll see you.

[Travers in drawing back, bumps his head against the window frame.

Benn. Won't you come out here, Mrs. Waters ? It's a bit creepy for you in there all alone.

Mrs. Waters. I'm all right.

Benn (in trembling tones). I keep fancying there's something dodging behind them currant bushes. How you can stay there alone I can't think. I thought I saw something looking over your shoulder just now. Fancy if it came creeping up behind you and caught hold of you !

[Travers creeps up and puts his arm round Mrs. Waters' waist.

Mrs. Waters. Oh ! (Speaking in a fierce undertone.) If you do that again——

Travers. He put it into my head. I should never have thought of such a thing by myself. As a rule, I'm one of the quietest.

Mrs. Waters (turning to window). Make haste, Mr. Benn, I've a lot to do when you've finished. (Turning to Travers) Now you get back in there. I'm going to open the door, and when I come back try to behave yourself as if you were——

Travers. A corpse ?

Mrs. Waters. No, as if you were ashamed of yourself.

Travers. I am. But it's been good fun, hasn't it ?
[Exit.

[Mrs. Waters opens door. Benn can be seen through the open window digging frantically. There is a pile of earth which he has thrown up.

Benn (wiping his brow with his arm). It's—it's hard work ; and I keep fancying——

[Looks round nervously, starts and draws near her.

SHORT MODERN PLAYS

Mrs. Waters (*going out and inspecting the hole*). I'll finish it—I want a little exercise, and if anybody passed and saw you here it might lead to questions. Now you'd better go straight off home, and mind, not a word to a soul about this.

[She put her hand on his shoulder. He shudders and draws away.]

Benn. Good-night ! (*As he moves away.*) Poor fellow !

[Exit down the garden.]

Mrs. Waters. He won't want to rescue *me* again in a hurry. (*Looks at the pile of earth.*) Now, I suppose I must fill this hole up. What an awful mess he's made !

[She picks up the spade.]

[Travers comes from room L. and looks through the window.]

Travers. Let me, it's my grave.

Mrs. Waters. I told you not to come out of that room, but as you're there, you may as well make yourself useful. I'm coming indoors, it's cold out here without any—with only a mackintosh on.

[Coming in at door.]

Travers. Yes, take care of yourself, there's a good girl. Where did I put my boots ?

[Lights candle and sits. Mrs. Waters closes door with a bang.]

Mrs. Waters. What awful impudence the man has. But he's not bad-looking. Why don't you get some settled work ?

Travers (*putting on boots*). Easier said than done. Since I took my discharge from the Army, I've done all I could get—and that's precious little.

Mrs. Waters. You've been a soldier ? I *thought* you were afraid of that gun. I—I mean, of course, you know how—how dangerous they are, being used to them.

THE BOATSWAIN'S MATE

Travers. Yes, I'm an old soldier. But don't you run away with the idea that I'm a beggar, because I'm not. I pay my way, such as it is. And, by the by, I s'pose I haven't earned that two pounds Benn gave me ? *[Rising and going to Mrs. Waters.*

Mrs. Waters. Two pounds ? Two pounds ? Won't I talk to him !

Travers (taking sovereigns from his pocket, and gazing at them regretfully). Yes, here they are.

Mrs. Waters. Don't you think you've earned them ?

Trovers (shaking his head). No, there, take 'em quick !—(sighs)—before I change my mind.

Mrs. Waters (regarding him closely). I'll—I'll tell him what I think of him when I'm tired of the joke.

Trovers (as she takes the coins). Soft hand you've got. I don't wonder Benn was desperate. I dare say I should have done just the same in his place. There's only one job I'm really fit for, now that I'm too old for the Army.

Mrs. Waters. Playing at burglars ?

Travers. Guess again.

Mrs. Waters. Strolling about looking for work ?

Travers (putting arm round Mrs. Waters' waist). No ; landlord of a little country public-house.

Mrs. Waters. How dare you ! (Crosses to door. Opening door gasping) Good-night !

Trovers. Good-bye ! I say, I should like to hear how old Benn takes the joke though.

Mrs. Waters (slowly). Well, if you should happen to be passing this way again, and—and like to look in—perhaps I'll tell you. Good-bye !

Travers (at door). I'll look in in two or three days' time, say to-morrow. (Taking her hand.) I say !—(softly)—it would be an awful joke if he came here and found me landlord. I'm fond of jokes. Suppose we think it over ?

SHORT MODERN PLAYS

Mrs. Waters. I can think best when I'm alone.
Good-bye.

[Benn looks through window. He does not see Travers, who is standing behind the door.]

Benn. I—I couldn't leave you, Mrs. Waters, all alone with—with it. So I've come back to see if I———*(Travers comes from behind door.)* Ha !

[He falls into the grave which is dug just outside the window, Travers leans out of the window and pulls him to his feet.]

Travers. Come out of my grave.

Mrs Waters. It's only—only——

[Moves fingers with hands raised in an endeavour to remember his name.]

Travers *(taking her hand and facing Benn as he stands at window staring at them)*. Only the future landlord of The Beehive.

CURTAIN

THE DEAR DEPARTING

By LEONID ANDREYEV

A Frivolous Performance

TRANSLATED FROM THE RUSSIAN

BY JULIUS WEST

CHARACTERS

Tourists, unspecified.
Photographers.
Drunkards.
Salvationists,
Children, mostly Russian.
English Tourists.
Italian Musicians.

The remaining characters are :

A Bloodthirsty Lady.
The Father of a Family, Russian.
The Mother of another Family.
A Stranger.
A Clergyman.
A Pedlar.
The Landlord of a Hotel and Cafe.
A Special Correspondent.
A Mule.
An Advertisement.
Two Policemen.
Waiter.

THE DEAR DEPARTING

A wild place in the mountains.

On an almost perpendicular rock, a man is perched in a dangerous and inaccessible position. It is difficult to explain how he got there—but there he is, and cannot be reached either from above or below. A short ladder, ropes, and poles bear witness to fruitless attempts at rescue.

Apparently the stranger has already spent a considerable time in his precarious situation, for a fair-sized and varied crowd has had time to assemble. Here are pedlars selling cooling drinks, and even a little cafe, all complete, around which a perspiring waiter is rushing, in the all but impossible task of supplying everybody's orders. Other pedlars are going round with cards, souvenirs, and all sorts of odds and ends; one of them is trying to dispose of tortoiseshell combs, which, as a matter of fact, are not made of tortoiseshell. Tourists are continually arriving, attracted by rumours of an imminent calamity. There are Englishmen, Germans, Russians, Frenchmen, Italians, etc., all showing their national peculiarities in their manners and dress. Nearly all have alpenstocks, binoculars, and cameras. They talk in several languages, which, for the benefit of our readers, we reproduce in one only.

At the foot of the rock, where the stranger must fall, two policemen are standing, keeping away the children, and attempting to hold back the crowd by means of a piece of thin string.

General tumult.

First Policeman. Now then, out of it, you young

SHORT MODERN PLAYS

rascal ! What'll your papa and mama say if he falls on your head ?

The Boy. Will he come down here ?

First Policeman. Yes, here.

The Boy. Won't he come any further ?

Second Policeman. The boy's right : he might spring up, break through the cord, and do some harm to the spectators. He can't weigh less than twelve stone.

First Policeman. Off you go ! Where are you getting to, little girl ? Is this your daughter, madam ? Please remove her ; the young man will drop down in a minute.

The Lady. In a minute ! Oh, *mon Dieu* ! And my husband won't be here to see !

The Little Girl. He's at the bar, mama.

The Lady (in distress). Yes, yes, of course, he's always at the bar. Call him, Nelly ; say he's going to drop in a minute. Quick ! Quick !

Voices (from the cafe). *Kellner ! Waiter ! Gargon ! Beer ! . . . We haven't any beer. . . . What ? What's that ? . . . What a rotten place ! . . . There'll be some in a minute. . . . Hurry up. . . . Kellner ! . . . Waiter ! . . . Garçon ! . . ."*

First Policeman. You again, young man !

The Boy. I only wanted to take that stone away.

First Policeman. But why ?

The Boy. So he shouldn't hurt himself when he fell.

Second Policeman. The kid's right : we've got to take away some stones and clear more space. Hasn't anybody any sand or sawdust ?

[Two English tourists approach. They examine the Stranger through their binoculars, and exchange observations.]

First Englishman. He's young.

Second Englishman. How old ?

First Englishman. Twenty-eight.

THE DEAR DEPARTING

Second Englishman. Twenty-six. Looks older because he's afraid.

First Englishman. Will you bet on it ?

Second Englishman. Ten to one. Will you make a note of it ?

First Englishman (writes it down. *To a Policeman*). Can you tell me how he got there ? Why don't they take him down ?

Policeman. They tried, but it was no good. Haven't any ladders long enough.

Second Englishman. Has he been there long ?

Policeman. Two days.

First Englishman. Oh ! He'll come down to-night.

Second Englishman. Within two hours. Bet on it ?

First Englishman. Note it down ! (*To the Stranger, shouts*) How do you feel ? What ? I can't hear.

The Stranger (almost inaudibly). Rotten !

The Lady. Oh, *mon Dieu* ! And my husband isn't here.

Little Girl (running up). Papa says he'll be here quite soon ; he's playing chess with another gentleman.

The Lady. Oh, *mon Dieu* ! Tell him, Nelly, that I insist. . . . By the way . . . will it be long before he falls, sergeant ? No, Nelly, you'd better go, and I'll keep a place for father.

[*A tall, thin lady, with a peculiarly independent and bloodthirsty appearance, is quarrelling with some tourist about her place. He is a weak little man and does not know how to insist upon his rights ; the lady grows farcer.*]

The Tourist. But it's my place, madam ; I've been here two hours.

Bloodthirsty Lady. What difference does it make to me how long you've been standing here ? I wish to stand here ; understand ? I'll see better from here ; understand ?

SHORT MODERN PLAYS

Tourist (feebly). But I can see better from here, too.
Bloodthirsty Lady. If you please ! What do you know about these things ?

Tourist. But what is there to know ? The man's got to drop, and that's all.

Bloodthirsty Lady. The man's got to drop, and that's all ! On my word ! Have you ever seen a man fall ? No ? I've seen it happen three times ; two acrobats a tight-rope walker, and three aviators.

Tourist. That makes six.

Bloodthirsty Lady. That makes six ! What a brilliant mathematician you are, to be sure ! And havejyoz," ever seen a tiger, in a menagerie, tear-r-r a woman to pieces before your very eyes ? Eh ? I thought not ! I've seen it, though ! If you please !

[*The Tourist shrugs his shoulders as if insulted, and the thin lady spreads herself out over the stone she has won by conquest. She takes out of her reticule various handkerchiefs, peppermint drops, a little flask, and places them around her; she then takes off her gloves, and wipes the lenses of her binoculars, placidly looking round on the other spectators. She turns to the lady whose husband is in the cafe.*

Bloodthirsty Lady (condescendingly). You'll make yourself so tired, darling. Why not sit down ?

The Lady. Oh, don't, please ! My legs are quite stiff.

Bloodthirsty Lady. Men nowadays have no manners at all. They'd never think of giving up their place to a lady. Have you any peppermint drops ?

The Lady (frightened). No. Are they necessary ?

Bloodthirsty Lady. When you've been looking upwards for a long time you are bound to feel faint. And haven't you any smelling salts ? No ? Dear me, how thoughtless of you ! How are we to bring you round again after he's dropped ? And no ether, I suppose ? Well, of course ! If you're like that,

THE DEAR DEPARTING

what can you . . . isn't there anybody here to look after you ?

The Lady (frightened). I'll tell my husband. He's in the cafe.

Bloodthirsty Lady. Your husband's a scoundrel !

A Policeman. Whose jacket's this ? Who threw the thing down here ?

The Boy. I did. I put it there so it shouldn't hurt him so much to fall.

The Policeman. Take it away.

[Some tourists, armed with cameras, are arguing as to the best position.]

First Tourist. I wanted to stand here.

Second Tourist. So you may have done, but I got here first.

First Tourist. You've only just come, and I've been here two days.

Second Tourist. Then why did you go away and not leave as much as your shadow behind ?

First Tourist. Why, confound it all, do you think I want to die of hunger ?

A Pedlar (with a comb, mysteriously). It's real tortoiseshell.

A Tourist. Well ?

The Pedlar. It's real tortoiseshell.

The Tourist. Go to—the devil !

One of the Tourists (with a camera). For goodness' sake, madam, don't sit on my camera.

The Lady. But where is it ?

The Tourist. Underneath you, of course !

The Lady. And I was so tired ! And it is a rotten camera. No wonder it hurt, when I was sitting on it.

The Tourist (in despair). Madam !

The Lady. And, you know, I thought it was a stone ! I saw something lying there, and I wondered whether it really was a stone. It was so dark. And it turns out to be your camera.

SHORT MODERN PLAYS

The Tourist (in despair). Please, madam !

The Lady. But why is it so big ? Cameras are always little things, and this is so big. On my word, I never thought it was a camera. And can you take me ? It would be so nice if you could take me with these mountains as a background.

The Tourist. But how can I take anything when you are still sitting on it ?

The Lady (jumping up in terror). What do you mean ? Why didn't you tell me ? Has it been taking me ?

Voices. Waiter ! Beer ! Why is there no wine ? It's been on order a long time ? What can I bring you ? Shan't be long, sir. This minute ! Waiter ! Waiter ! A toothpick !

[A fat and perspiring Tourist rushes in surrounded by children.]

The Tourist. Masha ! Sasha ! Peter ! Where's mother ? Oh, my God, where's Masha ?

A Student. Here she is, father.

The Tourist. Where is she ? Masha !

A Girl. Yes, papa.

The Tourist. But where are you ? *(Turns round.)* Oh, there you are ! Behind me all the time. Look, look ! Oh, my God, what are you looking at ?

The Girl. I don't know, papa.

The Tourist. No, it's impossible ! Just think, she's never once even seen lightning. She makes great eyes until they look like onions, and as soon as it flashes—she shuts them. So she's never seen it. *Masha*, you're yawning again. Look, can you see him ?

The Student. She can see, father.

The Tourist. Keep an eye on her. *(Suddenly changing to a tone of pity.)* Ah, poor young man ! No, you'd think he'd be certain to fall. Look, children, how pale he is ! See how dangerous it is to climb !

The Student (dully). He won't drop to-day, father.

THE DEAR DEPARTING

The Tourist. Nonsense. Who said so ?

Second Girl. Papa, Masha's got her eyes shut again.

The Student. Please let me sit down, father. Oh, Lord ! I don't think he's going to drop to-day. The hall-porter told me so. I am tired ! You simply drag us all over the place, from morning to night.

The Tourist. Who am I doing it for ? Do you think I like it, you idiot ?

Second Girl. Papa, Masha's doing it again.

Second Student. And I'm sick of it too. I keep on having bad dreams. I was dreaming all night about waiters.

The Tourist. Peter !

First Student. And I'm so thin ; I'm only skin and bone. I've had enough of it, father. Hand me over to a shepherd, or a swineherd. . . .

The Tourist. Sasha !

First Student. You know he won't fall, but you believe everything they tell you. Baedeker, too. Baedeker's a liar.

Masha (dully). Papa, he's beginning to fall.

[*The Stranger is shouting something from above.*

General movement. Voices : "Look, he's coming " ; binoculars are raised, a few photographers move their cameras about in an agitated manner ; and the policemen energetically clear a space.

A Photographer. Confound it ! Why on earth am I . . . All this beastly hurry !

Second Policeman. Excuse me, but your lens is covered up.

The First Photographer. Oh, the devil !

Voices. Sh ! He's going to fall ! No, he's saying something. No, he's falling ! Sh !

The Stranger (feebly). Help !

Tourist. Oh, poor young man ! Masha ! Peter ! There's a tragedy for you : the sky is clear, Nature

SHORT MODERN PLAYS

is beautiful, yet he must fall and hurt himself to death. Sasha, don't you understand how awful it is ?

Student (dully). I understand.

Tourist. And do you understand, Masha ? Just think, there's the sky, and there people are eating. Everything is so pleasant, but he's got to fall ! What a tragedy ! Peter, do you remember Hamlet ?

Second Girl. Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, at Elsinore.

Student. Yes, I know ; at Helsingfors. Why do you keep on bothering me, father ?

Masha (dully). He was dreaming about waiters all night.

Sasha. Better order some sandwiches !

The Pedlar. It's real tortoiseshell.

Tourist (confidingly). What, has it been stolen ?

The Pedlar. Sir !

Tourist (angrily). How can it be real, if it hasn't been stolen ?

Bloodthirsty Lady (condescendingly). Are all these your children ?

Tourist. Yes, madam. A father's responsibilities. . . . But, as you see, madam, they rebel : the age-long struggle between father and children, madam. . . . This is such an awful tragedy, one's heart aches from grief. . . . Masha, you're going off to sleep again !

Bloodthirsty Lady. You are absolutely right : children must be hardened. But why do you call this an awful tragedy ? Any man who works on a roof may have to fall a long way. But here—let's see—it can't be more than a hundred, or two hundred feet ? And I've seen a man fall from the clouds.

Tourist (in delight). What are you saying ? Sasha, children, listen ! From the clouds !

Bloodthirsty Lady. Yes. An aviator fell down and smashed himself upon an iron roof.

THE DEAR DEPARTING

Tourist. How awful !

Bloodthirsty Lady. That was really tragic ! They had to dose me for two hours before I recovered my senses. Nearly drowned me, the brutes ! I've carried smelling-salts about with me ever since.

[A troupe of wandering Italian singers and musicians appears. The short, stout tenor has a little brown beard and large, watery, stupidly meditative eyes : he sings with great sweetness. A thin hunchback, with a jockey-cap, sings in a squeaky baritone. The bass looks like a tramp; he also plays the mandolin. A thin woman with a violin rolls her eyes to such an extent that only the whites are visible. They arrange themselves and sing : " Sul mare lucica . . . Santa Lucia, Santa Lucia . . . "

Masha (dully). Papa, look ! He's beginning to wave his hands about.

Tourist. Can that be the influence of music ?

Bloodthirsty Lady. Quite possibly. All these things happen under the influence of music. But it may make him fall before he should. Here, you musicians, you get off ! Go away now, go away !

[A Tall Tourist, with moustaches pointing upwards, arrives, hotly gesticulating, followed by a few sympathetic sightseers.

Tall Tourist. It's disgusting ! Why don't they save him ? Gentlemen, didn't you hear him call out, " Save me " ?

The Other Sightseers (in chorus). Yes, we all heard.

Tall Tourist. There now ! And I, too, heard those words perfectly plainly : " Save me." Why don't they save him ? It's disgusting ! Police ! Police ! Why don't you save him ? What are you doing here ?

A Policeman. We are clearing a space for him to fall.

Tall Tourist. Yes, that's quite sensible. But why don't you save him ? You ought to save him. It's

SHORT MODERN PLAYS

your duty towards humanity. When a man asks to be saved, he ought to be saved. Am I right, gentlemen ?

The Sightseers (in chorus). Right, absolutely right ! He must be saved !

Tall Tourist (hotly). We are not heathens ; we are Christians. We must love our neighbours. Since he asks for help, every measure must be made use of which lies in the power of the administration. Policemen, have you taken all these measures ?

A Policeman. All the lot.

Tall Tourist. Every one ? Gentlemen, they have all been taken. Young man, listen ; every possible measure to save you has been taken. Do you hear ?

The Stranger (faintly). Help !

Tall Tourist (excitedly). Gentlemen, you hear : once again he is calling for help. Policemen, did you hear ?

One of the Sightseers (timidly). In my opinion, he ought to be saved.

Tall Tourist. Exactly what I say ! I've been saying so for the last two hours. Policemen, did you hear ? It's disgraceful !

The Same Sightseer (a little more bravely). In my opinion, we ought to apply to the heads of the administration.

The Other Sightseers (in chorus). Yes, yes, we've got to make a complaint. It's disgusting ! The State should not leave its citizens in danger. We all pay our taxes. He *must* be saved.

Tall Tourist. And what did I say ? Of course we've got to go and complain. . . . Young man, listen : are you a taxpayer ? What ! I don't hear.

The Tourist. Peter, Katie, what a tragedy ! Oh, poor young man ! He's got to fall in a minute and he's being asked for his inhabited house duty !

Katie (a girl in spectacles, learnedly). Bat can this be

THE DEAR DEPARTING

called an inhabited house, papa ? As I understand it, a house . . .

Peter (pinches her). Swank !

Masha (stupidly). Look, papa, he's going to fall again.

{There is again a movement in the crowd, with some shouts and agitation among the photographers.

Tall Tourist. We must make haste. Gentlemen, we must save him at all costs ! Who goes with me ?

Sightseers (in chorus). All of us !

[They go away, hotly gesticulating. From the cafe, come sounds of a growing animation ; the noise of beer-mugs and the beginning of a loud German song can be heard. The Waiter has now absolutely lost his bearings ; he runs out, looks at the sky in despair and wipes his perspiring face with a table-napkin. Heated orders come through : " Waiter, waiter ! "

The Stranger (fairly loudly). Waiter, can't you get me some soda-water ?

[The Waiter shakes, and looks upward in terror ; he sees the Stranger, and goes away pretending to have heard nothing. Impatient voices : "Waiter! Beer ! "

Waiter. This minute ! This minute !

[Two drunken men come out of the cafe.

The Lady. Oh, there's my husband ! Here, quick, come here !

Bloodthirsty Lady. What a beast !

First Drunkard (waving his hands). Eh, you up there—feeling bad, what ?

The Stranger (fairly loudly). Rotten. Tired of it.

First Drunkard. No drinks up there ?

The Stranger. I don't think.

Second Drunkard. What are you talking about drinks to him for ? The man's got to die, and you're exciting him with all these temptations. Listen !

SHORT MODERN PLAYS

We've been drinking your health all this time. That won't hurt you, will it ?

First Drunkard. What are you talking about ? How could it hurt him ? It can only do him good. Listen ! We're awfully sorry for you, by God, we are ! But don't you mind that—we're going back to the cafe in a minute.

Second Drunkard. Look what a lot of people there are !

First Drunkard. Come along ; if he falls they may close up the cafe.

[Another little batch of tourists arrives, led by a very elegant gentleman—a Special Correspondent, sent by one of the principal papers of Europe. The people who accompany him are in a state of extreme gratification ; many even leave the buffet to see him, and even the Waiter smiles pleasantly.]

Voices. The Special Correspondent, look !

The Lady. Oh, *mon Dieu* ! And my husband isn't here yet.

Tourist. Peter, Masha, Sasha, Katie, Vassia, look ! That is a chief correspondent. You understand—the chief correspondent. What he writes is all right.

Katie. Masha, again you are not looking.

Sasha. Why not let's have some sandwiches ? I'm done up, father ! One must eat. . . .

Tourist (mournfully). What a tragedy ! Katie, don't you understand how awful it all is ? Such lovely weather—and the chief correspondent ! Take out your note-book, Peter, your note-book.

Peter. I've lost it, father.

The Correspondent. Where is he ?

Voices (obligingly). There he is, there ! A little higher up, still higher ! No, higher than that !

Correspondent. If you please, gentlemen, I'll find him for myself. Ah, there he is ! Yes, his situation——

THE DEAR DEPARTING

A Tourist. Wouldn't you like a camp-stool ?

Correspondent. Thank you. (*Sits down.*) Yes, his situation is ... very, very interesting. (*Prepares his note-book, and says graciously to the photographers.*) Have you already taken him, gentlemen ?

First Photographer. Yes, rather. ... In view of the general nature of the place——

Second Photographer. And of the tragical situation of the young man . . .

Correspondent. Yes ! It's very, very interesting.

Tourist. You hear, Sasha ? There's a wise man, a chief correspondent, and he says it's interesting. And you talk about sandwiches ! Idiot !

Sasha. Perhaps he's had enough to eat——

Correspondent. Gentlemen, may I desire you to pre-serve silence ?

Voices. Keep quiet there in the cafe !

Correspondent (calling upwards). Allow me to introduce myself as the chief correspondent of the *European Press*, sent here by the special instructions of the editor. I propose to ask you a few questions regarding your situation. What is your name ? Your social standing ? Your age ?

[*The Stranger mumbles something. (A little confused.)* I can't hear anything. Has he been like that all the time ?

Voices. Yes, you can't hear a word.

Correspondent (writing something down). That's all right. Are you a bachelor ?

[*The Stranger mumbles again.* I can't hear ! Are you married ? Say it again !

A Tourist. He says he's a bachelor.

Second Tourist. No, of course not. He's married.

Correspondent (carelessly). You think so ? We'll put him down as married. How many children have you ? What ? I can't hear. Did he say three ? Hm . . . we'll put down five, to be on the safe side.

SHORT MODERN PLAYS

Tourist. What a tragedy ! Five children, just think !

Bloodthirsty Lady. He's a liar !

Correspondent (shouts). How did you get into your present position ? What ? I don't hear. Louder ! Say it again ! (*To the crowd.*) What's that he's saying ? He's got a dashed thin voice.

First Tourist. I thought I heard him shout that he had just lost himself.

Second Tourist. He doesn't know himself how he got up there.

Voices. He was hunting. . . . He was climbing. . . . He's only just a lunatic.

Correspondent. Permit me, permit me, gentlemen—at all events he didn't fall from the clouds. Still . . . (*Quickly writing down.*) " The unhappy young man . . . had been afflicted since his earliest childhood with paroxysms of insanity. . . . The bright radiance of the full moon . . . the wild rocks . . . a sleepy hotel porter . . . did not notice . . .

First Tourist (to Second Tourist, aside). But the moon's only in her first quarter.

Second Tourist. Do you think the public cares anything about astronomy ?

Tourist (in delight). Masha ! Pay attention ; here you have before you a remarkable instance of the influence of the moon upon living organisms. But what an awful tragedy ; to go out for a walk on a moonlight night and to climb up to some place from which you can neither come down nor be rescued !

Correspondent (shouts). What are your feelings ? I don't hear. Louder ! That's better ! Yes . . . it's awkward.

The Crowd (interested). Listen, listen to what his feelings are. How awful it is !

Correspondent (writing and repeating his words in a loud tone of voice). " A deathly terror enshrouds his limbs.

THE DEAR DEPARTING

. . . An icy horror runs down his back. . . . No hope. . . . In his mind's eye he sees pictures of his erstwhile happy family : his wife is making pastries, his five children lift up their angelic voices in blameless tenderness. . . . Their grandmother sits in an armchair smoking a pipe—I mean, their grandfather—while their . . . grandmother . . . Excited by the sympathy of the crowd—he expressed a final wish that his last words should be printed in our paper. . . ."

Bloodthirsty Lady. The liar !

Masha. Look, now he's going to fall.

Tourist (angrily). Don't interrupt ! Here is such an awful tragedy, and you . . . what are you shutting your eyes for ?

Correspondent (shouts). Hold on for just one more minute ! That's it ! My last question is : Have you, on the threshold of another world, any message for your fellow-citizens ?

The Stranger (feebly). Tell them all to go to hell !

Correspondent. What? Oh, yes. . . . (*Writing.*) " Deep affections . . . his last words . . . a determined opponent of Negro emancipation. . . . His last hope that never would those black-faced . . . "

A Clergyman (out of breath, makes his way through the crowd). Where is he? Ah, there! Unhappy youth! Gentlemen, has there indeed not been anybody here of my cloth ? No ? I thank you ! So I am really first!

Correspondent (writing down). " An affecting moment. . . . A clergyman appeared . . . deep silence . . . many were weeping ..."

Clergyman. If you please, if you please ! The departing soul wants to make its last peace with heaven. (*Shouts.*) Don't you want to make your peace with heaven, my son ? Confess your sins to me, and I will give you absolution. What ? I can't hear.

SHORT MODERN PLAYS

Correspondent (writing). " Sobs rent the air. The representative of the Church in touching words exhorted the criminal—I mean, the unfortunate. . . . With tears in his eyes, the unhappy youth gave thanks in a faint voice. . . ."

The Stranger (in a faint voice). If you don't go away, I'll fall on you. I weigh twelve stone.

[All fall back in confusion.

Voices. He's falling ; he's falling !

Tourist (excited). Masha ! Sasha ! Peter ?

The Policemen (energetically). Stand back, please !

The Lady. Nelly, quick, run and tell your father he's falling.

A Photographer (in despair). Oh, good Lord, my spool's finished ! *(Rushes about, looking at the Stranger with distress.)* Just one minute ! I've got some more there, in my overcoat. *(He steps back a little, still looking at the Stranger, and returns.)* No, I can't, but if... Oh, Lord ! It's there, in my coat. I'll be back in one minute. . . . What a fix !

Clergyman. Make haste, my friend, collect your strength if only to confess your important sins. We can leave the little ones.

The Tourist. What a tragedy !

Correspondent (writing down) " The criminal—that is, the unfortunate man—expressed general contrition . . . and unveiled some terrible mysteries. . . . The wretched man had robbed a banker and ..."

The Tourist. How wicked of him !

Clergyman. Firstly, have you committed murder? Secondly, have you stolen ?

The Tourist. Masha, Peter, Katie, Sasha, Vassia, close your ears.

Correspondent (writing). " The horrified crowd . . . cries of indignation. ..."

Clergyman. Have you coveted your neighbour's ass, or his ox ...

THE DEAR DEPARTING

A Photographer. What's that about an ass ?

Second Photographer. Where, where ? I don't see any ass.

First Photographer. I thought I heard something, that's all.

Clergyman. I congratulate you, my son, I congratulate you ; you have made your peace with heaven. Now you may fearlessly . . . Ah, what do I see ? The Salvation Army ! Policemen, send them away !

[A few Salvationists of both sexes, in uniform and carrying musical instruments, approach the crowd. There are only three musicians ; they are armed with a drum, a fiddle, and a remarkably squeaky trumpet.]

First Salvationist (drumming furiously and drawling loudly through his nose). My brothers and sisters . . .

Clergyman (tries to shout him down and yells even more strenuously through his nose). He has repented, brothers. Gentlemen, you were witnesses. He has repented and he has made his peace with heaven.

Second Salvationist (a woman, stands on a stone and wails). Like that sinner, I, too, abode in the darkness and evilly indulged in alcohol, before the light of the judgment . . .

A Voice. She's nearly blind drunk now.

Clergyman. Policeman, didn't you hear him repent and make his peace with heaven ?

[The First Salvationist drums furiously while the others attempt to sing a hymn, to the accompaniment of shouts, laughter, and hoots. In the café they are also trying to sing, and are calling the Waiter in several languages. A Policeman is struggling frantically to release himself from the grip of the Clergyman, who is trying to get him to do something; the Photographers are violently excited. A tourist Englishwoman appears on a mule, which spreads out its legs and con-

SHORT MODERN PLAYS

tributes its voice to the others. Silence is at length restored, the Salvation Army majestically withdraws, and the Clergyman follows it, waving his hands.

First English Tourist (to another). How disgusting ! This crowd has absolutely no idea of manners !

Second English Tourist. Let's go away.

First English Tourist. Half a minute. (*Tells.*) I say, old thing, wouldn't you like to make a short job of it?

Second English Tourist. What are you saying, Sir William?

First English Tourist (yells). Don't you see it's what they are all waiting for ? It's your duty as a gentleman to grant them that, and to save yourself the loss of dignity involved in suffering in public—before this mob.

Second English Tourist. Sir William !

Tourist (in delight). He's right, he's right ! Sasha, Peter, listen, he's right ! What a tragedy !

First English Tourist (pushing him aside). Come on down quickly, do you hear ? If you haven't the nerve, I can send along a shot to help you. Yes or no ?

Voices. That devil in brown has gone mad !

Policeman (seizing the English Tourist by the arm). You have no right to do that. I arrest you.

A Tourist. A nation of savages.

[The Stranger shouts something. Excitement below.

Voices. Listen, listen !

The Stranger (loudly). Take that idiot off to the devil ; he wants to shoot me. And tell the landlord I'm fed up.

Voices: What's that ? What landlord ? He's going mad, poor thing !

Tourist. Sasha, Masha, this is a picture of insanity. Peter, quick ! Remember Hamlet !

THE DEAR DEPARTING

The Stranger (angrily). Tell him my waist's nearly broken in two.

Masha (dully). Papa, he's waving his legs about.

Katie. Is that what they call convulsions, papa ?

Tourist (depressed). I don't know. I suppose so. What a tragedy !

Sasha (mournfully). Katie is a fool ! She goes to school and all that, and wears spectacles, and doesn't know it's the death-agony. I'm tired out, papa.

Tourist. Just think, children, here's a man just going to be dashed to pieces, and what does he think about ? His waist !

[A noise is heard. A few infuriated tourists drag in an extremely frightened man who wears a white waistcoat. He is smiling ; he bows to all sides ; and so on. He attempts an escape, but he is caught again and mobbed.]

Voices. Filthy swindler ! Disgraceful ! Police ! Police ! He's got to have a lesson.

Other Voices. What's the matter ? What's the swindle ? What is it ? They've caught a thief.

The Man. Gentlemen, it's all a joke, I assure you ; really, gentlemen ! Just a joke ! Visitors get so bored, and I wanted to amuse them.

The Stranger (loudly). Landlord !

The Man. Just a minute, just a minute.

The Stranger. Do you think I'm going to stay here till Doomsday ? You said till three o'clock, and what is it now ?

Tall Tourist (almost mad with indignation). Do you hear, gentlemen ? It means that that rascal, that fellow in the white waistcoat, has hired another rascal and just tied him up to the rock.

Voices. Is he tied on ?

Tall Tourist. Of course he is, and he can't fall. And here we all are, getting excited and waiting for him to drop, and he can't !

SHORT MODERN PLAYS

The Stranger. I should say so ! Think I'm going to break my back for two pounds ten ! Landlord, I've had enough. Some idiot's been wanting to shoot me for two hours—it's more than we agreed on.

Sasha. Papa said that Baedeker's a liar, but he believes anything that people tell him and drags us all over the place.

The Landlord. People get so bored. . . . My only wish was to amuse the honourable public.

Bloodthirsty Lady. What's that ? I don't understand. Why won't he fall ? If he isn't going to fall, then *who* is ?

Tourist. I don't understand either. Of course, he's got to fall.

Peter. You never understand anything you're told, papa. You've been told that he's tied on.

Sasha. Do you think you're going to convince him ? He'll believe any old Baedeker sooner than his own children.

Peter. Our father, too !

Tourist. Silence !

Bloodthirsty Lady. What's that ? He's got to fall !

Tall Tourist. But, just think, what a swindle ! You've jolly well got to explain the meaning of this, sir.

Landlord. The public wants to be amused. You must forgive me, gentlemen. But the desire to please ... to provide a few hours of healthy excitement ... to thrill the nerves ... to evoke altruistic sentiments. . . .

An Englishman. Is that cafe yours ?

Landlord. Yes.

Englishman. And is the hotel down below yours ?

Landlord. Yes ; the public gets . . .

Special Correspondent (writes). " A wicked swindle. . . . A hotel keeper, in his desire to increase his profits from the sale of spirituous liquors, exploits the

THE DEAR DEPARTING

finest feelings of humanity. . . . The indignation of the public . . ."

The Stranger (hotly). Are you going to let me down or not, landlord ?

Landlord. What have you to complain of? Do we bring you down every night, or don't we ?

The Stranger. If it isn't just about the limit, to talk of leaving me hanging here all night.

Landlord. Can't you wait just a few minutes ? They're getting tired of it. . . .

Tall Tourist. Now, do you understand what you've done, you wretch ! For the sake of your filthy gains, you have wickedly exploited our love for our neighbours. You have forced us to undergo terror and sympathy ; you have poisoned our hearts with sorrow—and what does it all amount to ? It comes to this, that that villain, your wretched accomplice, is tied on to the rock and not only will not fall, as we all expected, but couldn't if he wanted to.

Bloodthirsty Lady. What's that ? He's got to fall !

Tourist. Police ! Police !

[The Clergyman reappears, out of breath.]

Clergyman. Hullo ! Still alive ! Ah, there he is ! What charlatans these Salvation Army people are !

Voices. You haven't heard ; he can't let go.

Clergyman. What ? Let go of what ? We are all attached to life, until death releases us. But, whether he's fastened up there or not, at any rate I've made him make his peace with heaven, so that's all to the good, anyway ! And those charlatans——

Tourist. Police ! Police ! You've got to draw up an official report.

Bloodthirsty Lady (insultingly, to the Landlord). I can't allow you to swindle me like this. I've seen an aviator fall out of the clouds and dash himself to pieces on a iOof. I've seen a tiger tear a woman . . .

SHORT MODERN PLAYS

A Photographer. I've wasted three plates taking that scoundrel. You will answer to me for that, my dear sir.

Tourist. An official report, an official report ! How beastly ! Masha, Peter, Sasha, Vassia, call the police !

Landlord (in despair). But I can't make him fall if he doesn't want to. I've done all I could. Gentlemen, gentlemen !

Bloodthirsty Lady. I won't let you !

Landlord. Allow me, gentlemen ! On my word, he'll fall the next time, but he doesn't want to just now.

The Stranger. What's that about next time ?

Landlord. Do shut up !

The Stranger. For two pounds ten ?

Clergyman. This is indeed deplorable ! Only just this minute I reconciled him with heaven at the risk of my own life—you heard him threaten to fall on my head ? And he's still unhappy. Thief ! Murderer ! Coveter of his neighbour's ass ! ...

A Photographer. Gentlemen, an ass !

Second Photographer. Where's an ass ? I don't see one.

First Photographer (cooling down). I thought I heard something——

Third Photographer. You're an ass ! My eyes are squinting on your account.

Masha (dully). Papa, look, here's a policeman.

[*There is movement and noise. On one side of the stage the Policeman is mobbed; on the other side, the Landlord ; both are shouting : " By your leave, by your leave ! "*]

Tourist. Policeman, officer ! Here's this swindler, this thief. . .

Clergyman. Policeman ! Here's the thief, murderer, who covets his neighbour's ass ...

THE DEAR DEPARTING

Policeman. Permit me, permit me, gentlemen ; we'll soon make him know where he is and sorry for himself.

Landlord. But I can't make him fall if he doesn't want to !

Policeman. Hullo, young man, you up there ! Just tell us whether you can fall or whether you can't !

The Stranger (surlily). I don't want to fall.

Voices. Ah ! He has confessed ! What a wretch !

Tall Tourist. Take this down, policeman : " Desiring ... for the sake of profit ... to exploit the emotion of love for one's neighbour ... a sacred instinct ..."

Tourist. Listen, children, they're making out the report. What expressiveness !

Tall Tourist. " A sacred instinct which ..."

Policeman (dutifully writing, with his tongue in his cheek). " Love for one's neighbour ... a sacred instinct which ..."

Masha (dully). Papa, look ! Here's an advertisement coming.

[A few musicians arrive, carrying drums and trumpets. In front of them is an individual who carries on a long pole an enormous poster, showing a desperately long-haired man, inscribed : "I used to be bald."

The Stranger. You're too late ! They're drawing up the official report here now, old son ! You'd better hop it, quick !

Advertisement Carrier (stops and speaks in a loud voice). I was bald from the day of my birth and for a long time after. The scanty growth which covered my cranium by the time I had reached my tenth year resembled wool rather than hair. On my marriage, my skull was as bare as a cushion and the young bride . . .

Tourist. What a tragedy ! Just married and such

SHORT MODERN PLAYS

a head—children, do you understand how awful it is?

[*They all listen with interest ; even the Policeman attends., pen in hand.*

Advertisement Carrier (with inspiration). And a moment came about at last when the happiness of my wife was literally hanging on a hair. All the methods for restoring hair recommended by quacks . . .

Tourist. Take out your note-book, Peter.

Bloodthirsty Lady. But when is he going to drop ?

Landlord (obligingly). Next time, madam, next time. ... I won't tie him on so firmly . . . you see ?

CURTAIN

NOTES

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, by W. S. Gilbert.

Sir William Schwenk Gilbert (1836-1911), author of "The Bab Ballads" and the librettos of the incomparable Gilbert and Sullivan operas, was educated at London University. He served as an officer in the militia and as a clerk in the Education Department. He was called to the Bar, before he devoted himself to a literary career, which he began by contributing to "Fun." His work for the stage started with the production of "Dulcamara," a Christmas burlesque, in 1866. His collaboration with Sir Arthur Sullivan in the Savoy operas lasted from 1875, when "Trial by Jury" appeared, to the production of "The Grand Duke" in 1896. The unfortunate quarrel which led to the severance of the glorious partnership of Gilbert and Sullivan is one of the tragedies of English stage history. Besides his librettos Gilbert wrote a number of plays, including comedies, tragedies, and burlesques. "Rosencrantz and Guildenstern," a skit on Shakespeare's "Hamlet," was first performed at a charity matinee at the Vaudeville Theatre, London, in June 1891.

The following are the two speeches from "Hamlet" specially burlesqued by Gilbert in the Second Tableau :—

- (a) *Hamlet*. To be, or not to be : that is the question:
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
And by opposing end them ? To die ; to sleep ;
No more ; and by a sleep to say we end
The heart-ache, and the thousand natural shocks
That flesh is heir to, 'tis a consummation
Devoutly to be wish'd. To die, to sleep ;
To sleep : perchance to dream : ay, there's the rub ;
For in that sleep of death what dreams may come,
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,
Must give us pause : there's the respect
That makes calamity of so long life ;
For who would bear the whips and scorns of time,
The oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely,
The pangs of despised love, the law's delay,
The insolence of office, and the spurns
That patient merit of the unworthy takes,
When he himself might his quietus make

SHORT MODERN PLAYS

With a bare bodkin ? Who would fardels bear
To grunt and sweat under a weary life,
But that the dread of something after death,
The undiscover'd country from whose bourn
No traveller returns, puzzles the will,
And makes us rather bear those ills we have
Than fly to others that we know not of?
Thus conscience does make cowards of us all,
And thus the native hue of resolution
Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,
And enterprises of great pitch and moment
With this regard their currents turn awry,
And lose the name of action.

(b) *Re-enter PLAYERS with recorders.*

O, the recorders ! let me see one. To withdraw
with you :—why do you go about to recover the wind
of me, as if you would drive me into a toil ?

Guildestern. O, my lord, if my duty be too bold, my
love is too unmannerly.

Hamlet. I do not well understand that. Will you
play upon this pipe ?

Guildestern. My lord, I cannot.

Hamlet. I pray you.

Guildestern. Believe me, I cannot.

Hamlet. I do beseech you.

Guildestern. I know no touch of it, my lord.

Hamlet. It is as easy as lying : govern these ventages
with your fingers and thumb, give it breath with your
mouth, and it will discourse most eloquent music.
Look you, these are the stops.

Guildestern. But these cannot I command to any
utterance of harmony ; I have not the skill.

Hamlet. Why, look you now, how unworthy a thing
you make of me ! You would play upon me ; you
would seem to know my stops ; you would pluck out
the heart of my mystery ; you would sound me from
my lowest note to the top of my compass : and there
is much music, excellent voice, in this little organ ;
yet cannot you make it speak. 'Sblood, do you think
I am easier to be played on than a pipe ? Call me
what instrument you will, though you can fret me, yet
you cannot play upon me.

The following is Hamlet's speech to the players
burlesqued in the Third Tableau :—

NOTES

Enter HAMLET and PLAYERS.

Hamlet. Speak the speech, I pray you, as I pronounced it to you, trippingly on the tongue : but if you mouth it, as many of your players do, I had as lief the town-crier spoke my lines. Nor do not saw the air too much with your hand, thus ; but use all gently : for in the very torrent, tempest, and, as I may say, whirlwind of your passion, you must acquire and beget a temperance that may give it smoothness. O, it offends me to the soul to hear a robustious periwig-pated fellow tear a passion to tatters, to very rags, to split the ears of the groundlings, who, for the most part, are capable of nothing but inexplicable dumb-shows and noise : I would have such a fellow whipped for o'erdoing Termagant ; it out-herods Herod : pray you, avoid it.

First Player. I warrant your honour.

Hamlet. Be not too tame, neither, but let your own discretion be your tutor : suit the action to the word, the word to the action ; with this special observance, that you o'erstep not the modesty of nature : for anything so overdone is from the purpose of playing, whose end, both at the first and now, was and is, to hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to nature ; to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure. Now this overdone or come tardy off, though it make the unskilful laugh, cannot but make the judicious grieve ; the censure of the which one must in your allowance o'erweigh a whole theatre of others. O, there be players that I have seen play, and heard others praise, and that highly, not to speak it profanely, that neither having the accent of Christians nor the gait of Christian, pagan, nor man, have so strutted and bellowed, that I have thought some of nature's journeymen had made men, and not made them well, they imitated humanity so abominably.

First Player. I hope we have reformed that indifferently with us, sir.

Hamlet. O, reform it altogether. And let those that play your clowns speak no more than is set down for them : for there be of them that will themselves laugh, to set on some quantity of barren spectators to laugh too, though in the meantime some necessary question of the play be then to be considered : that's villainous,

SHORT MODERN PLAYS

and shows a most pitiful ambition in the fool that uses it. Go, make you ready. *[Exeunt Players.]*

"Trafalgar," from *The Dynasts*, by Thomas Hardy.

Thomas Hardy (1840-1928) was born near Dorchester, the son of a builder. He first practised as an architect, but the moderate success of his novel "Desperate Remedies," published in 1871, determined him to devote himself to writing. His novels and poetry are all concerned with the ironical treatment of human life by apparently malignant or indifferent forces which control the universe. Hardy, who is perhaps the last of the great Victorian authors, received the Order of Merit in 1910, and when he died in 1928 his ashes were buried in Westminster Abbey, his heart in Wessex.

The epic-drama, "The Dynasts," deals with the war with Napoleon and is written in three parts. Part I opens with Napoleon's threat of invading England in 1805, Napoleon's coronation at Milan, the battles of Austerlitz and Trafalgar, and the deaths of Nelson and Pitt. Part II deals with the battles of Jena and Wagram, the war in Spain, and Napoleon's divorce of Josephine and marriage with Marie Louise. Part III deals with the Russian campaign, the battle of Leipzig, Napoleon's abdication and exile to Elba, and final defeat at Waterloo.

As Shakespeare in his historical plays, Hardy interpolates between his elevated scenes little realistic episodes which reveal the effect made by the high events in progress on private soldiers, rustics, and other common people, while over the drama the author, as he explains in his Preface, "thought proper to introduce, as supernatural spectators of the terrestrial action, certain impersonated abstractions, or intelligences, called Spirits. Their doctrines are but tentative, and are advanced with little eye to a systematised philosophy warranted to lift 'the burthen of the mystery' of this unintelligible world. The chief thing hoped for them is that they and their utterances may have dramatic plausibility enough to procure for them, in the words of Coleridge, 'that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment which constitutes poetic faith.'" The Spirits, in fact, serve to give universal significance to the particular events on which they comment.

NOTES

The Clown of Stratford, by Sir John Squire.

Sir John Squire, born at Plymouth in 1884, was educated at Blundell's and St. John's College, Cambridge. He is famous as critic, essayist, poet, and parodist. In 1933 he was knighted for his services to literature and the arts.

The Clown of Stratford: the theory that the works of Shakespeare were really written by Bacon forms a controversy which need not affect this *jeu d'esprit*, "The Clown of Stratford." The opportunity may, however, be taken of saying that while Baconians display remarkable ingenuity in trying to prove their view by external evidence, it is hard to imagine how anyone who has read and entered into the spirit of Shakespeare and Bacon can take the theory seriously. That the same man could have written the poetic and romantic plays and also the sagacious, cautious, worldly essays and the philosophic treatises, is incredible. The pother probably springs from the fallacy that Shakespeare's plays are learned and must therefore have been written by a learned man. Shakespeare is not learned in the sense that Bacon and Milton are learned: he is profoundly learned in the human heart; the rest is inspiration, and an uncanny power of naturally assimilating such facts as appealed to him. Bacon in 1621 was charged with bribery before the House of Lords. He confessed that he had been guilty of corruption but not of perverting justice. He was deprived of the Great Seal, disabled from sitting in Parliament, and was confined—though only for a few days—in the Tower. He devoted the remainder of his life to literary work.

These our actors, etc.: "The Tempest," IV. I.

The Novum Organum: a treatise in Latin by Bacon in which he describes how knowledge may be made universal.

New Place: the house at Stratford supposed to have been bought by Shakespeare when he retired from London.

Burbage will probably have it at the Globe: Burbage, one of the chief players in the company which acted Shakespeare's plays, inherited from his father an interest in the Globe Theatre.

'To-morrow and to-morrow and to-morrow': "Macbeth," V. v.
, *Caesar's dust stops a bunghole*': "Hamlet," V. i.

, *Patience <n a monument*': "Twelfth Night," II. iv.

SHORT MODERN PLAYS

Birds of a Feather, by J. O. Francis.

John Oswald Francis, born in 1882, is the author of a number of plays, including "Change," "The Poacher," "Dark Little People," "Gross Currents," "Legend of the Welsh."

"Birds of a Feather" was first performed at the London School of Economics by the Welsh Society of the University of London in March 1923.

P. 125, l. 12. *Rodneys* : vagabonds, anything worthless.

Shivering Shocks, by Clemence Dane.

Clemence Dane (Winifred Ashton) has written both novels and plays of high distinction. Among her novels "Regiment of Women" and "Broome Stages" are specially notable, and among her plays "A Bill of Divorcement" and "Will Shakespeare." It has been said that the blank verse in "Will Shakespeare" is the finest in any English play since Shelley wrote "The Cenci."

Miss Dane prefaces "Shivering Shocks" with the following note: "This playlet was written at the request of a dramatic society of schoolboys. They provided the plot, or, rather, the ingredients. They demanded :—

A hero crippled in the war.

Crooks.

An inventor, who, shall invent something that the crooks are after.'

At least two stage fights.

Pistols, if possible.

A detective.

A cockney accent.

An Irish accent.

No women or love-making.

A drunken man who stammers.

In endeavouring to satisfy these serious requirements the following 'tremendous trifle' came into being."

The Boatswain's Mate, by W. W. Jacobs.

W. W. Jacobs was born in London in 1863. He was educated at private schools and served in the Savings Bank Department of the Civil Service between 1883 and 1899. He has become famous for his humorous short stories and novels, such as "Man," "Cargoes,"

NOTES

"The Skipper's Wooing," "A Master of Craft," "Night Watches," "Odd Craft": these tales are usually masterpieces both of humour and construction. Mr. Jacobs is also master of that powerfully macabre vein in which his short plays "The Monkey's Paw" and "The Ghost of Jerry Bundler" are written.

"The Boatswain's Mate," which was written first in story form, has not only been dramatised as it appears in this volume, but is also the libretto of the fine *opera comique* "The Boatswain's Mate" composed by Dame Ethel Smyth.

The Dear Departing, by Leonid Andreyev, translated by Julius West.

Leonid Nicolaievich Andreyev (1871-1919) was born in Orel. He was educated at the Gymnasium of Orel and at the University of Petersburg. Poverty and an unbalanced nervous system caused him when a young man to attempt suicide, which left his heart permanently weakened. For long periods he was idle, but at intervals, in intense bursts of literary energy, he produced stories, novels, and plays, all of which are permeated with horror of life, pity for human suffering, and scorn of human follies. Among his best known stories are "Once upon a Time there Lived," "The Grand Slam," "The Story of Scrguey Petrovitch," and "The Seven that were Hanged," a protest against capital punishment. Notable among his plays are "The Life of Man" and "King Hunger."

Andreyev refused to recognise the Bolshevik regime, and in consequence fled to Finland, where, having lost the fortune which he had made by literature, he died in poverty. In "The Dear Departing" the characteristics of each nationality are satirised as brilliantly as the universal gullibility of human nature. The play does not appear to have been written with a view to stage production.

QUESTIONS

The End of the Beginning.

Illustrate from " The End of the Beginning " how Sean O'Casey combines in his plays romantic and realistic qualities.

The Death Trap.

Rewrite the last few pages of this play inventing a different ending.

The Pot of Broth.

Show in what respects this play is Irish in regard to characterisation, atmosphere, and language.

Thread O' Scarlet.

Summarise the respective reasons for suspecting characters in " Thread o' Scarlet " other than the real culprit.

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.

Write a dramatic skit in a similar style burlesquing any other play of Shakespeare.

Trafalgar, from " The Dynasts"

Consider in what respects Hardy's poetic treatment of the battle of Trafalgar gets nearer to the heart of the event than would be achieved by bare prose narrative.

Birds of a Feather.

Show in what respects this play is Welsh in regard to characterisation, language, and scenery.

The Clown of Stratford.

Write a dramatic sketch similar to this one in which the two protagonists are either Dr Johnson and Boswell or Lord Tennyson and Queen Victoria.

Shivering Shocks.

Discuss with reference to this play the necessary ingredients for a dramatic "thriller."

The Boatswain's Mate.

Write a short play or story in which George Benn has his revenge.

The Dear Departing.

Show what are the characteristics of the various national types satirised in "The Dear Departing."

