PLAYS OF NEAR & FAR
BY LORD DUNSANY

DP / ORS

25.00

FE

1/500

Bleiu p 105

Plays of Near & Far

By LORD DUNSANY

THE GODS OF PEGANA
TIME AND THE GODS
THE SWORD OF WELLERAN
A DREAMER'S TALES
THE BOOK OF WONDER
FIVE PLAYS
FIFTY-ONE TALES
TALES OF WONDER
PLAYS OF GODS AND MEN
TALES OF WAR
UNHAPPY FAR-OFF THINGS
TALES OF THREE HEMISPHERES
IF
THE CHRONICLES OF RODRIGUEZ

Plays of Near & Far

By
LORD DUNSANY

G. P. Putnam's Sons
London & New York

MADE IN GREAT BRITAIN

First printed December, 1922
Limited Edition : Five Hundred Copies only

Printed by the
BOTOLPH PRINTING WORKS
GATE ST., KINGSWAY, W.C.2

PREFACE

Believing plays to be solely for the stage, I have never before allowed any of mine to be printed until they had first faced from a stage the judgment of an audience, to see if they were entitled to be called plays at all. A successful production also has been sometimes a moral support to me when some critic has said, as for instance of "A Night at an Inn," that though it reads passably it could never act.

But in this book I have made an exception to this good rule (as it seems to me), and that exception is "The Flight of the Queen." I know too little of managers and theatres to know what to do with it, and have a feeling that it will be long before it is ever acted, and am too fond of this play to leave it in obscurity. This beautiful story has been lying about the world for countless centuries, without ever having been dramatized. It is the story of a royal court, which I have merely adapted to the stage. The date that I have given is accurate; it happened in June; and happens every June; perhaps in some corner of the reader's garden. It is the story of the bees.

As for "The Compromise of the King of the Golden Isles," it is just the sort of play through which those that hunt for allegories might hunt merrily, unless I mention that there are no allegories in any of my plays.

PREFACE

An allegory I take to be a dig at something local and limited, such as politics, while outwardly appearing to tell of things on some higher plane. But, far from being the *chef d'œuvre* of some ponderously profound thinker, I look on the allegory, if I have rightly defined it, as being the one form of art that is narrowly limited in its application to life. When the man whose cause it championed has been elected alderman, when the esplanade has been widened, or the town better lighted or drained, the allegory's work must necessarily be over; but the truth of all other works of art is manifold and should be eternal.

Though there is no such land as the Golden Isles and was never any such king as Hamaran, yet all that we write with sincerity is true, for we can reflect nothing that we have not seen, and this we interpret with our idiosyncracies when we attempt any form of art.

I set some store by the way in which the three lines about Zarabardes are recited, though it is hard to explain in writing a matter of rhythm. But the heartlessness of it can be indicated by a clear pronunciation of the syllables, as though the people that utter these words had long been drilled in a formula.

The third play, "Cheezo," tells of one of those rare occasions when it is permissible for an artist, and may be a duty, to leave his wider art in order to attack a definite evil. And the invention of "great new foods" is often a huge evil.

PREFACE

"Cheezo" is a play of Right and Wrong, and Wrong triumphs. Were not this particular Wrong triumphing at this particular date I should not have thought it a duty to attack it, and were it easily defeated it would not have been worth attacking.

I have seen it acted with a Stage Curate, rather weak and a little comic; obviously such a man could be no match for Sladder. Hippanthigh should be of stronger stuff than that: he is defeated because that particular evil is, as I have said, defeating its enemies at present. Nor could there be any drama in a contest between the brutal Sladder and a Stage Curate; for the spark that we call humour, by whose light we see much of life, comes as it were of two flints, and not of a flint and cheese.

The three little plays that follow I will leave to speak for themselves, as ultimately all plays have to do.

DUNSANY

CONTENTS

TH

THE COMPROMISE OF THE KING OF THE GOLDEN ISLES

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

The King of the Golden Isles: King Hamaran.
The King's Politician.
The Ambassador of the Emperor.
The Emperor's Seeker.
Two Priests of the Order of the Sun.
The King's Questioners.
The Ambassador's Nubian.
The Herald of the Ambassador.
The Emperor's Dwarf.
The Deputy Cup-Bearer.
The King's Doom-Bearer.

THE COMPROMISE OF THE KING OF THE GOLDEN ISLES.

THE KING'S POLITICIAN: A man has fled from the Emperor, and has taken refuge in your Majesty's Court in that part of it called holy.

THE KING: We must give him up to the Emperor.

POLITICIAN: To-day a spearsman came running from Eng-Bathai seeking the man who fled. He carries the barbed spear of one of the Emperor's seekers.

KING: We must give him up.

POLITICIAN: Moreover he has an edict from the Emperor demanding that the head of the man who fled be sent back to Eng-Bathai.

KING: Let it be sent.

POLITICIAN: Yet your Majesty is no vassal of the Emperor, who dwells at Eng-Bathai.

KING: We may not disobey the Imperial edict.

POLITICIAN: Yet——

KING: None hath dared to do it.

POLITICIAN: It is so long since any dared to do it that the Emperor mocks at kings. If your Majesty disobeyed him the Emperor would tremble.

KING: Ah.

POLITICIAN: The Emperor would say, "There is a great king. He defies me." And he would tremble strangely.

KING: Yet—if——

POLITICIAN: The Emperor would fear you.

KING: I would fain be a great king—yet——

POLITICIAN: You would win honour in his eyes.

KING: Yet is the Emperor terrible in his wrath. He was terrible in his wrath in the olden time.

POLITICIAN: The Emperor is old.

KING: This is a great affront that he places upon a king, to demand a man who has come to sanctuary in that part of my Court called holy.

POLITICIAN: It is a great affront.

[*Enter the* SEEKER. *He abases himself.*

SEEKER: O King, I have come with my spear, seeking for one that fled the Emperor and has found sanctuary in your Court in that part called holy.

KING: It has not been the wont of the kings of my line to turn men from our sanctuary.

SEEKER: It is the Emperor's will.

KING: It is not *my* will.

SEEKER: Behold the Emperor's edict.

[*The* KING *takes it. The* SEEKER *goes towards the door.*

SEEKER: I go to sit with my spear by the door of the place called holy.

[*Exit* SEEKER.

KING: The edict, the edict. We must obey the edict.

POLITICIAN: The Emperor is old.

KING: True, we will defy him.

POLITICIAN: He will do nothing.

KING: And yet the edict.

POLITICIAN: It is of no importance.

KING: Hark. I will not disobey the Emperor. Yet will I not permit him to abuse the sanctuary of my Court. We will banish the man who fled from Eng-Bathai. [*To his* DOOM-BEARER.] Hither, the Doom-Bearer; take the black ivory spear, the wand of banishment, that lies on the left of my throne, and point it at the man that shelters in the holy place of my Court. Then show him the privy door behind the horns of the altar, so that he go safely hence and meet not the Emperor's seeker.

[*The* DOOM-BEARER *bows and takes the spear on the flat of both his hands. The shaft is all black, but the head is of white ivory. It is blunt and clearly ceremonial. Exit.*]

[*To* POLITICIAN.

Thus we shall be safe from the wrath of the

Emperor, and the holy place of my Court will not be violate.

POLITICIAN: Had your Majesty scorned the Emperor it were better. He is old and durst not take vengeance.

KING: I have decided, and the man is banished.

[*A* HERALD *marches in and blows his trumpet.*

HERALD: The Ambassador of the Emperor.

[*Enter the* AMBASSADOR. *He bows to the King from his place near the door.*

KING: For what purpose to my Court from Eng-Bathai comes thus the Ambassador of the Emperor?

AMBASSADOR: I bring to the King's Majesty a gift from the great Emperor, [AMBASSADOR *and his men bow*] who reigns in Eng-Bathai, the reward of obedience to his edict, a goblet of inestimable wine.

[*He signs and there enters a page bearing a goblet of glass. He has a pretty complexion and yellow hair falling as low as his chin and curling inwards. He wears a cerise belt round his tunic exactly matching the wine in the goblet he carries.*

He prays you drink it, and to know that it was made by vintners whose skill is lost, and stored in secret cellars over a hundred

years; and that the vineyards whence it came have been long since whelmed by war, and only live now in legend and this wine.

KING: A gift, you say, for obedience.

AMBASSADOR: A gift from the old wine-gardens of the sun.

KING: How knew the Emperor that I had thus obeyed him?

AMBASSADOR: It has not been men's wont to disobey the Emperor.

KING: Yet if I have sheltered this man in the holy place of my Court?

AMBASSADOR: If that be so the Emperor bids you drink out of this golden goblet. [*He signs and it is brought on by a bent and ugly dwarf*] and wishes you farewell.

KING: Farewell, you say?

AMBASSADOR: Farewell.

KING: What have you in the goblet?

AMBASSADOR: It is no common poison, but a thing so strange and deadly that the serpents of Lebutharna go in fear of it. Yea travellers there hold high a goblet of this poison, at arm's length as they go. The serpents hide their heads for fear of it. Even so the travellers pass the desert safely, and come to Eng-Bathai.

KING: I have not sheltered this man,

AMBASSADOR: There is no need then for this Imperial gift.

[*He throws the liquid out of the goblet through the doorway on to the marble. A great steam goes up.*

KING: Neither have I ordered that his head be sent back to Eng-Bathai.

AMBASSADOR: Alas, for so rare a wine.

[*He pours it away.*

KING: I have banished him and he is safe. I have neither obeyed nor disobeyed.

AMBASSADOR: The Emperor therefore bids you choose the gift that he honours himself by sending to your Court.

[*He signs. Enter a massive* NUBIAN *with two cups.*

The Emperor bids you drink one of these cups.

[*The huge* NUBIAN *moves up close to the* KING *holding up the two cups on a tray.*

[*The* POLITICIAN *slinks off. Exit L.*

KING: The cups are strangely alike.

AMBASSADOR: Only one craftsman in the City of Smiths ever discerned a difference. The Emperor killed him, and now no one knows.

KING: The potions also are alike.

AMBASSADOR: Strangely alike. [*The* KING *hesitates.*] The Emperor bids you choose his gift and drink.

KING: The Emperor has poisoned the cups!

AMBASSADOR: You greatly wrong the Emperor. Only one cup is poisoned.

KING: You say that one is poisoned?

AMBASSADOR: Only one, O King! Who may say which?

KING: And what if I refuse to do this thing?

AMBASSADOR: There are tortures that the Emperor never names. They are not spoken of where the Emperor is. Yet the Emperor makes a sign and they are accomplished. He makes the sign with a certain one of his fingers.

KING (*half to himself*): How wonderfully they have the look of wine.

AMBASSADOR: One is a wine scarcely less rare, scarcely less jubilant in the wits of man, than that which alas is lost.

[*He glances towards the spot where he threw the other.*

KING: And the other?

AMBASSADOR: Who may say? It is the most treasured secret that the Emperor's poisoners guard.

KING: I will send for my butlers that are wise in wine and they shall smell the cups.

AMBASSADOR: Alas, but the Emperor's poisoners

have added so wine-like a flavour to their most secret draught, that no man may tell by this means which is their work and which that inestimable wine.

KING: I will send for my tasters and they shall taste of the cups.

AMBASSADOR: Alas, so great a risk may not be run.

KING: Risks are the duty of a king's tasters.

AMBASSADOR: If they chanced to taste of the treasure of the Emperor's poisoners—well. But if they, or *any* man of common birth, were to taste of the wine that the Emperor sends only to kings, and even to kings but rarely, that were an affront to the Emperor's ancient wine that could not be permitted.

KING: It is surely permitted that I send for my priests, who tell by divination, having burnt strange herbs to the gods that guard the Golden Isles.

AMBASSADOR: It is permitted.

KING: Send for the priests.

KING (*mainly to himself*): They shall discern. The priests shall make for me this dreadful choice. They shall burn herbs and discern it. (*To* AMBASSADOR.) My priests are very subtle. They worship the gods that guard the Golden Isles.

AMBASSADOR: The Emperor has other gods.

[*Enter L. two priests of the Order of the Sun. Two acolytes follow. One carries a tripod and the other a gong.*

[*The priests abase themselves and the acolytes bow. The* AMBASSADOR *stands with almost Mongolian calm by the door from which he has not moved since he entered.*

[*The impassive* NUBIAN *stands motionless near the* KING, *holding up the cups on a tray.*

KING: The Emperor has honoured me with these two cups of wine that I may drink one of them to the grandeur of his throne. I bid you importune the gods that they may surely tell me which it were well to drink.

FIRST PRIEST: We will importune the gods with the savour of rarest spices. We will send up to them the odour of herbs they love. We will commune with them in silence and they shall answer our thoughts, when they snuff the savour of the smoke of the burning on the tripod that is sacred to the Sun.

[*The calm of the* AMBASSADOR *and the impassivity of the* NUBIAN *grow ominous. The two priests hang over the tripod. They cast herbs upon it. They pass their hands over it. The herbs begin to smoulder. A smoke*

goes up. The priests bend over the smoke. Presently they step back from it.

FIRST PRIEST: The gods sleep.

KING: They sleep! The gods that guard the Golden Isles?

FIRST PRIEST: The gods sleep.

KING: Importune them as never before. I will make sacrifice of many sheep. I will give emeralds to the Monks of the Sun.

[*The second acolyte moves nearer to the tripod and beats listlessly on his great gong at about the pace of a great clock striking slowly.*

FIRST PRIEST: We will importune the gods as never before.

[*They heap up more herbs and spices. The smoke grows thicker and thicker. It streams upwards. They hover about it as before. At a sign the gong ceases.*

The gods have spoken.

KING: What is their message?

FIRST PRIEST: Drink of the cup upon the Nubian's left.

KING: Ah. My gods defend me.

[*He seizes the cup boldly. He looks straight at the* AMBASSADOR, *whose face remains expressionless, merely*

watching. He lifts the cup upon the Nubian's left a little up from the tray.

[*He glances towards the priests.*

[*Suddenly he starts. He has seen a strange expression upon the face of the priest. He puts the cup down. He strides a step nearer and looks at his face.*

PRIEST!—Priest!—— What is that look in your eyes?

FIRST PRIEST: O King, I know not. I have given the message of the gods.

[*The* KING *continues to search out his face.*

KING: I mistrust it.

FIRST PRIEST: It is the message of the gods.

KING: I will drink of the other cup!

[*The* KING *steps back to his place in the front of his throne where the Nubian stands beside him. He takes the cup upon the Nubian's right. He gazes at the priest. He looks round at the Ambassador, but sees nothing in that watchful, expressionless face.*

[*He glances sidelong at the priest, then drinks, draining the cup at some length. He puts it down in silence. The face of the Ambassador and the whole bulk of the Nubian remain motionless.*

KING: An inestimable wine!

AMBASSADOR: It is the Emperor's joy.

KING: Send for my Questioners.

[*There are weird whistles. Two dark men run on in loin clothes.*

Ask these two priests the Seven Questions.

[*The* QUESTIONERS *run nimbly up to the two priests and lead them away by the arm.*

THE TWO ACOLYTES: O, O, O. Oh, oh.

[*They show extreme horror. The* AMBASSADOR *bows to the King.*

KING: You do not leave us at once?

AMBASSADOR: I go back to the Emperor, whom it is happiness to obey, and length of days.

[*He bows and walks away. The* HERALD *marches out, then the* AMBASSADOR; *the* PAGE, *the* DWARF *and the* NUBIAN *follow.*

[*Exeunt.*

[*The* HERALD *is heard blowing upon his trumpet the same notes as when he entered, one merry bar of music.*

[*The tray and two precious cups, one empty and the other full, are left glittering near the* KING.

KING (*looking at cups*): Those are rare emeralds that glisten there! Yet an evil gift. (*To the moaning acolytes.*) Be silent! Your priests sinned strangely.

[*The acolytes continue to moan.*

[*Enter one of the* QUESTIONERS. *He has sweat on his face and his hair has become damp and unkempt.*

QUESTIONER: We have asked the Seven Questions.

KING: Well?

QUESTIONER: They have not answered.

KING: Not answered!

QUESTIONER: Neither man has confessed.

KING: Oho! Do I keep Questioners that bring me no answers?

QUESTIONERS: We questioned them to the uttermost.

KING: And neither man confessed?

QUESTIONER: They would not confess.

KING: Ask them the Supreme Question.

[*The acolytes break out into renewed moaning.*

QUESTIONER: It shall be asked, O King.

[*Exit* QUESTIONER. *The acolytes moan on.*

KING: They would have made me drink of a poisoned cup. I say there is poison in that cup. Your priests would have had me drink it. (*The acolytes only answer by moans.*) Bid them confess. Bid them confess their crime and why it was done, and the Supreme Question shall be spared them. (*The acolytes only*

answer by moans.) Strange! They have done strangely. (*To acolytes.*) Why has your priest spoken falsely? (*The acolytes only moan.*) Why has he spoken falsely in the name of the gods? (*The acolytes moan on.*) Be silent! Be silent! May I not question whom I will? (*To himself*). They prophesied falsely in the name of the gods.

[*Enter the* QUESTIONERS.

FIRST QUESTIONER: The Supreme Question is asked.

[*The acolytes suddenly cease moaning.*

KING: Well?

FIRST QUESTIONER: They would not answer.

KING: They would not answer the Supreme Question?

FIRST QUESTIONER: They spoke at last, but they would not answer the question. They would not confess.

KING: What said they at last?

FIRST QUESTIONER: O, the King's Majesty, they but spake idly.

KING: What said they?

FIRST QUESTIONER: O, the King's Majesty, they said nought fitting.

KING: They muttered so that no man heard them clearly?

FIRST QUESTIONER: They spake. But it was not fitting.

KING: Did they speak of small things happening long ago?

FIRST QUESTIONER: O, the King's Majesty, it was not fitting.

KING: What said they? Speak!

FIRST QUESTIONER: The man you gave to me, O King, said: "No man that knew the counsels of the gods, who alone see future things, would say the gods advised King Hamaran ill when they bade him drink out of a poisoned cup." Then I put the question straightly and he died.

KING: The gods! He said it was the gods! . . . And the other?

SECOND QUESTIONER: He also said the same, O the King's Majesty.

KING: Both said the same. They were questioned in different chambers?

FIRST QUESTIONER: In different chambers, O King. I questioned mine in the Red Chamber.

KING (*to* SECOND QUESTIONER): And yours?

SECOND QUESTIONER: In the Chamber of Rats.

KING: Begone!

[*Exeunt* QUESTIONERS.

So . . . It *was* the gods.

[*The acolytes are crouched upon the floor. He does not notice them since they ceased to moan.*

The gods! With what dark and dreadful thing have they clouded the future?

Well, I will face it! But what is it? Is it one of those things a strong man can bear? Or is it—— ?

The future is more terrible than the grave, that has its one secret only.

No man, he said, could say that the gods had advised me ill when they bade me drink out of a poisoned cup.

What have the gods seen? What dreadful work have they overlooked where Destiny sits alone, making evil years?

The gods, he said, who alone see future things.

Yes, I have known men who never were warned by the gods, and did not drink poison, and came upon evil days, suddenly like a ship upon rocks no mariner knows. Yes, poison to some of *them* would have been very precious.

The gods have warned me and I have not hearkened, and must go on alone: must enter that strange country of the future whose paths are so dark to man . . . to meet a doom there that the gods have seen.

The gods have seen it! How shall I thwart the gods? How fight against the shapers of the hills?

Would that I had been warned. Would I had heeded when they bade me drink of the cup the Ambassador said was poisoned,

[*Far off is heard that merry bar of music blown by the* AMBASSADOR'S HERALD *on his horn.*]

Is it too late?

There it stands yet with its green emeralds winking.

[*He clutches it and looks down into it.*

How like to wine it is, which is full of dreams. It is silent and dreamy like the gods, whose dreams we are.

Only a moment in their deathless minds: then the dream passes.

[*He lifts up his arm and drinks it seated upon his throne with his head back and the great cup before his face. The audience begin to wonder when he will put it down. Still he remains in the attitude of a drinker. The acolytes begin to peer eagerly. Still he remains upright with the great cup to his lips. The acolytes patter away and the* KING *is left alone.*

[*Enter the* KING'S POLITICIAN *hurriedly. He goes up to the* KING *and seizes his right arm and tries to drag the cup away from his lips, but the* KING *is rigid and his arm cannot be moved. He steps back lifting up his hands.*

POLITICIAN: Oh-h!

[*Exit. You hear him announcing solemnly*

King Hamaran . . . is dead!

[*A murmur is heard of men, at first mournful. It grows louder and louder and then breaks into these clear words.*

Zarabardes is King! Zarabardes is King!
Rejoice! Rejoice! Zarabardes is King!
Zarabardes! Zarabardes! Zarabardes!

CURTAIN.

THE FLIGHT OF THE QUEEN

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

The Prince of Zoon.
Prince Meliflor.
Queen Zoomzoomarma.
Lady Oozizi.
Oomuz, *a Common Soldier.*
The Glory of Ximenung.
The Overlord of Moomoomon.
Prince Huz.

THE FLIGHT OF THE QUEEN

Scene I

Time: June.

Scene: In the Palace of Zoorm; the Hall of the Hundred Princes.

The Princes sit at plain oaken tables with pewter mugs before them. They wear bright grass-green cloaks of silk; they might wear circlets of narrow silver with one large hyacinth petal rising from it at intervals of an inch.

Oomuz, *a Common Soldier, huge and squat, with brown skin and dense black beard, stands just inside the doorway, holding a pike, guarding the golden treasure.*

The golden treasure lies in a heap three or four feet high near the right back corner.

Sentries, *also brown-skinned and bearded, carrying pikes, pass and repass outside the great doorway.*

The Glory of Ximenung: Heigho, Moomoomon.

The Overlord of Moomoomon: Heigho, Glory of Ximenung.

Ximenung: Weary?

Moomoomon: Aye, weary.

ANOTHER: Heigho.

PRINCE MELIFLOR (*sympathetically*): What wearies you?

MOOMOOMON: The idle hours and the idle days. Heigho.

OTHERS: Heigho.

MELIFLOR: Speak not against the idle hours, Moomoomon.

MOOMOOMON: Why then, lord of the sweet lands?

MELIFLOR: Because in idleness are all things, all things good.

XIMENUNG: Heigho, I am weary of the idle hours.

MOOMOOMON: You would work then?

XIMENUNG: No-o. That is not our destiny.

MELIFLOR: Let us be well contented with our lot. The idle hours are our sacred treasure.

XIMENUNG: Yes, I am well contented, and yet . . .

MOOMOOMON (*contemplatively*): And yet . . .

XIMENUNG: I sometimes dream that were it not for our glorious state, and this tradition of exalted ease, it might, it might be pleasant . . .

MOOMOOMON: To toil, to labour, to raid the golden hoards.

XIMENUNG: Yes, Moomoomon.

MELIFLOR: Never! Never!

OTHERS: No. No. No.

ANOTHER: And yet . . .

MELIFLOR: No, never. We should lose our glorious ease, the heritage that none may question.

XIMENUNG: What heritage is that, Prince Meliflor?

MELIFLOR: It is all the earth. To labour is to lose it.

MOOMOOMON: If we could toil we should gain some spot of earth that our labour would seem to make our own. How happily the workers come home at evening.

MELIFLOR: It would be to lose all.

PRINCE OF ZOON: How lose it, Meliflor?

MELIFLOR: To us alone the idle hours are given. The sky, the fields, the woods, the summer winds are for us alone. All others put the earth to uses. This or that field has this or that use; here one may go and another may not. They have each their bit of earth and become slaves to its purpose. But for us, ah! for us, is all; the gift of the idle hours.

SOME: Hurrah! Hurrah for the idle hours.

ZOON: Heigho. The idle hours weary me.

MELIFLOR: They give us all the earth and sky to contemplate. Both are for us.

MOOMOOMON: True. Let us drink, and speak of the blue sky.

MELIFLOR (*lifting mug*): And all our glorious heritage.

XIMENUNG (*putting hand to mug*): Aye, it is glorious, and yet . . .

[*Enter the* RAIDERS *of the Golden Hoard with spears and, in the other hand, leather wallets the size of your fist; these they cast on the heap. Nuggets the size of big filberts escape from some so that the heap is partly leather and partly gold. These wallets should be filled with nuggets of lead, about the size described, not one lump of lead and not sawdust or rags. Nothing destroys illusion on the stage more than a cannon ball falling with a soft pat. They look scowlingly at the Princes.*

[*Exeunt the* RAIDERS. *The Princes have scarcely noticed them.*

MELIFLOR: See how they waste the hours.

XIMENUNG: They have brought treasure from the Golden Hoard.

ZOON: Yes, from the Golden Hoard beyond the marshes. I went there once with old brown Oomuz there.

MELIFLOR: Of what avail is it to come back burdened thus? Has not the Queen more wealth than she'll ever need?

MOOMOOMON: Aye, the Queen needs nothing more.

ZOON: How can we know that?

MOMOOMON: Why not?

ZOON: The Queen obeys old impulses. Her sires are dead. Who knows whence those impulses come? How can we say what they are?

MOOMOOMON: She cannot need more wealth than what is here.

MELIFLOR: No, no, she cannot.

ZOON: She needs more, for she has bidden them go again to the Golden Hoards. Her impulses have demanded it.

MOOMOOMON: Then there is no reason in her impulses.

ZOON: They do not come from reason.

MOOMOOMON: So I said.

ZOON: They come from Fate.

MOOMOOMON: From Fate!

[*There is a hush at this.* OOMUZ *comes nearer and kneels down.*

OOMUZ: Oh, Masters, Masters. If there be anything greater, greater than the Queen, speak not of it, Masters, speak not its name.

ZOON: No, Oomuz. We need nothing greater.

OOMUZ: The name frightened me, Mighty Highness.

ZOON: Yes, yes, Oomuz; there is only the Queen.

MOOMOOMON: No, there is nothing greater than the Queen, and she has no need of anything more than the treasure that he guards there.

OOMUZ: There is one thing more.

MOOMOOMON: More? What is that?

OOMUZ: There is one thing more. The Queen needs one thing more. This has been told us and we know.

MOOMOOMON: What is it?

OOMUZ: How should we know that? None knows the need of the Queen.

[OOMUZ *returns to guard his heap.*

ZOON: What think you, Oomuz? What think you is this need of the Queen?

[OOMUZ *shakes his head about three times.* PRINCE OF ZOON *sighs.*

SEVERAL PRINCES (*together wearily*): Heigho.

MELIFOR: Take comfort in our heritage, illustrious comrades. Come! We will drink to the sun.

SOME: To the sun! To the sun! (*They drink.*)

MELIFLOR: To the golden idle hours! (*He drinks.*) Let us be worthy, glorious companions, of our exalted calling. Let us enjoy the days of idleness. Sing to us, mighty one of Zoon, as the idle hours go by. Sing us a song.

MOOMOOMON (*idly*): Yes, sing to us.

ZOON: As you all know, I can but hum. But I will hum you a song that I heard yesterday; very strange it was; sung in the meadows by two that were not of our people; sung in the evening. I heard it as I loitered home from the meadows beyond the marshes. There is no ease in the song, and yet . . .

MOOMOOMON: Hum it to us.

ZOON: They sang it together, the two that were not of our people.

[*He hums a song. They all lift up their heads from their listlessness.*

MELIFLOR (*wonderingly*): That is a song that is new.

ZOON: Yes, it is new to me.

MELIFLOR: It is like an old song.

ZOON: Yes, perhaps it is old.

MELIFLOR: What is the song?

ZOON: It tells of love.

THE PRINCES: Ah-h!

[*They seem to wake as though young and strong out of sleep. There is a great commotion among them. The sentries outside are utterly unmoved.* OOMUZ, *without sharing any of the excitement of the Princes, now nods his head solemnly as he had once shaken it.*

MOOMOOMON: Love! It must have been that that I felt that day in the twilight as I came

back round the peak of Zing-gee Mountain.

XIMENUNG: You felt it, Moomoomon? Tell us.

MOOMOOMON: All the air seemed gold, seemed gold of a sudden. Through it I saw fair fields, glittering green far down, glimpsed between clumps of the heather. The gold was all about them, yet they shone with their own fair colours. Ah, how can I tell you all I saw? My feet seemed scarce to touch the slope of the mountain; I too seemed one with the golden air in which all things were shining.

XIMENUNG: And this was Love?

MOOMOOMON: I know not. It was some strange new thing. It was strange and new like this song.

MELIFLOR: Perhaps, it was some other strange new thing.

MOOMOOMON: Perhaps. I know not.

ZOON: No. It was Love.

MOOMOOMON: And then that evening in the golden light I knew the purpose of Earth and why all things are.

XIMENUNG: What is the purpose, Moomoomon?

MOOMOOMON: I know not. I was content. I troubled not to remember.

ZOON: It was love.

XIMENUNG: Let us love.

OTHERS: Aye.

HUZ: Aye, that is best of all.

MELIFLOR: No, Princes. The best is idleness. Out of the idle hours all good things come.

HUZ: I will love. That is best.

MELIFLOR: It is like all things, the gift of the idle hours. The workers never love. Their fancies are fastened to the work they do, and do not roam towards love.

ALL: Love! Let us love.

MELIFLOR: We will love in idleness and praise the idle hours.

XIMENUNG: Whom will you love, lord of the shimmering fields?

MELIFLOR: I have but to show myself loitering by lanes in the evening.

XIMENUNG: I too will be there.

MELIFLOR: And when they see me . . .

XIMENUNG: They will see me too . . .

MELIFLOR (*rising*): Behold me.

XIMENUNG: So I do.

MELIFLOR: Will they look towards you when this is there?

XIMENUNG: Are birch-trees seen at dawn fairer than I?

MELIFLOR: Behold me; not a poplar is straighter,

not a flower is fairer. I will loiter along the lanes at evening.

[*He draws his sword.* XIMENUNG *does the same.* MOOMOOMON *draws his too and places it between them.*

MOOMOOMON: Be at peace. *I* will go to the lanes, and there need be no quarrel between you, for *I* . . . .

OTHERS: No, no, no . . . .

HUZ: We will all go.

ANOTHER: We will all love. Hurrah for love.

[*They have all risen. They wave their swords on high, not threatening each other. Zoon alone has not risen.*

MOOMOOMON (*to* ZOON): You do not speak, Prince of Zoon. Will you not love along the idle hours?

ZOON: Yes, yes. I love.

MOOMOOMON: Come then to the lanes to loiter. It draws towards evening. Let us all come to the lanes, where the honeysuckle is hanging.

ZOON: I love not in the lanes.

MOOMOOMON: Not in the lanes? Then . . . !

OTHERS: Not in the lanes?

ZOON: I love her than whom there is no greater on earth—(*Some* PRINCES: Ah!) unless it be that name that frightens Oomuz.

MOOMOOMON: He loves the . . . !

XIMENUNG: The . . .

MELIFLOR: The Queen!

[OOMUZ *nods his head again.*

ZOON: The Queen.

MOOMOOMON: If the Queen knew such a thing she would flee from the palace.

ZOON: I would pursue.

MOOMOOMON: She would go by Aether Mountain, where her mother went once before her.

ZOON: I would follow.

HUZ: We would all follow.

MELIFLOR: I would follow too. I would dance after her down the little street: the bright heels of my shoes would twinkle: my cloak would float out behind me: I would pursue her and call her name, beyond the street and over the moor as far as Aether Mountain: but I would not come up with her: that would be *too* daring.

ZOON: Love is not a toy, Prince Meliflor. Love is no less than a mood of Destiny.

MELIFLOR: Pooh! We must enjoy the idle hours that are for us alone.

ZOON: There will be no idle hours on Aether Mountain, following from crag to crag; if it be true that she would go that way.

MOOMOOMON: It is true. They know it. They say her mother went that way before. It is one of the royal impulses.

ZOON: Oomuz, did the mother of the Queen go once up Aether Mountain?

OOMUZ: Aye, and *her* mother.

ZOON: It is true.

XIMENUNG: You are sure of this?

OOMUZ: We know it. It has been said.

HUZ: We will all follow her up Aether Mountain.

MELIFLOR: We will follow merrily.

XIMENUNG: If we did this what would they do when we returned?

MELIFLOR: Who?

XIMENUNG: They.

MELIFLOR: They? They would not dare to speak to *us*.

XIMENUNG: Who knows what they would dare if we dared go after the Queen?

MOOMOOMON: They would dare nothing, knowing whence we come.

XIMENUNG: They care not whence we come.

MOOMOOMON: But they care for the event that is in our hands. They dare never touch us because of the event.

MELIFLOR: We are the heirs of the idle hours. For them is work. Surely they dare not leave their work to touch us.

MOOMOOMON: They care only for the event. Because it is prophesied that we are needed for the event we are sacred. Were it not for the event, why . . .

MELIFLOR: Were it not for the event we might not dare to do it; but, being sacred, let us enjoy our idle hours.

XIMENUNG: What if the event should one day befall?

MELIFLOR: It was prophesied long ago and has not come. It will not come for a long time.

MOOMOOMON: No, not for a long time.

[*A sentry passes.*

MELIFLOR: So we will follow the Queen.

HUZ: Yes, we will follow.

MOOMOOMON: We shall be a merry company.

MELIFLOR: Splendid to see.

ZOON: I would follow though I were not guarded for the event. Though the event should befall and we be immune no longer, still I should dare it.

MELIFLOR: I would dare it if I knew what they would do. But knowing not . . .

MOOMOOMON: What matter? We are guarded by the event.

ZOON: I say I care not.

MELIFLOR: Let us drum with our heels and beat with our scabbards against the benches so that we frighten the Queen. She will run from the palace then, and we will go after her with all our merry company.

MOOMOOMON: Yes, let us drum all together. I will give the word. All together and she will

run from the palace. We will go after and our cloaks will stream behind us.

HUZ: Brave! And our scabbards will show bright beneath them.

MELIFLOR: No, I will give the word. When she flees from the palace I will follow her first. Crowd not about my cloak as it streams in the wind. We must throw up our heels as we run to make our shoes twinkle. We must show gaily in the little street. Afterwards we can run more easily.

HUZ: Aye, in the street we must run beautifully

MOOMOOMON: I think that I should give the word when we rattle our scabbards and all drum with our heels; but I waive the point. But I do not think that the Queen can run far. She has never left the palace. How could she run over the moor as far as Aether Mountain. She will faint at the end of the street and we shall come up with her and bow and offer her our assistance.

MELIFLOR: Good, good. It would be cold and rocky on Aether Mountain.

MOOMOOMON: The Queen could never go there over the moor.

HUZ: No, she is too dainty.

XIMENUNG: They say she could.

MELIFLOR: They; what do they know? Common

workers. What should they know of queens ?

XIMENUNG : They have the old prophesies that came over the fields from the dawn.

MELIFLOR : Yet they cannot understand the Queen.

XIMENUNG : They say her mother went there.

MELIFLOR : That was long ago. Women are quite different now.

XIMENUNG : Well, give the word.

MELIFLOR : Nay. You shall give the word, Moomoomon. When you raise your hand we will all drum with our heels together and rattle our scabbards together, and frighten the Queen.

MOOMOOMON : I honour your courtesy, lord of the deep meadows.

MELIFLOR : We are ready then. When you raise your hand——

[*A gust of laughter is heard off, from a far part of the palace.*

MOOMOOMON : Hark ! Hark !

MELIFLOR : It is the Queen ! She laughed.

HUZ : Could she have guessed . . . ?

MOOMOOMON : I trust not.

MELIFLOR : She—she—cannot have been thinking of *us*.

MOOMOOMON : She—she—seldom laughs.

HUZ : What can it be ?

MOOMOOMON: Perhaps it was nothing and yet . . .

MELIFLOR: Yet it makes me uneasy.

MOOMOOMON: It is not that I fear, but, when a queen laughs—it makes a feeling in the palace—as though all were not well.

HUZ: It makes one have forebodings. One cannot help it.

MELIFLOR: Perhaps; perhaps later we could return to our gallant scheme; for the present I think I'll hide a while.

MOOMOOMON: Yes, let us hide.

MELIFLOR: So that if there be anything wrong in the palace it will not find us.

[*Exeunt* MOOMOOMON *and* MELIFLOR.

HUZ: Let us hide.

[*Exeunt all but* ZOON *and* OOMUZ.

[ZOON *has sat always with bent head at table. He sits so, still.*

ZOON (*bitterly*): They would follow the Queen.

OOMUZ: Mighty Highness——

ZOON (*still to himself*): They will come back boasting that they dared follow the Queen.

OOMUZ: Mighty Highness.

ZOON: Yes, good Oomuz.

OOMUZ: In other times once princes followed a queen and came back boasting. Master, the workers were angry. Be warned, Master, because you and I went together

once to the hoard beyond the marshes. Be warned. They were angry, Master.

ZOON: I care not for the workers.

OOMUZ: Master, be warned. It was long ago and they say they were very angry.

ZOON: I care not, Oomuz. I come not boasting back from the hills under Aether Mountain. I shall not halt till I have told the Queen my love. I shall wed with her who is less only than Fate, if less she be. I am not as those, Oomuz. Who weds the Queen is more than the servant of Fate.

OOMUZ: Master——

[*He stretches out his hands towards* ZOON *imploringly.*

ZOON: Well, Oomuz?

OOMUZ: Master. There is a doom about the Queen.

ZOON: What doom, Oomuz?

OOMUZ: We know not, Master. We are simple people and we know not that. But we know from of old there is a doom about her. We know it, Master; we have been told from of old.

ZOON: Yes, there could well be a doom about the Queen.

OOMUZ: Follow not after, Master, when she goes to Aether Mountain. There is surely a doom about her. A doom was with her mother upon that very peak.

ZOON: Yes, Oomuz, a doom well becomes her.

OOMUZ: Doubt it not, Master; there is a doom about her.

ZOON: Oomuz, I doubt not. For there is something wonderful about the Queen, beyond all earthly wonders. Something like thunder beyond far clouds or hail hurling from heaven; there should be indeed a terrible doom about her.

OOMUZ: Master, I have warned you for the sake of the days when we raided the golden hoard beyond the marshes.

ZOON (*taking his hand*): Thank you, good Oomuz.

[*He goes towards door after the others.*

OOMUZ: But where go you, Master?

ZOON: I wait to follow the Queen when she goes to Aether Mountain.

[*Exit.* OOMUZ *weeps silently on to the Queen's Treasure.*

CURTAIN.

Scene II

The Palace of Zoorm: the Hall of Queen Zoom-zoomarma.
Time: Same as Scene I.

The Queen: Is none worthy to kiss my hand, Oozizi; none?

Lady Oozizi: Lady, none.

[*The* Queen *sighs.*

You should not sigh, great lady.

Queen: Why should I not sigh, Oozizi?

Oozizi: Great lady, because such things as sighs pertain only to love.

Queen: Love is a joy, Oozizi; love is a glow. Love makes them dance so lightly along rays of the sunlight. It is made of sunlight and gladness. It is like flowers in twilight. How should they sigh?

Oozizi: Lady! Great lady! Say not such things of love!

Queen: Say not such things, Oozizi? Are they not true?

Oozizi: True? Yes, great lady, true. But love is a toy of the humble; love is a common thing that the lowly use; love is . . . Great lady, had any overheard you

speaking then they might have thought, they might have madly dreamed . . .

QUEEN: Dreamed what, Oozizi?

OOZIZI: Incredible things.

QUEEN (*meditatively*): I must not love, Oozizi.

OOZIZI: Lady! The common people love.

[*She points to door.*

Lady, the green fields going from here to the blueness, and bending towards it, and going wandering on, and the rivers they meet and the woods that shade the rivers, all own you for their sovereign. Lady, a million lime-trees mellow your realm. The golden hoards are yours. Yours are the deep fields and the iris marshes. Yours are the roads of wandering and all ways home. The common delights of love your mere soldiers know. Lady, you may not love.

[*The* QUEEN *sighs.* OOZIZI *continues her knitting.*

QUEEN: My mother loved, Oozizi.

OOZIZI: Lady, for a day. For one day, mighty lady. As one might stoop in idleness to a broken toy and pick it up and throw it again away, so she loved for a day. That idle fancy of an afternoon tarnished no pinnacle that shone from her exalted station. But to love for more than a day—(QUEEN'S *face lights up*)—that were

to place your high unequalled glory below a vulgar pastime. One alone may sit in the golden palace to reign over the green fields; but all may love.

QUEEN: Do all love but I, Oozizi?

OOZIZI: Wondrous many, lady.

QUEEN: How know you, Oozizi?

OOZIZI: The common shouts that come up at evening, the clamour of the lanes; they are but from love.

QUEEN: What is love, Oozizi?

OOZIZI: Love is a foolish thing.

QUEEN: How know you, Oozizi?

OOZIZI: They came tittering to me once; but I saw the foolishness of it.

QUEEN (*a little sadly*): And they came no more?

OOZIZI (*a little sadly too*): No more.

[*Both look thoughtfully out into dreams, the* QUEEN *on her throne, chin on hand.*

[*Suddenly a stir is heard from the Hall of the Hundred Princes.*

QUEEN (*alarmed*): Hark! What was that?

OOZIZI (*rises, listening anxiously*): It sounded . . . . to come from the Hall . . . . of the Hundred Princes.

QUEEN: They were never heard here before.

OOZIZI: Lady, never.

QUEEN (*anxiously*): What can it mean?

OOZIZI : I know not, lady.

QUEEN : Sound never troubled our inner chamber before.

OOZIZI : All is quiet now.

QUEEN : Hark ! (*They listen.*)

OOZIZI : All is quiet.

QUEEN : Sound from beyond our wall, Oozizi. How it disturbs. I could not rule over the green fields if sounds came up to me from the further halls full of their strange thoughts. Why do sounds come to me, Oozizi ?

OOZIZI : Great lady, it has never been before. It will never be again. You must forget it, lady. You must not let it disturb your reign.

QUEEN : It brought strange thoughts with it, Oozizi.

OOZIZI : All is quiet now.

QUEEN : If it came again . . . .

OOZIZI : Lady, it will not come again. It will come no more. It is quiet.

QUEEN : If it came again . . . Is the door open, Oozizi ? Yes . . . If it came again I should almost flee from the palace.

OOZIZI : Lady ! Think not of leaving the golden palace !

QUEEN : If it came again.

OOZIZI : It will not come again.

[*The heels of the Princes drum louder, off.*

QUEEN : Again, Oozizi :

[OOZIZI *pants.* *The* QUEEN *waits, listening, in fear. Again the heels are heard.*

[*The* QUEEN *runs to the small door. She looks out.*

OOZIZI : Lady ! Lady !

QUEEN : Oozizi.

OOZIZI : Lady ! Lady ! You must never leave the palace. You must never leave it. You must not.

QUEEN : Hark, it is quiet now.

OOZIZI : Lady, it would be terrible to leave the golden palace. Who would reign ? What would happen ?

QUEEN : It is quiet now. What would happen, Oozizi ?

OOZIZI : The world would end.

QUEEN : It is quiet now ; perhaps I need not fly.

OOZIZI : Lady, you must not.

QUEEN : And yet I would fain go over those green fields all gleaming with summer, and see the golden hoards that no man guards, glittering with such a light as glows this June.

OOZIZI : O, speak not, great lady, of the green fields and June. It is these that have intoxicated the Princes so that they do

this unrecorded thing, letting sound of them be heard in your sacred room.

QUEEN: Has June intoxicated them, Oozizi?

OOZIZI: Oh, lady, speak not of June.

QUEEN: Is June so terrible?

[*She returns towards* OOZIZI.

OOZIZI: It does strange things.

[*The noise breaks out again.*

Hark!

[*The* QUEEN *runs to the door again.* OOZIZI *stretches out her arms to the* QUEEN.

O, lady, never leave the golden palace.

[*The* QUEEN *listens; all is silent; she looks outside.*

QUEEN: I see the green fields gleaming. Strange flowers are standing among them, like princes I have not known.

OOZIZI: Oh, lady, speak not of the bewildering fields. They are all enchanted with Summer, and they have maddened the Princes. It is dangerous to look at them, lady.

[*The* QUEEN *gazes on over the fields.*

And yet you look.

QUEEN: I would fain go far over the strange soft fields; far and far to the high heathery lands——

OOZIZI: Lady, all is quiet; there is no danger; you must not leave the palace.

QUEEN: Yes, all is quiet.

[*The* QUEEN *returns.*

OOZIZI: It was a passing madness seized the Princes.

QUEEN: Oozizi, when I hear the sound of all their feet it is dreadful, and I must fly. And when I see the wonderful fields in the sunlight sloping away to lands I have never known, then I long to fly away and away for ever. passing from field to field and land to land.

OOZIZI: Lady, no, no!

QUEEN: Oozizi.

OOZIZI: Yes, great lady.

QUEEN: There is a mountain there that towers above the earth. It goes up into a calm of which our world knows nothing. Heaven, like a cloak, is draped about its shoulders. Why have none told me of this mountain, Oozizi?

OOZIZI (*awed*): Aether Mountain.

QUEEN: Why has none told me?

OOZIZI: When your glorious mother, lady, loved for a day . . .

QUEEN: Yes, Oozizi . . .

OOZIZI: She went, as all songs tell, to Aether Mountain.

QUEEN (*entranced*): To Aether Mountain?

OOZIZI: So they sing at evening, when they throw down their loads of gold and rest.

QUEEN: To Aether Mountain.

OOZIZI: Lady, Destiny sent her; but you must not go. You must not leave your throne to go to Aether Mountain.

QUEEN: There is a calm upon it not of earth.

OOZIZI: You must not go, lady, you must not go.

QUEEN: I will not go.

[*The Princes drum again, still louder with their heels.*

Hark!

[OOZIZI *is frightened. The* QUEEN *runs to the door.*

It is louder! They are nearer! They are coming here!

OOZIZI: No, lady. They would not dare!

QUEEN: I must go, Oozizi; I must go.

OOZIZI: No, lady. They will never dare. You must not. Hark! They come no nearer. June has maddened them, but they come no nearer. They are quiet now. Come back, lady. Leave the door, they come no nearer. See, it is all quiet now. They come no nearer, lady. (OOZIZI *catches her by the sleeve.*) Lady, you must not.

QUEEN (*much calmer, gazing away*): Oozizi, I must go.

OOZIZI: No, no, lady! All is quiet; you must not go.

QUEEN (*calmly*): It is calling for me, Oozizi.

OOZIZI: What is calling, lady? Nothing calls.

QUEEN: It is calling, Oozizi.

OOZIZI: Oh, lady, all is silent. No one calls.

QUEEN: It is calling for me now, Oozizi.

OOZIZI: No, no, lady. What calls?

QUEEN: Aether Mountain is calling. I know now who called my mother. It was Aether Mountain, Oozizi; he is calling.

OOZIZI: I—I scarce dare look out of the golden palace, lady, to where we must not go. Yet, yet I will look. (*She peers.*) Yes, yes, indeed; there stands old Aether Mountain. But he does not call. Indeed he does not call. He is all silent in Heaven.

QUEEN: It is his voice, Oozizi.

OOZIZI: What, lady? I hear no voice.

QUEEN: That great, great silence is his voice, Oozizi. He is calling me out of that blue waste of Heaven.

OOZIZI: Lady, I cannot understand.

QUEEN: He calls, Oozizi.

OOZIZI: Come away, lady. It is bad to look so long. Oh, if the Princes had not made their clamour heard! Oh, if they had not you had not gone to the door and seen

Aether Mountain, and this trouble had not come. Oh! Oh! Oh!

QUEEN: There is no trouble upon Aether Mountain.

OOZIZI: Oh, lady, it is terrible that you should leave the palace.

QUEEN: There is no trouble there. Aether Mountain goes all calm into Heaven. His grey-blue slopes are calm as the sky about him. There he stands calling. He is calling to me, Oozizi.

OOZIZI (*reflecting*): Can it be?

QUEEN: What would you ask, Oozizi?

OOZIZI: Can it be that it is with you, great lady, as it was with the Queen, your mother, when Destiny sent her hence to Aether Mountain?

QUEEN: Aether Mountain calls.

OOZIZI: Lady, for a moment hear me. Come with me but a little while.

[*She leads the* QUEEN *slowly by the arm back to the throne.*

Lady, be seated here once more and take up the orb and sceptre in your small hands as of old.

[*The* QUEEN *patiently does as she is told.*

Now, if Destiny calls you, let him call to you as to a Queen. Now, if it be for no whim of those that pass, that you would go so far from here to that great moun-

tain, say, seated upon your throne in the golden palace with sceptre and orb in hand, say would you go forth, lady ?

QUEEN (*almost dreaming*) : Aether Mountain calls.

[OOZIZI *bursts into tears. She helps the* QUEEN *by the arm from her throne and leads her part of the way to the door. There she stops. The* QUEEN *goes on to the door alone.*

OOZIZI : Farewell, lady.

[*The* QUEEN *gazes out rapturously towards Aether Mountain. Then she walks back and embraces Oozizi.*

QUEEN : Farewell, Oozizi.

OOZIZI : Farewell, great lady.

[*The* QUEEN *turns, then suddenly she runs swiftly and nimbly through the door and disappears.*

[*At once there is a murmur of voices from the Hall of the Hundred Princes.*

VOICES (*off*) : Ah, ah, ah.

[OOZIZI *stands still weeping.*

[*Enter the Princes, exquisite and frivolous. They crowd past each other.*

MELIFLOR : And where is our little Queen ?

[OOZIZI *answers with a defiant look through her tears, which has its effect on them.*

MOOMOOMON (*foppishly*) : There, there.

XIMENUNG: Gone!

MELIFLOR: Come! Let us follow.

MOOMOOMON: Shall we?

SEVERAL: Yes.

MOOMOOMON: Come.

[*They stream across from the side door R to the door in back,* OOZIZI *regarding them haughtily.*

OOZIZI (*menacingly*): It is Aether Mountain.

[*Entranced, silent, last of all* ZOON *follows. Exeunt all the Princes. Sounds as of rough protest heard from the workers off. The grim brown heads of two or three peer round the door by which the Princes entered. Many come on, dumb, puzzled, turning their brown heads, searching. At last they cluster round* OOZIZI.

"Er"? *they say.*

OOZIZI: Aether Mountain has called her.

[*They nod dumb heads gravely.*

CURTAIN.

Scene III

On the base of Aether Mountain.
Right, heather sloping up to left, which is rugged with tumbled grey rocks.
Further left all the scene is filled with the rising bulk of Aether Mountain.
Low down, far off and small in the background to the right appears a little palace of pure gold.
Enter right the Queen *running untired and nimble, unchecked by those grey rocks.*
Following her the tired Princes *come.*
Zoon *is no longer last, but about fourth, and gaining.*
Meliflor *leads.*

Meliflor: Permit me, great lady. My hand over the rocks. Permit . . .

[*He falls and cannot rise.*

Moomoomon: Permit me. (*He falls too.*) These rocks; it is these rocks.

Ximenung (*going wearily*): Great lady. A moment. One moment, great lady. Allow me.

[*But* Zoon *does not speak. Exeunt L. the Queen and those Princes that have not fallen. The curtain falls on stragglers crossing the stage.*

CURTAIN.

Scene IV

The Summit.

On the snow on the pinnacle of Aether Mountain, with only bright blue sky all round and everywhere, recline Queen Zoomzoomarma *and the* Prince of Zoon.

The Queen : You had known no love before, First of a Hundred ?

Prince of Zoon : There is no love on earth, O Queen of all.

Queen : Only here.

Zoon : Pure love is only here on this peak lonely in heaven.

Queen : Would you love me elsewhere if we went from here ?

Zoon : But we will never go from here.

Queen : No, we will never leave it.

Zoon : Lady, look down. (*She looks.*) The earth is sorrowful. (*She sighs.*) Cares. Cares. All over the wide surface we can see are troubles ; troubles far off and grey, that harm not Aether Mountain.

Queen : It looks a long way off and long ago.

ZOON (*wonderingly*): Only to-day we came to Aether Mountain.

QUEEN: Only to-day?

ZOON: We crossed a gulf of time.

QUEEN: It lies below us, all drowsy with years.

ZOON: Lady, here is your home, this peak that has entered heaven. Let us never leave your home.

QUEEN: I knew not until to-day of Aether Mountain. None had told me.

ZOON: Knew you never, lady, of love?

QUEEN: None had told me.

ZOON: This is your home; not Earth; no golden palace. Reign here alone, not knowing the cares of men, without yesterday or to-morrow, untroubled by history or council.

QUEEN: Yes, yes, we will return no more.

ZOON: See, lady, see the Earth. Is it not as a dream just faded?

QUEEN: It is dim indeed, grey and dream-like.

ZOON: It is the Earth we knew.

QUEEN: It is all dream-like.

ZOON: It is gone; we can dimly see it.

QUEEN: Was it a dream?

ZOON: Perhaps. It is gone now and does not matter.

QUEEN: Poor Earth. I hope it was real.

ZOON (*seizing her hand*): Oh, Zoomzoomarma, say not you hope that Earth was real. It is gone now. See; it is so far away. Sigh not for Earth, oh lady, sigh not for Earth.

QUEEN: Why not, King of Aether Mountain?

ZOON: Because when you sigh for tiny things I tremble for your love. See how faint and small it is and how far away.

QUEEN: I do not sigh for Earth, King of the Mountain. I only wish it well.

ZOON: Oh, wish it not well, lady.

QUEEN: Let us wish the poor Earth well.

ZOON: No, lady, no. Be with me always wholly, living not partly in dreams. There is no Earth. It is but a dream that left us. See, see (*pointing down*) it is a dim dream.

QUEEN (*looking down*): The people move there still. See, there is Prince Ximenung. Something down there seems almost unlike dreams.

ZOON: No, lady, it cannot be.

QUEEN: How know you, Lord of the Mountain?

ZOON: It was too unreal for life. Love was not there. Surely it was a dream.

QUEEN: Yes, I knew not love in the golden palace of Zoorm.

ZOON: Then indeed it was unreal, Golden Lady. Forget the dream of Earth.

QUEEN : If love be real . . .

ZOON : Can you doubt it ?

QUEEN : No. It was a dream. Just now I dreamt it. Are dreams bad, my Prince ?

ZOON : No. They are just dreams.

QUEEN : We will think of dreams no more.

ZOON : This is where love is, and here only. We should not dream too much or think of dreams, because the place is holy.

QUEEN : Is love here only, darling ?

ZOON : Here only, Golden Queen. Do any others elsewhere love as we.

QUEEN : No, I think not.

ZOON : Then how can pure love be elsewhere ?

QUEEN : It is true.

ZOON : On this clear peak that just enters Heaven love is and only here. The rest is dreams.

QUEEN : Could we awake from love and find Earth true ?

ZOON : No, no, no. Sweet Lady, let not such fancies alarm you.

QUEEN : And yet folks wake from dreams. It would be terrible.

ZOON : No, no, there are things too real for dreams. You cannot waken from love. Dreams are of fantastic things, things fanciful and weak, and things confused and intricate like Earth. When you think

of them in your dreams you see their unreality. But if love were not real what could there be to wake to.

QUEEN: True. How wise you are. It was but a fancy that troubled me. (*Looking down.*) It was one of those dreams at dawn. It is faint and far-off now.

ZOON: Will you love me for ever, Golden Queen?

QUEEN: For ever. Why not? You will love me for ever?

ZOON: For ever. I cannot help it.

QUEEN: Let us look at the dream far off, in the dimness our thoughts have forsaken.

ZOON: Aye, let us look. It was a sad dream somewhat; and yet upon this peak where all is love all that we see seems happy.

QUEEN: See the dream there. Look at those. They seem to walk dreamily as they walk in the dream.

ZOON: It is because they have not love, which is only here.

QUEEN: Look! Look at those dreamers in the dream.

ZOON: They are running.

QUEEN: Oh! Look!

ZOON: They are pursued.

QUEEN: The brown ones are pursuing them with spears.

ZOON: It is Prince Meliflor, Prince Moomoomon,

Prince Ximenung that run in the dream. And the Prince of Huz. The brown men are close.

QUEEN: The brown ones are overtaking them.

ZOON: Yes, they are closer.

QUEEN: Look! Prince Ximenung!

ZOON: Yes, he is dead in the dream.

QUEEN: The Prince of Huz?

ZOON: Speared.

QUEEN: Still, still they are killing them.

ZOON: It is all the Hundred Princes.

QUEEN: They are killing them all.

ZOON: A sad sight once.

QUEEN: Once?

ZOON: I should have wept once.

QUEEN: It is so far off now.

ZOON: It is so far, far off. We can only feel joy upon this holy mountain.

QUEEN: Only joy. (*He sighs as he looks.*) Look! (*He sighs again.*)

ZOON: There falls the poor Prince Meliflor.

QUEEN: How huge a thrust it was with the great spear.

ZOON: He is dead.

QUEEN: Are you not happy?

ZOON: Yes.

QUEEN: In your voice there seemed to sound some

far-off thing. Some strange thing. Was it sorrow ?

ZOON : No ; we are too high ; sorrow cannot come. No grief can touch us here, no woe drift up to us from the woes of Earth.

QUEEN : I thought there was some strange thing in your voice, like sorrows we have dreamed.

ZOON : No, Golden Queen. Those fancied sorrows of dreams cannot touch reality.

QUEEN : You will never be sorry we have woken and left the dream of Earth ?

ZOON : No, glorious lady ; nothing can bring me trouble ever again.

QUEEN : Not even I ?

ZOON : Never you, my Golden Zoomzoomarma, for on this sacred peak where there is only love you cannot.

QUEEN : We will dwell here for ever in endless joy.

ZOON (*looking down*) : All dead now, all the Princes.

QUEEN : Turn, my Prince, from the dream of Earth, lest trouble come up from it.

ZOON : It cannot drift up here ; yet we will turn from the dream.

QUEEN : Let us think of endless joy upon the edge of heaven.

ZOON : Yes, Queen ; for ever in reality while all else dream away.

QUEEN: It is the years that make them drowsy. They dream to dream the years away. Time cannot reach so high as here, the years are far below us.

ZOON: Far below us, making a dream and troubling it.

QUEEN: They do not know in the dream that only love is real.

ZOON: If time could reach us here we should pass, too. Nothing is real where time is.

QUEEN: How shall we spend the calm that time does not vex, together here for ever?

ZOON: Holding your hand. (*She gives it.*) And kissing it often in the calm of eternity. Sometimes watching, a moment, the dream go by; then kissing your hand again all in eternity.

QUEEN: And never wearying?

ZOON: Not while eternity lingers here in heaven.

QUEEN: Thus we will live until the dream goes by and Earth has faded under Aether Mountain.

ZOON: And then we shall watch the calm of Eternity.

QUEEN: And you will still kiss my hand at times.

ZOON: Yes, while eternity wiles Heaven away.

QUEEN: The silence is like music on Aether Mountain.

ZOON: It is because all is real. In the dream

nothing was real. Music had to be made and then soon passed trembling away. Here all things always are as the desire of Earth, Earth's desire that groped among fantasies finding them false.

QUEEN: Let us forget the dream.

ZOON (*kissing her hand*): I have forgotten for ever.

QUEEN: Ah!

ZOON: What trouble has drifted up to you from Earth?

QUEEN: An old saying.

ZOON: It was said in the dream.

QUEEN: It was true!

[*She snatches her hand away.*

Ah, I remember it. It was true.

ZOON: All is unreal but love, my crownéd Zoom-zoomarma. Where there was not love it cannot have been true.

[*He tries to take her hand again.*

QUEEN: Touch not my hand. It was true.

ZOON: What was the saying heard in the dream of Earth that was true?

QUEEN: None is worthy to touch my hand; no, none.

ZOON: By Aether Mountain, I will kiss your hand again! What is this saying out of a dream that dares deny reality?

QUEEN: It is true! Oh, it is true!

ZOON: Out of that hurried, aimless dream, that knows not its own end even, you have brought me a saying and say it against love.

QUEEN: I say it is true!

ZOON: Nothing is true against love. Fate only is greater.

QUEEN: Then it is Fate.

ZOON: Against Fate I will kiss your hand again.

QUEEN: None are worthy. No, none.
[*She draws her rapier.*

ZOON: I will kiss your hand again.

QUEEN: It must be this (*pointing with rapier*) for none are worthy.

ZOON: Though it be death I kiss your hand again.

QUEEN: It is certain death.

ZOON: Oh, Zoomzoomarma, forget that troubled dream, and things said by dreamers, while I kiss your hand in heaven if only once again.

QUEEN: None are worthy. It is death. None are worthy. None.

ZOON: Though it be death, yet once again upon Aether Mountain in heaven I kiss your hand.

QUEEN: Away! It is death. Upon the word of a Queen.

ZOON: I kiss your h . . .

[*She standing kills him kneeling. He falls off Aether Mountain, behind it out of sight.*

[*As he falls he calls her name after intervals. She kneels upon the summit and watches him falling, falling, falling.*

[*Fainter and fainter as he falls from that tremendous height comes up her name as he calls it.*

Zoomzoomarma! Zoomzoomarma!
Zoomzoomarma!

[*Still she is watching and he is falling still.*

[*At last when his cry of* ZOOMZOOMARMA *comes almost unheard to that incredible height and then is heard no more, she turns, and with infinite neatness picking up her skirts steps down daintily over the snow.*

[*She is going Earthward as the curtain falls.*

CURTAIN.

CHEEZO

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

SLADDER, *a successful man.*
SPLURGE, *his secretary and publicity agent.*
THE REV. CHARLES HIPPANTHIGH.
BUTLER.
MRS. SLADDER.
ERMYNTRUDE SLADDER.

CHEEZO

Scene

The big house that Sladder *has bought in the country.* Sladder's *study. Large French window opening on to a lawn.*

Time : Now.

Sladder's *daughter is seated in an armchair tapping on the arm of it a little impatiently.*

The door opens very cautiously, and the head of Mrs. Sladder *is put round it.*

Mrs. Sladder : O, Ermyntrude. Whatever are you doing here ?

Ermyntrude : I wanted to speak to father, mother.

Mrs. Sladder : But you mustn't come in here. We mustn't disturb father.

Ermyntrude : I want to speak to father.

Mrs. Sladder : Whatever about, Ermyntrude ?

Ermyntrude (*taps the arm of the chair*) : O, nothing, mother. Only about that idea of his.

Mrs. Sladder : What idea, child ?

Ermyntrude : O, that idea he had, that—er—I was some day to marry a duke.

MRS. SLADDER: And why shouldn't you marry a duke, child? I am sure father would make it worth his while.

ERMYNTRUDE: O well, I don't think I want to, mother.

MRS. SLADDER: But why not, Ermyntrude?

ERMYNTRUDE: O well, you know Mr. Jones——

MRS. SLADDER: That good man!

ERMYNTRUDE: ——did say that dukes were no good, mother. They oppress the poor, I think he said.

MRS. SLADDER: Very true.

ERMYNTRUDE: Well, there you are.

MRS. SLADDER: Yes, yes, of course. At the same time, father had rather set his heart on it. You wouldn't have any other reason now, child, would you?

ERMYNTRUDE: What more do you want, mother? Mr. Jones is a Cabinet Minister; he must know what he's talking about.

MRS. SLADDER: Yes, yes.

ERMYNTRUDE: And I hear he's going to get a peerage.

MRS. SLADDER (*with enthusiasm*): Well, I'm sure he deserves it. But child, you mustn't talk to father to-day. You mustn't stay here any longer.

ERMYNTRUDE: But why not, mother?

MRS. SLADDER: Well, child, he's been smoking one

of those big cigars again, and he's absent-like. And he's been talking a good deal with Mr. Splurge. It's one of his great days, I think, Ermyntrude. I feel sure it is. One of those days that has given us all this money, and all these fine houses, with all those little birds that his gentlemen friends shoot. He has an idea!

ERMYNTRUDE: O, mother, do you really think so?

MRS. SLADDER: I'm sure of it, child. (*Looking out.*) There! There he is! Walking along that path that they made. I can see he's got an idea. How like Napoleon.* He's walking with Mr. Splurge. They're coming in now. Come along, Ermyntrude, we mustn't disturb him to-day. He has some great idea, some great idea.

ERMYNTRUDE: How splendid, mother! What do you think it is?

MRS. SLADDER: Ah. I could never explain it to you, even if I knew. It is business, child, business. It isn't everybody that can understand business.

ERMYNTRUDE: I hear them coming, mother.

MRS. SLADDER: There must be things we can never understand: things too deep for us like. And business is the most wonderful of them all.

[*Exeunt R.*

* (N.B.—SLADDER *is not in the very least like Napoleon.*)

[*Enter* SLADDER *and* SPLURGE *through the window, which opens on to the lawn, down a step or two.*

SLADDER: Now, Splurge, we must do some business.

SPLURGE: Yes, sir.

SLADDER: Sit down, Splurge.

SPLURGE: Thank you, sir.

SLADDER: Splurge, I am going to say to you now, what I couldn't talk about with all those gardeners hanging about. And, by the way, Splurge, haven't we bought rather too many gardeners?

SPLURGE: No, sir. The Earl of Etheldune has seven; we had to go one better than him, sir.

SLADDER: Certainly, Splurge, certainly.

SPLURGE: So I bought ten for you, sir, to be on the safe side.

SLADDER: Ah, quite right, Splurge, quite right. There seemed to be rather a lot, but that's quite right. Well, now to business.

SPLURGE: Yes, sir.

SLADDER: I told you I'd invented a new name for a food.

SPLURGE: Yes, sir. Cheezo.

SLADDER: Well, what have you been able to do about it?

SPLURGE: I've had some nice little posters done, sir. I'm having it well written up. I've

got some samples here, and it looks like doing very well indeed.

SLADDER: Ah!

SPLURGE: It's a grand name, if I may say so, sir. It sounds so classical-like with that "O" at the end; and yet anyone can see what it's derived from, even if he's never learnt anything. It suggests cheese to them every time.

SLADDER: Let's see your samples.

SPLURGE: Well, sir, here's one. (*Brings paper from pocket. Reads.*) "What is Cheezo? Go where you may, speak with whom you will, the same question confronts you. Cheezo is the great new——"

SLADDER: No, Splurge. Cut that question bit. We must have no admission on our part that there's anyone who doesn't know what Cheezo is. Cut it.

SPLURGE: You're quite right, sir; you're quite right. That's a weak bit. I'll cut it. (*He scratches it out. Reads.*) "Cheezo is the great new food. It builds up body and brain."

SLADDER: That's good.

SPLURGE: "There is a hundred times more lactic fluid in an ounce of Cheezo than in a gallon of milk."

SLADDER: What's lactic fluid, Splurge?

SPLURGE: I don't know, sir, but it's good stuff all

right. It's the right thing to have in it. It's a good man that I got to write this.

SLADDER: All right. Go on.

SPLURGE: "Cheezo makes darling baby grow."

SLADDER: Good. Very good. Very good indeed, Splurge.

SPLURGE: Yes, I think that catches them, sir.

SLADDER: Go on.

SPLURGE: "Cheezo. The only food."

SLADDER: "The only food"? I don't like that.

SPLURGE: It will go down all right, sir, so long as the posters are big enough.

SLADDER: Go down all right! I wasn't fool enough to suppose that it wouldn't go *down* all right. What are posters for if the public doesn't believe them? Of course it will go *down* all right.

SPLURGE: O, I beg your pardon, sir. Then what don't you quite like about it?

SLADDER: I might invent another food one of these days, and then where should we be?

SPLURGE: I hadn't thought of that, sir.

SLADDER: Out with it.

SPLURGE: (*Scratches with pencil*). "Cheezo is made out of the purest milk from purest English cows."

SLADDER: Y-e-s, y-e-s. I don't say you're wrong. I don't say you're exactly wrong. But in business, Splurge, you want to keep

more to generalities. Talk about the bonds that bind the Empire, talk about the Union Jack, talk by all means about the purity of the English cow; but definite statements you know, definite statements——

SPLURGE: O, yes, I know, sir; but the police never interfere with anything one puts on a poster. It would be bad for business, a jury would never convict, and——

SLADDER: I didn't say they would; but if some interfering ass were to write to the papers to say that Cheezo wasn't made from milk, we should have to go to the expense of buying a dozen cows, and photographing them, and one thing and another. (*He gets up and goes to cupboard.*) Now, look here. I quite understand what you say, purity and all that, and a very good point too, but you look at this.

[*He unrolls a huge poster representing a dairymaid smirking in deadly earnest. On it is printed: "WON'T YOU HAVE SOME?" and on another part of the poster "CHEEZO FOR PURITY."*

You see. Your whole point's there. We state nothing and we can make the dairymaid as suggestive as we like.

SPLURGE: Yes, sir, that is excellent. Quite splendid.

SLADDER: They shall look at that on every road and railway, where it enters every town in England. I'll have it on the cliffs of Dover. It shall be the first thing they see when they come back home, and the last thing for them to remember when they leave England. I'll have it everywhere. I'll rub their noses in it. And then, Splurge, they'll ask for Cheezo when they want cheese, and that will mean I shall have the monopoly of all the cheese in the world.

SPLURGE: You're a great man, sir.

SLADDER: I'll be a greater one, Splurge. I'm not past work yet. What more have you got?

SPLURGE: I've rather a nice little poster being done, sir. A boy and a girl looking at one another with a rather knowing look. There's a large query mark all over the girl's dress. Then over the top in big letters I've put: "What is the secret?" and in smaller letters: "I've got a bit of Cheezo." It *makes* people look at it, the children's faces are so wicked.

SLADDER: Good, Splurge. Very good. I'll have that one. I'll rub their noses in that one.

SPLURGE: Then I've got some things for the Press. (*Reads.*) "She: 'Darling.' He: 'Yes, wifey.' She: 'You won't forget, darling.' He: 'No, wifey.' She: 'You won't

forget to bring me some of that excellent Cheezo, so nutritious, so nice for darling baby, to be had at all grocers; but be sure that you find the name of Sladder on their well-known pink wrappers.' He: 'Certainly, wifey.'" Just the usual thing, sir, of course; only I have a very good little picture to go with it, very suggestive indeed; I've made all the arrangements with the Press and the bill-posters, sir. I think we'll make a big thing of it, sir.

SLADDER: Well, Splurge, nothing remains to be done now, except to make the Cheezo.

SPLURGE: How do you think of doing it, sir?

SLADDER: Do you know how they kill pigs in Chicago? No, you've not travelled yet. Well, they get their pigs on a slide, one man cuts their throats as fast as they go by, another shaves their bristles, and so on, and so on; one man for each job, and all at it at once; they do it very expeditiously. Well, there's an interfering fellow sent there by the Government (we wouldn't stand him in England), and if a pig has a sign of tuberculosis on him he won't let that pig go down. Now you'd think that pig was wasted. He isn't. He goes into soap. Now, Splurge, how many cakes of soap were used in the world last year?

SPLURGE (*getting up*): Last year? I don't think we have the figures in for last year yet, sir.

[*He goes to bookshelf.*

SLADDER: Well, the year before will do.

SPLURGE (*taking book and turning pages*): The figures are given, I think, sir, from the 1st of March to the 1st of March.

SLADDER: That will do.

SPLURGE: Ah, here it is, sir. Soap statistics for the twelve months ending 1st of March this year. A hundred and four million users, using on an average twenty cakes each per year. Then there are partial users, and occasional users. The total would be about twenty-one hundred million, sir.

SLADDER: Pure waste, Splurge, all pure waste.

SPLURGE: Waste, sir?

SLADDER: Pure waste. What do you suppose becomes of all that soap, all that good fat? Proteids, I think they call 'em. And proteids are *good* for you, Splurge.

SPLURGE: What *becomes* of them, sir? They're used up.

SLADDER: No, Splurge. They disappear, I grant you. They float away. But they're still there Splurge, they're still there. All that good fat is somewhere.

SPLURGE: But—but, sir—but—In the drains, sir?

SLADDER: All those million of cakes of soap. There must be tons of it, Splurge. And we'll *get* it.

SPLURGE: You are a wonderful man, sir.

SLADDER: O, I've a few brains, Splurge. That anyone might have. But I use mine, that's all. There's cleverer people than me in the world——

SPLURGE: No, sir.

SLADDER: O, yes, there are. Lots of them. But they're damned fools. And why? 'Cause they don't use their brains. They mess about learning Greek. Greek! Can you believe it? What good does Greek ever do them? . . . But the money's not made yet, Splurge.

SPLURGE: I'm having it well advertised, sir.

SLADDER: Not so fast. What if they won't eat it?

SPLURGE: O, they'll eat it all right when it's advertised, sir. They eat everything that's advertised.

SLADDER: What if they can't eat it, Splurge?

SPLURGE: Can't, sir?

SLADDER: Send for my daughter.

SPLURGE: Yes, sir. (*He rises and goes to the door.*)

SLADDER: The battle of Waterloo was won on the playing fields of some damned place. A million of money will be won or lost in this house in five minutes.

SPLURGE: In this house, sir?

SLADDER: Yes, in Ermyntrude's sitting-room. Send for her.

SPLURGE: Yes, sir. Yes, sir. Miss Sladder! Miss Sladder!

ERMYNTRUDE (*off*): Yes, Mr. Splurge.

SPLURGE: Would you come to the study, miss, Mr. Sladder wants to speak to you.

ERMYNTRUDE: O, yes, Mr. Splurge.

SLADDER: The test! The test!

[*Re-enter* SPLURGE.

SPLURGE: Miss Sladder is coming, sir.

SLADDER: The test!

[*Enter* ERMYNTRUDE.

ERMYNTRUDE: What is it, father?

SLADDER: How are your white mice, child?

ERMYNTRUDE: Quite well, father, both of them.

SLADDER (*draws a box from his pocket, takes out a little bit of cheese*): Give them that, Ermyntrude.

ERMYNTRUDE: That, father. What is it?

SLADDER: Cheese.

ERMYNTRUDE: May I have a bit?

SLADDER: No, don't touch it!

ERMYNTRUDE: Very well, father.

SLADDER: If they eat it, you shall have——

ERMYNTRUDE: What, father?

SLADDER: Anything, everything. Only go and give them the cheese.

ERMYNTRUDE: All right, father.

[*She moves to the door R., she looks round, then goes out by the French window instead.*

SLADDER: Why are you going that way, child?

ERMYNTRUDE: O—er—I thought it would be nice to go round over the lawn, father. I can get in by the drawing-room.

SLADDER: O, very well. Be quick, dear.

ERMYNTRUDE: All right, father.

[*The magnet that has attracted* ERMYNTRUDE *to the lawn now appears in the form of* MR. HIPPANTHIGH, *passing the window on his way to the hall-door.* SLADDER *and* SPLURGE *do not see him, having their backs to the window.* ERMYNTRUDE *looks round now and then to be sure of this. They hold hands longer than is laid down as necessary in books upon etiquette under the head of visiting. She gives him a look of glad and hopeful interrogation but he shakes his head solemnly, and passes gravely on, as one whose errand is no cheerful duty. She looks after him, then goes her way.*

SLADDER: Well, Splurge, we can only wait. (*With emphasis.*) If these mice eat it——

SPLURGE: Yes, sir?

SLADDER: The public will eat it.

SPLURGE: Ah!

SLADDER: Any other business to-day?

SPLURGE: O, only the cook, sir. He's complaining about the vegetables, sir. He says he's never been anywhere before where they didn't buy them. We get them out of the kitchen garden here, and it seems he doesn't understand it. Says he won't serve a greengrocer, sir.

SLADDER: A kitchen garden is the wrong thing, is it?

SPLURGE: He says so, sir.

SLADDER: But there was one here when we came.

SPLURGE: O, only country people, sir. I suppose they didn't know any better.

SLADDER: Well, where do people grow vegetables, then?

SPLURGE: I asked the cook that, sir, and he said they don't grow them, they buy them.

SLADDER: O, all right, then. Let him buy them, then. We must do the right thing.

[*The hall-door bell rings.*

SLADDER: Hullo! Who's ringing my bell?

SPLURGE: That was the hall-door, wasn't it, sir?

SLADDER: Yes. What are they ringing it for?

[*Enter* BUTLER.

BUTLER: Mr. Hippanthigh has called to see you, sir.

SLADDER: Called to see me! What about?

BUTLER: He didn't inform me, sir.

SLADDER: I say, Splurge, have I got to see him?

SPLURGE: I think so, sir. I think they call on one another like that in the country.

SLADDER: Good lord, whatever for? (*To* BUTLER.) O, yes. I'll see him, I'll see him.

BUTLER: Very good, sir, I'll inform him so, sir.

[*Exit.*

SLADDER: I say, Splurge, I suppose I've got to have a butler, and all that, eh?

SPLURGE: O, yes, sir. One at least. It's quite necessary.

SLADDER: You—you couldn't have bought me a cheerfuller one now, could you?

SPLURGE: I'm afraid not, sir. If you were to take all this too lightheartedly, the other landowners would hardly like it, you know.

SLADDER: O, well! O, well! What kind of man is this Hippanthigh that's coming?

SPLURGE: He's the man that quarrels with the bishop, sir.

SLADDER: O, the curate. O, yes. I've heard about him. He's been here before, I think. Lawn tennis.

[*Enter* BUTLER.

BUTLER: Mr. Hippanthigh, sir.

[*Enter* HIPPANTHIGH. *Exit* BUTLER.

SLADDER: How do you do, Mr. Hippanthigh? How do you do? Pleased to see you.

HIPPANTHIGH: I wished to speak with you, Mr. Sladder, if you will permit me.

SLADDER: Certainly, Mr. Hippanthigh, certainly. Take a chair.

HIPPANTHIGH: Thank you, sir. I think I would sooner stand.

SLADDER: Please yourself. Please yourself.

HIPPANTHIGH: I wished to speak with you alone, sir.

SLADDER: Alone, eh? Alone? (*Aside to* SPLURGE.) It's usual, eh? (*To* HIPPANTHIGH.) Alone, of course, yes. You've come to call, haven't you. (*Exit* SPLURGE.) Can I offer you—er, er—calling's not much in my line, you know—but what I mean is—will you have a bottle of champagne?

HIPPANTHIGH: Mr. Sladder, I've come to speak with you because I believe it to be my duty to do so. I have hesitated to come, but when for particular reasons it became most painful to me to do so, then I knew that it was my clear duty, and I have come.

SLADDER: O, yes, what they call a duty call. O, yes, quite so. Yes, exactly.

HIPPANTHIGH: Mr. Sladder, many of my parishioners are acquainted with the thing that you sell as bread. (*From the moment of* HIPPANTHIGH'S *entry till now* SLADDER,

over-cheerful and anxious, has been struggling to do and say the right thing through all the complications of a visit; but now that the note of Business has been sounded he suddenly knows where he is and becomes alert and stern, and all there.)

SLADDER: What? Virilo?

HIPPANTHIGH: Yes. They pay more for it than they pay for bread, because they've been taught somehow, poor fools, that "they must have the best." They've been made to believe that it makes them, what they call virile, poor fools, and they're growing ill on it. Not so ill that I can prove anything, and the doctor daren't help me.

SLADDER: Are you aware, Mr. Hippanthigh, that if you said in public what you're saying to me, you would go to prison for it, unless you can run to the very heavy fine —damages would be enormous.

HIPPANTHIGH: I know that, Mr. Sladder, and so I have come to you as the last hope for my people.

SLADDER: Are you aware, Mr. Hippanthigh, that you are making an attack upon business? I don't say that business is as pure as a surplice. But I do say that in business it is—as you may not understand— get on or go under; and without my

business, or the business of the next man, who is doing his best to beat me, what would happen to trade? I don't know what's going to happen to England if you get rid of her trade, Mr. Hippanthigh. . . . Well? . . . When we're broke because we've been doing business with surplices on, what are the other countries going to do, Mr. Hippanthigh? Can you answer me that?

HIPPANTHIGH: No, Mr. Sladder.

SLADDER: Ah! So I've got the best of you?

HIPPANTHIGH: Yes, Mr. Sladder. I'm not so clever as you.

SLADDER: Glad you admit the point. As for cleverness it isn't that I've so much of that, but I use what I've got. Well, have you anything more to say?

HIPPANTHIGH: Only to appeal to you, Mr. Sladder, on behalf of these poor people.

SLADDER: Why. But you admitted one must have business, and that it can't be run like a tea-party. What more do you want?

HIPPANTHIGH: I want you to spare them, Mr. Sladder.

SLADDER: Spare them? Spare them? Why, what's the matter with them? I'm not killing them.

HIPPANTHIGH: No, Mr. Sladder, you're not killing them. The mortality among children's

a bit on the high side, but I wouldn't say that was entirely due to your bread. There's a good many minor ailments among the grown-up people, it seems to attack their digestion mostly, one can't trace each case to its source; but their health and their teeth aren't what they were when they had the pure wheaten bread.

SLADDER: But there *is* wheat in my bread, prepared by a special process.

HIPPANTHIGH: Ah! It's that special process that does it, I expect.

SLADDER: Well, they needn't buy it if it isn't good.

HIPPANTHIGH: Ah, they can't help themselves, poor fools; they've been taught to do it from their childhood up. Virilo, Bredo and Weeto, that are all so much better than bread, it's a choice between these three. Bread is never advertised, or God's good wheat.

SLADDER: Mr. Hippanthigh, if I'm too much of a fool to sell my goods I suffer for it; if they're such fools as to buy my Virilo, they suffer for it—that is to say, you say they do—that is a natural law that may be new to you. But why should I suffer more than them? Besides, if I take my Virilo off the market just to oblige you, Mr. Hippanthigh, a little matter of £30,000 a year——

HIPPANTHIGH: I—er——

SLADDER: O, don't mention it. Any little trifle to oblige! But if I did, up would go the sales of Bredo and Weeto (which have nothing to do with my firm), and your friends wouldn't be any better for that let me tell you, for I happen to know how *they're* made.

HIPPANTHIGH: I am not speaking of the wickedness of others. I come to appeal to you, Mr. Sladder, that for nothing that *you* do, our English race shall lose anything of its ancient strength, in its young men in their prime, or that they should grow infirm a day sooner than God intended, when He planned his course for man.

ERMYNTRUDE (*off*): Father! Father!

[SLADDER *draws himself up, and stands erect to meet the decisive news that he has expected.*

[*Enter* ERMYNTRUDE.

ERMYNTRUDE: Father! The mice have eaten the cheese.

SLADDER: Ah! The public will—— O! (*He has suddenly seen* HIPPANTHIGH).

HIPPANTHIGH (*solemnly*): What new wickedness is this, Mr. Sladder? (*All stand silent.*) Good-bye, Mr. Sladder.

[*He goes to the door, passing* ERMYNTRUDE. *He looks at her and sighs as*

he goes. He passes MRS. SLADDER *near the door, and bows in silence.*

[*Exit.*

ERMYNTRUDE: What have you been saying to Mr. Hippanthigh, father?

SLADDER: Saying! He's been doing all the saying. He doesn't let you do much saying, does Hippanthigh.

ERMYNTRUDE: But, father. What did he come to see you about?

SLADDER: He came to call your poor old father all kinds of bad names, he did. It seems your old father is a wicked fellow, Ermyntrude.

ERMYNTRUDE: O, father, I'm sure he never meant it.

[HIPPANTHIGH *goes by the window with a mournful face.* ERMYNTRUDE *runs to the window and watches him till he is out of sight. She quietly waves her hand to* HIPPANTHIGH, *unseen by her father.*

SLADDER: O, he meant it all right. He meant it. I'm sorry for that bishop of his that he quarrels with, if he lets him have it the way he went for your poor old father. O, dear me; dear me.

ERMYNTRUDE: I don't think he quarrels with him, father. I think he only insists that there can be no such thing as eternal punishment. I think that's rather nice of him.

SLADDER: I don't care a damn about eternal punishment one way or the other. But a man who quarrels with the head of his firm's a fool. If his bishop's keen on hell, he should push hell for all it's worth.

ERMYNTRUDE: Y-e-s, I suppose he should. But, father, aren't you glad that my mice have eaten the new cheese? I thought you'd be glad, father.

SLADDER: So I am, child. So I am. Only I don't feel quite so glad as I thought I was going to, now. I don't know why. He seems to have stroked me the wrong way somehow.

ERMYNTRUDE: You said you'd give me whatever I liked.

SLADDER: And so I will, child. So I will. A motor if you like, with chauffeur and footman complete. We can buy anything now, and I wouldn't grudge——

ERMYNTRUDE: I don't want a motor, father.

SLADDER: What would you like to have?

ERMYNTRUDE: O, nothing, father, nothing. Only about that duke, father——

SLADDER: What duke, Ermyntrude?

ERMYNTRUDE: Mother said you wanted me to marry a duke some day, father.

SLADDER: Well?

ERMYNTRUDE: Well I—er—I don't think I quite want to, father.

SLADDER: Ah! Quite so. Quite so. Quite so. And who *did* you think of marrying?

ERMYNTRUDE: O, father.

SLADDER: Well? (ERMYNTRUDE *is silent.*) When I was his age, I had to work hard for my living.

ERMYNTRUDE: O, father. How do you know what age he is?

SLADDER: O, I guessed he was 82, going to be 83 next birthday. But I daresay I know nothing of the world. I daresay I may have been wrong.

ERMYNTRUDE: O, father, he's young.

SLADDER: Dear me, you don't say so. Dear me, you do surprise me. Well, well, well, well. We do live and learn. Don't we? And what might his name be now?

ERMYNTRUDE: It's Mr. Hippanthigh, father.

SLADDER: O-o-o! It's Mr. Hippanthigh, is it? O-ho, O-ho! (*He touches a movable bell, shouting* "SPLURGE!" *To his daughter or rather to himself.*) We'll see Mr. Hippanthigh.

ERMYNTRUDE: What are you going to do, father?

SLADDER: We'll see Mr. Hippanthigh. (*Enter* SPLURGE.) Splurge, run after Mr. Hippanthigh and bring him back. Say I've got something to say to him. He's gone that way. Quick!

SPLURGE: Yes, sir. [*Exit.*

SLADDER: I've got something to say to *him* this time.

ERMYNTRUDE: Father! What are you going to do?

SLADDER: I'm going to give him What For.

ERMYNTRUDE: But why, father?

SLADDER: Because he's been giving it to your poor old father.

ERMYNTRUDE: Father——

SLADDER: Well?

ERMYNTRUDE: Be kind to him, father.

SLADDER: O, *I'll* be kind to him. I'll be *kind* to him. Just you wait. I'll be *kind* to him!

ERMYNTRUDE: But you wouldn't send him away, father. Father, for my sake you wouldn't do that?

SLADDER: O, we haven't *come* to that yet.

ERMYNTRUDE: But, but—you've sent for him.

SLADDER: O, I've sent for him to give him What For. We'll come to the rest later.

ERMYNTRUDE: But, when you do come to it, father.

SLADDER: Why, when we do come to it, if the young man's any good, I'll not stand in my daughter's way——

ERMYNTRUDE: O, thank you, father.

SLADDER: And if he's no good (*firmly*) I'll protect my child from him.

ERMYNTRUDE: But, father, I don't want to be protected.

SLADDER: If a man's a man, he must be some good at something. Well, this man's chosen the clergyman job. I've nothing against the job, it's well enough paid at the top, but is this young man ever going to get there? Is he ever going to get off the bottom rung? How long has he been a curate?

ERMYNTRUDE: Eight years, father.

SLADDER: It's a long time.

ERMYNTRUDE: But, father, he would get a vicarage if it wasn't for the bishop. The bishop stands in his way. It isn't nice of him.

SLADDER: If I'd quarrelled with the head of my firm when I was his age, you wouldn't be getting proposals from a curate; no such luck. The dustman would have been more in your line.

ERMYNTRUDE: But, father, he doesn't quarrel with the bishop. His conscience doesn't let him believe in eternal punishment, and so he speaks straight out. I do admire him so for it. He knows that if he was silent he'd have had a good living long ago.

SLADDER: The wife of the head of my firm believed in spirit rapping. Did I go and tell her what an old fool she was? No, I brought her messages from another world as regular as a postman.

[*Steps are heard outside the window.*

SLADDER: Run along, my dear, now.

ERMYNTRUDE: Very well, father.

SLADDER: The man that's going to look after my daughter must be able to look after himself. Otherwise *I* will, till a better man comes.

[*Exit* ERMYNTRUDE. HIPPANTHIGH *and* SPLURGE *appear at the window.* HIPPANTHIGH *enters and* SPLURGE *moves away.*

HIPPANTHIGH: You sent for me, Mr. Sladder?

SLADDER: Y-e-s—y-e-s. Take a chair. Now, Mr. Hippanthigh, I haven't often been told off the way you told me off.

HIPPANTHIGH: I felt it to be my duty, Mr. Sladder.

SLADDER: Yes, quite so. Exactly. Well, it seems I'm a thoroughly bad old man, only fit to rob the poor, an out-and-out old ruffian.

HIPPANTHIGH I never said that.

SLADDER: No. But you made me feel it. I never felt so bad about myself before, not as bad as that. But you, Mr. Hippanthigh, you were the high-falutin' angel with a new brass halo, out on its bank holiday. Now, how would clandestine love-making strike you, Mr. Hippanthigh? Would that be all right to your way of thinking?

HIPPANTHIGH: Clandestine, Mr. Sladder? I hardly understand you.

SLADDER: I understand that you have been making love to my daughter.

HIPPANTHIGH: I admit it.

SLADDER: Well, I haven't heard you say anything about it to me before. Did you tell her mother?

HIPPANTHIGH: Er—no.

SLADDER: Perhaps you told me. Very likely I've forgotten it.

HIPPANTHIGH: No.

SLADDER: Well, who *did* you tell?

HIPPANTHIGH: We—we hadn't told anyone yet.

SLADDER: Well, I think clandestine's the word for it, Mr. Hippanthigh. I haven't had time in my life to bother about the eaxct meanings of words or any nonsense of that sort, but I think clandestine's about the word for it.

HIPPANTHIGH: It's a hard word, Mr. Sladder.

SLADDER: May be. And who began using hard words? You came here and made me out a pickpocket, just because I use a few tasty little posters which sell my goods, and all the while you're trying on the sly to take a poor old man's daughter away from him. Well, Mr. Hippanthigh?

HIPPANTHIGH: I—I never looked at it in that light before, Mr. Sladder. I never thought

of it in that way. You have made me feel ashamed (*he lowers his head*), ashamed.

SLADDER: Aha! Aha! I thought I would. Now you know what it's like when you make people ashamed of themselves. You don't like it when they do it to you. Aha! (SLADDER *is immensely pleased with himself.*)

HIPPANTHIGH: Mr. Sladder, I spoke to you as my conscience demanded, and you have shown me that I have done wrong in not speaking sooner about our engagement. I would have spoken to you, but I could not say that and the other thing in the same day. I meant to tell you soon;—well, I didn't, and I know it looks bad. I've done wrong and I admit it.

SLADDER: Aha! (*Still hugely pleased.*)

HIPPANTHIGH: But, Mr. Sladder, you would not on that account perhaps spoil your daughter's happiness, and take a terrible revenge on me. You would not withhold your consent to our——

SLADDER: Wait a moment; we're coming to that. There's some bad animal that I've heard of that lives in France, and when folks attack it it defends itself. I've just been defending myself. I think I've shown

you that you're no brand-new extra-gilt angel on the top of a spire.

HIPPANTHIGH: O—I—er—never——

SLADDER: Quite so. Well, now we come on to the other part. Very well. Those lords and people, they marry one another's daughters, because they know they're all no good. They're afraid it will get out like, and spread some of their damned mediæval ideas where they'll do harm. So they keep it in the family like. But we people who have had the sense to look after ourselves, we don't throw our daughters away to any young man that can't look after himself. See?

HIPPANTHIGH: I assure you, Mr. Sladder, I should —er——

SLADDER: She's my only daughter, and if any of my grandchildren are going to the work-house, they'll go to one where the master's salary is high, and they'll go there as master.

HIPPANTHIGH: I am aware, Mr. Sladder, that I have very little money; as you would look at it, very little.

SLADDER: It isn't the amount of money you've got as matters. The question is this: are you a young man as money is any good to? If I died and left you a million, would you know what to do with it? I've met men what wouldn't

last more than six weeks on a million. Then they'd starve if nobody gave them another million. I'm not going to give my daughter to one of that sort.

HIPPANTHIGH: I was third in the classical tripos at Cambridge, Mr. Sladder.

SLADDER: I don't give a damn for classics; and I don't give a damn for Cambridge; and I don't know what a tripos is. But all I can tell you is that if I was fool enough to waste my time with classics, third wouln't be good enough for me. No, Mr. Hippanthigh, you've chosen the church as your job, and I've nothing to say against your choice; its a free country, and I've nothing to say against your job; it's well enough paid at the top, only you don't look like getting there. I chose business as my job, there seemed more sense in it; but if I'd chosen the Church, I shouldn't have stuck as a curate. No, nor a bishop either. I wouldn't have had an archbishop bally-ragging me and ordering me about. No. I'd have got to the top, and drawn big pay, and *spent* it.

HIPPANTHIGH: But, Mr. Sladder, I could be a vicar to-morrow if my conscience would allow me to cease protesting against a certain point which the bishop holds to be—

SLADDER: I know all about that. I don't care

what it is that keeps you on the bottom rung of the ladder. Conscience, you say. Well, it's a different thing with every man. It's conscience with some, drink with others, sheer stupidity with most. It's pretty crowded already, that bottom rung, without me going and putting my daughter on it. Where do you suppose I'd be now if I'd let my conscience get in my way? Eh?

HIPPANTHIGH: Mr. Sladder, I cannot alter my beliefs.

SLADDER: Nobody asks you to. I only ask you to leave the bishop alone. He says one thing and you preach another whenever you get half a chance; it's enough to break up any firm.

HIPPANTHIGH: Believing as I do that eternal punishment is incompatible with——

SLADDER: Now, Mr. Hippanthigh, that's got to stop. I don't mind saying, now that I've given you What For, that you don't seem a bad young fellow: but my daughter's not going to marry on the bottom rung, and there's an end of that.

HIPPANTHIGH: But, Mr. Sladder, can you bring yourself to believe in anything so terrible as eternal punishment, so contrary to——

SLADDER: Me? No.

HIPPANTHIGH: Then, how can you ask me to?

SLADDER: That particular belief never happened to stand between me and the top of the tree. Many things did, but they're all down below me now, Mr. Hippanthigh, way down there (*pointing*) where I can hardly see them. You get off that bottom rung as I did years ago.

HIPPANTHIGH: I cannot go back on all I've said.

SLADDER: I don't want to make it hard for you. Only just say you believe in eternal punishment, and then give up talking about it. You may say it to me if you like. We'll have one other person present so that there's no going back on it, my daughter if you like. I'll let the bishop know, and he won't stand in your way any longer, but at present you force his hand. It's you or the rules of the firm.

HIPPANTHIGH: I cannot.

SLADDER: You can't just say to me and my daughter that you believe in eternal punishment, and leave me to go over to Axminster and put it right with the bishop?

HIPPANTHIGH: I cannot say what I do not believe.

SLADDER: Think. The bishop probably doesn't believe it himself. But you've been forcing his hand,—going out of your way to.

HIPPANTHIGH: I cannot say it.

SLADDER (*rising*): Mr. Hippanthigh, there's two

kinds of men, those that succeed, those that don't. I know no other kind. You . . .

HIPPANTHIGH: I cannot go against my conscience.

SLADDER: I don't care what your reason is. You are the second kind. I am sorry my daughter ever loved a man of that sort. I am sorry a man of that sort ever entered my house. I was a little, dirty, ragged boy. You make me see what I would be to-day if I had been a man of your kind. I would be dirty and ragged still. (*His voice has been rising during this speech.*)

[*Enter* ERMYNTRUDE.

ERMYNTRUDE: Father! What are you saying, father? I heard such loud voices.

[HIPPANTHIGH *stands silent and mournful.*

SLADDER: My child, I had foolish ideas for you once, but now I say that you are to marry a man, not a wretched, miserable little curate, who will be a wretched, miserable little curate all his life.

ERMYNTRUDE: Father, I will not hear such words.

SLADDER: I've given him every chance. I've given him more than every chance, but he prefers the bottom rung of the ladder; there we will leave him.

ERMYNTRUDE: O, father! How can you be so cruel?

SLADDER : It's not my fault, and it's not the bishop's fault. It's his own silly pig-headedness.

[*He goes back to his chair.*

ERMYNTRUDE (*going up to* HIPPANTHIGH) : O, Charlie, couldn't you do what father wants ?

HIPPANTHIGH : No, no, I cannot. He wants me to go back on things I've said.

[*Enter* MRS. SLADDER *carrying a wire cage, with two dead white mice in it. Also* SPLURGE.

MRS. SPLURGE : O, the mice have died, John. The mice have died. O, Ermyntrude's poor mice ! And father's great idea ! Whatever shall we do ?

SLADDER : Er ? (*Almost a groan.*) Eh ? Died have they ?

[SLADDER *ages in his chair. You would say he was beaten. Suddenly he tautens up his muscles and stands up straight with shoulders back and clenched hands.*

So they would beat Sladder, would they ? They would beat Sladder. No, that has yet to be done. We'll go on, Splurge. The public shall eat Cheezo. It's a bit strong perhaps. We'll tone it down with bad nuts that they use for the other cheeses. We'll advertise it, and they'll eat it. See to it, Splurge. They don't beat Sladder.

MRS. SLADDER: O, I'm so glad. I'm so glad, John.

HIPPANTHIGH (*suddenly with clear emphasis*): I THINK I *DO* BELIEVE IN ETERNAL PUNISHMENT.

SLADDER: Ah. At last. Well, Ermyntrude, is your cruel old parent's blessing any use to you?

[*He places one hand on her shoulder and one on* HIPPANTHIGH'S.

MRS. SLADDER: Why, Ermyntrude! Well, I never! And to think of all this happening in one day!

[HIPPANTHIGH *is completely beaten.* ERMYNTRUDE *is smiling at him. He puts an arm round her shoulder in dead silence.*

CURTAIN.

A GOOD BARGAIN

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

Brother Antoninus.

Brother Lucullus Severus.

Brother Gregorius Pedro.

Satan.

Smoggs.

A GOOD BARGAIN

Scene

A Crypt of a Monastery. Brother Gregorius Pedro *is seated on a stone bench reading. Behind him is a window.*

Enter Brother Lucullus Severus.

Lucullus Severus: Brother, we may doubt no longer.

Gregorius Pedro: Well?

Lucullus Severus: It is certain. Certain.

Gregorius Pedro: I too had thought so.

Lucullus Severus: It is clear now, clear as . . . It is certain.

Gregorius Pedro: Well, why not? After all, why not?

Lucullus Severus: You mean . . . ?

Gregorius Pedro: 'Tis but a miracle.

Lucullus Severus: Yes, but . . .

Gregorius Pedro: But you did not think to see one?

Lucullus Severus: No, no, not that; but Brother Antoninus . . .

Gregorius Pedro: Well, why not he? He is holy as any, fasts as often as any, wears coarser clothing than most of us, and once

scourged a woman because she looked at our youngest—scourged her right willingly.

LUCULLUS SEVERUS: Yet, Brother Antoninus!

GREGORIUS PEDRO: Yet, why not?

LUCULLUS SEVERUS: We knew him, somehow. One does not know the blessed saints of heaven.

GREGORIUS PEDRO: No, no indeed. I never thought to see such a thing on earth; and now, now . . . you say it is certain?

LUCULLUS SEVERUS: Certain.

GREGORIUS PEDRO: Ah, well. It seemed like it, it seemed like it for some days. At first I thought I had looked too long through our eastern window, I thought it was the sun that had dazzled my eyes; and then, then it was clearly something else.

LUCULLUS SEVERUS: It is certain now.

GREGORIUS PEDRO: Ah, well.

LUCULLUS SEVERUS (*sitting beside him, sighs*): I grudge him nothing.

GREGORIUS PEDRO (*a little heavily*): No, nor I.

LUCULLUS SEVERUS: You are sad, brother.

GREGORIUS PEDRO: No, not sad.

LUCULLUS SEVERUS: Ah, but I see it.

GREGORIUS PEDRO: Ah, well.

LUCULLUS SEVERUS: What grieves you, brother?

GREGORIUS PEDRO: (*Sighs*) We shall water the

roses no more, he and I. We shall roll the lawns no more. We shall tend the young tulips together never again.

LUCULLUS SEVERUS: Oh, why not? Why not? There is not all that difference.

GREGORIUS PEDRO: There is.

LUCULLUS SEVERUS: It is our cross, brother. We must bear it.

GREGORIUS PEDRO: Ah, yes. Yes, yes.

[*A bell rings noisily.*

LUCULLUS SEVERUS: The gate bell, brother! Be of good cheer, it is the gate bell ringing!

GREGORIUS PEDRO: Why should I be of good cheer because the gate bell rings?

LUCULLUS SEVERUS: Why, brother, the world is at the gate. We shall see someone. It is an event. Someone will come and speak of the great world. Oh, be of good cheer, be of good cheer, brother.

GREGORIUS PEDRO: I think that I am heavy at heart to-day.

[*Enter* JOHN SMOGGS.

SMOGGS: Ullo, Governor. Is either o' yer the chief monk?

LUCULLUS SEVERUS: The Reverend Abbot is not here.

SMOGGS: 'Ain't, ain't 'e?

LUCULLUS SEVERUS: But what do you seek, friend?

SMOGGS: Want to know what you blokes are getting up to.

LUCULLUS SEVERUS: We do not understand your angry zeal.

GREGORIUS PEDRO: Tell us, friend.

SMOGGS: One o' yer is playing games no end, and we won't 'ave it.

GREGORIUS PEDRO: Games ?

SMOGGS: Well, miracles if you like it better, and we won't 'ave it, nor any of your 'igh church games nor devices.

GREGORIUS PEDRO: What does he say, brother ?

LUCULLUS SEVERUS: Friend, you perplex us. We hoped you would speak to us of the great world, its gauds, its wickedness, its——

SMOGGS: We won't 'ave it. We won't 'ave none of it, that's all.

LUCULLUS SEVERUS: Tell us, friend, tell us what you mean. Then we will do whatever you ask. And then you shall speak to us of the world.

SMOGGS: There 'e is, there 'e is, the blighter. There 'e is. 'E's coming. O Lord . . . !

[*He turns and runs. Exit.*

GREGORIUS PEDRO: It's Antoninus !

LUCULLUS SEVERUS: Why, yes ; yes, of course !

GREGORIUS PEDRO: He must have seen him over the garden wall.

LUCULLUS SEVERUS: We must hush it up.

GREGORIUS PEDRO: Hush it up ?

LUCULLUS SEVERUS: There must be no scandal in the monastery.

[*Enter* BROTHER ANTONINUS *wearing a halo. He walks across and exits.*

[GREGORIUS *is gazing with wide eyes.*

LUCULLUS SEVERUS: There must be no scandal in the monastery.

GREGORIUS PEDRO: It has grown indeed!

LUCULLUS SEVERUS: Yes, it has grown since yesterday.

GREGORIUS PEDRO: I noticed it dimly just three days ago. I noticed it dimly. But I did not—— I could not guess . . . I never dreamed that it would come to this.

LUCULLUS SEVERUS: Yes, it has grown for three days.

GREGORIUS PEDRO: It was just a dim light over his head, but now . . . !

LUCULLUS SEVERUS: It flamed up last night.

GREGORIUS PEDRO: There is no mistaking it now.

LUCULLUS SEVERUS: There must be *no scandal.*

GREGORIUS PEDRO: No scandal, brother?

LUCULLUS SEVERUS: Look how unusual it is. People will talk. You heard what that man said. They will all talk.

GREGORIUS PEDRO (*sadly*): Ah, well.

LUCULLUS SEVERUS: How could we face it.

GREGORIUS PEDRO: It is, yes, yes,—it is unusual.

LUCULLUS SEVERUS: Nothing like it has happened for many centuries.

GREGORIUS PEDRO (*sadly*): No, no. I suppose not. Poor Antoninus.

LUCULLUS SEVERUS: Why could he not have waited?

GREGORIUS PEDRO: Waited? What? Three—three hundred years?

LUCULLUS SEVERUS: Or even five or ten. He is long past sixty.

GREGORIUS PEDRO: Yes, yes, it would have been better.

LUCULLUS SEVERUS: You saw how ashamed he was.

GREGORIUS PEDRO: Poor Antoninus. Yes, yes. Brother, I think if we had not been here he would have come and sat on this bench.

LUCULLUS SEVERUS: I think he would. But he was ashamed to come, looking, looking like that.

GREGORIUS PEDRO: Brother, let us go. It is the hour at which he loves to come and sit here, and read in the Little Book of Lesser Devices. Let us go so that he may come here and be alone.

LUCULLUS SEVERUS: As you will, brother; we must help him when we can.

[*They rise and go.*

GREGORIUS PEDRO: Poor Antoninus.

LUCULLUS SEVERUS (*glancing*): I think he will come back now.

[*Exeunt. The bare, sandaled foot of* ANTONINUS *appears as the last heel lifts in the other doorway.*

[*Enter* ANTONINUS *rather timidly. He goes to bench and sits. He sighs. He shakes his head to loosen the halo, but in vain. He sighs. Then he opens his book and reads in silence. Silence gives way to mumbles, mumbles to words.*)

ANTONINUS : . . . and finally beat down Satan under our feet.

[*Enter* SATAN. *He has the horns and long hair and beard of a he-goat. His face and voice are such as could have been once in heaven.*

ANTONINUS (*standing, lifting arm*) : In the name of . . .

SATAN : Banish me not.

ANTONINUS : In the name . . .

SATAN : Say nothing you may regret, until I have spoken.

ANTONINUS : In the . . .

SATAN : Hear me.

ANTONINUS : Well ?

SATAN : There fell with me from heaven a rare, rare spirit, the light of whose limbs far outshone dawn and evening.

ANTONINUS : Well ?

SATAN : We dwell in darkness.

ANTONINUS : What is that to me ?

SATAN : For that rare spirit I would have the gaud

you wear, that emblem, that bright ornament. In return I offer you——

ANTONINUS: Begone——

SATAN: I offer you——

ANTONINUS: Begone.

SATAN: I offer you—Youth.

ANTONINUS: I will not traffic with you in damnation.

SATAN: I do not ask your soul, *only that shining gaud.*

ANTONINUS: Such things are not for hell.

SATAN: I offer you Youth.

ANTONINUS: I do not need it. Life is a penance and ordained as a tribulation. I have come through by striving. Why should I care to strive again?

SATAN (*smiles*): Why?

ANTONINUS: Why should I?

SATAN (*laughs, looking through window*): It's spring, brother, is it not?

ANTONINUS: A time for meditation.

SATAN (*laughs*): There are girls coming over the hills, brother. Through the green leaves and the May.

[ANTONINUS *draws his scourge from his robe.*

ANTONINUS: Up! Let me scourge them from our holy place.

SATAN: Wait, brother, they are far off yet. But you would not scourge them, you would

not scourge them, they are so . . . Ah! one has torn her dress!

ANTONINUS: Ah, let me scourge her!

SATAN: No, no, brother. See, I can see her ankle through the rent. You would not scourge her. Your great scourge would break that little ankle.

ANTONINUS: I will have my scourge ready, if she comes near our holy place.

SATAN: She is with her comrades. They are maying. Seven girls. (ANTONINUS *grips his scourge.*) Her arms are full of may.

ANTONINUS: Speak not of such things. Speak not, I say.

[SATAN *is leaning leisurely against the wall, smiling through the window.*

SATAN: How the leaves are shining. Now she is seated on the grass. They have gathered small flowers, Antoninus, and put them in her hair, a row of primroses.

ANTONINUS (*his eyes go for a moment on to far, far places. Unintentionally*): What colour?

SATAN: Black.

ANTONINUS: No, no, no! I did not mean her hair. No, no. I meant the flowers.

SATAN: Yellow, Antoninus.

ANTONINUS (*flurried*): Ah, of course, yes, yes.

SATAN: Sixteen and seventeen and fifteen, and another of sixteen. All young girls.

The age for you, Antoninus, if I make you twenty. Just the age for you.

ANTONINUS: You—you cannot.

SATAN: All things are possible unto me except salvation.

ANTONINUS: How?

SATAN: Give me your gaud. Then meet me at any hour between star-shining and cock-crow under the big cherry tree, when the moon is waning.

ANTONINUS: Never.

SATAN: Ah, Spring, Spring. They are dancing. Such nimble ankles.

[ANTONINUS *raises his scourge.*

SATAN (*more gravely*): Think, Antoninus, forty or fifty more Springs.

ANTONINUS: Never, never, never.

SATAN: And no more striving next time. See Antoninus, see them as they dance, there with the may behind them under the hill.

ANTONINUS: Never! I will not look.

SATAN: Ah, look at them, Antoninus. Their sweet figures. And the warm wind blowing in Spring.

ANTONINUS: Never! My scourge is for such.

[SATAN *sighs. The girls laugh from the hill.* ANTONINUS *hears the laughter. A look of fear comes over him.*

ANTONINUS: Which . . . (*a little peal of girlish laughter off*). Which cherry tree did you speak of?

SATAN: This one over the window.

ANTONINUS (*with an effort*): It shall be held accursed. I will warn the brethren. It shall be cut down and hewn asunder and they shall burn it utterly.

SATAN (*rather sorrowfully*): Ah, Antoninus.

ANTONINUS: You shall not tempt a monk of our blessed order.

SATAN: They are coming this way, Antoninus.

ANTONINUS: What! What!

SATAN: Have your scourge ready, Antoninus.

ANTONINUS: Perhaps, perhaps they have not merited extreme chastisement.

SATAN: They have made a garland of may, a long white garland drooped from their little hands. Ah, if you were young, Antoninus.

ANTONINUS: Tempt me not, Satan. I say, tempt me not!

[*The girls sing,* SATAN *smiles, the girls sing on.* ANTONINUS *tip-toes to seat, back to window, and sits listening. The girls sing on. They pass the window and shake the branch of a cherry tree. The petals fall in sheets past the window. The girls sing on and* ANTONINUS *sits listening.*

ANTONINUS (*hand to forehead*): My head aches. I think it is that song. . . . Perhaps, perhaps it is the halo. Too heavy, too heavy for *us*.

[SATAN *walks gently up and removes it and walks away with the gold disc.* ANTONINUS *sits silent.*

SATAN: When the moon is waning.

[*Exit. More petals fall past the window. The song rings on.* ANTONINUS *sits quite still, on his face a new ecstacy.*

CURTAIN.

IF SHAKESPEARE LIVED TO-DAY

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

Sir Webley Woothery-Jurnip } *Members of the*
Mr. Neeks } *Olympus.*

Jergins, *an old waiter.*

Mr. Trundleben, *Secretary of the Club.*

Mr. Gleek, *Editor of the "Banner and Evening Gazette," and member of the Olympus.*

IF SHAKESPEARE LIVED TO-DAY

Scene

A room in the Olympus Club.

Time: After luncheon.

Sir Webley Woothery-Jurnip *and* Mr. Neeks *sit by a small table. Further away sits* Mr. Gleek, *the Editor of the "Banner and Evening Gazette."* Sir Webley Jurnip *rises and rings the bell by the fire-place. He returns to his seat.*

Mr. Neeks: I see there's a man called Mr. William Shakespeare putting up for the Club.

Sir Webley: Shakespeare? Shakespeare? Shakespeare? I once knew a man called Shaker.

Neeks: No, it's Shakespeare—Mr. William Shakespeare.

Sir Webley: Shakespeare? Shakespeare? Do *you* know anything about him?

Neeks: Well, I don't exactly recall—I made sure that you——

Sir Webley: The Secretary ought to be more careful. Waiter!

Jergins: Yes, Sir Webley. [*He comes.*

Sir Webley: Coffee, Jergins. Same as usual.

JERGINS: Yes, Sir Webley.

SIR WEBLEY: And, Jergins—there's a man called Mr. William Shakespeare putting up for the Club.

JERGINS: I'm sorry to hear that, Sir Webley.

SIR WEBLEY: Yes, Jergins. Well, there it is, you see; and I want you to go up and ask Mr. Trundleben if he'd come down.

JERGINS: Certainly, Sir Webley.

SIR WEBLEY: And then get my coffee.

JERGINS: Yes, Sir Webley.

[*He goes slowly away.*

NEEKS: He'll be able to tell us all about him.

SIR WEBLEY: At the same time he should be more careful.

NEEKS: I'm afraid—I'm afraid he's getting rather, rather old.

SIR WEBLEY: Oh, I don't know, he was seventy only the other day. I don't call that too old—nowadays. He can't be now, he can't be more than, let me see, seventy-eight. Where does this Mr. Shaker live?

NEEKS: Shakespeare. Somewhere down in Warwickshire. A village called Bradford, I think, is the address he gives in the Candidates' Book.

SIR WEBLEY: Warwickshire! I do seem to remember something about him now. If he's the same man I certainly do. William Shakespeare, you said.

NEEKS: Yes, that's the name.

SIR WEBLEY: Well, I certainly have heard about him now you mention it.

NEEKS: Really! And what does he do?

SIR WEBLEY: Do? Well, from what I heard he poaches.

NEEKS: Poaches!

SIR WEBLEY: Yes, a poacher. Trundleben deserves to get the sack for this. A poacher from the wilds of Warwickshire. I heard all about him. He got after the deer at Charlecote.

NEEKS: A poacher!

SIR WEBLEY: That's all he is, a poacher. A member of the Olympus! He'll be dropping in here one fine day with other people's rabbits in his pockets.

[*Enter* JERGINS.

JERGINS: Your coffee, Sir Webley.

SIR WEBLEY: My coffee. I should think so. (*He sips it.*) One needs it.

JERGINS: Mr. Trundleben will be down at once, Sir Webley. I telephoned up to him.

SIR WEBLEY: Telephoned! Telephoned! The Club's getting more full of new-fangled devices every day. I remember the time when—— Thank you, Jergins.

[JERGINS *retires.*

This is a pretty state of things, Neeks.

NEEKS: A pretty state of things indeed, Sir Webley.

SIR WEBLEY: Ah, here's Trundleben.

NEEKS: He'll tell us all about it, Sir Webley. I'm sure he'll——

SIR WEBLEY: Ah, Trundleben. Come and sit down here. Come and——

TRUNDLEBEN: Thank you, Sir Webley. I think I will. I don't walk quite as well as I used, and what with——

SIR WEBLEY: What's all this we hear about this Mr. Shakespeare, Trundleben?

TRUNDLEBEN: Oh, ah, well yes, yes indeed. Well, you see, Sir Webley, he was put up for the Club. Mr. Henry put him up.

SIR WEBLEY (*disapprovingly*): Oh, Mr. Henry.

NEEKS: Yes, yes, yes. Long hair and all that.

SIR WEBLEY: I'm afraid so.

NEEKS: Writes poetry, I believe.

SIR WEBLEY: I'm afraid so.

TRUNDLEBEN: Well then, what does Mr. Newton do but go and second him, and there you are, Sir Webley.

SIR WEBLEY: Yes, a pretty state of things. Has he . . . Does he . . . What is he?

TRUNDLEBEN: He seems to write, Sir Webley.

SIR WEBLEY: Oh, he does, does he? What does he write?

TRUNDLEBEN: Well, I wrote and asked him that, Sir Webley, and *he* said plays.

SIR WEBLEY: Plays? Plays? Plays? I'm sure I never heard . . . What plays?

TRUNDLEBEN: I asked him that, Sir Webley, and he said . . . he sent me a list (*fumbling*). Ah, here it is.

[*He holds it high, far from his face, tilts his head back and looks down his nose through his glasses.*

He says—let me see—"Hamelt," or "Hamlet," I don't know how he pronounces it. "Hamelt, Hamlet"; he spells it "H-a-m-l-e-t." If you pronounce it the way one pronounces handle, it would be "Hamelt," but if——

SIR WEBLEY: What's it all about?

TRUNDLEBEN: Well, I gathered the scene was in Denmark.

NEEKS: Denmark! H'm! another of those neutrals!

SIR WEBLEY: Well, I wouldn't so much mind where the scene of the play was put, if only it was a play one ever had heard of.

NEEKS: But those men who have much to do with neutrals are rather the men—don't you think, Sir Webley?—who . . .

SIR WEBLEY: Who want watching. I believe you're right, Neeks. And that type of unsuccessful play-wright is just the kind of man I always rather . . .

NEEKS: That's rather what I feel, Sir Webley.

SIR WEBLEY: It wouldn't be a bad plan if we told somebody about him.

NEEKS: I think I know just the man, Sir Webley. I'll just drop him a line.

SIR WEBLEY: Yes, and if he's all right there's no harm done, but I always suspect that kind of fellow. Well, what else, Trundleben? This is getting interesting.

TRUNDLEBEN: Well, Sir Webley, it's really very funny, but he sent me a list of the characters in this play of his, "Hamelt," and, and it's really rather delicious——

NEEKS: Yes?

SIR WEBLEY: Yes? What is it?

TRUNDLEBEN: He's got a *ghost* in his play. (*He-he-he-he-he*) A ghost! He really has.

SIR WEBLEY: What! Not on the stage?

TRUNDLEBEN: Yes, on the stage!

NEEKS: Well, well, well.

SIR WEBLEY: But that's absurd.

TRUNDLEBEN: I met Mr. Vass the other day—it was his four hundredth presentation of "The Nighty"—and I told him about it. He said that bringing a ghost on the stage was, of course—er—ludicrous.

SIR WEBLEY: What else does he say he's done?

TRUNDLEBEN: Er—er—there's an absurdly long list—er—"Macbeth."

SIR WEBLEY: "Macbeth." That's Irish.

NEEKS: Ah, yes. Abbey Theatre style of thing.

TRUNDLEBEN: I think I heard he offered it them. But of course——

SIR WEBLEY: No, quite so.

TRUNDLEBEN: I gathered it was all rather a—rather a sordid story.

SIR WEBLEY (*solemnly*): Ah!

[NEEK *with equal solemnity wags his head.*

TRUNDLEBEN (*focussing his list again*): Here's a very funny one. This is funnier than "Hamlet." "The Tempest." And the stage directions are "The sea, with a ship."

SIR WEBLEY (*laughs*): Oh, that's lovely! That's really too good. The sea with a ship! And what's it all about?

TRUNDLEBEN: Well, I rather gathered that it was about a magician, and he—he makes a storm.

SIR WEBLEY: He makes a storm. Splendid! On the stage, I suppose.

TRUNDLEBEN: Oh yes, on the stage.

[SIR WEBLEY *and* NEEK *laugh heartily.*

NEEKS: He'd . . . He'd have to be a magician for that, wouldn't he?

SIR WEBLEY: Ha, ha! Very good! He'd have to be a magician to do that, Trundleben.

TRUNDLEBEN: Yes, indeed, Sir Webley; indeed he would, Mr. Neeks.

SIR WEBLEY: But that stage direction is priceless. I'd really like to copy that down if you'd let me. What is it? "The sea with a ship"? It's the funniest bit of the lot.

TRUNDLEBEN: Yes, that's it, Sir Webley. Wait a moment, I have it here. The—the whole thing is "the sea with a ship, afterwards an island." Very funny indeed.

SIR WEBLEY: "Afterwards an island"! That's very good, too. "Afterwards an island." I'll put that down also. (*He writes.*) And what else, Trundleben? What else?

[TRUNDLEBEN *holds out his list again.*

TRUNDLEBEN: "The Tragedy of—of King Richard the—the Second."

SIR WEBLEY: But *was* his life a tragedy? *Was* it a tragedy, Neeks?

NEEKS: I—I—well I'm not quite sure; I really don't think so. But I'll look it up.

SIR WEBLEY: Yes, we can look it up.

TRUNDLEBEN: I think it was rather—perhaps *rather* tragic, Sir Webley.

SIR WEBLEY: Oh, I don't say it wasn't. No doubt. No doubt at all. That's one thing.

But to call his whole life a tragedy is—is quite another. What, Neeks ?

NEEKS : Oh, quite another.

TRUNDLEBEN : Oh, certainly, Sir Webley. Tragedy is—er—is a very strong term indeed, to —to apply to such a case.

SIR WEBLEY : He was probably out poaching when he should have been learning his history.

TRUNDLEBEN : I'm afraid so, Sir Webley.

SIR WEBLEY : And what else, eh ? Anything more ?

TRUNDLEBEN : Well, there are some poems, he says. [*Holds up a list.*

SIR WEBLEY : And what are they about ?

TRUNDLEBEN : Well, there's one called . . . Oh. I'd really rather not mention that one ; perhaps that had better be left out altogether.

NEEKS : Not . . . ?

SIR WEBLEY : Not quite . . . ?

TRUNDLEBEN : No, not at all.

SIR WEBLEY and NEEKS : H'm.

TRUNDLEBEN : Left out altogether. And then there are "Sonnets," and—and "Venus and Adonis," and—and "The Phœnix and the Turtle."

SIR WEBLEY : The Phœnix and the what ?

TRUNDLEBEN : The Turtle.

SIR WEBLEY : Oh. Go on . . .

TRUNDLEBEN : One called " The Passionate Pilgrim," another " A Lover's Complaint."

SIR WEBLEY : I think the whole thing's very regrettable.

NEEKS : I think so too, Sir Webley.

TRUNDLEBEN (*mournfully*) : And there've been no poets since poor Browning died, none at all. It's absurd for him to call himself a poet.

NEEKS : Quite so, Trundleben, quite so.

SIR WEBLEY : And all these plays. What does he mean by calling them plays ? They've never been acted.

TRUNDLEBEN : Well—er—no, not exactly acted, Sir Webley.

SIR WEBLEY : What do you mean by not exactly, Trundleben ?

TRUNDLEBEN : Well, I believe they were acted in America, though of course not in London.

SIR WEBLEY : In America ? What's that got to do with it. America ? Why, that's the other side of the Atlantic.

TRUNDLEBEN : Oh, yes, Sir WEBLEY, I—I quite agree with you.

SIR WEBLEY : America ! I daresay they did. I daresay they did act them. But that doesn't make him a suitable member for the Olympus. Quite the contrary.

NEEKS : Oh, quite the contrary.

TRUNDLEBEN: Oh, certainly, Sir Webley, certainly.

SIR WEBLEY: I daresay "Macbeth" would be the sort of thing that would appeal to Irish Americans. *Just* the sort of thing.

TRUNDLEBEN: Very likely, Sir Webley, I'm sure.

SIR WEBLEY: Their game laws are very lax, I believe, over there; they probably took to him on account of his being a poacher.

TRUNDLEBEN: I've no doubt of it, Sir Webley. Very likely.

NEEKS: I expect that was just it.

SIR WEBLEY: Well now, Trundleben; are we to ask the Olympus to elect a man who'll come in here with his pockets bulging with rabbits.

NEEKS: Rabbits, and hares too.

SIR WEBLEY: And venison even, if you come to that.

TRUNDLEBEN: Yes indeed, Sir Webley.

SIR WEBLEY: Thank God the Olympus can get its haunch of venison without having to go to a man like that for it.

NEEKS: Yes indeed.

TRUNDLEBEN: Indeed I hope so.

SIR WEBLEY: Well now, about those plays. I don't say we've absolute proof that the man's entirely hopeless. We must be sure of our ground.

NEEKS: Yes, quite so.

TRUNDLEBEN: Oh, I'm afraid Sir Webley, they're very bad indeed. There are some quite unfortunate—er—references in them.

SIR WEBLEY: So I should have supposed. So I should have supposed.

NEEKS: Yes, yes, of course.

TRUNDLEBEN: For instance, in that play about that funny ship—I have a list of the characters here—and I'm afraid, well—er,—er you see for yourself. (*Hands paper.*) You see that is, I am afraid, in very bad taste, Sir Webley.

SIR WEBLEY: Certainly, Trundleben, certainly. Very bad indeed.

NEEKS (*peering*): Er—er, what is it, Sir Webley?

SIR WEBLEY (*pointing*): That, you see.

NEEKS: A—a drunken butler! But most regrettable.

SIR WEBLEY: A very deserving class. A—a quite gratuitous slight. I don't say you mightn't see one drunken butler . . .

TRUNDLEBEN: Quite so.

NEEKS: Yes, of course.

SIR WEBLEY: But to put it boldly on a programme like that is practically tantamount to implying that all butlers are drunken.

TRUNDLEBEN: Which is by no means true.

SIR WEBLEY: There would naturally be a protest of some sort, and to have a member of

the Olympus mixed up with a controversy like that would be—er—naturally —er—most . . .

TRUNDLEBEN: Yes, of course, Sir Webley.

SIR WEBLEY: And then of course, if he does a thing like that once . . .

NEEKS: There are probably other lapses just as deplorable.

TRUNDLEBEN: I haven't gone through his whole list, Sir Webley. I often feel about these modern writers that perhaps the less one looks the less one will find that might be, er . . .

SIR WEBLEY: Yes, quite so.

NEEKS: That is certainly true.

SIR WEBLEY: Well, we can't wade all through his list of characters to see if they are all suitable to be represented on a stage.

TRUNDLEBEN: Oh no, Sir Webley, quite impossible; there are—there are—I might say—hundreds of them.

SIR WEBLEY: Good gracious! He must have been wasting his time a great deal.

TRUNDLEBEN: Oh, a great deal, Sir Webley.

SIR WEBLEY: But we shall have to go further into this. We can't have . . .

NEEKS: I see Mr. Gleek sitting over there, Sir Webley.

SIR WEBLEY: Why, yes, yes, so he is.

NEEKS: The *Banner and Evening Gazette* would know all about him if there's anything to know.

SIR WEBLEY: Yes, of course they would.

NEEKS: If we were to ask him.

SIR WEBLEY: Well, Trundleben, you may leave it to us. Mr. Neeks and I will talk it all over and see what's to be done.

TRUNDLEBEN: Thank you, Sir Webley. I'm really very sorry it all happened—very sorry indeed.

SIR WEBLEY: Very well, Trundleben, we'll see what's to be done. If nothing's known of him and his plays, you'll have to write and request him to withdraw his candidature. But we'll see. We'll see.

TRUNDLEBEN: Thank you, Sir Webley. I'm sure I'm very sorry it all occurred. Thank you, Mr. Neeks.

[*Exit* TRUNDLEBEN, *waddling slowly away.*

SIR WEBLEY: Well, Neeks, that's what it will have to be. If nothing whatever's known of him we can't have him putting up for the Olympus.

NEEKS: Quite so, Sir Webley. I'll call Mr. Gleek's attention.

[*He begins to rise, hopefully looking Gleek-wards, when* JERGINS *comes between him and* MR. GLEEK. *He has come to take away the coffee.*

SIR WEBLEY: Times are changing, Jergins.

JERGINS: I'm afraid so, Sir Webley.

SIR WEBLEY: Changing fast, and new members putting up for the Club.

JERGINS: Yes, I'm afraid so, Sir Webley.

SIR WEBLEY: You notice it too, Jergins.

JERGINS: Yes, Sir Webley, it's come all of a sudden. Only last week I saw . . .

SIR WEBLEY: Well, Jergins.

JERGINS: I saw Lord Pondleburrow wearing a . . .

SIR WEBLEY: Wearing what, Jergins?

JERGINS: Wearing one of those billycock hats, Sir Webley.

SIR WEBLEY: Well, well. I suppose they've got to change, but not at that rate.

JERGINS: No, Sir Webley.

[EXIT, *shaking his head as he goes.*

SIR WEBLEY: Well, we must find out about this fellow.

NEEKS: Yes. I'll call Mr. Gleek's attention. He knows all about that sort of thing.

SIR WEBLEY: Yes, yes. Just . . .

[NEEKS *rises and goes some of the way towards* GLEEK'S *chair.*

NEEKS: Er—er——

GLEEK (*looking round*): Yes?

SIR WEBLEY: Do you know anything of a man called Mr. William Shakespeare?

GLEEK (*looking over his pince-nez*): No!

[*He shakes his head several times and returns to his paper.*

CURTAIN.

FAME AND THE POET

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

HARRY DE REVES, *a Poet.*
(*This name, though of course of French origin, has become anglicised and is pronounced* DE REEVS.)

DICK PRATTLE, *a Lieutenant-Major of the Royal Horse Marines.*

FAME.

FAME AND THE POET

Scene

The Poet's rooms in London. Windows in back. A high screen in a corner.
Time: February 30th.

The Poet *is sitting at a table writing.*

[*Enter* Dick Prattle.

Prattle: Hullo, Harry.

de Reves: Hullo, Dick. Good Lord, where are you from?

Prattle (*casually*): The ends of the earth.

de Reves: Well, I'm damned!

Prattle: Thought I'd drop in and see how you were getting on.

de Reves: Well, that's splendid. What are you doing in London?

Prattle: Well, I wanted to see if I could get one or two decent ties to wear—you can get nothing out there—then I thought I'd have a look and see how London was getting on.

de Reves: Splendid! How's everybody?

PRATTLE: All going strong.

DE REVES: That's good.

PRATTLE (*seeing paper and ink*): But what are you doing?

DE REVES: Writing.

PRATTLE: Writing? I didn't know you wrote.

DE REVES: Yes, I've taken to it rather.

PRATTLE: I say—writing's no good. What do you write?

DE REVES: Oh, poetry.

PRATTLE: Poetry! Good Lord!

DE REVES: Yes, that sort of thing, you know.

PRATTLE: Good Lord! Do you make any money by it?

DE REVES: No. Hardly any.

PRATTLE: I say—why don't you chuck it?

DE REVES: Oh, I don't know. Some people seem to like my stuff, rather. That's why I go on.

PRATTLE: I'd chuck it if there's no money in it.

DE REVES: Ah, but then it's hardly in your line, is it? You'd hardly approve of poetry if there *was* money in it.

PRATTLE: Oh, I don't say that. If I could make as much by poetry as I can by betting I don't say I wouldn't try the poetry touch, only——

DE REVES: Only what?

PRATTLE: Oh, I don't know. Only there seems more sense in betting, somehow.

DE REVES: Well, yes. I suppose it's easier to tell what an earthly horse is going to do, than to tell what Pegasus——

PRATTLE: What's Pegasus ?

DE REVES: Oh, the winged horse of poets.

PRATTLE: I say ! You don't believe in a winged horse, do you ?

DE REVES: In our trade we believe in all fabulous things. They all represent some large truth to us. An emblem like Pegasus is as real a thing to a poet as a Derby winner would be to you.

PRATTLE: I say. (Give me a cigarette. Thanks.) What ? Then you'd believe in nymphs and fauns, and Pan, and all those kind of birds ?

DE REVES: Yes. Yes. In all of them.

PRATTLE: Good Lord !

DE REVES: You believe in the Lord Mayor of London, don't you ?

PRATTLE: Yes, of course ; but what has——

DE REVES: Four million people or so made him Lord Mayor, didn't they ? And he represents to them the wealth and dignity and tradition of——

PRATTLE: Yes ; but, I say, what has all this——

DE REVES: Well, he stands for an idea to them, and they made him Lord Mayor, and so he is one . . .

PRATTLE: Well, of course he is.

DE REVES: In the same way Pan has been made what he is by millions; by millions to whom he represents world-old traditions.

PRATTLE (*rising from his chair and stepping backwards, laughing and looking at the* POET *in a kind of assumed wonder*): I say . . . I say . . . You old heathen . . . but Good Lord . . .

[*He bumps into the high screen behind, pushing it back a little.*

DE REVES: Look out! Look out!

PRATTLE: What? What's the matter?

DE REVES: The screen!

PRATTLE: Oh, sorry, yes. I'll put it right.

[*He is about to go round behind it.*

DE REVES: No, don't go round there.

PRATTLE: What? Why not?

DE REVES: Oh, you wouldn't understand.

PRATTLE: Wouldn't understand? Why, what have you got?

DE REVES: Oh, one of those things. . . . You wouldn't understand.

PRATTLE: Of course I'd understand. Let's have a look.

[*The* POET *walks towards* PRATTLE *and the screen. He protests no further.* PRATTLE *looks round the corner of the screen.*

An altar.

DE REVES (*removing the screen altogether*) : That is all. What do you make of it ?

[*An altar of Greek design, shaped like a pedestal, is revealed. Papers litter the floor all about it.*

PRATTLE : I say—you always were an untidy devil.

DE REVES : Well, what do you make of it ?

PRATTLE : It reminds me of your room at Eton.

DE REVES : My room at Eton ?

PRATTLE : Yes, you always had papers all over your floor.

DE REVES : Oh, yes——

PRATTLE : And what are these ?

DE REVES : All these are poems ; and this is my altar to Fame.

PRATTLE : To Fame ?

DE REVES : The same that Homer knew.

PRATTLE : Good Lord !

DE REVES : Keats never saw her. Shelley died too young. She came late at the best of times, now scarcely ever.

PRATTLE : But, my dear fellow, you don't mean that you think there really is such a person ?

DE REVES : I offer all my songs to her.

PRATTLE : But you don't mean you think you could actually *see* Fame ?

DE REVES : We poets personify abstract things, and

not poets only but sculptors and painters too. All the great things of the world are those abstract things.

PRATTLE: But what I mean is, they're not really there, like you or me.

DE REVES: To us these things are more real than men, they outlive generations, they watch the passing of kingdoms: we go by them like dust; they are still there, unmoved, unsmiling.

PRATTLE: But, but, you can't think that you could *see* Fame, you don't expect to *see* it?

DE REVES: Not to me. Never to me. She of the golden trumpet and Greek dress will never appear to me. . . . We all have our dreams.

PRATTLE: I say—what have you been doing all day?

DE REVES: I? Oh, only writing a sonnet.

PRATTLE: Is it a long one?

DE REVES: Not very.

PRATTLE: About how long is it?

DE REVES: About fourteen lines.

PRATTLE (*impressively*): I tell you what it is.

DE REVES: Yes?

PRATTLE: I tell you what. You've been overworking yourself. I once got like that on board the Sandhurst, working for the passing-out exam. I got so bad that I could have seen anything.

DE REVES: Seen anything?

PRATTLE: Lord, yes; horned pigs, snakes with wings; anything; one of your winged horses even. They gave me some stuff called bromide for it. You take a rest.

DE REVES: But my dear fellow, you don't understand at all. I merely said that abstract things are to a poet as near and real and visible as one of your bookmakers or barmaids.

PRATTLE: I know. You take a rest.

DE REVES: Well, perhaps I will. I'd come with you to that musical comedy you're going to see, only I'm a bit tired after writing this; it's a tedious job. I'll come another night.

PRATTLE: How do you know I'm going to see a musical comedy?

DE REVES: Well, where would you go? *Hamlet's* on at the Lord Chamberlain's. You're not going there.

PRATTLE: Do I look like it?

DE REVES: No.

PRATTLE: Well, you're quite right. I'm going to see "The Girl from Bedlam." So long. I must push off now. It's getting late. You take a rest. Don't add another line to that sonnet; fourteen's quite enough. You take a rest. Don't have any dinner to-night, just rest. I was like that once myself. So long.

DE REVES: So long.

[*Exit* PRATTLE. DE REVES *returns to his table and sits down.*

Good old Dick! He's the same as ever. Lord, how time passes.

He takes his pen and his sonnet and makes a few alterations.

Well, that's finished. I can't do any more to it.

[*He rises and goes to the screen; he draws back part of it and goes up to the altar. He is about to place his sonnet reverently at the foot of the altar amongst his other verses.*

No, I will not put it there. This one is worthy of the altar.

[*He places the sonnet upon the altar itself.*

If that sonnet does not give me fame, nothing that I have done before will give it to me, nothing that I ever will do.

[*He replaces the screen and returns to his chair at the table. Twilight is coming on. He sits with his elbow on the table, his head on his hand, or however the actor pleases.*

Well, well. Fancy seeing Dick again. Well, Dick enjoys his life, so he's no fool. What was that he said? "There's no money in poetry. You'd better chuck it." Ten years' work and what have I

to show for it ? The admiration of men who care for poetry, and how many of *them* are there ? There's a bigger demand for smoked glasses to look at eclipses of the sun. Why should Fame come to me ? Haven't I given up my days for her ? That is enough to keep her away. I am a poet ; that is enough reason for her to slight me. Proud and aloof and cold as marble, what does Fame care for us ? Yes, Dick is right. It's a poor game chasing illusions, hunting the intangible, pursuing dreams. Dreams ? Why, we are ourselves dreams.

[*He leans back in his chair.*

We are such stuff
As dreams are made on, and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep.

[*He is silent for a while. Suddenly he lifts his head.*

My room at Eton, Dick said. An untidy mess.

[*As he lifts his head and says these words, twilight gives place to broad daylight, merely as a hint that the author of the play may have been mistaken, and the whole thing may have been no more than a poet's dream.*

So it was, and it's an untidy mess there (*looking at screen*) too. Dick's right.

I'll tidy it up. I'll burn the whole damned heap,

[*He advances impetuously towards the screen.*

every damned poem that I was ever fool enough to waste my time on.

[*He pushes back the screen.* FAME *in a Greek dress with a long golden trumpet in her hand is seen standing motionless on the altar like a marble goddess.*

So . . . you have come!

[*For a while he stands thunderstruck. Then he approaches the altar.*

Divine fair lady, you have come.

[*He holds up his hand to her and leads her down from the altar and into the centre of the stage. At whatever moment the actor finds it most convenient, he repossesses himself of the sonnet that he had placed on the altar. He now offers it to* FAME.

This is my sonnet. Is it well done?

[FAME *takes it and reads it in silence, while the* POET *watches her rapturously.*

FAME: You're a bit of all right.

DE REVES: What?

FAME: Some poet.

DE REVES: I—I—scarcely . . . understand.

FAME: You're IT.

DE REVES: But . . . it is not possible . . . are you she that knew Homer?

FAME: Homer? Lord, yes. Blind old bat, 'e couldn't see a yard.

DE REVES: O Heavens!

[FAME *walks beautifully to the window. She opens it and puts her head out.*

FAME (*in a voice with which a woman in an upper storey would cry for help if the house was well alight*): Hi! Hi! Boys! Hi! Say, folks! Hi!

[*The murmur of a gathering crowd is heard.* FAME *blows her trumpet.*

FAME: Hi, he's a poet! (*Quickly, over her shoulder.*) What's your name?

DE REVES: De Reves.

FAME: His name's de Reves.

DE REVES: Harry de Reves.

FAME: His pals call him Harry.

THE CROWD: Hooray! Hooray! Hooray!

FAME: Say, what's your favourite colour?

DE REVES: I . . . I . . . I don't quite understand.

FAME: Well, which do you like best, green or blue?

DE REVES: Oh—er—blue.

[*She blows her trumpet out of the window.*

No—er—I think green.

FAME: Green is his favourite colour.

THE CROWD: Hooray! Hooray! Hooray!

FAME: 'Ere, tell us something. They want to know all about yer.

DE REVES: Wouldn't you perhaps . . . would they care to hear my sonnet, if you would—er . . .

FAME (*picking up quill*): Here, what's this?

DE REVES: Oh, that's my pen.

FAME (*after another blast on her trumpet*): He writes with a quill.

[*Cheers from the* CROWD.

FAME (*going to a cupboard*): Here, what have you got in here?

DE REVES: Oh . . . er . . . those are my breakfast things.

FAME (*finding a dirty plate*): What have yer had on this one?

DE REVES (*mournfully*): Oh, eggs and bacon.

FAME (*at the window*): He has eggs and bacon for breakfast.

THE CROWD: Hip hip hip, *hooray!*
Hip hip hip, *hooray!*
Hip hip hip, *hooray!*

FAME: Hi, and what's this?

DE REVES (*miserably*) : Oh, a golf stick.

FAME : He's a man's man ! He's a virile man ! He's a manly man !

[*Wild cheers from the* CROWD, *this time only from women's voices.*

DE REVES : Oh, this is terrible. This is terrible. This is terrible.

[FAME *gives another peal on her horn. She is about to speak.*

DE REVES (*solemnly and mournfully*) : One moment, one moment . . .

FAME : Well, out with it.

DE REVES : For ten years, divine lady, I have worshipped you, offering all my songs . . . I find . . . I find I am not worthy . . .

FAME : Oh, you're all right.

DE REVES : No, no, I am not worthy. It cannot be. It cannot possibly be. Others deserve you more. I must say it ! *I cannot possibly love you.* Others are worthy. You will find others. But I, no, no, no. It cannot be. It cannot be. Oh, pardon me, but it *must* not.

[*Meanwhile* FAME *has been lighting one of his cigarettes. She sits in a comfortable chair, leans right back, and puts her feet right up on the table amongst the poet's papers.*

Oh, I fear I offend you. But—it cannot be.

FAME: Oh, that's all right, old bird; no offence. I ain't going to leave you.

DE REVES: But—but—but—I do not understand.

FAME: I've come to stay, I have.

[*She blows a puff of smoke through her trumpet.*

CURTAIN.