

SELECT ONE-ACT PLAYS

For
Class XII
(Elective Course)

Editor :
Dr. D.D. Jyoti



Punjab School Education Board
Sahibzada Ajit Singh Nagar

© Punjab School Education Board

Edition : 2004.....5,000

All rights , including those of translation , reproduction and annotation etc. , are reserved by the Punjab School Education Board.

Warning

1. The Agency-holders shall not add any extra binding with a view to charge money for the binding. (Ref. C No. 7 of agreement with Agency-holders).
2. Printing, Publishing, Stocking, Holding or Selling etc of spurious Text-books qua text-books printed and published by the Punjab School Education Board is cognizable offence under Indian Penal Code.
(The textbooks of the Punjab School Education Board are printed on paper carrying water mark of the Board)

Price : Rs. 13-00

Published by : **Secretary**, Punjab School Education Board, Vidya Bhawan
Phase-8 Sahibzada Ajit Singh Nagar-160062 & Printed by Jyoti Prakash
Works, Mathura.

FOREWORD

The 10+2+3 pattern of education aims at revitalising education by giving it a new direction, by making it socially and individually relevant, and by relating it to the national aspirations. Two syllabuses in English, one General, the other Elective, have been developed for the Senior Secondary classes i.e., XI and XII. The syllabi assume that the learner has undergone a five or six-year English course at the Secondary school based on a syllabus of 2000 to 2500 words and about 200 structural items. The syllabus in General English aims at developing in the learner higher-order language abilities whereas the thrust of the Elective syllabus is on developing in the learner sensitivity to the imaginative and creative uses of language.

The present book, 'Select One-Act Plays' is designed to provide extensive exposure to the student to one of the latest literary genres, that is, the one-act play. An attempt has been made through this book to impart higher-order reading skills and to extend the vocabulary resources of the students.

It is hoped that the book would meet the academic needs of the class XII students. Suggestions for further improvement in the book, however, will be welcome.

Chairman

CHAPTER IV

The first of the three main divisions of the world is the land. The land is divided into three parts: the continents, the islands, and the archipelagoes. The continents are the large masses of land which are separated from each other by deep seas or oceans. The islands are small masses of land which are separated from the continents by narrow straits or channels. The archipelagoes are groups of islands which are situated in a line or in a cluster.

The second of the three main divisions of the world is the water. The water is divided into three parts: the oceans, the seas, and the bays. The oceans are the large bodies of water which are separated from each other by narrow straits or channels. The seas are smaller bodies of water which are situated between the continents and the islands. The bays are small bodies of water which are situated between the islands and the archipelagoes.

The third of the three main divisions of the world is the air. The air is divided into three parts: the atmosphere, the hydrosphere, and the lithosphere. The atmosphere is the layer of gas which surrounds the earth. The hydrosphere is the layer of water which covers the earth. The lithosphere is the layer of solid rock which forms the earth's crust.

THE ONE-ACT PLAY

The One-act play is a distinctive literary-dramatic genre of the beginning of the twentieth century. It is a full-fledged dramatic kind which suits well to the changed ethos of modern living, therefore, a popular and living kind of literature today.

The one-act play has the same relation to the drama as the short story has to the novel. It is not a full-length play in miniature, just as the short story is not a shortened novel. It is a literary form by itself with conventions and norms of its own.

The one-act play is not easier to write than a full-length play. The artistic challenges are perhaps greater in the one-act play. The structure of the one-act play is so brief and compact that it imposes severe restrictions on the playwright. He just cannot take time to develop his characters and action. He is supposed to, as the curtain rises, take his audience into the thick of the action.

Brevity is the essence of a one-act play ; brevity in plot, characterisation and dialogue. The structure of the one-act play should be such as should show that this form can achieve the magnificence of a full-length play.

It should also be noted that the one-act play closely approaches the classical conception of the dramatic art. It deals with a single main episode and is either a pure comedy or a pure tragedy. The time of the action in reality is very often equivalent to that of its representation on the stage, and the action itself is confined to a single place. The one-act play almost sticks to the three 'Unities' of time, place and action.

The one-act play shows how a single theme can be presented, developed and brought to a climax with the minimum of material and the maximum of dramatic effect.

Manoj Kumar
Subject Expert

CONTENTS

- | | | |
|----|---|--------|
| 1. | THE BISHOP'S CANDLESTICKS
Norman McKinnel | 1-23 |
| 2. | THE MIRACLE-MERCHANT
Saki | 24-39 |
| 3. | THE KING'S WARRANT
Ronald Gow | 40-59 |
| 4. | THE MAN WHO WOULDN'T
GO TO HEAVEN
F. Sladen-Smith | 60-95 |
| 5. | THE MONKEY'S PAW
W. W. Jacobs | 96-127 |

THE BISHOP'S CANDLESTICKS

NORMAN MCKINNEL

Introductory Note:

The Bishop's Candlesticks illustrate a profound but not generally accepted human truth; that a wicked criminal who has completely lost faith in goodness and even elementary human decencies can hope for redemption. Like *The Monkey's Paw* it is not an entirely original composition. If *The Monkey's Paw* is a dramatization of a short story; the present play is based on an episode in the early chapters of Victor Hugo's most well-known novel '*Les Misérables*.' Realizing the powerful dramatic potentialities of the episode, the Bishop and the Convict in Victor Hugo's Novel Norman McKinnel, who was an actor too, dramatized it after subjecting it to a few modifications with a view to making it still more effective on the stage.

The two most important characters in the play—as in the episode in the novel are The Bishop and the Convict who are endowed with a high degree of typicality. No doubt, they are interesting as human beings too, but their function in the play is intended by the playwright to be symbolic or allegorical. The Bishop is a personification of Christian charity. Actuated by this virtue he even commits the sin of telling a lie—when he misinforms the gendarmes that he himself has gifted away the silver candlesticks to the Convict. Incidentally it is this very unworldly behaviour—so foolish in the eyes of the worldlings like Persome which ultimately converts a mere number, a beast, into a human being with a soul. In his own words the Convict feels “as if I were a man again and not a wild beast.” What a whole decade of whipping and starving in the prison (appropriately called “hell” by the Convict) has been done in a few hours by

the humane words and behaviour of the noble Bishop. Miracles can indeed be wrought by love and sympathy.

The Convict like most criminals has not been born a criminal but has been forced by circumstances to become one. Once caught and consigned to the prison hulk, he loses his caste as a human being. But his final reclamation triumphantly proves that the man in him was never dead but only dormant.

Persome, the character next in the importance to the Bishop and Convict, serves as a dramatic foil to her brother the Bishop. Her attitude to the Convict (as to the world in general) is conventional and selfish and as such it presents a forceful contrast to that of the Bishop. It is she who provides whatever comic elements this otherwise serious and sentimental play contains though the uncouth behaviour of the Convict in throwing a bone on the floor, flinging away the fork, etc.—is also a little comical on account of its incongruity.

THE BISHOP'S CANDLES

Persons in the play

THE BISHOP

THE CONVICT

PERSOME - The Bishop's sister, a widow

MARIE - a maid - servant

SERGEANT OF GENDARMES

TIME. The beginning of last century

PLACE. France, about thirty miles from Paris

THE BISHOP'S CANDLESTICKS

SCENE: *The kitchen of the BISHOP'S cottage. It is plainly but substantially furnished Doors R. and L. and L. C. Window. R. C. Fireplace with heavy mantelpiece down R. Oak settle with cushions behind door L.C. Table in window R. C. with writing materials and crucifix (wood) Eight-day clock R. of window. Kitchen dresser with cupboard to lock down L. Oak dining table R. C. Chairs, books, etc. Winter wood scene without. On the mantelpiece are two very handsome candlesticks which look strangely out of place with their surroundings.*

MARIE and PERSOME discovered. MARIE stirring some soup on the fire. PERSOME laying the cloth, etc.

PERSOME. Marie, isn't the soup boiling yet?

MARIE. Not yet, madam.

PERSOME. Well it ought to be. You haven't tended the fire properly, child.

MARIE. But madam, you yourself made the fire up.

PERSOME. Don't answer me back like that, it is rude.

MARIE. Yes, madam.

PERSOME. Then don't let me have to rebuke you again.

MARIE. No, madam.

PERSOME. I wonder where my brother can be. It is after eleven o'clock (*looking at the clock*) and no sign of him. Marie!

MARIE. Yes, madam.

PERSOME. Did Monseigneur the Bishop leave any message for me?

MARIE. No, madam.

PERSOME. Did he tell you where he was going?

MARIE. Yes, madam.

PERSOME. 'Yes madam' (*imitating*). Then why haven't you told me, stupid!

MARIE. Madam didn't ask me.

PERSOME. But that is no reason for your not telling me, is it?

MARIE. Madam said only this morning I was not to chatter, so I thought—

PERSOME. Ah, mon Dieu, you thought ! Ah ! it is helpless.

MARIE. Yes, madam.

PERSOME. Don't keep saying 'Yes, madam', like a parrot, nincompoop.

MARIE. No, madam.

PERSOME. Well, Where did Monseigneur say he was going?

MARIE. To my mother's, madam.

PERSOME. To your mother's indeed ! And why, pray ?

MARIE. Monseigneur asked me how she was, and I told him she was feeling poorly.

PERSOME. You told she was feeling poorly, did you ? And so my brother is to be kept out of his bed, and go without his supper because you told him she was feeling poorly. There's gratitude for you !

MARIE. Madam, the soup is boiling !

PERSOME. Then pour it out, fool, and don't chatter. (*Marie about to do so*) No, no. Not like that, here let me do it, and do you put the salt — cellars on the table — the silver ones.

MARIE. The silver ones, madam ?

PERSOME. Yes the silver ones. Are you deaf as well as stupid ?

MARIE. They are sold, madam.

PERSOME. Sold ! (*With horror*) Sold ! Are you mad ? Who sold them ? Why were they sold ?

MARIE. Monseigneur the Bishop told me this afternoon while you were out to take them to Monseigneur Gervais who has often admired them, and sell them for as much as he could.

PERSOME. But you had no right to do so without asking me.

MARIE. But, madam, Monseigneur the Bishop told me
(*with awe*).

PERSOME. Monseigneur the Bishop is a — ahem. But, but what can he have wanted with the money?

MARIE. Pardon, madam, but I think it was for Mere Gringoire.

PRESOME. Mere Gringoire indeed? Mere Gringoire! What the old witch who lives at the top of the hill, and who says she is bedridden because she is too lazy to do any work? And what did Mere Gringoire want with that money, pray?

MARIE. Madam it was for the rent. The bailiff would not wait any longer and threatened to turn her out to-day if it were not paid, so she sent little Jean to Monseigneur to ask for help and—

PERSOME. Oh mon Dieu! It is hopeless, hopeless. We shall have nothing left. His estate is sold, his savings have gone. His furniture, everything. Were it not for my little dot we should starve, and now my beautiful — beautiful (*sob*) salt-cellars. Ah, it is too much, too much (*she breaks down crying*).

MARIE. Madam, I am sorry, if I had known—

PERSOME. Sorry, and why, pray? If Monseigneur the Bishop chooses to sell his salt-cellars he may do so, I suppose, go and wash your hands, they are disgracefully dirty.

MARIE. Yes madam (*going towards R.*)

(*Enter the Bishop, C.*)

BISHOP. Ah, how nice and warm it is in here! It is worth going out in the cold for the sake of comfort of coming in (*Persome has hastened to help him off with his coat, etc. Marie has dropped a deep curtsy*). Thank you, dear (*looking at her*). Why, what is the matter? You have been crying. Has Marie been troublesome, eh? (*Shaking his finger at her*) Ah!

PERSOME. No, it wasn't Marie—but, but—

BISHOP. Well, well, you shall tell me presently. Marie my child, run home now, your mother is better. I have prayed with her, and the doctor has been. Run home (*Marie putting on cloak and*

going). And Marie, let yourself in quietly in case your mother is asleep.

MARIE. Oh, thanks, Monseigneur.

(*She goes to door C., as it opens the snow drives in.*)

BISHOP. Here, Marie, take my comforter, it will keep you warm. It is very cold tonight.

MARIE. Oh, no, Monseigneur (*shamefacedly*)

PERSOME. What nonsense, brother, she is young, she won't hurt.

BISHOP. Ah, Persome, you have not been out, you don't know how cold it has become. Here, Marie, let me put it on for you. (*Does so*) There ! Run along, little one. (*Exit Marie C.*)

PERSOME. Brother, I have no patience with you. There, sit down and take your soup. It has been waiting ever so long. And if it is spoilt it serves you right.

BISHOP. It smells delicious.

PERSOME. I'm sure Marie's mother is not so ill that you need have stayed out on such a night as this. I believe those people pretend to be ill just to have the Bishop call on them. They have no thought of Bishop !

BISHOP. It is kind of them to want to see me.

PERSOME. Well for my part I believe that charity begins at home.

BISHOP. And so you make me this delicious soup. You are very good to me, sister.

PERSOME. Good to you, yes ! I should think so. I should like to know where you would be without me to look after you. The dupe of every idle scamp or lying old woman in the parish.

BISHOP. If people lie to me they are poor, not I.

PERSOME. But it is ridiculous, you will soon have nothing left. You give away everything, everything !!

BISHOP. My dear, there is so much suffering in the world and I can do so little (*sighs*) so very little.

PERSOME. Suffering, yes, but you never think of the suffering you cause to those who love you best, the suffering you cause to me.

BISHOP (*rising*). You, sister dear? Have I hurt you? Ah, I remember, you have been crying. Was it my fault? I did not mean to hurt you. I am sorry.

PERSOME. Sorry, Yes. Sorry won't mend it. Humph! Oh, do go on eating your soup before it gets cold.

BISHOP. Very well, dear. (*Sits*) But tell me—

PERSOME. You are like a child, I can't trust you out of my sight. No sooner is my back turned than you get that little minx Marie to sell the silver salt-cellars.

BISHOP. Ah, yes, the salt-cellars. It is pity. You, you were proud of them.

PERSOME. Proud of them, why they have been in our family for years.

BISHOP. Yes, it is pity, they were beautiful, but still dear, one can eat salt out of china just as well.

PERSOME. Yes, or meat off the floor, I suppose. Oh, it's coming to that. And as for old wretch Mere Gringoire, I wonder she had the audacity to send her here again. The last time I saw her I gave her such a talking to that it ought to have had some effect.

BISHOP. Yes! offered to take her in here for a day or two, but she seemed to think it might distress you.

PERSOME. Distress me!!!

BISHOP. And the bailiff, who is very just man, would not wait longer for the rent, so so— You—see I *had* to pay it.

PERSOME. *You had* to pay it (*Gesture of comic despair.*)

BISHOP. Yes, and you see I had no money so I had to dispose of the salt-cellars. It was fortunate I had them, wasn't it? (*Smiling*) But I'm sorry I have grieved you.

PERSOME. Oh, go on! Go on! You are incorrigible. You'll sell your candlesticks next.

BISHOP. (*with real concern*) No, no, sister, not my candlesticks.

PERSOME. Oh ! Why not ? They would pay somebody's rent. I suppose.

BISHOP. Ah, you are good, sister, to think of that, but, but I don't want to sell them. You see, dear, my mother gave them to me on—on death-bed just after you were born, and—and she asked me to keep them in remembrance of her, so I would like to keep them, but perhaps it is a sin to set such store by them ?

PERSOME. Brother, brother, you will break my heart (*with tears in her voice*). There ! don't say anything more. Kiss me and give me your blessing. I'm going to bed. *They kiss.*

BISHOP. *making sign of the Cross and murmuring blessing.*
(PERSOME *locks cupboard door and turns to go.*)

PERSOME. Don't sit up too long and tire your eyes.

BISHOP. (*comes to table and opens a book, then looks up at the candlesticks*). They would pay somebody's rent. It was kind of her to think of that.

(*He stirs the fire, trims the lamp, arranges some books and papers, sits down, is restless, shivers slightly, clock out side strikes twelve, and he settles to read. Music during this, Enter the CONVICT stealthily. he has a long knife and seizes at the BISHOP from behind*).

CONVICT. If you call out you are a dead man !

BISHOP. But my friend, as you see, I am reading. Why should I call out ? Can I help you in any way ?

CONVICT. (*hoarsely*). I want food. I'm starving. I haven't eaten anything for three days. Give me food quickly, quickly, curse you.

BISHOP (*eagerly*). But certainly, my son, you shall have food. I will ask my sister for the keys of the cupboard. (*Rising*).

CONVICT. Sit down !!! (*The BISHOP sits, smiling*). None of that, my friend ! I'm too old a bird to be caught with chaff. You

would ask your sister for the keys, would you? A likely story! You would rouse the house too Eh! Ha! Ha! A good joke truly. Come, where is the food? I want no keys. I have a wolf inside me tearing at my entrails, tearing me: quick, tell me where the food is.

BISHOP(*aside*). I wish Persome would not lock the cupboard
(*Aloud*) Come, my friend you have nothing to fear. My sister and I are alone here.

CONVICT. How do I know that?

BISHOP. Why, I have just told you.

(CONVICT *looks long at the* BISHOP).

CONVICT. Humph! I'll risk it. (BISHOP, *going to door R.*)
But mind! Play me false and as sure as there are devils in hell I'll drive my knife through your heart. I have nothing to lose.

BISHOP. You have your soul to lose, my son, it is more value than my heart. (*At the door R. Calling*) Persome! Persome!

(*The CONVICT stands behind him with his knife ready*)

Persome (*within*). Yes, brother.

BISHOP. Here is a poor traveller who is hungry. If you are not undressed will you come and open the cupboard and I will give him some supper.

PERSOME(*within*). What, at this time of night? A pretty business truly. Are we to have no sleep now, but to be at the beck and call of everyone ne'er-do-well who happens to pass?

BISHOP. But, Persome, that traveler is hungry.

PERSOME. Oh, very well, I am coming (PERSOME *enters R. Sees the knife in the CONVICT'S hand* (*Frightened*) Brother, what is he doing with that knife?

BISHOP. The knife, oh, well, you see, dear, perhaps he may have thought that I—I had sold ours.

(*Laughs gently*).

PERSOME. Brother, I am frightened. He glares at us like A wild beast (*aside to him*).

CONVICT. Hurry, I tell you, give me food or I'll stick my

knife in you both and help myself.

BISHOP. Give me the keys, Persome (*she gives them to him*) and now, dear, you may go to bed.

PERSOME, *going*. The CONVICT springs in front of her.

CONVICT. Stop ! Neither of you leave the room till I do.

(*She looks at the BISHOP*)

BISHOP. Persome, will you favour this gentleman with your company at supper ? He evidently desires it.

PERSOME. Very well, brother.

(*She sits down at table staring at the two*)

BISHOP. Here is some cold pie and a bottle of wine and some bread.

CONVICT. Put them on the table, and stand below it so that I can see you.

(BISHOP does so and opens drawer in table, taking out knife and fork, looking at the knife in CONVICT'S hand.)

CONVICT. My knife is sharp (*He runs his finger along the edge and looks at them meaningly.*) And as for forks (*taking it up*) faugh ! steel ! (*He throws it away.*) We don't use forks in prison.

PERSOME. Prison ?

CONVICT (*cutting off an enormous slice, which he tears with his fingers like an animal then starts*). What was that ? (*He looks at the door*). Why the devil do you leave the window unshuttered and the door unbarred so that anyone can come in (*shutting them*) ?

BISHOP. That is why they are left open.

CONVICT. Well, they are shut now !

BISHOP (*sighs*). For the first time in thirty years.

(CONVICT eats voraciously and throws a bone on the floor.)

PERSOME. Oh, my nice clean floor !

(BISHOP picks up the bone and puts it on plate)

CONVICT. You're not afraid of thieves ?

BISHOP. I am sorry for them.

CONVICT. Sorry for them. Ha ! ha ! ha ! (*Drinks from bottle.*)

That's good one. Sorry for them. Ha ! ha ! ha ! (*Drinks.*) (*suddenly*)
What the devil are you ?

BISHOP. I am a bishop.

CONVICT. Ha ! ha ! ha ! A bishop. Holy Virgin, a bishop.
Well I'm damned.

BISHOP. I hope you may escape that, my son. Persome, you
may leave us, this gentleman will excuse you.

PERSOME. Leave you with -

BISHOP. Please ! my friend and I can talk more-freely then.
(*By this time, owing to his starving condition, the wine
has affected the CONVICT.*)

CONVICT. What's that ? Leave us. Yes, yes, Leave us. Good
night. I want to talk to the Bishop. Ha ! Ha !
(*Laughs as he drinks and coughs*)

BISHOP. Good night, Persome.
(*He holds the door open and she goes out R., holding in her skirts
as she passes the CONVICT.*)

CONVICT. (*chuckling to himself.*) The Bishop. Ha ! ha !
Well I'm- (*Suddenly very loudly*) D' you know what I am ?

BISHOP. I think one who has suffered much ?

CONVICT. Suffered (*puzzled*), suffered ? My God, yes, (*Drinks*)
But that's a long time ago. Ha ! ha ! That was when I was a man;
now I'm not a man; now I'm a number; number 15729, and I've
lived in hell for ten years.

BISHOP. Tell me about it-about hell.

CONVICT. Why ? (*Suspiciously*). Do you want to tell the
police-to set them on my track ?

BISHOP. No ! I will not tell the police.

CONVICT (*looks at him earnestly*). I believe you (*Scratch-
ing his head*), but damn me if I know why.

BISHOP (*laying his hand on the CONVICT'S arm*). Tell me
about the time-the time before you went to hell.

CONVICT. It's so long ago I forgot, but I had a little cottage,

there were vines growing on it (*dreamily*), they looked pretty with the evening sun on them and, and—there was a woman—she was (*thinking hard*)—she must have been my wife—yes (*Suddenly and very rapidly*). Yes, I remember ! she was ill, we had no food. I could get no work, it was a bad year, and my wife, my Jeanette, was ill, dying, (*pause*) so I stole to buy her food. (*Long pause. The BISHOP gently pats his hand*). They caught me. I pleaded to them, I told them why I stole, but they laughed at me, and I was sentenced to ten years in the prison hulks, (*pause*) ten years in hell. The night I was sentenced the gaoler told me—told me Jeanette was dead. (*Sobs with fury*) Ah, damn them, damn them. God curse them all. (*He sinks on the table sobbing*).

BISHOP. Now tell me about the prisonship, about hell.

CONVICT. Tell you about it ? Look here, I was a man once. I'm a beast now, and they made me what I am. They chained me up like a wild animal they lashed me like a hound. I fed on filth, I was covered with vermin, I slept on boards and I complained. Then they lashed me again. For ten years, ten years. Oh God! They took away my name. They took away, my soul, and they gave me a devil in its place. But one day they were careless, one day they forgot to chain up their wild beast, and he escaped. He was free. That was six weeks ago. I was free, free to starve.

BISHOP. To starve ?

CONVICT. Yes, to starve. They feed you in hell, but when you escape from it you starve. They were hunting me everywhere and I had no passport, no name. So I stole again, I stole these rags, I stole my food daily. I slept in the woods, in barns, anywhere. I dare not ask for work. I dare not go into a town to beg, so I stole, and they have made me what I am, they have made me a thief. God curse them all. (*Empties the bottle and throws it into the fireplace R., smashing it.*)

BISHOP. My son, you have suffered much, but there is hope for all.

CONVICT. Hope ! Hope ! Ha ! ha ! ha ! (*Laughs wildly*).

BISHOP. You have walked far, you are tired. Lie down and sleep on the couch there, and I will get you some coverings.

CONVICT. And if anyone comes ?

BISHOP. No one will come, but if they do, are you not my friend ?

CONVICT. Your friend (*puzzled*) ?

BISHOP. They will not molest the Bishop's friend.

CONVICT. The Bishop's friend,

(*Scratching his head, utterly puzzled*)

BISHOP. I will get the coverings. (*Exit. L.*)

CONVICT. (*looks after him, scratches his head*). The Bishop's friend ! (*He goes to fire to warm himself and notices the candlesticks. He looks round to see if he is alone, and takes them down, weighing them*). Silver, by God, and Heavy. What a prize !

(*He hears the BISHOP coming, and in his haste drops one candlestick on the table.*) (*Enter the BISHOP.*)

BISHOP. (*sees what is going on, but goes to the settle up L. with coverings*). Ah, you are admiring my candlesticks. I am proud of them. They were a gift from my mother. A little too handsome for this poor cottage perhaps, but all I have to remind me of her. Your bed is ready. Will you lie down now ?

CONVICT. Yes, yes, I'll lie down now. (*Puzzled*) Look here, why the devil are you—ki—kind to me ? (*Suspiciously*) What do you want ? Eh ?

BISHOP. I want you to have a good sleep, my friend.

CONVICT. I believe you want to convert me, save my soul, don't you call it ? Well it's no good, see ? I don't want my damned religion, and as far the Church, bah ! I hate the Church.

BISHOP. That is a pity, my son, as the Church does not hate you.

CONVICT. You are going to try to convert me. Oh, ha ! ha ! that's a good idea Ha ! ha ! ha ! No, no, Monseigneur the Bishop, I

don't want any of your Faith, Hope and Charity, see ? So anything you do for me you're doing to the devil, understand (*defiantly*) ?

BISHOP. One must do a great deal for the devil, in order to do a little for God.

CONVICT. (*angrily*) I don't want any damned religion, I tell you.

BISHOP. Won't you lie down, it is late

CONVICT (*grumbling*). Well all right, but I won't be preached at I-I (*On couch*) You're sure no one will come ?

BISHOP. I don't think they will, but if they do—you yourself have locked the door.

CONVICT. Humph ! I wonder if it's safe. (*He goes to the door and tries it, then turns, and sees the BISHOP holding the covering, annoyed.*) Here ! you go to bed. I'll cover myself. (*The BISHOP hesitates*) Go on, I tell you.

BISHOP. Good night, my son. (Exit, L.)

(CONVICT waits till he is off, then tries the BISHOP'S door).

CONVICT. No lock of course. Curse it. (*Looks round and sees the candlesticks again*) Humph ! I'll have another look at them. (*He takes them up and toys with them*) Worth hundreds I'll warrant. If I had these turned into money they'd start me fair. Humph ! The old boy's fond of them too, said his mother gave him them. His mother, yes. They didn't think of *my* mother when they sent me to hell. He was kind to me too—but what's a bishop for except to be kind to you ? Here, cheer up: my hearty, you're getting soft. God ! wouldn't my chain-mates laugh to see 15729 hesitating about collar-ing the plunder because he felt good. Good Ha ! ha ! Oh my God ! Good ! Ha ! ha !, 15729 getting soft. That's a good one. Ha ! ha ! No, I'll take his candlesticks and go, If I stay here he'll preach at me in the morning, and I'll get soft. Damn him and his preaching too. Here goes !

(*He takes the candlesticks, stows them in his coat, and cautiously exits, L.C. As he does so the door slams.*)

PERSOME. (*without*). Who's there ? Who's there, I say ? Am I to get no sleep to night ? Who's there, I say ? (*Enter R. PERSOME*), I'm sure I heard the door shut (*Looking round*). No one here ? (*knocks*) at the Bishop's door *L* sees the candlesticks have gone) The candle-sticks, the candlesticks. They are gone. Brother, brother, come out. Fire, murder, thieves. (*Enter Bishop L.*),

BISHOP. What is it, dear, what is ? What is the matter ?

PERSOME. He has gone. The man with the hungry eyes has gone, and he has taken your candlesticks.

BISHOP. Not my candlesticks, sister, surely not those. (*He looks and sighs*). Ah that is hard, very hard, I, I—He might have left me those. They were all I had. (*Almost breaking down.*)

PERSOME. Well, but go and inform the police. He can't have gone far. They will soon catch him, and you'll get the candlesticks, back again. You don't deserve them, though, leaving them about with a man like that in the house.

BISHOP. You are right, Persome. It was my fault. I led him into temptation.

PERSOME. Oh, nonsense ! Led him into temptation indeed ! The man is a thief, a common scoundrelly thief. I knew it the moment I saw him. Go and inform the police or I will.

(*Going, but he stops her*)

BISHOP. And have him sent back to prison (*very softly*), sent back to hell ! No, Persome. It is a just punishment for me ; I set too great store by them. It was a sin. My punishment is just, but oh God, it is very hard. (*He buries his head in his hands.*)

PERSOME. No, brother, you are wrong. If you won't tell the, police I will. I will not stand by and see you robbed. I know you are my brother and my bishop and the best man in all France, but you are a fool, I tell you, a child, and I will not have your goodness abused. I shall go and inform the police (*going*).

BISHOP. Stop, Persome. The candlesticks were mine, they are *his* now. It is better so. He has more need of them than I. My

mother would have wished it so had she been here.

PERSOME. But—

(Great knocking without)

SERGEANT *(without)* Monseigneur; Monseigneur, we have something for you, may we enter?

BISHOP. Enter, my son.

Enter SERGEANT *and three* GENDARMES *with* CONVICT *bound*

(The SERGEANT carries the candlesticks)

PERSOME. Ah so they have caught you villain, have they?

SERGEANT. Yes, madam, we found this scoundrel slinking along the road, and as he wouldn't give any account of himself we arrested him on suspicion. Holy Virgin, isn't he strong and didn't he struggle? While we were securing him, these candlesticks fell out of his pocket *(PERSOME seizes them, goes to table, and brushes them with her apron lovingly.)* I remembered the candlesticks of Monseigneur the Bishop so we brought him here that you might identify them and then we'll lock him up.

(The Bishop and the Convict have been looking at each other. The Convict with dogged defiance.)

BISHOP. But, but I don't understand, the gentleman is my very good friend.

SERGEANT. Your *friend*, Monseigneur, Holy Virgin !! Well!!!

BISHOP. Yes, my friend, he did me the honour to sup with me tonight and I—I have given him the candlesticks.

SERGEANT *(incredulously)*. You gave *him, him* your candlesticks? Holy Virgin!

BISHOP *(severely)*. Remember, my son, that she is holy.

SERGEANT *(saluting)*. Pardon, monseigneur.

BISHOP. And now I think you may let your prisoner go.

SERGEANT. But he won't show me his papers, he won't tell me who he is?

BISHOP. I have told you he is my friend.

SERGEANT. Yes, that's all very well, but—

BISHOP. He is your Bishop's friend, surely that is enough.

SERGEANT. Well, but—

BISHOP. Surely ?

(A pause. The SERGEANT and the BISHOP look at each other.)

SERGEANT, I—I—Humph ! *(To his men)* Loose the prisoner.
(They do so.) Right about turn, quick march !

(Exit SERGEANT and GENDARMES. A long pause.)

CONVICT *(very slowly, as if in a dream)*. You told them you had, given me the candlesticks, given me them. By God !

PERSOME. *(shaking her fist at him and hugging the candlesticks to her breast)*. Oh, you scoundrel, you pitiful scoundrel, you come here and are fed, and warmed, and—and you thief; steal from your bene- factor. Oh, you blackguard.

BISHOP. Persome, you are overwrought. Go to your room.

PERSOME. What, and leave you with him to be cheated again, perhaps murdered. No, I will not.

BISHOP. *(with slight severity)* Persome, leave us, I wish it
(She looks hard at him, then turns towards her door.)

PERSOME. Well, if I must go at least I'll take the candlesticks with me.

BISHOP *(more severely)*. Persome, place the candlesticks on that table and leave us.

PERSOME *(defiantly)*. I will not !

BISHOP *(loudly and with great severity)*. I Your Bishop, command it. *(Persome does so with great reluctance and exits R.)*

CONVICT *(shamefacedly)*, Monseigneur, I'm glad I didn't get away with them, curse me. I am. I'm glad.

BISHOP. Now won't you sleep here ? Sec, your bed is ready.

CONVICT. No I *(looking at the candlesticks)* No ! no ! I daren't, I daren't—besides I must go on, I must get to Paris, it is big and I—I can be lost there, they won't find me there and I must travel at night, do you understand ?

BISHOP. I see—you must travel by night.

CONVICT. I, I—didn't believe there was any good in the world—one does'nt when one has been in hell, but somehow I—I—know you're good and, it's a queer thing to ask but -but could you, would you, bless me before I go—I—I—think it would help me. I—

(Hangs his head very shamefacedly)

(BISHOP makes sign of the Cross and murmurs blessing.)

CONVICT *(tries to speak, but a sob almost chokes him)* Good night. *(He hurries towards the door.)*

BISHOP. Stay, my son, you have forgotten your property *(giving him, the candlesticks.)*

CONVICT. You mean you want me to take them ?

BISHOP. Please, they may help you. *(The CONVICT takes the candlesticks in absolute amazement).* And my son, here is a path through the woods at the back of this cottage which leads to Paris ; it is a very lonely path, and I have noticed that my good friends the gendarmes do not like lonely paths at night. It is curious.

CONVICT. Ah, thanks, monseigneur. I—I—*(He sobs)* Ah ! I'm a fool, a child to cry, but somehow you have made me feel that—that it is just as if something had come into me—as if I were a man again and not a wild beast.

(The door at back is open, and the CONVICT is standing in it.)

BISHOP *(putting his hand on his shoulder)*. Always remember my son, that this poor body is Temple of the Living God.

CONVICT *(with great awe)*. The Temple is of the Living God. I'll remember. *(Exit L.C.)*

The BISHOP closes the door and goes quietly to the priedieu in the window R., he sinks on his knees, and bows his head in prayer.

SLOW CURTAIN

Glossary

- Settle : long, wooden seat with high back and arms
- Crucifix : Model of the cross with the figure of Jesus on it.
- two very handsome candlesticks : These very candlesticks later play the role of an instrument in reforming convict.
- Monseigneur : A title (like "mylord" in England) which in France is given to a person of high birth or rank, especially Bishops.
- mon Dieu : My God.
- nincompoop : fool.
- salt-cellar : small, open containers for salt at table.
- ahem : noise made when clearing the throat. All set to use a strong term for the bishop. Persome checks herself in time and pretends to clear obstruction in her throat.
- Mere : French for "Mother", title used for an old women.
- bailiff : A landlord's agent.
- dot : dowry (French)
- dropped a deep curtsy : bent her knees in token of respect for bishop.
- comforter : woollen scarf
- for my part : so far as I am concerned.
- scamp : worthless person.
- parish : division of a county.
- minx : Clever, Impudent girl.
- Yes, or meat off the floor, I suppose : Persome is sarcastic. If, as the Bishop thinks, one can eat salt out of a china jar as well as out of an elegant, silver salt-cellar then one can dispense with plates and dishes too. Why not eat your food off the floor ?

No, No sister not my candlesticks : The Bishop attaches sentimental value to the candlesticks which are the death bed gift of his mother. He can dispense with anything else but not with them. This exchange between the brother and the sister serves to intensify the impact of subsequent incident if the theft of this very candlesticks and the Bishop's noble gesture.

perhaps, it is a sin to set such store by them : For a true Christian to get attached to material things is a sin. The noble Bishop wonders his attachment to his mother's candle-sticks is something sinful. ("To set store by") means "to value".

be at the beck and call of : be ready to carry out the orders of.

ne'er-do-well : good for nothing fellow.

faugh : expression of disgust.

voraciously : greedily.

That's a good one: it is a funny joke.

prison hulks : old, out-of use ships used as prisons.

vermin : lice.

Faith, Hope and Charity: form St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans in the new Testament : And now abideth Faith, Hope and Charity, these three but the greatest of these is Charity." Note the charity in the Christian context implies universal love and fellow-feeling rather than something like giving alms to the poor.

bah : Expression of contempt.

Chain - mates : fellow-prisoners.

collaring the plunder : taking away the stolen goods.

prie-dieu : Kneeling-desk.

Exercises

1. Give a brief character-sketch of the Bishop.
2. What do you learn about Persome from the play ?
3. Discuss the idea which the playwright seems to propagate.
4. Towards the conclusion of the play the Convict tells the Bishop ... " ... Some how you had made me feel as if I were man again and not a wild beast." How has the Bishop succeeded in giving this feeling to the Convict ?
5. Explain the following statements:
 - (i) The Bishop's kitchen is plainly but substantially furnished.
 - (ii) It is worth going out in the cold for the sake of comfort of coming in. (The Bishop).
 - (iii) Well for my part I believe, that charity begins at home. (Persome).
 - (iv) You are like a child, I can't trust you out of my sight (Persome)
 - (v) I' am too old a bird to be caught by chaff (The Convict).
 - (vi) One must do a great deal for the devil, in order to do a little for God (The Bishop).
6. Use the following phrases in sentences of your own : —
 - (i) to make up;
 - (ii) to go without;
 - (iii) to break down;
 - (iv) to help (somebody) off with (something)
 - (v) to drop a curtsy;
 - (vi) to call on;
 - (vii) to look after;
 - (viii) to set store by;
 - (ix) to call out;
 - (x) to be at the beck and call.

7. Re-write the following sentences as directed :—
 - (i) Did Monseigneur the Bishop leave any message for me ?
(Change the voice)
 - (ii) Go and wash your hand, they are disgracefully dirty.
(because)
 - (iii) How nice and warm it is in here : (Write a non-exclamatory sentence equivalent in meaning).
 - (iv) She goes to the door, and as it opens the snow drives in.
(Use past tense).
 - (v) It is kind of them to want to see me. (Use "if they")
8. Put the following dialogue into indirect narration :
 PERSOME. Marie, isn't the soup boiling yet ?
 MARIE. Not yet, Madam.
 PERSOME. Well, it is ought to be. You haven't tended the fire properly, child.
 MARIE. But, madam, You yourself made the fire up.
 PERSOME. Don't answer me back like that. It is rude.
 MARIE. Yes, madam.
9. Explain the following with reference to the context :—
 - (i) Well for my part I believe that charity begins at home.
 - (ii) You are like a child, I can't trust you out of my sight.
 - (iii) I'm too old a bird to be caught with chaff.
 - (iv) One must do a great deal for the devil, in order to do a little for God.
10. Be sure of the pronunciation of the following words :
 Convict (Noun) ; Convict (verb)
 Crucifix : Bishop : Comforter : Voraciously

THE MIRACLE-MERCHANT

Hall-sitting-room in MRS. BEAUWHISTLE'S country house. French window, right. Doors, right centre and mid centre. Staircase, left centre. Door, Left. Long table, centre of stage, towards footlights, set with breakfast service. Chairs at table. Writing-table and chair, right of stage. Small hall table, back of stage. Wooden panelling below stair case, hung with swords, daggers, etc., in view of audience. Stand with golf-clubs, etc., left.

MRS. BEAUWHISTLE *seated at writing-table; she has had her breakfast. Enter LOUIS down staircase.*

LOUIS: Good morning, Aunt. (*He inspects the breakfast dishes.*)

MRS. BEAUWHISTLE: Good morning, Louis.

LOUIS: Where is Miss Martlet? (*Helps himself from dish.*)

MRS. BEAUWHISTLE: She finished her breakfast a moment ago.

LOUIS (*sits down*): I'm glad we're alone. I wanted to ask you- (*Enter STURRIDGE, left, with coffee, which he places on table and withdraws.*) I wanted to ask you—

MRS. BEAUWHISTLE: Whether I could lend you twenty pounds I suppose?

LOUIS: As a matter of fact I was only going to ask for fifteen. Perhaps twenty would sound better.

MRS. BEAUWHISTLE: The answer is the same in either case, and it's no. I couldn't even lend you five. You see I've had no end of extra expenses just lately—

LOUIS: My dear aunt, please don't give reasons. A charming woman should always be unreasonable, it's part of her charm. Just say 'Louis. I love you very much, but I'm damned if I lend you any more money.' I should understand perfectly.

MRS. BEAUWHISTLE: Well, we'll take it as said. I've just had a letter from Dora Bittholz, to say she is coming on Thursday.

Persons in the Play**MRS. BEAUWHISTLE****LOUIS COURCET, her nephew****JANE MARTLET****STURRIDGE, Mrs. Beauwhistle's butler****PAGE BOY**

THE MIRACLE-MERCHANT

SAKI

Introductory Note :

SAKI was the pen-name of Hector Hugh Munro (1870-1916), a well-known English political satirist, novelist, short story writer and dramatist. Born in Burma, he went to England for his education, travelled all over Europe and died in France as a soldier during the First World War. Though he began his literary career as a journalist, he soon gave up journalism and turned to fiction. He wrote two novels, *The Unbearable Bassington* and *When William Came*. Specialising in short stories; Munro developed a brilliantly witty style based very much on his favourite dramatist, Oscar Wilde. Like Wilde, he builds his action around a succession of epigrams or epigrammatic situations. (An epigram is a statement expressing an idea in a clever and amusing way.) At the same time, his work reflects much of the carefree background of England in the Edwardian period, the peaceful years before 1914.

The Miracle-Merchant is 'Saki's' dramatised version of his own short-story called *The Hen*. It is interesting to compare the two and to observe the skilful introduction of appropriate stage movement in the play. Much of the dialogue remains unaltered, but the few additions, (the breakfast scene, for instance) enliven the scene.

LOUIS : This next Thursday ? I say, that's rather awkward, isn't it ?

MRS. BEAUWHISTLE : Why awkward ?

LOUIS : Jane Martlet has only been here six days and she never stays less than a fortnight, even when she's asked definitely for a week. You'll never get her out of the house by Thursday.

MRS. BEAUWHISTLE : But why should I ? She and Dora are good friends, aren't they ? They used to be.

LOUIS : Used to be, yes ; that is what makes them such bitter enemies now. Each feels that she has nursed a viper in her bosom. Nothing fans the flame of human resentment so much as the discovery that one's bosom has been utilised as a snake-sanatorium.

MRS. BEAUWHISTLE : But why are they enemies ? What have they quarrelled about ? Some man I suppose.

LOUIS : No. A hen has come between them.

MRS. BEAUWHISTLE : A hen ! What hen ?

LOUIS : It was a bronze Leghorn or some such exotic breed, and Dora sold it to Jane at a rather exotic price. They both go in for poultry breeding you know.

MRS. BEAUWHISTLE : If Jane agreed to give the price I don't see what there was to quarrel about—

LOUIS : Well, you see, the bird turned out to be an abstainer from the egg habit, and I'm told that the letters which passed between the two women were a revelation as to how much abuse could be got on to a sheet of notepaper.

MRS. BEAUWHISTLE : How ridiculous ! Couldn't some of their friends compose the quarrel ?

LOUIS : It would have been rather like composing the storm music of a Wagner opera. Jane was willing to take back some of her most libellous remarks if Dora would take back the hen.

MRS. BEAUWHISTLE : And wouldn't she ?

LOUIS : Not she. She said that would be owing herself in the wrong, and you know that Dora would never, under any

circumstances, own herself in the wrong. She would as soon think of owning a slum property in Whitechapel as do that.

MRS. BEAUWHISTLE : It will be a most awkward situation, having them both under my roof at the same time. Do you suppose they won't speak to one another ?

LOUIS : On the contrary, the difficulty will be to get them to leave off. Their descriptions of each other's conduct and character have hitherto been governed by the fact that only four ounces of plain speaking can be sent through the post for a penny.

MRS. BEAUWHISTLE : What is to be done ? I can't put Dora off, I've already postponed her visit once, and nothing, short of a miracle would make Jane leave before her self-allotted fortnight is over.

LOUIS : I don't mind trying to supply a miracle at short notice- miracles are rather in my line.

MRS. BEAUWHISTLE : My dear Louis, you'll be clever if you get Jane out of this house before Thursday.

LOUIS : I shall not only be clever, I shall be rich; in sheer gratitude you will say to me, 'Louis, I love you more than ever, and here are the twenty pounds we were speaking about.

(Enter JANE, door, centre.)

JANE : Good morning, Louis.

LOUIS (rising) : Good morning, Jane.

JANE : Go on with your breakfast ; I've had mine but I'll just have a cup of coffee to keep your company. (Helps herself.) Is there any toast left ?

LOUIS : Sturridge is bringing some. Here it comes.
(STURRIDGE enters, left, with toast rack. JANE seats herself and is helped to toast ; she takes three pieces.)

JANE : Isn't there any butter ?

STURRIDGE . Your sleeve is in the butter, miss.

JANE : Oh, yes.

(Helps herself, generously, Exit STURRIDGE, left)

MRS. BEAUWHISTLE : Jane dear, I see the Mackenzie-Hubbard wedding is on Thursday next, St. Peter's, Eaton Square' such a pretty church for weddings. I suppose you'll be wanting to run away from us to attend it. You were always such friends with Louisa Hubbard, it would hardly do for you not to turn up.

JANE : Oh I'm not going to bother to go all that way for a silly wedding, much as I like Louisa ; I shall go and stay with her for several weeks after she's come back from her honeymoon. (LOUIS grins across at his aunt.) I don't see any honey !

LOUIS : Your other sleeve's in the honey.

JANE : Bother, so it is. (*Helps herself liberally.*)

MRS. BEAUWHISTLE (*rising*) : Well, I must leave you and go and do some gardening. Ring for anything you want, Jane.

JANE : Thank you, I'm all right.

(*Exit MRS. BEAUWHISTLE by French window, right.*)

LOUIS (*pushing back his chair*) : Do you mind my smoking?

JANE (*still eating heartily*) : Not at all. (*Enters STURRIDGE with tray, left, as if to clear away breakfast things. Places tray on side table, back centre, and is about to retire.*) Oh I say, can I have some more, hot milk ? This is nearly cold.

(*STURRIDGE takes jug and exit, left, LOUIS looks fixedly after him. Seats himself near JANE and stares solemnly at the floor.*)

LOUIS : Servants are a bit of a nuisance.

JANE : Servants a nuisance ! I should think they are ! The trouble I have in getting suited you would hardly believe. But I don't see what you have to complain of—your aunt is so wonderfully lucky in her servants. Sturridge for instance—he's been with her for years and I'm sure he's a jewel as butlers go.

LOUIS : That's just the trouble. It's when servants have been with you for years that they become a really serious nuisance. The other sort, the here today and gone tomorrow lot, don't matter—you've simply got to replace them. It's the stayers and the jewels that are the real worry.

JANE : But if they give satisfaction—

LOUIS : That doesn't prevent them from giving trouble. As it happens, I was particularly thinking of Sturridge when I made the remark about servants being a nuisance.

JANE : The excellent Sturridge a nuisance ! I can't believe it.

LOUIS : I know he is excellent and my aunt simply couldn't get along without him. But his very excellence has had an effect on him.

JANE : What effect ?

LOUIS (*solemnly*) : Have you ever considered what it must be like to go on unceasingly doing the correct thing in the correct manner in the same surroundings for the greater part of a lifetime ? To know and, ordain and superintend exactly what silver and glass and table linen shall be used and set out on what occasions, to have pantry and cellar and plate-cupboard under a minutely devised and undeviating administration, to be noiseless, impalpable, omnipresent, infallible ?

JANE (*with conviction*) : I should go mad.

LOUIS : Exactly. Mad.

(*Enter STURRIDGE, left, with milk jug which he places on table and exit, left.*)

JANE : But—Sturridge hasn't gone mad.

LOUIS : On most points he's thoroughly sane and reliable, but at times he is subject to the most obstinate delusions.

JANE : Delusions—what sort of delusions ? (*She helps herself to more coffee*).

LOUIS : Unfortunately they usually centre round someone staying in the house ; that is where the awkwardness comes in. For instance, he took it into his-head that Matilda Sheringham, who was here last summer, was the Prophet Elijah.

JANE : The Prophet Elijah ! The man who was fed by ravens ?

LOUIS : Yes, it was the ravens that particularly impressed Sturridge's imagination. He was rather offended, it seems, at the

idea that Matilda should have her private catering arrangements and he declined to compete with the birds in any way : he wouldn't allow any tea to be sent up to her in morning and when he waited at table he passed her, over altogether in handing round the dishes. Poor Matilda could scarcely get anything to eat.

JANE : How horrible ! How very horrible ! Whatever did you do ?

LOUIS : It was judged best for her to cut her visit short. (*With emphasis*) In a case of that kind it was the only thing to be done.

JANE : I shouldn't have done that. (*Cuts herself some bread and butters it.*) I should have humoured him in some way. I should have said the ravens were moulting. I certainly shouldn't have gone away.

LOUIS : It's not always wise to humour people when they get these ideas into their heads. There's no knowing to what lengths they might go.

JANE : You don't mean to say Sturridge might be dangerous?

LOUIS : One can never be certain. Now and then he gets some idea about a guest which might take an unfortunate turn. That is what is worrying me at the present moment.

JANE (*excitedly*) : Why, has he taken some fancy about me.

LOUIS (*who has taken a putter out of the stand, left, and is polishing it with an oil rag*) : He has.

JANE : No, really ? Who on earth does he think I am ?

LOUIS : Queen Anne.

JANE : Queen Anne ! What an idea ! But anyhow there's nothing dangerous about her ; she's such a colourless personality. No one could feel very strongly about Queen Anne.

LOUIS (*sternly*) : What does posterity chiefly say about her ?

JANE : The only thing I can remember about her is the saying 'Queen Anne's dead.'

LOUIS : Exactly. Dead.

JANE : Do you mean that he takes me for the ghost of

Queen Anne ?

LOUIS : Ghost ? Dear no. Who ever heard of a ghost that came down to breakfast and ate kidneys and toast and honey with a healthy appetite ? No it's the fact to you being so very much alive and flourishing that perplexes and irritates him.

JANE (*anxiously*) : Irritates him ?

LOUIS : Yes, All his life he has been accustomed to look on Queen Anne as the personification of everything that is dead and done with, 'as dead as Queen Anne' you know, and now he has to fill your glass at lunch and dinner and listen to your accounts of the gay, time you had at the Dublin Horse Show, and naturally he feels that there is something scandalously wrong somewhere.

JANE (*with increased anxiety*) : But he wouldn't be downright hostile to me on that account, would he ? Not violent ?

LOUIS (*carelessly*) : I didn't get really alarmed about it till late night, when he was bringing in the coffee. I caught him scowling at you with a very threatening look and muttering things about you.

JANE : What things ?

LOUIS : That you ought to be dead long ago and that someone should see to it, and that if no one else did, he would. (*Cheerfully*) That's why I mentioned the matter to you.

JANE : This is awful ! Your aunt must be told about it at once.

LOUIS : My aunt mustn't bear a word about it. It would upset her dreadfully. She relies on Sturridge for everything.

JANE : But he might kill me at any moment !

LOUIS : Not at any moment ; he's busy with the silver all the afternoon.

JANE : What a frightful situation to be in, with a mad butler dangling over one's head.

LOUIS : Of course it's only a temporary madness ; perhaps if you were to cut your visit short and come to us some later in the year

he might have forgotten all about Queen Anne.

JANE : Nothing would induce me to cut short my visit. You must keep a sharp look out on Sturridge and be ready to intervene if he gets violent. Probably we are both exaggerating things a bit. (*Rising*) I must go and write some letters in the morning room. Mind, keep an eye on the man. (*Exit door, right centre.*)

LOUIS (*savagely*) : Quel type !

(*Enter MRS. BEAUWHISTLE by French window, right.*)

MRS. BEAUWHISTLE : Can't find my gardening gloves anywhere. I suppose, they are where I left them, it's a way my things have. (*Rummages in drawer of table back centre*) They are. (*Produces gloves from drawer*) And how is your miracle doing, Louis ?

LOUIS : Rotten ! I've invented all sorts of excellent reasons for stimulating the migration instinct in that woman, but you might as well try to drive away an attack of indigestion by talking to it.

MRS. BEAUWHISTLE : Poor Louis ! I'm afraid Jane's staying powers are superior to any amount of hustling that you can't bring to bear. (*Enter STURRIDGE, left; he begins clearing break fast things*). I could have told you from the first that you were engaged on a wild-goose-chase.

LOUIS : Chase ! You can't chase a thing that refuses to budge. One of the first conditions of the case is that the thing you are chasing should run away.

MRS. BEAUWHISTLE (*laughing*) : That's a condition that Jane will never fulfil.

(*Exit through window, right LOUIS continues cleaning golf club, then suddenly stops and looks reflectively at STURRIDGE, who is busy with the breakfast things.*)

LOUIS : Where is Miss Martlet ?

STURRIDGE : In the morning room, I believe sir, writing letters.

LOUIS : You see that old basket-hilted sword on the wall ?

STURRIDGE : Yes, Sir. This big one ? (*Points to sword.*)

LOUIS : Miss Martlet wants to copy the inscription on its blade. I wish you would take it to her ; my hands are, all over oil.

STURRIDGE : Yes, sir. (*Turns to wall where sword is hanging.*)

LOUIS : Take it without the sheath, it will be less trouble. (*STURRIDGE draws the blade, which is broad and bright, and exit by door, centre. LOUIS stands back under shadow of staircase. Enter JANE door, right centre, at full run, screams : 'Louis ! Louis ! Where are you ?' and rushes upstairs at top speed. Enters STURRIDGE door, right centre, sword in hand. LOUIS steps forward*)

STURRIDGE : Miss Martlet slipped out of the room, sir, as I came in ; I don't think she saw me coming. Seemed in a bit of a hurry.

LOUIS : Perhaps she has a train to catch. Never mind, you, can put the sword back, I'll copy out the inscription for her myself later.

(*STURRIDGE returns sword to its place. LOUIS continues cleaning putter. STURRIDGE carries breakfast tray out by door, left. Enter PAGE, running full speed downstairs.*)

PAGE : The time-table ! Miss Martlet wants to look up a train.

(*LOUIS dashes to drawer of small table, centre ; he and PAGE hunt through contents, throwing gloves, etc. etc., on to floor*)

LOUIS : Here it is ! (*PAGE seizes book, starts to run upstairs. LOUIS grabs him by tip of jacket, pulls him back, opens book, searches frantically.*) Here you are. Leaves eleven fifty-five, arrives Charing, Cross two twenty. PAGE dashes upstairs with time-table. LOUIS (*flies to speaking tube in wall, left, whistle down it*) Is that you, Tomkins ? To car as quick as you can, to catch the eleven fifty-five. Never mind your livery, just as you are.

(*Shuts off tube. PAGE dashes downstairs.*)

PAGE : Miss Martlet's golf-clubs !

(LOUIS dashes for them in stand, and gives them to boy.)

LOUIS : Here, this Tom-o'-shanter is hers-and this motor veil.

(Gives them to boy.)

PAGE : She said there was a novel of hers down here.

(LOUIS goes to writing-table where there are six books on shelf and gives them all to PAGE.)

LOUIS : Here, take the lot. Fly! (He pushes the PAGE vigorously up first steps of staircase. Exit PAGE. The sound of books dropping can be heard as he goes. LOUIS dashes round room to see if, anything more belonging to JANE remains. Looks at his watch, compares it with small clock on writing-table. Goes to speaking tube.) Hullo, is Tomkins there ? What ? Oh, all right. (Shuts off tube. Goes to table, where coffee pot still remains and pours out cup of coffee, drinks it. Looks again at watch.)

STURRIDGE (enter left) : The car has come round, sir.

LOUIS : Good, I'll go and tell Miss Martlet. Will you find my aunt, she's somewhere in the garden and tell her that Miss Martlet had to leave in a hurry to catch the eleven fifty-five ; called away urgently ; and couldn't stop to say good-bye. Matter of life and death.

STURRIDGE : Yes, sir,

(Exit STURRIDGE door left. LOUIS exit up staircase. Enter MRS. BEAUWHISTLE by window ; right. She has a letter in her hand, she looks in at door, right centre, returns and calls : 'Louis-Louis !' Sound of a motor heard, LOUIS rushes in by door. left.)

LOUIS (excitedly) : How much did you say you'd lend me if I, got, rid of Jane Martlet ?

MRS. BEAUWHISTLE : We need to get rid of her. Dora has just written to say she can't come this month.

(LOUIS collapses into chair.)

Glossary

French window	:one that serves as both a window and a door
sanatorium	:health resort
Leghorn	:kind of domestic fowl
exotic	:foreign or unusual ; strange ; unreasonably high (price)
compose	:settle ; bring to an end
Wagner	:Richard Wanger (1813-83). German composer , famous for his 'operas'—dramatic composition with music ; in which the words are sung
libellous remarks	:remarks that are damaging to the reputation of another person
owning	:admitting ; confessing
ordain	:decide ; give orders
impalpable	:that cannot be touched or felt
delusion	:false opinion or belief, especially one that may be a symptom of madness
Elijah	:a prophet who lived in the ninth century B.C. and mentioned in the Old Testament
raven	:large, black bird like a crow, popularly regarded as a bird of ill omen
humoured	:gratified
moulting	:(of birds) losing feathers before a new growth
putter	:club for stroking a golf-ball towards or into a hole
posterity	:future generations
scowling	:looking in a bad-tempered way (at)
Quel type !	:(French) What a sort
rummage	:turn things over, move things about, while looking for something
migration	:movement of birds, fishes, etc., from one place to another
hustle	:push roughly
hilt	:handle of a sword or dagger

inscription	: words inscribed or written on a monument, etc.
sheath	: cover for the blade of a weapon or tool
page	: boy acting as a personal attendant of a person of high rank.
tom-o'-shanter	: round woollen or cloth cap fitting closely to the forehead

I Exercises

1. Do you think Louis regularly borrows money from Mrs. Beauwhistle?
2. Louis is a reflection of the playwright, 'Saki', in real life. Like 'Saki', Louis frequently speaks epigrammatic sentences. Early in the play he says : 'A charming woman should always be unreasonable, it's part of her charm.' Can you point out similar epigrammatic constructions in the play?
3. Do you think Louis is particularly fond of Jane? Why not? What specific, habit of hers is annoying to him? Do you think at least Mrs. Beauwhistle approves of her habit? Why does Louis think that Jane should get out of the house by Thursday?
4. What, in fact, has been the cause of the antagonism between Dora and Jane?
5. A *pun* is a humorous use of two words which sound the same or of two meanings of the same word. The humorous effect lies in the use of two meanings of the same word *compose*. Can you point out the use of another pun in the next few lines and how it provides a humorous effect?
6. Why can't Mrs. Beauwhistle put off Dora's visit to save the situation? What does Louis offer to do to save the house hold from imminent crisis? Do you think he sounds over-confident when he makes this offer? What does he expect in return for his services?

7. How does Mrs. Beauwhistle try to get rid of Jane ? Why does she not succeed ?
 8. Can you indicate the point in the play where the idea of exploiting Sturridge to get Jane to leave the house occurs to Louis ? What does it suggest about Louis's own character ? How does he begin the execution of his idea ?
 9. According to Louis, who does Sturridge think Jane is ? Does Sturridge think she is the ghost of Queen Anne ? What then is it that really irritates him ? How does Louis get the idea that the butler might be positively hostile to Jane ?
 10. Why does Louis ask Sturridge to carry up a sword to Jane ? Why does he choose one of the bigger swords ? Does this act of Sturridge have the desired effect ? Does Sturridge himself realise that he, has, been exploited by Louis to force Jane out of the house ? How do you know ?
 11. Notice the intense activity in the final scene in which Louis and Page are involved. How does this compare with the ending of the play, when Louis is informed that Dora has put off her visit ? Did you expect such an ending ?
 12. A distinctive feature of 'Saki's short stories and plays is the surprise ending. A surprise ending is particularly suited to a one-act play in which the creation of a single final impression on the mind of the audience is vital. What impression did *The Miracle-Merchant* make on your mind ? Do you think you would have felt differently if Louis's plan had succeeded ?
- II. Comment on the characterisation of Louis Courcet and Sturridge. Which of these two characters do you consider most successfully presented ?
- III. Explain the following with reference to the context :
- (i) Nothing fans the flame of human resentment so much as the discovery that one's bosom has been utilised as a snake-sanatorium.

- (ii) I don't mind trying to supply a miracle at short notice-
miracles are rather in my line.
- (iii) It's when servants have been with you for years that
they become a really serious nuisance. The other sort,
the here today and gone tomorrow lot, don't matter
you've simply got to replace them. It's the stayers and
the jewels that are, the real worry.
- (iv) The Prophet Elijah ! The man who was fed by ravens?
- (v) We needn't get rid of her. Dora has just written to say
she can't come this month.

IV. (a) Frame sentences with the following :

Stairs : ladder :

to keep company :

Mind (as verb).

- (b) Be sure of the pronunciation of the following words :
- Breakfast : Ghost : Anne : Louis.
-

THE KING'S WARRANT

RONALD GOW

Introductory Note :

The play presents an interesting exploit of the legendary gentleman outlaw Robin Hood. It is still controversial whether or not such a man really did exist, but in folk literature Robin Hood occupies a place of prominence. There is a whole cycle of folk ballads (traditional verse-stories) built around him and his band of outlaws, notably Little John- jocularly so called, for he was a heavily built man. Robin Hood is presented in these ballads as merry, devil-may-care law-breaker and highwayman who robs the rich and is generous to the poor. He never molests women, never kills except when attacked, is an unerring Bowman and specializes in outwitting and teasing the Sheriff of Nottingham. He is a master of the art of disguise which helps him in times of difficulty. Thus he has all the qualifications of a traditional folk outlaw-hero.

It may be mentioned that the present play does not dramatize the story narrated in any one specific Robin Hood ballad. But what Robin Hood does is perfectly in keeping with his character as it emerges from the ballad. He is able to hoodwink his arch adversary the Sheriff of Nottingham who acts like an overbearing and deceitful coward. With the help of a clever disguise the outlaw honest and truthful but extremely vigilant, turns the tables on the Sheriff. The play is rich in strokes of humour : for example, the Host reading out the ballad left by the stranger as if it were the King's warrant, the Sheriff's foolish presumption that the stranger is none other than Hood in disguise and his pulling of his beard, the discomfiture of the Sheriff when "his own" bowmen direct their bows at him, etc.

Persons in the Play

THE PEDLAR

THE HOST

THE SHERIFF

THE BOY

THE STRANGER

LITTLE JOHN

YEOMEN AND OTHERS

SCENE—An Inn on the Nottingham road.

1. THE KING'S WARRANT

An inn on Nottingham road. Some yeomen, clad in Lincoln green, sit at a table, singing. A Pedlar enters, carrying a pack. He sits down apart from the others. The Landlord attends to him. Soon the singing ceases, and yeomen put their heads together, discussing the Pedlar.

PEDLAR. *(to the Host)*. I am a Pedlar, and take my goods to Lincoln market. It is my hope, by the grace of God, and honest, dealings, to win softer living in a hard world.

HOST. There's small reward for honesty these days.

PEDLAR. If a man has the wit to escape the law, he has but little strength to defy the barons. And if he be too small a prey for the barons, then thieves and robbers will have the picking of him.

HOST. Aye, the roads are full of danger, even by day. And at night-well, he is either a fool or well armed that will venture on the roads by night.

PEDLAR. Or else he's a robber.

HOST. Aye, that's the trade for the dark.

PEDLAR. I think this road runs by Sherwood.

HOST. A part of it goes through the forest.

PEDLAR. And belike that scoundrel Robin Hood and his men...

HOST. Hush ! Speak not so loud.

PEDLAR *(looking around)*. Oho ? Is his name so dreaded, that we, must whisper it ?

HOST. A wise man knows when to whisper.

PEDLAR. And when to wink, eh ?

HOST *(laughing)*. Aye, and when to wink. Both eyes, sometimes.

PEDLAR. Well said, mine host. Then I'll spend the night between sunset and cock-crow winking in the best bed. How long to sunset !

HOST. He's down behind the tree-tops already. I'll go now and prepare the candles.

PEDLAR. And send me a cup of sack, host.

HOST. The best in the country, my friend.

(The Host goes out. The sound of a horn comes from the distance. The men start. One goes to the window and peers out. They motion to each other, and having laid money on the table, depart hurriedly. The Host returns with the drink.)

PEDLAR. So those are Robin Hood's brave men?

HOST. Robin Hood has many brave men in his band. May be those were of his band, as you say.

PEDLAR. And may be that was their leader's horn calling them.

HOST. May be we'er hard of hearing in these parts.

(The Host is counting the money from the table.)

PEDLAR. And so long as the money's sound, we'll keep our mouths shut, eh? Is that the way the tune goes?

HOST. Aye, and thank the Lord for as honest a knave as Robin Hood. I know the law would give golden crowns for his head, but I fear there would be a worse come after him. There's not a man in these parts, whose heart is sound, and whose conscience is clear, that goes in tear of the Sherwood men. *You're an honest trader, now, and they' never harm the like of you.*

PEDLAR. And yet, for all that, I'd be glad of the hundred crowns they offer for his head in Nottingham. I hear the Sheriff will pay that money for him, dead or alive.

HOST. They'll not take him alive, and if they take him dead, I warrant they'll need a hundred men to hold him down.

PEDLAR *(slowly)*. A hundred crowns! *(He seizes the Host by the arm.)* Half of it would make you rich man, mine host.

HOST. Let the Sheriff keep his money. I'd as life die poor, with no man's blood on my head.

PEDLAR. But man, 'tis the King's law. The Sheriff does no,

more than his duty.

HOST. The Sheriff wants his revenge.

PEDLAR. Why, how's that ?

HOST. Have you not heard the dance the outlaw leads him ? How Robin went to Nottingham in the guise of a butcher and offered a herd of fat cattle to the Sheriff ? And how the Sheriff, thinking to make a mean bargain, offered but half of the fair price ? And how the outlaw brought the Sheriff to Sherwood, and for a herd of fat cattle, what do you think he showed him ?

PEDLAR. Nay, I know not your story.

HOST (*laughing and slapping his thigh.*) A herd of the King's own deer. Aye, he sold them to the Sheriff.

PEDLAR. And was the Sheriff fool enough to buy.

HOST. Fool or no fool, he paid the price. May be he thought a whole skin was cheap at any price. Aye, and that's not only grudge the Sheriff bears the Sherwood men. Only last fair day...

(*A rider gallops up to the inn.*)

HOST. Hear you that ? A rider. Some traveller. (*The Host opens the door. Enters the Sheriff of Nottingham, black-bearded overbearing man.*)

SHERIFF. Have my horse looked to. And saddle me another, from your stable, I return to Nottingham tonight.

HOST. The Sheriff of Nottingham ?

SHERIFF. Aye, the Sheriff ! Don't stand gaping at me man !

HOST. This is an honour for my humble roof.

SHERIFF. Fool ! Think you the High Sheriff of Nottingham travels abroad to taste the pleasures of this paltry sty ? See to the horse and bring me better wine than you sell to cut throats.

HOST. But Your men ? Is your worship alone ?

SHERIFF. I rode from Nottingham alone. But perhaps I shall return with a companion.

HOST. Good Master Sheriff, I have done nothing unlawful I am an honest landlord, and ply an honest trade...

SHERIFF. Silence, jackanapes ! Bring me wine.

(The Host goes out. Sheriff paces up and down, glancing out of the window and peering into corners.)

SHERIFF *(to the Pedlar)*. And who might you be sir ?

PEDLAR. I am a pedlar travelling to Lincoln, where I hope by the grace of God and fair and honest dealing, to...

SHERIFF. Tush ! Leave you epitaph to the grave-stone maker. If you come to so honest an end. Has there been anyone here beside yourself ?

PEDLAR. Two or three fellows only clothed in forest green, who went away some time ago.

SHERIFF. Did you speak with them ?

PEDLAR. No, nor they with me.

SHERIFF. Have you spoken with the landlord ?

PEDLAR. We were speaking when you came.

SHERIFF. What did he tell you ?

PEDLAR. A great deal of nothing.

SHERIFF. Come, sirrah, speak out ; I must know everything.

PEDLAR. He told me of an outlaw hereabouts called Robin Hood.

SHERIFF. Aha ! What did he say of Robin Hood ?

PEDLAR. He told me how he had hoodwinked some officer of the law in these parts. How this officer had been made to buy the King's deer.

SHERIFF. Then thousand gallows ! Will that story never die ? A host of yapping tongues have spread the slander over half the shire and not a tongue but adds a treasonable lie against my person. I'll have him hanging forty cubits high, and then I'll quarter him myself !

PEDLAR. Mine host but told the tale to show the outlaw's wickedness. For my part, I was so angered I swore to win the hundred crowns you offer for his head.

(Enter the Landlord, bearing a candle and a flagon of wine, which he places beside the Sheriff.)

SHERIFF. Bring me another cup. If your wine be poisoned, this fellow dies too.

HOST. Very good, my lord. *(The Host goes out)*

SHERIFF. So, my brave fellow, you would win the hundred crowns?

PEDLAR. Give me but the chance! There's not a man would stand up to my cudgel—nay not even Robin Hood...

SHERIFF *(With a warning finger)*. Quiet *(The Host returns, and sets down another cup.)* Leave us now, and see that we are not disturbed.

HOST. Very good, sir.

SHERIFF. Stay. If a fellow calls at the inn I must see him.

HOST. Very good, sir. *(He goes out)*

SHERIFF. Now, my good friend, sit here at the table. Taste this wine for me.

PEDLAR. Your worship is very good.

SHERIFF. You never thought to take the wine with the Sheriff of Nottingham, eh?

PEDLAR. 'Tis a great honour, sir—and excellent wine. Your health—and your success.

SHERIFF. My success? What have you guessed, you rogue?

PEDLAR. I think that you are on the heels of Robin Hood.

SHERIFF. You're shrewd fellow. Come, sit closer. *(The Sheriff lays a parchment roll on the table)*. Listen. If you know aught of this man Hood, then you'll know he's a man of his word.

PEDLAR. They tell me he has the manners of a nobleman.

SHERIFF. I have always observed that the rogue keeps his promises. To-day there came a message to my castle in Nottingham. Here it is.

(The Sheriff produces a letter and reads :)
To the High Sheriff of Nottingham.

"To-night, at sunset, in the tavern on the Nottingham road. Come alone and unarmed. I, too shall come alone and unarmed."

"(Signed) Robin Hood."

PEDLAR. But this may be a trap.

SHERIFF (*smiling*). I know the man too well. He has all the vanity of chivalry, and holds himself too proud for treachery. Curse him!

PEDLAR. And have you come alone?

SHERIFF. Look for yourself. I, the High Sheriff of Nottingham who retain a band of one hundred stalwart yeomen, am here alone to meet him. How far is it to sunset?

PEDLAR. The sun is almost down.

SHERIFF. Then quick! I must explain. I need a witness of this meeting. You seem, an honest rogue.

PEDLAR. Not so honest that I should refuse a bag of gold and so much a rogue that I wouldn't earn it.

SHERIFF. Spoken like an Englishman. Now listen. I cannot lay lawful hands on Robin Hood without a warrant of arrest. Here I hold the King's warrant for the apprehension of this outlaw. Now mark me carefully. I am little match for the stalwart forester. Should he refuse to return with me to Nottingham on this warrant, then may I call on you to help me seize him. Remember—one hundred crowns.

PEDLAR. I reckon myself a match for him any day.

SHERIFF. Good. Then do as I bid you. But remember this—I have broken no pledge. I came alone and unarmed. (*There is a knock at the door.*) Hist! Here he comes. Over to your place. Remember, *he may be disguised.*

(*The Pedlar moves back to his seat. the Sheriff stands waiting, his back to the door. A very small boy comes in.*)

SHERIFF (*not looking at the new-comer*). And so we meet again! (*He turns to see the boy*). What in the name of fury is that? How did this thing get in?

PEDLAR. Alas, I know him not.

SHERIFF. Out of here, impertinent young grasshopper.

PEDLAR. Remember, Sheriff, *he may be disguised*.

SHERIFF. Disguised. Ten thousand devils ! Am I to be a laughing-stock in every country tavern ?

PEDLAR. What is it, boy ?

BOY. Good sir, I seek my father.

SHERIFF. His father ! Tchah !

(He paces angrily up and down.)

PEDLAR. Is your name Robin Hood ?

BOY. Na, Sir

SHERIFF. Fool ! Why not ask him if he's the Sheriff of Nottingham.

BOY. If you please, sir I'm not.

SHERIFF. Eh? Not what ?

BOY. Not the Sheriff of Nottingham.

SHERIFF. *(groaning)*. Oh !

(He turns away to find that a stranger has entered the room. He is gaudily dressed, and walks in an elegant manner. He sews himself in the Sheriff's chair. The Sheriff surveys him cautiously.)

SHERIFF. Good even to you, sir.

STRANGER. Thank you, my good man.

SHERIFF. Good m.....

(He bottles up his indignation. The Pedlar whispers "Disguised", The Sheriff nods.)

SHERIFF. Good sir, I'm an officer of the law, and must know your business.

STRANGER. My business ? How, haw, haw ! Well... I go to a meeting.

SHERIFF. DO you go alone ?

STRANGER. I go alone.

SHERIFF. And unarmed.

STRANGER.. I go, as you say, unarmed.

(The Sheriff nods meaningly to the Pedlar.)

SHERIFF. At what hour is your meeting ?

STRANGER. We meet at sunset already.

PEDLAR. Aye, but 'tis sunset already.

STRANGER. I am one who believes that they should be kept waiting.

SHERIFF. The plague you do ! (*The Pedlar makes a movement suggesting that he should overpower the Stranger, but the Sheriff shakes his head, and waves him back.*) And what, sirrah, is the object of this meeting ?

STRANGER. To heat a breach that I have been the heart of another.

SHERIFF. What kind of a breach ?

STRANGER. Alas, I have sinned. I have been the cause of a bitter quarrel. I fear I have broken a heart. I go to ask forgiveness.

SHERIFF. Oho, so you repent, do you, my fine fellow ?

STRANGER. Never was repentance so deep as mine. (*He weeps*)

SHERIFF. And what if it is too late ?

STRANGER. Then I shall die.

SHERIFF. That's Sure enough, anyway.

STRANGER. Of a broken heart.

SHERIFF. Of a broken neck, you mean. A true to this nonsense !

STRANGER. Nonsense ?

SHERIFF. And end to this tomfoolery !

STRANGER (*rising*). Sirrah !

SHERIFF. Why are you wearing that beard ?

STRANGER. But—this beard is my beard.

SHERIFF. Off with it !

(*The Sheriff seizes the stranger by the beard. The Stranger dances round howling, but the beard does not come off.*)

SHERIFF. By all the saints, but that beard is well stuck on, your face.

STRANGER. Impudent scoundrel ! You have pulled my beard!

SHERIFF. But are you not disguised ?

STRANGER. Disguised ! Sir, it took me three years to grow this beard !

SHERIFF. Answer me, and no more quibbling. Are you, or are You not Robin Hood ?

STRANGER. Am I Robin Hood ?

SHERIFF. That's what I said.

STRANGER. Certainly not.

SHERIFF. Then why in the name of Beelzebub do you come here, riddling and quibbling and pretending that you are Robin Hood?

STRANGER. My good man, I never...

SHERIFF. Silence !

STRANGER. But really, sir, after all, it is not unkind of you. I like it. Haw, haw, haw !

SHERIFF. You like what ?

STRANGER. I like being mistaken for Robin Hood. I think the fair Eleanor will be pleased when I tell her.

PEDLAR. And who is the fair Eleanor ?

STRANGER. Why, did I not tell you ? She is the lady I go to meet.

SHERIFF. A lady ?

STRANGER. We had quarrelled. Now all is well. She loves me. Here is a ballad I have composed in praise of her beauty.

(He produces a roll of parchment. The Sheriff snatches it from him and flings it on the table.)

SHERIFF. A hundred thousand furies ! How dare you come here masquerading and prating to me of your abominable woman ? Do you know what I am ?

STRANGER. I think you're a very rude fellow.

SHERIFF. I'd have you know, sirrah, that I'm the High Sheriff of Nottingham, and that insults against my person are insults against, his gracious Majesty the King. God bless him ! Get out !

STRANGER. But...

SHERIFF. Get Out...

STRANGER. But—my ballad.

SHERIFF (*Picking it up and flinging it at him*). Go and tell the fair Eleanor that if she, cannot find a better suitor in Nottinghamshire, she'd best be a spinster for the rest of her days.

(*The Sheriff turns away, biting his nails in anger. As the Stranger goes he turns to the Pedlar.*)

STRANGER. After all, he did think I was Robin Hood didn't he I feel so flattered. And the fair Eleanor will be pleased when I tell her of it, haw, haw, haw !

(*He swaggers and postures himself out of the inn.*)

SHERIFF. Oh, that I should be plagued by fools !

PEDLAR. Are you certain, sir, that he was not Robin Hood all the time ?

SHERIFF. Didn't I pull his beard ?

PEDLAR. They say he is a master of disguise, so that even those who know him best are most deceived.

SHERIFF. By heaven. If Hood has fooled me again, I'll take a terrible revenge !

PEDLAR. 'Tis past sunset, your worship.

SHERIFF. (*Shaking his head.*) Strange, strange. The scoundrel always keeps his word. (*He calls.*) Landlord ! Landlord, I say !

(*Enters the Host, running.*)

HOST. Coming, your worship, coming.

SHERIFF. Tell me, is there anyone hiding in your house ?

HOST. Nay, your worship.

SHERIFF. (*seizing him by the throat*). If you deceive me now, I'll burn the inn about your ears.

HOST. Have mercy, good sir, there is no one, at all.

(*The small boy has been looking in the Pedlar's pack, and now, draws out a suit of Lincoln green. The Pedlar tries to hide it, but he is too late.*)

SHERIFF. Stop ! What's this ? A suit of Lincoln green in Pedlar's pack ? You're a fine Pedlar, sirrah.

PEDLAR. I do some small trade in old clothing , your worship.

SHERIFF. And you are a master of disguise, perchance ?

PEDLAR. Nay, I.

SHERIFF. That beard seems false !

(The Pedlar's beard comes off in the Sheriff's hand.)

HOST. Robin Hood !

SHERIFF. Robin Hood, by all the saints !

ROBIN. Who kept his promise, Master Sheriff ?

SHERIFF. Robin Hood, I'll hang you on the highest gallows ever built in England.

BOY *(to Robin Hood)*. I'll help you.

ROBIN. Away, boy ! You've done mischief enough to-night.
(The boy runs out.) Good master Sheriff, we have long been enemies, but never have I fooled you better.

SHERIFF. There'll be no fooling with a hempen cord round your neck. Where's the King's warrant ? *(He takes it from the table)*
Robin Hood, outlaw and traitor, I arrest you in the name of King.

ROBIN. I claim to have the warrant read.

SHERIFF. Here, Landlord, read the warrant, and witness this arrest.

HOST. *(trembling)*. Yes, your worship. *(He reads:)*

"Thine eyes are like two stars;

Fair Eleanor, my love;

Thy lips are like red roses;

Fair Eleanor, my dove.."

SHERIFF. Thunder and fury ! What's this ? Where's the warrant ? Death and destruction, that fellow has taken it ! *(Robin laughs.)*
But, this is not the end. *(He blows a silver whistle. The room fills with armed men)* Men, come quickly ! Bend your bows at him ! Watch him close ! This time he shall not escape. Robin Hood, I

charge you with masquerading in a strange disguise, furthermore with unlawful intention, and as an officer of the law I arrest you.

ROBIN. Very clever, Master Sheriff and very nobly spoken. *(Robin stands with folded arms, while the bowmen cover him.)* You relied upon my word to come alone. Did you come alone to the meeting-place?

SHERIFF. Bah! One does not hunt mad dogs with chivalry. My men were standing by to ward off treachery.

ROBIN. Your men are stout fellows, Master Sheriff. I like well their looks.

SHERIFF. Seize him and bind him!

(The men do not move. The Sheriff is repeating the order when he turns to find the bows directed at himself. Robin steps forward.)

SHERIFF. Why, what's this?

ROBIN. Little John, stand forward. Put up your bows, my men. Now, friend Sheriff, when I gave my word to come alone, I came alone, but my men were in the woods a mile away. Had you, too, come alone to the meeting-place they would not have interfered. Is not that so, Little John?

LITTLE JOHN. Those were our orders, Master Robin.

ROBIN. And you have obeyed them?

LITTLE JOHN. To the letter.

ROBIN. Then tell the Sheriff why you took a hand.

LITTLE JOHN. Well, sir, seeing the Sheriff here followed by a company of men, whom he bade hide within earshot of this house, we fell on them and bound them, giving them some hard knocks, by my faith. And then this boy ran to tell us of your peril, and hearing a signal, we came in.

SHERIFF. A boy! Tchah!

ROBIN. Yes, Master Sheriff: not Robin Hood, but a boy has beaten you.

SHERIFF. This game has gone far enough. Landlord, my horse!

ROBIN. Softly ! Before you go, Sheriff, there is the little matter of the hundred crowns you promised me.

SHERIFF. Insolent knave ! What do you mean ? I owe no money.

ROBIN. Who discovered my disguise ? Was it not this boy ? The money is rightfully his.

SHERIFF. (*turning*) Oh, this is a nightmare ! I'll pay the whelp no money.

ROBIN. Stop ! Remember, Robin Hood is a man of his word. Where are the crowns ? (*The Sheriff sees that he is beaten, and produces a bag*) Give them to the boy.

(*Sheriff does so, and goes out in a very bad temper.*)

ROBIN. And now, my merry men, we'll drink a toast. Landlord, bring out the best in your cellar, and fill each man a cup. My noble friends, I'll give you a toast. We'll drink to his worship the High Sheriff, of Nottingham, and long may he live to make us merry !
(*The noise of a horse galloping, and a roar of laughter.*)

Glossary

Nottingham	:	According to some chroniclers Robin Hood belonged to south-west Yorkshire, while others place him in Sherwood and Plumpton park, Cumberland. However, according to popular legend he was born in Locksley, Nottinghamshire, some time in the twelfth century. Nottingham is the chief town in the country of Nottinghamshire
Yeomen	:	medieval farmers-turned-soldiers ; here members of Robin Hood's gang.
Lincoln green	:	a bright green cloth once made at Lincoln.
to win softer living	:	To win one's livelihood is very difficult,
in a hard world	:	but it becomes easier if one is honest and enjoys the favour of God.

- barons : powerful noblemen.
- will have the picking : will rob him
of him
- Sherwood : Sherwood Forest was the sanctuary of
Robin Hood and his gang.
- belike : it is likely.
- Both eyes, sometimes : Winking with both eyes signifies sleeping.
The host cleverly suggests to the pedlar to
go to sleep.
- He : refers to the sun.
- sack : a kind of white wine.
- horn : a wind instrument made from a horn.
- We're hard of hearing : The host cleverly implies that it is safe
not to take notice of the activities of the
dreaded outlaw. A wise man ought to
know when to whisper, when to wink, and
when to be hard of hearing.
- Is that the way the : Is it what the people commonly say ?
tune goes ?
- the Sherwood men : Robin Hood and his gang.
- Lief : (Now obsolete).
- the dance the outlaw : Willingly to lead somebody a dance (or
pretty, dance)
- leads him : means to cause him a lot of trouble by mak-
ing him follow from place to place.
- the King's own deer : wild deer in Sherwood Forest
- a whole skin : that is, life.
- Fool : The Sheriff's haughtiness and bad temper
find ample expression in his language and
behaviour.
- abroad : out of doors, (Old use).
- sty : a small building for pigs ; here said con-
temptuously of the small inn.

- I shall return with a : The Sheriff cryptically suggests that he
companion : would, take Robin Hood as a captive to
Nottingham from where he had just arrived.
The host, however, takes the Sheriff to mean
that he intends arresting him. Hence his
pleading-
- Jackanapes : an impudent or clownish fellow.
- Tush : an interjection denoting impatience or con-
tempt.
- Leave your epitaph : An epitaph is a description of a dead
person inscribed on his tombstone. Most
epitaphs sing praises of the dead in glow-
ing terms and, thus tend to be untruthful.
The pedlar's pious word, "by the grace of
God, and fair and honest dealing" appear
to the Sheriff as part of his epitaph. Hence
his contemptuous interjection.
- A great deal of nothing : much, but nothing important.
- Sirrah : fellow (spoken contemptuously).
- Ten thousand gallows : an expression denoting the Sheriff's anger
and, irritation at the very mention of that
humiliating story.
- him : refers to Robin Hood.
- Cubits : A cubit was an old unit of length, from eigh-
teen, to twenty-two inches.
- quarter : cut with a sword into four pieces. Crimi-
nals were frequently "condemned to be
hanged, drawn, and quartered."
- flagon : large, round bottle.
- parchment : paper for writing prepared from the skin of
a goat or sheep.
- aught : anything. (Old use.)

- chivalry : qualities such as courage, honesty, generosity and faithfulness which characterized the knights of the Middle Ages.
- too proud of treachery : But the Sheriff is both proud and treacherous as his subsequent conduct shows.
- earn : that is, earn it by honest means
- like an Englishman : that is, frankly and boldly.
- lay lawful hands on : arrest him by using provisions of the law.
- forester : For most of the time Robin Hood and his band live in Sherwood Forest.
- Hist : an interjection asking for silence.
- grasshopper : said contemptuously of a small-sized person.
- he may be disguised : The pedlar mimics the Sheriff's cautionary words. Robin Hood may indeed come disguised but he cannot contract himself to the dimensions of a "very small boy." the pedlar's words throw the Sheriff into yet another fit of anger.
- Tchah : again an interjection denoting impatience and irritation.
- of a broken neck : by hanging. Taking the stranger for Hood in disguise the foolish Sheriff threatens him with hanging.
- truce : end.
- in the name of : one of the several oaths used by the Sheriff.
- Beelzebub : Beelzebub is a leader of evil spirits.
- riddling and quibbling : talking in a puzzling, evasive manner. It may be noted that the behaviour and talk of the stranger are not puzzling at all. They appear so only to the silly Sheriff who has at once decided that the stranger is none other than Hood in disguise.

A hundred thousand : furies	another oath . Furies are Greek goddesses of revenge, snake-haired and dog-faced.
swaggers and postures :	walks out of the inn in a self important.
himself out of the inn :	artificial manner. The fact that somebody can mistake him for Hood inflates the stranger's ego and makes him assume a pompous gait.
They say he is— :	very ironical and dramatically effective words.
are most deceived	Neither the Sheriff nor the audience yet know, that the speaker is Robin Hood himself but disguised as a pedlar.
about your ears :	in a confused heap; in a falling mass of ruin.
a suit of Lincoln green :	the dress of a yeoman, also that of Hood.
a hempen cord :	the hangman's rope (made of fibres of hemp—a plant).
that fellow :	the stranger (who has, mistakenly taken away the King's warrant instead of his ballad in praise of his beloved's beauty).
Bah :	an interjection denoting contempt.
To the letter :	exactly.
took a hand :	interfered
within earshot :	within hearing distance.
Softly :	an exclamation enjoining upon the Sheriff not to be hasty in departure.
whelp :	puppy ; here spoken contemptuously of the small boy.

Exercises

- I. 1. Discuss the role of the small boy in the play.
2. What do you learn about the character of the Sheriff from the play ?
3. Write a note on the humour in the play.

4. Was Robin Hood justified in demanding from the Sheriff the payment of one hundred crowns to the small boy ?
5. Narrate the story of the play as if you were Robin Hood.

II. Frame sentences using the following phrases :

- (i) to stand up ;
- (ii) to be on the heels of ;
- (iii) a man of his word
- (iv) too proud for ;
- (v) to lay one's hand on
- (vi) a laughing-stock
- (vii) about one's ears
- (viii) to stand by ;
- (ix) to be a match for somebody
- (x) within earshot.

III. Explain the following with reference to the context

- (a) And yet, for all that, I'd be glad of the hundred crowns they offer for his head in Nottingham. I hear the Sheriff will pay that money for him dead or alive.
- (b) Bah ! One does not hunt mad dogs with chivalry. My men were standing by to ward off treachery.

IV. Give a character-sketch of Robin Hood.

V. Be sure of the pronunciation of the following words :

Sheriff, exclamation, whelp, quibble, swagger, Lincoln.

THE MAN WHO WOULDN'T GO TO HEAVEN

F. SLADEN-SMITH

Introductory Note:

Sladen-Smith was a well-known writer of one-act plays. He was the Director of the Little Theatre belonging to the Unnamed Society of Manchester. His satirical fantasy "The Man Who Wouldn't Go To Heaven" won the Howard de Walden Cup in 1930. He was a typical representative of the new Amateur Movement and served it with distinction as a playwright, producer, adjudicator, lecturer, reviewer and director. 'The Invisible Duke', 'The Tower of Babel' and 'Solomon And Sheba' are some of his other notable plays.

Many of his plays take us to the Oriental and the medieval world, peopled by picturesque and romantic figures. The dialogue is excellent, and the characterisation as definite as a painting in primary colours. He is very skilful in the art of combining fantasy with satire. 'The Man Who Wouldn't Go To Heaven' is a fantasy in which he satirises, the various notions that people hold about Heaven. All that Sladen-Smith writes is characterised by wit and originality.

General Remarks

'The Man Who Wouldn't Go To Heaven' is one of his best-known dramatic compositions. Its first performance was given by the Unnamed Society, Manchester at The Little Theatre, Lomax Street, Salford, on March 24, 1928.

We are shown the Gateway to Heaven, guarded by an angel,

called Thariel. Human beings reach there one by one after their physical death. Thariel asks them to ascend some steps that lead to Heaven. One of the arrivals named Alton, refuses to enter heaven and instigates some others to defy Thariel. However, these companions succumb to the invisible pressure of the Divine will and ultimately ascend the steps. Alton and a lunatic are left alone on the stage. Even Thariel disappears. The lunatic induces Alton to play snap with him. Alton gets so much absorbed in the game that he becomes oblivious of his surroundings. Thariel appears once more on the stage and tells Alton. Alton frets and fumes but finds himself irretrievably in the meshes of fate. The dramatist wants us to understand that Heaven is not a place but an experience. The way to Heaven is not through reason and argument, but through experiencing the *joie vivre*. Alton was transported to Heaven when he was completely absorbed in the game of snap. Human reason is not potent enough to unveil the mystery of the universe. It is, therefore, useless to fight against the forces, which we cannot understand. Hypocrisy is a bar to Heaven. We may, or may not, subscribe their ideologies or views, but the characters in this play are all sincere in their beliefs and practices.

The end of the play has a tragic undertone since Alton, the chief character is ultimately shown helpless in the face of the Divine will and is transported to Heaven against his will. The characterization in the play is convincing and forceful. It is as definite as a painting in primary colours. Each character is portrayed vividly. The free-thinker Alton the essentially wise lunatic, the fire-breathing McNulty, the pretty but pathetic nun, the ultra-modern Harriet, the silly Mrs. Bagshawe, Nightingale with his love for young and pretty girls, Mrs. Muggins with her fondness for the company of gentleman, Bradley the rebel and the lover, and the simple, loving and trusting Margaret all are painted with the skill of a master and represent distinct attitudes towards life on this and that side of the grave.

The dialogue in the play has a racy and telling quality. From the beginning to the end, there persists a strain of humour, ironical innuendo and rational speculation.

The situations in the play are interesting, significant and dramatic. The reproduction of the terrible world of buzzers and roaring machinery is singularly effective. Equally so is the scene where Alton and the Lunatic are surrounded by magnificent masked Angels, watching serenely and silently the spectacle of the philosopher and the Lunatic experiencing the joy of complete absorption in the game of cards.

Persons in the Play

THARIEL

MARGARET

RICHARD ALTON

BOBBIE NIGHTINGALE

ELIZA MUGGINS

SISTER MARY TERESA

MRS. CUTHBERT BAGSHAW

HARRIET REBECCA STRENHAM

REV. JOHN McNULTY

TIMOTHY TOTO NEWBIGGIN

DERRICK BRADLEY

THE MAN WHO WOULDN'T GO TO HEAVEN

SCENE: *A gateway leading to Heaven. A flight of steps leads to a white-curtained archway. In front of this archway sits Thariel at a small table towards the left. On the table is a large book. Thariel's wings and raiment are magnificent. The characters enter from a small archway on the extreme left. On the right is a long bench.*

As the curtain rises, Thariel is talking to a young girl.

GIRL: And then I go up those steps ?

THARIEL: Yes.

GIRL: And never see any one again ?

THARIEL: Why should you think that ?

GIRL: Because *(looking round)* it all seems so lonely.

THARIEL: *(Indicating bench.)* Perhaps you would like to wait until someone comes ? There is sure to be someone in a moment.

GIRL: Oh, no, no, please. There is only one I would—

THARIEL: But he might not come just yet.

GIRL: Oh—then you know— ?

THARIEL: Yes, I know.

GIRL: Oh, I suppose you do. *(Eagerly.)* But, when he does come, you'll be very nice and kind to him, won't you ? I mean, he is bound to be a little shy and nervous. *(With a smile.)* He is so funny when he's shy !

THARIEL: Is he ? Then we'll do our best with him. Pass up those stairs, please.

GIRL: What is beyond ?

THARIEL: So many things ; all so different.

GIRL: But he won't be different when he comes' will he ? I couldn't bear that ! I shall wait so patiently—will he have changed ?

THARIEL: Why do you all make yourselves unhappy by perpetual questioning ? Pass along.

(Enter Alton)

THARIEL: Name, please.

ALTON: Well, I'm blowed !

GIRL: (*Ascending the steps and turning round.*) He will come some day ?

THARIEL: Certainly ; possibly very soon. But I am not allowed to tell people when others are coming.

ALTON: Well, I'm blessed !

GIRL: (*At the top of the steps.*) But when he does come you'll be very kind to him and send him to me ?

THARIEL: Very kind to him and send him to you. Yes. (*Girl disappears through curtain.*) Now then, name please.

ALTON: Well, I never !

THARIEL: So you keep on saying. Why ?

ALTON. Do you expect I expected — ? Do you imagine I imagined — ? It can't be true—it can't ! I must have gone off my head !

THARIEL: Do I surprise you ?

ALTON: You ? I should think you did ! I—I—No, I simply, can't believe in you.

THARIEL: In that case you must disbelieve in me. Name please". (*opens book.*)

ALTON: Richard Alton. What is in that book ?

THARIEL: Your name, and a good many others. All I expect at this period.

ALTON: You mean today.

THARIEL: (*Writing in book.*) There is no day.

ALTON: What do you mean ?

THARIEL: (*With quiet impatience.*) Well, how can there be ?

ALTON: Look here, you know, I never believed in a hereafter, or any such nonsense. You know quite well there is no such place as Heaven or at least, there ought not to be.

THARIEL: There is a great deal in what you say but still here

you are.

ALTON: But I need not put up with it ! Unless it is all a silly dream—which, mind you, I think it may be—unless it's a dream, I'm dead, I suppose. *Am I dead ?*

THARIEL: Technically, yes. For the sake of argument, Yes.

ALTON: Well, then I can't be, because like every sensible man. I've always believed in utter extinction.

THARIEL: Do you feel utterly extinct ?

ALTON: No, so I must be delirious or dreaming. But to dream of Heaven and angles ! That beats me. The place I've laughed at all my life, and now I imagine I'm bang in it.

THARIEL : I would not go so far as to say you were in Heaven ; at least, not yet. But, technically, you understand, you will be if you go up those steps.

ALTON: I'm sure it's all rot, I'm delirious.

THARIEL: You're not.

ALTON: I'm dreaming.

THARIEL: No.

ALTON: Then some trick is being played on me. I won't have it, do you hear ? (*Brings his fist down on Tharief's book.*) I'll have no tricks played on me !

THARIEL: Well, go and say all that when 'you've passed up those steps.

ALTON: You *don't* suppose I'm going up those steps ?

THARIEL: Why not ?

ALTON: Do you imagine, after half a lifetime spent in writing and talking against such rubbish, I'm going to start climbing idiotic stairs supposed to lead to an idiotic Heaven ? Where do those steps really lead to ? — tell me that !

THARIEL: Pass along and see.

ALTON: I refuse, unless you answer my questions. You know very well Heaven is a sheer impossibility.

THARIEL: If I explained further you wouldn't understand,

so pass along there, *please*.

ALTON: I will not.

THARIEL: (*With a Sigh.*) Then go and sit on that scat. (*Indicating bench on the right.*) I haven't time to argue with you at present, here is somebody coming.

(*Enter Nightingale*)

ALTON: I tell you, nothing shall make me go up those silly steps, and enter your silly Heaven.

THARIEL: Very well. (*To Nightingale*) Name please.

NIGHTINGALE: Nightingale, Bobbie Nightingale. I say, is this the box-office for Heaven?

ALTON: No, it's not!

NIGHTINGALE: All right old man, but surely this impressive-looking gentleman knows best. I may be wrong, but the whole get-up, of the place smacks of sanctity.

THARIEL: (*Who has been examining his book.*) Robert Nightingale. Yes. Any remark to make before you pass up those steps?

NIGHTINGALE: 'Cept that, if this is really anywhere near Heaven, it's the last place I expected to get to.

THARIEL: (*smiling.*) So many people say that.

NIGHTINGALE: But are you sure it's all O.K.? I wouldn't like to get you into trouble. Fact is, I've been a little—little—you know.

THARIEL: (*Referring to book.*) Yes; so I see.

ALTON: Don't you believe him. It's all put on. You bet he knows nothing about you.

NIGHTINGALE: I say, are you the Devil's Advocate?

ALTON: My name's Richard Alton. You may have heard of me. Free-thinker Dick, I used to be called. Went up and down the country, exposing religion; had a great following at one time, I can tell you. Started life as a miner and worked myself up. I don't know what all this foolery means, but I'm jolly well not going to give way

to it. Do as I do; be a sensible man. Refuse to go up, those steps.

NIGHTINGALE: Well, considering everything you've got some courage.

THARIEL: He always had courage, that is why he is here before his time.

(Enter Mrs. Muggins)

THARIEL: Name, please.

MRS. MUGGINS: Eliza' Muggins, Mr Angel, sir, good morning. Well, I'm in Heaven after all ! And consequently no chance of meeting Muggins, thank God: But me in Heaven ! Not that I ever did anything wrong, Mr. Angel, far from it. As I always said, more sinned against than sinning, and by a long chalk; but still it is a Surprise ! I bet it's my health that's got me here. The doctor, he says, never imagine yourself well, he says, and I didn't and here I am !

THARIEL: Any further remarks to make before you pass on?

MRS. MUGGINS: Oh, Mr Angel, sir, I don't fancy no passings on just yet. I've had enough of passings on in a manner of speaking my life's been all passing on. You'll look well and you'll feel well, the doctor says, but never imagine yourself well, he says, and I didn't and 'here I am !

THARIEL: Then if you don't feel like passing on just yet, perhaps you'll join these two gentlemen.

MRS. MUGGINS: Oh, with pleasure, Mr. Angel ; I was always fond of the company of gentlemen, except perhaps Muggings, not that he was a gentleman, by no means ! And I see I've got my Sunday dress just as if I was going to a party.

ALTON: Come along, Mrs. Muggins, and we'll smash the whole blooming thing.

MRS. MUGGINS: Why, it's Free-thinker Dick ! My daughter Maud, she once went to one of your lectures and came back believing nothing, something shocking. And the next week she saw the story of the Bible at the pictures, and believed so many things we had to call in the doctor. How are you feeling now you've got

here Mr. Alton ? Bit of a surprise for you, ain't it ?

ALTON: I don't believe in it any more than I did on earth.

MRS. MUGGINS: No, I dare say you wouldn't,

(Sits down beside him.)

NIGHTINGALE: Hanged if I know what to do. Of course could go straight on if you're sure it's all right. On the other hand... say, old man, do you expect any—any—

THARIEL: There is sure to be a pretty girl up here before long.

NIGHTINGALE: Thanks, then I'll certainly wait.

(Sits down on the other side of Mrs. Muggins.)

NUN: *(Entering.)* I suppose this must be the Gate of Heaven. Oh, how wonderful ! Oh, how glorious ! It is just what I expected it to be like.

THARIEL: Glad to hear you say that. We always try to please people.*(Opening book)* You are—?

NUN: Sister Mary Teresa of the Holy Angels.

THARIEL: Right. Do you wish to say anything before you go forward ?

NUN: To say anything ? Oh, how dare I speak ?—besides, I have nothing to say, it is all so wonderful. It is so wonderful to see you, a real angel ! But would you please tell me—shall I suffer much ?

THARIEL: What's that ?

NUN: Shall I suffer much ? Because, of course, I know there will be a long, long purification before I am fit to enter the humblest Gate of Heaven.

NIGHTINGALE: Shame !

NUN: *(Turning to him,)* I beg your pardon ?

NIGHTINGALE: I said, 'Shame', my dear; I said it loudly.

THARIEL: Do you want to suffer ?

NUN: I know I ought to ... Mother Mary Joseph said we ought to love suffering. She said she did.

ALTON: And did she ?

NUN: It was a little difficult to see Just what suffering she had, but I am sure whatever it was, it was great and she will go straight to Heaven.

THARIEL: But what makes you think you will go straight to Heaven ?

NUN: Oh, I am not so proud and vainglorious as that ! I know this is only a brief space of rest before my trials begin.

NIGHTINGALE: Shame !

NUN: Please you tell me why this gentleman is so ashamed ?

THARIEL: He is not. He never felt ashamed in his life. What he would term your beauty is having an effect on what he calls his heart.

NIGHTINGALE: You're right there, old boy. It makes me boil all over to think of a pretty creature like that being shut up.

NUN: But I wanted it. I threatened to throw myself into the river if they did not let me enter a convent.

ALTON: Simply one more case of sex-repression.

MRS. MUGGINS: Now come, Mr Alton, you didn't ought to say, such things in front of a religious lady.

THARIEL: Then your ideal of happiness is a convent ?

NUN: Not now. Oh, I ought not to have said that ! But I feel so strange. May I go further, please, I'm supposed to go further ?

THARIEL: Certainly. Just up those steps.

NUN: Thank you. (*Ascends the steps. Suddenly*) Oh ! all saints, and martyrs pray for me !

ALTON: What is the matter ?

NUN: I am afraid ! I am afraid ! I know fortitude is always necessary, but—

NIGHTINGALE: The poor child is frightened to death. (*To Thariel.*) Can't you possibly say something decent to her ?

THARIEL: Of course, of course. My poor child, there is nothing whatever to be afraid of. Go straight forward.

NUN: But, although I renounced so much on earth, still it was earth —this is so strange, and I feel I must renounce still more. And there are so many things I have not tasted ! Ah ! (*Sways slightly.*)

NIGHTINGALE: Good heavens ! (*Rushes forward and seizes her in his arms.*) My pretty little white bird, before you die again, let me kiss you and kiss you that you may know love if only for a moment !

(*Kisses her passionately. From the other earthlings comes an involuntary cry of horror. Suddenly the Nun and Nightingale break away from each other and look scaredly at Thariel, who is calmly writing in his book. A slight pause.*)

THARIEL: (*Without looking up.*) Have you finished ?

NIGHTINGALE: Damn You for a spoil-sport !

THARIEL: What did I spoil ?

NIGHTINGALE: Oh, we felt you there all the time.

THARIEL: You felt something more important than me.

NUN (*Suddenly*): Oh, I am cursed for evermore ! An eternity Of Hell awaits me !

THARIEL: Nonsense ! Of course it doesn't. Don't be so primitive.

MRS. MUGGINS: Don't take on so, dearie, I've been cursed something terrible in my time, but here I am.

NIGHTINGALE: (*To Thariel*): Is she cursed for even more ? (*A pause*) Say something, You coward !

THARIEL: I cannot discuss these trivialities.

NIGHTINGALE: Do you call sending a nun to Hell because she had a good, thumping kiss, trivial ?

THARIEL: (*Wearily, to Nun.*) Will you please go forward now ?

NUN: But I am in mortal sin ! Mother Mary Joseph would say—

THARIEL: Mother Mary Joseph may not be here for some time yet. I'm sorry to disappoint you both.

MRS. MUGGINS: I don't see any reason why they should be disappointed, Mr. Angel. It was a good, hearty kiss, past denying.

THARIEL: It was singularly ineffective.

NIGHTINGALE: There's something very beastly about you.

ALTON: Hear, hear!

NUN: Oh, for courage to go forward?

THARIEL: (*With a strange shade of meaning in his voice.*)
You have gone forward already.

NIGHTINGALE: What do you mean?

(*But the Nun has slipped quietly through the curtains.*)

MRS. MUGGINS: Well, it's all queer, but fairly comfortable, isn't it? Not that that's anything to go by. The doctor, he says to me, You'll feel comfortable he says, and you'll look comfortable he says, but, never imagine—

ALTON: Comfortable! With that foot sitting there in fancy, dress, and saying evasive, meaningless things to the poor creatures who come before him? But I'm not taken in by him. He's, not going to put me in what he calls Heaven, like some dog in a kennel. I'm not a child.

THARIEL: That's just the pity of it.

NIGHTINGALE: I feel a perfect fool standing here while you two argue. I may as well slip in and see how Sister Mary's going on, unless — say, old man, when's the next pretty girl coming along?

MRS. MUGGINS: It's a proper shame the way some of 'em's took off sudden. Why is it allowed, Mr. Angel?

ALTON: A good question.

THARIEL: What a lot you think about death down there!

ALTON: It has a knack of obtruding, you know. When you, realize—

NIGHTINGALE: If you are going to start again, I'll take the plunge. Anything to avoid, an argument. (*Ascending the steps.*)

So, long, everybody. By Jove, I don't wonder that poor girl felt a bit queer. It's distinctly atmospheric up here. You know nothing seems to matter, somehow. One begins to feel very simple, like some bally child. (*Ascending a step.*) I'm about to be executed!

MRS. MUGGINS: (*Greatly interested.*) Is he really, Mr. Angel? I never thought I should live to see an execution!

THARIEL: He can be anything he likes later, but not just yet, past along there, *please*.

NIGHTINGALE: Damned if I want to, after all.

(*Tries to step back.*)

THARIEL: (*Sharply.*) Sorry, but you can't do that.

NIGHTINGALE: Why can't I?

ALTON: Don't be bamboozled by their conjuring tricks. Make an effort, come back if you want to.

MRS. MUGGINS: Yes, make an effort, Mr. Nightingale, make an effort!

NIGHTINGALE: I say, can't I really come back for a moment? I don't much want to go to forward, you know. I've been a bit, thick, sometimes, you know.

THARIEL: It matters supremely little what you've been. Pass along there, please.

ALTON: Do nothing of the kind!

NIGHTINGALE: Look here, old man, if you were on these steps you'd sing a very different song. I'd like to come back, but somehow I can't. And yet, dash it, I feel much more real than you.

ALTON: Don't be a fool.

Enter a fat, fussy female.

FEMALE: (*Amazed.*) Oh, dear, oh dear! How shocking, how surprising!

THARIEL: Name please.

FEMALE: Mrs. Cuthbert Bagshawe, Emilia Stubbins that was, you know. Oh, dear, if only Mr. Bagshawe were here, but I left rather suddenly, and I see I've got my new silk blouse on, the one

vicar preferred. Oh, dear, wherever am I? I'll do anything you like, sir—within reason, of course—but I'm not at all used to being alone; Mr. Bagshawe was always with me, in fact I was hardly ever out of his sight, which makes one so dreadfully dependent, doesn't it? However, I'm certainly out of his sight, and as I always said—

THARIEL: Pass along, please, up those steps.

MRS. BAGSHAWE: I should love to, of course, but of only Mr. Bagshawe—

THARIEL: There is a gentleman on the steps waiting to conduct you forward.

MRS. BAGSHAWE: Oh, but how kind, how—

NIGHTINGALE: (*To Thariel*.) Look here, are you suffering from a sense of humour?

THARIEL: Not after all these aeons.

NIGHTINGALE: But considering the way I've carried on—and, I really *have*, you know—to send me into Heaven with—

MRS. BAGSHAWE: (*Arriving beside Nightingale*.) I don't know you, of course, but I'm sure that under the circumstances Mr. Bagshawe would be only too—

NIGHTINGALE: Oh, but I say—

THARIEL: Robert Nightingale, will you please conduct Mrs. Bagshawe forward?

NIGHTINGALE: All right, old man, I apol. Sorry to have been such a trouble to you. (*Taking Mrs. Bagshawe's arm*.) So long every-body. Now, Mrs. Bagshawe, we're in for it! (*Arm in arm they disappear*.)

MRS. MUGGINS: I must say that's a nice, comfortable gentleman. My daughter, Maud, once went for a week to Brighton with a gentleman like that.

ALTON: Damn shame such things happen.

MRS. MUGGINS: Not it! She badly needed a bit of polish. (*A strong-minded woman in shooting attire strids in*.)

WOMAN: (*To Thariel*.) Here, you. If this is Heaven; as I

strongly suspect, there's been a mistake.

MRS. MUGGINS: There's honesty, now.

THARIEL: Most people expect Hell. Name please.

WOMAN: Harriet Rebecca Strenham. But there's been a blunder, I'll take a bet on it.

THARIEL: Why do you think there has been a mistake?

HARRIET: Well, fact is, I did myself in. Got fearfully fed up, seized a gun—always a good shot—well, I expect it's in the papers. Unsound mind, you know, and all the rest of it. Damn rubbish! Never was more sane in my life—like most people who do themselves in. (*Calling loudly.*) Bob!

THARIEL: You're here, nevertheless.

HARRIET: Yes, but of course it's a mistake. Never expected to go to Heaven. Fact is, between you and me, never expected there was a Heaven.

ALTON: There isn't.

HARRIET: Oh, is that so? Bob!

THARIEL: Would you mind telling me why you keep shouting 'Bob'?

MRS MUGGINS: The poor dearie's calling for her husband. It's pathetic, it is.

HARRIET: Indeed I'm not, my good woman, I'm not the marrying kind—had troubles enough. Bob's my dog. Fine little fellow, devoted me.

THARIEL: But why should you think he is here?

HARRIET: Well, strictly between ourselves, you know, I did him in also. Just before myself. Saw no use in him moping and pining without me. And, if I've got here, surely that little fellow won't be kept out. Worth twenty of me—always was. Bob!

ALTON: You're the kind we want; come and take a seat here. We want people of character on this bench.

THARIEL: Wouldn't you rather go forward?

ALTON: No, don't give way to him! Come here and help us.

HARRIET: But how the deuce can I help you ?

ALTON: They're obviously making fools of us in some way, and it's up to people of sense not to be taken in by it, I want to get to something definite : stay here and help me.

HARRIET: (*Going to him.*) Well, I don't mind resting for a moment. Besides, I'm not going into Heaven without the dog. Bob !

FREE CHURCH MINISTER: (*Arriving.*) To whomsoever is here, peace.

MRS. MUGGINS: That 's the best up to now.

FREE CHURCH MINISTER: (*Advancing to Thariel.*) I take it you, reverend sir, are incharge of this little gathering of holy souls?

ALTON(*To the other.*): Damn funny.

THARIEL: I am in charge here. Name please.

FREE CHURCH MINISTER: McNulty. The Reverend John McNulty, who has at last left a world of sin and suffering and is content. This is Heaven, I suppose ? It is a blessed thought that, if there is a Heaven, there is also a Hell.

THARIEL: Do you find that a blessed thought ?

McNULTY: I do indeed. My constant preaching on the subject has not been in vain. There is a Hell, there is a Hell ! (*With satisfaction.*). Hell !

MRS. MUGGINS: Well, I never thought to hear such language when I was a spirt !

LUNATIC (*Arriving.*): I am here. (*Strides forward*)

THARIEL: Quite so. Your name ?

LUNATIC: Timothy Toto Newbiggin.

THARIEL: Why ?

LUNATIC: Why ? Because I thought of it as I came along. It's better than my real name, new isn't it ?

THARIEL: (*After a moment's reference to his book.*) It's a matter of opinion. Now, Mr. McNulty, any remarks to make before you go forward ?

McNULTY: I presume no one here is in need of a word of

comfort ?

ALTON: Much good your croaking about Hell will do us.

McNULTY: (*Turning round—horrificed.*) Good gracious ! It is Alton, the unbeliever ! I should never have thought it possible. Then this must be—this must be *Hell* .

HARRIET: I was certain there'd been a mistake.

McNULTY: This explains all. These peculiar people, that woman smoking—

HARRIET: (*Taking her cigarette out of her mouth in amazement.*) My good man, where *have* you been vegetating ?

MRS. MUGGINS: Oh, Mr. Angel, surely he's wrong ? This isn't one of their fool's paradises, is it ?

LUNATIC: (*Sitting down cross-legged at Thariel's feet.*) No one takes any notice of me, although, bless you, I don't mind where I'm put.

McNULTY: I have preached on Hell ; I have meditated on Hell ; I turned my own son out of doors because he did not believe in Hell, And now the presence of the man Alton convinces me that this must be Hell.

HARRIET: I believe you hope it is.

MRS. MUGGINS, Well, the doctor said I couldn't have too much warmth. You'll look warm, he says, and you'll feel warm, he says, but never imagine—

McNULTY: I hoped for better things; I admit it ; in sinful pride I hoped for better things. But, oh, what a comfort I know that Hell exists !

ALTON: As if all this mummery were anything at all.

McNULTY: Mummery !

MRS. MUGGINS: But it can't be Hell. I don't smell no fire or smoke.

LUNATIC: And there are no little nondescript monsters, are there ?

McNULTY: I cannot imagine that man in Heaven.

ALTON: And yet you cannot imagine yourself in Hell. It's a good joke. (They laugh)

LUNATIC: (To Thariel.) Why don't you laugh?

THARIEL: Our notions of humour here are different. Any remarks to make before you go further?

LUNATIC: Yes. (Rises.) Ever heard of the Euroquillo?

THARIEL: Why?

LUNATIC: (Archly.) It is a very bitter bird.

THARIEL: No doubt.

LUNATIC: (His forefinger on his nose.) That is, a bird renowned for its bitterness.

MRS. MUGGINS: Surely the poor dear's not right in his head.

LUNATIC: What wonderful powers of observation you possess, madam. I've not been right in my head since—(to Thariel) how long—ago will it be?

THARIEL: (After a brief reference to his book.) It will be about ten years now. It was just after you took up politics.

LUNATIC: You see, he knows. He is a very knowing man—that is, a man renowned for his knowingness. They were just going to make me an M.P. when I discovered it was more blessed to be the Queen of Sheba. May I tell you more about the Euroquillo?

THARIEL: I am too busy. Go and tell the others about it before you pass on.

MRS. MUGGINS: Surely we don't want a poor lunatic among us, Mr. Angel? We've got enough queer creatures here as it is.

McNULTY: No lunatic will help us solve these knotty problems.

LUNATIC: (Going to them.) But I love knotty problems, that is, problems renowned for their—

MRS. MUGGINS: (Making him sit down, and patting him.) Yes, dearie, we know.

THARIEL: (To Alton, with a smile.) I'm sure you'll find him a great help.

ALTON: Of what use are a madman's words ?

THARIEL: You consider your own more useful ? (*A Boy arrives at the gate.*) But I know you have a sharp division down there between what you call the sane and insane. Most curious.

BOY: Hullo !

THARIEL: Hullo !

BOY (*Entering.*): So, I've arrived, have I ?

THARIEL: It looks like it, doesn't it ? Are you surprised ?

BOY: (*Looking round.*) It's a bit quaint, isn't it.

THARIEL: Most things are.

BOY: And what a lot of people ! Good morning !

HARRIET: Say, young man, did you happen to notice a little dog on your way here ?

MRS. MUGGINS: Now don't worry the poor dear. It's a bit flurrying to be took off sudden.

BOY: It wasn't so sudden. (*To Thariel.*) Why am I dressed up in these things ?

THARIEL: (*Smiling.*) They are the clothes in which you felt happiest while on earth. They'll soon vanish.

ALL, EXCEPT ALTON AND LUNATIC. What ?

(*Harriet and Mrs. Muggins rise.*)

HARRIET: Look here, what do you mean ?

MRS. MUGGINS: Am I going to look like a picture by Halma Tadema any moment ?

McNULTY: I know it was Hell.

LUNATIC: (*Rising and producing a pack of cards.*) I'm sure it will all be very different. Let's play Snap to keep ourselves warm.

ALTON: Fools ! You believe anything he says.

(*Harriet, Mrs. Muggins, and Lunatic sit down again, the Lunatic quietly playing Snap by himself— one hand against the other— on the extreme right.*)

BOY: I appear to have created a disturbance.

THARIEL: Don't apologize. Anything disturbs them. They're

still dreadfully human.

ALTON: And why the hell shouldn't we be ?

HARRIET: A damn good question.

MRS. MUGGINS: The cussing and swearing that goes on up here is the limit. Why don't you answer their questions, dearie, I mean Mr. Angel ?

THARIEL: If I did there would be more cussing and swearing than ever. We've noticed human beings hate answers to question. (*To Boy.*) I haven't had your name yet.

BOY: Oh, sorry. Bradley. Derrick Bradley.

THARIEL: (*Looking in book.*) Yes, I promised just now to be very nice and kind to you.

BOY: Did you really ? Then I wish you'd tell me something: I won't kick up a row, I promise you.

THARIEL: (*Rather wearily.*) What do you want to know ?

BOY: To put it bluntly, what's it all for down there. It used to puzzle me no end, and I always made up my mind that if there were any—any hereafter—I'd ask that question as soon as I arrived. What's it all for—the misery, the struggle, everything ?

ALTON: At last we've got a sensible man. (*pointing to Thariel*) But he won't answer that question, you see.

THARIEL: Was there much misery for you ?

BOY: Not much I suppose—until—You see there was someone I was very fond of—I wish I knew what it was all for. (*Turning to the others.*) After all, it is a bit thick down there, now isn't it ?

HARRIET: Most people haven't got a dog's chance. Bob !

MRS. MUGGINS: Life don't bear thinking about, desire, and that's a fact.

McNULTY: The world is a vale of tears, and it is a sin to think it anything else.

THARIEL: It's a pity you thought about it so much.

ALTON: How dare you sit there and say such things ? Do you mean we ought to accept everything that is thrown at us by an evilly

disposed fate, and--- ? I suppose you call that being dreadfully human ?

MRS. MUGGINS: But how can we help being dreadfully human, Mr. Angel

THARIEL: You can't possibly help it.

BOY: Then, if we can't help it, what's it all for ?

HARRIET, ALTON, MRS. MUGGINS: Yes, what's it all for ?

THARIEL: That's precisely what it is for.

ALTON: (*Rising.*) Damn you, give a plain answer to a plain question !

(*Goes up to the table.*)

BOY: (*Going up to the table.*) Yes. Why was I born?

THARIEL: Because the human species has a knack of propagating itself.

MRS. MUGGINS: Now, Mr. Angel, don't be so common.

LUNATIC: (*Waving a hand to Thariel.*) I knew you were a humorous man, that is, a man renowned — Snap !

HARRIET: Must say, this kind of thing rouses me. (*Going to table.*) It's up to you to give some kind of answer. Hang it all, you, ought to know !

MRS. MUGGINS: (*Rising and going to the table.*) I'm, sure, Mr. Angel, if I was to tell you about my daughter Maud — —

McNULTY: (*Trying to restrain them.*) My friends, it is better to submit even in Hell than to argue.

LUNATIC: It is. Come and play Snap.

(*Minister indignantly refuses.*)

BOY: Now, there's my immortal soul—I heard a lot about that in the past.

THARIEL: Well, you'll hear nothing whatever about it in the future.

BOY, HARRIET, McNULTY: Why not ?

MRS. MUGGINS: Do you mean we're going with nothing on to hexinction ?

THARIEL: Oh, you are so silly and so tiresome ! What you call your immortal soul is only one of many curious tortures you invent for yourselves. Extinction, immortality, soul; all words invented to cover your supreme ignorance.

BOY: If these things are so silly, why are you all dressed up as an angel ?

THARIEL: How do you know I am ? You think you are all, dressed up in a cricketing suit. (*With a strange smile.*) That is not how I see you.

HARRIET: Tell us more about that.

THARIEL: I cannot. There has been too much uproar already. Nothing will alter your ideas or your vision at present ; pass up those, stairs and learn a little wisdom.

ALTON: Not until we know something definite. (*Turning to the others.*) Stand by me, all of you. The whole time we were on earth we were tormented with doubts and problems impossible to solve. And if we asked questions some vague nonsense was preached to us. Now we've arrived somewhere—goodness knows where — and the same game goes on. But we can resist; we need not be baffled by mysteries forever. Will you all stand by me ?

HARRIET: I don't mind standing by you. This gentleman (*indicating Tharief*) is a bit too indeterminate for me.

MRS. MUGGINS: Of course, Maud would want me to be on your side, Mr. Alton.

BOY: I'm with you all right.

McNULTY: They are all with you, my friend. The human heart is ever rebellious and stubborn.

LUNATIC: Snap !

ALTON: You see; weak, dreadful creatures that we are, we still have courage left.

THARIEL: I never said you were weak. I said you were dreadful and so you are. But you are stronger than I. It makes me laugh to think you do not realize it.

ALTON: It's all very well to sit there laughing at us, and writing in a silly book, and sending lunatics to talk to us, but we are fresh from a world whose grey realities make this trumpery show and your meaningless remarks disgusting and infuriating. What do you know of the misery of most of the people who come up here? How can you realize the hopeless problems they have left behind—*unsolved*? How would you go on down there, I should like to know? As this boy says, what's it all for? God, I wish you could see the slum I died in! God, I wish you could smell it! There you sit saying: 'Pass along there, please', with a silly smirk on your face, hurrying poor wretches on to fresh misery. All their lives someone has said: 'Pass along there, please', and—God help us all—most people have passed along, to be killed in mills, factories, and offices, or blown to pieces because a few old fools some-where have quarrelled. You're worse than our blasted kings and queens and presidents, curse me if you're not! What do you know of the horrible questioning that comes to us as we struggle down there? What does it matter to us if you see us now in some queer way that we cannot understand? It is *down there* which counts, and the people we have left struggling behind us, not all the mysterious bunkum up here. It is, down there we think of! I wish you could see it, I wish you could hear it; I wish you could hear, as I've heard so often, the buzzers hooting on a bitter December morning, calling the slaves to work. (*Leaning over him in sudden passion.*) Hear it, you figure of fun, and with it all the misery of a wretched world!

(From very far away comes a curious and rather terrible sound. There is the hooting of buzzers, the roaring of machinery, and, most of all, a strange, prolonged, sobbing wail, insistent and vitally distressing.)

ALTON: Good God, what is that?

THARIEL: Isn't that what you intend me to hear?

ALTON: Are you making this happen to fool me?

THARIEL: You are too busy fooling yourself for any one else

to fool you. I told you human beings have strange powers, especially when they come here. You want me to hear this. I hear it. I have heard it before.

MRS. MUGGINS: Oh, Mr. Angel, that sound does bring back the shocking sights I've seen in my time. You know there's a lot in what Mr. Alton says: I wish you could see a little of what goes on, I really do (*Wiping her eyes.*) I've always thought that, if only you gentlemen in heaven could see a bit more of what goes on, you just couldn't help trying to alter it a little.

THARIEL: I see it and hear it.

HARRIET: Of course, Heaven's all very well, but there are sights, and sounds on earth that would surprise you.

THARIEL: I hear them and see them.

McNULTY: The groans, tears and pains of humanity rise up expiation of the wrath of God.

THARIEL: I hear them and see them.

BOY: Then why don't you *do* something about it?

ALTON: He either can't or won't. (*The sound dies away.*) All, he can say is: 'Pass along there'. I wish I'd been able to stop the others who came while I was here.

HARRIET: Let's have 'em back. He says we have remarkable powers, and your *buzzar* stunt was most successful. See if you can call 'em back—they may be able to tell us something.

MRS. MUGGINS: O—O—O ! It fair gives me the creeps to hear you talk like that ! I'm sure it hadn't ought to be done.

McNULTY: Beware, rash man, of blasphemy.

LUNATIC: (*Looking up from his game.*) I thought we'd got beyond blasphemy long ago.

ALTON: It's splendid idea. (*Goes, to centre of stage.*) All you, who have passed up the stairs since I came, come back, come back. (*A pause.*) Come back.

(*The stage swiftly darkens : when the light returns, the girl, the Nun, Nightingale, and Mrs. Bagshawe are seen*

standing motionless on the top of the steps. They are grave, and there is something a little unreal about their appearance.)

NUN: *(Stepping forward after a short silence.)* Why have you called us back ?

ALTON: Come down and thrash the matter out.

NUN: We cannot come down : you must come to us.

ALTON: Why ?

NUN. Because there is no going back. You should have learnt that before coming here. There is no going back.

ALL THOSE WITH HER: There is no going back.

BOY: *(Suddenly.)* Margaret !

THARIEL: Silence !

BOY: But it is Margaret ! I can see her—Margaret, I am here !

NUN: The earth ! The earth speaks ! *(They appear distressed. Swift darkness. When the light returns They have gone.)*

BOY: It was Margaret, I saw her !

THARIEL: *(Really annoyed)* I am tired of you till you shriek and rave. You see all things with your dreadful, earthly eyes. I am tired of you. *(Closes book.)* You have no simplicity in you.

ALTON: Your simplicities are no use to us. Of course, I'm not at all sure they were really the same people who—

THARIEL: Oh, why won't you go up those stairs and quarrel with someone else ?

ALTON: I have told you we are not going up those steps at your bidding. You say we have mysterious powers ! well, we are going to exercise those powers. *(A man appears at the gate.)* Send that man away ! No one shall enter here until we've learnt more.

THARIEL: *(Waving his hand to man.)* Another gate.

(Man disappears.)

ALTON: And shut the gate. *(Gate shuts with a heavy clang.)*

HARRIET: Now, my boy, you've done it

McNULTY: Heaven or Hell. I cannot possibly approve of this.

ALTON: I don't care a damn who approves and who does not. It is the time there was a revolt here. (*To Thariel.*) Get out of this, I've had enough of you (*Thariel rises with a smile*)—and take that book and your silly smile elsewhere.

(*Thariel goes with dignity by the steps. As he goes it gradually becomes dark, with exception of the curtain and arch way at the back.*)

MRS. MUGGINS: Oh, Mr. Alton, now you've been and gone and behaved really stupid. They are eclipsing something to frighten us!

McNULTY: There has been grave blasphemy. We are in exterior darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

HARRIET: Of course this sort of thing is all very well, but they have the whip-hand, you know.

BOY: I don't mind what happens if I may see Margaret again.

LUNATIC: (*Still quietly playing Snap.*) Mr. Alton is a man renowned for his masterfulness, but nothing will make him realize it is, so different here.

ALTON: All my life I have been in revolt against power, and I am still in revolt. I loathe mystery and veils. No one has ever solved my problems or helped me. I can only fight and smash and hate! Why should I go to a Heaven that is obviously as perplexing and foolish as the earth? I will fight and smash and hate it!

MRS. MUGGINS: (*Going to the foot of the steps.*) Oh, Mr. Angel, it's gone a bit too far now, hasn't it? A joke's a joke, but don't you go thinking we are all as silly as Mr. Alton. I don't mind much where I'm put so long as I'm put somewhere, I'm always at home, I am. If it's Heaven, I'm ready any old time; if it's Hell, well, let's get down to it and make the best of things. But teeth gnashing in darkness isn't in my line at all, and the sooner I'm out of it the better.

(*The Nun appears.*)

NUN: Come, Mrs. Muggins, I've been sent to fetch you.

MRS. MUGGINS: And I'm coming, desire, with all my heart, and, proud to be in good company. (*Turning round as she reaches the steps.*) Now, Mr. Alton, give up worrying and cursing, and take whatever comes, like a good boy. It's quite comfortable up here, wish I'd come before but, as Maud always said, you can't help listening to that Mr. Alton. Why aren't I more frightened, dearie, now I'm close to Heaven?

NUN: (*Kissing her on the Forehead as they enter.*) because you've never been very far away from it.

(*Hardly have they gone when Nightingale appears, very little altered.*)

NIGHTINGALE: (*Beckoning to McNulty.*) Come along.

McNULTY: Have they sent you to fetch me?

NIGHTINGALE: They have. Don't ask me why. I seem to be, expected to chaperon the most impossible people.

McNULTY: (*With conviction.*) I was right. This is the beginning of my torments. But I accept. My consolation is that I spoke the truth; Hell exists; my belief is justified.

NIGHTINGALE: Glad to find you're determined to look on the bright side of things. (*Helping him up.*) Now come along up those stairs, and (*going through curtain*) here we are!

(*They disappear.*)

HARRIET: (*Striding forward*) Well, I'm not going to wait until some footling person is sent to fetch me; I'll go now. (*A bottom of steps.*) Now look here, Alton we're up against it. No use fighting forces we know nothing about. Though I should end the whole idiotic muddle as far as I was concerned by doing myself in, but I can't see it's made much difference. All I've done is to lose my dog. However, perhaps they'll put that straight. (*Pushing open curtains and shouting in Stentorian tones.*) Bob!

(*She disappears.*)

(*The Boy goes to the steps and calls.*)

Select One-Act Plays

BOY: Margaret ! (*The girl appears.*) By Jove , it is good to see you, again ! May I come now ?

GIRL: Yes, yes. I seem to have waited so long already.

BOY: (*On first step.*) I say, it won't all be different up there will it ? I mean we shall still know each other ?

GIRL: (*Holding out her arms to him with a smile.*) Come and See.

(*He runs up the steps, into her arms. The curtains cover them.*)

(*Darkness descends on the stage with the exception of a light that plays on Alton and the Lunatic in the foreground.*)

(*A pause, Alton turns and looks at the Lunatic, who, sitting crosslegged, cards in hand, looks up at him.*)

ALTON: Well ?

LUNATIC: The Euroquillo is a very bitter bird.

ALTON: Aren't you going also ?

LUNATIC: That is, bird renowned for its bitterness.

ALTON: I said, aren't you going also ?

LUNATIC: Wouldn't that be rather unsporting ?

ALTON: What do you mean ?

LUNATIC: You might feel a bit lonely.

ALTON: I have been lonely all my life.

LUNATIC: Because you think such a lot. It would have been so much better if you'd played Snap more and thought less.

ALTON: Curse you for a fool !

LUNATIC: Quite so—come and play Snap.

ALTON: Do you suppose I've nothing better to do than to play Snap with a lunatic ?

LUNATIC: What have you better to do ? You've refused to go up the steps, you've frightened every one but me away— what is there better to do ? Oh, how I laugh when all the thought in the world proves useless, and the only thing left is to play the fool ! It's no good arguing, with me because I shouldn't understand you, but I can play Snap and so can you. (*Dealing out the cards.*) Let's begin.

ALTON: I wish I could make you realize —

LUNATIC: I'd so much rather you didn't. I'm sure you were most effective while on earth, but it's so different here : you'd better play Snap until you realize it. Come, be a sport ; I stayed behind to play with you.

ALTON: (*Sitting down.*) God knows, I do this to please you not to please myself.

LUNATIC: (*Gravely*) It is not improbable, God knows you are pleasing him considerably more in consequence.

(They play intently, calling out 'Snap' at frequent intervals. Alton gradually becomes engrossed in the game and distinctly more cheerful. Sometimes he laughs. It grows lighter, and shadowy forms are seen. The light returns: steps, table and archway have gone: the players are surrounded by magnificent masked Angels, standing, serene and silent, watching the game.)

ALTON: By Jove ! I'd no idea I should enjoy this foolery so much. Snap ! I feel positively young !

LUNATIC: I have never managed to fee positively old. Snap!

ALTON: Snap ! I've won ! I've won !

(Looks up : is transfixed with astonishment)

LUNATIC: (*Rising and bowing.*) We have a distinguished audience.

(The Angels part in the centre : Thariel advances in glory.)

ALTON: Now what's the matter ?

THARIEL: I regret to inform you that you have entered Heaven.

ALTON: (*Rising.*) I did not go up those steps !

THARIEL: No, there was no need, after all.

LUNATIC: I told you it was better to play Snap with a Lunatic than to spend your time cursing.

ALTON: But I won't have it ! I won't have it, do you hear ?
(Breaking down completely and hiding his face in his hands.) Oh,

why can't you let me alone? I've always been alone before.

THARIEL: (*Very quietly, gazing at him compassionately.*)
As if these earthlings ever were alone.

ALTON: (*Jumping up.*) But, now I am here, take care! I shall hate and smash and rebel as much as ever. You may have caught me, but you have not tamed me. I shall never forget the injustice and cruelty of the earth. I shall never cease to curse the powers that could do so much, and do—nothing! I shall smash—(*gazing at the Angels his voice grows faint*) and hate (*his voice grows fainter*) and rebel—

(*His voice dies away. The Angels, calm, benignant, stand watching him. There is a curious sense of power, of mystery about them. Alton is motionless.*)

LUNATIC: (*Going up to him, softly.*) I told you it would be so different.

Glossary

Raiment	:	dress.
I'm blowed	:	It is my misfortune that I have been sent to heaven.
Delirious	:	wandering in mind.
Bang	:	shut up.
This impressive looking gentleman	:	the angel.
Smacks of	:	suggests.
Sanctity	:	quality of being sacred
Cept	:	except.
Devil's Advocate	:	an advocate at the papal courts, who objects to canonisation.
Free thinker	:	a rationalist.
By a long chalk	:	for a considerable period of time.
Smash	:	expose.

The whole blooming:	this show of Heaven.
thing	
Ain't it ?	: Are you not a little surprised to find yourself at the gate of Heaven ?
Old man	: refers to Thariel.
What's that ?	: what do you mean by your suffering ?
Purification	: The nun holds the view that only the purest souls go to Heaven.
She did	: she suffered.
Vainglorious	: boastful.
Old boy	: refers to the angel.
Boil all over	: very uneasy and indignant.
Fortitude	: firmness in meeting danger.
Renounced	: gave up.
Earthlings	: creatures of the earth.
Involuntary	: spontaneous.
Spoil-sport	: a kill joy.
Trivialities	: small things
Past denying	: without doubt.
Kennel	: a house for dogs.
Sister Mary	: the nun
Down there	: on the earth.
Knack	: skill.
Obtruding	: forcing or thrusting.
I'll take plunge	: I will do something drastic to stop you.
Bally	: small.
Bamboozled	: confused.
Conjuring	: playing tricks,
Thick	: dull.
You'd sing a very different song	: you would feel very uncomfortable as I do.
The vicar	: Mrs. Bagshawe's husband who was a parish person.

Aeons	:	ages.
I apol.	:	I apologize.
I'll take a bet on it	:	I am quite sure.
Did myself in	:	committed suicide.
Moping	:	distorting the face.
Pining	:	wasting away under pain.
That little fellow	:	my little dog.
Free Church	:	that branch of Presbyterians in Scotland which left the established church in the Disruption of 1843.
Minister	:	clergyman.
Damn funny	:	extremely funny.
When I was a spirit	:	after my death on the earth.
Croaking	:	talking in a low hoarse voice like a frog.
Vegetating	:	leading an inactive life.
Mummery	:	sport with a mask on ; here it means a great show without reality.
Nondescript	:	odd.
That man	:	Alton.
Archly	:	cunningly.
Queen of Sheba	:	Sheba, was the ancient kingdom of Arabia, believed by some authorities to be , the modern Yemen. The Queen of Sheba once visited Solomon. The Koran contains an allusion to the story that Solomon having heard a report that her legs and feet were covered with hair, invited her into a court of which the floor was covered with glass. The Queen, mistaking this for water, lifted her robe in order to pass through it, thus giving Solomon an opportunity of ascertaining the truth of the report. According to some legends she bore a son to

Solomon whom she named David and who became King of Abyssinia. Her real name was Balkis.

Knotty	:	intricate.
Snap	:	a game of cards.
Cussing	:	cursing.
Kick up a row	:	start a quarrel.
Bluntly	:	plainly.
It is a bit thick down there	:	life on earth is a little dull and cheerless.
A Vale of tears	:	full of sorrows and sufferings.
Knack	:	gift, or power.
Propagating itself	:	increasing itself by reproduction.
Rouses me	:	puts me into anger.
Hang it all	:	an expression of annoyance.
Hextinction	:	extinction.
Tormented	:	greatly troubled.
Vague nonsense	:	foolish and indefinite answers.
Grey realities	:	unpleasant experiences.
This trumpery show	:	this foolish and gaudy show of heaven.
Disgusting and infuriating	:	disappointing and annoying.
Old fools	:	Old statesmen.
Horrible questioning	:	most knotty problems which crop up in our minds.
It is down there which counts	:	it is the life on earth that really matters.
Mysterious bunkum	:	vague humbug.
The buzzers hooting	:	the steam whistles of the mills and facto- ries calling men to work.
Figure of fun	:	ridiculous clown.
Sobbing wail	:	sad moan.

You gentlemen in Heaven	:	you gods or angels in heaven.
Expiation	:	satisfaction or compensation.
Your buzzer stunt	:	your talk about the steam whistle.
Blasphemy	:	contempt or indignity offered to God.
The earth speaks	:	the desires of flesh are active even in heaven
Gnashing of teeth	:	grinding of teeth.
They have the whip : hand	:	they have the power to control.
Hexterior darkness	:	darkness outside heaven.
In my line	:	in my way of doing things.
Beckoning	:	making a sign.
I accept	:	I resign myself to my fate.
Footling person	:	conductor.
idiotic muddle	:	foolish confusion.
Put that straight	:	correct the mistake and send the dog to heaven.
Stentorian tones	:	a loud voice.
The Euroquillo	:	bird— a meaningless sentence.
Curse you for a fool :	:	you being a fool should be damned.
You	:	were most effective while on earth- your arguments against God and heaven were most effective while you were on earth.
God knows	:	Mark! how unconsciously an atheist utters the name of God ?
Shadowy forms	:	indistinctly visible figures.
This foolery	:	this foolish game of cards.
Transfixed with astonishment	:	struck dumb with wonder.
Breaking down	:	getting upset.
Earthlings	:	human beings who live on the earth.
Benignant	:	kind and generous.

Exercises

1. What is the moral of the play 'The man who Wouldn't Go to Heaven' ?
 2. Sketch the character of Richard Alton.
 3. What impressions does the character of Sister Mary Teresa leave on your mind ?
 4. How would you introduce Thariel to those who have not read the play ?
 5. "The Lunatic (Timothy Toto Newbiggin) is the wisest and the sanest character in the play." Support or refute this view.
- I. Explain the following with reference to the context :
- (i) The place I've laughed at all my life, and now I imagine I'm bang in it.
 - (ii) The human heart is ever rebellious and stubborn.
 - (iii) Why should I go to a Heaven that is obviously as perplexing and foolish as the earth ?
- II. Be sure of the pronunciation of the following words:
Mary : Lunatic : Transfixed : Gnashing : Blasphemy :
Expiation : Ridiculous : Idiotic : Suicide : Involuntary.

THE MONKEY'S PAW

W. W. JACOBS

Introductory Note.

This is a dramatization of W. W. Jacobs' famous short story—The Monkey's Paw by Louis N. Parker and is a successful horror and mystery play. It presents incident after incident suggestive of horror and of the hidden operations of supernatural powers.

The playwright owes this success to several factors, the two most important of which are, first his dexterous blending of the true-to-life domestic scenes with incidents suggestive of terrible mysteries and supernatural powers, and secondly his deep knowledge of human psychology, particularly his insight into human behaviour under conditions of extreme stress. Mr. and Mrs. White and their son Herbert are an ordinary English lower middle class family, but a mysterious catastrophe, which makes every reader's flesh creep. And yet, seen in a different light, all that actually happens—Herbert's death, the compensation of exactly 200 paid by Herbert's Company and even the knocking at the door in the last scene (it might have been the wind after all or may be, a subjective though vivid illusion reflective of the intense psychic disturbance of Herbert's parents) can be taken as mere coincidences.

The domestic scene in the beginning of the play is well presented indeed. The slightly hen-pecked but loving father, the doting but no-nonsense mother, and the doubting and somewhat careless son make up a quite typical English working class family living a quiet life. But arrival of the Sergeant Major Morris who has (suggestively) seen service in India—traditionally the mysterious land of fakirs, magicians, snake-charmers, etc. all leads to the subsequent

weird happenings involving Herbert's death and magic resurrection. Perhaps Herbert is singled out for destruction by the Indian fakir's curse on account of his very scepticism and scoffing. And, meaningfully, it is while telling his mates the story of the monkey's paw that he is caught and crushed to death by the machinery. The parent's reaction to Herbert's death, to the offer of compensation by the employing Company, and to Herbert's knocking at the door in the middle of the night is psychologically convincing and genuinely pathetic.

Much of the fascinating-horrifying effect of the play owes itself to the playwright's use of subtle suggestions and ironies, both verbal, and situational. For example, Herbert's causal words to the Sergeant "The fly-wheel might gobble me up" bear a meaningful premonition of the impending tragedy. Similarly the Sergeant's narration of the experience of the first possessor of the monkey's paw whose third wish was for death" carries a suggestive adumbration of what would shortly happen to Mr. White himself ! Mr. White's third and last wish is also for death, though not his own but that of his son. Nothing, however, is more poignantly ironical than the following dialogue :

MR. WHITE. Is he (Herbert) in pain ?

SAMPSON. He is not in pain.

MRS. WHITE. Oh, thank God ! Thank God for that ?.....

The ironically sinister meaning of the apparently reassuring words "He is not in pain" takes a little time to reveal itself of the poor Mr. and Mrs. White.

Humour and horror do not go together ; one is not disposed to, chuckle while one's heart is sinking in one's shoes. Still the present play is not without a few mild strokes of humour. For example, when after losing at chess to his son, Mr. White suddenly starts grumbling pettishly about the inaction of the Country Council in improving the environs of the house, Mrs. White silences him with these taunting words . "Never mind, dear. Perhaps you'll win to-

morrow". However, the original short story is richer in humour than its dramatised version. As J. W. Marriott rightly observes, "While Mr. Jacobs uses the *macabre* only rarely and the humorous most frequently in his stories, the proportions seem to have become reversed in his plays."

Persons in the Play

MR. WHITE

MRS. WHITE

HERBERT

SERGEANT-MAJOR MORRIS

MR. SAMPSON

THE MONKEY'S PAW

SCENE : *The living-room of an old-fashioned cottage on the outskirts of Fulham. Set corner-wise in the left angle at the back a deep window; further front, L., three or four steps lead up to a door. Further forward a dresser, with plates, glasses, etc. R.C. at back an alcove with the street door fully visible. On the inside of the street door, a wire letterbox. On the right a cupboard, then a fire-place. In the centre a round table. Against the wall, L. back, an old-fashioned piano. A comfortable armchair each side of the fireplace. Other chairs. On the mantelpiece a clock, old china figures, etc. An air of comfort pervades the room.*

I

At the rise of the curtain, MRS. WHITE, a pleasant-looking old woman, is seated in the armchair below the fire, attending to a kettle which is steaming on the fire, and keeping a laughing eye on MR. WHITE and HERBERT. These two are seated at the right angle of the table nearest the fire with a chess-board between them. MR. WHITE is evidently losing. His hair is ruffled; his spectacles are high up on his forehead. HERBERT, a fine young fellow, is looking with satisfaction at the move he has just made. MR. WHITE makes several attempts to move, but thinks better of them. There is a shaded lamp on the table. The door is tightly shut. The curtains of the window are drawn; but every now and then the wind is heard whistling outside.

MR. WHITE. *(moving at last, and triumphant)*. There, Herbert, my boy! Got you, I think.

HERBERT. Oh you're a deep'un, Dad, aren't you?

MRS. WHITE. Mean to say he's beaten you at last?

HERBERT. Lor, no! Why, he's overlooked—

MR WHITE. (*very excited*). I see it ! lemme have that back !

HERBERT. Not much. Rules of the game !

MR. WHITE. (*disgusted*). I don't hold with them scientific rules. You turn what ought to be an innocent relaxation—

MRS WHITE. Don't talk so much, Father., You put him off—

HERBERT. (*laughing*). Not he !

MR. WHITE. (*trying to distract his attention*). Hark at the wind.

HERBERT. (*drily*). Ah ! I'm listening. Check.

MR. WHITE. (*still trying to distract him*). I should hardly think Sergeant-major Morris'd come to-night.

HERBERT. Mate (*Rises goes up L.*)

MR. WHITE. (*with an outbreak of disgust and sweeping the chessmen off the board*). That's the worst of living so far out. Your friends can't come for a quiet chat, and you addle your brains over a confounded—

HERBERT. Now, Father ! Morris'll turn up all right.

MR WHITE. (*still in a temper*). Lovers' Lane, Fulham ! HO ! of all the beastly, slushy out-o'-the way place to live in—! Pathway's bog, and the road's a torrent. (*To MRS. WHITE, who has risen, and is at his side*). What's the County Council thinking of, that's what I want to know ? Because this is the only house in the road it doesn't matter if nobody can get near it, I s'pose.

MRS. WHITE. Never mind, dear. Perhaps you will'n tomorrow. (*she moves to back of table.*)

MR. WHITE. Perhaps I'll — perhaps I'll — What d'you mean ? (*Bursts out laughing*). There ! You always know what's going on inside o'me, don't you, Mother ?

MRS. WHITE. Ought to, after thirty year, John.

(*She goes to dresser, and busies herself wiping tumblers and tray there. He rises, goes to fireplace and lights pipe.*)

HERBERT. (*down C.*) And it's not such a bad place, Dad, after all. One of the few old-fashioned houses left near London. None

o' your stucco villas. Homelike, I call it. And so do you, or you wouldn't ha' bought it. (*Rolls a Cigarette*)

MR. WHITE. (R. growling). Nice job I made o' that too ! With two hundred pounds owin' on it.

HERBERT. (*on back of chair, C.*) Why I shall work that off in no time, Dad. Matter o' three years, with the rise promised me.

MR. WHITE. If you don't get married.

HERBERT. Not me. Not that sort.

MRS. WHITE. I wish you would, Herbert. A good steady lad—
(*She brings the tray with a bottle of whisky, glasses, a lemon, spoons, buns, and a knife to the table.*)

HERBERT. Lot's o' time, Mother. Sufficient for the day—as the sayin' goes. Just now my dynamos don't leave me any time for love making. Jealous they are. I tell you !

MR. WHITE (*chuckling*). I lay awake o' nights often, and think. If Herbert took a nap, and let his what-d' you-call-ums—dynamos' run down, all Fulham would be in darkness. Lord ! What a joke !
(*Gets, R.C.*)

HERBERT. Joke ! And me with the sack ! Pretty idea of a joke you've got, I don't think.

(*Knock at outer door.*)

MRS. WHITE. Hark !
(*Knock repeated, louder*)

MR. WHITE (*going toward door*). That's him. That's the Sergeant major. (He unlocks door, back).

HERBERT (*removes chessboard*). Wonder what yarn he's got for us to night. (*Places chessboard on piano*).

MRS. WHITE. (*goes up right, busies herself putting the other armchair nearer fire etc.*) Don't let the door slam, John !

MR. WHITE. *opens the door a little, struggling with it.*

Wind. SERGEANT-MAJOR MORRIS *a veteran with a distinct - military appearance—left arm gone—dressed as a commissionaire, is seen to enter. MR. WHITE helps him off with the coat, which he hangs up in the outer hall.*

MR. WHITE (*at the door*). Slip in quick ! It's as much as I can do to hold it against the wind.

SERGEANT. Awful ! Awful ! (*Busy taking off his cloak, etc.*) And a mile up the road—by the cemetery—it's worse. Enough to blow the hair off your head.

MR. WHITE. Give me your stick.

SERGEANT. If it wasn't I knew what a welcome I'd get—

MR. WHITE. (*proceeding him in to the room*). Sergeant-major Morris !

MRS. WHITE. Tut ! tut ! So cold you must be ! Come to the fire do'ee, now.

SERGEANT. How are you, marm ? (*To HERBERT*) How's yourself, laddie ? Not on duty yet, eh, ? Day-week, eh ?

HERBERT. (*C.*) No, sir. Night-week. But there's half an hour yet.

SERGEANT. (*sitting in the armchair above the fire, which MRS. WHITE is motioning him toward*).

(MR. WHITE mixes grog for MORRIS)

Thank'ee kindly marm. That's good—hah ! That's sight better than the trenche at Chitral. That's better than settin' in a puddle with the rain pourin' down in buckets, and the native takin' pot-shots at you.

MRS. WHITE. Did't you have no umbrellas ? (*Corner below fire, kneels before it, stirs it, etc.*)

SERGEANT. Umbrella— ? Ho ! ho ! That's good ! Eh, White ? That's good. Did ye hear what she said ? Umbrellas !— *And* goloshes ! *and* hot-water bottles !—Ho, yes ! No offence, marm, but it's easy to see you was never a soldier.

HERBERT (*rather hurt*). Mother spoke out o' kindness, sir.

SERGEANT. And well I know it ; and no offence intended. No, marm, 'adship, 'adship is the soldier's lot, starvation, fever, and get, yourself shot. That's a bit o' my own.

MRS. WHITE. You don't look to've taken much harm-ex-

cept— (*Indicates his empty sleeve. She takes kettle to table, then returns to fire.*)

SERGEANT. (*showing a medal hidden under his coat*) And that I got this for. No, marm. Tough. Thomas Morris is tough.

(*MR. WHITE is holding a glass of grog under the SERGEANT'S nose.*)

And sober. What's this now ?

MR. WHITE. Put your nose in it ! you'll see.

SERGEANT. Whisky ? And hot ? And sugar ? And a slice of lemon ? No, I said I'd never—but seein' the sort o' night—Well ! (*waving the glass at them.*) Here's another thousand a year !

MR. WHITE (*sits R. of table, also with a glass*). Same to you and many of 'em.

SERGEANT (*to HERBERT, who has no glass*). What ? Not you ?

HERBERT (*laughing and sitting across chair, C*). Oh ! 'tisin't for want of being sociable. But any work don't go with it. Not if't was ever so little. I've got to keep a cool head, a steady eye, and a still hand. The fly-wheel might gobble me up.

MRS. WHITE. Don't Herbert. (*Sits in armchair, below fire.*)

HERBERT. (*laughing*). No fear. Mother.

SERGEANT. Ah ! you electricians !—Sort o' magicians, you are, Light ! says you—And light it is. And, power ! says you—and the trams go whizzin'. And, knowledge ! says you—and words go 'ummin' to the ends o' the world. I fair beat me—and I've seen a bit in my time too.

HERBERT (*nudges his father*). Your Indian magic ? All a fake, governor. The fakir's fake.

SERGEANT. Fake, you call it ? I tell you, I've *seen* it.

HERBERT (*nudging his father with his foot*). Oh, Come, now such as what ? Come, now !

SERGEANT. I've seen a cove with no more clothes on than a baby, (*to MRS. WHITE*) if you know what I mean—take an empty

basket—empty, mind!—as empty as—as this here glass—

MR. WHITE. Hand it over, Morris. (*Hands it to HERBERT, who goes quickly behind table and fills it.*)

SERGEANT. Which was not my intentions, but used for illustration.

HERBERT (*while mixing*). Oh, I've seen the basket trick; and I've read how it was done. Why, I could do it myself, with a bit o' practice. Ladle out something stronger.

(*HERBERT brings him the glass*)

SERGEANT. Stronger?—what do you say to an old fakir chuchin a rope up in the air—in the *air*, mind you!—and swarming up it, same as if it was looked on—vanishing clean out o' sight? I've seen that.

(*HERBERT goes to table, plunges a knife into a bun and offers it to the SERGEANT with exaggerated politeness.*)

SERGEANT. (*eyeing it with disgust*). Bun—? What for?

HERBERT. That yarn takes it. (*MR. and MRS. WHITE delighted.*)

SERGEANT. Mean to say you doubt my word?

MRS. WHITE. No, no! He is only taking you off—You shouldn't Herbert.

MR. WHITE. Herbert always was one for a bit o' fun!

(*HERBERT puts bun back on table, comes round in front, and moving the chair out of the way, sits cross-legged on the floor at his father's side*)

SERGEANT. But it's true. Why, if I chose, I could tell you things—But there! you don't get no more yarns out o' me.

MR. WHITE. Nonsense, old friend. (*Puts down his glass*). You're not going to get shirty about a bit o' fun. (*Moves his chair nearer. MORRIS'S*). What was that you started telling me the other day about a monkey's paw, or some-thing? (*Nudges HERBERT, and winks at. MRS. WHITE.*)

SERGEANT (*gravely*). Nothing Leastways, nothing worth

hearing.

MRS. WHITE. (*with astonished curiosity*) Monkey's paw—?

MR. WHITE. Ah—you was tellin' me—

SERGEANT. Nothing. Don't go on about it. (*Puts his empty glass to his lips—then stares at it.*) What? Empty again? There I When I begin thinkin' o' the paw, it makes me that absent-minded—

MR. WHITE (*rises and fills glass*). You said you' always carried it, on you—

SERGEANT. So I do, for fear of what might happen. (*Sunk in thought*) Ay!—ay!

MR. WHITE (*handing him his glass refilled*). There. (*Sits again in, same chair.*)

MRS. WHITE. What's it for?

SERGEANT. You wouldn't believe me, if I was tell you.

HERBERT. I will, every word.

SERGEANT. Magic, then!—Don't you laugh!

HERBERT. I'm not. Got it on you now?

SERGEANT. Of course.

HERBERT. Let's see it.

(*Seeing the SERGEANT embarrassed with his glass.* MRS. WHITE *rises, takes it from him, places it on mantelpiece and remains standing.*)

SERGEANT. Oh, it's nothing to look at. (*Hunting in his pocket, just an ordinary—little paw—dried to a mummy. Produces it and holds it towards MRS. WHITE*) here.

MRS. WHITE. (*who has leant forward eagerly to see it, starts, back with a little cry of disgust*) Oh!

HERBERT. Give us a look. (*MORRIS passes the paw to Mr. WHITE, from whom HERBERT takes it.*) Why, it's all dried up!

SERGEANT. I said so.

(*Wind*)

MRS. WHITE. (*with a slight shudder*). Hark at the wind!
(*Sits, again in her old place.*)

MR WHITE. (*taking the paw from HERBERT.*) And what, might there be special about it?

SERGEANT. (*impressively*) That the paw has had a spell put upon it!

MR WHITE. No? (*In great alarm he thrusts the paw back into MORRIS' hand.*)

SERGEANT (*pensively, holding the paw in the palm of his hand*). Ah! By an old fakir. He was a very holy man. He'd sat all doubled up in one spot, goin on for fifteen years; thinkin' o' things. And he wanted to show that fate ruled people. That everything was, cut and dried from the beginning, as you might say. That there warn't no gettin' away from it. And that, if you tried to, you caught it hot. (*Pauses solemnly*). So he put a spell on this bit of a paw. It might ha' been anything else, but he took the first thing that came handy. Ah! He put a spell on it; and made it so that three people (*looking at them, and with deep meaning*) could each have three wishes.

(*All but MRS. WHITE (laugh rather nervously)*)

MR WHITE. Ssh! Don't!

SERGEANT. (*more gravely*). But—! But, mark you, though the wishes were granted those three people would have cause to wish they *hadn't* been.

MR WHITE. But how *could* the wishes be granted?

SERGEANT. He didn't say. It would all happen so natural you might think it a coincidence if so disposed

HERBERT. Why haven't you tried it, sir?

SERGEANT (*gravely, after a pause*). I have.

HERBERT (*eagerly*). You've had your three wishes?

SERGEANT. (*gravely*). Yes.

MRS WHITE. Were they granted?

SERGEANT. (*staring at the fire*) They were. (*A pause.*)

MR WHITE. Has anybody else wished?

SERGEANT. Yes, The first owner had his three wishes—
(*Lost in recollection*) Yes, oh yes, he had his three wishes all right.

I don't know what his first two were (*very impressively*) but the third was for death.

(*All shudder.*)

That's how I got the paw.

(*A pause*)

HERBERT (*cheerfully*). Well ! Seems to me you've only got to wish for things that can't have any bad luck about 'em—(*Rises*).

SERGEANT. (*shaking his head*). Ah !

MR. WHITE. (*tentatively*) MORRIS—if you have had your three wishes—it's no good to you, now—what do you keep it for ?

SERGEANT. (*still holding the paw ; looking at it*). Fancy, I s'pose. I did have some idea of selling it up, but I don't think, I will. It's done mischief enough already. Besides, people, won't buy. Some of 'em think it's a fairy-tale. And some want to try it first, and pay after.

(*Nervous laugh from the others*).

MRS WHITE. If you could have another three wishes, would you ?

SERGEANT (*slowly—weighing the paw in his hand and looking at it*). I don't know—(*Suddenly, with violence, flinging it in the fire*) No ! I'm damned if I would !

(*Movement from all.*)

MR WHITE (*rises and quickly snatches it out of the fire*). What are you doing ?

(*WHITE goes R.C.*)

SERGEANT. (*rising and following him and trying to prevent him*) Let it burn ! Let the internal thing burn !

HERBERT (*rises*). Let it burn, Father !

MRS WHITE. (*wiping it on his coat-sleeve*) No. If you don't want it, give it to me.

SERGEANT (*violently*). I won't ! I won't ! My hands are clear of it. I threw it on the fire. If you keep it, don't blame me, whatever happens. Here ! Pitch it back again.

MR WHITE (*stubbornly*). I'm going to keep it. What do you say, Herbert ?

HERBERT (*L. C. laughing*). I say, keep it if you want to.

Stuff and nonsense, anyhow.

MR WHITE (*looking at the paw thoughtfully*). Stuff and nonsense. Yes, I wonder—(*casually*) I wish—(*He was going to say some ordinary thing like "I wish I were certain"*)

SERGEANT (*misunderstanding him, violently*). Stop! Mind what you're doing. That's not the way?

MR WHITE. What is the way?

MRS WHITE (*moving away, up R. C. to back of table, and beginning to put the tumblers straight, and the chairs in their places*). Oh don't have anything to do with it, John.

(*Takes glass on tray to dresser. L. busies herself there, rinsing them in a bowl of water on the dresser, and wiping them with a cloth.*)

SERGEANT. That's what I say, marm. But if I wasn't to tell him, he might go wishing something he didn't mean to, You hold it in your right hand, and wish aloud. But I warn you! I warn you!

MRS WHITE. Sounds like *The Arabian Nights*. Don't you think you might wish me for pair o' hands?

MR WHITE (*laughing*). Right you are, Mother!—I wish—

SERGEANT (*pulling his arm down*). Stop it! if you must wish, wish for something sensible. Look here! I can't stand this. Gets on, my nerves. Where's my coat? (*Goes into alcove*).

MR WHITE (*crosses to fire place and carefully puts the paw on mantelpiece. He is absorbed in it to the end of the tableau.*)

HERBERT. I'm coming your way, to the works, in a minute. Won't you wait? (*Goes up C., helps MORRIS with his coat.*)

SERGEANT. (*putting on his coat*). No I'm all shook up. I want fresh air. I don't want to be here when you wish. And wish you will as soon's my back's turned. I know. I know. But I've warned you, mind.

MR WHITE (*helping into his coat.*). All right, Morris. Don't you fret about us. (*Give him money*). Here.

SERGEANT (*refusing it*). No I won't—

MR WHITE (*forcing it into his hand*). Yes, you will. (*Opens door*).

SERGEANT (*turning to the room*). Well, good night all, (*To WHITE*). Put it in the fire.

ALL. Good night.

(*Exit. SERGEANT, MR WHITE closes door, comes towards fireplace, absorbed in the paw.*)

HERBERT (*down L.*). If there's no more in this than there is in his -other stories, we shan't make much out of it.

MR WHITE. (*comes down R. C. to WHITE*). Did you give him anything for it, Father?

MR WHITE. A trifle. He didn't want it, but I made him take it.

MRS WHITE. There, now! You shouldn't. Throwing your money about.

MR WHITE (*looking at the paw which he has picked up again*). I wonder—

HERBERT. What?

MR WHITE. I wonder, whether we hadn't better chuck it on the fire?

HERBERT (*laughing*). Likely! Why we're all going to be rich and famous and happy.

MRS WHITE. Throw it on the fire, indeed, when you've give money for it! So like you, Father.

HERBERT. Wish to be an emperor, Father to begin with. Then you can't be henpecked!

MRS WHITE (*going for him front of table with a duster*). You young—! (*Follows him to back of table.*)

HERBERT (*running away from her round behind table*). Steady with that du'ter, Mother!

MRS WHITE. Be quiet, there! (*HERBERT catches MRS. WHITE in his arms and kisses her*). I wonder—(*He has the paw in his hand*). I don't know what to wish for, and that's a fact. (*He looks*

about him with a happy smile). I seem to've got all I want.

HERBERT (*with his hands on the old man's shoulder*). Old Dad ! if you'd only cleared the debt on the house, you'd be quite happy, wouldn't you ! (*Laughing*). Well—go ahead !—wish for the two hundred, pounds: that'll just do it.

MR WHITE (*half laughing*). Shall I ? Crosses to R. C.

HERBERT. Go on ! Here ! I'll play slow music. (*Crosses to piano*)

MRS WHITE. Don't'ee John. Don't have nothing to do, with it !

HERBERT. Now, Dad ! (*Plays*).

MR WHITE. I will ! (*Hold up the paw, as if half ashamed*). I wish for two hundred pounds.

(*Crash on the piano. At the same instant MR. WHITE utters a cry and lets the paw drop.*)

MRS WHITE and HERBERT. What's the matter ?

MR WHITE (*gazing with horror at the paw*). It moved ! As I wished, it twisted in my hand like a snake.

HERBERT (*goes down R. and picks the paw up*). Nonsense, Dad. Why, it's as stiff a bone. (*Lays it on the mantelpiece*).

MRS WHITE. MUST have been your fancy, Father.

HERBERT (*laughing*). Well—? (*Looking round the room*). I don't see the money, and I bet never shall.

MR WHITE (*relieved*). Thank God, there's no harm done ! But it gave me a shock.

HERBERT. Half-past eleven. I must get along. I'm, on at midnight (*Goes up C, fetches his coat etc.*) We've had quite a merry, evening.

MRS WHITE. I'am off to bed. Don't be late for break-fast, Herbert.

HERBERT. I shall walk home as usual. Does me good. I shall be with you about nine. Don't wait, though.

MRS WHITE. You know your father never waits though.

HERBERT. Goodnight, Mother. (*Kisses her. She lights candle on dresser, L., goes upstairs and exit.*)

HERBERT. (*coming to his father, R., who is sunk in thought.*) Good night, Dad. You'll find the cash tied up in the middle of the bed.

MR WHITE (*staring seizes HERBERT'S hand*). It moved, Herbert.

HERBERT. Ah ! And a monkey hanging by his tail from the bed-post, watching you count the golden sovereigns.

MR WHITE (*accompanying him to the door*). I wish you wouldn't joke my boy.

HERBERT. All right, Dad. (*Opens door*). Lord ! What weather ! Good night.

The old man shakes his head, closes the door, locks it, puts the chain up, slips the lower bolt, has some difficulty with the upper bolt.

MR WHITE. This bolt's stiff again ! I must get Herbert to look into it in the morning.

(Comes into room, puts out the lamp crosses towards step ; but is irresistibly attracted towards fireplace. Sits and stares into the fire. His expression changes ; he sees something horrible.)

MR WHITE (*with an involuntary cry*). Mother ! Mother !

MRS WHITE (*appearing at the door at the top of the steps with candle*). What's the matter ? (*Comes down R. C.*)

MR WHITE (*mastering himself, Rises*) Nothing—I—haha !—I saw faces in the fire.

MRS WHITE. Come along.

(She takes his arm and draws him towards the steps. He looks back frightened towards fireplace as they reach the first step.)

The Monkey's Paw
TABLEAU CURTAIN

II

Bright sunshine. The table, which has been moved nearer the window, is laid for breakfast. MRS. WHITE busy about the table. MR. WHITE standing in the window looking off R. The inner door is open, showing the outer door.

MR. WHITE. What a morning Herbert's got for walking home?

MRS. WHITE. (L. C.) What's clock! (*Looks at clock on mantelpiece.*) Quarter to nine, I declare. He's off at eight. (*Crosses to fire.*)

MR. WHITE. Takes him half an hour to change and wash. He's just by the cemetery now.

MRS. WHITE. He'll be here in ten minutes.

MR. WHITE. (*coming to the table*). What's for breakfast?

MRS. WHITE. Sausages. (*At the mantelpiece*) Why, if here isn't that dirty monkey's paw! (*Picks it up, looks at it with disgust, puts it back. Takes sausages in dish from before the fire and places them on table*) Silly thing! The idea of us listening to such nonsense!

MR. WHITE. (*goes up to window again*). Ay! the Sergeant-major and his yarns! I suppose all old soldiers are alike—

MRS. WHITE. Come on, Father Herbert hates us to wait.

(*They both sit and begin breakfast.*)

MRS. WHITE. How could wishes be granted, now a days?

MR. WHITE. Ah! Been thinking about it all night, have you?

MRS. WHITE. You kept me awake, with your tossing and tumbling—

MR. WHITE. Ay, I had a bad night.

MRS. WHITE. It was the storm, I expect. How it blew!

MR. WHITE. I didn't hear it. I was asleep and not asleep, if you know what I mean.

MRS. WHITE. And all that rubbish about its making you

unhappy if your wish *was* granted ! How could two hundred pounds hurt you, eh Father ?

MR WHITE. Might drop on my head in a lump. Don't see any other way. And I'd try to bear that. Though, mind you, Morris said it would all happen so naturally that You might take it for a coincidence, if so disposed.

MRS WHITE. Well-it hasn't happened. That all I know. And it isn't going to. (*A letter is seen to drop in the letter-box.*) And how you can sit there and talk about it — (*Sharp postman's knock ; she jumps to her feet*) What' that ?

MR WHITE. Postman, o' course.

MRS WHITE. (*seeing the letter from a distance ; in an awed, whisper*). He brought a letter, John !

MR WHITE (*laughing*). What did you think he'd bring ? Ton o' Coals ?

MRS WHITE. John-! John-! Suppose ?

MR WHITE. Suppose what ?

MRS WHITE. Suppose it was two hundred pounds !

MR WHITE. (*Suppressing his excitement*). Eh ! Here ! Don't talk nonsense. Why don't you fetch it ?

MRS WHITE. (*crosses and takes letter-out of the box*). It's thick, John-*(feels it)*-and-it's got something crisp inside it. (*Takes letter to* WHITE, R. C.)

MR WHITE. Who-who's it for ?

MRS WHITE. You.

MR WHITE. Hand it over, then. (*Feeling and examining it with ill concealed excitement*) The idea ! What a superstitious old woman you are ! Where are my specs ?

MRS WHITE. Let me open it.

MR WHITE. Don't you touch it. Where are my specs ?

(*Goes to R.*)

MRS. WHITE. Don't let sudden wealth sour your temper, John.

MR. WHITE. Will you find my specs ?

MRS. WHITE. (*taking them off mantlepiece*). Here, John, here. (*As he opens the letter*). Take care ! Don't tear it !

MR. WHITE. Tear what ?

MRS. WHITE. If it was banknotes, John !

MR. WHITE (*taking a thick, formal document out of the envelop and a crisp looking slip*). You've gone dotty.— You've made me nervous. (*Reads*) 'Sir, Enclosed please find receipt for interest on the mortgages of £200 on your house, duly received.'

They look at each other. MR. WHITE *sits down to finish his breakfast silently.* MRS. WHITE : *goes to the window.*

MRS. WHITE. That comes of listening to tipsy old soldiers.

MR. WHITE (*pettish*). What does ?

MRS. WHITE. You thought there was banknotes in it.

MR. WHITE (*injured*). I didn't ! I said all along—

MRS. WHITE. How Herbert will laugh, when I tell him !

MR. WHITE (*with gruff good-humour*). You're not going to tell him. You're going to keep your mouth shut. That's what you're going to do. Why, I should never hear the last of it.

MRS. WHITE. Serve you right. I shall, tell him. You know you like his fun. See how he joked you last night when you said the paw moved.

(She is looking through the window towards R.)

MR. WHITE. So it did. It did move. That I'll swear to.

MRS. WHITE (*abstractedly. she is watching something outside*). You thought it did.

MR. WHITE. I say it did. There was no thinking about it. You saw how it upset me, didn't you ! *(She doesn't answer.)*

Didn't you ? — Why don't listen ? (Turns round) What is it ?

MRS. WHITE. Nothing.

MR. WHITE (*turns back to his breakfast*). Do you see Herbert coming ?

MRS. WHITE. No.

MR WHITE. He's about due. What is it ?

MRS WHITE. Nothing. Only a man. Looks like a gentleman. Leastways, he's in black, and he's got a tophat on.

MR WHITE. What about him ? (*He is not interested; goes on eating.*)

MRS WHITE. He stood at the garden-gate as if he wanted to come in. But he couldn't seem to make up his mind.

MR WHITE. Oh, go on ! You're full o' fancies.

MRS WHITE. He's going — no ; he's coming back.

MR WHITE. Don't let him see you peeping.

MRS WHITE. (*with increasing excitement*). He's looking at the house. He's got his hand on the latch. No. He turns away again (*Eagerly*) John ! He looks like a sort of a lawyer.

MR WHITE. What of it ?

MRS WHITE. Oh, you'll only laugh again. But suppose—suppose he's coming about two hundred—

MR WHITE. You're not to mention it again ! You're a foolish, old woman—Come and eat your breakfast. (*Eagerly*) Where is he now ?

MRS WHITE. Gone down the road. He has turned back. He seems to've made up his mind, Here he comes !—Oh, John, and me all untidy ! (*Crosses to fire R.*)

(*Knock*)

MR WHITE (*to MRS. WHITE. who is hastily smoothing her hair, etc.*) What's it matter ? He's made a mistake. Come to the wrong, house. (*Crosses in fireplace*).

MRS WHITE *opens the door*. MR. SAMPSON, *dressed from head to foot in solemn black, with a tophat, stand in the doorway*).

SAMPSON (*outside*). Is this Mr. White's ?

MRS WHITE. Come in, sir. Please step in.

(*She shows him into the room ; goes R. ; he is awkward and nervous*)

You must overlook our being so untidy. and the room all any

how ; and John in his garden-coat, (*To MR. WHITE, reproachfully*) Oh, John.

SAMPSON (*to MR. WHITE*). Morning. My name is Sampson.

MRS WHITE (*offering a chair*). Won't you please be seated ?

(SAMPSON *stands quite still up C.*)

SAMPSON. Ah—thank you—no, I think not—I think not.

(*Pause*).

MR WHITE (*awkwardly, trying to help him*). Fine weather for the time o' year.

SAMPSON. Ah—yes—yes—(*pause; he makes a renewed effort*.) My name is Sampson—I've come—

MRS WHITE. Perhaps you was wishful to see Herbert; he'll be 'home in a minute. (*Pointing*) Here's his breakfast waiting—

SAMPSON (*interrupting her hastily*) No, no! (*Pause*) I've come from the electrical works—

MRS WHITE. Why, you might have come with him.

(MR WHITE *see something is wrong, tenderly puts his hand on her arm.*)

SAMPSON. No—no I've come—alone.

MRS WHITE, (*with a little anxiety*). Is anything the matter?

SAMPSON. I was asked to call—

MRS WHITE (*abruptly*). Herbert ? Has anything happened ? Is he hurt ? Is he hurt ?

MR WHITE (*soothing her*). There, there, Mother. Don't you jump to conclusions. Let the gentleman speak. You've not brought bad news, I'm sure, sir.

SAMPSON. I'm—sorry—

MRS WHITE. Is he hurt ? (*SAMPSON bows.*)

MRS WHITE. Badly ?

SAMPSON. Very badly. (*Turns away*)

MRS WHITE (*with a cry*). John—! (*She instinctively moves*

towards MR. WHITE.)

MR. WHITE. Is he in pain?

SAMPSON. He is not in pain.

MRS. WHITE. Oh thank God! Thank God for that! Thank—
(*She looks in a startled fashion at MR. WHITE — realises what SAMPSON means, catches his arm and tries to turn him towards her.*) Do you mean?

(*SAMPSON avoids her look; she gropes for her husband, he takes her two hands in his, and gently lets her sink into the arm chair above the fireplace, then he stands on her right, between her and SAMPSON.*)

MR. WHITE (*hoarsely*). Go on, sit.

SAMPSON. He was telling his mates a story. Something that had happened here last night. He was laughing and wasn't noticing—and—*and*—(*hushed*) the machinery caught him—

(*A little cry from MRS. WHITE, her face shows her horror and agony*)

MR. WHITE (*vague, holding MRS. WHITE'S hand*). The machinery caught him—yes—and him the only child—it's hard, sir—very hard—

SAMPSON (*subdued*). The Company wished me to convey their sincere sympathy with you in your great loss—

MR. WHITE (*staring blankly*). Our—great—loss—!

SAMPSON. I was to say further— (*as if apologizing*) I am only their servant—I am only obeying orders—

MR. WHITE. Our—great—loss—

SAMPSON (*laying an envelope on the table and edging towards the door*). I was to say, the Company disclaim all responsibility, but, in consideration of your son's services, they wish to present you with a certain sum as compensation. (*Gets to door*).

MR. WHITE. Our—great—Loss—(*Suddenly with horror*). How—how much?

SAMPSON (*in the door*). Two hundred pounds (*Exit. MRS.*

WHITE gives a cry. *The old man takes no heed of her smiles, faintly, puts out his hands like a sightless man, and drops a senseless heap, to the floor.* MRS. WHITE stares at him blankly and her hands go out helplessly towards him.)

TABLEAU CURTAIN

III

Night. On the table a candle is flickering at its last gasp.

The room looks neglected. MR. WHITE is dozing fitfully in the armchair. MRS. WHITE is in the window peering through the blinds towards L

(MR. WHITE starts, wakes, looks around him)

MR WHITE. (*fretfully*). Jeeny-Jeeny

MRS WHITE. (*in the window*). Yes.

MR WHITE. Where are you ?

MRS WHITE. At the window.

MR WHITE. What are you doing ?

MRS WHITE. Looking up the road.

MR. WHITE. (*falling back*) What's the use, Jenny ? What's the, use ?

MRS WHITE. That's. where the cemetery is; that's where we've laid him.

MR WHITE. Ay-ay-a week to-day-what o' clock is it ?

MRS WHITE. I don't know.

MR WHITE. We don't take much account of time now, Jenny, do we ?

MRS WHITE. Why should we ? He don't come home. He'll never come home again. There's nothing to think about-

MR WHITE.- Or talk about. (*Pause.*) Comes away from the window; you'll get cold.

MRS WHITE. It's colder where *he* is.

MR WHITE. Ay-gone for ever-

MRS WHITE. And taken all our hopes with him-

MR WHITE. And all our wishes—

MRS WHITE. Ay, and all our—*(with a sudden cry)* John!
(She comes quicker to him: he rises.)

MR WHITE. Jenny ! For God's sake ! What's the matter ?

MRS WHITE. *(with a dreadful eagerness)*. The paw ! The monkey's Paw !

MR WHITE. *(bewildered)*. Where ? Where is it ? What's wrong with it ?

MRS WHITE. I want it ! You haven't done away with it ?

MR WHITE. I haven't seen it—since—why ?

MRS WHITE. I want it ! Find it ! Find it !

MR WHITE. *(groping on the mantelpiece)*. Here ! Here it is ! What, do you want of it *(He leaves it there)*.

MRS WHITE. Why didn't I think of it ? Why didn't you think of it.

MR WHITE. Think of what ?

MRS WHITE. The other two wishes

MR WHITE. *(with horror)* What ?

MRS WHITE. We've only had one.

MR WHITE. *(tragically)* Wasn't that enough ?

MRS WHITE. No ! We'll have one more. *(WHITE crosses to R. C. MRS WHITE takes the paw and follows him)*. Take it. Take it, quickly. And wish—

MR WHITE. *(avoiding the paw)* Wish what ?

MRS WHITE. Oh John ! John ! Wish our boy alive again.

MR WHITE. Good God ! Are you mad ?

MRS WHITE. Take it. Take it and wish. *(With a paroxysm of grief)* Oh ; my boy ! My boy !

MR WHITE. Get to bed. Get to sleep. You don't know what—you're saying.

MRS WHITE. We had the first wish granted—why not the second ?

MR WHITE. *(hushed)* He's been dead ten days, and—Jenny

Jenny ! I only knew him by his clothing—if you wasn't allowed to see him then—how could you bear to see him now ?

MRS WHITE. I don't care. Bring him back.

MR WHITE. (*shrinking from the paw*) I dare not touch it.

MRS WHITE. (*thrusting it in his hand*) Here ! Here !

Wish !

MR WHITE. (*trembling*) Jenny ?

MRS WHITE. (*fiercely*). Wish. (*She goes on frantically whispering "Wish".*)

MR WHITE. (*shuddering, but overcome by her insistence*)

I—I—wish—my—son—alive again.

(*He drops it with a cry. The candle goes out. Utter darkness. He sinks into a chair. MRS. WHITE hurries to the window and draws the blind back. She stands in the moonlight. Pause.*)

MRS WHITE. (*drearily*) Nothing.

MR WHITE. Thank God ! Thank God !

MRS WHITE. Nothing at all. Along the whole length of the road not a living thing. (*Closes blind*). And nothing, nothing, nothing left in our lives, John.

MR WHITE. Except each other, Jenny—and memories.

MRS WHITE. (*coming back slowly to the fireplace*). We're too old. We were only alive in him. We can't begin again. We can't feel anything now. John, but emptiness and darkness. (*She sinks into armchair.*)

MR WHITE. 'Tisn't for long, Jenny. There's that to look forward to.

MRS WHITE. Every minute's long, now.

MR WHITE. (*rising*). I can't bear this darkness

MRS WHITE. It's dreary-dreary.

MR WHITE. (*crosses to dresser.*) Where's the candle ? (*Finds it and brings it to table*). And the matches ? Where are the matches ? We mustn't sit in the dark. Tisn't wholesome. (*Lights match; the other candlestick is close to him*). There. (*Turning with*

the lighted match toward MRS. WHITE, who is rocking and moaning). Don't take on so, Mother.

MRS. WHITE. I'm a mother no longer.

MR. WHITE. (*lights candle*) There now; there now. Go on up to bed. Go on, now—I'm a coming.

MRS. WHITE. Whether I'm here or in bed, or wherever I am. I'm with my boy, I'm with —

(*A low single knock at the street door.*)

MRS. WHITE. (*startling*) What's that !

MR. WHITE. (*mastering his Horror*) A rat. The house is full of 'em

(*A louder single knock; she starts up. He catches her by the arm.*) Stop ! What are you going to do ?

MRS. WHITE. (*wildly*) It's my boy ! It's Herbert ! I forgot it was a mile away ! What are you holding me for ? I must open the door — ! (*The knocking continues in single knocks at irregular intervals, constantly growing louder and more insistent*)

MR. WHITE. (*still holding her*) For God's sake !

MRS. WHITE. (*struggling*). Let me go !

MR. WHITE. Don't open the door !

(*He drags her towards left front.*)

MRS. WHITE. Let me go !

MR. WHITE. (*struggling fiercely*). Do you think I fear the child I bore ! Let me go ! (*She wrenches herself loose and rushes to the door, which she tears open*). I'm coming, Herbert ! I'm coming !

MR. WHITE. (*cowering in the extreme corner, left front*). Don't do it ! Don't 'ee do it !

(*MRS. WHITE. is at work on the outer door, where the knocking still continues. She slips the chain, slips the lower bolt, unlocks the door*)

MR. WHITE. (*suddenly*) The paw ! Where's the monkey's paw ?

(*He gets on his knees and feels along the floor for it.*)

MRS WHITE. (*tugging at the top bolt*) John ! The top bolt's struck. I can't move it. Come and help. Quick.

MR WHITE. (*wildly groping*) The paw ! There's a wish left. (*The knocking is now loud, and in groups of increasing length, between the speeches*)

MRS WHITE. D'ye hear him ? John ! Your child's knocking

MR WHITE. Where is it ? Where did it fall ?

MRS WHITE. (*tugging desperately at the bolt*) Help ! Help ! Will you keep your child from his home ?

MR WHITE. Where did it fall ? I can't find it—I can't find—

(*The knocking is now tempestuous, and there are blows upon the door as of a body bearing against it.*)

MRS WHITE. Herbert ! Herbert ! My boy wait ! Your mother's opening to you ! Ah ! It's moving ! It's moving

MR WHITE. God forbid ! (*Finds the paw.*) Ah !

MRS WHITE. (*slipping the bolt*) Herbert !

MR WHITE. (*has raised himself to his knees, he holds the paw high.*) I wish him dead. (*The knocking stops abruptly.*) I wish him dead and at peace !

MRS WHITE. (*flinging the door open simultaneously.*)
Herb—

(*A flood of moonlight. Emptiness. The old man sways in prayer on his knees. The old woman lies half swooning, wailing against the door post.*)

Glossary

- Fulham : a district in South-West London.
L. : "L" and "R", mean the left and right of the actors(not the audience). "L.C." and "R.C." mean, respectively, left of the centre and right of the centre of the stage.

alcove	:	partially enclosed extension room.
Got you	:	I have defeated you (colloquial.)
a deep'un	:	a deep one, that is, tricky fellow. (Again colloquial). Similarly "Lor" is "Lord" "Lemme" is "Let me".
addle your brains	:	confuse yourself; trouble your mind.
Never mind, dear	:	Mr. White's sudden attack on the County Council is perhaps an outcome of his defeat at chess at the hands of his son. Being upset by defeat he invents a target for hitting. His wife, who knows the reason for his irritation, tries to silence him with these words.
Perhaps you'll win tomorrow.	:	
down C.	:	in the front of the centre, towards the foot-lights. "Up" is the opposite.
stucco villas	:	big houses, plastered on the outside.
Rolls a cigarette:	:	Herbert makes his own cigarettes by rolling tobacco in paper.
work that off	:	get rid of that.
Sufficient for the day as the Sayin', goes	:	The reference is to the biblical saying, "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof."
with the sack	:	dismissed.
commissionaire	:	uniformed door-porter at a hotel, theatre, etc.
Tut ! Tut !	:	interjection expressing, impatience.
marm	:	madam.
chitral	:	in the north-west of Pakistan. The reference is to the rebellion of the Pathans put down by the British in 1895.
pot-shots	:	shot within an easy range.
goloshes	:	rubber shoes worn over ordinary shoes.
The fly-wheel might gobble me up	:	I might get caught into the fly-wheel and disappear.

governor	:	a colloquial term for mate.
cove	:	fellow
looked	:	hooked
That yarn takes it :		it is a reward for your foolish , unbeliev- able story.
taking you off	:	imitating you.
to get shirty	:	to become ill-tempered.
it's nothing to look at :		it is not impressive in appearance.
cut and dried	:	fixed.
you caught it hot :		you would suffer.
the third was for death :		terrifyingly suggestive, why did the first possessor of the paw wish for death ?
all shook up	:	agitated.
A trifle	:	Very little money.
This bolt's stiff again :		Towards the end of the play Mrs. White's difficulty with the upper bolt gives Mr. White time enough to search out the paw and wish for Herbert's second death.
gone dotty	:	become idiotic.
pettish	:	angry.
in black	:	wearing a black dress. The man is a lawyer or a legal representative. Black is also a symbol of death and mourning.
He is not in pain :		In fact he is dead , but Mrs. White for a little time is deceived by these words into believing, that he has escaped serious in- jury
Paroxysm	:	fit.

I only knew him from his clothing : His body must have been
crushed beyond recognition.

Exercises

I. 1. According to the Sergeant the fakir who put a spell on the monkey's paw "wanted to show that the fate ruled people." Do the incidents of the play prove the fakir right ?

2. Describe the mental state of the Whites after the death of their son.
3. With what means does the dramatist build up the atmosphere of terror and mystery around the monkey's paw ?
4. Elaborate the meaning of the following
 - (i) I was asleep and not asleep.
 - (ii) We were only alive in him. We can't begin again.
5. Use the following phrases in sentences of your own :
 - (i) to keep an eye on
 - (ii) to put off
 - (iii) in a temper
 - (iv) to run down
 - (v) to take (somebody) off
 - (vi) cut and dried
 - (vii) to put out
 - (viii) to jump to conclusions
 - (ix) in consideration of
 - (x) to do away with
 - (xi) to go out
 - (xii) to look forward to
6. Fill in the blanks below with appropriate prepositions
 - (i) The house of the Whites is situated..... the outskirts Falham.
 - (ii) Mrs. White swept the chessmen the board.
 - (iii) This is the only house..... the road.
 - (iv) You said you always carried the monkey's paw..... you.

- (v) The monkey's paw has had a spell put.....it.
- (vi) This nonsense is getting..... my nerves.
- (vii) You should not throw your money.....

II. Comment on the characterisation of Mr. White and Mrs. White, which of these two characters do you consider most successfully presented ?

III. Explain the following with reference to the context :

- (i) SERGEANT (violently) : I won't ! I won't ! My hands are clear of it. I threw it on the fire, If you keep it, don't blame me, whatever happens. Here ! Pitch it back again.
- (ii) MR White . I don't hear it. I was asleep and not asleep, if you know what I mean.
- (iii) MRS WHITE . (coming back slowly to the fire-place). We're too old. We were only alive in him. We can't begin again. We can't feel anything now, John, but emptiness and darkness. (She sinks into armchair.)
- (iv) MRS WHITE (wildly).It's my boy ! It's Herbert ! I forgot it was a mile away ! What are you holding me for ? I must open the door !

- IV. (a) Frame the sentences with the following words :
mystery , target , buried , paroxysm , pettish , henpecked
- (b) Be sure of the pronunciation of the following words :
hotel, theatre, paroxysm, biblical, cigarette.
-