

P S
3525
Y6
W3
1917
MAIN

ITCH FIRES

A PLAY IN FOUR ACTS

BY TRACY D. MYGATT

TWELVE THOUSAND
YOUNG MEN KILLED

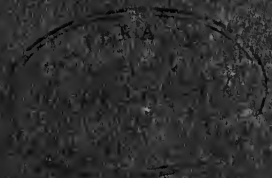
FOUR YARDS
OF DIRT
GAINED

UC-NRLF



QB 299 183

Copyright of The Drama

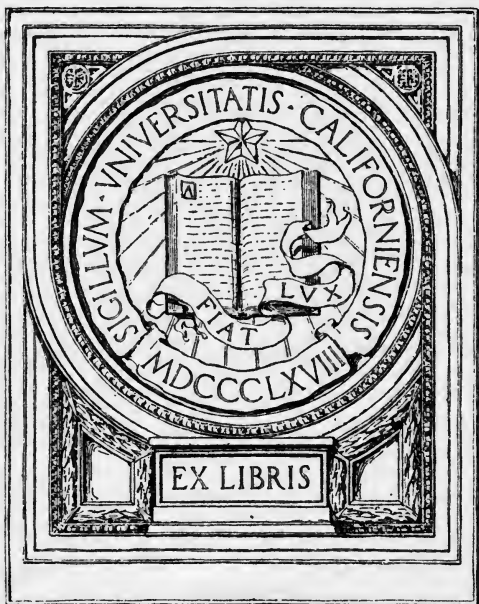


WITH AN INTRODUCTION

BY DAVID STARR JORDAN

YB 31726

GIFT OF



960
11996
W

X 54 P X





WATCHFIRES

A PLAY IN FOUR ACTS

By TRACY D. MYGATT

WITH AN INTRODUCTION

By DAVID STARR JORDAN

NEW YORK
1917

Copyright, 1917, by Tracy D. Mygat

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

For permission
to give this play, apply to the Author,
2 Jane Street, New York

Second Edition

PS3525
Y6 W3
1917
MAIN

INTRODUCTION

Miss Mygatt's play, *Watchfires*, teaches the most needed lesson of the day, that humanity knows no national lines, and that all those who suffer the cruelties of war, suffer alike and together.

One of the noblest scholars the great University of Paris ever sent to America, Robert Pelissier, Professor of French at Stanford, was among the thousands of young men destroyed in the attack on the Somme. His last letter to America said: "The soldiers in the ranks do not hate each other. They say, 'Les Boches, ce sont des hommes comme nous.'" (The Prussians, they are men like us.) It is not the soldier that keeps alive the fear, the lies, the hate, that surround every war like an atmosphere of pestilence, —war which starts with the men who make money by it, and is joyously pushed on by those who welcome it as a backfire against democracy. It is a unique form of crime so adjusted that those only suffer who are innocent.

Meantime, those left behind, since they can do nothing to check the dreaded foe, wait in fear and hate and ignorance. In Norman Hall's poem, the London soldier "is glad to get back in the trenches again where there is more of human feeling."

The number slain in the present war, killed, starved, wounded, mutilated, uncared for, is said to approach forty million. This is only a guess, but if the number were

WATCHFIRES

divided in half, it would still represent as many people as live beyond the Mississippi river. And each one of these was beloved by someone, cherished in a spirit that knows no political borderlines, the same spirit that holds together your family and mine. This means an aggregate of personal distress with which no other planet in the stellar universe, not even fiery Mars, could compete.

"I cannot help thinking of you as ye deserve, oh ye governments!" cries Thoreau. For it is through the weakness and inhumanity of governments that this cloud of misery is let loose on the world,—governments that have no root in the will of the people, which wrangle with one another over petty private interests and barbaric robberies, and which in time of stress have no resource but to make their people fight.

These matters, war's cause, identical in all countries, its common cost in human happiness, together with the cry of the peoples that will not be stilled, for peace and liberty of conscience, Miss Mygatt's play suggests. It ranks with the very best of the war-dramas. In this dark hour of crisis, I wish all Americans might read *Watchfires*, might love Sidney and Mary, and courageous Frieda as well, breathing meanwhile the play's clear air of international understanding.

DAVID STARR JORDAN.

New York,
March 20th, 1917.

TO

FANNIE M. WITHERSPOON

*Whose fearless scrutiny and creative faith
have helped me to believe that wars shall cease, this play
is dedicated.*



Persons of the Play

(They are named in the order of their appearance)

Mrs. Neville.

Edward Neville, *her son, a Volunteer*

A Maid.

Mr. Henry Matthewson, *Editor of The Patriot*

Sidney Stevenson, *an Active Pacifist*

Frieda, *a Social Democrat**

Gretchen, *Another*

A Little Girl

Herr Knechtbiel, *a Social Democrat*

The Commander

Frieda's Mother

Fritz, *a Soldier*

Karlchen, *a Baby*

Jim, *who has fought in "Kitchener's Mob"*

'Liza, *his wife*

Geoffrey, *a Conscientious Objector*

Mary Greer, *daughter of an English munition maker*

First Woman

First Man

Second Woman

Second Man

A Plain-Clothes Man

A Reactionary

*In Germany a Socialist is called a Social Democrat.

WATCHFIRES

The Chairman, *a Passive Pacifist*

Mr. Lansdowne

A Member of the Committee

A Clergyman

A Doctor

Also Children, Soldiers, Police, a Crowd, Members of the Committee

TIME: June 1916—December 1916.

AUTHOR'S NOTE:

By a consolidation of characters, the speaking parts can readily be reduced to 15.

ACT I.—*Mrs. Neville's apartment in New York.*

ACT II—(*Six months later*) *Frieda's home in Berlin.*

ACT III—(*Seven days later*) *An East End Tea Shop, London.*

ACT IV—(*Before Christmas*) *A house in New York.*

ACT I

TIME: June 1916.

PLACE: Mrs. Neville's apartment on the upper West Side, New York.

A smoky sunset fills the living room, which is full of flowers and pretty in a quiet, undistinguished way, like thousands of other middle class homes, except that across the sofa a guardsman's cloak is thrown, a sabre and other accoutrements have been flung down on a table, a revolver across a new copy of "Mr. Britling"; also the piano is draped in an American flag, and a portrait of Theodore Roosevelt hangs on the wall draped in the colors.

Mrs. Neville, a tall attractive woman of fifty, comes in, a little pile of underclothing, held as if for immediate packing, in her hand.

MRS. NEVILLE: (*To herself*) It's for his country, or I couldn't stand the thought of his going. Ned! My little boy! To carry *this* about with him day and night——! (*she fingers the revolver with reverent awe.*) And a little while ago I was worrying about his Fourth of July fire-crackers! Oh, well! we hadn't seen a world war then— And yet it's just as hard for me today as if all those poor millions of mothers weren't sending out their sons—(*stops on hearing a step. Ned comes in quickly, a good-looking boy, fair Angle-Saxon type, vainly trying not to look too pleased over his uniform.*)

WATCHFIRES

NED: Hello, mother dear. It's great to find you here. (*Hugs her boyishly. Suddenly her courage breaks, and she clings to him sobbing.*)

MRS. NEVILLE: Ned, Ned, don't you understand? I may never see you again! Those Mexicans are so sly—they will do their best to kill you—don't let them, Ned, they—

NED: (*Smiling confidently*) There, there, mother dear, don't you worry. We'll get them first—nothing but a lot of Greasers! Why,—just look at that bayonet—(*He has disengaged himself, and picked up the weapon on the table, stroking its blade lovingly.*) This is the thing that comes in well in the hand to hand fighting; if you just stick that point through your enemy, bearing on hard, as Jim Brown says, why, he just has to roll over and on you go. The English have developed it stunningly. They—

MRS. NEVILLE: (*Looking at him fixedly, a look of vague horror dawning in her eyes*) But, Ned, you talk as if you liked killing!

NED: (*Defiant, but half ashamed*) Now, mother, of course, I don't like it, I just meant— And anyway, I can't see if I did like it, that it's much worse than what you've just said about not letting the Greasers get me! One of us has got to get the other! After all, you know, war is war.

MRS. NEVILLE: (*Doubtfully, her love still clouded by the idea which is struggling to break through*). Yes, dear, I suppose so. But they say this isn't war—just patrolling the Border. Let's hope—(*She is interrupted by the ring of the telephone, takes up the receiver.*) Yes, this is Mrs. Neville. Who did you say? Who? Oh, Sidney, yes! Well, I'm doing my best, dear. We mothers have to give them up, you know, when their other mother, their country,

WATCHFIRES

calls them. What? I don't understand. Not their country? Why, Sidney, what do you mean? No, I *don't* understand. The connection must be very bad—You say you can hear me? Well, never mind. You're coming over? Well, dear, Ned will be very glad; we've been expecting you all afternoon. You were too busy with what? With who? *Reporters*? I'm sorry, I must have misunderstood, the connection is atrocious—Wait, I'll find it. In *The Day*, third page, second column. (*Ned, meanwhile, hovering over his mother, has picked up The Day in question; as he finds the article, he drops his bayonet to the floor.*)

NED: (*Indignantly*) Mother, what are they thinking about? Just listen to this!

MRS. NEVILLE: (*To Ned*) In a moment, dearest. Yes, good-bye Sidney. Very glad to see you, I'm sure. (*With a somewhat set expression she hangs up the receiver, and crosses to sofa where she draws Ned down beside her.*)

NED: (*Reading sarcastically*) "That the Peace Parties calling themselves The Allied Committees of the American Peace Movement could find no better time for pressing their propaganda than the eve of the departure of our troops for Mexico, is noteworthy. And although the meeting was said to have been organized largely through the efforts of a Miss Sidney Stevenson"—(*Ned pauses, his mother's fingers nervously locking and interlocking as she watches the color mount slowly to his face; after a moment he continues in a dry, hard voice.*) "And although the meeting was said to have been organized by a Miss Sidney Stevenson for the purpose of creating Peace sentiment here, with a view to the speedy termination of the Great War, no small part of the time was consumed by a Mr.

WATCHFIRES

Charles Barrows in his exposure of the alleged special interests, which, he charged, have precipitated the present state of friction between ourselves and Mexico. Indeed, at one point in his address, when he was telling his audience that 'if Mexico were to follow the American example of bandit-hunting, she would be obliged to send troops into Wall Street for the true casus belli,' the house became so noisy that if it had not been for some patriotic young guardsmen, who drowned out Mr. Barrow's further disclosures by singing *America*, it is hard to predict results. As it appears, however, the mere singing of the stirring national anthem was enough to establish the fact that the heart of the nation is sound, and to gloriously refute the pacifist contention that the youth of today thinks before it feels." (*Irritably.*) Stupid sort of ending—seems to put us in the wrong, after all. Sounds as if the reporter were laughing at us.

MRS. NEVILLE: (*Reading the paper over his shoulder*) No, no, dear, don't you see (*pointing*) "and gloriously refutes the pacifist contention"—But Sidney—you don't think she really——?

NED: Oh, hang it, Mater—I beg your pardon. (*Strides up and down the room; his mother looks at him keenly.*)

MRS. NEVILLE: I've sometimes thought Sidney wasn't as—as American as she ought to be; all that Revolutionary blood in her veins,—they used to put the country first——

NED: (*Roughly*) I can't talk about her! Oh, of course, she thinks she's doing just that. She said back at the Vera Cruz stage it was only plain decency for the United States to let Mexico solve her own problems. Oh, I don't know—she said, for instance, that Uncle Henry——

WATCHFIRES

MRS. NEVILLE: (*Looks up, startled.*) What did she say about him?

NED: That he was deliberately trying through his newspaper to make the United States pick a quarrel with Mexico so there'd be intervention, and then his Mexican oil wells and stuff would bring in more dividends.

MRS. NEVILLE: (*Indignantly*) Ned! What an abominable idea. When he prints the most patriotic paper in America! If one American gets killed down there his red ink headlines——

NED: Oh, *I* never said she was right! (*The bell rings, and a maid comes in.*)

MAID: Mr. Henry Matthewson. (*Mother and son exchange glances.*)

MRS. NEVILLE: (*To the maid*) Show him in, please. (*As the maid goes out, turns to Ned.*) What a coincidence! He'll be so glad you're going, dear boy. (*Ned tries not to look self-conscious as Mr. Henry Matthewson, a stout man of fifty comes into the room.*)

MR. MATTHEWSON: (*Kissing Mrs. Neville*) Well, well, sister, how are you? 'Seems to me you look a bit seedy. And how's Ned? Why, why, what's this? Khaki? Going abroad?

MRS. NEVILLE: Abroad?

NED: No, Mexico.

MR. MATTHEWSON: (*Blankly*) Mexico? What for? After oil wells? (*Chuckles to himself.*) Better wait a bit, wait a bit. Rather warm this time of year. Now, in the winter, delightful climate, delightful!

MRS. NEVILLE: (*Frigidly*) Ned isn't going for pleasure, Henry. He has heard his country call.

WATCHFIRES

MR. MATTHEWSON: His country? (*Stares from one to the other. It is their turn to look blank.*)

NED: Why, surely, you, sir, with your newspaper, telling us all our duty—(*Stops, confused by the older man.*)

MR. MATTHEWSON: (*In a singular tone*) You read my newspaper?

NED: (*Embarrassed in his turn*) Well—er—not always; of course, lately——

MR. MATTHEWSON: I see. And you? (*Turning to Mrs. Neville.*)

MRS. NEVILLE: Well, your stand on this has been perfectly noble, Henry, your solicitude for the least of our unfortunate citizens—though to tell you the truth I sometimes do think you—er—overstress the murders and (*lowering her voice*) the divorce cases; (*desperately*) I—I don't always read your paper—(*Smiling inscrutably Mr. Matthewson comes close to Ned.*)

MR. MATTHEWSON: My dear fellow, cut this out. (*He touches the uniform.*) Your mother will miss you—(*They stare at him aghast; the door bell again rings, and without announcement Sidney Stevenson runs into the room. She is dressed in white, a bunch of red roses at her belt. Her clothes are conventional enough, her inherent radicalism breaking through without their assistance in the fresh nervous energy of voice and gesture; throughout the scene she is struggling between her love for Ned and her keen sense of the wrongheadedness of his adventure; vestigially an affectionate cave woman, she is trying to subordinate herself to the impersonal good; this is emotionally hard work, and her difficulties from time to time vent themselves in a crossness which is, to the careful observer, a significant*

WATCHFIRES

indication of her fear and her love. At the moment of entrance she seems to see only Ned.)

MRS. NEVILLE: (*Coming over to her, stretching out her hands, glad of a diversion from an interview so bewildering to her mind.*) Sidney, dear! So soon!—this is my brother.

SIDNEY: (*Scarcely noticing her; she and Ned both behave as if no one else were in the room. In a low voice,*) You're really going?

NED: To-night.

SIDNEY: (*Tensely*) Why are you going? Didn't you go to that big meeting in Carnegie? Don't you know it's all a trap——?

MRS. NEVILLE: (*Interrupting more firmly.*) Sidney, let me present my brother, Mr. Henry Matthewson, Miss Sidney Stevenson. (*Both start and stare fixedly at one another.*)

SIDNEY: (*Very gravely*) I'm glad to meet Mr. Henry Matthewson. I've heard of you before. (*Her eyes hold Mr. Matthewson's until his drop.*) But I did not know you were Ned's uncle. You (*she hesitates*) must be delighted he is enlisting.

MR. MATTHEWSON: On the contrary, my dear Miss Sidney—permit me, I, too, have heard of you before,—I was just advising him to—er—remain at home. There are plenty of other boys better fitted than he——

NED: (*Bewildered.*) What do you mean? Why am I not fitted? The doctor told me that I was the best specimen that came up for examination.

MRS. NEVILLE: I always took good care of you, dear.

SIDNEY: I think I understand. Shall I explain to your

WATCHFIRES

nephew, Mr. Matthewson? (*A long look passes between them.*)

MR. MATTHEWSON: (*Hastily*) No indeed, don't take the trouble. I see I was quite wrong. 'Had no idea you were so strong, my dear fellow,—delighted I'm sure, but I must be going. (*Kisses his sister hastily, slaps Ned on the back and is about to go when Sidney interposes.*)

SIDNEY: (*Drawing a newspaper from her bag.*) That was a wonderful cartoon you had in to-day's *Patriot*, Mr. Matthewson. This—(*holds up an evening paper with picture of United States map, shaded lines extending southward through Mexico, the whole marked in large caps "Eventually, why not now?" Mother and son give an exclamation of disgust, Mr. Matthewson grows pale.*) It was awfully good, you know—that big American eagle flapping his restless wings over Mexico. Puts the issue so squarely before us,—just plain simple annexation. I should have thought you'd have been so glad to find Ned enlisting.

MR. MATTHEWSON: (*Icily*) That cartoon appeared without my consent. It is against the policy of the paper. The man who drew it is dismissed. I thank you Miss Stevenson, (*with an elaborate bow*) for drawing my attention to it. (*Again turns to go.*)

SIDNEY: (*With bitter emphasis.*) Send your cartoonist to the Border, Mr. Matthewson,—along with your nephew. Why, (*with a sudden quiver in her laugh*) he might draw a good picture of Ned, toes turned up in the desert—dying for his—(*she looks squarely at Mr. Matthewson*) his country.

MR. MATTHEWSON: (*Uncertainly*) You—you'd better stay home, young man; I imagine (*with a pale attempt at*

WATCHFIRES

jocularly) the young lady is a little down on me, fancying I have influenced you to go. Now, I really think——

SIDNEY: (*Passionately*) Mr. Matthewson, I'd rather die to-day than see Ned start for the Border. You are quite right. I—I love him. Ever since we were children— (*Ned tries to put a quick arm about her; she puts it gently away.*) No, no, wait till I'm through. But he can't stay home at *your* bidding! (*She turns to Ned.*) Do you think he's asking you to stay for the same reasons I am? He's only frightened to think that he may be sending one of his own blood to death instead of the poor wretches he sells his miserable paper to! Oh, yes, yes, let me say it to your face, Mr. Matthewson (*she turns to him*). There's no time like the present, when your sister's only child—— (*Mrs. Neville, who has tried to stop her, looks shocked and horrified, from one to the other; Mr. Matthewson, trying without avail to get away, though furiously angry, decides to discount Sidney's outburst as nerves.*)

NED: (*Stammering, divided between his love for Sidney and his dismay at her behavior to so important a relative.*) Won't you wait a minute?

MR. MATTHEWSON: (*With one more glance at Sidney's blazing eyes, backs precipitately out.*) Good afternoon, ladies. Ned, my boy, good luck! (*Door slams after him. Sidney drops wearily into a chair. Mrs. Neville, trying to control herself, puts her hand on the girl's shoulder.*)

MRS. NEVILLE: Of course, I don't understand you, my dear. I know you mean well, but wasn't it a—little unladylike?

SIDNEY: (*Brokenly*) Oh, you don't understand! You don't understand! When the very babies in the streets are

WATCHFIRES

playing soldier, when school boys in a dozen states are drilling with guns, when the man I should have liked to marry is going to invade a weak sister republic, and ten million men have been killed in two years, I have to be a woman before I'm a lady! (*She drops her head in her hands; Mrs. Neville pats it softly, then leaves room unobtrusively.*)

NED: (*Slams door shut, then crosses and sits on the floor beside Sidney, his head in her lap. Presently he turns and tries to gather her into his arms.*) Sweetheart! Sweetheart! Have you got to talk about this? Our last day for so long? You may be right about Uncle Henry, I loathe *The Patriot* myself,—but surely war is necessary, the people want it. Of course, Peace is frightfully idealistic and all that, but facts are facts——

SIDNEY: (*Trying hard to get herself in hand.*) Yes, and if America had tried hard enough in the first place she could have stopped the war. It's the backwash from Europe we're getting now,—Mexico and all this "Preparedness." I tell you if we could see and hear the people *themselves*, not as they are represented in *The Patriot* and all the other yellow press of the nations, but the people *themselves*, it wouldn't seem this way. Now a girl like Frieda, that I went to college with,—I've no idea what's happening to her; it must be terrible.

NED: Yes, I'm sorry for the German women, they're up against it with their beastly Kaiser, but it's a different matter with the English. My cousin, you know, on father's side, Mary Greer,——

SIDNEY: (*To herself.*) Why, she was with Frieda and me two years ago. How queer it seems now.

WATCHFIRES

NED: (*Continuing*) I'm sure she's for the government. Mary's awfully clever and no end of a sport——

SIDNEY: (*Smiling a little through her tears*) Ned, dear, some day I believe you'll see that the good sports are for peace. That's what takes the real nerve nowadays. "An Adventure in Internationalism," that's what a lot of us are after to-day.

NED: (*Abruptly*) Sidney, I've got to report. And I must say good-bye to the Mater. (*He gets up, looking at her wistfully.*) You won't come to the train to-night?

SIDNEY: I'd make a demonstration if I did! Perhaps I ought to—but I'm due to speak in Boston——

NED: (*Half alarmed*) No, no. And there won't be any fighting, dearest. (*They are both standing, their arms about each other, Sidney no longer trying to keep back her tears.*) And, anyway, I do promise not to get killed.

SIDNEY: (*Looking up through her tears*) Nor to kill! I care more about that——

NED: (*Wonderingly*) But you said you loved me?

SIDNEY: That's why. (*After a moment, slowly*) Oh, dearest, women have behaved so blindly about this war business all along,—sacrificing and sacrificing,—never asking, never thinking. It's time somebody thought! And it's hardest—oh, don't you believe it's not hard—to work with committees when you're —you're——

NED: (*Stroking her hair, murmurs*) Sidney, Sidney, anyway we love each other.

SIDNEY: (*Pressing his head to her breast passionately*) God keep you, dear! (*He breaks from her and runs toward door a little blindly, stops on threshold as Sidney speaks.*)

WATCHFIRES

SIDNEY: (*Stretching out her arms to him*) And all over Europe girls have been suffering like this for twenty-two months! (*He goes up the broad staircase with bent head, intensely conscious and desirous of her.*)

(*To herself*) This is the backwash; oh, to stop the war in Europe! To stop it before it is too late! To stop it before it is too late!

CURTAIN

ACT II

TIME: *Five months later. Therefore it is November 1916.*

PLACE: *Frieda's home in Berlin.*

A small bare living room with usual German setting, except that where the picture of the Kaiser usually hangs, there is a large portrait of Karl Marx and a little to the left of it, a copy of Walter Crane's "May Day." A ball of gray wool, with knitting needles and half of a sock on the table. It is twilight, snow falling outside.

Frieda, a girl of 25, a cloak over her shoulders, comes in, stares out of window down dreary street.

FRIEDA: (*Softly*) Oh, I wish he would come, I wish he would come! I wonder if he knows I got hold of these all right! And if they're what he wants. (*She crosses to empty fire place, kneels before it, and takes out a heavy bundle she has been guarding beneath her cloak. Listen-*

WATCHFIRES

ing a moment, hearing no one, she unties the string. A thick pile of closely packed leaflets is revealed. Again making sure no one is about, she deftly raises two tiles near the fire place, thrusts her hand in, and secretes the package. With one page held tightly in her hand, she goes to the table, and strikes a match. As she does so, her hands touch the stocking.) Oh, poor mother! poor mother! She does it for the soldiers; she likes to think she can warm them, and remind them of the dear ones at home loving and praying for them,—(*holds up the stocking*) hoping Hans will get it, I suppose. (*Suddenly cries out passionately.*) Oh, Hans, Hans! Little dear brother, how will you ever feel its warmth marching up those terrible icy passes in Galicia, the snow and the wind about you all the bitter night? Can you think of us then? Can you care that she has grown whitehaired and old longing for your return,—you and Fritz and Heinrich and Karl, that never will return—that never will return! . . . (*Shielding the match in her hand, she begins to read snatches of her paper quickly.*); “German People, Demand Peace! Demand it now, now! It is you who fight the battles,—”

(*There is a soft rap on the outer door. Frieda goes out and opens it. Returns in a moment with Gretchen, who walks in, limping at every step. She also wears a long cloak.*)

GRETCHEN: Frieda! Did you get the leaflets?

FRIEDA: Yes, here. (*Holds out the one in her hand.*)

I was just beginning to read it when you came in.

GRETCHEN: Good! I'm crazy to hear it, but I think I ought to put these away first, don't you? Are yours safe?

FRIEDA: Yes, that tile by the fire place. It pulls up, you

WATCHFIRES

know, and there's a good bit of space underneath. But sit down, Gretchen. We're all right here for a minute anyway,—and I want to read it to you before mother gets back.

GRETCHEN: All right, I'll sit here by the window and watch for her. Tell me, Frieda, is she still loyal to the government, with three sons dead, and poor Klara——

FRIEDA: Sh! Don't speak of that, Gretchen! I can't stand it. Yes, mother just suffers and suffers and knits—she won't ever try to *think* it out! That's the whole trouble, isn't it, in every country, since the war broke out? Most people would rather suffer any amount than think even a little. But listen—(*She lights a candle, and shading it with her hand, begins to read again, her voice thrilling with passion*) “German People, Demand Peace! Demand it now!” You don't think the light shows through the window too much, Gretchen? After all, I suppose I want to distribute these before I'm arrested again?

GRETCHEN: No, I don't think so.—You mean this house is really watched already, with four soldiers in the family?

FRIEDA: Oh, they've forgotten that. And remember three of my brothers are dead. Dead men don't bother the government, or the war would have stopped before this! They've a notion I'm dangerous, I guess. Now then, listen, and tell me if you think it will stir the people. (*Reads again*) “It is you who fight the battles, you whose homes are full of blind and wounded; you whose very graveyards may not bury their dead, you whose little children are starving.

“Demand Peace! Let the world hear the voice of the German people. It has heard your rulers, your war lords, your munitioners, your imperialists: and the world hates

WATCHFIRES

them; they have brought it death, and unless the people save their nation, Death will be king, and he is higher than Pope or President, Czar or Kaiser. To-day, behind closed doors, the bravest man in Germany——” (*her voice rings out triumphantly*)

GRETCHEN: And you love the bravest man in Germany, Frieda, you love him!

FRIEDA: (*With solemn exultation.*) Yes, I love him. (*She continues.*) “To-day behind closed doors the bravest man in Germany stood up in the Reichstag, and told his fellow deputies that this was a war of aggression, not of self-defense; that a handful of men already high in power, were making vast profits out of it, and that once you, the German people, could know that it was neither a war of honor nor self-defense, you would not fight a day longer.

“It is the same in Russia; the same in England. Each country has a small group who profit, and the people pay. German People, he tells you the truth. In the name of your wounded and your dead, and the world itself, that it may live and not die—come to the Square tomorrow at twelve o’clock! Demand Peace! Ask and ye shall receive! Seek and ye shall find! Knock and it shall be opened unto you!” (*The candle goes out as she finishes, and the room is in darkness, except for the white twilight that flickers in from the snowy street outside.*)

GRETCHEN: (*Softly*) Splendid, Frieda, splendid! The people will come! The poor betrayed people! Do you think the soldiers will ride us down as they did last summer?

FRIEDA: (*Going to her and taking her hand.*) I don’t know. Does it still hurt you, dear?

WATCHFIRES

GRETCHEN: My knee? Sometimes; I don't mind the pain so much as the lameness; it holds me back when I'm in a hurry! But I might as well get used to it; the doctor says it's for life.

FRIEDA: Was it worth it, Gretchen?

GRETCHEN: Frieda! How can you ask me? It's the one thing in my life I have to be glad about—that I wasn't a coward when that glittering mass of steel charged down the Square, and the people cried, "Run! Run! or they'll kill us!" And I shouted back, "Stand firm! Remember our men in the trenches!" Oh, if you could have been there, too!

FRIEDA: Yes, but I wouldn't have missed that night. All day the prison had been so desolate. Two months I had been there, and I felt as if everybody had forgotten me. And then, that night, as your "rioters" were brought in, there was a sudden thrill passed over everything; I don't know how they knew there had been a Peace demonstration, but they did know. For suddenly the place was ringing with the Internationale. One after the other of us caught it, sweeping down those gray corridors, and our cells were suddenly transfigured. We were comrades there together! The war was blotted out! (*The sound of children's voices is heard outside, and Frieda steps to the door. Presently returns, a dozen little ones with her.*)

FRIEDA: They've come for the milk tickets, Gretchen.

GRETCHEN: You have milk for them?

FRIEDA: There's still a little left. (*Lights up.*) You know, that American woman who came to Germany a month ago? She was really a pacifist, though she bluffed through as a war correspondent. She had a good bit of

WATCHFIRES

pull, of course, and half the officials were wining and dining with her, in hopes that she'd write Germany was flourishing when she got back; but she saw how it was. She met one woman after the other whose babies had died or were sick, and finally she got hold of some goats,—Mrs. Schreiber is milking them, and I give out the tickets to the neediest children as long as they last. (*Distributes the tickets among them.*)

GRETCHEN: (*Bitterly*) Well, I'm glad the Americans are giving us goat's milk. Small favors, you know—By the way, Hilda's baby died this morning.

LITTLE GIRL: Our baby died, too. Mother says the milk came too late, and anyways goats wasn't the same as cows.

GRETCHEN: No, of course not, and the cows are at the front, helping your papa defend his home while his baby dies. (*Little Girl begins to cry softly, and the other children stand about, sad, shabby little waifs.*)

GRETCHEN: (*Harshly*) Americans all know about what we did to the Belgian babies; they prefer to forget what England's food blockade is doing to ours. Yet every time a Zeppelin kills a child on the English coast—(*the children look at her with wide, frightened eyes.*)

FRIEDA: Hush, Gretchen, the children! (*Goes up and puts her arms about the two smallest.*) Remember, Liebchens, please, please remember, war is bad and cruel to *all* the people in it! Your papas in the trenches think they're defending you, and you're starving for milk; and the French and English and Russian papas who are fighting your papas think they're defending their babies; and even the far away Americans think that if they fight the Mexicans, it will defend their children; and the truth is, the

WATCHFIRES

children everywhere are dying. That's why we must stop war. (*A step outside. Herr Knechtbiel dashes into the room, runs forward to Frieda and catches her in his arms before them all.*)

KNECHTBIEL: Stop war! Stop war! Ah, sweetheart, you've said it! (*Gretchen gives them a long look, an expression of immeasurable pain in her eyes. Touches Frieda gently on shoulder.*)

GRETCHEN: I'll take them home, dear, and then I'll come back. (*She moves toward the door, the children following her.*)

KNECHTBIEL: (*Detains her, putting his hand on the head of the youngest child.*) Just leave Karlchen, will you, Gretel? I like to have a baby about. (*Gretchen nods and goes out, her eyes drinking in his figure thirstily until the door closes.*)

KNECHTBIEL: (*One hand on the child's head, his arm about Frieda.*) Listen, dear heart, I shouldn't have come—

FRIEDA: You don't mean—

KNECHTBIEL: Yes, after my speech this afternoon I shall be watched until my arrest. It's only a question of hours, perhaps minutes,—but they don't want to stir up the people. They've probably got wind of the demonstration to-morrow. You have the leaflets?

FRIEDA: Yes, here. (*She points to the pile on the table Gretchen has left, takes them up and puts them quickly with the others under the tile in the floor, the child watching her with big eyes. Knechtbiel takes one from her, runs his eye over it.*)

KNECHTBIEL: Yes, yes, that's good. And the comrades are taking the others, you say, districting the city?

WATCHFIRES

FRIEDA: Yes, yes.

KNECHTBIEL: (*Reads*) . . . "The bravest man in Germany"—No, no, dearest, you shouldn't have said that; that isn't true——"

FRIEDA: (*Throwing herself passionately into his arms.*) I will say it! I will! I will! Our soldiers are brave, yes! But they go with the drums and the plaudits and the flying colors, and you—you go alone—(*very low*) except for me.

KNECHTBIEL: Ah, dear, isn't that enough? And there are thousands, too,—you know it as well as I,—they're only waiting for the leaders. Help will come soon. There is America——

FRIEDA: (*Bitterly*) Yes, America, drunk with gold.

KNECHTBIEL: Some day soon, soon, America will help us. (*Impatiently*) Oh, not the "pro-Germans" American munitioners and imperialists are so afraid will spoil their profits; they're only making our work more difficult every day,—but the comrades, the pacifists, the men with the true vision who love the old Germany but who see the new. Oh, Frieda, Frieda, let us pledge to this child the new Fatherland, the Fatherland of Peace and Justice and Internationalism! (*With bent head he puts his hand, clasped in hers, over the child's head.*)

FRIEDA AND KNECHTBIEL: (*Together*) For this child, for our children—the new Fatherland! (*As they stand together, the house, silently surrounded with soldiers, is broken into and a dozen men with drawn swords enter the room.*)

THE COMMANDER: Herr Knechtbiel, you are under arrest.

WATCHFIRES

KNECHTBIEL: (*Tersely*) Telling the truth to my fellow deputies!

THE COMMANDER: Silence! Ask your questions of the court-martial. (*To the soldiers.*) Search him. (*They search him roughly, finding the leaflet in his pocket, the Commander glancing at it.*) Treason! So there was more behind your speech! You must be proud of yourself.

FRIEDA: Germany will be proud of him some day, when you who have done your best to ruin her, can injure her no longer.

KNECHTBIEL: (*To Frieda*) Hush!

THE COMMANDER: (*Raising his hands*) Another? Last summer's sentence evidently not enough! (*Turns to soldiers, with a gesture towards Frieda*) Her, too! (*Seizes Frieda's wrists*) Come, with your—lover!

KNECHTBIEL: How dare you!

FRIEDA: It doesn't matter, it doesn't matter! (*With irrepresible joy*) Oh, if our English comrades could see us now, they would know that the International was not dead.

THE COMMANDER: Socialism again,—God damn it! (*To the soldiers as he catches sight of the Karl Marx portrait*) Here, break that damn thing and the English picture. (*The soldiers roughly drag the prisoners away, and with a blow of their swords the big portrait crashes down. They tear and stamp it into pulp; so with the "May Day."* Knechtbiel and Frieda look on unmoved.)

FRIEDA: (*Provocatively*) So weak for all your power? To hate a picture? But you did well; you could break his picture,—you cannot kill his spirit in us! (*The child meanwhile has crept to a corner behind a big chair. Looks on with motionless eyes.*)

WATCHFIRES

THE COMMANDER: Here, search the place. (*They search roughly, flinging chairs, books, tables about; they find nothing*) Now then, right about! (*He has manacled Knechtbiel and Frieda. Turns to a soldier.*) You, Fritz, stay here on guard. (*Frieda turns and gives the child a long look, shaping a word unnoticed by soldiers.*)

FRIEDA: Three of my brothers have died for Germany; a fourth is in Galicia; my sister is mad with misery. I am all my mother has; and you take me?

THE COMMANDER: Hurry up, there. (*Frieda and Knechtbiel go out guarded by the soldiers. Fritz is left alone with the child. A few moments pass, then the mother comes in.*)

THE MOTHER: Lieber Gott! Is it the English?

THE SOLDIER: No, it's us. Your daughter's a traitor!

THE MOTHER: (*Picks up her knitting mechanically. Her hands tremble and she drops it*) Frieda? A traitor?

THE SOLDIER: She wants peace—and Herr Knechtbiel, too. He wants peace!

THE MOTHER: (*Slowly*) Peace isn't wrong. The Bible says, Blessed are the peace makers, for they shall be called the children of God.

THE SOLDIER: But the Kaiser—(*he salutes*)—doesn't want peace.

THE MOTHER: And who is the Kaiser? Is he higher than God?

THE SOLDIER: (*Without hesitation*) Yes, he rules us all the time—(*slowly, as if wondering at himself*), and I think God has forgotten us. (*Suddenly loses control*) I never wanted to do these things! I've killed and killed,—and there was a woman—but I have to obey—

WATCHFIRES

THE MOTHER: And I gave all my sons. And now they've taken my little Frieda. I thought I gave them to God, but now—perhaps—I think it was only to the Kaiser. (*The soldier turns away*) Stop, let me think, the people want peace——

THE CHILD: (*Picking his way through the broken glass*) Pretty lady tell me here. (*Tries to raise a tile clumsily, old woman helps him and pulls out a leaflet. She reads it slowly.*)

THE MOTHER: "German People! Demand Peace! It is you who fight the battles." ' Yes, yes, it is true. But what does it mean? What does Frieda want? (*Gretchen rushes in at the open door. Starts violently at sight of the disorder. As the soldier makes no effort to stop her, she crosses the room swiftly and whispers to the mother.*)

GRETCHEN: (*Whispers*) We must take these out with us, now, now! (*To the soldier, imperiously*) We have had enough war. The people want peace! Let us pass!

THE SOLDIER: (*Wonderingly*) Yes, I want peace, too. (*Gretchen and the mother start for the door.*)

THE MOTHER: (*With a sudden quaver*) Where is Frieda?

GRETCHEN: (*Preoccupied*) Frieda? In prison, I think,—(*to herself*) but she did not go alone. Ah, if he were with one, and if he loved!—(*Rousing herself, speaks half to the mother and half as if figuring probabilities to herself.*) But Frieda will come perhaps—to America—America!

(*The two women pass out, the mother muttering to herself as she bends over a pile of leaflets. The child and soldier are left together. A moment passes. Then the soldier kneels down, covering his face with his hands.*)

WATCHFIRES

THE SOLDIER: God forgive me! (*The child pats him softly.*)

CURTAIN

ACT III

TIME: *One week later.*

PLACE: *Inside an East End Tea Shop, late afternoon. The room is cold and dreary. Two listless looking couples sit at tables, the men old and infirm, the women, clothes and faces alike pinched with misery. A young soldier with one leg sits at a table with a typical East End girl. Another girl, Mary Greer, young and erect, sits at a table alone, her back half-turned to the audience; she is making notes on a little tablet, her tea cooling unheeded, but as scraps of conversation drift her way she becomes more and more keenly alive, though tensely quiet.*

WOUNDED SOLDIER: Naw, naw, why should I look for a job? I'm tired, I tell you, tired! I done my bit, now let the country keep me!

'LIZA: But you got to work, Jim. I done all I could while you was gone, but I ain't fit no more. Don't forget there's a baby——

JIM: (*His face darkening*) Oh, damn the baby, it ain't my fault!

'LIZA: (*Fiercely*) Then why did you marry me? Why did you marry me?

WATCHFIRES

JIM: Now, look-a 'ere, don't you get 'uffy? Was it my fault? Did I want to marry you? Between Lloyd George tellin' me it was my juty, with so many men goin' to be killed, and you 'angin' 'round my neck——

'LIZA: I didn't! I didn't!—Oh, well, then, I did. When I thought o' you marchin' a'wy, 'n never comin' 'ome, 'n all the boys gone,—'n the 'Uns maybe comin' in the night—'n they said you was a 'ero——(*She bursts into tears.*)

JIM: (*Patting her roughly*) Oh, well, there, there, 'Liza! We're both of us in the same boat—the war done it—'on'y don't talk to me of work! I want to get rested! 'N you ain't so pretty as you used to be, you know,—not as I want to say nothin' to 'urt your feelin's. But the truth is (*he pauses, crumbling his bread awkwardly*) the truth is there was a little girl over in Belgian—(*he stops at sight of her face dark with rage*)

'LIZA: Go on, Jim. Don't stop. Ain't I done two men's work every d'y since you been gone, and you reckon I can't stand to hear about that little girl in Belgian? That was where England went to defend women's honor against the Germans, wasn't it?

JIM: Aw, come now, Lizzie, don't scratch me! Ain't I risked my life for the country, and won't I be lame all my days?

'LIZA: Yes, you're a 'ero, all right! (*Breaks into unpleasant laughter*) And I suppose you'll love *her* baby better'n mine! (*He sits regarding her hopelessly, his eyes far away.*)

JIM: (*Clumsily*) I reckon I am kind of a blighter, 'Liza, but it ain't my fault. Honest to God, I couldn't help it! The war done it.

WATCHFIRES

'LIZA: (*Looking up through her tears at a sudden commotion outside*) What's that? (*A young man with torn coat and bleeding face dashes into the room, while the roar of jeering men and women comes nearer.*)

YOUNG MAN: Can you hide me? It won't look well for England if they actually kill me. They've come near enough! (*They stare at him, open mouthed. Then Liza spies a white feather on his lapel.*)

'LIZA: He's a coward, he's afraid to enlist! Hi, there, get 'im. (*She tries to hit him, but Jim has placed himself between them.*)

JIM: (*To Lizzie*) Why should he enlist? (*Bitterly*) It didn't do so much for me, did it?

YOUNG MAN: (*Noting Jim's khaki*) Thanks, my friend. You know what war is, don't you? The soldiers have had enough. (*By this time everybody in the shop is standing, staring at the white feather and its soldier protector. Their mutterings grow louder as the crowd comes closer. Mary Greer, who has kept her face averted, now turns and holds out her hand to both Jim and the young man. She is frank and cool, a throb of eager adventure in her every word.*)

MARY: Geof! I'm so terribly glad you're here! A little ahead of time——? (*She smiles as the crowd begins to stream through the door.*) Now, then, a meeting! A straight, heart-to-heart talk, so much the better if impromptu. (*She shoves him gently behind her, and with arms outstretched addresses the people.*) No, no, you wouldn't hit a woman, you know! Not since the Militants, anyhow, and I'm not that! Not at all, though I do believe in Votes for Women. (*She laughs, but they glower angrily before them.*)

WATCHFIRES

THE CROWD: Aw, shut up. 'Tain't no time for a speech. 'E won't fight for 'is country. Well! We'll teach him wot's wot!

FIRST WOMAN: I got a blanket! A good little rollin' 'll do 'im no 'arm.

FIRST MAN: No 'arm, and all the good in the world.

SECOND WOMAN: 'N it's nothin' to wot them bloody 'Uns did to my man! (*She comes forward menacingly.*)

THE CROWD: (*Angrily*) 'E's a 'Un, 'n so's the lidy! (*The young man has tried to speak, but Mary keeps him behind her.*) ..

MARY: (*whispering to Geof.*) No, no, let me speak just a minute. (*To the crowd*) A Hun? No, I'm not that. They were very bloodthirsty people, that liked killing, and mobs, and insulting women; now the Germans——

SECOND WOMAN: Shut up, and don't speak their bally name or I'll——

JIM: (*Attempting a diversion*) Who are you, anyw'y, lidy?

MARY: Do you want to know? (*Her face, very serious, has grown pale*) Shall I tell you? Will you keep quiet?

THE CROWD: (*Gripped by her manner.*) Yes, tell us.

MARY: Well, then, I'm the daughter of Sir Herbert Greer.

THE CROWD: (*Gasps*) Sir 'Erbert Greer? 'Im?

MARY: Yes, him; the greatest munition maker in England! The man that helps most, after Lloyd George and Asquith and Lord Northcliffe to keep it all going. And if you want to know what my father has made out of this war that has killed your husband (*she points to the second woman*) and your boy (*she points to another in dingy*)

WATCHFIRES

black) and your sons (*she points to a man with a black band across his sleeve*) and that has broken your business to nothing (*she points to a fussy little shop-keeper*)—he has made sixty million pounds! (*The crowd gasps*) Yes, sixty million pounds! You never thought of that before, did you? You didn't read about it in the paper? No, it wouldn't have looked well there, that a man so high in English politics, who loved his country so very, very dearly, should be coining millions at home while your sons do the fighting.

THE CROWD: (*Awestruck but dubious*) But the 'Uns! They'd kill us if we didn't kill them.

MARY: Call them Germans, please. The papers call them Huns, so that my father and the other munitioners can get more money.—The Huns never wrote a scrap of music, you know.

THE CROWD: Well, the Germans, then. Should we let them kill us first?

MARY: (*With wonderful persuasiveness*) Look here, friends, you're all mixed up. The German people don't want to kill us a bit more than we want to kill them—maybe less. It's their government, just like our government, that's making them kill, for money again, just like us. Money is the government, right now, in Germany and England and America, but it won't always be so; when the people understand, they won't want to fight ever any more.

A MAN: (*Doubtfully*) But the Belgians, lidy—we 'ad to defend Belgian. She was unprepared.

MARY: Let me tell you something. I didn't know it myself till the other day, but thirty years ago when we had that same treaty with Belgium that we have now, but were

WATCHFIRES

friends with Germany for *money* reasons—mark that—for *money* reasons, and there was chance of Germany's marching through Belgium against France, our government decided that it wouldn't be necessary to interfere; we'd just let her go ahead; do you understand that? So in 1914, twenty-seven years later, when we were jealous of Germany, we just made Belgium the excuse; it wasn't that we were so honorable, friends, it was for money reasons. And Belgium wasn't unprepared. Don't let yourselves be fooled by that nonsense! Belgium was as prepared as arms could make her. But no little state can stand up to a big one.

THE MAN: Yes, but what would you do then?

MARY: Let the People govern!

JIM: (*A sudden light breaking*) You mean us as does the fightin', let us do the managin', 'n see as we don't get into all this 'ere 'ot water? (*The crowd peers at him curiously*)

MARY: Exactly. (*To Jim, confidently*) You don't hate the Germans, do you?

JIM: The Fritzis? No, I dunno as I do. 'O course I wants to do my juty. But they're good enough chaps—

MARY: And the atrocities?

JIM: I never seen none. Though (*lowering his voice with a side-long look at his wife*) though I done some things myself, I'm ashimed to remember. War mikes you.

SECOND MAN: But Militaryism. We got to crush militaryism, we 'ave.

MARY: (*Passionately*) Crush it at home then!

THE CROWD: Wot do you mean, lidy?

MARY: I mean that everywhere the people are sick to death of the war, and every time they try to say so, they're

WATCHFIRES

imprisoned and persecuted and prevented! Why the only reason this meeting to-day hasn't been broken up, is because Sylvia Pankhurst is holding a tremendous Peace demonstration a mile away, and it's taken the entire police force to manage the crowd. But the Peace meetings go on, just the same, one hundred a week, all over England, and all the persecution in the world can't stop it! Crush Militarism in Germany? Why you can't send a letter out of England that tells even a piece of the truth, but that the Censor cuts it; the Labor Unions can't keep their hours nor publish their papers; nor (*she turns to the man beside her who has been standing unobserved by the crowd for the past few minutes*) nor a man obey his conscience! Five thousand Conscientious Objectors in England—imprisoned, persecuted, mauled about like criminals—Why? Because they *won't kill!* (*The crowd is silent.*)

SECOND MAN: (*Comes up and shakes Geoffrey's hand roughly*) Forgive us, will ye, I reckon we didn't quite understand. Ye mean ye ain't a traitor to England so much as just that ye won't kill the Germans, is that it?

GEOFFREY: Yes, that's it. And you see when there are enough of them feeling the same way about not being willing to kill us, no matter what our governments say, why the war will stop. It's simple enough, once you begin.

SECOND MAN: (*Incredulously*) You mean there are Germans that won't fight?

MARY: (*Draws a letter from her pocket*) Look here, friends, this got past the Censor. It's from a German girl I went to school with long ago in America, Frieda—her very name means Peace, you know; lots of German girls are called that, just as ours are called Mary; and she says

WATCHFIRES

(*she lowers her voice*) she says she's been arrested for her Pacifism—she calls it Socialism;—it's rather the same thing,—but hopes to get away, and if she does is coming to America.

SECOND MAN: To America? But America hates Germany. She's too proud to fight—because it pays better not to, the papers say,—but she won't stand for German girls,—she's for us.

MARY: For us, yes—us, the People. And the true America, the free America, stands with her hands stretched out to the people of all nations. And that is the America that will welcome Frieda.

SECOND MAN: She will betray her own nation?

MARY: She sees a greater Fatherland, as I a greater England, as Sidney, an American girl I know, a greater United States. Oh dear friends, it isn't that we don't love our countries, but we love the people more,—the people of the whole wide earth. They all want peace; there isn't any difference; American and German and French and Russian and English. And the true America can help us if she will.

A VOICE: (*Harshly*) Yes, and the meeting is adjourned. It has gone on long enough. We weren't all at the big meeting as you thought. Now, then, make way. (*Amid a storm of curses, a plain-clothes man begins to push his way to the rear of the shop. Mary turns quickly to Geoffrey.*)

GEOFFREY: Quick, quick, there's a back way out,—a chum took it the other day when they were after him. Hull-o! (*with a glance at Jim who is cleverly barring the progress of the plain-clothes man; being successful he is presently*

WATCHFIRES

helped by others of the crowd.) The soldier's held him up!

THE CROWD: (*Angrily, to the plain-clothes man.*) Get out of 'ere! It's you mikin' the trouble. The lidy an' us was 'avin' a bit of a chat——

GEOFFREY: (*Quickly*) Now's your chance!

MARY: (*To Geoffrey*) Thank you, thank you. It was mad to talk to them here to-day. But it was my last chance before the boat sails, and I had to when you came, anyway. It's the last proof I needed that the people want peace.

GEOFFREY: You have his letter safe?

MARY: Yes, yes. I'll die before they take it from me. It will mean everything in stirring America to her duty. (*With a brief, warm hand clasp, she slips away, just as the policeman, blowing his whistle loudly, is reinforced by a mounted squad.*)

JIM: All right, then, arrest me! I meant to give my leg to England, but the lidy says it was for the munitioners' pockets, and I've 'ad enough of patriotism, if this is 'ow I'm treated!

'LIZA: Then tike me along. I can't work no more,— prison's better'n starvin'.

THE CROWD: (*Uproariously, as the police come in.*) Tike us all. We've 'eard the first sensible talk since the war started!

THE OFFICER: (*To Geoffrey*) This is your doing? Preaching treason while brave men are laying down their lives?

GEOFFREY: (*As the other policemen make frantic efforts to discover Mary in the rear of the shop.*) Arrest me if you like! I only wish my American friends that think Eng-

WATCHFIRES

land's fighting for democracy could see you do it! No, I'm not willing to commit murder on a lot of poor fellows as misguided as those here! (*Officer is about to arrest him when an immense crowd surges past the Tea Shop, singing and shouting; some khaki-clad figures are in the forefront.*)

THE CROWD: (*Outside*) You arrested some of us, but you can't arrest all of us. There's lots of us left, lots of us, and we want peace! We want peace!

CURTAIN

ACT IV

TIME: Before Christmas 1916.

SCENE: A large living room in a private house in New York. Portraits and books line the walls. A score of men and women, several of whom look fagged, are seated at a long table, writing and discussing in low tones. The meeting has been going on for some time.

SIDNEY: I think we should plan our agitation precisely as if we knew there was a clear demand for peace on the other side. We do know it, with every scrap of intelligence we possess, and we must voice it.

A REACTIONARY: (*Ponderously*) My dear young lady, we must do nothing in haste. We cannot move until we are sure that our efforts for an early peace—(*Sidney moves restlessly*) for an early peace will not be misunderstood by the Allies. The President has already incurred the displeasure—(*Sidney, longing to interrupt him, is assisted at*

WATCHFIRES

this point by a young man whose sudden start of irritation at the older man's words draws the attention of the Chairman. The Reactionary stops for a pompous cough.)

CHAIRMAN: (*Taking advantage of pause*) Yes, yes, Mr. Lansdowne, pray give us the benefit of your opinion. Mr. Lansdowne (*he turns to the others*) enlisted last year; he saw active service until overcome by chlorine gas six months ago, and he has been in the hospital most of the time since. (*There is a movement of general interest.*)

THE REACTIONARY: Which side? The Central Powers, I presume?

LANSDOWNE: (*Drily*) No, sir, the Allies. I was one of the men fighting "somewhere in France." I don't belong to your committee; if I were able to work at all, I should go to England to help the U. D. C., for I saw enough to know (*he weighs every word slowly*), I saw enough to know that this room is large enough to hold the soldiers at the front who want the war continued.

THE REACTIONARY: The Germans?

LANSDOWNE: Not only the Germans. All of them. I know what it was in our regiment of volunteers, men, mind you, who had wanted to go as I did, thinking it was the way to serve democracy, and I know the hatred of the whole thing that struck us after the first six weeks; and if that's the way with the volunteers, think what it means to the conscripts, men who have to leave wives and little children, old fathers and mothers, men who have to go and stick it out until the end! I saw plenty of them in the hospital,—that's where you see war unmasked,—Walt Whitman was right; in the trenches and on the field, you're drugged; it's in the hospital your eyes open.

WATCHFIRES

THE CHAIRMAN: Then why don't they give us a sign? This committee knows that I want to do the right thing, but I cannot help feeling there is something in what Mr. Johnson (*pointing to the reactionary*) says. We must wait for a sign. Now if a great Englishman, or if the German people——

SIDNEY: But how do we know what they've tried to get across to us? It isn't as if their men were back among us, like our boys from the Border; my friend, for instance (*her color rises slowly*) has been writing me from Texas, each letter showing how his mind is turning our way—Oh, haven't we imagination enough to piece together out of what we already know, the difficulties of getting true reports out of England and Germany?

A MEMBER: Yes, there's something in that. My wife got a letter yesterday from her sister in England, and there was a page in it, all jumbled up with talk about the babies and so on, that seemed to say this was the sixth appeal she'd sent to America to ask why we didn't help the Allies!

THE REACTIONARY: Yes, of course, help the Allies fight; or did she mean with money for the Belgians? Now, I don't mind making out a check—(*he draws out a check book ponderously.*)

A MEMBER: (*Impatiently*) No, no, she said for Peace pretty plainly, though it was written in small and all blotted up. The sixth appeal, she said! And this is the first word we'd had for eight months! (*The Reactionary seeing no one commending him, surreptitiously returns the check book to his pocket.*)

WATCHFIRES

THE CHAIRMAN: (*Judicially*) Such things must, of course, be considered.

SIDNEY: Oh, if word could come now, now! (*From a nearby church, a peal of Christmas chimes rings out into the night.*)

A CLERGYMAN: (*Doubtfully*) Of course, it is the psychological time for a peace effort——

THE REACTIONARY: In the absence of important advices from England, and in the absence of the people's desire for a different government in Germany, I say we must be most careful, *most careful*, to observe a strict neutrality.

SIDNEY: (*Her hands clasped, her eyes filled with unutterable longing*) America's opportunity! Oh, I'm sure they're speaking the word over there, if we would only hear! (*A sudden step outside, vague and tottering The handle of the door is turned uncertainly, and Frieda, white to the lips, stands at the threshold. For an instant no one moves. The chimes continue.*)

SIDNEY: (*With sudden realization*) Frieda! Frieda! (*She rushes to her, clasps her in her arms, and with Lansdowne's help draws her to a sofa where she slowly comes to herself.*)

FRIEDA: (*In broken English*) You are the brave Americans who will bring us peace? I thank you! I always knew America——(*she shuts her eyes. One of the committee, a young doctor, pours something from a glass in his case, and she opens her eyes again.*)

SIDNEY: Frieda, darling, no, no; don't try to speak yet. Here, won't someone open that window? (*With the cold air blowing full on her face, Frieda raises herself with great effort.*)

WATCHFIRES

FRIEDA: I must talk, Sidney. Gentlemen, (*she addresses the meeting, pausing for strength between each word*) I have written a statement for you on the boat, and he has written you a letter,—they will explain the things I cannot say now. After I am gone, you will understand—(*a general stir, the doctor bends over her anxiously.*)

SIDNEY: Frieda, Frieda, it's only fatigue. You're not ill—

FRIEDA: (*Raises her hand*) After my prison term last summer—

THE REACTIONARY: (*Interrupting*) Your prison term, Fraulein? You are not a criminal?

FRIEDA: (*Wearily*) For Peace agitation. I was one of a hundred other people—(*general stir*)

LANSDOWNE: (*Under his breath*) Ah, the truth at last!

FRIEDA: Well, I was sick a long time, the prison was cold; so this last month, when I went in again (*another stir*) it was harder. And then the excitement of the escape—it was too much, I suppose—so when they wounded me getting through the French lines—

ALL: Wounded? You are wounded! (*The doctor tries to make her let him attend her, but gives it up before her weak, imperious hand.*)

FRIEDA: Here (*she touches her breast*)—he didn't know—he thought I was a German spy,—and then when I told him it was for peace, just before I fainted,—he was sorry and helped me. You—(*she raises herself determinedly*) you Americans must make peace. You can do it if you are fine and brave enough. The German people are demanding Peace—(*her mind reverts a moment to the day of her arrest in Germany; suddenly sobs*) Ach, Knechtbiel!

WATCHFIRES

You and I—(*At the sound of the famous name they start, a look of fuller understanding dawning among them*)

THE CHAIRMAN: The bravest man in Germany!

SIDNEY: (*Whispers*) Oh, Frieda, whatever comes, you were lucky in having your man brave and true. I wish—(*Frieda, seeing the look in her eyes, understands, and strokes her hand softly.*)

FRIEDA: He will come to understand some day. But (*she rouses herself*) Herr Knechtbiel is not the bravest man in Germany. I said so myself—that day—but now we know there are hundreds of others, perhaps thousands—*Ach, meine Heeren und Damen*, bring peace to the people of Germany, before our government has killed us all! (*Gives Sidney the paper, which Sidney passes to the Chairman.*)

THE CHAIRMAN: From Herr Knechtbiel! I think we should do something—

THE REACTIONARY: But England—we must do nothing in haste—(*There is a violent ring at the bell, and a moment later the door is flung wide. Edward Neville, no longer in uniform, stands on the threshold with a girl. Sidney starts forward but controls herself.*)

NED: This is my cousin, Mary Greer, whom your secretary (*his eyes find Sidney's and a look of immense joy and comprehension passes from his to hers*) always said would come. Miss Greer sent me a wireless, thinking me safer (*he smiles wistfully*) than you pacifists. Her boat docked two hours ago, and after the most incredible revelation of English Peace sentiment—(*Suddenly he stops, for Frieda has raised herself bolt upright from her couch, staring into Mary's face. At the same moment the latter,*

WATCHFIRES

with the simplest gesture, flings aside hat and outer garments, and, unconscious of them all, leaps forward, catching Frieda in her arms.)

MARY: Frieda, Frieda! Little Sister! Little Sister! (*For a long minute there is silence, but for the bells; "O, come all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant!" they peal into the night.*)

FRIEDA: (*Clasping Mary close*) Sister! (*Very low.*) You forgive us?

MARY: (*Kneeling beside her couch*) Can you forgive us? My people, too, have done very wrong. Oh, Frieda, then you were on the boat with me!

FRIEDA: Yes, I must have been. You see, I was sick—and I lay in my cabin just praying and praying—"Lieber Gott, let me get to America! Let me beg them for Peace! Let me live that long!"

MARY: (*Not understanding*) And He did, dear. And all the years beyond, you and I will work together,—and Sidney—(*Sidney has come up softly*)

SIDNEY: (*With tense excitement*) Ned says you bring us a letter, Mary. Will you tell us who your letter is from?

MARY: (*Rising from the couch, exultant joy in her manner.*) Frieda brought you the message from Germany, and I—I am the messenger of England, the England of the future, of democracy. My letter (*she draws it from her breast and lays it before the Chairman*) my letter contains evidence, collected from every country in England, that the people there, as in Germany, want Peace, and beg America to help them get it!

THE REACTIONARY: But is the letter from anybody

WATCHFIRES

special? That's the point! (They edge away from him)

MARY: The letter is from—Lester Bertram!* (*There is a long flutter of excitement through the room.*)

LANSDOWNE: (*To himself*) At last, at last! I wonder how often he's tried to send before. (*They crowd about the Chairman, who begins to read the letter.*)

FRIEDA: So now you have your word! (*Attempting to smile.*) You will not need to wait for a messenger from every country? (*Suddenly she cries out*) Oh, Mary. Mary! You will see your country saved from war! And Sidney, please God, will keep America unstained—but I—I shall never see my Fatherland, my young Fatherland.—The dark—the dark is coming so fast!

MARY: (*Whispers to the doctor*) Wounded? Dying? Oh, my little sister!

DOCTOR: (*Whispers to Mary*) No, I can do nothing; the wound must have opened on the ship; it has been bleeding. (*Mary kneels, holding Frieda's hands clasped in hers; Sidney and Ned stand near by; the others in low tones and with frequent pauses read the letters, constantly glancing towards the couch.*)

NED: (*Whispers to Sidney*) Yes, yes, I must tell you now. What I wrote you from the Border was true, it was all a mistake, and Mary's made me understand the rest, and now Frieda—Darling, darling, will you—(*She slips her hand in his, motioning him to silence.*)

MARY: (*Very low.*) Frieda, you are so near—you will

*The allusion here is to the now famous letter addressed by Mr. Bertrand Russell of England to President Wilson, which a secret messenger, eluding the English censor, brought to the White House in late December.

"I am compelled by a profound conviction to speak for all the nations in the name of Europe," Mr. Russell concludes. "In the name of Europe, I appeal to you to bring us peace."

WATCHFIRES

see soon, even in the dark—Frieda, will it be long, will it be long?

FRIEDA: I can't tell—there are so many souls going past—I can see them quite plainly—and they all go home together, to the same home—comrades, comrades—Russian and French and English and German—and they—they are all crying something into the night—Listen! (*The bells peal on Adeste Fideles.*) “America, bring Peace! America, bring Peace!”

DOCTOR: (*Leans over and nods.*) Yes. (*Mary bends down and gently closes Frieda's eyes.*)

THE CHAIRMAN: I think a motion to adjourn—

SIDNEY: (*Crossing to the table, with strange calm.*) Mr. Chairman, forgive me, but I think first I should like to lay before the Committee a plan I proposed to you yesterday,—the plan for the great symbolic demonstration, which should at last adequately voice America's desire for Peace. May I go on?

ALL: Yes, yes, this is the time.

THE REACTIONARY: Wouldn't it be more respectful to—to the young lady to defer action? (*Waves a hand towards Frieda's body*)

MARY: (*Who is standing above it, head bent*) I think—I'm sure—Frieda would be glad to have you go on *now*.

SIDNEY: One moment, then. I've been dreaming big this time (*she smiles*). I want our demand voiced in something more than letters to congressmen and senators, though letters there must be, and something more than meetings, though meetings too, in every city of the land,—Watchfires, as it were, Watchfires, burning from coast to coast, that our people may see them far away, and that as, in




WATCHFIRES

Europe, the watchfires signalled mobilization for war, so here they may be Watchfires of Peace. But there's another thing to do here in New York, at the world's gateway. We have a great harbor—the ships of the world ride up and down it, and in that harbor is the symbol of the pure and free America, the America that shall be, the figure of Liberty. I want boats, boats flying the colors of the world, to gather in the Harbor, in our safe haven, and one by one, each to bring its nation's offering, there to our Statue, where a living woman to symbolize America shall receive them into her safe and loving keeping; and the people of New York, the men and women of the Melting Pot, shall see it as America's pledge to the future. And perhaps (*her voice grows lower*) perhaps the boats of the warring nations will come forward in couples, England and—(*she falters for a moment, her eyes resting on Frieda's body*) England and Germany together, the vanguard, the vanguard of the new day, of the people's will to peace. (*All look at her, fired at last by her vision*)

THE CHAIRMAN: Is it the sense of the meeting that we undertake this?

ALL: Yes, yes.

THE REACTIONARY: That letter from Lester Bertram was quite conclusive to my mind. I think the Harbor Demonstration is a good idea. A little novel, perhaps, but, with time to develop it—

MARY: Not too much time, gentlemen! The soldiers in the trenches urge us to speed.

SIDNEY: (*As they all rise*) To light our Watchfires upon the waters that sweep around the world!

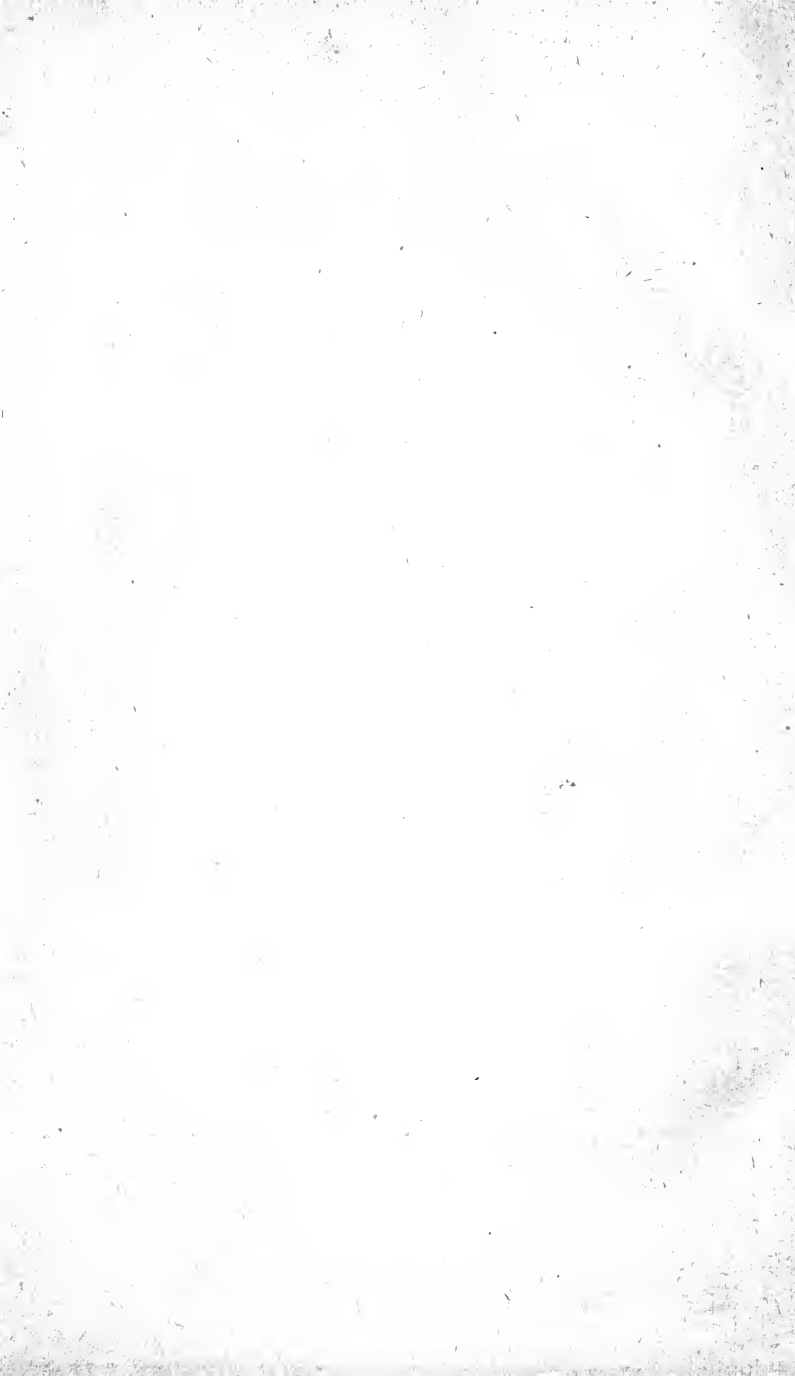
CURTAIN

BOYS

THEY laugh at us for thinking wars will cease
When enough lads like us, young, not so wise,
Stand up, and tell them that we will not go,
Will not enlist for murdering other boys
Betrayed and drafted for the sport of kings.
They laugh; we are so young we cannot know,
Say they, the powers pitted against us,
The mere pawns we are, moved by the red greed
Of a long thousand years.

And yet they say,
—Not they, others, who dash the tears aside
Lest we should see, and wonder why they cry,—
That the world's battles have been fought by boys.
(Boys like us, I suppose, just turned eighteen,
Enjoying ball and swimming, and sometimes,
Liking to see a girl home.) Fought by boys,
Who died, and left a thrilling of romance
For all the writers and the dried-up poets
That went out after them, when the red fields
Were safe and green again, and very quiet.
I guess we've thought about those boys too long,
To feel like killing any other boys.
Aren't there enough dead for the poets to sing?
And if they must sing death instead of life,
Why, I could show them things right here at home
That's why I shan't go out to any war,
I don't care what they call it, with what words
They dress up murder of those other boys;
They are my comrades, and whatever tongue—
German, or French, or Mexican or Jap—
They speak in, we have pledged them here and now
Never to kill them; so, some day, the wars,
For lack of us young boys, the wars will cease.

Courtesy The Survey)





UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA LIBRARY
BERKELEY

**THIS BOOK IS DUE ON THE LAST DATE
STAMPED BELOW**

Books not returned on time are subject to a fine of 50c per volume after the third day overdue, increasing to \$1.00 per volume after the sixth day. Books not in demand may be renewed if application is made before expiration of loan period.

JAN 16 1918

NOV. 8 1918

JUL 28 1919

U. C. BERKELEY LIBRARIES



C045594053

YB 31926

356941

mygatt

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA LIBRARY

WATCHFIRES

Professor Emily Greene Balch, of Wellesley College:

... It is hard for people to see that the real line of struggle is not between two groups of belligerents, but between progressive and reactionary forces within each country.

Miss Mygatt's play, WATCHFIRES suggests all this. It reads so well that it ought to act much better. It is full of incident; it is dramatic; it is timely. Good luck to it!

Mr. James Waldo Fawcett, Editor THE DAWN, writes:

The play's the thing. No other form of art is half so visual. WATCHFIRES is a vigorous little brief for America as international peace-maker; a singularly interesting example of what a play about war should be. Not without a grim humor of its own, flashing through its keynote of pity. The author is one who knows whereof she writes.

... If we remain out of the present conflict, it will be largely because such things have been written.

Price 35 cents per copy

TRACY D. MYGATT
2 Jane Street, New York City

THE DAWN A NATIONAL PEACE MAGAZINE

Edited by James Waldo Fawcett and Leigh Denton

War and Peace as seen by such notable writers and artists as: Warren Worth Bailey, Meyer London, Winter Russell, Joseph D. Leonard, Scott Nearing, Max Eastman, David Starr Jordan, Amos Pinchot, Owen B. Lovejoy, Edmont Hall, Arens, Florence Traubel, E. Southwick, Al Young, Maurice Becker, Emily Greene Balch, Tracy D. Mygatt, Mary Cary, Alice, Elizabeth Freeman, and others.

Published weekly at 61 Fifth Ave., New York City
Ten Cents per Copy