

UNIVERSITY OF ST. MICHAEL'S COLLEGE



3 1761 04052 4746



F. D. Hoehner
Nov 52

95

1st reprint

same year as first
1922

binders plus defect
clean.

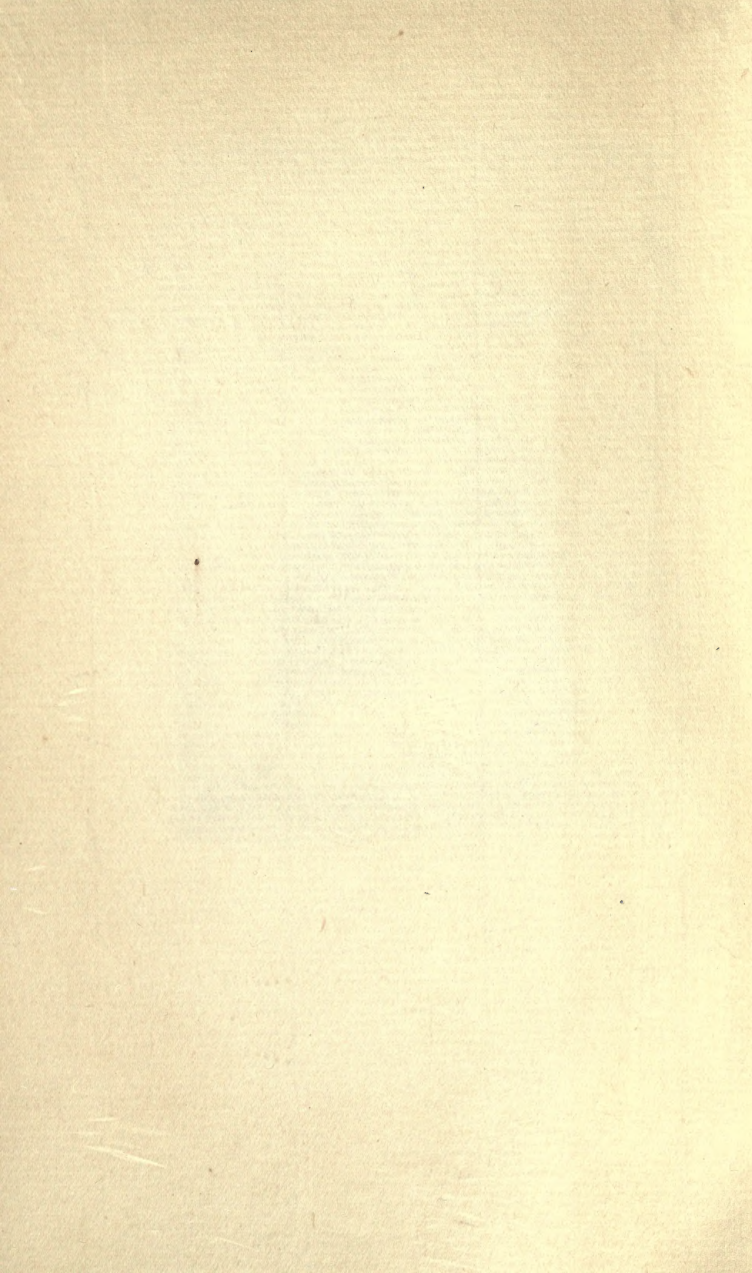


PLATE IN PROSE AND VERSE

PLAYS IN PROSE AND VERSE

WRITTEN FOR AN OPEN THEATRE,
AND GENERALLY WITH THE VIEW OF A STAGE



PLAYS IN PROSE AND VERSE

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
NEW YORK - BOSTON - CHICAGO
DALLAS - SAN FRANCISCO
THE MACMILLAN CO. OF CANADA, LTD.
TORONTO

MACMILLAN AND CO. LIMITED
ST. MARTIN'S STREET, LONDON

1911



MACMILLAN AND CO., LIMITED

LONDON • BOMBAY • CALCUTTA • MADRAS
MELBOURNE

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

NEW YORK • BOSTON • CHICAGO
DALLAS • SAN FRANCISCO

THE MACMILLAN CO. OF CANADA, LTD.
TORONTO

PLAYS IN PROSE AND VERSE

WRITTEN FOR AN IRISH THEATRE,
AND GENERALLY WITH THE HELP OF A FRIEND

BY
W. B. YEATS



MACMILLAN AND CO., LIMITED
ST. MARTIN'S STREET, LONDON

1922

PLAYS IN PROSE AND VERSE

WRITTEN FOR AN IRISH THEATRE
AND GENERALLY WITH THE HELP OF A FRIEND

COPYRIGHT

First Edition November 1922

Reprinted December 1922



MACMILLAN AND CO. LIMITED
25, MARTIN'S STREET, LONDON

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN

PREFACE

IN this book are all Plays of mine played at the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, except "The Land of Heart's Desire" and "The Countess Cathleen," which are in *Poems* (T. Fisher Unwin). I have also written *Four Plays for Dancers*, but I leave them under separate cover as they were written for private performances in studio or drawing-room, and are a different form of art. "On Baile's Strand," though produced for the first time at the opening of the Abbey Theatre in December 1904, was planned when I had no hope of that, or any, theatre, and the characters walk on to an empty stage at the beginning and leave that stage empty at the end, because I thought of its performance upon a large platform with a door at the back and an exit through the audience at the side, and no proscenium, or curtain ; and being intended for a platform

and a popular audience—no other audience at the time caring a straw about us—is full of what I thought to be good round speeches. It makes one of a series of plays upon events in the life of Cuchulain, and if placed in the order of those events the plays would run : 1. “ The Hawk’s Well ” (*Four Plays for Dancers*) ; 2. “ The Green Helmet ” ; 3. “ On Baile’s Strand ” ; 4. “ The Only Jealousy of Emer ” (*Four Plays for Dancers*) : but they were so little planned for performance upon one evening that they should be at their best on three different kinds of stage.

“ The Player Queen ” is the only work of mine, not mere personal expression, written during these last twenty years, which is not avowedly Irish in its subject matter being all transacted in some No-Man’s-Land. I wrote it, my head full of fantastic architecture invented by myself upon a miniature stage, which corresponds to that of the Abbey in the proportion of one inch to a foot, with a miniature set of Gordon Craig screens and a candle ; and if it is gayer than my wont it is that I tried to find words and events that would seem well placed under a beam of

light reflected from the ivory-coloured surface of the screens.

No verse play of mine requires much more than an hour for its performance; and most, being intended for a theatre where every evening winds up with comedy or satire, are much shorter.

"Deirdre," "The King's Threshold," "The Hour-Glass," in its verse form, are more difficult to play than "The Green Helmet" or "The Countess Cathleen" because in each some one personage is upon the stage through the whole, or all but the whole play, and should not be attempted where the principal player lacks subjectivity and variety.

I have explained at the end of this book how often Lady Gregory has collaborated with me. I have sometimes asked her help because I could not write dialect and sometimes because my construction had fallen into confusion. To the best of my belief "The Unicorn from the Stars," but for fable and chief character, is wholly her work. "The Green Helmet" and "The Player Queen" alone perhaps are wholly mine.

W. B. YEATS.

THOOR BALLYLEE,

May 1, 1922.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
CATHLEEN NI HOULIHAN	I
THE POT OF BROTH	19
THE HOUR-GLASS (in Prose)	37
THE KING'S THRESHOLD	63
ON BAILE'S STRAND	115
THE SHADOWY WATERS (Stage Version)	159
DEIRDRE	187
THE UNICORN FROM THE STARS (in collaboration with Lady Gregory)	231
THE GREEN HELMET	303
THE HOUR-GLASS (in Verse)	329
THE PLAYER QUEEN	361
NOTES	415
MUSIC FOR PLAYS	433

CATHLEEN NI HOULIHAN

PERSONS IN THE PLAY

PETER GILLANE.

MICHAEL GILLANE, *his Son, going to be married.*

PATRICK GILLANE, *a lad of twelve, Michael's Brother.*

BRIDGET GILLANE, *Peter's Wife.*

DELIA CAHEL, *engaged to Michael.*

THE POOR OLD WOMAN.

Neighbours.

CATHLEEN NI HOULIHAN

SCENE : *Interior of a cottage close to Killala, in 1798. BRIDGET is standing at a table undoing a parcel. PETER is sitting at one side of the fire, PATRICK at the other.*

PETER. What is that sound I hear ?

PATRICK. I don't hear anything. [*He listens.*] I hear it now. It's like cheering. [*He goes to the window and looks out.*] I wonder what they are cheering about. I don't see anybody.

PETER. It might be a hurling.

PATRICK. There's no hurling to-day. It must be down in the town the cheering is.

BRIDGET. I suppose the boys must be having some sport of their own. Come over here, Peter, and look at Michael's wedding-clothes.

PETER [*shifts his chair to table*]. Those are grand clothes, indeed.

BRIDGET. You hadn't clothes like that when you married me, and no coat to put on of a Sunday more than any other day.

4 CATHLEEN NI HOULIHAN

PETER. That is true, indeed. We never thought a son of our own would be wearing a suit of that sort for his wedding, or have so good a place to bring a wife to.

PATRICK [*who is still at the window*]. There's an old woman coming down the road. I don't know is it here she is coming?

BRIDGET. It will be a neighbour coming to hear about Michael's wedding. Can you see who it is?

PATRICK. I think it is a stranger, but she's not coming to the house. She's turned into the gap that goes down where Murteen and his sons are shearing sheep. [*He turns towards BRIDGET.*] Do you remember what Winny of the Cross Roads was saying the other night about the strange woman that goes through the country whatever time there's war or trouble coming?

BRIDGET. Don't be bothering us about Winny's talk, but go and open the door for your brother. I hear him coming up the path.

PETER. I hope he has brought Delia's fortune with him safe, for fear the people might go back on the bargain and I after making it. Trouble enough I had making it.

[PATRICK *opens the door and* MICHAEL *comes in.*]

BRIDGET. What kept you, Michael? We were looking out for you this long time.

MICHAEL. I went round by the priest's house to bid him be ready to marry us to-morrow.

BRIDGET. Did he say anything?

MICHAEL. He said it was a very nice match, and that he was never better pleased to marry any two in his parish than myself and Delia Cahel.

PETER. Have you got the fortune, Michael?

MICHAEL. Here it is.

[MICHAEL puts bag on table and goes over and leans against chimney-jamb.

BRIDGET, who has been all this time examining the clothes, pulling the seams and trying the lining of the pockets, etc., puts the clothes on the dresser.

PETER [*getting up and taking the bag in his hand and turning out the money*]. Yes, I made the bargain well for you, Michael. Old John Cahel would sooner have kept a share of this a while longer. 'Let me keep the half of it until the first boy is born,' says he. 'You will not,' says I. 'Whether there is or is not a boy, the whole hundred pounds must be in Michael's hands before he brings your daughter to the house.' The wife spoke to him then, and he gave in at the end.

BRIDGET. You seem well pleased to be handling the money, Peter.

PETER. Indeed, I wish I had had the luck

6 CATHLEEN NI HOULIHAN

to get a hundred pounds, or twenty pounds itself, with the wife I married.

BRIDGET. Well, if I didn't bring much I didn't get much. What had you the day I married you but a flock of hens and you feeding them, and a few lambs and you driving them to the market at Ballina. [*She is vexed and bangs a jug on the dresser.*] If I brought no fortune I worked it out in my bones, laying down the baby, Michael that is standing there now, on a stook of straw, while I dug the potatoes, and never asking big dresses or anything but to be working.

PETER. That is true, indeed.

[*He pats her arm.*]

BRIDGET. Leave me alone now till I ready the house for the woman that is to come into it.

PETER. You are the best woman in Ireland, but money is good, too. [*He begins handling the money again and sits down.*] I never thought to see so much money within my four walls. We can do great things now we have it. We can take the ten acres of land we have the chance of since Jamsie Dempsey died, and stock it. We will go to the fair at Ballina to buy the stock. Did Delia ask any of the money for her own use, Michael?

MICHAEL. She did not, indeed. She did not seem to take much notice of it, or to look at it at all.

BRIDGET. That's no wonder. Why would she look at it when she had yourself to look at, a fine, strong young man? It is proud she must be to get you; a good steady boy that will make use of the money, and not be running through it or spending it on drink like another.

PETER. It's likely Michael himself was not thinking much of the fortune either, but of what sort the girl was to look at.

MICHAEL [*coming over towards the table*]. Well, you would like a nice comely girl to be beside you, and to go walking with you. The fortune only lasts for a while, but the woman will be there always.

PATRICK [*turning round from the window*]. They are cheering again down in the town. Maybe they are landing horses from Ennis-crone. They do be cheering when the horses take the water well.

MICHAEL. There are no horses in it. Where would they be going and no fair at hand? Go down to the town, Patrick, and see what is going on.

PATRICK [*opens the door to go out, but stops for a moment on the threshold*]. Will Delia remember, do you think, to bring the greyhound pup she promised me when she would be coming to the house?

MICHAEL. She will surely.

[PATRICK goes out, leaving the door open.]

8 CATHLEEN NI HOULIHAN

PETER. It will be Patrick's turn next to be looking for a fortune, but he won't find it so easy to get it and he with no place of his own.

BRIDGET. I do be thinking sometimes, now things are going so well with us, and the Cahels such a good back to us in the district, and Delia's own uncle a priest, we might be put in the way of making Patrick a priest some day, and he so good at his books.

PETER. Time enough, time enough, you have always your head full of plans, Bridget.

BRIDGET. We will be well able to give him learning, and not to send him tramping the country like a poor scholar that lives on charity.

MICHAEL. They're not done cheering yet.

[He goes over to the door and stands there for a moment, putting up his hand to shade his eyes.]

BRIDGET. Do you see anything?

MICHAEL. I see an old woman coming up the path.

BRIDGET. Who is it, I wonder? It must be the strange woman Patrick saw a while ago.

MICHAEL. I don't think it's one of the neighbours anyway, but she has her cloak over her face.

BRIDGET. It might be some poor woman heard we were making ready for the wedding and came to look for her share.

PETER. I may as well put the money out of

sight. There is no use leaving it out for every stranger to look at.

[He goes over to a large box in the corner, opens it and puts the bag in and fumbles at the lock.]

MICHAEL. There she is, father ! *[An OLD WOMAN passes the window slowly, she looks at MICHAEL as she passes.]* I'd sooner a stranger not to come to the house the night before my wedding.

BRIDGET. Open the door, Michael ; don't keep the poor woman waiting.

[The OLD WOMAN comes in. MICHAEL stands aside to make way for her.]

OLD WOMAN. God save all here !

PETER. God save you kindly !

OLD WOMAN. You have good shelter here.

PETER. You are welcome to whatever shelter we have.

BRIDGET. Sit down there by the fire and welcome.

OLD WOMAN *[warming her hands]*. There is a hard wind outside.

[MICHAEL watches her curiously from the door. PETER comes over to the table.]

PETER. Have you travelled far to-day ?

OLD WOMAN. I have travelled far, very far ; there are few have travelled so far as myself, and there's many a one that doesn't make me welcome. There was one that had strong

10 CATHLEEN NI HOULIHAN

sons I thought were friends of mine, but they were shearing their sheep, and they wouldn't listen to me.

PETER. It's a pity indeed for any person to have no place of their own.

OLD WOMAN. That's true for you indeed, and it's long I'm on the roads since I first went wandering.

BRIDGET. It is a wonder you are not worn out with so much wandering.

OLD WOMAN. Sometimes my feet are tired and my hands are quiet, but there is no quiet in my heart. When the people see me quiet, they think old age has come on me and that all the stir has gone out of me. But when the trouble is on me I must be talking to my friends.

BRIDGET. What was it put you wandering?

OLD WOMAN. Too many strangers in the house.

BRIDGET. Indeed you look as if you'd had your share of trouble.

OLD WOMAN. I have had trouble indeed.

BRIDGET. What was it put the trouble on you?

OLD WOMAN. My land that was taken from me.

PETER. Was it much land they took from you?

OLD WOMAN. My four beautiful green fields.

CATHLEEN NI HOULIHAN 11

PETER [*aside to BRIDGET*]. Do you think could she be the widow Casey that was put out of her holding at Kilglass a while ago?

BRIDGET. She is not. I saw the widow Casey one time at the market in Ballina, a stout fresh woman.

PETER [*to OLD WOMAN*]. Did you hear a noise of cheering, and you coming up the hill?

OLD WOMAN. I thought I heard the noise I used to hear when my friends came to visit me. [*She begins singing half to herself.*]

I will go cry with the woman,
For yellow-haired Donough is dead,
With a hempen rope for a neckcloth,
And a white cloth on his head,—

MICHAEL [*coming from the door*]. What is it that you are singing, ma'am?

OLD WOMAN. Singing I am about a man I knew one time, yellow-haired Donough that was hanged in Galway.

[*She goes on singing, much louder.*]

I am come to cry with you, woman,
My hair is unwound and unbound ;
I remember him ploughing his field,
Turning up the red side of the ground,
And building his barn on the hill
With the good mortared stone ;
Oh ! we'd have pulled down the gallows
Had it happened in Enniscrone !

MICHAEL. What was it brought him to his death ?

12 CATHLEEN NI HOULIHAN

OLD WOMAN. He died for love of me : many a man has died for love of me.

PETER [*aside to BRIDGET*]. Her trouble has put her wits astray.

MICHAEL. Is it long since that song was made ? Is it long since he got his death ?

OLD WOMAN. Not long, not long. But there were others that died for love of me a long time ago.

MICHAEL. Were they neighbours of your own, ma'am ?

OLD WOMAN. Come here beside me and I'll tell you about them. [MICHAEL *sits down beside her at the hearth.*] There was a red man of the O'Donells from the north, and a man of the O'Sullivans from the south, and there was one Brian that lost his life at Clontarf by the sea, and there were a great many in the west, some that died hundreds of years ago, and there are some that will die to-morrow.

MICHAEL. Is it in the west that men will die to-morrow ?

OLD WOMAN. Come nearer, nearer to me.

BRIDGET. Is she right, do you think ? Or is she a woman from beyond the world ?

PETER. She doesn't know well what she's talking about, with the want and the trouble she has gone through.

BRIDGET. The poor thing, we should treat her well.

PETER. Give her a drink of milk and a bit of the oaten cake.

BRIDGET. Maybe we should give her something along with that, to bring her on her way. A few pence or a shilling itself, and we with so much money in the house.

PETER. Indeed I'd not begrudge it to her if we had it to spare, but if we go running through what we have, we'll soon have to break the hundred pounds, and that would be a pity.

BRIDGET. Shame on you, Peter. Give her the shilling and your blessing with it, or our own luck will go from us.

[PETER goes to the box and takes out a shilling.]

BRIDGET [to the OLD WOMAN]. Will you have a drink of milk, ma'am?

OLD WOMAN. It is not food or drink that I want.

PETER [offering the shilling]. Here is something for you.

OLD WOMAN. This is not what I want. It is not silver I want.

PETER. What is it you would be asking for?

OLD WOMAN. If any one would give me help he must give me himself, he must give me all.

[PETER goes over to the table staring at the shilling in his hand in a

14 CATHLEEN NI HOULIHAN

bewildered way, and stands whispering to BRIDGET.

MICHAEL. Have you no one to care you in your age, ma'am ?

OLD WOMAN. I have not. With all the lovers that brought me their love I never set out the bed for any.

MICHAEL. Are you lonely going the roads, ma'am ?

OLD WOMAN. I have my thoughts and I have my hopes.

MICHAEL. What hopes have you to hold to ?

OLD WOMAN. The hope of getting my beautiful fields back again ; the hope of putting the strangers out of my house.

MICHAEL. What way will you do that, ma'am ?

OLD WOMAN. I have good friends that will help me. They are gathering to help me now. I am not afraid. If they are put down to-day they will get the upper hand to-morrow. [*She gets up.*] I must be going to meet my friends. They are coming to help me and I must be there to welcome them. I must call the neighbours together to welcome them.

MICHAEL. I will go with you.

BRIDGET. It is not her friends you have to go and welcome, Michael ; it is the girl coming into the house you have to welcome.

You have plenty to do, it is food and drink you have to bring to the house. The woman that is coming home is not coming with empty hands ; you would not have an empty house before her. [*To the OLD WOMAN.*] Maybe you don't know, ma'am, that my son is going to be married to-morrow.

OLD WOMAN. It is not a man going to his marriage that I look to for help.

PETER [*to Bridget*]. Who is she, do you think, at all ?

BRIDGET. You did not tell us your name yet, ma'am.

OLD WOMAN. Some call me the Poor Old Woman, and there are some that call me Cathleen, the daughter of Houlihan.

PETER. I think I knew some one of that name, once. Who was it, I wonder ? It must have been some one I knew when I was a boy. No, no ; I remember, I heard it in a song.

OLD WOMAN [*who is standing in the doorway*]. They are wondering that there were songs made for me ; there have been many songs made for me. I heard one on the wind this morning.

[*Sings.*]

Do not make a great keening
When the graves have been dug to-morrow.
Do not call the white-scarfed riders
To the burying that shall be to-morrow.

16 CATHLEEN NI HOULIHAN

Do not spread food to call strangers
To the wakes that shall be to-morrow ;
Do not give money for prayers
For the dead that shall die to-morrow. . .

they will have no need of prayers, they will have no need of prayers.

MICHAEL. I do not know what that song means, but tell me something I can do for you.

PETER. Come over to me, Michael.

MICHAEL. Hush, father, listen to her.

OLD WOMAN. It is a hard service they take that help me. Many that are red-cheeked now will be pale-cheeked ; many that have been free to walk the hills and the bogs and the rushes, will be sent to walk hard streets in far countries ; many a good plan will be broken ; many that have gathered money will not stay to spend it ; many a child will be born and there will be no father at its christening to give it a name. They that have red cheeks will have pale cheeks for my sake, and for all that, they will think they are well paid.

[She goes out ; her voice is heard outside singing.]

They shall be remembered for ever,
They shall be alive for ever,
They shall be speaking for ever,
The people shall hear them for ever.

BRIDGET [*to PETER*]. Look at him, Peter ; he has the look of a man that has got the touch. [*Raising her voice.*] Look here,

Michael, at the wedding clothes. Such grand clothes as these are ! You have a right to fit them on now, it would be a pity to-morrow if they did not fit. The boys would be laughing at you. Take them, Michael, and go into the room and fit them on. *[She puts them on his arm.]*

MICHAEL. What wedding are you talking of ? What clothes will I be wearing to-morrow ?

BRIDGET. These are the clothes you are going to wear when you marry Delia Cahel to-morrow.

MICHAEL. I had forgotten that.

[He looks at the clothes and turns towards the inner room, but stops at the sound of cheering outside.]

PETER. There is the shouting come to our own door. What is it has happened ?

[NEIGHBOURS come crowding in, PATRICK and DELIA with them.]

PATRICK. There are ships in the Bay ; the French are landing at Killala !

[PETER takes his pipe from his mouth and his hat off, and stands up. The clothes slip from MICHAEL'S arm.]

DELIA. Michael ! *[He takes no notice.]* Michael ! *[He turns towards her.]* Why do you look at me like a stranger ?

[She drops his arm. BRIDGET goes over towards her.]

18 CATHLEEN NI HOULIHAN

PATRICK. The boys are all hurrying down the hillside to join the French.

DELIA. Michael won't be going to join the French.

BRIDGET [*to* PETER]. Tell him not to go, Peter.

PETER. It's no use. He doesn't hear a word we're saying.

BRIDGET. Try and coax him over to the fire.

DELIA. Michael, Michael! You won't leave me! You won't join the French, and we going to be married!

[She puts her arms about him, he turns towards her as if about to yield.]

OLD WOMAN'S *voice outside.*

They shall be speaking for ever,
The people shall hear them for ever.

[MICHAEL breaks away from DELIA, stands for a second at the door, then rushes out, following the OLD WOMAN'S voice. BRIDGET takes DELIA, who is crying silently, into her arms.]

PETER [*to* PATRICK, *laying a hand on his arm*]. Did you see an old woman going down the path?

PATRICK. I did not, but I saw a young girl, and she had the walk of a queen.

THE POT OF BROTH

PERSONS IN THE PLAY

JOHN CONEELY, *an elderly man.*

SIBBY CONEELY, *a young or middle-aged woman.*

A TRAMP.

THE POT OF BROTH

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

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

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

TRAMP. What in the earthly world is going on outside? Any one would think it was the Fiannta-h-Eireann at their hunting!

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

JOHN'S *voice*. What can I do, Sibby? I all to had my hand upon her when she flew away!

SIBBY'S *voice*. She's out into the garden! Follow after her! She has the wide world before her now.

TRAMP. Sibby he called her. I wonder is it Sibby Coneely's house I am in! If that's so it's a bad chance I have of going out heavier than I came in. I often heard of her, a regular slave driver that would starve the rats. A niggard with her eyes on kippeens, that would skin a flea for its hide! It was the bad luck of the world brought me here, and not a house or a village between this and Tubber. And it isn't much I have left to bring me on there. [*Begins emptying out his pockets on the chest.*] There's my pipe and not a grain to fill it with! There's my handkerchief I got at the coronation dinner! There's my knife and nothing left of it but the handle. [*Shakes his pocket out.*] And there's a crust of the last dinner I got, and the last I'm likely to get till to-morrow.

That's all I have in the world unless the stone I picked up to pelt at that yelping dog a while ago. [*Takes stone out of pocket and tosses it up and down.*] In the time long ago I usen't to have much trouble to find a dinner, getting over the old women and getting round the young ones ! I remember the time I met the old minister on the path and sold him his own flock of turkeys. My wits used to fill my stomach then, but I'm afraid they're going from me now with all the hardship I went through.

[*Cackling heard again and cries.*

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

[*A choked cackle and prolonged screech.*

TRAMP. There's a dinner for somebody anyway. That it may be for myself ! How will I come round her, I wonder ? There is no more pity in her heart than there's a soul in a dog. If all the saints were standing barefoot before her she'd bid them to call another day. It's myself I have to trust to now, and my share of talk. [*Looks at the stone.*] I know what I'll do, I know what the tinker did with a stone, and I'm as good a man as he is anyway. [*He jumps up and waves the stone over his head.*] Now, Sibby ! If I don't do it one way I'll do it another. My wits against the world !

THE POT OF BROTH

There's broth in the pot for you, old man,
There's broth in the pot for you, old man,
 There's cabbage for me
 And broth for you,
And beef for Jack the journeyman.

I wish you were dead, my gay old man,
I wish you were dead, my gay old man,
 I wish you were dead
 And a stone at your head,
So as I'd marry poor Jack the journeyman.

JOHN'S *voice* [*outside*]. Bring it in, bring it in, Sibby. You'll be late with the priest's dinner.

SIBBY'S *voice*. Can't you wait a minute till I'll draw it?

Enter JOHN.

JOHN. I didn't know there was any one in the house.

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

JOHN [*begins groping among the pots and pans*]. I'll see can I find anything here for you . . . I don't see much . . . maybe there's something in the chest.

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

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

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

SIBBY. Cock you up with tenderness ! All the expense I'm put to ! My grand hen I've been feeding these five years ! Wouldn't that have been enough to part with ? Indeed I wouldn't have thought of parting with her itself but she had got tired of laying since Easter.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

TRAMP. Is it me ask anything to eat? [*Holds up stone.*] I have here what is better

than beef and mutton, and currant cakes and sacks of flour.

SIBBY. What is it at all ?

TRAMP [*mysteriously*]. Those that gave it to me wouldn't like me to tell that.

SIBBY [*to JOHN*]. Do you think is he a man that has friends among the Sidhe ?

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

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

JOHN. What is it it can do ?

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

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

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

SIBBY. You're welcome to that much. John, fill the small pot with water.

[*John fills the pot from a kettle.*]

TRAMP [*putting in stone*]. There now, that's all I have to do but to put it on the fire to

boil, and it's a grand pot of broth will be before me then.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

TRAMP. Oh, don't mind taking so much trouble; those leaves beside me will do well enough. [*He takes a couple of good handfuls of the cabbage and onions and puts them in.*]

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

TRAMP. Well, it is how it happened. I was out one time, and a grand greyhound with me, and it followed a hare, and I went after it. And I came up at last to the edge of a gravel pit where there were a few withered furze bushes, and there was my fine hound sitting up, and it shivering, and a little old man sitting before him, and he taking off a

hareskin coat. [*Looking round at the ham bone.*] Give me the loan of a kippeen to stir the pot with. . . . [*He takes the ham bone and puts it into the pot.*]

JOHN. Oh ! the ham bone !

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

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

TRAMP [*stirring the pot with the ham bone*]. Well, as I was telling you he was sitting up, and one time I thought he was as small as a nut, and the next minute I thought his head to be in the stars. Frightened I was.

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

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

SIBBY. Poteen ! Would it make that ?

TRAMP. It would, ma'am ; and wine, the same as the Clare Miltia uses.

SIBBY. Let me see what does it look like now. [*Is bending forward.*]

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

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

JOHN. Well, he is a gifted man !

SIBBY. It would be a great comfort to have a stone like that. [*She has finished plucking the chicken which lies in her lap.*]

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

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

TRAMP. But to put a bit of meat with it any other day of the week, it would do it no harm at all, but good. Look here now, ma'am, I'll put that nice little hen you have in your lap in the pot for a minute till you'll see. [*Takes it and puts it in.*]

JOHN [*sarcastically*]. It's a good job this is not a Friday !

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

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

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

SIBBY [*getting up*]. Let me take the chicken out now.

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

[SIBBY *sits down again complacently*.

SIBBY. Did they do that indeed?

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

Philomel, I've listened oft

To thy lay, near weeping willow—

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

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

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

THE POT OF BROTH

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

SIBBY. Why would they call me Paistin ?

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

SIBBY. Well, maybe so.

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

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

[SIBBY *takes a fork and rises to take out the chicken.* TRAMP *puts his hand to stop her and goes on :*

Oh I would think that I had my fee,
Though I am shrunken to bone and skin,
Could I but drink, my love on my knee
Between two barrels at the inn.

[SIBBY *half rises again.* TRAMP *puts his hand upon her hand.*

TRAMP. Wait now till you hear the end
[sings] :

Nine nights I lay in longing sore
Between two bushes under the rain ;

Thinking to meet my love once more
I cried and whistled but vain, all vain.

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

SIBBY [to JOHN]. I always knew I was too good for you ! [*She goes on humming.*]

JOHN. Well, he has the poor woman bewitched.

SIBBY [*suddenly coming to her wits*]. Did you take the chicken out yet ?

TRAMP [*taking it out and giving it a good squeeze into the pot*]. I did, ma'am. Look at it there.

[*He takes it and lays on table.*

JOHN. How is the broth getting on ?

TRAMP [*tasting it with a spoon*]. It's grand. It's always grand.

SIBBY. Give me a taste of it.

TRAMP [*takes the pot off and slips the ham bone behind him*]. Give me some vessel till I'll give this sky-woman a taste of it.

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

SIBBY. There's a good smell on it anyway. [*Tasting.*] It's lovely. Oh, I'd give the

world and all to have the stone that made that !

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

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

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

SIBBY [*eagerly*]. What reason is that ?

TRAMP. It's a misfortune that overtakes me, ma'am, every time I make an attempt to keep a pot of my own to boil it in, and I don't like to be always under a compliment to the neighbours, asking the loan of one. But whatever way it is, I never can keep a pot with me. I had a right to ask one of the little man that gave me the stone. The last one I bought got the bottom burned out of it one night I was giving a hand to a friend that keeps a still, and the one before that I hid under a bush one time I was going into Ennis for the night, and some boys in the town dreamed about it and went looking for treasure in it, and they found nothing but eggshells, but they brought it away for all that. And another one. . . .

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

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

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

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

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

TRAMP. It's here! [*Slaps his pocket and exit. JOHN follows him.*]

SIBBY [*looking at the stone in her hand*].
Broth of the best, stirabout, poteen, wine
itself, he said ! And the people that will be
coming to see the miracle ! I'll be as rich
as Biddy Early before I die !

[JOHN comes back.

SIBBY. Where were you, John ?

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

SIBBY. He is so indeed.

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

THE HOUR-GLASS :
A MORALITY
(IN PROSE)

PERSONS IN THE PLAY

A WISE MAN.

A FOOL.

SOME PUPILS.

AN ANGEL.

THE WISE MAN'S WIFE AND TWO CHILDREN.

THE HOUR-GLASS :

A MORALITY

SCENE : *A large room with a door at the back and another at the side opening to an inner room. A desk and a chair in the middle. An hour-glass on a bracket near the door. A creepy stool near it. Some benches. An astronomical globe perhaps. Perhaps a large ancient map of the world on the wall or some musical instruments. Floor may be strewn with rushes. A WISE MAN sitting at his desk.*

WISE MAN [*turning over the pages of a book*]. Where is that passage I am to explain to my pupils to-day? Here it is, and the book says that it was written by a beggar on the walls of Babylon : 'There are two living countries, the one visible and the one invisible ; and when it is winter with us it is summer in that country, and when the November winds are up among us it is lambing-time there.' I wish that my pupils had asked me to explain any other passage.

[*The FOOL comes in and stands at the door holding out his hat. He has a pair of shears in the other hand.*] It sounds to me like foolishness ; and yet that cannot be, for the writer of this book, where I have found so much knowledge, would not have set it by itself on this page, and surrounded it with so many images and so many deep colours and so much fine gilding, if it had been foolishness.

FOOL. Give me a penny.

WISE MAN [*turns to another page*]. Here he has written : 'The learned in old times forgot the visible country.' That I understand, but I have taught my learners better.

FOOL. Won't you give me a penny ?

WISE MAN. What do you want ? The words of the wise Saracen will not teach you much.

FOOL. Such a great wise teacher as you are will not refuse a penny to a Fool.

WISE MAN. What do you know about wisdom ?

FOOL. Oh, I know ! I know what I have seen.

WISE MAN. What is it you have seen ?

FOOL. When I went by Kilcluan where the bells used to be ringing at the break of every day, I could hear nothing but the people snoring in their houses. When I went by Tubbervanach where the young men used to be climbing the hill to the blessed

well, they were sitting at the cross-roads playing cards. When I went by Carrigoras, where the friars used to be fasting and serving the poor, I saw them drinking wine and obeying their wives. And when I asked what misfortune had brought all these changes, they said it was no misfortune, but it was the wisdom they had learned from your teaching.

WISE MAN. Run round to the kitchen, and my wife will give you something to eat.

FOOL. That is foolish advice for a wise man to give.

WISE MAN. Why, Fool?

FOOL. What is eaten is gone. I want pennies for my bag. I must buy bacon in the shops, and nuts in the market, and strong drink for the time when the sun is weak. And I want snares to catch the rabbits and the squirrels and the hares, and a pot to cook them in.

WISE MAN. Go away. I have other things to think of now than giving you pennies.

FOOL. Give me a penny and I will bring you luck. The fishermen give me leave to sleep among the nets in their lofts in the winter-time because they say I bring them luck; and in the summer-time the wild creatures let me sleep near their nests and their holes. It is lucky even to look at me or to touch me, but it is much more lucky

to give me a penny. [*Holds out his hand.*]
If I wasn't lucky, I'd starve.

WISE MAN. What have you got the shears for ?

FOOL. I won't tell you. If I told you, you would drive them away.

WISE MAN. Whom would I drive away ?

FOOL. I won't tell you.

WISE MAN. Not if I give you a penny ?

FOOL. No.

WISE MAN. Not if I give you two pennies ?

FOOL. You will be very lucky if you give me two pennies, but I won't tell you !

WISE MAN. Three pennies ?

FOOL. Four, and I will tell you !

WISE MAN. Very well, four. But I will not call you Teigue the Fool any longer.

FOOL. Let me come close to you where nobody will hear me. But first you must promise you will not drive them away. [*WISE MAN nods.*] Every day men go out dressed in black and spread great black nets over the hills, great black nets.

WISE MAN. Why do they do that ?

FOOL. That they may catch the feet of the angels. But every morning, just before the dawn, I go out and cut the nets with my shears, and the angels fly away.

WISE MAN. Ah, now I know that you are Teigue the Fool. You have told me that I am wise, and I have never seen an angel.

FOOL. I have seen plenty of angels.

WISE MAN. Do you bring luck to the angels too ?

FOOL. Oh, no, no ! No one could do that. But they are always there if one looks about one ; they are like the blades of grass.

WISE MAN. When do you see them ?

FOOL. When one gets quiet, then something wakes up inside one, something happy and quiet like the stars—not like the seven that move, but like the fixed stars.

WISE MAN. And what happens then ?

FOOL. Then all in a minute one smells summer flowers, and tall people go by, happy and laughing, and their clothes are the colour of burning sods.

WISE MAN. Is it long since you have seen them, Teigue the Fool ?

FOOL. Not long, glory be to God ! I saw one coming behind me just now. It was not laughing, but it had clothes the colour of burning sods, and there was something shining about its head.

WISE MAN. Well, there are your four pennies. You, a fool, say ‘ Glory be to God,’ but before I came the wise men said it. Run away now. I must ring the bell for my scholars.

FOOL. Four pennies ! That means a great

deal of luck. Great teacher, I have brought you plenty of luck !

[He goes out shaking the bag.]

WISE MAN. Though they call him Teigue the Fool, he is not more foolish than everybody used to be, with their dreams and their preachings and their three worlds ; but I have overthrown their three worlds with the seven sciences. *[He touches the books with his hands.]* With Philosophy that was made from the lonely star, I have taught them to forget Theology ; with Architecture, I have hidden the ramparts of their cloudy heaven ; with Music, the fierce planets' daughter whose hair is always on fire, and with Grammar that is the moon's daughter, I have shut their ears to the imaginary harpings and speech of the angels ; and I have made formations of battle with Arithmetic that have put the hosts of heaven to the rout. But, Rhetoric and Dialectic, that have been born out of the light star and out of the amorous star, you have been my spearman and my catapult ! Oh ! my swift horsemen ! Oh ! my keen darting arguments, it is because of you that I have overthrown the hosts of foolishness ! *[An ANGEL, in a dress the colour of embers, and carrying a blossoming apple bough in her hand and a gilded halo about her head, stands upon the threshold.]* Before I came, men's minds were stuffed with folly

about a heaven where birds sang the hours, and about angels that came and stood upon men's thresholds. But I have locked the visions into heaven and turned the key upon them. Well, I must consider this passage about the two countries. My mother used to say something of the kind. She would say that when our bodies sleep our souls awake, and that whatever withers here ripens yonder, and that harvests are snatched from us that they may feed invisible people. But the meaning of the book may be different, for only fools and women have thoughts like that ; their thoughts were never written upon the walls of Babylon. [*He sees the ANGEL.*] What are you ? Who are you ? I think I saw some that were like you in my dreams when I was a child—that bright thing, that dress that is the colour of embers ! But I have done with dreams, I have done with dreams.

ANGEL. I am the Angel of the Most High God.

WISE MAN. Why have you come to me ?

ANGEL. I have brought you a message.

WISE MAN. What message have you got for me ?

ANGEL. You will die within the hour. You will die when the last grains have fallen in this glass. [*She turns the hour-glass.*]

WISE MAN. My time to die has not come.

I have my pupils. I have a young wife and children that I cannot leave. Why must I die ?

ANGEL. You must die because no souls have passed over the threshold of Heaven since you came into this country. The threshold is grassy, and the gates are rusty, and the angels that keep watch there are lonely.

WISE MAN. Where will death bring me to ?

ANGEL. The doors of Heaven will not open to you, for you have denied the existence of Heaven ; and the doors of Purgatory will not open to you, for you have denied the existence of Purgatory.

WISE MAN. But I have also denied the existence of Hell !

ANGEL. Hell is the place of those who deny.

WISE MAN [*kneels*]. I have, indeed, denied everything, and have taught others to deny. I have believed in nothing but what my senses told me. But, oh ! beautiful angel, forgive me, forgive me !

ANGEL. You should have asked forgiveness long ago.

WISE MAN. Had I seen your face as I see it now, oh ! beautiful angel, I would have believed, I would have asked forgiveness. Maybe you do not know how easy it is to doubt. Storm, death, the grass rotting, many sicknesses, those are the messengers

that came to me. Oh ! why are you silent ? You carry the pardon of the Most High ; give it to me ! I would kiss your hands if I were not afraid—no, no, the hem of your dress !

ANGEL. You let go undying hands too long ago to take hold of them now.

WISE MAN. You cannot understand. You live in a country that we can only dream about. Maybe it is as hard for you to understand why we disbelieve as it is for us to believe. Oh ! what have I said ! You know everything ! Give me time to undo what I have done. Give me a year—a month—a day—an hour ! Give me to this hour's end, that I may undo what I have done !

ANGEL. You cannot undo what you have done. Yet I have this power with my message. If you can find one that believes before the hour's end, you shall come to Heaven after the years of Purgatory. For, from one fiery seed, watched over by those that sent me, the harvest can come again to heap the golden threshing floor. But now farewell, for I am weary with the weight of time.

WISE MAN. Blessed be the Father, blessed be the Son, blessed be the Spirit, blessed be the Messenger They have sent !

ANGEL [*at the door, and pointing at the hour-*

glass]. In a little while the uppermost glass will be empty. *[Goes out.]*

WISE MAN. Everything will be well with me. I will call my pupils ; they only say they doubt. *[Pulls the bell.]* They will be here in a moment. I hear their feet outside on the path. They want to please me ; they pretend that they disbelieve. Belief is too old to be overcome all in a minute. Besides I can prove what I once disproved. *[Another pull at the bell.]* They are coming now. I will go to my desk. I will speak quietly, as if nothing had happened.

[He stands at the desk with a fixed look in his eyes.]

Enter PUPILS and the FOOL.

FOOL. Leave me alone. Leave me alone. Who is that pulling at my bag ? King's son, do not pull at my bag.

A YOUNG MAN. Did your friends the angels give you that bag ? Why don't they fill your bag for you ?

FOOL. Give me pennies ! Give me some pennies !

A YOUNG MAN. What do you want pennies for, that great bag at your waist is heavy ?

FOOL. I want to buy bacon in the shops, and nuts in the market, and strong drink for the time when the sun is weak, and snares to catch rabbits and the squirrels that steal the

nuts, and hares, and a great pot to cook them in.

A YOUNG MAN. Why don't your friends tell you where buried treasures are ?

ANOTHER. Why don't they make you dream about treasures ? If one dreams three times there is always treasure.

FOOL [*holding out his hat*]. Give me pennies ! Give me pennies !

[*They throw pennies into his hat. He is standing close to the door, that he may hold out his hat to each newcomer.*]

A YOUNG MAN. Master, will you have Teigue the Fool for a scholar ?

ANOTHER YOUNG MAN. Teigue, will you give us your pennies if we teach you lessons ? No, he goes to school for nothing on the mountains. Tell us what you learn on the mountains, Teigue ?

WISE MAN. Be silent all ! [*He has been standing silent, looking away.*] Stand still in your places, for there is something I would have you tell me.

[*A moment's pause. They all stand round in their places. TEIGUE still stands at the door.*]

WISE MAN. Is there any one amongst you who believes in God ? In Heaven ? Or in Purgatory ? Or in Hell ?

ALL THE YOUNG MEN. No one, Master ! No one !

WISE MAN. I knew you would all say that ; but do not be afraid. I will not be angry. Tell me the truth. Do you not believe ?

A YOUNG MAN. We once did, but you have taught us to know better.

WISE MAN. Oh ! teaching, teaching does not go very deep ! The heart remains unchanged under it all. You have the faith that you always had, and you are afraid to tell me.

A YOUNG MASTER. No, no, Master !

WISE MAN. If you tell me that you have not changed I shall be glad and not angry.

A YOUNG MAN [*to HIS NEIGHBOUR*]. He wants somebody to dispute with.

HIS NEIGHBOUR. I knew that from the beginning.

A YOUNG MAN. That is not the subject for to-day ; you were going to talk about the words the beggar wrote upon the walls of Babylon.

WISE MAN. If there is one amongst you that has not changed, he will be my best friend. Surely there is one amongst you. [*They are all silent.*] Surely what you learned at your mother's knees has not been so soon forgotten.

A YOUNG MAN. Master, till you came, no teacher in this land was able to get rid of foolishness and ignorance. But every one

has listened to you, every one has learned the truth. You have had your last disputation.

ANOTHER. What a fool you made of that monk in the market-place ! He had not a word to say.

WISE MAN [*comes from his desk and stands among them in the middle of the room*]. Pupils, dear friends, I have deceived you all this time. It was I myself who was ignorant. There is a God. There is a Heaven. There is fire that passes and there is fire that lasts for ever.

[TEIGUE, *through all this, is sitting on a stool by the door, reckoning on his fingers what he will buy with his money.*

A YOUNG MAN [*to ANOTHER*]. He will not be satisfied till we dispute with him. [*To the WISE MAN*] Prove it, Master. Have you seen them ?

WISE MAN [*in a low, solemn voice*]. Just now, before you came in, some one came to the door, and when I looked up I saw an angel standing there.

A YOUNG MAN. You were in a dream. Anybody can see an angel in his dreams.

WISE MAN. Oh, my God ! It was not a dream ! I was awake, waking as I am now. I tell you I was awake as I am now.

A YOUNG MAN. Some dream when they

are awake, but they are the crazy, and who would believe what they say? Forgive me, Master, but that is what you taught me to say. That is what you said to the monk when he spoke of the visions of the saints and the martyrs.

ANOTHER YOUNG MAN. You see how well we remember your teaching.

WISE MAN. Out, out from my sight! I want somebody who has not changed. That is the grain the angel spoke of—I must find it before I die. I tell you I must find it. The sands are falling there and you answer me with arguments. Out with you, out of my sight! [*The YOUNG MEN laugh.*]

A YOUNG MAN. How well he plays at faith! He is like the monk when he had nothing more to say.

WISE MAN. Out, out, this is no time for laughter! Out with you, though you are a king's son! [*They begin to hurry out.*]

A YOUNG MAN. Come, come; he wants us to find some one who will dispute with him. [*All go out.*]

WISE MAN [*alone; he goes to the door at the side*]. I will call my wife. She will believe; women always believe. [*He opens the door and calls.*] Bridget! Bridget! [*BRIDGET comes in wearing her apron, her sleeves turned up from her floury arms.*] Bridget, tell me the truth; do not say what you think will

please me. Do you sometimes say your prayers ?

BRIDGET. Prayers ! No, you taught me to leave them off long ago. At first I was sorry, but I am glad now for I am sleepy in the evenings.

WISE MAN. But do you not believe in God ?

BRIDGET. Oh, a good wife only believes what her husband tells her !

WISE MAN. But sometimes when you are alone, when I am in the school and the children asleep, do you not think about the saints, about the things you used to believe in ? What do you think of when you are alone ?

BRIDGET [*considering*]. I think about nothing. Sometimes I wonder if the linen is bleaching white, or I go out to see if the crows are picking up the chickens' food.

WISE MAN. Oh, what can I do ! Is there nobody who believes he can never die ? I must go and find somebody ! [*He goes towards the door, but stops with his eyes fixed on the hour-glass.*] I cannot go out ; I cannot leave that. Go and call my pupils again. I will make them understand. I will say to them that only amid spiritual terror or only when all that laid hold on life is shaken can we see truth. There is something in Plato, but—No, do not call them. They would answer as I have bid.

BRIDGET. You want somebody to get up an argument with.

WISE MAN. Oh, look out of the door and tell me if there is anybody there in the street. I cannot leave this glass ; somebody might shake it ! Then the sand would fall more quickly.

BRIDGET. I don't understand what you are saying. [*Looks out.*] There is a great crowd of people talking to your pupils.

WISE MAN. Oh, run out, Bridget, and see if they have found somebody that, all the time I was teaching, understood nothing or did not listen !

BRIDGET [*wiping her arms in her apron and pulling down her sleeves*]. It's a hard thing to be married to a man of learning that must be always having arguments. [*Goes out and shouts through the kitchen door.*] Don't be meddling with the bread, children, while I'm out.

WISE MAN [*kneels down*]. ' *Confiteor Deo Omnipotenti, beatae Mariae—salvum—salvum . . .* ' I have forgotten it all. It is thirty years since I have said a prayer. I must pray in the common tongue, like a clown begging in the market, like Teigue the Fool ! [*He prays.*] Help me, Father, Son and Spirit !

[BRIDGET *enters, followed by the FOOL, who is holding out his hat to her.*

FOOL. Give me something ; give me a penny to buy bacon in the shops, and nuts in the market, and strong drink for the time when the sun grows weak.

BRIDGET. I have no pennies. [*To the WISE MAN.*] Your pupils cannot find anybody to argue with you. There is nobody in the whole country who has enough belief to fill a pipe since you put down the monk. Can't you be quiet now and not always wanting to have arguments ? It must be terrible to have a mind like that.

WISE MAN. I am lost ! I am lost !

BRIDGET. Leave me alone now ; I have to make the bread for you and the children.

WISE MAN. Out of this, woman, out of this, I say ! [*BRIDGET goes through the kitchen door.*] Will nobody find a way to help me ! But she spoke of my children. I had forgotten them. They will not have changed. It is only those who have reason that doubt ; the young are full of faith. Bridget, Bridget, send my children to me.

BRIDGET [*inside*]. Your father wants you ; run to him now.

[*The two CHILDREN come in. They stand together a little way from the threshold of the kitchen door, looking timidly at their father.*]

WISE MAN. Children, what do you believe ?

Is there a Heaven ? Is there a Hell ? Is there a Purgatory ?

FIRST CHILD. We haven't forgotten, father.

THE OTHER CHILD. Oh no, father. [*They both speak together as if in school.*] There is nothing we cannot see ; there is nothing we cannot touch.

FIRST CHILD. Foolish people used to think that there was, but you are very learned and you have taught us better.

WISE MAN. You are just as bad as the others, just as bad as the others ! Do not run away ! Come back to me ! [*The CHILDREN begin to cry and run away.*] Why are you afraid ? I will teach you better—no, I will never teach you again. Go to your mother ! no, she will not be able to teach them . . . Help them, O God ! . . . The grains are going very quickly. There is very little sand in the uppermost glass. Somebody will come for me in a moment ; perhaps he is at the door now ! All creatures that have reason doubt. Oh that the grass and the plants could speak ! Somebody has said that they would wither if they doubted. Oh speak to me, O grass blades ! O fingers of God's certainty, speak to me ! You are millions and you will not speak. I dare not know the moment the messenger will come for me. I will cover the glass. [*He covers it with a cloth.* Sees the FOOL, who is sitting

by the door playing with some flowers which he has stuck in his hat. He has begun to blow a dandelion-head.] What are you doing ?

FOOL. Wait a moment. [*He blows.*]
Four, five, six.

WISE MAN. What are you doing that for ?

FOOL. I am blowing at the dandelion to find out what time it is.

WISE MAN. You have heard everything ! That is why you want to find out what hour it is ! You are waiting to see them coming through the door to carry me away. [*FOOL goes on blowing.*] I will not have you sitting there. I will have no one here when they come. [*He seizes the FOOL by the shoulders, and begins to force him out through the door, then suddenly changes his mind.*] No, I have something to ask you. [*He drags him back into the room.*] Is there a Heaven ? Is there a Hell ? Is there a Purgatory ?

FOOL. So you ask me now. I thought when you were asking your pupils, I said to myself, if he would ask Teigue the Fool, Teigue could tell him all about it, for Teigue has learned all about it when he has been cutting the nets.

WISE MAN. Tell me quickly !

FOOL. I said, Teigue knows everything. Not even the cats or the hares that milk the cows have Teigue's wisdom. But Teigue will not speak ; he says nothing.

WISE MAN. Tell me, tell me ! For under the cover the grains are falling, and when they are all fallen I shall die ; and my soul will be lost if I have not found somebody that knows and believes ! Speak, speak !

FOOL [*looking wise*]. I will not speak ! I will not tell you what is in my mind, and I won't tell you what is in my bag. You might steal away my thoughts. I met a bodach on the road yesterday, and he said, ' Teigue, tell me how many pennies are in your bag ; I will wager three pennies that there are not twenty pennies in your bag ; let me put in my hand and count them.' But I pulled the strings tighter, like this ; and when I go to sleep every night I hide the bag where no one knows.

WISE MAN [*goes towards the hour-glass as if to uncover it*]. No, no, I have not the courage. [*He kneels.*] Have pity upon me, Fool, and tell me !

FOOL. Ah, now that is different. I am not afraid of you now. What is that I am to tell you ? But I must come near, somebody in there might hear what the angel said.

WISE MAN. But speak and I am saved. What did the angel say to you ?

FOOL. O no, no, no. How could poor Teigue see angels ? O Teigue tells one tale here, another tale there, and everybody gives

him pennies. If Teigue had not his tales he would starve.

[He backs away and goes out.]

WISE MAN. My last hope is gone and now that it is too late I can see it all. Those words about winter and summer, about our November being the lambing time in that other country—all, all is plain now. We sink in on God, we find him in becoming nothing—we perish into reality.

[The FOOL comes back.]

FOOL. There was one there—there by the threshold stone, writing there ; and she said, ‘Go in, Teigue, and tell him everything that he asks you. He will give you a penny if you tell him.’

WISE MAN. We perish into reality—strange that I never saw it until now.

FOOL. Will you give me a penny if I tell you ?

WISE MAN. O no, do not tell me anything. I am content to know that God’s will prevails whatever that be.

FOOL. Waiting till the moment had come—that is what the one out there was saying, but I might tell you what you asked. That is what he was saying.

WISE MAN. Be silent. May God’s will prevail though that be my damnation. What was I born for but that I might cry that His will be fulfilled upon the instant, though that

be my damnation. I am dying. The sand has run out. Ring the bell, ring for my pupils. [*FOOL rings.*] For I am going from the country of the seven wandering stars, and am going to the country of the fixed stars. [*Voices of PUPILS singing.*] They are coming. I must make all plain to them, that they may wish His will be fulfilled though that be our damnation. There is no other truth. [*Dies.*]

PUPILS *enter.*

YOUNG MAN. Look at the Fool turned bell-ringer.

ANOTHER. What have you called us in for, Teigue?

FOOL. There was something he wanted to say, but you must wake him, he has fallen asleep.

YOUNG MAN. No wonder he has dreams. He is so fast asleep that I cannot wake him. O, he is dead. . . .

PUPILS *gather round.*

FOOL. Look, look, what has come from his mouth . . . a little winged thing . . . a little shining thing . . . it has gone to the door. . . . O look, there in the door. . . . [*The ANGEL appears at the door, she opens her hands and closes them again.*] The Angel has taken it in her hands.

A YOUNG MAN. What are you pointing at?

FOOL. The Angel has taken it in her hands. She will open her hands in the Garden of Paradise.

YOUNG MAN. There is nobody there—there is nobody in the door.

THE KING'S THRESHOLD

TO FRANK FAY

*Because of his beautiful speaking in
the character of Seanchan*

PERSONS IN THE PLAY

KING GUAIRE.

SEANCHAN (*pronounced* SHANAHAN).

HIS PUPILS.

THE MAYOR OF KINVARA.

TWO CRIPPLES.

BRIAN, *an old servant*.

THE LORD HIGH CHAMBERLAIN.

A SOLDIER.

A MONK.

COURT LADIES.

TWO PRINCESSES.

FEDELM.



THE KING'S THRESHOLD

SCENE : *Steps before the Palace of KING GUAIRE at Gort. A table or litter in front of steps at one side, with food on it, and a bench. SEANCHAN lying on steps. PUPILS before steps. KING on the upper step before a curtained door.*

KING. I welcome you that have the mastery
Of the two kinds of Music : the one kind
Being like a woman, the other like a man.
Both you that understand stringed instruments,
And how to mingle words and notes together
So artfully, that all the Art's but Speech
Delighted with its own music ; and you that
 carry
The long twisted horn, and understand
The heady notes that, being without words,
Can hurry beyond Time and Fate and
 Change.
For the high angels that drive the horse of
 Time—
The golden one by day, by night the silver—

68 THE KING'S THRESHOLD

Are not more welcome to one that loves the
world

For some fair woman's sake.

I have called you hither

To save the life of your great master,
Seanchan,

For all day long it has flamed up or flickered
To the fast cooling hearth.

OLDEST PUPIL. When did he sicken ?
Is it a fever that is wasting him ?

KING. No fever or sickness. He has
chosen death :

Refusing to eat or drink, that he may bring
Disgrace upon me ; for there is a custom,
An old and foolish custom, that if a man
Be wronged, or think that he is wronged, and
starve

Upon another's threshold till he die,
The common people, for all time to come,
Will raise a heavy cry against that threshold,
Even though it be the King's.

OLDEST PUPIL. My head whirls round ;
I do not know what I am to think or say.
I owe you all obedience, and yet
How can I give it, when the man I have loved
More than all others, thinks that he is wronged
So bitterly, that he will starve and die
Rather than bear it ? Is there any man
Will throw his life away for a light issue ?

KING. It is but fitting that you take his side
Until you understand how light an issue

Has put us by the ears. Three days ago
 I yielded to the outcry of my courtiers—
 Bishops, Soldiers, and Makers of the Law—
 Who long had thought it against their dignity
 For a mere man of words to sit amongst them
 At the great council of the state and share
 In their authority. I bade him go,
 Though at the first with kind and courteous
 words,

But when he pleaded for the poets' right,
 Established at the establishment of the world,
 I said that I was King, and that all rights
 Had their original fountain in some king,
 And that it was the men who ruled the world,
 And not the men who sang to it, who should
 sit

Where there was the most honour. My
 courtiers—

Bishops, Soldiers, and Makers of the Law—
 Shouted approval ; and amid that noise
 Seanchan went out, and from that hour to this
 Although there is good food and drink
 beside him,
 Has eaten nothing.

OLDEST PUPIL. I can breathe again.
 You have taken a great burden from my mind
 For that old custom's not worth dying for.

KING. Persuade him to eat or drink. Till
 yesterday
 I thought that hunger and weakness had been
 enough ;

70 THE KING'S THRESHOLD

But finding them too trifling and too light
To hold his mouth from biting at the grave,
I called you hither, and all my hope's in you,
And certain of his neighbours and good
friends

That I have sent for. While he is lying there
Perishing, my good name in the world
Is perishing also. I cannot give way,
Because I am King ; because if I gave way,
My Nobles would call me a weakling, and it
may be

The very throne be shaken.

OLDEST PUPIL. I will persuade him.
Your words had been enough persuasion,
King ;

But being lost in sleep or reverie,
He cannot hear them.

KING. Make him eat or drink.
Nor is it all because of my good name
I'd have him do it, for he is a man
That might well hit the fancy of a king,
Banished out of his country, or a woman's
Or any other's that can judge a man
For what he is. But I that sit a throne,
And take my measure from the needs of the
State,
Call his wild thought that overruns the
measure,
Making words more than deeds, and his
proud will
That would unsettle all, most mischievous,

And he himself a most mischievous man.

[*He turns to go, and then returns again.*
 Promise a house with grass and tillage land,
 An annual payment, jewels and silken ware,
 Or anything but that old right of the poets.

[*He goes into palace.*

OLDEST PUPIL. The King did wrong to
 abrogate our right ;
 But Seanchan, who talks of dying for it,
 Talks foolishly. Look at us, Seanchan ;
 Waken out of your dream and look at us,
 Who have ridden under the moon and all the
 day,
 Until the moon has all but come again,
 That we might be beside you.

SEANCHAN [*half turning round, leaning on
 his elbow, and speaking as if in a dream*].

I was but now
 In Almhuin, in a great high-raftered house,
 With Finn and Osgar. Odours of roast flesh
 Rose round me, and I saw the roasting spits ;
 And then the dream was broken, and I saw
 Grania dividing salmon by a stream.

OLDEST PUPIL. Hunger has made you
 dream of roasting flesh ;
 And though I all but weep to think of it,
 The hunger of the crane, that starves himself
 At the full moon because he is afraid
 Of his own shadow and the glittering water,
 Seems to me little more fantastical
 Than this of yours.

72 THE KING'S THRESHOLD

SEANCHAN. Why, that's the very truth.
It is as though the moon changed every-
thing—

Myself and all that I can hear and see ;
For when the heavy body has grown weak,
There's nothing that can tether the wild mind
That, being moonstruck and fantastical,
Goes where it fancies. I have even thought
I knew your voice and face, but now the
words

Are so unlikely that I needs must ask
Who is it that bids me put my hunger by.

OLDEST PUPIL. I am your oldest pupil,
Seanchan ;
The one that has been with you many years—
So many, that you said at Candlemas
That I had almost done with school, and
knew

All but all that poets understand.

SEANCHAN. My oldest pupil ? No, that
cannot be,
For it is some one of the courtly crowds
That have been round about me from sunrise,
And I am tricked by dreams ; but I'll refute
them.

At Candlemas I bid that pupil tell me
Why poetry is honoured, wishing to know
If he had any weighty argument
For distant countries and strange, churlish
kings.

What did he answer ?

OLDEST PUPIL. I said the poets hung
Images of the life that was in Eden
About the child-bed of the world, that it,
Looking upon those images, might bear
Triumphant children. But why must I
stand here,

Repeating an old lesson, while you starve ?

SEANCHAN. Tell on, for I begin to know
the voice.

What evil thing will come upon the world
If the Arts perish ?

OLDEST PUPIL. If the Arts should perish,
The world that lacked them would be like a
woman,

That looking on the cloven lips of a hare,
Brings forth a hare-lipped child.

SEANCHAN. But that's not all :
For when I asked you how a man should guard
Those images, you had an answer also,
If you're the man that you have claimed to be,
Comparing them to venerable things
God gave to men before he gave them wheat.

OLDEST PUPIL. I answered—and the word
was half your own—

That he should guard them as the Men of
Dea

Guard their four treasures, as the Grail King
guards

His holy cup, or the pale, righteous horse
The jewel that is underneath his horn,
Pouring out life for it as one pours out

74 THE KING'S THRESHOLD

Sweet heady wine. . . . But now I understand ;

You would refute me out of my own mouth ;
And yet a place at council, near the King,
Is nothing of great moment, Seanchan.

How does so light a thing touch poetry ?

[SEANCHAN *is now sitting up. He still looks dreamily in front of him.*

SEANCHAN. At Candlemas you called this
poetry

One of the fragile, mighty things of God,
That die at an insult.

OLDEST PUPIL [*to other PUPILS*]. Give me
some true answer,

Upon that day he spoke about the Court
And called it the first comely child of the
world,

And said that all that was insulted there
The world insulted, for the Courtly life
Is the world's model. How shall I answer
him ?

Can you not give me some true argument ?
I will not tempt him with a lying one.

YOUNGEST PUPIL. O, tell him that the
lovers of his music
Have need of him.

SEANCHAN. But I am labouring
For some that shall be born in the nick o'
time,
And find sweet nurture, that they may have
voices,

Even in anger, like the strings of harps ;
And how could they be born to majesty
If I had never made the golden cradle ?

YOUNGEST PUPIL [*throwing himself at SEANCHAN's feet*]. Why did you take me from
my father's fields ?

If you would leave me now, what shall I love ?
Where shall I go ? What shall I set my hand
to ?

And why have you put music in my ears,
If you would send me to the clattering houses?
I will throw down the trumpet and the harp,
For how could I sing verses or make music
With none to praise me, and a broken heart ?

SEANCHAN. What was it that the poets
promised you,

If it was not their sorrow ? Do not speak.
Have I not opened school on these bare steps,
And are not you the youngest of my scholars ?
And I would have all know that when all falls
In ruin, poetry calls out in joy,
Being the scattering hand, the bursting pod,
The victim's joy among the holy flame,
God's laughter at the shattering of the world.
And now that joy laughs out, and weeps and
burns

On these bare steps.

YOUNGEST PUPIL. O master, do not die !

OLDEST PUPIL. Trouble him with no useless
argument.

Be silent ! There is nothing we can do

76 THE KING'S THRESHOLD

Except find out the King and kneel to him,
And beg our ancient right.

For here are some
To say whatever we could say and more,
And fare as badly. Come, boy, that is no use.

[*Raises* YOUNGEST PUPIL.

If it seem well that we beseech the King,
Lay down your harps and trumpets on the
stones

In silence, and come with me silently.
Come with slow footfalls, and bow all your
heads,

For a bowed head becomes a mourner best.

[*They lay harps and trumpets down one by one, and then go out very solemnly and slowly, following one another. Enter* MAYOR, TWO CRIPPLES, and BRIAN, *an old servant. The* MAYOR, *who has been heard, before he came upon the stage, muttering 'Chief Poet,' 'Ireland,' etc., crosses in front of SEANCHAN to the other side of the steps. BRIAN takes food out of basket. The CRIPPLES are watching the basket. The* MAYOR *has an Ogham stick in his hand.*

MAYOR [*as he crosses*]. 'Chief Poet,' 'Ireland,' 'Townsmen,' 'Grazing land.'
Those are the words I have to keep in mind—
'Chief Poet,' 'Ireland,' 'Townsmen,'
'Grazing land.'

THE KING'S THRESHOLD 77

I have the words. They are all upon the
Ogham.

'Chief Poet,' 'Ireland,' 'Townsmán,' 'Graz-
ing land.'

But what's their order ?

*[He keeps muttering over his speech
during what follows.]*

FIRST CRIPPLE. The King were rightly
served

If Seanchán drove his good luck away.

What's there about a king, that's in the world
From birth to burial like another man,
That he should change old customs, that
were in it

As long as ever the world has been a world ?

SECOND CRIPPLE. If I were king I would
not meddle with him,

For there is something queer about a poet.

I knew of one that would be making rhyme
Under a thorn at crossing of three roads.

He was as ragged as ourselves, and yet
He was no sooner dead than every thorn tree
From Inchy to Kiltartan withered away.

FIRST CRIPPLE. The King is but a fool !

MAYOR. I am getting ready.

FIRST CRIPPLE. A poet has power from
beyond the world,

That he may set our thoughts upon old times,
And lucky queens and little holy fish
That rise up every seventh year——

MAYOR.

Hush ! hush !

78 THE KING'S THRESHOLD

FIRST CRIPPLE. To cure the crippled.

MAYOR. I am half ready now.

BRIAN. There's not a mischief I'd begrudge the King

If it were any other——

MAYOR. Hush ! I am ready.

BRIAN. That died to get it. I have brought out the food,

And if my master will not eat of it,

I'll home and get provision for his wake,

For that's no great way off. Well, have your say,

But don't be long about it.

MAYOR [*goes close to SEANCHAN*]. Chief Poet of Ireland,

I am the Mayor of your own town Kinvara,

And I am come to tell you that the news

Of this great trouble with the King of Gort

Has plunged us in deep sorrow—part for you,

Our honoured townsman, part for our good town.

[*Begins to hesitate ; scratching his head.*]

But what comes now ? Something about the King.

BRIAN. Get on ! get on ! The food is all set out.

MAYOR. Don't hurry me.

FIRST CRIPPLE. Give us a taste of it.

He'll not begrudge it.

SECOND CRIPPLE. Let them that have their limbs

Starve if they will. We have to keep in mind
The stomach God has left us.

MAYOR. Hush ! I have it !
The King was said to be most friendly to us,
And we have reason, as you'll recollect,
For thinking that he was about to give
Those grazing lands inland we so much need,
Being pinched between the water and the
stones.

Our mowers mow with knives between the
stones ;

The sea washes the meadows. You know well
We have asked nothing but what's reasonable.

SEANCHAN. Reason in plenty. Yellowy
white hair,
A hollow face, and not too many teeth.
How comes it he has been so long in the
world

And not found Reason out ?

*[While saying this he has turned half
round. He hardly looks at the
MAYOR.]*

BRIAN *[trying to pull MAYOR away]*. What
good is there

In telling him what he has heard all day !
I will set food before him.

MAYOR *[shoving BRIAN away]*. Don't hurry
me !

It's small respect you're showing to the town !
Get farther off ! *[to SEANCHAN]*. We would
not have you think,

80 THE KING'S THRESHOLD

Weighty as these considerations are,
That they have been as weighty in our minds
As our desire that one we take much pride in,
A man that's been an honour to our town,
Should live and prosper ; therefore we be-
seech you

To give way in a matter of no moment,
A matter of mere sentiment—a trifle—
That we may always keep our pride in you.

*[He finishes this speech with a pompous
air, motions to BRIAN to bring the
food to SEANCHAN, and sits on seat.]*

BRIAN. Master, Master, eat this ! It's
not king's food,

That's cooked for everybody and nobody.
Here's barley-bread out of your father's oven,
And dulse from Duras. Here is the dulse,
your honour ;

It's wholesome, and has the good taste of the
sea.

*[Takes dulse in one hand and bread in
other and presses them into SEAN-
CHAN's hands. SEANCHAN shows by
his movement his different feeling to
BRIAN.]*

FIRST CRIPPLE. He has taken it, and there'll
be nothing left !

SECOND CRIPPLE. Nothing at all, he wanted
his own sort.

What's honey to a cat, corn to a dog,
Or a green apple to a ghost in a churchyard ?

THE KING'S THRESHOLD 81

SEANCHAN [*pressing food back into BRIAN's hands*]. Eat it yourself, for you have come a journey,

And it may be ate nothing on the way.

BRIAN. How could I eat it, and your honour starving !

It is your father sends it, and he cried
Because the stiffness that is in his bones
Prevented him from coming, and bade me
tell you

That he is old, that he has need of you,
And that the people will be pointing at him,
And he not able to lift up his head,
If you should turn the King's favour away ;
And he adds to it, that he cared you well,
And you in your young age, and that it's
right

That you should care him now.

SEANCHAN [*who is now interested*]. And is that all ?

What did my mother say !

BRIAN. She gave no message ;
For when they told her you had it in mind to
starve,

Or get again the ancient right of the poets,
She said : ' No message can do any good.
He will not send the answer that you want.
We cannot change him.' And she went
indoors,

Lay down upon the bed, and turned her face
Out of the light. And thereupon your father

82 THE KING'S THRESHOLD

Said : ' Tell him that his mother sends no message,

Albeit broken down and miserable.'

[*A pause.*

Here's pigeon's eggs from Duras, and these others

Were laid by your own hens.

SEANCHAN. She has sent no message.

Our mothers know us ; they know us to the bone.

They knew us before birth, and that is why
They know us even better than the sweet-
hearts

Upon whose breasts we have lain.

Go quickly ! Go

And tell them that my mother is in the right.

There is no answer. Go and tell them that.

Go tell them that she knew me.

MAYOR. What is he saying ?

I never understood a poet's talk

More than the baa of a sheep !

[*Comes over from seat.* SEANCHAN
turns away.

You have not heard,
It may be, having been so much away,
How many of the cattle died last winter
From lacking grass, and that there was much
sickness

Because the poor have nothing but salt fish
To live on through the winter ?

THE KING'S THRESHOLD 83

BRIAN. *He says nothing to the point.* Get away,
And leave the place to me ! It's my turn
now,

For your sack's empty !

MAYOR. Is it ' get away ' !
Is that the way I'm to be spoken to !
Am I not Mayor ? Amn't I authority ?
Amn't I in the King's place ? Answer me
that !

BRIAN. Then show the people what a king
is like :
Pull down old merings and root custom up,
Whitewash the dunghills, fatten hogs and
geese,
Hang your gold chain about an ass's neck,
And burn the blessed thorn trees out of the
fields,
And drive what's comely away !

MAYOR. Holy Saint Coleman !

FIRST CRIPPLE. Fine talk ! fine talk !

What else does the King do ?
He fattens hogs and hunts the wise man out.
SECOND CRIPPLE. He fattens geese.

FIRST CRIPPLE. And drives away the swan.

MAYOR. How dare you take his name into
your mouth !
How dare you lift your voice against the
King !

What would we be without him ?

BRIAN. Why do you praise him ?
I will have nobody speak well of him,

84 THE KING'S THRESHOLD

Or any other king that robs my master.

MAYOR. And had he not the right to ? and
the right

To strike your master's head off, being the
King,

Or yours or mine ? I say, ' Long live the
King !

Because he does not take our heads from us.'

Call out, ' Long life to him ! '

BRIAN. Call out for him !

[*Speaking at same time with* MAYOR.]

There's nobody 'll call out for him,

But smiths will turn their anvils,

The millers turn their wheels,

The farmers turn their churns,

The witches turn their thumbs,

Till he be broken and splintered into pieces.

MAYOR [*at same time with* BRIAN]. He

might, if he'd a mind to it,

Be digging out our tongues,

Or dragging out our hair,

Or bleaching us like calves,

Or weaning us like lambs,

But for the kindness and the softness that is
in him.

[*They gasp for breath.*]

FIRST CRIPPLE. I'll curse him till I drop !

[*Speaking at same time as* SECOND
CRIPPLE, and MAYOR and BRIAN,
who have begun again.]

The curse of the poor be upon him,

The curse of the widows upon him,

The curse of the children upon him,
The curse of the bishops upon him,
Until he be as rotten as an old mushroom !

SECOND CRIPPLE [*speaking at same time as*
FIRST CRIPPLE *and* MAYOR *and* BRIAN].

The curse of wrinkles be upon him !
Wrinkles where his eyes are,
Wrinkles where his nose is,
Wrinkles where his mouth is,
And a little old devil looking out of every
wrinkle !

BRIAN [*speaking at same time with* MAYOR
and CRIPPLES]. And nobody will sing
for him,

And nobody will hunt for him,
And nobody will fish for him,
And nobody will pray for him,
But ever and always curse him and abuse him.

MAYOR [*speaking at same time with* CRIPPLES
and BRIAN]. What good is in a poet ?

Has he money in a stocking,
Or cider in the cellar,
Or flitches in the chimney,
Or anything anywhere but his own idleness ?

[BRIAN *seizes* MAYOR.

Help ! help ! Am I not in authority ?

BRIAN. That's how I'll shout for the King !

MAYOR. Help ! help ! Am I not in the
King's place ?

BRIAN. I'll teach him to be kind to the
poor !

86 THE KING'S THRESHOLD

MAYOR. Help ! help ! Wait till we are in Kinvara !

FIRST CRIPPLE [*beating MAYOR on the legs with crutch*]. I'll shake the royalty out of his legs !

SECOND CRIPPLE [*burying his nails in MAYOR's face*]. I'll scramble the ermine out of his skin !

[*The CHAMBERLAIN comes down steps shouting, " Silence ! silence ! silence ! "*]

CHAMBERLAIN. How dare you make this uproar at the doors.

Deafening the very greatest in the land,
As if the farmyards and the rookeries
Had all been emptied !

FIRST CRIPPLE. It is the Chamberlain.

[*CRIPPLES go out.*]

CHAMBERLAIN. Pick up the litter there,
and get you gone !

Be quick about it ! Have you no respect
For this worn stair, this all but sacred door,
Where suppliants and tributary kings
Have passed, and the world's glory knelt in
silence ?

Have you no reverence for what all other
men

Hold honourable ?

BRIAN. If I might speak my mind,
I'd say the King would have his luck again
If he would let my master have his rights.

THE KING'S THRESHOLD 87

CHAMBERLAIN. Pick up your litter ! Take
your noise away !
Make haste, and get the clapper from the
bell !

BRIAN [*putting last of food into basket*].
What do the great and powerful care for
rights
That have no armies !

[CHAMBERLAIN *begins shoving them out
with his staff.*

MAYOR. My lord, I am not to blame.
I'm the King's man, and they attacked me
for it.

BRIAN. We have our prayers, our curses
and our prayers,
And we can give a great name or a bad
one.

[MAYOR *is shoving BRIAN out before him
with one hand. He keeps his face
to CHAMBERLAIN, and keeps bowing.
The CHAMBERLAIN shoves him with
his staff.*

MAYOR. We could not make the poet eat,
my lord.

[CHAMBERLAIN *shoves him with his staff.*
Much honoured [*is shoved again*—honoured
to speak with you, my lord ;
But I'll go find the girl that he's to marry.
She's coming, but I'll hurry her, my lord.
Between ourselves, my lord [*is shoved again*],
she is a great coaxer.

88 THE KING'S THRESHOLD

Much honoured, my lord. Oh, she's the
girl to do it ;

For when the intellect is out, my lord,
Nobody but a woman's any good.

[Is shoved again.]

Much honoured, my lord *[is shoved again]*,
much honoured, much honoured !

[Is shoved out, shoving BRIAN out before him]

[All through this scene, from the outset of the quarrel, SEANCHAN has kept his face turned away, or hidden in his cloak. While the CHAMBERLAIN has been speaking, the SOLDIER and the MONK have come out of the palace. The MONK stands on top of steps at one side, SOLDIER a little down steps at the other side. COURT LADIES are seen at opening in the palace curtain behind SOLDIER. CHAMBERLAIN is in the centre.]

CHAMBERLAIN *[to SEANCHAN]*. Well, you
must be contented, for your work

Has roused the common sort against the King,
And stolen his authority. The State

Is like some orderly and reverend house,

Wherein the master, being dead of a sudden,

The servants quarrel where they have a mind
to,

And pilfer here and there.

[Pause, finding that SEANCHAN does not answer.]

How many days
Will you keep up this quarrel with the King,
And the King's nobles, and myself, and all,
Who'd gladly be your friends, if you would
let them? [*Going near to MONK.*
If you would try, you might persuade him,
father.

I cannot make him answer me, and yet
If fitting hands would offer him the food,
He might accept it.

MONK. Certainly I will not.
I've made too many homilies, wherein
The wanton imagination of the poets
Has been condemned, to be his flatterer.
If pride and disobedience are unpunished
Who will obey?

CHAMBERLAIN [*going to other side towards*
SOLDIER]. If you would speak to him,
You might not find persuasion difficult,
With all the devils of hunger helping you.

SOLDIER. I will not interfere, and if he
starve
For being obstinate and stiff in the neck,
'Tis but good riddance.

CHAMBERLAIN. One of us must do it.
It might be, if you'd reason with him, ladies,
He would eat something, for I have a notion
That if he brought misfortune on the King,
Or the King's house, we'd be as little thought
of

As summer linen when the winter's come.

90 THE KING'S THRESHOLD

FIRST GIRL. But it would be the greater
compliment
If Peter 'd do it.

SECOND GIRL. Reason with him, Peter.
Persuade him to eat ; he's such a bag of
bones !

SOLDIER. I'll never trust a woman's word
again !
There's nobody that was so loud against him
When he was at the council ; now the wind's
changed,

And you that could not bear his speech or his
silence,

Would have him there in his old place again ;
I do believe you would, but I won't help you.

SECOND GIRL. Why will you be so hard
upon us, Peter ?

You know we have turned the common sort
against us.

And he looks miserable.

FIRST GIRL. We cannot dance,
Because no harper will pluck a string for us.

SECOND GIRL. I cannot sleep with think-
ing of his face.

FIRST GIRL. And I love dancing more than
anything.

SECOND GIRL. Do not be hard on us ; but
yesterday

A woman in the road threw stones at me.
You would not have me stoned ?

FIRST GIRL. May I not dance ?

THE KING'S THRESHOLD 91

SOLDIER. I will do nothing. You have put him out,
And now that he is out—well, leave him out.

FIRST GIRL. Do it for my sake, Peter.

SECOND GIRL. And for mine.

[Each girl as she speaks takes PETER's hand with her right hand, stroking down his arm with her left. While

SECOND GIRL is stroking his arm, FIRST GIRL leaves go and gives him the dish.

SOLDIER. Well, well ; but not your way.

[To SEANCHAN.] Here's meat for you.

It has been carried from too good a table
For men like you, and I am offering it
Because these women have made a fool of me.

[A pause.]

You mean to starve ? You will have none of it ?

I'll leave it there, where you can sniff the savour.

Snuff it, old hedgehog, and unroll yourself !
But if I were the King, I'd make you do it
With wisps of lighted straw.

SEANCHAN. You have rightly named me.
I lie rolled up under the ragged thorns
That are upon the edge of those great waters
Where all things vanish away, and I have heard

Murmurs that are the ending of all sound.
I am out of life ; I am rolled up, and yet,

92 THE KING'S THRESHOLD

Hedgehog although I am, I'll not unroll
For you, King's dog ! Go to the King,
your master.

Crouch down and wag your tail, for it may be
He has nothing now against you, and I think
The stripes of your last beating are all healed.

[*The SOLDIER has drawn his sword.*

CHAMBERLAIN [*striking up sword*]. Put up
your sword, sir ; put it up, I say !
The common sort would tear you into pieces
If you but touched him.

SOLDIER. If he's to be flattered,
Petted, cajoled, and dandled into humour,
We might as well have left him at the table.

[*Goes to one side sheathing sword.*

SEANCHAN. You must need keep your
patience yet awhile,
For I have some few mouthfuls of sweet air
To swallow before I have grown to be as civil
As any other dust.

CHAMBERLAIN. You wrong us, Seanchan.
There is none here but holds you in respect ;
And if you'd only eat out of this dish,
The King would show how much he honours
you.

[*Bowing and smiling.*

Who could imagine you'd so take to heart
Being driven from the council ? I am certain
That you, if you will only think it over,
Will understand that it is men of law,
Leaders of the King's armies, and the like,

That should sit there.

SEANCHAN. Somebody has deceived you,
Or maybe it was your own eyes that lied,
In making it appear that I was driven
From the great council. You have driven
away

The images of them that weave a dance
By the four rivers in the mountain garden.

CHAMBERLAIN. You mean we have driven
poetry away.

But that's not altogether true, for I,
As you should know, have written poetry.
And often when the table has been cleared,
And candles lighted, the King calls for me,
And I repeat it him. My poetry
Is not to be compared with yours ; but still,
Where I am honoured, poetry is honoured—
In some measure.

SEANCHAN. If you are a poet,
Cry out that the King's money would not
buy,
Nor the high circle consecrate his head,
If poets had never christened gold, and even
The moon's poor daughter, that most whey-
faced metal,
Precious ; and cry out that none alive
Would ride among the arrows with high heart,
Or scatter with an open hand, had not
Our heady craft commended wasteful virtues.
And when that story's finished, shake your
coat

94 THE KING'S THRESHOLD

Where little jewels gleam on it, and say,
A herdsman, sitting where the pigs had
trampled,

Made up a song about enchanted kings,
Who were so finely dressed, one fancied them
All fiery, and women by the churn
And children by the hearth caught up the
song

And murmured it, until the tailors heard it.

CHAMBERLAIN. If you would but eat some-
thing you'd find out.

That you have had these thoughts from lack
of food,

For hunger makes us feverish.

SEANCHAN. Cry aloud,
That when we are driven out we come again
Like a great wind that runs out of the
waste

To blow the tables flat ; and thereupon
Lie down upon the threshold till the King
Restore to us the ancient right of the poets.

MONK. You cannot shake him. I will to
the King,

And offer him consolation in his trouble,
For that man there has set his teeth to die.
And being one that hates obedience,
Discipline, and orderliness of life,
I cannot mourn him.

FIRST GIRL. 'Twas you that stirred it up.
You stirred it up that you might spoil our
dancing.

Why shouldn't we have dancing? We're not in Lent.

Yet nobody will pipe or play to us ;
And they will never do it if he die.

And that is why you are going.

MONK. What folly's this ?

FIRST GIRL. Well, if you did not do it, speak to him—

Use your authority ; make him obey you.
What harm is there in dancing ?

MONK. Hush ! begone !

Go to the fields and watch the hurley players,
Or any other place you have a mind to.

This is not woman's work.

FIRST GIRL. Come ! let's away !

We can do nothing here.

MONK. The pride of the poets !

Dancing, hurling, the country full of noise,
And King and Church neglected. Seanchan,
I'll take my leave, for you are perishing
Like all that let the wanton imagination
Carry them where it will, and it's not likely
I'll look upon your living face again.

SEANCHAN. Come nearer, nearer !

MONK. Have you some last wish ?

SEANCHAN. Stoop down, for I would
whisper it in your ear.

Has that wild God of yours, that was so wild
When you'd but lately taken the King's pay,
Grown any tamer ? He gave you all much
trouble.

96 THE KING'S THRESHOLD

MONK. Let go my habit !

SEANCHAN. Have you persuaded him
To chirp between two dishes when the King
Sits down to table ?

MONK. Let go my habit, sir !

[Crosses to centre of stage.

SEANCHAN. And maybe he has learned to
sing quite softly

Because loud singing would disturb the King,
Who is sitting drowsily among his friends
After the table has been cleared. Not yet !

[SEANCHAN has been dragged some feet
clinging to the MONK's habit.

You did not think that hands so full of
hunger

Could hold you tightly. They are not civil
yet.

I'd know if you have taught him to eat bread
From the King's hand, and perch upon his
finger.

I think he perches on the King's strong hand.
But it may be that he is still too wild.

You must not weary in your work ; a king
Is often weary, and he needs a God
To be a comfort to him.

[The MONK plucks his habit away and
goes into palace. SEANCHAN holds
up his hand as if a bird perched upon
it. He pretends to stroke the bird.

A little God,
With comfortable feathers, and bright eyes.

THE KING'S THRESHOLD 97

FIRST GIRL. There will be no more dancing
in our time,
For nobody will play the harp or the fiddle.
Let us away, for we cannot amend it,
And watch the hurley.

SECOND GIRL. Hush ! he is looking at us.

SEANCHAN. Yes, yes, go to the hurley, go
to the hurley,
Go to the hurley ! Gather up your skirts—
Run quickly ! You can remember many
love songs ;
I know it by the light that's in your eyes—
But you'll forget them. You're fair to look
upon.

Your feet delight in dancing, and your
mouths

In the slow smiling that awakens love.

The mothers that have borne you mated
rightly.

They'd little ears as thirsty as your ears
For many love songs. Go to the young men.
Are not the ruddy flesh and the thin flanks
And the broad shoulders worthy of desire ?
Go from me ! Here is nothing for your eyes.
But it is I that am singing you away—
Singing you to the young men.

[*The TWO YOUNG PRINCESSES come out
of palace. While he has been speak-
ing the GIRLS have shrunk back hold-
ing each other's hands.*

FIRST GIRL.

Be quiet !

98 THE KING'S THRESHOLD

Look who it is has come out of the house.
Princesses, we are for the hurling field.
Will you go there ?

FIRST PRINCESS. We will go with you,
Aileen.

But we must have some words with Seanchan,
For we have come to make him eat and drink.

CHAMBERLAIN. I will hold out the dish and
cup for him

While you are speaking to him of his folly,
If you desire it, Princess.

[He has taken dish and cup.]

FIRST PRINCESS. No, Finula
Will carry him the dish and I the cup.
We'll offer them ourselves.

[They take cup and dish.]

FIRST GIRL. They are so gracious ;
The dear little Princesses are so gracious.

*[PRINCESS holds out her hand for
SEANCHAN to kiss it. He does not
move.]*

Although she is holding out her hand to him,
He will not kiss it.

FIRST PRINCESS. My father bids us say
That, though he cannot have you at his table,
You may ask any other thing you like
And he will give it you. We carry you
With our own hands a dish and cup of
wine.

FIRST GIRL. Oh, look ! he has taken it !
He has taken it !

THE KING'S THRESHOLD 99

The dear Princesses ! I have always said
That nobody could refuse them anything.

[SEANCHAN *takes the cup in one hand.*

*In the other he holds for a moment
the hand of the PRINCESS.*

SEANCHAN. Oh long, soft fingers and pale
finger-tips,

Well worthy to be laid in a king's hand !
Oh, you have fair white hands, for it is certain
There is uncommon whiteness in these hands.
But there is something comes into my mind,
Princess. A little while before your birth,
I saw your mother sitting by the road
In a high chair ; and when a leper passed,
She pointed him the way into the town.
He lifted up his hand and blessed her hand—
I saw it with my own eyes. Hold out your
hands ;

I will find out if they are contaminated,
For it has come into my thoughts that maybe
The King has sent me food and drink by
hands

That are contaminated. I would see all your
hands.

You've eyes of dancers ; but hold out your
hands,

For it may be there are none sound among
you.

[*The PRINCESSES have shrunk back in terror.*

FIRST PRINCESS. He has called us lepers.

[*SOLDIER draws sword.*

100 THE KING'S THRESHOLD

CHAMBERLAIN. He's out of his mind,
And does not know the meaning of what he
said.

SEANCHAN [*standing up*]. There's no sound
hand among you—no sound hand.
Away with you ! away with all of you !
You are all lepers ! There is leprosy
Among the plates and dishes that you have
carried.
And wherefore have you brought me leper's
wine ?

[*He flings the contents of the cup in their faces.*
There, there ! I have given it to you again.
And now

Begone, or I will give my curse to you.
You have the leper's blessing, but you think
Maybe the bread will something lack in
savour

Unless you mix my curse into the dough.

[*They go out hurriedly in all directions.*
SEANCHAN *is staggering in the middle*
of the stage.

Where did I say the leprosy had come from ?
I said it came out of a leper's hand,

[*Enter CRIPPLES.*
And that he walked the highway. But that's
folly,

For he was walking up there in the sky.
And there he is even now, with his white hand
Thrust out of the blue air, and blessing them
With leprosy.

THE KING'S THRESHOLD 101

FIRST CRIPPLE. He's pointing at the moon
That's coming out up yonder, and he calls
it

Leprous, because the daylight whitens it.

SEANCHAN. He's holding up his hand
above them all—

King, noblemen, princesses—blessing all.

Who could imagine he'd have so much
patience ?

FIRST CRIPPLE [*clutching the other CRIPPLE*].
Come out of this !

SECOND CRIPPLE [*pointing to food*]. If you
don't need it, sir,

May we not carry some of it away ?

[*They cross towards food and pass in
front of SEANCHAN.*

SEANCHAN. Who's speaking ? Who are
you ?

FIRST CRIPPLE. Come out of this !

SECOND CRIPPLE. Have pity on us, that
must beg our bread

From table to table throughout the entire
world,

And yet be hungry.

SEANCHAN. But why were you born
crooked ?

What bad poet did your mothers listen to
That you were born so crooked ?

CRIPPLE. Come away !
Maybe he's cursed the food, and it might kill
us.

102 THE KING'S THRESHOLD

OTHER CRIPPLE. Yes, better come away.

[They go out.]

SEANCHAN *[staggering, and speaking wearily]*.

He has great strength
And great patience to hold his right hand
there,

Uplifted, and not wavering about.

He is much stronger than I am, much
stronger.

*[Sinks down on steps. MAYOR and
FEDELM have entered.]*

MAYOR. He is delirious now.

FEDELM.

Before I speak
Of food or drink I'll take him out of this.
For while he is on this threshold and can hear,
It may be, the voices that made mock of him,
He would not listen.

MAYOR. No, speak to him at once.
Press food upon him while delirious
And he may eat not knowing what he does.

[MAYOR goes out.]

FEDELM. Seanchan ! Seanchan !

[He remains looking into the sky.]

Can you not hear me, Seanchan ?

It is myself.

*[He looks at her, dreamily at first, then
takes her hand.]*

SEANCHAN. Is this your hand, Fedelm ?
I have been looking at another hand
That is up yonder.

FEDELM.

I have come for you.

THE KING'S THRESHOLD 103

SEANCHAN. Fedelm, I did not know that
you were here.

FEDELM. And can you not remember that
I promised
That I would come and take you home with
me
When I'd the harvest in? And now I've
come,
And you must come away, and come on the
instant.

SEANCHAN. Yes, I will come. But is the
harvest in?
This air has got a summer taste in it.

FEDELM. But is not the wild middle of the
summer
A better time to marry? Come with me
now!

SEANCHAN [*seizing her by both wrists*]. Who
taught you that? For it's a certainty,
Although I never knew it till last night,
That marriage, because it is the height of life,
Can only be accomplished to the full
In the high days of the year. I lay awake :
There had come a frenzy into the light of the
stars,

And they were coming nearer, and I knew
All in a minute they were about to marry
Clods out upon the ploughlands, to beget
A mightier race than any that has been.
But some that are within there made a noise,
And frightened them away.

104 THE KING'S THRESHOLD

FEDELM. Come with me now !
We have far to go, and daylight's running
out.

SEANCHAN. The stars had come so near
me that I caught
Their singing. It was praise of that great
race
That would be haughty, mirthful, and white-
bodied,
With a high head, and open hand, and how,
Laughing, it would take the mastery of the
world.

FEDELM. But you will tell me all about
their songs
When we're at home. You have need of
rest and care,
And I can give them you when we're at home.
And therefore let us hurry, and get us home.

SEANCHAN. It's certain that there is some
trouble here,
Although it's gone out of my memory.
And I would get away from it. Give me
your help. [*Trying to rise.*]
But why are not my pupils here to help me ?
Go, call my pupils, for I need their help.

FEDELM. Come with me now, and I will
send for them,
For I have a great room that's full of beds
I can make ready ; and there is a smooth lawn
Where they can play at hurley and sing poems
Under an apple-tree.

THE KING'S THRESHOLD 105

SEANCHAN. I know that place :
An apple-tree, and a smooth level lawn
Where the young men can sway their hurley
sticks.

[*Sings.*]

The four rivers that run there,
Through well-mown level ground,
Have come out of a blessed well
That is all bound and wound
By the great roots of an apple,
And all the fowl of the air
Have gathered in the wide branches
And keep singing there.

[FEDELM, *troubled, has covered her eyes
with her hands.*]

FEDELM. No, there are not four rivers, and
those rhymes
Praise Adam's paradise.

SEANCHAN. I can remember now,
It's out of a poem I made long ago
About the Garden in the East of the World,
And how spirits in the images of birds
Crowd in the branches of old Adam's crab-
tree.

They come before me now, and dig in the fruit
With so much gluttony, and are so drunk
With that harsh wholesome savour, that their
feathers
Are clinging one to another with the juice.
But you would lead me to some friendly place,
And I would go there quickly.

106 THE KING'S THRESHOLD

FEDELM [*helping him to rise*]. Come with me.
[*He walks slowly, supported by her, till he comes to table.*

SEANCHAN. But why am I so weak? Have I been ill?

Sweetheart, why is it that I am so weak?

[*Sinks on to seat.*

FEDELM [*goes to table*]. I'll dip this piece of bread into the wine,
For that will make you stronger for the journey.

SEANCHAN. Yes, give me bread and wine ;
that's what I want,
For it is hunger that is gnawing me.

[*He takes bread from FEDELM, hesitates, and then thrusts it back into her hand.*

But, no ; I must not eat it.

FEDELM. Eat, Seanchan.
For if you do not eat it you will die.

SEANCHAN. Why did you give me food?
Why did you come?

For had I not enough to fight against
Without your coming?

FEDELM. Eat this little crust,
Seanchan, if you have any love for me.

SEANCHAN. I must not eat it—but that's
beyond your wit.

Child ! child ! I must not eat it, though I die.

FEDELM [*passionately*]. You do not know
what love is ; for if you loved,
You would put every other thought away.

THE KING'S THRESHOLD 107

But you have never loved me.

SEANCHAN [*seizing her by wrist*]. You, a child,

Who have but seen a man out of the window,
Tell me that I know nothing about love,
And that I do not love you ? Did I not say
There was a frenzy in the light of the stars
All through the livelong night, and that the
night

Was full of marriages ? But that fight's over
And all that's done with, and I have to die.

FEDELM [*throwing her arms about him*]. I
will not be put from you, although I
think

I had not grudged it you if some great lady,
If the King's daughter, had set out your bed.
I will not give you up to death ; no, no !
And are not these white arms and this soft
neck

Better than the brown earth ?

SEANCHAN [*struggling to disengage himself*].
Begone from me !

There's treachery in those arms and in that
voice.

They're all against me. Why do you linger
there ?

How long must I endure the sight of you ?

FEDELM. O, Seanchan ! Seanchan !

SEANCHAN [*rising*]. Go where you will,
So it be out of sight and out of mind.

I cast you from me like an old torn cap,

108 THE KING'S THRESHOLD

A broken shoe, a glove without a finger,
A crooked penny ; whatever is most worth-
less.

FEDELM [*bursts into tears*]. Oh, do not
drive me from you !

SEANCHAN [*takes her in his arms*]. What
did I say,
My dove of the woods ? I was about to
curse you.

It was a frenzy. I'll unsay it all.
But you must go away.

FEDELM. Let me be near you.
I will obey like any married wife.
Let me but lie before your feet.

SEANCHAN. Come nearer. [*Kisses her*.
If I had eaten when you bid me, sweetheart,
The kiss of multitudes in times to come
Had been the poorer.

[*Enter KING from palace, followed by
the two PRINCESSES.*

KING [*to FEDELM*]. Has he eaten yet ?

FEDELM. No, King, and will not till you
have restored
The right of the poets.

KING [*coming down and standing before
SEANCHAN*]. Seanchan, you have refused
Everybody I have sent, and now
I come to you myself.

FEDELM. Come nearer, King,
He is now so weak he cannot hear your voice.

KING. Seanchan, put away your pride as I

THE KING'S THRESHOLD 109

Have put my pride away. I had your love
Not a great while ago, and now you have
planned

To put a voice by every cottage fire,
And in the night when no one sees who cries,
To cry against me till my throne has
crumbled.

And yet if I give way I must offend
My courtiers and nobles till they, too,
Strike at the crown. What would you have
of me ?

SEANCHAN. When did the poets promise
safety, King ?

KING. Seanchan, I bring you bread in my
own hands,
And bid you eat because of all these reasons,
And for this further reason, that I love you.

[SEANCHAN *pushes bread away, with
FEDELM's hand.*

You have refused, Seanchan ?

SEANCHAN. We have refused it.

KING. I have been patient, though I am a
king,
And have the means to force you. But that's
ended,

And I am but a king, and you a subject.
Nobles and courtiers, bring the poets hither ;

[*Enter COURT LADIES, MONK, SOLDIERS,
CHAMBERLAIN, and COURTIERS with
PUPILS, who have halters round their
necks.*

110 THE KING'S THRESHOLD

For you can have your way. I that was
man,

With a man's heart, am now all king again,
Speak to your master ; beg your life of him ;
Show him the halter that is round your necks.
If his heart's set upon it, he may die ;
But you shall all die with him.

[Goes up steps.

Beg your lives !

Begin, for you have little time to lose.

Begin it, you that are the oldest pupil.

OLDEST PUPIL. Die, Seanchan, and pro-
claim the right of the poets.

KING. Silence ! you are as crazy as your
master.

But that young boy, that seems the youngest
of you

I'd have him speak. Kneel down before him,
boy ;

Hold up your hands to him that you may
pluck

That milky-coloured neck out of the noose.

YOUNGEST PUPIL. Die, Seanchan, and pro-
claim the right of the poets.

SEANCHAN. Come nearer me that I may
know how face

Differs from face and touch you with my
hands.

O more than kin, O more than children could
be,

For children are but born out of our blood

THE KING'S THRESHOLD III

And share our frailty. O my chicks, my chicks !

That I have nourished underneath my wings
And fed upon my soul.

[He rises and walks down steps.]

I need no help.

He needs no help that joy has lifted up
Like some miraculous beast out of Ezekiel.
The man that dies has the chief part in the
story,

And I will mock and mock that image yonder,
That evil picture in the sky—no, no !

I have all my strength again, I will outface it.
O look upon the moon that's standing there
In the blue daylight—take note of the com-
plexion

Because it is the white of leprosy
And the contagion that afflicts mankind
Falls from the moon. When I and these are
dead

We should be carried to some windy hill
To lie there with uncovered face awhile
That mankind and that leper there may know
Dead faces laugh.

[He falls and then half rises.]

King ! King ! Dead faces laugh.

[He dies.]

OLDEST PUPIL. King, he is dead ; some
strange triumphant thought
So filled his heart with joy that it has burst,
Being grown too mighty for our frailty,

112 THE KING'S THRESHOLD

And we who gaze grow like him and abhor
The moments that come between us and that
death

You promised us.

KING. Take up his body.
Go where you please and lay it where you
please,

So that I cannot see his face or any
That cried him towards his death.

YOUNGEST PUPIL. Dead faces laugh !
The ancient right is gone, the new remains
And that is death.

*[They go towards the King holding out
their halters.]*

We are impatient men,
So gather up the halters in your hands.

KING. Drive them away.

*[He goes into the palace. The SOLDIERS
block the way before the PUPILS.]*

SOLDIER. Here is no place for you.
For he and his pretensions now are finished.
Begone before the men-at-arms are bidden
To beat you from the door.

OLDEST PUPIL. Take up his body
And cry that driven from the populous
door

He seeks high waters and the mountain birds
To claim a portion of their solitude.

*[They make a litter with cloak and
stuffs or use one discovered, heaped
with food, at the opening of the play.]*

THE KING'S THRESHOLD 113

YOUNGEST PUPIL. And cry that when they
took his ancient right

They took all common sleep ; therefore he
claims

The mountain for his mattress and his pillow.

OLDEST PUPIL. And there he can sleep on,
not noticing,

Although the world be changed from worse
to worse,

Amid the changeless clamour of the curlew.

*[They raise the litter on their shoulders
and move a few steps.]*

YOUNGEST PUPIL *[motioning to them to stop]*.

Yet make triumphant music ; sing aloud

For coming times will bless what he has
blessed

And curse what he has cursed.

OLDEST PUPIL.

No, no, be still,

Or pluck a solemn music from the strings

You wrong his greatness speaking so of
triumph.

YOUNGEST PUPIL. O silver trumpets, be
you lifted up

And cry to the great race that is to come.

Long-throated swans upon the waves of time,

Sing loudly for beyond the wall of the world

That race may hear our music and awake.

OLDEST PUPIL *[motioning the musicians to
lower their trumpets]*. Not what it leaves
behind it in the light

But what it carries with it to the dark

114 THE KING'S THRESHOLD

Exalts the soul ; nor song nor trumpet blast
Can call up races from the worsening world
To mend the wrong and mar the solitude
Of the great shade we follow to the tomb.

[FEDELM *and the PUPILS* go out carrying
the litter. Some play a mournful
music.

ON BAILE'S STRAND

TO WILLIAM FAY

*Because of the beautiful fantasy of
his playing in the character of the Fool.*

PERSONS IN THE PLAY

A FOOL.

A BLIND MAN.

CUCHULAIN, *King of Muirthemne.*

CONCHUBAR, *High King of Uladh.*

A YOUNG MAN, *Son of Cuchulain.*

KINGS AND SINGING WOMEN.

ON BAILE'S STRAND

SCENE : *A great hall at Dundevalgan, not 'Cuchulain's great ancient house' but an assembly house nearer to the sea. A big door at the back, and through the door misty light as of sea mist. There are many chairs and one long bench. One of these chairs, which is towards the front of the stage, is bigger than the others. Somewhere at the back there is a table with flagons of ale upon it and drinking-horns. There is a small door at one side of the hall. A FOOL and BLIND MAN, both ragged, and their features made grotesque and extravagant by masks, come in through the door at the back. The BLIND MAN leans upon a staff.*

FOOL. What a clever man you are though you are blind ! 'There's nobody with two eyes in his head that is as clever as you are. Who but you could have thought that the henwife sleeps every day a little at noon ? I would never be able to steal anything if you didn't tell me where to look for it. And what a good cook you are ! You take the

fowl out of my hands after I have stolen it and plucked it, and you put it into the big pot at the fire there, and I can go out and run races with the witches at the edge of the waves and get an appetite, and when I've got it, there's the hen waiting inside for me, done to the turn.

BLIND MAN [*who is feeling about with his stick*]. Done to the turn.

FOOL [*putting his arm round BLIND MAN'S neck*]. Come now, I'll have a leg and you'll have a leg, and we'll draw lots for the wish-bone, I'll be praising you, I'll be praising you while we're eating it, for your good plans and for your good cooking. There's nobody in the world like you, Blind Man. Come, come. Wait a minute. I shouldn't have closed the door. There are some that look for me, and I wouldn't like them not to find me. Don't tell it to anybody, Blind Man. There are some that follow me. Boann herself out of the river and Fand out of the deep sea. Witches they are, and they come by in the wind, and they cry, 'Give a kiss, Fool, give a kiss,' that's what they cry. That's wide enough. All the witches can come in now. I wouldn't have them beat at the door and say: 'Where is the Fool? Why has he put a lock on the door?' Maybe they'll hear the bubbling of the pot and come in and sit on the ground. But we

won't give them any of the fowl. Let them go back to the sea, let them go back to the sea.

BLIND MAN [*feeling legs of big chair with his hands*]. Ah ! [*Then, in a louder voice as he feels the back of it.*] Ah—ah—

FOOL. Why do you say ' Ah-ah ' ?

BLIND MAN. I know the big chair. It is to-day the High King Conchubar is coming. They have brought out his chair. He is going to be Cuchulain's master in earnest from this day out. It is that he's coming for.

FOOL. He must be a great man to be Cuchulain's master.

BLIND MAN. So he is. He is a great man. He is over all the rest of the kings of Ireland.

FOOL. Cuchulain's master ! I thought Cuchulain could do anything he liked.

BLIND MAN. So he did, so he did. But he ran too wild, and Conchubar is coming to-day to put an oath upon him that will stop his rambling and make him as biddable as a house-dog and keep him always at his hand. He will sit in this chair and put the oath upon him.

FOOL. How will he do that ?

BLIND MAN. You have no wits to understand such things. [*The BLIND MAN has got into the chair.*] He will sit up in this chair and he'll say : ' Take the oath, Cuchulain. I bid you take the oath. Do as I tell you. What are your wits compared with mine, and

what are your riches compared with mine ? And what sons have you to pay your debts and to put a stone over you when you die ? Take the oath, I tell you. Take a strong oath.'

FOOL [*crumpling himself up and whining*]. I will not. I'll take no oath. I want my dinner.

BLIND MAN. Hush, hush ! It is not done yet.

FOOL. You said it was done to a turn.

BLIND MAN. Did I, now ? Well, it might be done, and not done. The wings might be white, but the legs might be red. The flesh might stick hard to the bones and not come away in the teeth. But, believe me, Fool, it will be well done before you put your teeth in it.

FOOL. My teeth are growing long with the hunger.

BLIND MAN. I'll tell you a story—the kings have story-tellers while they are waiting for their dinner—I will tell you a story with a fight in it, a story with a champion in it, and a ship and a queen's son that has his mind set on killing somebody that you and I know.

FOOL. Who is that ? Who is he coming to kill ?

BLIND MAN. Wait, now, till you hear. When you were stealing the fowl, I was lying

in a hole in the sand, and I heard three men coming with a shuffling sort of noise. They were wounded and groaning.

FOOL. Go on. Tell me about the fight.

BLIND MAN. There had been a fight, a great fight, a tremendous great fight. A young man had landed on the shore, the guardians of the shore had asked his name, and he had refused to tell it, and he had killed one, and others had run away.

FOOL. That's enough. Come on now to the fowl. I wish it was bigger. I wish it was as big as a goose.

BLIND MAN. Hush ! I haven't told you all. I know who that young man is. I heard the men who were running away say he had red hair, that he had come from Aoife's country, that he was coming to kill Cuchulain.

FOOL. Nobody can do that.

[*To a tune.*]

Cuchulain has killed kings,
Kings and sons of kings,
Dragons out of the water,
And witches out of the air,
Banachas and Bonochas and people of the woods.

BLIND MAN. Hush ! hush !

FOOL [*still singing*].

Witches that steal the milk,
Fomor that steal the children,
Hags that have heads like hares,

Hares that have claws like witches,
All riding a cock-horse

[*Spoken.*]

Out of the very bottom of the bitter black north.

BLIND MAN. Hush, I say !

FOOL. Does Cuchulain know that he is coming to kill him ?

BLIND MAN. How would he know that with his head in the clouds ? He doesn't care for common fighting. Why would he put himself out, and nobody in it but that young man ? Now if it were a white fawn that might turn into a queen before morning—

FOOL. Come to the fowl. I wish it was as big as a pig ; a fowl with goose grease and pig's crackling.

BLIND MAN. No hurry, no hurry. I know whose son it is. I wouldn't tell anybody else, but I will tell you,—a secret is better to you than your dinner. You like being told secrets.

FOOL. Tell me the secret.

BLIND MAN. That young man is Aoife's son. I am sure it is Aoife's son, it flows in upon me that it is Aoife's son. You have often heard me talking of Aoife, the great woman-fighter Cuchulain got the mastery over in the north ?

FOOL. I know, I know. She is one of

those cross queens that live in hungry Scotland.

BLIND MAN. I am sure it is her son. I was in Aoife's country for a long time.

FOOL. That was before you were blinded for putting a curse upon the wind.

BLIND MAN. There was a boy in her house that had her own red colour on him and everybody said he was to be brought up to kill Cuchulain, that she hated Cuchulain. She used to put a helmet on a pillar-stone and call it Cuchulain and set him casting at it. There is a step outside—Cuchulain's step.

[CUCHULAIN *passes by in the mist outside the big door.*]

FOOL. Where is Cuchulain going?

BLIND MAN. He is going to meet Conchubar that has bidden him to take the oath.

FOOL. Ah, an oath, Blind Man. How can I remember so many things at once? Who is going to take an oath?

BLIND MAN. Cuchulain is going to take an oath to Conchubar who is High King.

FOOL. What a mix-up you make of everything, Blind Man! You were telling me one story, and now you are telling me another story. . . . How can I get the hang of it at the end if you mix everything at the beginning? Wait till I settle it out. There now, there's Cuchulain [*he points to one foot*], and

there is the young man [*he points to the other foot*] that is coming to kill him, and Cuchulain doesn't know. But where's Conchubar? [*Takes bag from side.*] That's Conchubar with all his riches—Cuchulain, young man, Conchubar.—And where's Aoife? [*Throws up cap.*] There is Aoife, high up on the mountains in high hungry Scotland. Maybe it is not true after all. Maybe it was your own making up. It's many a time you cheated me before with your lies. Come to the cooking-pot, my stomach is pinched and rusty. Would you have it to be creaking like a gate?

BLIND MAN. I tell you it's true. And more than that is true. If you listen to what I say, you'll forget your stomach.

FOOL. I won't.

BLIND MAN. Listen. I know who the young man's father is, but I won't say. I would be afraid to say. Ah, Fool, you would forget everything if you could know who the young man's father is.

FOOL. Who is it? Tell me now quick, or I'll shake you. Come, out with it, or I'll shake you.

[*A murmur of voices in the distance.*]

BLIND MAN. Wait, wait. There's somebody coming. . . . It is Cuchulain is coming. He's coming back with the High King. Go and ask Cuchulain. He'll tell you. It's

little you'll care about the cooking-pot when you have asked Cuchulain that . . .

[BLIND MAN *goes out by side door.*

FOOL. I'll ask him. Cuchulain will know. He was in Aoife's country. [*Goes up stage.*] I'll ask him. [*Turns and goes down stage.*] But, no, I won't ask him, I would be afraid. [*Going up again.*] Yes, I will ask him. What harm in asking? The Blind Man said I was to ask him. [*Going down.*] No, no. I'll not ask him. He might kill me. I have but killed hens and geese and pigs. He has killed kings. [*Goes up again almost to big door.*] Who says I'm afraid? I'm not afraid. I'm no coward. I'll ask him. No, no, Cuchulain, I'm not going to ask you.

He has killed kings,
Kings and the sons of kings,
Dragons out of the water,
And witches out of the air,
Banachas and Bonachas and people of the woods.

[FOOL *goes out by side door, the last words being heard outside.* CUCHULAIN and CONCHUBAR *enter through the big door at the back. While they are still outside, CUCHULAIN'S voice is heard raised in anger. He is a dark man, something over forty years of age. CONCHUBAR is much older and carries a long staff, elaborately carved or with an elaborate gold handle.*

CUCHULAIN. Because I have killed men
without your bidding ;
And have rewarded others at my own
pleasure,
Because of half a score of trifling things
You'd lay this oath upon me, and now—
and now
You add another pebble to the heap,
And I must be your man, well-nigh your
bondsman,
Because a youngster out of Aoife's country
Has found the shore ill-guarded.

CONCHUBAR. He came to land
While you were somewhere out of sight and
hearing,
Hunting or dancing with your wild com-
panions.

CUCHULAIN. He can be driven out. I'll
not be bound.
I'll dance or hunt, or quarrel or make love,
Wherever and whenever I've a mind to.
If time had not put water in your blood,
You never would have thought it.

CONCHUBAR. I would leave
A strong and settled country to my children.

CUCHULAIN. And I must be obedient in
all things ;
Give up my will to yours ; go where you
please ;
Come when you call ; sit at the council-
board

Among the unshapely bodies of old men ;
I whose mere name has kept this country
safe,

I that in early days have driven out
Maeve of Cruachan and the northern pirates,
The hundred kings of Sorchu, and the kings
Out of the Garden in the East of the World.
Must I, that held you on the throne when all
Had pulled you from it, swear obedience
As if I were some cattle-raising king ?
Are my shins speckled with the heat of the
fire,

Or have my hands no skill but to make figures
Upon the ashes with a stick ? Am I
So slack and idle that I need a whip
Before I serve you ?

CONCHUBAR. No, no whip, Cuchulain,
But every day my children come and say :
' This man is growing harder to endure.
How can we be at safety with this man
That nobody can buy or bid or bind ?
We shall be at his mercy when you are gone ;
He burns the earth as if he were a fire,
And time can never touch him.'

CUCHULAIN. And so the tale
Grows finer yet ; and I am to obey
Whatever child you set upon the throne,
As if it were yourself !

CONCHUBAR. Most certainly.
I am High King, my son shall be High King ;
And you for all the wildness of your blood,

And though your father came out of the sun,
Are but a little king and weigh but light
In anything that touches government,
If put into the balance with my children.

CUCHULAIN. It's well that we should speak
our minds out plainly,
For when we die we shall be spoken of
In many countries. We in our young days
Have seen the heavens like a burning cloud
Brooding upon the world, and being more
Than men can be now that cloud's lifted up,
We should be the more truthful. Conchubar,
I do not like your children—they have no
pith,
No marrow in their bones, and will lie soft
Where you and I lie hard.

CONCHUBAR. You rail at them
Because you have no children of your own.

CUCHULAIN. I think myself most lucky
that I leave
No pallid ghost or mockery of a man
To drift and mutter in the corridors,
Where I have laughed and sung.

CONCHUBAR. That is not true,
For all your boasting of the truth between us ;
For there is no man having house and lands,
That have been in the one family
And called by the one name for centuries,
But is made miserable if he know
They are to pass into a stranger's keeping,
As yours will pass.

CUCHULAIN. The most of men feel that,
But you and I leave names upon the harp.

CONCHUBAR. You play with arguments as
lawyers do,
And put no heart in them. I know your
thoughts,
For we have slept under the one cloak and
drunk
From the one wine cup. I know you to the
bone.

I have heard you cry, aye in your very
sleep,
'I have no son,' and with such bitterness
That I have gone upon my knees and prayed
That it might be amended.

CUCHULAIN. For you thought
That I should be as biddable as others
Had I their reason for it ; but that's not
true ;
For I would need a weightier argument
Than one that marred me in the copying,
As I have that clean hawk out of the air
That, as men say, begot this body of mine
Upon a mortal woman.

CONCHUBAR. Now as ever
You mock at every reasonable hope,
And would have nothing, or impossible
things.
What eye has ever looked upon the child
Would satisfy a mind like that ?

CUCHULAIN.

I would leave

My house and name to none that would not
face

Even myself in battle.

CONCHUBAR. Being swift of foot,
And making light of every common chance,
You should have overtaken on the hills
Some daughter of the air, or on the shore
A daughter of the Country-under-Wave.

CUCHULAIN. I am not blasphemous.

CONCHUBAR. Yet you despise
Our queens, and would not call a child your
own,

If one of them had borne him.

CUCHULAIN. I have not said it.

CONCHUBAR. Ah ! I remember I have
heard you boast,
When the ale was in your blood, that there
was one

In Scotland, where you had learnt the trade
of war,

That had a stone-pale cheek and red-brown
hair ;

And that although you had loved other
women,

You'd sooner that fierce woman of the camp
Bore you a son than any queen among them.

CUCHULAIN. You call her a ' fierce woman
of the camp,'

For having lived among the spinning-wheels,
You'd have no woman near that would not
say,

' Ah ! how wise ! ' ' What will you have
for supper ? '

' What shall I wear that I may please you,
sir ? '

And keep that humming through the day and
night

For ever. A fierce woman of the camp !

But I am getting angry about nothing.

You have never seen her. Ah ! Conchubar,
had you seen her

With that high, laughing, turbulent head of
hers

Thrown backward, and the bowstring at her
ear,

Or sitting at the fire with those grave eyes

Full of good counsel as it were with wine,

Or when love ran through all the lineaments

Of her wild body—although she had no child,

None other had all beauty, queen, or lover,

Or was so fitted to give birth to kings.

CONCHUBAR. There's nothing I can say
but drifts you farther

From the one weighty matter. That very
woman—

For I know well that you are praising Aoife—

Now hates you and will leave no subtilty

Unknotted that might run into a noose

About your throat, no army in idleness

That might bring ruin on this land you serve.

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

I never have known love but as a kiss
 In the mid-battle, and a difficult truce
 Of oil and water, candles and dark night,
 Hillside and hollow, the hot-footed sun,
 And the cold, sliding, slippery-footed
 moon—

A brief forgiveness between opposites
 That have been hatreds for three times the age
 Of this long-'stablished ground.

CONCHUBAR.

Listen to me.

Aoife makes war on us, and every day
 Our enemies grow greater and beat the walls
 More bitterly, and you within the walls
 Are every day more turbulent ; and yet,
 When I would speak about these things, your
 fancy

Runs as it were a swallow on the wind.

*[Outside the door in the blue light of the
 sea mist are many old and young
 KINGS ; amongst them are three
 WOMEN, two of whom carry a bowl of
 fire. The third, in what follows,
 puts from time to time fragrant herbs
 into the fire so that it flickers up into
 brighter flame.]*

Look at the door and what men gather
 there—

Old counsellors that steer the land with me,
 And younger kings, the dancers and harp-
 players

That follow in your tumults, and all these

Are held there by the one anxiety.
Will you be bound into obedience
And so make this land safe from them and
theirs ?

You are but half a king and I but half ;
I need your might of hand and burning heart,
And you my wisdom.

CUCHULAIN [*going near to door*]. Nestlings
of a high nest,
Hawks that have followed me into the air
And looked upon the sun, we'll out of this
And sail upon the wind once more. This king
Would have me take an oath to do his will,
And having listened to his tune from morn-
ing,

I will no more of it. Run to the stable
And set the horses to the chariot-pole,
And send a messenger to the harp-players.
We'll find a level place among the woods,
And dance awhile.

A YOUNG KING. Cuchulain, take the oath.
There is none here that would not have you
take it.

CUCHULAIN. You'd have me take it ? Are
you of one mind ?

THE KINGS. All, all, all, all !

A YOUNG KING. Do what the High King
bids you.

CONCHUBAR. There is not one but dreads
this turbulence
Now that they're settled men.

136 ON BAILE'S STRAND

CUCHULAIN. Are you so changed,
Or have I grown more dangerous of late ?
But that's not it. I understand it all.
It's you that have changed. You've wives
and children now,
And for that reason cannot follow one
That lives like a bird's flight from tree to
tree.—
It's time the years put water in my blood
And drowned the wildness of it, for all's
changed,
But that unchanged.—I'll take what oath
you will :
The moon, the sun, the water, light, or air,
I do not care how binding.

CONCHUBAR. On this fire
That has been lighted from your hearth and
mine ;
The older men shall be my witnesses,
The younger, yours. The holders of the
fire
Shall purify the thresholds of the house
With waving fire, and shut the outer door,
According to the custom ; and sing rhyme
That has come down from the old law-makers
To blow the witches out. Considering
That the wild will of man could be oath-
bound,
But that a woman's could not, they bid us
sing
Against the will of woman at its wildest

In the shape-changers that run upon the
wind.

[CONCHUBAR *has gone on to his throne.*

THE WOMEN.

[*They sing in a very low voice after the first few words so that the others all but drown their words.*

May this fire have driven out
The shape-changers that can put
Ruin on a great king's house
Until all be ruinous.
Names whereby a man has known
The threshold and the hearthstone,
Gather on the wind and drive
The women, none can kiss and thrive,
For they are but whirling wind,
Out of memory and mind.
They would make a prince decay
With light images of clay,
Planted in the running wave ;
Or, for many shapes they have,
They would change them into hounds
Until he had died of his wounds,
Though the change were but a whim ;
Or they'd hurl a spell at him,
That he follow with desire
Bodies that can never tire,
Or grow kind, for they anoint
All their bodies, joint by joint,
With a miracle-working juice
That is made out of the grease
Of the ungoverned unicorn.
But the man is thrice forlorn,
Emptied, ruined, wracked, and lost,
That they follow, for at most
They will give him kiss for kiss ;

While they murmur, 'After this
 Hatred may be sweet to the taste.'
 Those wild hands that have embraced
 All his body can but shove
 At the burning wheel of love,
 Till the side of hate comes up.
 Therefore in this ancient cup
 May the sword-blades drink their fill
 Of the homebrew there, until
 They will have for masters none
 But the threshold and hearthstone.

CUCHULAIN [*speaking, while they are singing*]. I'll take and keep this oath, and
 from this day
 I shall be what you please, my chicks, my
 nestlings.
 Yet I had thought you were of those that
 praised
 Whatever life could make the pulse run
 quickly,
 Even though it were brief, and that you held
 That a free gift was better than a forced.—
 But that's all over.—I will keep it, too,
 I never gave a gift and took it again.
 If the wild horse should break the chariot-
 pole,
 It would be punished. Should that be in
 the oath?

[*Two of the WOMEN, still singing, crouch
 in front of him holding the bowl over
 their heads. He spreads his hands
 over the flame.*]

I swear to be obedient in all things
To Conchubar, and to uphold his children.

CONCHUBAR. We are one being, as these
flames are one :

I give my wisdom, and I take your strength.
Now thrust the swords into the flame, and

pray

That they may serve the threshold and the
hearthstone

With faithful service.

[*The KINGS kneel in a semicircle before
the two WOMEN and CUCHULAIN,
who thrusts his sword into the flame.
They all put the points of their swords
into the flame. The third WOMAN is
at the back near the big door.*

CUCHULAIN. O pure, glittering ones
That should be more than wife or friend or
mistress,

Give us the enduring will, the unquenchable
hope,

The friendliness of the sword !—

[*The song grows louder, and the last
words ring out clearly. There is a
loud knocking at the door, and a cry
of 'Open ! open !'*

CONCHUBAR. Some king that has been
loitering on the way.

Open the door, for I would have all know
That the oath's finished and Cuchulain
bound,

And that the swords are drinking up the flame.

[The door is opened by the third WOMAN, and a YOUNG MAN with a drawn sword enters.]

YOUNG MAN. I am of Aoife's country.

[The KINGS rush towards him. CUCHULAIN throws himself between.]

CUCHULAIN. Put up your swords.
He is but one. Aoife is far away.

YOUNG MAN. I have come alone into the midst of you
To weigh this sword against Cuchulain's sword.

CONCHUBAR. And are you noble? for if of common seed,
You cannot weigh your sword against his sword
But in mixed battle.

YOUNG MAN. I am under bonds
To tell my name to no man; but it's noble.

CONCHUBAR. But I would know your name and not your bonds.
You cannot speak in the Assembly House,
If you are not noble.

FIRST OLD KING. Answer the High King!

YOUNG MAN. I will give no other proof than the hawk gives—
That it's no sparrow!

[He is silent for a moment, then speaks to all.]
Yet look upon me, kings.

I, too, am of that ancient seed, and carry
The signs about this body and in these bones.

CUCHULAIN. To have shown the hawk's
grey feather is enough,
And you speak highly, too. Give me that
helmet.

I'd thought they had grown weary sending
champions.

That sword and belt will do. This fighting's
welcome.

The High King there has promised me his
wisdom ;

But the hawk's sleepy till its well-beloved

Cries out amid the acorns, or it has seen
Its enemy like a speck upon the sun.

What's wisdom to the hawk, when that clear
eye

Is burning nearer up in the high air ?

[*Looks hard at YOUNG MAN ; then
comes down steps and grasps YOUNG
MAN by shoulder.*]

Hither into the light.

[*To CONCHUBAR.*] The very tint
Of her that I was speaking of but now.
Not a pin's difference.

[*To YOUNG MAN.*] You are from the North
Where there are many that have that tint of
hair—

Red-brown, the light red-brown. Come
nearer, boy,

For I would have another look at you.

There's more likeness—a pale, a stone-pale
cheek.

What brought you, boy ? Have you no fear
of death ?

YOUNG MAN. Whether I live or die is in
the gods' hands.

CUCHULAIN. That is all words, all words ;
a young man's talk.

I am their plough, their harrow, their very
strength ;

For he that's in the sun begot this body
Upon a mortal woman, and I have heard tell
It seemed as if he had outrun the moon ;
That he must follow always through waste
heaven,

He loved so happily. He'll be but slow
To break a tree that was so sweetly planted.
Let's see that arm. I'll see it if I choose.
That arm had a good father and a good
mother,

But it is not like this.

YOUNG MAN. You are mocking me ;
You think I am not worthy to be fought.
But I'll not wrangle but with this talkative
knife.

CUCHULAIN. Put up your sword ; I am
not mocking you.

I'd have you for my friend, but if it's not
Because you have a hot heart and a cold eye,
I cannot tell the reason.

[To CONCHUBAR.] He has got her fierceness,

And nobody is as fierce as those pale women.
But I will keep him with me, Conchubar,
That he may set my memory upon her
When the day's fading.—You will stop with
us,

And we will hunt the deer and the wild bulls ;
And, when we have grown weary, light our
fires

Between the wood and water, or on some
mountain

Where the shape-changers of the morning
come.

The High King there would make a mock
of me

Because I did not take a wife among them.

Why do you hang your head ? It's a good
life :

The head grows prouder in the light of the
dawn,

And friendship thickens in the murmuring
dark

Where the spare hazels meet the wool-white
foam.

But I can see there's no more need for words
And that you'll be my friend from this day
out.

CONCHUBAR. He has come hither not in
his own name

But in Queen Aoife's, and has challenged us
In challenging the foremost man of us all.

CUCHULAIN. Well, well, what matter ?

CONCHUBAR. You think it does not matter;
 And that a fancy lighter than the air,
 A whim of the moment has more matter in it.
 For having none that shall reign after you,
 You cannot think as I do, who would leave
 A throne too high for insult.

CUCHULAIN. Let your children
 Re-mortar their inheritance, as we have,
 And put more muscle on.—I'll give you gifts,
 But I'd have something too—that arm-ring,
 boy.

We'll have this quarrel out when you are
 older.

YOUNG MAN. There is no man I'd sooner
 have my friend
 Than you, whose name has gone about the
 world

As if it had been the wind ; but Aoife'd say
 I had turned coward.

CUCHULAIN. I will give you gifts
 That Aoife'll know, and all her people know,
 To have come from me. [*Showing cloak.*

My father gave me this.
 He came to try me, rising up at dawn
 Out of the cold dark of the rich sea.
 He challenged me to battle, but before
 My sword had touched his sword, told me
 his name,

Gave me this cloak, and vanished. It was
 woven

By women of the Country-under-Wave

Out of the fleeces of the sea. O ! tell her
I was afraid, or tell her what you will.
No ; tell her that I heard a raven croak
On the north side of the house, and was
afraid.

CONCHUBAR. Some witch of the air has
troubled Cuchulain's mind.

CUCHULAIN. No witchcraft. His head is
like a woman's head
I had fancy for.

CONCHUBAR. A witch of the air
Can make a leaf confound us with memories.
They run upon the wind and hurl the spells
That make us nothing, out of the invisible
wind.

They have gone to school to learn the trick
of it.

CUCHULAIN. No, no—there's nothing out
of common here ;
The winds are innocent.—That arm-ring,
boy.

A KING. If I've your leave I'll take this
challenge up.

ANOTHER KING. No, give it me, High
King, for this wild Aoife
Has carried off my slaves.

ANOTHER KING. No, give it me,
For she has harried me in house and herd.

ANOTHER KING. I claim this fight.

OTHER KINGS [*together*]. And I ! And I !
And I !

CUCHULAIN. Back ! back ! Put up your
swords ! Put up your swords !
There's none alive that shall accept a
challenge

I have refused. Laegaire, put up your
sword !

YOUNG MAN. No, let them come. If
they've a mind for it,
I'll try it out with any two together.

CUCHULAIN. That's spoken as I'd have
spoken it at your age.
But you are in my house. Whatever man
Would fight with you shall fight it out with
me.

They're dumb, they're dumb. How many
of you would meet [Draws sword.

This mutterer, this old whistler, this sand-
piper,

This edge that's greyer than the tide, this
mouse

That's gnawing at the timbers of the world,
This, this—Boy, I would meet them all in
arms

If I'd a son like you. He would avenge me
When I have withstood for the last time the
men

Whose fathers, brothers, sons, and friends I
have killed

Upholding Conchubar, when the four pro-
vinces

Have gathered with the ravens over them.

But I'd need no avenger. You and I
Would scatter them like water from a dish.

YOUNG MAN. We'll stand by one another
from this out.

Here is the ring.

CUCHULAIN. No, turn and turn about.
But my turn's first because I am the older.

[*Spreading out cloak.*]

Nine queens out of the Country-under-Wave
Have woven it with the fleeces of the sea
And they were long embroidering at it.—

Boy,

If I had fought my father, he'd have killed me,
As certainly as if I had a son
And fought with him, I should be deadly to
him ;

For the old fiery fountains are far off
And every day there is less heat o' the blood.

CONCHUBAR [*in a loud voice*]. No more of
this. I will not have this friendship.

Cuchulain is my man, and I forbid it.

He shall not go unfought, for I myself—

CUCHULAIN. I will not have it.

CONCHUBAR. You lay commands on me ?

CUCHULAIN [*seizing CONCHUBAR*]. You
shall not stir, High King. I'll hold
you there.

CONCHUBAR. Witchcraft has maddened
you.

THE KINGS [*shouting*]. Yes, witchcraft !
witchcraft !

FIRST OLD KING. Some witch has worked
upon your mind, Cuchulain.

The head of that young man seemed like a
woman's

You'd had a fancy for. Then of a sudden
You laid your hands on the High King
himself !

CUCHULAIN. And laid my hands on the
High King himself ?

CONCHUBAR. Some witch is floating in the
air above us.

CUCHULAIN. Yes, witchcraft, witchcraft !
Witches of the air !

[To YOUNG MAN.] Why did you ? Who was
it set you to this work ?

Out, out ! I say, for now it's sword on
sword !

YOUNG MAN. But . . . but I did not.

CUCHULAIN. Out, I say, out, out !

[YOUNG MAN goes out followed by

CUCHULAIN. *The KINGS follow
them out with confused cries, and
words one can hardly hear because
of the noise. Some cry, 'Quicker,
quicker !' 'Why are you so
long at the door ?' 'We'll be
too late !' 'Have they begun to
fight ?' 'Can you see if they are
fighting ?' and so on. Their voices
drown each other. The three WOMEN
are left alone.*

FIRST WOMAN. I have seen, I have seen !

SECOND WOMAN. What do you cry aloud?

FIRST WOMAN. The ever-living have shown
me what's to come.

THIRD WOMAN. How ? Where ?

FIRST WOMAN. In the ashes of the bowl.

SECOND WOMAN. While you were holding
it between your hands ?

THIRD WOMAN. Speak quickly !

FIRST WOMAN. I have seen Cuchulain's
roof-tree

Leap into fire, and the walls split and blacken.

SECOND WOMAN. Cuchulain has gone out
to die.

THIRD WOMAN.

O ! O !

SECOND WOMAN. Who could have thought
that one so great as he

Should meet his end at this unnoted sword !

FIRST WOMAN. Life drifts between a fool
and a blind man

To the end, and nobody can know his end.

SECOND WOMAN. Come, look upon the
quenching of this greatness.

*[The other two go to the door, but they
stop for a moment upon the threshold
and wail.]*

FIRST WOMAN. No crying out, for there'll
be need of cries

And rending of the hair when it's all
finished.

[The WOMEN go out. There is the

sound of clashing swords from time to time during what follows.

Enter the FOOL dragging the BLIND MAN.

FOOL. You have eaten it, you have eaten it ! You have left me nothing but the bones.

[He throws BLIND MAN down by big chair.

BLIND MAN. O, that I should have to endure such a plague ! O, I ache all over ! O, I am pulled to pieces ! This is the way you pay me all the good I have done you.

FOOL. You have eaten it ! You have told me lies. I might have known you had eaten it when I saw your slow, sleepy walk. Lie there till the kings come. O, I will tell Conchubar and Cuchulain and all the kings about you !

BLIND MAN. What would have happened to you but for me, and you without your wits ? If I did not take care of you, what would you do for food and warmth !

FOOL. You take care of me ? You stay safe, and send me into every kind of danger. You sent me down the cliff for gulls' eggs while you warmed your blind eyes in the sun ; and then you ate all that were good for food. You left me the eggs that were neither egg nor bird. *[BLIND MAN tries to rise ; FOOL makes him lie down again.]* Keep quiet now, till I shut the door. There is some noise outside—a high vexing noise, so that I can't be listening to myself. *[Shuts the big door.]*

Why can't they be quiet ! why can't they be quiet ! [BLIND MAN *tries to get away.*] Ah ! you would get away, would you ! [*Follows BLIND MAN and brings him back.*] Lie there ! lie there ! No, you won't get away ! Lie there till the kings come. I'll tell them all about you. I will tell it all. How you sit warming yourself, when you have made me light a fire of sticks, while I sit blowing it with my mouth. Do you not always make me take the windy side of the bush when it blows, and the rainy side when it rains.

BLIND MAN. Oh, good Fool ! listen to me. Think of the care I have taken of you. I have brought you to many a warm hearth, where there was a good welcome for you, but you would not stay there ; you were always wandering about.

FOOL. The last time you brought me in it was not I who wandered away, but you that got put out because you took the crubeen out of the pot when nobody was looking. Keep quiet, now !

CUCHULAIN [*rushing in*]. Witchcraft ! There is no witchcraft on the earth, or among the witches of the air, that these hands cannot break.

FOOL. Listen to me, Cuchulain. I left him turning the fowl at the fire. He ate it all, though I had stolen it. He left me nothing but the feathers.

CUCHULAIN. Fill me a horn of ale !

BLIND MAN. I gave him what he likes best. You do not know how vain this fool is. He likes nothing so well as a feather.

FOOL. He left me nothing but the bones and feathers. Nothing but the feathers, though I had stolen it.

CUCHULAIN. Give me that horn. Quarrels here, too ! [*Drinks.*] What is there between you two that is worth a quarrel ? Out with it !

BLIND MAN. Where would he be but for me ? I must be always thinking—thinking to get food for the two of us, and when we've got it, if the moon is at the full or the tide on the turn, he'll leave the rabbit in the snare till it is full of maggots, or let the trout slip back through his hands into the stream.

[*The FOOL has begun singing while the BLIND MAN is speaking.*

FOOL [*singing*].

When you were an acorn on the tree-top,
Then was I an eagle cock ;
Now that you are a withered old block,
Still am I an eagle cock.

BLIND MAN. Listen to him, now. That's the sort of talk I have to put up with day out, day in.

[*The FOOL is putting the feathers into his hair. CUCHULAIN takes a hand-*

ful of feathers out of a heap the FOOL has on the bench beside him, and out of the FOOL's hair, and begins to wipe the blood from his sword with them.

FOOL. He has taken my feathers to wipe his sword. It is blood that he is wiping from his sword.

CUCHULAIN [*goes up to door at back and throws away feathers*]. They are standing about his body. They will not awaken him, for all his witchcraft.

BLIND MAN. It is that young champion that he has killed. He that came out of Aoife's country.

CUCHULAIN. He thought to have saved himself with witchcraft.

FOOL. That blind man there said he would kill you. He came from Aoife's country to kill you. That blind man said they had taught him every kind of weapon that he might do it. But I always knew that you would kill him.

CUCHULAIN [*to the BLIND MAN*]. You knew him, then?

BLIND MAN. I saw him, when I had my eyes, in Aoife's country.

CUCHULAIN. You were in Aoife's country?

BLIND MAN. I knew him and his mother there.

CUCHULAIN. He was about to speak of her when he died.

BLIND MAN. He was a queen's son.

CUCHULAIN. What queen? what queen?
[*Seizes BLIND MAN, who is now sitting upon the bench.*] Was it Scathach? There were many queens. All the rulers there were queens.

BLIND MAN. No, not Scathach.

CUCHULAIN. It was Uathach, then?
Speak! speak!

BLIND MAN. I cannot speak; you are clutching me too tightly. [CUCHULAIN *lets him go.*] I cannot remember who it was. I am not certain. It was some queen.

FOOL. He said a while ago that the young man was Aoife's son.

CUCHULAIN. She? No, no! She had no son when I was there.

FOOL. That blind man there said that she owned him for her son.

CUCHULAIN. I had rather he had been some other woman's son. What father had he? A soldier out of Alba? She was an amorous woman—a proud, pale, amorous woman.

BLIND MAN. None knew whose son he was.

CUCHULAIN. None knew! Did you know, old listener at doors?

BLIND MAN. No, no; I knew nothing.

FOOL. He said a while ago that he heard Aoife boast that she'd never but the one lover, and he the only man that had overcome her in battle.

[*Pause.*]

BLIND MAN. Somebody is trembling, Fool !
The bench is shaking. Why are you
trembling ? Is Cuchulain going to hurt us ?
It was not I who told you, Cuchulain.

FOOL. It is Cuchulain who is trembling.
It is Cuchulain who is shaking the bench.

BLIND MAN. It is his own son he has slain.

CUCHULAIN. 'Twas they that did it, the
pale windy people.

Where ? where ? where ? My sword
against the thunder !

But no, for they have always been my friends ;
And though they love to blow a smoking coal
Till it's all flame, the wars they blow aflame
Are full of glory, and heart up-lifting pride,
And not like this. The wars they love
awaken

Old fingers and the sleepy strings of harps.
Who did it then ? Are you afraid ? Speak
out !

For I have put you under my protection,
And will reward you well. Dubthach the
Chafer ?

He'd an old grudge. No, for he is with
Maeve.

Laegaire did it ! Why do you not speak ?
What is this house ? [*Pause.*] Now I
remember all.

[*Comes before CONCHUBAR's chair, and
strikes out with his sword, as if
CONCHUBAR was sitting upon it.*]

'Twas you who did it—you who sat up there
With your old rod of kingship, like a
magpie

Nursing a stolen spoon. No, not a magpie,
A maggot that is eating up the earth !

Yes, but a magpie, for he's flown away.

Where did he fly to ?

BLIND MAN. He is outside the door.

CUCHULAIN. Outside the door ?

BLIND MAN. Between the door and the sea.

CUCHULAIN. Conchubar, Conchubar ! the
sword into your heart ?

*[He rushes out. Pause. FOOL creeps
up to the big door and looks after him.]*

FOOL. He is going up to King Conchubar.
They are all about the young man. No, no,
he is standing still. There is a great wave
going to break, and he is looking at it. Ah !
now he is running down to the sea, but he
is holding up his sword as if he were going
into a fight. *[Pause.]* Well struck ! well
struck !

BLIND MAN. What is he doing now ?

FOOL. Oh ! he is fighting the waves !

BLIND MAN. He sees King Conchubar's
crown on every one of them.

FOOL. There, he has struck at a big one !
He has struck the crown off it ; he has made
the foam fly. There again, another big one !

BLIND MAN. Where are the kings ? What
are the kings doing ?

FOOL. They are shouting and running down to the shore, and the people are running out of the houses. They are all running.

BLIND MAN. You say they are running out of the houses? There will be nobody left in the houses. Listen, Fool!

FOOL. There, he is down! He is up again. He is going out in the deep water. There is a big wave. It has gone over him. I cannot see him now. He has killed kings and giants, but the waves have mastered him, the waves have mastered him!

BLIND MAN. Come here, Fool!

FOOL. The waves have mastered him.

BLIND MAN. Come here!

FOOL. The waves have mastered him.

BLIND MAN. Come here, I say.

FOOL [*coming towards him, but looking backwards towards the door*]. What is it?

BLIND MAN. There will be nobody in the houses. Come this way; come quickly! The ovens will be full. We will put our hands into the ovens. [*They go out.*]

THE SHADOWY WATERS

ACTING VERSION

PERSONS IN THE PLAY

FORCAEL.

AIBRIC.

SAILORS.

DECTORA.

THE SHADOWY WATERS

ACTING VERSION

A mast and a great sail, a large tiller, a poop rising several feet above the stage, and from the overhanging stern a lanthorn hanging. The sea or sky is represented by a semi-circular cloth of which nothing can be seen except a dark abyss. The persons move but little. Some sailors are discovered crouching by the sail. FORGAEL is asleep and AIBRIC standing by the tiller on the raised poop.

FIRST SAILOR. It is long enough, and too long, Forgael has been bringing us through the waste places of the great sea.

SECOND SAILOR. We did not meet with a ship to make a prey of these eight weeks, or any shore or island to plunder or to harry. It is a hard thing, age to be coming on me, and I not to get the chance of doing a robbery that would enable me to live quiet and honest to the end of my lifetime.

FIRST SAILOR. We are out since the new

moon. What is worse again, it is the way we are in a ship, the barrels empty and my throat shrivelled with drought, and nothing to quench it but water only.

FORGAEL [*in his sleep*]. Yes ; there, there ; that hair that is the colour of burning.

FIRST SAILOR. Listen to him now, calling out in his sleep.

FORGAEL [*in his sleep*]. That pale forehead, that hair the colour of burning.

FIRST SAILOR. Some crazy dream he is in, and believe me it is no crazier than the thought he has waking. He is not the first that has had the wits drawn out from him through shadows and fantasies.

SECOND SAILOR. That is what ails him. I have been thinking it this good while.

FIRST SAILOR. Do you remember that galley we sank at the time of the full moon ?

SECOND SAILOR. I do. We were becalmed the same night, and he sat up there playing that old harp of his until the moon had set.

FIRST SAILOR. I was sleeping up there by the bulwark, and when I woke in the sound of the harp a change came over my eyes, and I could see very strange things. The dead were floating upon the sea yet, and it seemed as if the life that went out of every one of them had turned to the shape of a man-headed bird—grey they were, and they rose up of a sudden and called out with voices

like our own, and flew away singing to the west. Words like this they were singing : 'Happiness beyond measure, happiness where the sun dies.'

SECOND SAILOR. I understand well what they are doing. My mother used to be talking of birds of the sort. They are sent by the lasting watchers to lead men away from this world and its women to some place of shining women that cast no shadow, having lived before the making of the earth. But I have no mind to go following him to that place.

FIRST SAILOR. Let us creep up to him and kill him in his sleep.

SECOND SAILOR. I would have made an end of him long ago, but that I was in dread of his harp. It is said that when he plays upon it he has power over all the listeners, with or without the body, seen or unseen, and any man that listens grows to be as mad as himself.

FIRST SAILOR. What way can he play it, being in his sleep ?

SECOND SAILOR. But who would be our captain then to make out a course from the Bear and the Polestar, and to bring us back home ?

FIRST SAILOR. I have that thought out. We must have Aibric with us. He knows the constellations as well as Forgael. He is a good hand with the sword. Join with us ; be our captain, Aibric. We are agreed to put an end to Forgael, before he wakes.

164 THE SHADOWY WATERS

There is no man but will be glad of it when it is done. Join with us, and you will have the captain's share and profit.

AIBRIC. Silence ! for you have taken Forgael's pay.

FIRST SAILOR. Little pay we have had this twelvemonth. We would never have turned against him if he had brought us, as he promised, into seas that would be thick with ships. That was the bargain. What is the use of knocking about and fighting as we do unless we get the chance to drink more wine and kiss more women than lasting peaceable men through their long lifetime ? You will be as good a leader as ever he was himself, if you will but join us.

AIBRIC. And do you think that I will join myself
To men like you, and murder him who has been
My master from my earliest childhood up ?
No ! nor to a world of men like you
When Forgael's in the other scale. Come !
come !
I'll answer to more purpose when you have
drawn
That sword out of its scabbard.

FIRST SAILOR. You have awaked him.
We had best go, for we have missed this
chance. [SAILORS go out.

FORGAEL. Have the birds passed us ? I
could hear your voice.

THE SHADOWY WATERS 165

But there were others.

AIBRIC. I have seen nothing pass.

FORGAEL. You are certain of it? I never
wake from sleep

But that I am afraid they may have passed ;
For they're my only pilots. I have not seen
them

For many days, and yet there must be many
Dying at every moment in the world.

AIBRIC. They have all but driven you
crazy, and already

The sailors have been plotting for your death ;
Whatever has been cried into your ears
Has lured you on to death.

FORGAEL. No ; but they promised—

AIBRIC. I know their promises. You have
told me all.

They are to bring you to unheard-of passion,
To some strange love the world knows no-
thing of,

Some Ever-living woman as you think,
One that can cast no shadow, being unearthly.
But that's all folly. Turn the ship about,
Sail home again, be some fair woman's
friend ;

Be satisfied to live like other men,
And drive impossible dreams away. The
world

Has beautiful women to please every man.

FORGAEL. But he that gets their love after
the fashion

166 THE SHADOWY WATERS

Loves in brief longing and deceiving hope
And bodily tenderness, and finds that even
The bed of love, that in the imagination
Had seemed to be the giver of all peace,
Is no more than a wine-cup in the tasting,
And as soon finished.

AIBRIC. All that ever loved
Have loved that way—there is no other way.

FORGAEL. Yet never have two lovers kissed
but they
Believed there was some other near at hand,
And almost wept because they could not find it.

AIBRIC. When they have twenty years ;
in middle life
They take a kiss for what a kiss is worth,
And let the dream go by.

FORGAEL. It's not a dream,
But the reality that makes our passion
As a lamp shadow—no—no lamp, the sun.
What the world's million lips are thirsting for,
Must be substantial somewhere.

AIBRIC. I have heard the Druids
Mutter such things as they awake from trance.
It may be that the dead have lit upon it,
Or those that never lived ; no mortal can.

FORGAEL. I only of all living men shall find
it.

AIBRIC. Then seek it in the habitable world,
Or leap into that sea and end a journey
That has no other end.

FORGAEL. I cannot answer.

I can see nothing plain ; all's mystery.
Yet, sometimes there's a torch inside my head
That makes all clear, but when the light is
gone

I have but images, analogies,
The mystic bread, the sacramental wine,
The red rose where the two shafts of the
cross,

Body and soul, waking and sleep, death, life,
Whatever meaning ancient allegorists
Have settled on, are mixed into one joy.
For what's the rose but that ? miraculous
cries,

Old stories about mystic marriages,
Impossible truths ? But when the torch is lit
All that is impossible is certain,
I plunge in the abyss. [SAILORS *come in*.

FIRST SAILOR. Look there ! there in the
mist ! A ship of spices.

SECOND SAILOR. We would not have noticed
her but for the sweet smell through the air.
Ambergris and sandalwood, and all the herbs
the witches bring from the sunrise.

FIRST SAILOR. No ; but opoponax and
cinnamon.

FORGAEL [*taking the tiller from AIBRIC*]. The
Ever-living have kept my bargain ; they have
paid you on the nail.

AIBRIC. Take up that rope to make her
fast while we are plundering her.

FIRST SAILOR. There is a king on her deck

168 THE SHADOWY WATERS

and a queen. Where there is one woman it is certain there will be others.

AIBRIC. Speak lower or they'll hear.

FIRST SAILOR. They cannot hear; they are too much taken up with one another. Look! he has stooped down and kissed her on the lips.

SECOND SAILOR. When she finds out we have as good men aboard she may not be too sorry in the end.

FIRST SAILOR. She will be as dangerous as a wild cat. These queens think more of the riches and the great name they get by marriage than of a ready hand and a strong body.

SECOND SAILOR. There is nobody is natural but a robber. That is the reason the whole world goes tottering about upon its bandy legs.

AIBRIC. Run upon them now, and overpower the crew while yet asleep.

[SAILORS and AIBRIC go out. The clashing of swords and confused voices are heard from the other ship, which cannot be seen because of the sail.]

FORGAEL [*who has remained at the tiller*].
There! there! They come! Gull, gannet,
or diver,
But with a man's head, or a fair woman's.
They hover over the masthead awhile

THE SHADOWY WATERS 169

To wait their friends, but when their friends
have come

They'll fly upon that secret way of theirs,
One—and one—a couple—five together.

And now they all wheel suddenly and fly
To the other side, and higher in the air,
They've gone up thither, friend's run up by
friend ;

They've gone to their beloved ones in the
air,

In the waste of the high air, that they may
wander

Among the windy meadows of the dawn.

But why are they still waiting ? Why are
they

Circling and circling over the masthead ?

Ah ! now they all look down—they'll speak
of me

What the Ever-living put into their minds,

And of that shadowless unearthly woman

At the world's end. I hear the message
now.

But it's all mystery. 'There's one that cries,
'From love and hate.' Before the sentence
ends

Another breaks upon it with a cry,

'From love and death and out of sleep and
waking.'

And with the cry another cry is mixed,

'What can we do, being shadows ?' All
mystery,

170 THE SHADOWY WATERS

And I am drunken with a dizzy light.
But why do they still hover overhead ?
Why are you circling there ? Why do you
linger ?

Why do you not run to your desire,
Now that you have happy winged bodies ?
Being too busy in the air, and the high air,
They cannot hear my voice. But why that
circling ?

[*The SAILORS have returned. DECTORA
is with them.*

[*Turning and seeing her.*] Why are you stand-
ing with your eyes upon me ?

You are not the world's core. Oh no,
no, no !

That cannot be the meaning of the birds.
You are not its core. My teeth are in the
world,

But have not bitten yet.

DECTORA. I am a queen,
And ask for satisfaction upon these
Who have slain my husband and laid hands
upon me.

FORGAEL. I'd set my hopes on one that had
no shadow :—

Where do you come from ? who brought you
to this place ?

Why do you cast a shadow ? Answer me
that.

DECTORA. Would that the storm that over-
threw my ships,

THE SHADOWY WATERS 171

And drowned the treasures of nine conquered
nations,
And blew me hither to my lasting sorrow,
Had drowned me also. But, being yet alive,
I ask a fitting punishment for all
That raised their hands against him.

FORGAEL. There are some
That weigh and measure all in these waste
seas—

They that have all the wisdom that's in life,
And all that prophesying images
Made of dim gold rave out in secret tombs ;
They have it that the plans of kings and
queens

Are dust on the moth's wing ; that nothing
matters

But laughter and tears—laughter, laughter
and tears—

That every man should carry his own soul
Upon his shoulders.

DECTORA. You've nothing but wild words,
And I would know if you would give me
vengeance.

FORGAEL. When she finds out that I'll not
let her go—
When she knows that.

DECTORA. What is that you are muttering ?
That you'll not let me go ? I am a queen.

FORGAEL. Although you are more beautiful
than any,
I almost long that it were possible ;

172 THE SHADOWY WATERS

But if I were to put you on that ship,
With sailors that were sworn to do your will,
And you had spread a sail for home, a wind
Would rise of a sudden, or a wave so huge,
It had washed among the stars and put them
out,
And beat the bulwark of your ship on mine,
Until you stood before me on the deck—
As now.

DECTORA. Does wandering in these deso-
late seas
And listening to the cry of wind and wave
Bring madness ?

FORGAEL. Queen, I am not mad.

DECTORA. And yet you say the water and
the wind
Would rise against me.

FORGAEL. No, I am not mad—
If it be not that hearing messages
From lasting watchers that outlive the moon
At the most quiet midnight is to be stricken.

DECTORA. And did those watchers bid you
take me captive ?

FORGAEL. Both you and I are taken in the
net.
It was their hands that plucked the winds
awake
And blew you hither ; and their mouths have
promised

I shall have love in their immortal fashion.
They gave me that old harp of the nine spells

THE SHADOWY WATERS 173

That is more mighty than the sun and moon,
Or than the shivering casting-net of the
stars,

That none might take you from me.

DECTORA [*first trembling back from the mast
where the harp is, and then laughing*].

For a moment

Your raving of a message and a harp
More mighty than the stars half troubled me.
But all that's raving. Who is there can
compel

The daughter and granddaughter of a king
To be his bedfellow ?

FORGAEL.

Until your lips

Have called me their beloved, I'll not kiss
them.

DECTORA. My husband and my king died
at my feet,

And yet you talk of love.

FORGAEL.

The movement of time

Is shaken in these seas, and what one does
One moment has no might upon the moment
That follows after.

DECTORA.

I understand you now.

You have a Druid craft of wicked sound,
Wrung from the cold women of the sea—
A magic that can call a demon up,
Until my body give you kiss for kiss.

FORGAEL. Your soul shall give the kiss.

DECTORA.

I am not afraid,

While there's a rope to run into a noose

174 THE SHADOWY WATERS

Or wave to drown. But I have done with
words,
And I would have you look into my face
And know that it is fearless.

FORGAEL. Do what you will,
For neither I nor you can break a mesh
Of the great golden net that is about us.

DECTORA. There's nothing in the world
that's worth a fear.

*[She passes FORGAEL and stands for a
moment looking into his face.]*

I have good reason for that thought.

*[She runs suddenly on to the raised part
of the poop.]*

And now
I can put fear away as a queen should.

*[She mounts on the bulwark, and turns
towards FORGAEL.]*

Fool, fool ! Although you have looked into
my face

You did not see my purpose. I shall have
gone

Before a hand can touch me.

FORGAEL *[folding his arms]*. My hands are
still ;

The Ever-living hold us. Do what you will,
You cannot leap out of the golden net.

FIRST SAILOR. There is no need for you to
drown. Give us our pardon and we will
bring you home on your own ship, and make
an end of this man that is leading us to death.

THE SHADOWY WATERS 175

DECTORA. I promise it.

AIBRIC.

I am on his side.

I'd strike a blow for him to give him
time

To cast his dreams away.

FIRST SAILOR. He has put a sudden dark-
ness over the moon.

DECTORA. Nine swords with handles of
rhinoceros horn

To him that strikes him first !

FIRST SAILOR. I will strike him first. No !
for that music of his might put a beast's head
upon my shoulders, or it may be two heads
and they devouring one another.

DECTORA. I'll give a golden galley full of
fruit

That has the heady flavour of new wine

To him that wounds him to the death.

FIRST SAILOR. I'll strike at him. His
spells, when he dies, will die with him and
vanish away.

SECOND SAILOR. I'll strike at him.

THE OTHERS. And I ! And I ! And I !

[FORGAEL *plays upon the harp.*

FIRST SAILOR [*falling into a dream*]. It is
what they are saying, there is some person
dead in the other ship ; we have to go and
wake him. They did not say what way he
came to his end, but it was sudden.

SECOND SAILOR. You are right, you are
right. We have to go to that wake.

176 THE SHADOWY WATERS

DECTORA. He has flung a Druid spell upon
the air,
And set you dreaming.

SECOND SAILOR. What way can we raise a
keen, not knowing what name to call him
by ?

FIRST SAILOR. Come on to his ship. His
name will come to mind in a moment. All
I know is he died a thousand years ago, and
was never yet waked.

SECOND SAILOR. How can we wake him
having no ale ?

FIRST SAILOR. I saw a skin of ale aboard
her—a pig-skin of brown ale.

THIRD SAILOR. Come to the ale, a pigskin
of brown ale, a goatskin of yellow !

FIRST SAILOR [*singing*]. Brown ale and
yellow ; yellow and brown ale ; a goatskin
of yellow !

ALL [*singing*]. Brown ale and yellow ;
yellow and brown ale !

[SAILORS *go out*.]

DECTORA. Protect me now, gods, that my
people swear by !

[AIBRIC *has risen from the ground where
he had fallen. He has begun looking
for his sword as if in a dream.*]

AIBRIC. Where is my sword that fell out
of my hand

When I first heard the news ? Ah, there it
is !

THE SHADOWY WATERS 177

*[He goes dreamily towards the sword,
but DECTORA runs at it and takes it
up before he can reach it.]*

[Sleepily.] Queen, give it me.

DECTORA. No, I have need of it.

AIBRIC. Why do you need a sword? But
you may keep it,
Now that he's dead I have no need of it,
For everything is gone.

A SAILOR *[calling from the other ship]*.
Come hither, Aibric,
And tell me who it is that we are waking.

AIBRIC *[half to DECTORA, half to himself]*.
What name had that dead king? Arthur
of Britain?

No, no—not Arthur. I remember now.
It was golden-armed Iollan, and he died
Brokenhearted, having lost his queen
Through wicked spells. That is not all the
tale,

For he was killed. O! O! O! O! O! O!
For golden-armed Iollan has been killed.

*[He goes out. While he has been
speaking, and through part of what
follows, one hears the singing of the
SAILORS from the other ship. DEC-
TORA stands with the sword lifted
in front of FORGAEL. He changes
the tune.]*

DECTORA. I will end all your magic on the
instant.

[Her voice becomes dreamy, and she lowers the sword slowly, and finally lets it fall. She spreads out her hair. She takes off her crown and lays it upon the deck.]

The sword is to lie beside him in the grave.
It was in all his battles. I will spread my
hair,
And wring my hands, and wail him bitterly,
For I have heard that he was proud and
laughing,
Blue-eyed, and a quick runner on bare feet,
And that he died a thousand years ago.
O! O! O!

[FORGAEL changes the tune.]

But no, that is not it.

I knew him well, and while I heard him
laughing
They killed him at my feet. O! O! O! O!
For golden-armed Iollan that I loved.
But what is it that made me say I loved
him?

It was that harper put it in my thoughts,
But it is true. Why did they run upon him,
And beat the golden helmet with their
swords?

FORGAEL. Do you not know me, lady? I
am he

That you are weeping for.

DECTORA. No, for he is dead.
O! O! O! for golden-armed Iollan.

THE SHADOWY WATERS 179

FORGAEL. It was so given out, but I will
prove
That the grave-diggers in a dreamy frenzy
Have buried nothing but my golden arms.
Listen to that low-laughing string of the
moon
And you will recollect my face and voice,
For you have listened to me playing it
These thousand years.

*[He starts up, listening to the birds.
The harp slips from his hands, and
remains leaning against the bul-
warks behind him.]*

What are the birds at there ?
Why are they all a-flutter of a sudden ?
What are you calling out above the mast ?
If railing and reproach and mockery
Because I have awakened her to love
By magic strings, I'll make this answer to it :
Being driven on by voices and by dreams
That were clear messages from the Ever-
living,
I have done right. What could I but obey ?
And yet you make a clamour of reproach.

DECTORA *[laughing]*. Why, it's a wonder
out of reckoning
That I should keen him from the full of the
moon

To the horn, and he be hale and hearty.

FORGAEL. How have I wronged her now
that she is merry ?

180 THE SHADOWY WATERS

But no, no, no! your cry is not against me.
You know the councils of the Ever-living,
And all the tossing of your wings is joy,
And all that murmuring's but a marriage
song;

But if it be reproach, I answer this :
There is not one among you that made love
By any other means. You call it passion,
Consideration, generosity ;
But it was all deceit, and flattery
To win a woman in her own despite,
For love is war, and there is hatred in it ;
And if you say that she came willingly—

DECTORA. Why do you turn away and hide
your face,
That I would look upon for ever ?

FORGAEL. My grief.

DECTORA. Have I not loved you for a
thousand years ?

FORGAEL. I never have been golden-armed
Iollan.

DECTORA. I do not understand. I know
your face
Better than my own hands.

FORGAEL. I have deceived you
Out of all reckoning.

DECTORA. Is it not true
That you were born a thousand years ago,
In islands where the children of Aengus wind
In happy dances under a windy moon,
And that you'll bring me there ?

THE SHADOWY WATERS 181

FORGAEL. I have deceived you ;
I have deceived you utterly.

DECTORA. How can that be ?
Is it that though your eyes are full of love
Some other woman has a claim on you,
And I've but half ?

FORGAEL. Oh, no !

DECTORA. And if there is,
If there be half a hundred more, what matter ?
I'll never give another thought to it ;
No, no, nor half a thought ; but do not speak.
Women are hard and proud and stubborn-
hearted,
Their heads being turned with praise and
flattery ;
And that is why their lovers are afraid
To tell them a plain story.

FORGAEL. That's not the story ;
But I have done so great a wrong against you,
There is no measure that it would not burst.
I will confess it all.

DECTORA. What do I care,
Now that my body has begun to dream,
And you have grown to be a burning coal
In the imagination and intellect ?
If something that's most fabulous were true—
If you had taken me by magic spells,
And killed a lover or husband at my feet—
I would not let you speak, for I would know
That it was yesterday and not to-day
I loved him ; I would cover up my ears,

182 THE SHADOWY WATERS

As I am doing now. [*A pause.*] Why do you weep?

FORGAEL. I weep because I've nothing for your eyes

But desolate waters and a battered ship.

DECTORA. Oh, why do you not lift your eyes to mine?

FORGAEL. I weep—I weep because bare night's above,

And not a roof of ivory and gold.

DECTORA. I would grow jealous of the ivory roof,

And strike the golden pillars with my hands.

I would that there was nothing in the world

But my beloved—that night and day had perished,

And all that is and all that is to be,

And all that is not the meeting of our lips.

FORGAEL. Why do you turn your eyes upon bare night?

Am I to fear the waves, or is the moon

My enemy?

DECTORA. I looked upon the moon,

Longing to knead and pull it into shape

That I might lay it on your head as a crown.

But now it is your thoughts that wander away,

For you are looking at the sea. Do you not know

How great a wrong it is to let one's thought

Wander a moment when one is in love?

THE SHADOWY WATERS 183

[He has moved away. She follows him. He is looking out over the sea, shading his eyes.]

DECTORA. Why are you looking at the sea ?

FORGAEL. Look there !

There where the cloud creeps up upon the moon.

DECTORA. What is there but a troop of ash-grey birds

That fly into the west ?

[The scene darkens, but there is a ray of light upon the figures.]

FORGAEL. But listen, listen !

DECTORA. What is there but the crying of the birds ?

FORGAEL. If you'll but listen closely to that crying

You'll hear them calling out to one another
With human voices.

DECTORA. Clouds have hid the moon.
The birds cry out, what can I do but tremble ?

FORGAEL. They have been circling over our heads in the air,

But now that they have taken to the road

We have to follow, for they are our pilots ;

They're crying out. Can you not hear their cry ?—

'There is a country at the end of the world

Where no child's born but to outlive the moon.'

184 THE SHADOWY WATERS

[*The SAILORS come in with AIBRIC.
They carry torches.*

AIBRIC. We have lit upon a treasure that's
so great

Imagination cannot reckon it.

The hold is full—boxes of precious spice,

Ivory images with amethyst eyes,

Dragons with eyes of ruby. The whole ship

Flashes as if it were a net of herrings.

Let us return to our own country, Forgael,

And spend it there. Have you not found
this queen ?

What more have you to look for on the seas ?

FORGAEL. I cannot—I am going on to the
end.

As for this woman, I think she is coming
with me.

AIBRIC. Speak to him, lady, and bid him
turn the ship.

He knows that he is taking you to death ;

He cannot contradict me.

DECTORA. Is that true ?

FORGAEL. I do not know for certain.

DECTORA. Carry me

To some sure country, some familiar place.

Have we not everything that life can give

In having one another ?

FORGAEL.

How could I rest

If I refused the messengers and pilots

With all those sights and all that crying
out ?

THE SHADOWY WATERS 185

DECTORA. I am a woman, I die at every breath.

AIBRIC [*to the SAILORS*]. To the other ship,
for there's no help in words.

And I will follow you and cut the rope
When I have said farewell to this man here,
For neither I nor any living man
Will look upon his face again.

[*SAILORS go out, leaving one torch
perhaps in a torch-holder on the
bulwark.*]

FORGAEL [*to DECTORA*]. Go with him,
For he will shelter you and bring you home.

AIBRIC [*taking FORGAEL's hand*]. I'll do it
for his sake.

DECTORA. No. Take this sword
And cut the rope, for I go on with Forgael.

AIBRIC. Farewell ! Farewell !

[*He goes out. The light grows stronger.*]

DECTORA. The sword is in the rope—
The rope's in two—it falls into the sea,
It whirls into the foam. O ancient worm,
Dragon that loved the world and held us to it,
You are broken, you are broken. The world
drifts away,

And I am left alone with my beloved,
Who cannot put me from his sight for ever.
We are alone for ever, and I laugh,
Forgael, because you cannot put me from you.
The mist has covered the heavens, and you
and I

186 THE SHADOWY WATERS

Shall be alone for ever. We two—this
crown—

I half remember. It has been in my dreams.
Bend lower, O king, that I may crown you
with it.

O flower of the branch, O bird among the
leaves,

O silver fish that my two hands have taken
Out of the running stream, O morning star,
Trembling in the blue heavens like a white
fawn

Upon the misty border of the wood,
Bend lower, that I may cover you with my
hair,

For we will gaze upon this world no longer.
[*The harp begins to burn as with fire.*

FORGAEL [*gathering DECTORA'S hair about
him*]. Beloved, having dragged the net
about us,

And knitted mesh to mesh, we grow im-
mortal ;

And that old harp awakens of itself
To cry aloud to the grey birds, and dreams,
That have had dreams for father, live in us.

DEIRDRE

TO MRS. PATRICK CAMPBELL

*Who in the generosity of her genius has played my
Deirdre in Dublin and London with the Abbey
Company, as well as with her own people, and*

TO ROBERT GREGORY

who designed the beautiful scene she played it in.

PERSONS IN THE PLAY

MUSICIANS.

FERGUS, *an old man.*

NAISI, *a young king.*

DEIRDRE, *his queen.*

A DARK-FACED MESSENGER.

CONCHUBAR (*pronounced CONOCHAR*), *the old King of
Uladh, who is still strong and vigorous.*

DARK-FACED EXECUTIONER.

DEIRDRE

SCENE : *A Guest-house in a wood. It is a rough house of timber ; through the doors and some of the windows one can see the great spaces of the wood, the sky dimming, night closing in. But a window to the left shows the thick leaves of a coppice ; the landscape suggests silence and loneliness. There is a door to right and left, and through the side windows one can see anybody who approaches either door, a moment before he enters. In the centre, a part of the house is curtained off ; the curtains are drawn. There are unlighted torches in brackets on the walls. There is, at one side, a small table with a chessboard and chessmen upon it. At the other side of the room there is a brazier with a fire ; two women, with musical instruments beside them, crouch about the brazier : they are comely women of about forty. Another woman, who carries a stringed instrument, enters hurriedly ; she speaks, at first standing in the doorway.*

FIRST MUSICIAN. I have a story right, my wanderers,

That has so mixed with fable in our songs,
That all seemed fabulous. We are come, by
chance,
Into King Conchubar's country, and this
house
Is an old guest-house built for travellers
From the seashore to Conchubar's royal
house,
And there are certain hills among these woods
And there Queen Deirdre grew.

SECOND MUSICIAN. That famous queen
Who has been wandering with her lover
Naisi,
And none to friend but lovers and wild
hearts ?

FIRST MUS. [*going nearer to the brazier*].
Some dozen years ago, King Conchubar
found

A house upon a hillside in this wood,
And there a comely child with an old witch
To nurse her, and there's nobody can say
If she were human, or of those begot
By an invisible king of the air in a storm
On a king's daughter, or anything at all
Of who she was or why she was hidden there
But that she'd too much beauty for good luck.
He went up thither daily, till at last
She put on womanhood, and he lost peace,
And Deirdre's tale began. The King was
old.

A month or so before the marriage day,

A young man, in the laughing scorn of his
youth,
Naisi, the son of Usna, climbed up there,
And having wooed, or, as some say, been
wooed,
Carried her off.

SEC. MUS. The tale were well enough
Had it a finish.

FIRST MUS. Hush ! I have more to tell ;
But gather close that I may whisper it :
I speak of terrible, mysterious ends—
The secrets of a king.

SEC. MUS. There's none to hear !

FIRST MUS. I have been to Conchubar's
house and followed up
A crowd of servants going out and in
With loads upon their heads : embroideries
To hang upon the walls, or new-mown rushes
To strew upon the floors, and came at length
To a great room.

SEC. MUS. Be silent ; there are steps !

[*Enter FERGUS, an old man, who moves
about from door to window excitedly
through what follows.*

FERGUS. I thought to find a message from
the king.

You are musicians by these instruments,
And if as seems—for you are comely women—
You can praise love, you'll have the best of
luck,
For there'll be two, before the night is in,

That bargained for their love, and paid for it
All that men value. You have but the time
To weigh a happy music with a sad ;
To find what is most pleasing to a lover,
Before the son of Usna and his queen
Have passed this threshold.

FIRST MUS. Deirdre and her man !

FERGUS. I was to have found a message in
this house,
And ran to meet it. Is there no messenger
From Conchubar to Fergus, son of Rogh ?

FIRST MUS. Are Deirdre and her lover tired
of life ?

FERGUS. You are not of this country, or
you'd know
That they are in my charge and all forgiven.

FIRST MUS. We have no country but the
roads of the world.

FERGUS. Then you should know that all
things change in the world,
And hatred turns to love and love to hate,
And even kings forgive.

FIRST MUS. An old man's love
Who casts no second line, is hard to cure ;
His jealousy is like his love.

FERGUS. And that's but true.
You have learned something in your
wanderings.

He was so hard to cure, that the whole court,
But I alone, thought it impossible ;
Yet after I had urged it at all seasons,

I had my way, and all's forgiven now ;
And you shall speak the welcome and the joy
That I lack tongue for.

FIRST MUS. Yet old men are jealous.

FERGUS [*going to door*]. I am Conchubar's
near friend, and that weighed somewhat,
And it was policy to pardon them.

The need of some young, famous, popular
man

To lead the troops, the murmur of the crowd,
And his own natural impulse, urged him to it.
They have been wandering half-a-dozen
years.

FIRST MUS. And yet old men are jealous.

FERGUS [*coming from door*]. Sing the more
sweetly

Because, though age is arid as a bone,
This man has flowered. I've need of music,
too ;

If this grey head would suffer no reproach,
I'd dance and sing—

[*Dark-faced MEN with strange, barbaric
dress and arms begin to pass by the
doors and windows. They pass one
by one and in silence.*]

and dance till the hour ran out,
Because I have accomplished this good deed.

FIRST MUS. Look there—there at the
window, those dark men,

With murderous and outlandish-looking
arms—

They've been about the house all day.

FERGUS [*looking after them*]. What are you ?
Where do you come from, who is it sent you
here ?

FIRST MUS. They will not answer you.

FERGUS. They do not hear.

FIRST MUS. Forgive my open speech, but
to these eyes

That have seen many lands, they are such men
As kings will gather for a murderous task,
That neither bribes, commands, nor promises
Can bring their people to.

FERGUS. And that is why
You harped upon an old man's jealousy.
A trifle sets you quaking. Conchubar's
fame

Brings merchandise on every wind that blows.
They may have brought him Libyan dragon-
skin,

Or the ivory of the fierce unicorn.

FIRST MUS. If these be merchants, I have
seen the goods
They have brought to Conchubar, and under-
stood

His murderous purpose.

FERGUS. Murderous, you say ?
Why, what new gossip of the roads is this ?
But I'll not hear.

FIRST MUS. It may be life or death.
There is a room in Conchubar's house, and
there——

FERGUS. Be silent, or I'll drive you from the door.

There's many a one that would do more than that,

And make it prison, or death, or banishment
To slander the high King.

[Suddenly restraining himself and speaking gently.]

He is my friend ;

I have his oath, and I am well content.

I have known his mind as if it were my
own

These many years, and there is none alive
Shall buzz against him, and I there to stop it.

I know myself, and him, and your wild
thought

Fed on extravagant poetry, and lit

By such a dazzle of old fabulous tales

That common things are lost, and all that's
strange

Is true because 'twere pity if it were not.

[Going to the door again.]

Quick ! quick ! your instruments ! they are
coming now.

I hear the hoofs a-clatter. Begin that song ;

But what is it to be ? I'd have them hear

A music foaming up out of the house

Like wine out of a cup. Come now, a verse

Of some old time not worth remembering,

And all the lovelier because a bubble.

Begin, begin, of some old king and queen,

Of Luhgaidh Redstripe or another ; no, not
 him,
 He and his lady perished wretchedly.

FIRST MUSICIAN [*singing*]

‘ Why is it,’ Queen Edain said,
 ‘ If I do but climb the stair

FERGUS. Ah ! that is better. . . . They
 are alighted now.

Shake all your cockscombs, children ; these
 are lovers. [FERGUS *goes out.*

FIRST MUSICIAN

‘ Why is it,’ Queen Edain said,
 ‘ If I do but climb the stair
 To the tower overhead,
 When the winds are calling there,
 Or the gannets calling out,
 In waste places of the sky,
 There’s so much to think about,
 That I cry, that I cry ? ’

SECOND MUSICIAN

But her goodman answered her :
 ‘ Love would be a thing of nought
 Had not all his limbs a stir
 Born out of immoderate thought ;
 Were he anything by half,
 Were his measure running dry.
 Lovers, if they may not laugh,
 Have to cry, have to cry.’

[DEIRDRE, NAISI, and FERGUS *have
 been seen for a moment through the
 windows, but now they have entered.*

THE THREE MUSICIANS [*together*]

But is Edain worth a song
Now the hunt begins anew ?
Praise the beautiful and strong ;
Praise the redness of the yew ;
Praise the blossoming apple-stem.
But our silence had been wise.
What is all our praise to them,
That have one another's eyes ?

DEIRDRE. Silence your music, though I
thank you for it ;
But the wind's blown upon my hair, and I
Must set the jewels on my neck and head
For one that's coming.

NAISI. Your colour has all gone
As 'twere with fear, and there's no cause for
that.

DEIRDRE. These women have the raddle
that they use
To make them brave and confident, although
Dread, toil, or cold may chill the blood o'
their cheeks.

You'll help me, women. It is my husband's
will

I show my trust in one, that may be here
Before the mind can call the colour up.
My husband took these rubies from a king
Of Surracha that was so murderous
He seemed all glittering dragon. Now
wearing them
Myself wars on myself, for I myself—

That do my husband's will, yet fear to do it—
Grow dragonish to myself.

[*The WOMEN have gathered about her.*

NAISI *has stood looking at her, but*

FERGUS *brings him to the chess table.*

NAISI.

No messenger !

It's strange that there is none to welcome us.

FERGUS. King Conchubar has sent no
messenger

That he may come himself.

NAISI.

And being himself,

Being High King, he cannot break his faith.

I have his word and I must take that word,

Or prove myself unworthy of my nurture

Under a great man's roof.

FERGUS.

We'll play at chess

Till the king comes. It is but natural

That she should doubt him, for her house
has been

The hole of the badger and the den of the fox.

NAISI. If I were childish and had faith in
omens,

I'd rather not have lit on that old chess-
board

At my home-coming.

FERGUS.

There's a tale about it—

It has been lying there these many years—

Some wild old sorrowful tale.

NAISI.

It is the board

Where Lughaidh Redstripe and that wife of
his,

Who had a seamew's body half the year,
Played at the chess upon the night they died.

FERGUS. I can remember now, a tale of
treachery,

A broken promise and a journey's end—
But it were best forgot.

[DEIRDRE *has been standing with the*
WOMEN about her. They have been
helping her to put on her jewels and
to put the pigment on her cheeks and
arrange her hair. She has gradu-
ally grown attentive to what FERGUS
is saying.

NAISI.

If the tale's true,

When it was plain that they had been
betrayed,

They moved the men and waited for the end
As it were bedtime, and had so quiet minds
They hardly winked their eyes when the
sword flashed.

FERGUS. She never could have played so,
being a woman,

If she had not the cold sea's blood in her.

DEIRDRE. I have heard the Ever-living
warn mankind

By changing clouds, and casual accidents
Or what seem so.

NAISI.

It would but ill become us,

Now that King Conchubar has pledged his
word,

Should we be startled by a cloud or a shadow.

DEIRDRE. There's none to welcome us.

NAISI. Being his guest,
Words that would wrong him can but wrong
ourselves.

DEIRDRE. An empty house upon the
journey's end !
Is that the way a king that means no mischief
Honours a guest ?

FERGUS. He is but making ready
A welcome in his house, arranging where
The moorhen and the mallard go, and where
The speckled heathcock on a golden dish.

DEIRDRE. Had he no messenger ?

NAISI. Such words and fears
Wrong this old man who's pledged his word
to us.

We must not speak or think as women do,
That when the house is all a-bed sit up
Marking among the ashes with a stick
Till they are terrified.—Being what we are
You should have too calm thought to start
at shadows.

[*To* FERGUS.] Come, let us look if there's a
messenger

From Conchubar. We cannot see from this
Because we are blinded by the leaves and
twigs,

But it may be the wood will thin again.
It is but kind that when the lips we love
Speak words that are unfitting for kings' ears
Our ears be deaf.

FERGUS. But now I had to threaten
These wanderers because they would have
weighed

Some crazy phantasy of their own brain
Or gossip of the road with Conchubar's word.
If I had thought so little of mankind
I never could have moved him to this pardon.
I have believed the best of every man,
And find that to believe it is enough
To make a bad man show him at his best,
Or even a good man swing his lantern higher.

[NAISI and FERGUS go out. *The last words are spoken as they go through the door. One can see them through part of what follows, either through door or window. They move about, talking or looking along the road towards CONCHUBAR'S house.*

FIRST MUS. If anything lies heavy on your
heart,
Speak freely of it, knowing it is certain
That you will never see my face again.

DEIRDRE. You've been in love ?

FIRST MUS. If you would speak of love,
Speak freely. There is nothing in the world
That has been friendly to us but the kisses
That were upon our lips, and when we are old
Their memory will be all the life we have.

DEIRDRE. There was a man that loved me.

He was old ;
I could not love him. Now I can but fear.

He has made promises, and brought me home ;

But though I turn it over in my thoughts,
I cannot tell if they are sound and wholesome,
Or hackles on the hook.

FIRST MUS. I have heard he loved you,
As some old miser loves the dragon-stone
He hides among the cobwebs near the roof.

DEIRDRE. You mean that when a man who
has loved like that
Is after crossed, love drowns in its own flood,
And that love drowned and floating is but
hate ;

And that a king who hates, sleeps ill at night,
Till he has killed ; and that, though the day
laughs,
We shall be dead at cock-crow.

FIRST MUS. You have not my thought.
When I lost one I loved distractedly,
I blamed my crafty rival and not him,
And fancied, till my passion had run out,
That could I carry him away with me,
And tell him all my love, I'd keep him yet.

DEIRDRE. Ah ! now I catch your meaning,
that this king
Will murder Naisi, and keep me alive.

FIRST MUS. 'Tis you that put that meaning
upon words
Spoken at random.

DEIRDRE. Wanderers like you,
Who have their wit alone to keep their lives,

Speak nothing that is bitter to the ear
At random ; if they hint at it at all
Their eyes and ears have gathered it so lately
That it is crying out in them for speech.

FIRST MUS. We have little that is certain.

DEIRDRE. Certain or not,
Speak it out quickly, I beseech you to it ;
I never have met any of your kind,
But that I gave them money, food, and fire.

FIRST MUS. There are strange, miracle-
working, wicked stones,
Men tear out of the heart and the hot brain
Of Libyan dragons.

DEIRDRE. The hot Istain stone,
And the cold stone of Fanes, that have power
To stir even those at enmity to love.

FIRST MUS. They have so great an influence, if but sewn
In the embroideries that curtain in
The bridal bed.

DEIRDRE. O Mover of the stars
That made this delicate house of ivory,
And made my soul its mistress, keep it safe !

FIRST MUS. I have seen a bridal bed, so
curtained in,
So decked for miracle in Conchubar's house,
And learned that a bride's coming.

DEIRDRE. And I the bride?
Here is worse treachery than the seamw
suffered,
For she but died and mixed into the dust

Of her dear comrade, but I am to live
And lie in the one bed with him I hate.
Where is Naisi ? I was not alone like this
When Conchubar first chose me for his wife ;
I cried in sleeping or waking and he came,
But now there is worse need.

NAISI [*entering with* FERGUS]. Why have
you called ?

I was but standing there, without the door.

DEIRDRE. I have heard terrible mysterious
things,

Magical horrors and the spells of wizards.

FERGUS. Why, that's no wonder. You
have been listening
To singers of the roads that gather up
The stories of the world.

DEIRDRE. But I have one
To make the stories of the world but nothing.

NAISI. Be silent if it is against the king
Whose guest you are.

FERGUS. No, let her speak it out,
I know the High King's heart as it were my
own,

And can refute a slander, but already
I have warned these women that it may be
death.

NAISI. I will not weigh the gossip of the
roads
With the king's word. I ask your pardon
for her :

She has the heart of the wild birds that fear

The net of the fowler or the wicker cage.

DEIRDRE. Am I to see the fowler and the
cage

And speak no word at all ?

NAISI. You would have known,
Had they not bred you in that mountainous
place,

That when we give a word and take a word
Sorrow is put away, past wrong forgotten.

DEIRDRE. Though death may come of it ?

NAISI. Though death may come.

DEIRDRE. When first we came into this
empty house

You had foreknowledge of our death, and
even

When speaking of the paleness of my cheek
Your own cheek blanched.

NAISI. Listen to this old man.
He can remember all the promises
We trusted to.

DEIRDRE. You speak from the lips out
And I am pleading for your life and mine.

NAISI. Listen to this old man, for many
think

He has a golden tongue.

DEIRDRE. Then I will say
What it were best to carry to the grave.
Look at my face where the leaf raddled it
And at these rubies on my hair and breast.
It was for him, to stir him to desire,
I put on beauty ; yes, for Conchubar.

NAISI. What frenzy put these words into
your mouth ?

DEIRDRE. No frenzy, for what need is there
for frenzy
To change what shifts with every change of
the wind,
Or else there is no truth in men's old sayings ?
Was I not born a woman ?

NAISI. You're mocking me.

DEIRDRE. And is there mockery in this
face and eyes,
Or in this body, in these limbs that brought
So many mischiefs ? Look at me and say
If that that shakes my limbs be mockery.

NAISI. What woman is there that a man
can trust
But at the moment when he kisses her
At the first midnight ?

DEIRDRE. Were it not most strange
That women should put evil in men's
hearts
And lack it in themselves ? And yet I think
That being half good I might change round
again

Were we aboard our ship and on the sea.

NAISI. We'll to the horses and take ship
again

FERGUS. Fool, she but seeks to rouse your
jealousy
With crafty words.

DEIRDRE. Were we not born to wander ?

These jewels have been reaped by the
innocent sword

Upon a mountain, and a mountain bred me ;
But who can tell what change can come to
love

Among the valleys ? I speak no falsehood
now.

Away to windy summits, and there mock
The night-jar and the valley-keeping bird !

FERGUS. Men blamed you that you stirred
a quarrel up

That has brought death to many. I have
made peace ;

Poured water on the fire, but if you fly
King Conchubar may think that he is mocked
And the house blaze again ; and in what
quarter,

If Conchubar were the treacherous man you
think,

Would you find safety now that you have
come

Into the very middle of his power,

Under his very eyes.

DEIRDRE.

Under his eyes

And in the very middle of his power.

Then there is but one way to make all safe,

I'll spoil this beauty that brought misery

And houseless wandering on the man I
loved.

These wanderers will show me how to do it ;

To clip this hair to baldness, blacken my skin

With walnut juice, and tear my face with
briars.

Oh, that the creatures of the woods had torn
My body with their claws !

FERGUS. What, wilder yet !

DEIRDRE [*to* NAISI]. Whatever were to
happen to my face

I'd be myself, and there's not any way
But this to bring all trouble to an end.

NAISI. Leave the gods' handiwork un-
blotched, and wait

For their decession, our decession is past.

[*A dark-faced MESSENGER comes to the
threshold.*]

FERGUS. Peace, peace ; the messenger is
at the door ;

He stands upon the threshold ; he stands
there ;

He stands, King Conchubar's purpose on his
lips.

MESSENGER. Supper is on the table, Con-
chubar

Is waiting for his guests.

FERGUS. All's well again !

All's well ! all's well ! You cried your
doubts so loud

That I had almost doubted.

NAISI. We doubted him,

And he the while but busy in his house
For the more welcome.

DEIRDRE. The message is not finished.

FERGUS. Come quickly. Conchubar will
laugh, that I——

Although I held out boldly in my speech—
That I, even I——

DEIRDRE. Wait, wait ! He is not done.

MESSANGER. Deirdre and Fergus, son of
Roigh, are summoned ;

But not the traitor that bore off the queen.
It is enough that the king pardon her,
And call her to his table and his bed.

NAISI. So then, it's treachery.

FERGUS. I'll not believe it.

NAISI. Lead on and I will follow at your
heels

That I may challenge him before his court
To match me there, or match me in some
place

Where none can come between us but our
swords,

For I have found no truth on any tongue
That's not of iron.

MESSANGER. I am Conchubar's man,
I am content to serve an iron tongue :
That Tongue commands that Fergus, son of
Roigh

And Deirdre come this night into his house
And none but they.

[He goes followed by NAISI.]

FERGUS. Some rogue, some enemy,
Has bribed him to embroil us with the king ;
I know that he has lied because I know

King Conchubar's mind as if it were my own,
But I'll find out the truth.

*[He is about to follow NAISI, but
DEIRDRE stops him.]*

DEIRDRE. No, no, old man,
You thought the best, and the worst came of
it ;

We listened to the counsel of the wise,
And so turned fools. But ride and bring
your friends.

Go, and go quickly. Conchubar has not
seen me ;

It may be that his passion is asleep,
And that we may escape.

FERGUS. But I'll go first,
And follow up that Libyan heel, and send
Such words to Conchubar, that he may know
At how great peril he lays hands upon you.

NAISI *enters.*

NAISI. The Libyan, knowing that a ser-
vant's life
Is safe from hands like mine, but turned and
mocked.

FERGUS. I'll call my friends, and call the
reaping-hooks,
And carry you in safety to the ships.
My name has still some power. I will protect,
Or, if that is impossible, revenge.

[Goes out by other door.]

NAISI *[who is calm, like a man who has*

passed beyond life]. The crib has fallen
and the birds are in it ;

There is not one of the great oaks about us
But shades a hundred men.

DEIRDRE. Let's out and die,
Or break away, if the chance favour us.

NAISI. They would but drag you from me,
stained with blood.

Their barbarous weapons would but mar that
beauty,

And I would have you die as a queen
should—

In a death chamber. You are in my charge. We will wait here, and when they come upon us,

I'll hold them from the doors, and when that's over,

Give you a cleanly death with this grey edge.

DEIRDRE. I will stay here ; but you go out and fight.

Our way of life has brought no friends to us,
And if we do not buy them leaving it,

We shall be ever friendless.

NAISI. What do they say ?

That Lughaidh Redstripe and that wife of
his

Sat at this chessboard, waiting for their end.

They knew that there was nothing that could save them,

And so played chess as they had any night

For years, and waited for the stroke of sword.

I never heard a death so out of reach
Of common hearts, a high and comely end.
What need have I, that gave up all for love,
To die like an old king out of a fable,
Fighting and passionate? What need is
there

For all that ostentation at my setting?
I have loved truly and betrayed no man.
I need no lightning at the end, no beating
In a vain fury at the cage's door.

[To MUSICIANS.] Had you been here when
that man and his queen
Played at so high a game, could you have
found

An ancient poem for the praise of it?
It should have set out plainly that those two,
Because no man and woman have loved better,
Might sit on there contentedly, and weigh
The joy comes after. I have heard the sea-
mew

Sat there, with all the colour in her cheeks,
As though she'd say: 'There's nothing
happening

But that a king and queen are playing chess.'
DEIRDRE. He's in the right, though I have
not been born

Of the cold, haughty waves, my veins being
hot,

And though I have loved better than that
queen,

I'll have as quiet fingers on the board.

Oh, singing women, set it down in a book,
That love is all we need, even though it is
But the last drops we gather up like this ;
And though the drops are all we have known
of life,

For we have been most friendless—praise us
for it

And praise the double sunset, for naught's
lacking,

But a good end to the long, cloudy day.

NAISI. Light torches there and drive the
shadows out.

For day's grey end comes up.

[*A MUSICIAN lights a torch in the fire
and then crosses before the chess-
players, and slowly lights the torches
in the sconces. The light is almost
gone from the wood, but there is a
clear evening light in the sky, in-
creasing the sense of solitude and
loneliness.*

DEIRDRE.

Make no sad music.

What is it but a king and queen at chess ?

They need a music that can mix itself

Into imagination, but not break

The steady thinking that the hard game needs.

[*During the chess, the MUSICIANS sing
this song.*]

Love is an immoderate thing
And can never be content,

Till it dip an ageing wing,
Where some laughing element
Leaps and Time's old lanthorn dims.
What's the merit in love-play,
In the tumult of the limbs
That dies out before 'tis day,
Heart on heart, or mouth on mouth,
All that mingling of our breath,
When love longing is but drouth
For the things come after death ?

[*During the last verses DEIRDRE rises
from the board and kneels at NAISI's
feet.*

DEIRDRE. I cannot go on playing like that
woman
That had but the cold blood of the sea in her
veins.

NAISI. It is your move. Take up your
man again.

DEIRDRE. Do you remember that first
night in the woods
We lay all night on leaves, and looking
up,
When the first grey of the dawn awoke the
birds,
Saw leaves above us ? You thought that I
still slept,
And bending down to kiss me on the eyes,
Found they were open. Bend and kiss me
now,
For it may be the last before our death.
And when that's over, we'll be different ;

Imperishable things, a cloud or a fire.
And I know nothing but this body, nothing
But that old vehement, bewildering kiss.

[CONCHUBAR *comes to the door.*

MUS. Children, beware !

NAISI [*laughing*]. He has taken up my
challenge ;

Whether I am a ghost or living man
When day has broken, I'll forget the rest,
And say that there is kingly stuff in him.

[*Turns to fetch spear and shield, and
then sees that CONCHUBAR has gone.*

FIRST MUS. He came to spy upon you, not
to fight.

NAISI. A prudent hunter, therefore, but
no king.

He'd find if what has fallen in the pit
Were worth the hunting, but has come too
near,

And I turn hunter. You're not man, but
beast.

Go scurry in the bushes, now, beast, beast,
For now it's topsy-turvy. I upon you.

[*He rushes out after CONCHUBAR.*

DEIRDRE. You have a knife there, thrust
into your girdle.

I'd have you give it me.

MUS. No, but I dare not.

DEIRDRE. No, but you must.

MUS. If harm should come to you,
They'd know I gave it.

DEIRDRE [*snatching knife*]. There is no
mark on this
To make it different from any other
Out of a common forge.

[*Goes to the door and looks out.*]

MUS. You have taken it,
I did not give it you ; but there are times
When such a thing is all the friend one has.

DEIRDRE. The leaves hide all, and there's
no way to find
What path to follow. Why is there no
sound ?

[*She goes from door to window.*]

MUS. Where would you go ?

DEIRDRE. To strike a blow for Naisi,
If Conchubar call the Libyans to his aid.
But why is there no clash ? They have met
by this !

MUS. Listen. I am called wise. If Con-
chubar win,
You have a woman's wile that can do much,
Even with men in pride of victory.
He is in love and old. What were one knife
Among a hundred ?

DEIRDRE [*going towards them*]. Women, if
I die,
If Naisi die this night, how will you praise ?
What words seek out ? for that will stand to
you ;
For being but dead we shall have many
friends.

All through your wanderings, the doors of
 kings
 Shall be thrown wider open, the poor man's
 hearth
 Heaped with new turf, because you are
 wearing this

[*Gives MUSICIAN a bracelet.*
 To show that you have Deirdre's story right.
 MUS. Have you not been paid servants in
 love's house

To sweep the ashes out and keep the doors ?
 And though you have suffered all for mere
 love's sake

You'd live your lives again.

DEIRDRE. Even this last hour.

CONCHUBAR *enters with dark-faced MEN.*

CONCHUBAR. One woman and two men ;
 that is the quarrel
 That knows no mending. Bring in the man
 she chose
 Because of his beauty and the strength of his
 youth.

[*The dark-faced MEN drag in NAISI
 entangled in a net.*

NAISI. I have been taken like a bird or a
 fish.

CONCHUBAR. He cried 'Beast, beast !'
 and in a blind-beast rage
 He ran at me and fell into the nets,
 But we were careful for your sake, and took him

With all the comeliness that woke desire
Unbroken in him. I being old and lenient
I would not hurt a hair upon his head.

DEIRDRE. What do you say ? Have you
forgiven him ?

NAISI. He is but mocking us. What's
left to say

Now that the seven years' hunt is at an
end ?

DEIRDRE. He never doubted you until I
made him,
And therefore all the blame for what he says
Should fall on me.

CONCHUBAR. But his young blood is hot,
And if we're of one mind, he shall go free,
And I ask nothing for it, or, if something,
Nothing I could not take. There is no king
In the wide world that, being so greatly
wronged,

Could copy me, and give all vengeance up.
Although her marriage-day had all but come,
You carried her away ; but I'll show mercy.
Because you had the insolent strength of
youth

You carried her away ; but I've had time
To think it out through all these seven years.
I will show mercy.

NAISI. You have many words.

CONCHUBAR. I will not make a bargain ; I
but ask
What is already mine.

[DEIRDRE *moves slowly towards CONCHUBAR while he is speaking, her eyes fixed upon him.*

You may go free
If Deirdre will but walk into my house
Before the people's eyes, that they may know
When I have put the crown upon her head
I have not taken her by force and guile.
The doors are open, and the floors are strewed
And in the bridal chamber curtains sewn
With all enchantments that give happiness,
By races that are germane to the sun,
And nearest him, and have no blood in their
veins—

For when they're wounded the wound drips
with wine—

Nor speech but singing. At the bridal door
Two fair king's daughters carry in their hands
The crown and robe.

DEIRDRE. Oh, no ! Not that, not that.
Ask any other thing but that one thing.
Leave me with Naisi. We will go away.
Into some country at the ends of the earth.
We'll trouble you no more ; and there is no
one

That will not praise you if you pardon us.
'He is good, he is good,' they'll say to one
another ;

'There's nobody like him, for he forgave
Deirdre and Naisi.'

CONCHUBAR.

Do you think that I

Shall let you go again, after seven years
 Of longing and of planning here and there,
 And trafficking with merchants for the stones
 That make all sure, and watching my own
 face

That none might read it ?

DEIRDRE *to* NAISI. It's better to go with
 him.

Why should you die when one can bear it all ?
 My life is over ; it's better to obey.

Why should you die ? I will not live long,
 Naisi.

I'd not have you believe I'd long stay living ;
 Oh no, no, no ! You will go far away.

You will forget me. Speak, speak, Naisi,
 speak,

And say that it is better that I go.

I will not ask it. Do not speak a word,

For I will take it all upon myself.

Conchubar, I will go.

NAISI. And do you think
 That, were I given life at such a price,
 I would not cast it from me ? O my eagle !
 Why do you beat vain wings upon the rock
 When hollow night's above ?

DEIRDRE. It's better, Naisi.
 It may be hard for you, but you'll forget.
 For what am I, to be remembered always ?
 And there are other women. There was
 one,

The daughter of the King of Leodas ;

I could not sleep because of her. Speak to
him ;
Tell it out plain, and make him understand.
And if it be he thinks I shall stay living,
Say that I will not.

NAISI. Would I had lost life
Among those Scottish kings that sought it of
me,
Because you were my wife, or that the
worst
Had taken you before this bargaining !
O eagle ! If you were to do this thing,
And buy my life of Conchubar with your
body,
Love's law being broken, I would stand alone
Upon the eternal summits, and call out,
And you could never come there, being
banished.

DEIRDRE [*kneeling to CONCHUBAR*]. I would
obey, but cannot. Pardon us.
I know that you are good. I have heard you
praised
For giving gifts ; and you will pardon us,
Although I cannot go into your house.
It was my fault. I only should be punished.
[*Unseen by DEIRDRE, NAISI is gagged.*
The very moment these eyes fell on him,
I told him ; I held out my hands to him ;
How could he refuse ? At first he would
not—

I am not lying—he remembered you.

What do I say ? My hands ?—No, no, my
lips—

For I had pressed my lips upon his lips—
I swear it is not false—my breast to his ;

[CONCHUBAR *motions* ; NAISI, *unseen by*
DEIRDRE, *is taken behind the curtain.*

Until I woke the passion that's in all,
And how could he resist ? I had my beauty.
You may have need of him, a brave, strong
man,

Who is not foolish at the council-board,
Nor does he quarrel by the candle-light
And give hard blows to dogs. A cup of wine
Moves him to mirth, not madness.

[*She stands up.*

What am I saying ?

You may have need of him, for you have
none

Who is so good a sword, or so well loved
Among the common people. You may need
him,

And what king knows when the hour of need
may come ?

You dream that you have men enough. You
laugh.

Yes ; you are laughing to yourself. You say,
'I am Conchubar—I have no need of
him.'

You will cry out for him some day and say,
'If Naisi were but living'—[*she misses*
NAISI]. Where is he ?

Where have you sent him ? Where is the
son of Usna ?

Where is he, O, where is he ?

[*She staggers over to the MUSICIANS.*

*The EXECUTIONER has come out with
sword on which there is blood ; CON-
CHUBAR points to it. The MUSICIANS
give a wail.*

CONCHUBAR. The traitor who has carried
off my wife

No longer lives. Come to my house now,
Deirdre,

For he that called himself your husband's
dead.

DEIRDRE. O, do not touch me. Let me
go to him. [Pause.

King Conchubar is right. My husband's
dead.

A single woman is of no account,
Lacking array of servants, linen cupboards,
The bacon hanging—and King Conchubar's
house

All ready, too—I'll to King Conchubar's
house.

It is but wisdom to do willingly
What has to be.

CONCHUBAR. But why are you so calm ?
I thought that you would curse me and cry
out,

And fall upon the ground and tear your
hair.

DEIRDRE [*laughing*]. You know too much
 of women to think so ;
 Though, if I were less worthy of desire,
 I would pretend as much ; but, being myself,
 It is enough that you were master here.
 Although we are so delicately made,
 There's something brutal in us, and we are
 won
 By those who can shed blood. It was some
 woman
 That taught you how to woo : but do not
 touch me :
 I shall do all you bid me, but not yet
 Because I have to do what's customary.
 We lay the dead out, folding up the hands,
 Closing the eyes, and stretching out the feet,
 And push a pillow underneath the head,
 Till all's in order ; and all this I'll do
 For Naisi, son of Usna.

CONCHUBAR. It is not fitting.
 You are not now a wanderer, but a queen,
 And there are plenty that can do these things.

DEIRDRE [*motioning CONCHUBAR away*].
 No, no. Not yet. I cannot be your queen,
 Till the past's finished, and its debts are paid.
 When a man dies, and there are debts unpaid,
 He wanders by the debtor's bed and cries,
 ' There's so much owing.'

CONCHUBAR. You are deceiving me.
 You long to look upon his face again.
 Why should I give you now to a dead man

That took you from a living ?

[He makes a step towards her.]

DEIRDRE.

In good time.

You'll stir me to more passion than he could,
And yet, if you are wise, you'll grant me this :
That I go look upon him that was once
So strong and comely and held his head so
high

That women envied me. For I will see
him

All blood-bedabbled and his beauty gone.
It's better, when you're beside me in your
strength,

That the mind's eye should call up the soiled
body,

And not the shape I loved. Look at him,
women.

He heard me pleading to be given up,
Although my lover was still living, and yet
He doubts my purpose. I will have you tell
him

How changeable all women are ; how soon
Even the best of lovers is forgot,
When his day's finished.

CONCHUBAR.

No ; but I will trust

The strength that you have praised, and not
your purpose.

DEIRDRE [*almost with a caress*]. It is so
small a gift and you will grant it
Because it is the first that I have asked.
He has refused. There is no sap in him ;

Nothing but empty veins. I thought as much.

He has refused me the first thing I have asked—

Me, me, his wife. I understand him now ;
I know the sort of life I'll have with him ;
But he must drag me to his house by force.
If he refuses [*she laughs*], he shall be mocked
of all.

They'll say to one another, ' Look at him
That is so jealous that he lured a man
From over sea, and murdered him, and yet
He trembled at the thought of a dead face !'

[*She has her hand upon curtain.*

CONCHUBAR. How do I know that you
have not some knife,
And go to die upon his body ?

DEIRDRE. Have me searched,
If you would make so little of your queen.
It may be that I have a knife hid here
Under my dress. Bid one of these dark
slaves

To search me for it. [*Pause.*

CONCHUBAR. Go to your farewells, queen.

DEIRDRE. Now strike the wire, and sing
to it a while,

Knowing that all is happy, and that you know
Within what bride-bed I shall lie this night,
And by what man, and lie close up to him
For the bed's narrow, and there outsleep the
cock-crow. [*She goes behind the curtain.*

FIRST MUS. They are gone, they are gone.
The proud may lie by the proud.

SEC. MUS. Though we were bidden to sing,
cry nothing loud.

FIRST MUS. They are gone, they are gone.

SEC. MUS. Whispering were enough.

FIRST MUS. Into the secret wilderness of
their love.

SEC. MUS. A high, grey cairn. What
more is to be said ?

FIRST MUS. Eagles have gone into their
cloudy bed.

[*Shouting outside. FERGUS enters.*

*Many men with scythes and sickles
and torches gather about the doors.
The house is lit with the glare of
their torches.*

FERGUS. Where's Naisi, son of Usna, and
his queen ?

I and a thousand reaping-hooks and scythes
Demand him of you.

CONCHUBAR. You have come too late.

I have accomplished all. Deirdre is mine ;
She is my queen, and no man now can rob me.
I had to climb the topmost bough, and pull
This apple among the winds. Open the
curtain,

That Fergus learn my triumph from her lips.

[*The curtain is drawn back. The
MUSICIANS begin to keen with low
voices.*

No, no ; I'll not believe it. She is not dead—
She cannot have escaped a second time !

FERGUS. King, she is dead ; but lay no
hand upon her.

What's this but empty cage and tangled wire,
Now the bird's gone ? But I'll not have you
touch it.

CONCHUBAR. You are all traitors, all
against me—all.

And she has deceived me for a second time ;
And every common man can keep his wife,
But not the King.

[*Loud shouting outside : 'Death to
Conchubar !' 'Where is Naisi ?'
etc. The dark-skinned MEN gather
round CONCHUBAR and draw their
swords ; but he motions them away.*

I have no need of weapons,
There's not a traitor that dare stop my way.
Howl, if you will ; but, I being king, did
right

In choosing her most fitting to be queen,
And letting no boy lover take the sway.

THE UNICORN FROM THE
STARS

PERSONS IN THE PLAY

FATHER JOHN.

THOMAS HEARNE, *a coachbuilder.*

ANDREW HEARNE, *his brother.*

MARTIN HEARNE, *his nephew.*

JOHNNY BACACH

PAUDEEN

BIDDY LALLY

NANNY

} *beggars.*

THE UNICORN FROM THE STARS

ACT I

Interior of a coachbuilder's workshop. Parts of a gilded coach, among them an ornament representing a lion and unicorn. THOMAS working at a wheel. FATHER JOHN coming from door of inner room.

FATHER JOHN. I have prayed over Martin. I have prayed a long time, but there is no move in him yet.

THOMAS. You are giving yourself too much trouble, Father. It's as good for you to leave him alone till the doctor's bottle will come. If there is any cure at all for what is on him, it is likely the doctor will have it.

FATHER JOHN. I think it is not doctor's medicine will help him in this case.

THOMAS. It will, it will. The doctor has his business learned well. If Andrew had gone to him the time I bade him and had not turned again to bring yourself to the house, it is likely Martin would be walking at this

time. I am loth to trouble you, Father, when the business is not of your own sort. Any doctor at all should be able and well able to cure the falling sickness.

FATHER JOHN. It is not any common sickness that is on him now.

THOMAS. I thought at the first it was gone to sleep he was. But when shaking him and roaring at him failed to rouse him, I knew well it was the falling sickness. Believe me, the doctor will reach it with his drugs.

FATHER JOHN. Nothing but prayer can reach a soul that is so far beyond the world as his soul is at this moment.

THOMAS. You are not saying that the life is gone out of him !

FATHER JOHN. No, no, his life is in no danger. But where he himself, the spirit, the soul, is gone, I cannot say. It has gone beyond our imaginings. He is fallen into a trance.

THOMAS. He used to be queer as a child, going asleep in the fields, and coming back with talk of white horses he saw, and bright people like angels or whatever they were. But I mended that. I taught him to recognise stones beyond angels with a few strokes of a rod. I would never give in to visions or to trances.

FATHER JOHN. We who hold the faith have no right to speak against trance or vision.

Saint Elizabeth had them, Saint Benedict, Saint Anthony, Saint Columcille. Saint Catherine of Siena often lay a long time as if dead.

THOMAS. That might be so in the olden time, but those things are gone out of the world now. Those that do their work fair and honest have no occasion to let the mind go rambling. What would send my nephew, Martin Hearne, into a trance, supposing trances to be in it, and he rubbing the gold on the lion and unicorn that he had taken in hand to make a good job of for the top of the coach?

FATHER JOHN [*taking up ornament*]. It is likely it was that sent him off. The flashing of light upon it would be enough to throw one that had a disposition to it into a trance. There was a very saintly man, though he was not of our church, he wrote a great book called *Mysterium Magnum*, was seven days in a trance. Truth, or whatever truth he found, fell upon him like a bursting shower, and he a poor tradesman at his work. It was a ray of sunlight on a pewter vessel that was the beginning of all. [*Goes to the door and looks in.*] There is no stir in him yet. It is either the best thing or the worst thing can happen to any one, that is happening to him now.

THOMAS. And what in the living world can

236 UNICORN FROM THE STARS

happen to a man that is asleep on his bed.

FATHER JOHN. There are some would answer you that it is to those who are awake that nothing happens, and it is they that know nothing. He is gone where all have gone for supreme truth.

THOMAS [*sitting down again and taking up tools*]. Well, maybe so. But work must go on and coachbuilding must go on, and they will not go on the time there is too much attention given to dreams. A dream is a sort of a shadow, no profit in it to any one at all. A coach, now, is a real thing and a thing that will last for generations and be made use of to the last, and maybe turn to be a hen-roost at its latter end.

FATHER JOHN. I think Andrew told me it was a dream of Martin's that led to the making of that coach.

THOMAS. Well, I believe he saw gold in some dream, and it led him to want to make some golden thing, and coaches being the handiest, nothing would do him till he put the most of his fortune into the making of this golden coach. It turned out better than I thought, for some of the lawyers came looking at it at Assize time, and through them it was heard of at Dublin Castle . . . and who now has it ordered but the Lord Lieutenant ! [FATHER JOHN *nods*.] Ready

it must be and sent off it must be by the end of the month. It is likely King George will be visiting Dublin, and it is he himself will be sitting in it yet.

FATHER JOHN. Martin has been working hard at it, I know.

THOMAS. You never saw a man work the way he did, day and night, near ever since the time six months ago he first came home from France.

FATHER JOHN. I never thought he would be so good at a trade. I thought his mind was only set on books.

THOMAS. He should be thankful to myself for that. Any person I will take in hand, I make a clean job of them the same as I would make of any other thing in my yard—coach, half-coach, hackney-coach, ass-car, common-car, post-chaise, calash, chariot on two wheels, on four wheels. Each one has the shape Thomas Hearne put on it, and it in his hands; and what I can do with wood and iron, why would I not be able to do it with flesh and blood, and it in a way my own?

FATHER JOHN. Indeed, I know you did your best for Martin.

THOMAS. Every best. Checked him, taught him the trade, sent him to the monastery in France for to learn the language and to see the wide world; but who should know that if you did not know it, Father

238 UNICORN FROM THE STARS

John, and I doing it according to your own advice ?

FATHER JOHN. I thought his nature needed spiritual guidance and teaching, the best that could be found.

THOMAS. I thought myself it was best for him to be away for a while. There are too many wild lads about this place. He to have stopped here, he might have taken some fancies, and got into some trouble, going against the Government maybe the same as Johnny Gibbons that is at this time an outlaw, having a price upon his head.

FATHER JOHN. That is so. That imagination of his might have taken fire here at home. It was better putting him with the Brothers, to turn it to imaginings of heaven.

THOMAS. Well, I will soon have a good hardy tradesman made of him now that will live quiet and rear a family, and be maybe appointed coachbuilder to the Royal Family at the last.

FATHER JOHN [*at window*]. I see your brother Andrew coming back from the doctor ; he is stopping to talk with a troop of beggars that are sitting by the side of the road.

THOMAS. There, now, is another that I have shaped. Andrew used to be a bit wild in his talk and in his ways, wanting to go rambling, not content to settle in the place

where he was reared. But I kept a guard over him ; I watched the time poverty gave him a nip, and then I settled him into the business. He never was so good a worker as Martin, he is too fond of wasting his time talking vanities. But he is middlinghandy, and he is always steady and civil to customers. I have no complaint worth while to be making this last twenty years against Andrew.

ANDREW *comes in.*

ANDREW. Beggars there outside going the road to the Kinvara fair. They were saying there is news that Johnny Gibbons is coming back from France on the quiet ; the king's soldiers are watching the ports for him.

THOMAS. Let you keep now, Andrew, to the business you have in hand. Will the doctor be coming himself or did he send a bottle that will cure Martin ?

ANDREW. The doctor can't come, for he's down with the lumbago in the back. He questioned me as to what ailed Martin, and he got a book to go looking for a cure, and he began telling me things out of it, but I said I could not be carrying things of that sort in my head. He gave me the book then, and he has marks put in it for the places where the cures are . . . wait now. . . .
[Reads] 'Compound medicines are usually

taken inwardly, or outwardly applied ; inwardly taken, they should be either liquid or solid ; outwardly, they should be fomentations or sponges wet in some decoctions.'

THOMAS. He had a right to have written it out himself upon a paper. Where is the use of all that ?

ANDREW. I think I moved the mark maybe . . . here, now, is the part he was reading to me himself. . . . 'The remedies for diseases belonging to the skins next the brain, headache, vertigo, cramp, convulsions, palsy, incubus, apoplexy, falling sickness.'

THOMAS. It is what I bid you to tell him that it was the falling sickness.

ANDREW [*dropping book*]. O, my dear, look at all the marks gone out of it ! Wait, now, I partly remember what he said . . . a blister he spoke of . . . or to be smelling hartshorn . . . or the sneezing powder . . . or if all fails, to try letting the blood.

FATHER JOHN. All this has nothing to do with the real case. It is all waste of time.

ANDREW. That is what I was thinking myself, Father. Sure it was I was the first to call out to you when I saw you coming down from the hill-side, and to bring you in to see what could you do. I would have more trust in your means than in any doctor's learning. And in case you might fail to cure him, I have a cure myself I heard from

my grandmother—God rest her soul !—and she told me she never knew it to fail. A person to have the falling sickness, to cut the top of his nails and a small share of the hair of his head, and to put it down on the floor, and to take a harry-pin and drive it down with that into the floor and to leave it there. ‘That is the cure will never fail,’ she said, ‘to rise up any person at all having the falling sickness.’

FATHER JOHN [*hand on ear*]. I will go back to the hill-side, I will go back to the hill-side ; but no, no, I must do what I can. I will go again, I will wrestle, I will strive my best to call him back with prayer.

[*Goes in and shuts door.*]

ANDREW. It is queer Father John is sometimes, and very queer. There are times when you would say that he believes in nothing at all.

THOMAS. If you wanted a priest, why did you not get our own parish priest that is a sensible man, and a man that you would know what his thoughts are ? You know well the bishop should have something against Father John to have left him through the years in that poor mountainy place, minding the few unfortunate people that were left out of the last famine. A man of his learning to be going in rags the way he is, there must be some good cause for that.

ANDREW. I had all that in mind and I bringing him. But I thought he would have done more for Martin than what he is doing. To read a Mass over him I thought he would, and to be convulsed in the reading it, and some strange thing to have gone out with a great noise through the doorway.

THOMAS. It would give no good name to the place such a thing to be happening in it. It is well enough for labouring-men and for half-acre men. It would be no credit at all such a thing to be heard of in this house, that is for coachbuilding the capital of the county.

ANDREW. If it is from the devil this sickness comes, it would be best to put it out whatever way it would be put out. But there might no bad thing be on the lad at all. It is likely he was with wild companions abroad, and that knocking about might have shaken his health. I was that way myself one time.

THOMAS. Father John said that it was some sort of a vision or a trance, but I would give no heed to what he would say. It is his trade to see more than other people would see, the same as I myself might be seeing a split in a leather car hood that no other person would find out at all.

ANDREW. If it is the falling sickness is on him, I have no objection to that—a plain

straight sickness that was cast as a punishment on the unbelieving Jews. It is a thing that might attack one of a family, and one of another family, and not to come upon their kindred at all. A person to have it, all you have to do is not to go between him and the wind, or fire, or water. But I am in dread trance is a thing might run through the house the same as the cholera morbus.

THOMAS. In my belief there is no such thing as a trance. Letting on people do be to make the world wonder the time they think well to rise up. To keep them to their work is best, and not to pay much attention to them at all.

ANDREW. I would not like trances to be coming on myself. I leave it in my will if I die without cause, a holly-stake to be run through my heart the way I will lie easy after burial, and not turn my face downwards in my coffin. I tell you I leave it on you in my will.

THOMAS. Leave thinking of your own comforts, Andrew, and give your mind to the business. Did the smith put the irons yet on to the shafts of this coach?

ANDREW. I will go see did he.

THOMAS. Do so, and see did he make a good job of it. Let the shafts be sound and solid if they are to be studded with gold.

ANDREW. They are, and the steps along

with them—glass sides for the people to be looking in at the grandeur of the satin within—the lion and the unicorn crowning all. It was a great thought Martin had the time he thought of making this coach !

THOMAS. It is best for me to go see the smith myself and leave it to no other one. You can be attending to that ass-car out in the yard wants a new tyre on the wheel—out in the rear of the yard it is. [*They go to door.*] To pay attention to every small thing, and to fill up every minute of time shaping whatever you have to do, that is the way to build up a business. [*They go out.*]

FATHER JOHN [*bringing in MARTIN*]. They are gone out now—the air is fresher here in the workshop—you can sit here for a while. You are now fully awake, you have been in some sort of a trance or a sleep.

MARTIN. Who was it that pulled at me ? Who brought me back ?

FATHER JOHN. It is I, Father John, did it. I prayed a long time over you and brought you back.

MARTIN. You, Father John, to be so unkind ! O leave me, leave me alone !

FATHER JOHN. You are in your dream still.

MARTIN. It was no dream, it was real. Do you not smell the broken fruit—the grapes ? the room is full of the smell.

UNICORN FROM THE STARS 245

FATHER JOHN. Tell me what you have seen, where you have been ?

MARTIN. There were horses—white horses rushing by, with white shining riders—there was a horse without a rider, and some one caught me up and put me upon him and we rode away, with the wind, like the wind—

FATHER JOHN. That is a common imagining. I know many poor persons have seen that.

MARTIN. We went on, on, on. We came to a sweet-smelling garden with a gate to it, and there were wheatfields in full ear around, and there were vineyards like I saw in France, and the grapes in bunches. I thought it to be one of the townlands of heaven. Then I saw the horses we were on had changed to unicorns, and they began trampling the grapes and breaking them. I tried to stop them but I could not.

FATHER JOHN. That is strange, that is strange. What is it that brings to mind ? I heard it in some place, *monoceros de astris*, the unicorn from the stars.

MARTIN. They tore down the wheat and trampled it on stones, and then they tore down what were left of grapes and crushed and bruised and trampled them. I smelt the wine, it was flowing on every side—then everything grew vague. I cannot remember clearly, everything was silent ; the trampling

246 UNICORN FROM THE STARS

now stopped, we were all waiting for some command. Oh! was it given! I was trying to hear it; there was some one dragging, dragging me away from that. I am sure there was a command given, and there was a great burst of laughter. What was it? What was the command? Everything seemed to tremble round me.

FATHER JOHN. Did you awake then?

MARTIN. I do not think I did, it all changed—it was terrible, wonderful! I saw the unicorns trampling, trampling, but not in the wine troughs. Oh, I forget! Why did you waken me?

FATHER JOHN. I did not touch you. Who knows what hands pulled you away? I prayed, that was all I did. I prayed very hard that you might awake. If I had not, you might have died. I wonder what it all meant? The unicorns—what did the French monk tell me?—strength they meant, virginal strength, a rushing, lasting, tireless strength.

MARTIN. They were strong. Oh, they made a great noise with their trampling.

FATHER JOHN. And the grapes, what did they mean? It puts me in mind of the psalm, *Et calix meus inebrians quam praeclarus est*. It was a strange vision, a very strange vision, a very strange vision.

MARTIN. How can I get back to that place?

UNICORN FROM THE STARS 247

FATHER JOHN. You must not go back, you must not think of doing that. That life of vision, of contemplation, is a terrible life, for it has far more of temptation in it than the common life. Perhaps it would have been best for you to stay under rules in the monastery.

MARTIN. I could not see anything so clearly there. It is back here in my own place the visions come, in the place where shining people used to laugh around me, and I a little lad in a bib.

FATHER JOHN. You cannot know but it was from the Prince of this world the vision came. How can one ever know unless one follows the discipline of the Church? Some spiritual director, some wise learned man that is what you want. I do not know enough. What am I but a poor banished priest, with my learning forgotten, my books never handled and spotted with the damp!

MARTIN. I will go out into the fields where you cannot come to me to awake me. I will see that townland again; I will hear that command. I cannot wait, I must know what happened, I must bring that command to mind again.

FATHER JOHN [*putting himself between MARTIN and the door*]. You must have patience as the saints had it. You are taking your own way. If there is a command from

248 UNICORN FROM THE STARS

God for you, you must wait His good time to receive it.

MARTIN. Must I live here forty years, fifty years . . . to grow as old as my uncles, seeing nothing but common things, doing work . . . some foolish work ?

FATHER JOHN. Here they are coming ; it is time for me to go. I must think and I must pray. My mind is troubled about you. [*To THOMAS as he and ANDREW come in.*] Here he is ; be very kind to him for he has still the weakness of a little child. [*Goes out.*]

THOMAS. Are you well of the fit, lad ?

MARTIN. It was no fit. I was away—for awhile—no, you will not believe me if I tell you.

ANDREW. I would believe it, Martin. I used to have very long sleeps myself and very queer dreams.

THOMAS. You had, till I cured you, taking you in hand and binding you to the hours of the clock. The cure that will cure yourself, Martin, and will waken you, is to put the whole of your mind on to your golden coach ; to take it in hand and to finish it out of face.

MARTIN. Not just now. I want to think—to try and remember what I saw, something that I heard, that I was told to do.

THOMAS. No, but put it out of your mind. There is no man doing business that can keep two things in his head. A Sunday or a

holy-day, now, you might go see a good hurling or a thing of the kind, but to be spreading out your mind on anything outside of the workshop on common days, all coach-building would come to an end.

MARTIN. I don't think it is building I want to do. I don't think that is what was in the command.

THOMAS. It is too late to be saying that, the time you have put the most of your fortune in the business. Set yourself now to finish your job, and when it is ended maybe I won't begrudge you going with the coach as far as Dublin.

ANDREW. That is it, that will satisfy him. I had a great desire myself, and I young, to go travelling the roads as far as Dublin. The roads are the great things, they never come to an end. They are the same as the serpent having his tail swallowed in his own mouth.

MARTIN. It was not wandering I was called to. What was it? What was it?

THOMAS. What you are called to, and what every one having no great estate is called to, is to work. Sure the world itself could not go on without work.

MARTIN. I wonder if that is the great thing, to make the world go on? No, I don't think that is the great thing—what does the Munster poet call it?—‘this crowded

slippery coach-loving world.' I don't think I was told to work for that.

ANDREW. I often thought that myself. It is a pity the stock of the Hearnese to be asked to do any work at all.

THOMAS. Rouse yourself, Martin, and don't be talking the way a fool talks. You started making that golden coach, and you were set upon it, and you had me tormented about it. You have yourself wore out working at it, and planning it, and thinking of it, and at the end of the race, when you have the winning-post in sight, and horses hired for to bring it to Dublin Castle, you go falling into sleeps and blathering about dreams, and we run to a great danger of letting the profit and the sale go by. Sit down on the bench now, and lay your hands to the work.

MARTIN [*sitting down*]. I will try. I wonder why I ever wanted to make it ; it was no good dream set me doing that. [*He takes up wheel.*] What is there in a wooden wheel to take pleasure in it ? Gilding it outside makes it no different.

THOMAS. That is right, now. You had some good plan for making the axle run smooth.

MARTIN [*letting wheel fall and putting his hands to his head*]. It is no use. [*Angrily.*] Why did you send the priest to awake me ?

My soul is my own and my mind is my own. I will send them to where I like. You have no authority over my thoughts.

THOMAS. That is no way to be speaking to me. I am head of this business. Nephew, or no nephew, I will have no one come cold or unwilling to the work.

MARTIN. I had better go ; I am of no use to you. I am going—I must be alone—I will forget if I am not alone. Give me what is left of my money and I will go out of this.

THOMAS [*opening a press and taking out a bag and throwing it to him*]. There is what is left of your money ! The rest of it you have spent on the coach. If you want to go, go, and I will not have to be annoyed with you from this out.

ANDREW. Come now with me, Thomas. The boy is foolish, but it will soon pass over. He has not my sense to be giving attention to what you will say. Come along now, leave him for awhile ; leave him to me I say, it is I will get inside his mind.

[*He leads THOMAS out. MARTIN bangs door angrily after them and sits down, taking up lion and unicorn.*]

MARTIN. I think it was some shining thing I saw. What was it ?

ANDREW [*opening door and putting in his head*]. Listen to me, Martin.

MARTIN. Go away, no more talking ; leave me alone.

ANDREW. O, but wait. I understand you. Thomas doesn't understand your thoughts, but I understand them. Wasn't I telling you I was just like you once ?

MARTIN. Like me ? Did you ever see the other things, the things beyond ?

ANDREW. I did. It is not the four walls of the house keep me content. Thomas doesn't know. Oh no, he doesn't know.

MARTIN. No, he has no vision.

ANDREW. He has not, nor any sort of a heart for a frolic.

MARTIN. He has never heard the laughter and the music beyond.

ANDREW. He has not, nor the music of my own little flute. I have it hidden in the thatch outside.

MARTIN. Does the body slip from you as it does from me ? They have not shut your window into eternity ?

ANDREW. Thomas never shut a window I could not get through. I knew you were one of my own sort. When I am sluggish in the morning, Thomas says, 'Poor Andrew is getting old.' That is all he knows. The way to keep young is to do the things youngsters do. Twenty years I have been slipping away, and he never found me out yet !

UNICORN FROM THE STARS 253

MARTIN. That is what they call ecstasy, but there is no word that can tell out very plain what it means. That freeing of the mind from its thoughts, those wonders we know when we put them into words; the words seem as little like them as blackberries are like the moon and sun.

ANDREW. I found that myself the time they knew me to be wild, and used to be asking me to say what pleasure did I find in cards, and women, and drink.

MARTIN. You might help me to remember that vision I had this morning, to understand it. The memory of it has slipped from me. Wait, it is coming back, little by little. I know that I saw the unicorns trampling, and then a figure, a many-changing figure, holding some bright thing. I knew something was going to happen or to be said, something that would make my whole life strong and beautiful like the rushing of the unicorns, and then, and then—

JOHNNY BACACH's *voice at window*. A poor person I am, without food, without a way, without portion, without costs, without a person or a stranger, without means, without hope, without health, without warmth—

ANDREW [*looking towards window*]. It is that troop of beggars. Bringing their tricks and their thieveries they are to the Kinvara Fair.

MARTIN [*impatiently*]. There is no quiet—come to the other room. I am trying to remember.

[*They go to door of inner room, but ANDREW stops him.*]

ANDREW. They are a bad-looking fleet. I have a mind to drive them away, giving them a charity.

MARTIN. Drive them away or come away from their voices.

ANOTHER VOICE. I put under the power of my prayer

All that will give me help.
Rafael keep him Wednesday,
Sachiel feed him Thursday,
Hamiel provide him Friday,
Cassiel increase him Saturday.

Sure giving to us is giving to the Lord and laying up a store in the treasury of heaven.

ANDREW. Whisht ! He is entering by the window ! [JOHNNY *climbs up*.

JOHNNY. That I may never sin, but the place is empty.

PAUDEEN. Go in and see what can you make a grab at.

JOHNNY [*getting in*]. That every blessing I gave may be turned to a curse on them that left the place so bare ! [*He turns things over*]. I might chance something in this chest if it was open.

[ANDREW *begins creeping towards him*.

UNICORN FROM THE STARS 255

NANNY [*outside*]. Hurry on, now, you limping crabfish you ! We can't be stopping here while you'll boil stirabout !

JOHNNY [*seizing bag of money and holding it up high in both hands*]. Look at this, now, look !

[ANDREW comes behind, seizes his arm.

JOHNNY [*letting bag fall with a crash*]. Destruction on us all !

MARTIN [*running forward, seizes him. Heads disappear*]. That is it ! O, I remember. That is what happened. That is the command. Who was it sent you here with that command ?

JOHNNY. It was misery sent me in, and starvation and the hard ways of the world.

NANNY [*outside*]. It was that, my poor child, and my one son only. Show mercy to him now and he after leaving gaol this morning.

MARTIN [*to ANDREW*]. I was trying to remember it—when he spoke that word it all came back to me. I saw a bright many-changing figure ; it was holding up a shining vessel [*holds up arms*] ; then the vessel fell and was broken with a great crash ; then I saw the unicorns trampling it. They were breaking the world to pieces—when I saw the cracks coming I shouted for joy ! And I heard the command, ' Destroy, destroy, destruction is the life-giver ! destroy ! '

256 UNICORN FROM THE STARS

ANDREW. What will we do with him? He was thinking to rob you of your gold.

MARTIN. How could I forget it or mistake it? It has all come upon me now; the reasons of it all, like a flood, like a flooded river.

JOHNNY [*weeping*]. It was the hunger brought me in and the drouth.

MARTIN. Were you given any other message? Did you see the unicorns?

JOHNNY. I saw nothing and heard nothing; near dead I am with the fright I got and with the hardship of the gaol.

MARTIN. To destroy, to overthrow all that comes between us and God, between us and that shining country. To break the wall, Andrew, to break the thing—whatever it is that comes between, but where to begin—

ANDREW. What is it you are talking about?

MARTIN. It may be that this man is the beginning. He has been sent—the poor, they have nothing, and so they can see heaven as we cannot. He and his comrades will understand me. But how to give all men high hearts that they may all understand?

JOHNNY. It's the juice of the grey barley will do that.

ANDREW. To rise everybody's heart, is it? Is it that was your meaning all the time? If you will take the blame of it all, I'll do what you want. Give me the bag of money

then. [*He takes it up.*] Oh, I've a heart like your own. I'll lift the world, too. The people will be running from all parts. Oh, it will be a great day in this district.

JOHNNY. Will I go with you?

MARTIN. No, you must stay here; we have things to do and to plan.

JOHNNY. Destroyed we all are with the hunger and the drouth.

MARTIN. Go, then, get food and drink, whatever is wanted to give you strength and courage. Gather your people together here, bring them all in. We have a great thing to do. I have to begin—I want to tell it to the whole world. Bring them in, bring them in, I will make the house ready.

[*He stands looking up as if in ecstasy;*

ANDREW and JOHNNY BACACH go out.

ACT II

The same workshop. MARTIN seen arranging mugs and bread, etc., on a table. FATHER JOHN comes in, knocking at open door as he comes; his mind intensely absorbed.

MARTIN. Come in, come in, I have got the house ready. Here is bread and meat—everybody is welcome.

[Hearing no answer, turns round.]

FATHER JOHN. Martin, I have come back. There is something I want to say to you.

MARTIN. You are welcome, there are others coming. They are not of your sort, but all are welcome.

FATHER JOHN. I have remembered suddenly something that I read when I was in the seminary.

MARTIN. You seem very tired.

FATHER JOHN *[sitting down]*. I had almost got back to my own place when I thought of it. I have run part of the way. It is very important; it is about the trance that you

have been in. When one is inspired from above, either in trance or in contemplation, one remembers afterwards all that one has seen and read. I think there must be something about it in St. Thomas. I know that I have read a long passage about it years ago. But, Martin, there is another kind of inspiration, or rather an obsession or possession. A diabolical power comes into one's body, or overshadows it. Those whose bodies are taken hold of in this way, jugglers, and witches, and the like, can often tell what is happening in distant places, or what is going to happen, but when they come out of that state they remember nothing. I think you said—

MARTIN. That I could not remember.

FATHER JOHN. You remembered something, but not all. Nature is a great sleep ; there are dangerous and evil spirits in her dreams, but God is above Nature. She is a darkness, but He makes everything clear ; He is light.

MARTIN. All is clear now. I remember all, or all that matters to me. A poor man brought me a word, and I know what I have to do.

FATHER JOHN. Ah, I understand, words were put into his mouth. I have read of such things. God sometimes uses some common man as his messenger.

MARTIN. You may have passed the man who brought it on the road. He left me but now.

FATHER JOHN. Very likely, very likely, that is the way it happened. Some plain, unnoticed man has sometimes been sent with a command.

MARTIN. I saw the unicorns trampling in my dream. They were breaking the world. I am to destroy, destruction was the word the messenger spoke.

FATHER JOHN. To destroy ?

MARTIN. To bring again the old disturbed exalted life, the old splendour.

FATHER JOHN. You are not the first that dream has come to. [*Gets up, and walks up and down.*] It has been wandering here and there, calling now to this man, now to that other. It is a terrible dream.

MARTIN. Father John, you have had the same thought.

FATHER JOHN. Men were holy then, there were saints everywhere. There was reverence ; but now it is all work, business, how to live a long time. Ah, if one could change it all in a minute, even by war and violence ! There is a cell where Saint Ciaran used to pray ; if one could bring that time again !

MARTIN. Do not deceive me. You have had the command.

FATHER JOHN. Why are you questioning

me? You are asking me things that I have told to no one but my confessor.

MARTIN. We must gather the crowds together, you and I.

FATHER JOHN. I have dreamed your dream, it was long ago. I had your vision.

MARTIN. And what happened?

FATHER JOHN [*harshly*]. It was stopped; that was an end. I was sent to the lonely parish where I am, where there was no one I could lead astray. They have left me there. We must have patience; the world was destroyed by water, it has yet to be consumed by fire.

MARTIN. Why should we be patient? To live seventy years, and others to come after us and live seventy years it may be; and so from age to age, and all the while the old splendour dying more and more.

[*A noise of shouting.* ANDREW, *who has been standing at the door, comes in.*

ANDREW. Martin says truth, and he says it well. Planing the side of a cart or a shaft, is that life? It is not. Sitting at a desk writing letters to the man that wants a coach, or to the man that won't pay for the one he has got, is that life, I ask you? Thomas arguing at you and putting you down—'Andrew, dear Andrew, did you put the tyre on that wheel yet?' Is that life?

No, it is not. I ask you all, what do you remember when you are dead? It's the sweet cup in the corner of the widow's drinking-house that you remember. Ha, ha, listen to that shouting! That is what the lads in the village will remember to the last day they live.

MARTIN. Why are they shouting? What have you told them?

ANDREW. Never you mind; you left that to me. You bade me to lift their hearts and I did lift them. There is not one among them but will have his head like a blazing tar-barrel before morning. What did your friend the beggar say? The juice of the grey barley, he said.

FATHER JOHN. You accursed villain! You have made them drunk!

ANDREW. Not at all, but lifting them to the stars. That is what Martin bade me to do, and there is no one can say I did not do it.

[A shout at door, and beggars push in a barrel. They cry, 'Hi! for the noble master!' and point at ANDREW]

JOHNNY. It's not him, it's that one!

[Points at MARTIN.]

FATHER JOHN. Are you bringing this devil's work in at the very door? Go out of this, I say! get out! Take these others with you!

MARTIN. No, no; I asked them in, they

must not be turned out. They are my guests.

FATHER JOHN. Drive them out of your uncle's house !

MARTIN. Come, Father, it is better for you to go. Go back to your own place. I have taken the command. It is better perhaps for you that you did not take it.

[FATHER JOHN *and* MARTIN *go out*.

BIDDY. It is well for that old lad he didn't come between ourselves and our luck. Himself to be after his meal, and ourselves staggering with the hunger ! It would be right to have flayed him and to have made bags of his skin.

NANNY. What a hurry you are in to get your enough ! Look at the grease on your frock yet, with the dint of the dabs you put in your pocket ! Doing cures and foretellings is it ? You starved pot-picker, you !

BIDDY. That you may be put up to-morrow to take the place of that decent son of yours that had the yard of the gaol wore with walking it till this morning !

NANNY. If he had, he had a mother to come to, and he would know her when he did see her ; and that is what no son of your own could do and he to meet you at the foot of the gallows.

JOHNNY. If I did know you, I knew too much of you since the first beginning of my

life ! What reward did I ever get travelling with you ? What store did you give me of cattle or of goods ? What provision did I get from you by day or by night but your own bad character to be joined on to my own, and I following at your heels, and your bags tied round about me !

NANNY. Disgrace and torment on you ! Whatever you got from me, it was more than any reward or any bit I ever got from the father you had, or any honourable thing at all, but only the hurt and the harm of the world and its shame !

JOHNNY. What would he give you, and you going with him without leave ! Crooked and foolish you were always, and you begging by the side of the ditch.

NANNY. Begging or sharing, the curse of my heart upon you ! It's better off I was before ever I met with you to my cost ! What was on me at all that I did not cut a scourge in the wood to put manners and decency on you the time you were not hardened as you are !

JOHNNY. Leave talking to me of your rods and your scourges ! All you taught me was robbery, and it is on yourself and not on myself the scourges will be laid at the day of the recognition of tricks.

PAUDEEN. 'Faith, the pair of you together is better than Hector fighting before Troy !

UNICORN FROM THE STARS 265

NANNY. Ah, let you be quiet. It is not fighting we are craving, but the easing of the hunger that is on us and of the passion of sleep. Lend me a graineen of tobacco now till I'll kindle my pipe—a blast of it will take the weight of the road off my heart.

[ANDREW gives her some. NANNY grabs at it.]

BIDDY. No, but it's to myself you should give it. I that never smoked a pipe this forty year without saying the tobacco prayer. Let that one say did ever she do that much.

NANNY. That the pain of your front tooth may be in your back tooth, you to be grabbing my share ! [They snap at tobacco.]

ANDREW. Pup, pup, pup ! Don't be snapping and quarrelling now, and you so well treated in this house. It is strollers like yourselves should be for frolic and for fun. Have you ne'er a good song to sing, a song that will rise all our hearts ?

PAUDEEN. Johnny Bacach is a good singer, it is what he used to be doing in the fairs, if the oakum of the gaol did not give him a hoarseness within the throat.

ANDREW. Give it out so, a good song, a song will put courage and spirit into any man at all.

JOHNNY [*singing*]

Oh come, all ye airy bachelors,
A warning take by me,

266 UNICORN FROM THE STARS

A sergeant caught me fowling,
And fired his gun so free.

His comrades came to his relief,
And I was soon trepanned,
And bound up like a woodcock
Had fallen into their hands.

The judge said transportation,
The ship was on the strand ;
They have yoked me to the traces
For to plough Van Dieman's Land !

ANDREW. That's no good of a song but a melancholy sort of a song. I'd as lief be listening to a saw going through timber. Wait, now, till you will hear myself giving out a tune on the flute. [*Goes out for it.*]

JOHNNY. It is what I am thinking there must be a great dearth and a great scarcity of good comrades in this place, a man like that youngster, having means in his hand, to be bringing ourselves and our rags into the house.

PAUDEEN. You think yourself very wise, Johnny Bacach. Can you tell me, now, who that man is ?

JOHNNY. Some decent lad, I suppose, with a good way of living and a mind to send up his name upon the roads.

PAUDEEN. You that have been gaoled this eight months know little of this countryside. It isn't a limping stroller like yourself the

UNICORN FROM THE STARS 267

Boys would let come among them. But I know. I went to the drill a few nights and I skinning kids for the mountainy men. In a quarry beyond the drill is—they have their plans made—it's the square house of the Brownes is to be made an attack on and plundered. Do you know, now, who is the leader they are waiting for?

JOHNNY. How would I know that?

PAUDEEN [*singing*]

Oh, Johnny Gibbons, my five hundred healths to you.
It is long you are away from us over the sea!

JOHNNY [*standing up excitedly*]. Sure that man could not be Johnny Gibbons that is outlawed!

PAUDEEN. I asked news of him from the old lad, and I bringing in the drink along with him. 'Don't be asking questions,' says he; 'take the treat he gives you,' says he. 'If a lad that has a high heart has a mind to rouse the neighbours,' says he, 'and to stretch out his hand to all that pass the road, it is in France he learned it,' says he, 'the place he is but lately come from, and where the wine does be standing open in tubs. Take your treat when you get it,' says he, 'and make no delay or all might be discovered and put an end to.'

JOHNNY. He came over the sea from France! It is Johnny Gibbons, surely, but

it seems to me they were calling him by some other name.

PAUDEEN. A man on his keeping might go by a hundred names. Would he be telling it out to us that he never saw before, and we with that clutch of chattering women along with us? Here he is coming now. Wait till you see is he the lad I think him to be.

MARTIN [*coming in*]. I will make my banner, I will paint the unicorn on it. Give me that bit of canvas, there is paint over here. We will get no help from the settled men—we will call to the lawbreakers, the tinkers, the sievemakers, the sheepstealers.

[*He begins to make banner.*]

BIDDY. That sounds to be a queer name of an army. Ribbons I can understand, Whiteboys, Rightboys, Threshers, and Peep o' Day, but Unicorns I never heard of before.

JOHNNY. It is not a queer name but a very good name. [*Takes up lion and unicorn.*] It is often you saw that before you in the dock. There is the unicorn with the one horn, and what it is he is going against? The lion of course. When he has the lion destroyed, the crown must fall and be shivered. Can't you see it is the League of the Unicorns is the league that will fight and destroy the power of England and King George?

PAUDEEN. It is with that banner we will

march and the lads in the quarry with us, it is they will have the welcome before him ! It won't be long till we'll be attacking the Square House ! Arms there are in it, riches that would smother the world, rooms full of guineas, we will put wax on our shoes walking them ; the horses themselves shod with no less than silver !

MARTIN [*holding up banner*]. There it is ready ! We are very few now, but the army of the Unicorns will be a great army ! [*To JOHNNY.*] Why have you brought me the message ? Can you remember any more ? Has anything more come to you ? You have been drinking, the clouds upon your mind have been destroyed . . . Can you see anything or hear anything that is beyond the world ?

JOHNNY. I can not. I don't know what do you want me to tell you at all ?

MARTIN. I want to begin the destruction, but I don't know where to begin . . . you do not hear any other voice ?

JOHNNY. I do not. I have nothing at all to do with Freemasons or witchcraft.

PAUDEEN. It is Biddy Lally has to do with witchcraft. It is often she threw the cups and gave out prophecies the same as Columcille.

MARTIN. You are one of the knowledgeable women. You can tell me where it is

best to begin, and what will happen in the end.

BIDDY. I will foretell nothing at all. I rose out of it this good while, with the stiffness and the swelling it brought upon my joints.

MARTIN. If you have foreknowledge you have no right to keep silent. If you do not help me I may go to work in the wrong way. I know I have to destroy, but when I ask myself what I am to begin with, I am full of uncertainty.

PAUDEEN. Here now are the cups handy and the leavings in them.

BIDDY [*taking cups and pouring one from another*]. Throw a bit of white money into the four corners of the house.

MARTIN. There ! [*Throwing it.*]

BIDDY. There can be nothing told without silver. It is not myself will have the profit of it. Along with that I will be forced to throw out gold.

MARTIN. There is a guinea for you. Tell me what comes before your eyes.

BIDDY. What is it you are wanting to have news of ?

MARTIN. Of what I have to go out against at the beginning . . . there is so much . . . the whole world it may be.

BIDDY [*throwing from one cup to another and looking*]. You have no care for yourself.

You have been across the sea, you are not long back. You are coming within the best day of your life.

MARTIN. What is it? What is it I have to do?

BIDDY. I see a great smoke, I see burning . . . there is a great smoke overhead.

MARTIN. That means we have to burn away a great deal that men have piled up upon the earth. We must bring men once more to the wildness of the clean green earth.

BIDDY. Herbs for my healing, the big herb and the little herb, it is true enough they get their great strength out of the earth.

JOHNNY. Who was it the green sod of Ireland belonged to in the olden times? Wasn't it to the ancient race it belonged? And who has possession of it now but the race that came robbing over the sea? The meaning of that is to destroy the big houses and the towns, and the fields to be given back to the ancient race.

MARTIN. That is it. You don't put it as I do, but what matter? Battle is all.

PAUDEEN. Columcille said, the four corners to be burned, and then the middle of the field to be burned. I tell you it was Columcille's prophecy said that.

BIDDY. Iron handcuffs I see and a rope and a gallows, and it maybe is not for your-

self I see it, but for some I have acquaintance with a good way back.

MARTIN. That means the law. We must destroy the law. That was the first sin, the first mouthful of the apple.

JOHNNY. So it was, so it was. The law is the worst loss. The ancient law was for the benefit of all. It is the law of the English is the only sin.

MARTIN. When there were no laws men warred on one another and man to man, not with machines made in towns as they do now, and they grew hard and strong in body. They were altogether alive like him that made them in his image, like people in that unfallen country. But presently they thought it better to be safe, as if safety mattered or anything but the exaltation of the heart, and to have eyes that danger had made grave and piercing. We must overthrow the laws and banish them.

JOHNNY. It is what I say, to put out the laws is to put out the whole nation of the English. Laws for themselves they made for their own profit, and left us nothing at all, no more than a dog or a sow.

BIDDY. An old priest I see, and I would not say is he the one was here or another. Vexed and troubled he is, kneeling fretting and ever-fretting in some lonesome ruined place.

MARTIN. I thought it would come to that. Yes, the Church too—that is to be destroyed. Once men fought with their desires and their fears, with all that they call their sins, unhelped, and their souls became hard and strong. When we have brought back the clean earth and destroyed the law and the Church all life will become like a flame of fire, like a burning eye . . . Oh, how to find words for it all . . . all that is not life will pass away.

JOHNNY. It is Luther's Church he means, and the humpbacked discourse of Seaghan Calvin's Bible. So we will break it, and make an end of it.

MARTIN. We will go out against the world and break it and unmake it. [*Rising.*] We are the army of the Unicorn from the Stars! We will trample it to pieces.—We will consume the world, we will burn it away—Father John said the world has yet to be consumed by fire. Bring me fire.

ANDREW [*to* BEGGARS]. Here is Thomas. Hide—let you hide.

[*All except* MARTIN *hurry into next room.*]

THOMAS *comes in.*

THOMAS. Come with me, Martin. There is terrible work going on in the town! There is mischief gone abroad. Very strange things are happening!

MARTIN. What are you talking of? What has happened?

THOMAS. Come along, I say, it must be put a stop to. We must call to every decent man. It is as if the devil himself had gone through the town on a blast and set every drinking-house open!

MARTIN. I wonder how that has happened. Can it have anything to do with Andrew's plan?

THOMAS. Are you giving no heed to what I'm saying? There is not a man, I tell you, in the parish and beyond the parish but has left the work he was doing whether in the field or in the mill.

MARTIN. Then all work has come to an end? Perhaps that was a good thought of Andrew's.

THOMAS. There is not a man has come to sensible years that is not drunk or drinking! My own labourers and my own serving-men are sitting on counters and on barrels! I give you my word, the smell of the spirits and the porter and the shouting and the cheering within, made the hair to rise up on my scalp.

MARTIN. And yet there is not one of them that does not feel that he could bridle the four winds.

THOMAS [*sitting down in despair*]. You are drunk too. I never thought you had a fancy for it.

MARTIN. It is hard for you to understand. You have worked all your life. You have said to yourself every morning, 'What is to be done to-day?' and when you are tired out you have thought of the next day's work. If you gave yourself an hour's idleness, it was but that you might work the better. Yet it is only when one has put work away that one begins to live.

THOMAS. It is those French wines that did it.

MARTIN. I have been beyond the earth. In Paradise, in that happy townland, I have seen the shining people. They were all doing one thing or another, but not one of them was at work. All that they did was but the overflowing of their idleness, and their days were a dance bred of the secret frenzy of their hearts, or a battle where the sword made a sound that was like laughter.

THOMAS. You went away sober from out of my hands; they had a right to have minded you better.

MARTIN. No man can be alive, and what is paradise but fulness of life, if whatever he sets his hand to in the daylight cannot carry him from exaltation to exaltation, and if he does not rise into the frenzy of contemplation in the night silence. Events that are not begotten in joy are misbegotten and darken the world, and nothing is begotten in joy if

276 UNICORN FROM THE STARS

the joy of a thousand years has not been crushed into a moment.

THOMAS. And I offered to let you go to Dublin in the coach !

MARTIN [*giving banner to PAUDEEN*]. Give me the lamp. The lamp has not yet been lighted and the world is to be consumed !

[*Goes into inner room.*]

THOMAS [*seeing ANDREW*]. Is it here you are, Andrew ? What are these beggars doing ? Was this door thrown open too ? Why did you not keep order ? I will go for the constables to help us !

ANDREW. You will not find them to help you. They were scattering themselves through the drinking-houses of the town, and why wouldn't they ?

THOMAS. Are you drunk too ? You are worse than Martin. You are a disgrace !

ANDREW. Disgrace yourself ! Coming here to be making an attack on me and badgering me and disparaging me ! And what about yourself that turned me to be a hypocrite ?

THOMAS. What are you saying ?

ANDREW. You did, I tell you ! Weren't you always at me to be regular and to be working and to be going through the day and the night without company and to be thinking of nothing but the trade ? What did I want with a trade ? I got a sight of the

fairy gold one time in the mountains. I would have found it again and brought riches from it but for you keeping me so close to the work.

THOMAS. Oh, of all the ungrateful creatures ! You know well that I cherished you, leading you to live a decent, respectable life.

ANDREW. You never had respect for the ancient ways. It is after the mother you take it, that was too soft and too lumpish, having too much of the English in her blood. Martin is a Hearne like myself. It is he has the generous heart ! It is not Martin would make a hypocrite of me and force me to do night-walking secretly, watching to be back by the setting of the seven stars !

[He begins to play his flute.]

THOMAS. I will turn you out of this, yourself and this filthy troop ! I will have them lodged in gaol.

JOHNNY. Filthy troop, is it ? Mind yourself ! The change is coming. The pikes will be up and the traders will go down !

All seize THOMAS and sing.

When the Lion will lose his strength,
And the braket-thistle begin to pine,
The harp shall sound sweet, sweet at length,
Between the eight and the nine !

THOMAS. Let me out of this, you villains !

278 UNICORN FROM THE STARS

NANNY. We'll make a sieve of holes of you, you old bag of treachery !

BIDDY. How well you threatened us with gaol, you skim of a weasel's milk !

JOHNNY. You heap of sicknesses ! You blinking hangman ! That you may never die till you'll get a blue hag for a wife !

[MARTIN *comes back with lighted lamp.*

MARTIN. Let him go. [*They let THOMAS go, and fall back.*] Spread out the banner. The moment has come to begin the war.

JOHNNY. Up with the Unicorn and destroy the Lion ! Success to Johnny Gibbons and all good men !

MARTIN. Heap all those things together there. Heap those pieces of the coach one upon another. Put that straw under them. It is with this flame I will begin the work of destruction. All nature destroys and laughs.

THOMAS. Destroy your own golden coach !

MARTIN [*kneeling before THOMAS*]. I am sorry to go a way that you do not like and to do a thing that will vex you. I have been a great trouble to you since I was a child in the house, and I am a great trouble to you yet. It is not my fault. I have been chosen for what I have to do. [*Stands up.*] I have to free myself first and those that are near me. The love of God is a very terrible thing !
[THOMAS *tries to stop him, but is prevented by*

UNICORN FROM THE STARS 279

BEGGARS. MARTIN *takes a wisp of straw and lights it.*] We will destroy all that can perish ! It is only the soul that can suffer no injury. The soul of man is of the imperishable substance of the stars !

[*He throws wisp into heap—it blazes up.*

ACT III

Before dawn. A wild rocky place. NANNY and BIDDY LALLY squatting by a fire. Rich stuffs, etc., strewn about. PAUDEEN watching by MARTIN, who is lying as if dead, a sack over him.

NANNY [*to PAUDEEN*]. Well, you are great heroes and great warriors and great lads altogether, to have put down the Brownes the way you did, yourselves and the White-boys of the quarry. To have ransacked the house and have plundered it ! Look at the silks and the satins and the grandeurs I brought away ! Look at that now ! [*Holds up a velvet cloak.*] It's a good little jacket for myself will come out of it. It's the singers will be stopping their songs and the jobbers turning from their cattle in the fairs to be taking a view of the laces of it and the buttons ! It's my far-off cousins will be drawing from far and near !

BIDDY. There was not so much gold in it all as what they were saying there was. Or

maybe that fleet of Whiteboys had the place ransacked before we ourselves came in. Bad cess to them that put it in my mind to go gather up the full of my bag of horseshoes out of the forge. Silver they were saying they were, pure white silver ; and what are they in the end but only hardened iron ! A bad end to them ! [*Flings away horseshoes.*] The time I will go robbing big houses again it will not be in the light of the full moon I will go doing it, that does be causing every common thing to shine out as if for a deceit and a mockery. It's not shining at all they are at this time, but duck yellow and dark.

NANNY. To leave the big house blazing after us, it was that crowned all ! Two houses to be burned to ashes in the one night. It is likely the servant-girls were rising from the feathers and the cocks crowing from the rafters for seven miles around, taking the flames to be the whitening of the dawn.

BIDDY. It is the lad is stretched beyond you have to be thankful to for that. There was never seen a leader was his equal for spirit and for daring. Making a great scatter of the guards the way he did. Running up roofs and ladders, the fire in his hand, till you'd think he would be apt to strike his head against the stars.

NANNY. I partly guessed death was near

him, and the queer shining look he had in his two eyes, and he throwing sparks east and west through the beams. I wonder now was it some inward wound he got, or did some hardy lad of the Brownes give him a tip on the skull unknownst in the fight? It was I myself found him, and the troop of the Whiteboys gone, and he lying by the side of a wall as weak as if he had knocked a mountain. I failed to waken him trying him with the sharpness of my nails, and his head fell back when I moved it, and I knew him to be spent and gone.

BIDDY. It's a pity you not to have left him where he was lying and said no word at all to Paudeen or to that son you have, that kept us back from following on, bringing him here to this shelter on sacks and upon poles.

NANNY. What way could I help letting a screech out of myself, and the life but just gone out of him in the darkness, and not a living Christian by his side but myself and the great God?

BIDDY. It's on ourselves the vengeance of the red soldiers will fall, they to find us sitting here the same as hares in a tuft. It would be best for us follow after the rest of the army of the Whiteboys.

NANNY. Whisht! I tell you. The lads are cracked about him. To get but the

UNICORN FROM THE STARS 283

wind of the word of leaving him, it's little but they'd knock the head off the two of us. Whisht !

Enter JOHNNY BACACH with candles.

JOHNNY [*standing over MARTIN*]. Wouldn't you say now there was some malice or some venom in the air, that is striking down one after another the whole of the heroes of the Gael ?

PAUDEEN. It makes a person be thinking of the four last ends, death and judgment, heaven and hell. Indeed and indeed my heart lies with him. It is well I knew what man he was under his byname and his disguise.

[*Sings*]

Oh, Johnny Gibbons, it's you were the prop to us.
You to have left us, we are put astray !

JOHNNY. It is lost we are now and broken to the end of our days. There is no satisfaction at all but to be destroying the English, and where now will we get so good a leader again ? Lay him out fair and straight upon a stone, till I will let loose the secret of my heart keening him !

[*Sets out candles on a rock, propping them up with stones.*]

NANNY. Is it mould candles you have brought to set around him, Johnny Bacach ?

It is great riches you should have in your pocket to be going to those lengths and not to be content with dips.

JOHNNY. It is lengths I will not be going to the time the life will be gone out of your own body. It is not your corpse I will be wishful to hold in honour the way I hold this corpse in honour.

NANNY. That's the way always, there will be grief and quietness in the house if it is a young person has died, but funning and springing and tricking one another if it is an old person's corpse is in it. There is no compassion at all for the old.

PAUDEEN. It is he would have got leave for the Gael to be as high as the Gall. Believe me, he was in the prophecies. Let you not be comparing yourself with the like of him.

NANNY. Why wouldn't I be comparing myself? Look at all that was against me in the world. Would you be matching me against a man of his sort, that had the people shouting him and that had nothing to do but to die and to go to heaven?

JOHNNY. The day you go to heaven that you may never come back alive out of it! But it is not yourself will ever hear the saints hammering at their musics! It is you will be moving through the ages, chains upon you, and you in the form of a dog or a

monster. I tell you that one will go through Purgatory as quick as lightning through a thorn-bush.

NANNY. That's the way, that the way.

[*Croons*]

Three that are watching my time to run,
The worm, the devil, and my son,
To see a loop around their neck
It's that would make my heart to lep !

JOHNNY. Five white candles. I wouldn't begrudge them to him indeed. If he had held out and held up it is my belief he would have freed Ireland !

PAUDEEN. Wait till the full light of the day and you'll see the burying he'll have. It is not in this place we will be waking him. I'll make a call to the two hundred Ribbons he was to lead on to the attack on the barracks at Aughanish. They will bring him marching to his grave upon the hill. He had surely some gift from the other world, I wouldn't say but he had power from the other side.

ANDREW [*coming in very shaky*]. Well, it was a great night he gave to the village, and it is long till it will be forgotten. I tell you the whole of the neighbours are up against him. There is no one at all this morning to set the mills going. There was no bread baked in the night-time, the horses are not

fed in the stalls, the cows are not milked in the sheds. I met no man able to make a curse this night but he put it on my head and on the head of the boy that is lying there before us. . . . Is there no sign of life in him at all ?

JOHNNY. What way would there be a sign of life and the life gone out of him this three hours or more ?

ANDREW. He was lying in his sleep for a while yesterday, and he wakened again after another while.

NANNY. He will not waken, I tell you. I held his hand in my own and it getting cold as if you were pouring on it the coldest cold water, and no running in his blood. He is gone sure enough and the life is gone out of him.

ANDREW. Maybe so, maybe so. It seems to me yesterday his cheeks were bloomy all the while, and now he is as pale as wood ashes. Sure we all must come to it at the last. Well, my white-headed darling, it is you were the bush among us all, and you to be cut down in your prime. Gentle and simple, every one liked you. It is no narrow heart you had, it is you were for spending and not for getting. It is you made a good wake for yourself, scattering your estate in one night only in beer and in wine for the whole province ; and that you may be sitting

in the middle of Paradise and in the chair of the Graces !

JOHNNY. Amen to that. It's pity I didn't think the time I sent for yourself to send the little lad of a messenger looking for a priest to overtake him. It might be in the end the Almighty is the best man for us all !

ANDREW. Sure I sent him on myself to bid the priest to come. Living or dead I would wish to do all that is rightful for the last and the best of my own race and generation.

BIDDY [*jumping up*]. Is it the priest you are bringing in among us ? Where is the sense in that ? Aren't we robbed enough up to this with the expense of the candles and the like ?

JOHNNY. If it is that poor starved priest he called to that came talking in secret signs to the man that is gone, it is likely he will ask nothing for what he has to do. There is many a priest is a Whiteboy in his heart.

NANNY. I tell you, if you brought him tied in a bag he would not say an Our Father for you, without you having a half-crown at the top of your fingers.

BIDDY. There is no priest is any good at all but a spoiled priest. A one that would take a drop of drink, it is he would have courage to face the hosts of trouble. Rout them out he would, the same as a shoal of

288 UNICORN FROM THE STARS

fish from out the weeds. It's best not to vex a priest, or to run against them at all.

NANNY. It's yourself humbled yourself well to one the time you were sick in the gaol and had like to die, and he bade you to give over the throwing of the cups.

BIDDY. Ah, plaster of Paris I gave him. I took to it again and I free upon the roads.

NANNY. Much good you are doing with it to yourself or any other one. Aren't you after telling that corpse no later than yesterday that he was coming within the best day of his life?

JOHNNY. Whisht, let ye. Here is the priest coming.

FATHER JOHN *comes in.*

FATHER JOHN. It is surely not true that he is dead?

JOHNNY. The spirit went from him about the middle hour of the night. We brought him here to this sheltered place. We were loth to leave him without friends.

FATHER JOHN. Where is he?

JOHNNY [*taking up sacks*]. Lying there stiff and stark. He has a very quiet look as if there was no sin at all or no great trouble upon his mind.

FATHER JOHN [*kneels and touches him*]. He is not dead.

BIDDY [*pointing to NANNY*]. He is dead.

If it was letting on he was, he would not have let that one rob him and search him the way she did.

FATHER JOHN. It has the appearance of death, but it is not death. He is in a trance.

PAUDEEN. Is it Heaven and Hell he is walking at this time to be bringing back newses of the sinners in pain ?

BIDDY. I was thinking myself it might away he was, riding on white horses with the riders of the forths.

JOHNNY. He will have great wonders to tell out the time he will rise up from the ground. It is a pity he not to waken at this time and to lead us on to overcome the troop of the English. Sure those that are in a trance get strength, that they can walk on water.

ANDREW. It was Father John wakened him yesterday the time he was lying in the same way. Wasn't I telling you it was for that I called to him ?

BIDDY. Waken him now till they'll see did I tell any lie in my foretelling. I knew well by the signs, he was coming within the best day of his life.

PAUDEEN. And not dead at all ! We'll be marching to attack Dublin itself within a week. The horn will blow for him, and all good men will gather to him. Hurry on, Father, and waken him.

290 UNICORN FROM THE STARS

FATHER JOHN. I will not waken him. I will not bring him back from where he is.

JOHNNY. And how long will it be before he will waken of himself?

FATHER JOHN. Maybe to-day, maybe to-morrow, it is hard to be certain.

BIDDY. If it is *away* he is he might be away seven years. To be lying like a stump of a tree and using no food and the world not able to knock a word out of him, I know the signs of it well.

JOHNNY. We cannot be waiting and watching through seven years. If the business he has started is to be done we have to go on here and now. The time there is any delay, that is the time the Government will get information. Waken him now, Father, and you'll get the blessing of the generations.

FATHER JOHN. I will not bring him back. God will bring him back in his own good time. For all I know he may be seeing the hidden things of God.

JOHNNY. He might slip away in his dream. It is best to raise him up now.

ANDREW. Waken him, Father John. I thought he was surely dead this time, and what way could I go face Thomas through all that is left of my lifetime, after me standing up to face him the way I did? And if I do take a little drop of an odd night, sure I'd be very lonesome if I did not take it. All

UNICORN FROM THE STARS 291

the world knows it's not for love of what I drink, but for love of the people that do be with me ! Waken him, Father, or maybe I would waken him myself. [*Shakes him.*]

FATHER JOHN. Lift your hand from touching him. Leave him to himself and to the power of God.

JOHNNY. If you will not bring him back why wouldn't we ourselves do it ? Go on now, it is best for you to do it yourself.

FATHER JOHN. I woke him yesterday. He was angry with me, he could not get to the heart of the command.

JOHNNY. If he did not, he got a command from myself that satisfied him, and a message.

FATHER JOHN. He did—he took it from you—and how do I know what devil's message it may have been that brought him into that devil's work, destruction and drunkenness and burnings ! That was not a message from heaven ! It was I awoke him, it was I kept him from hearing what was maybe a divine message, a voice of truth, and he heard you speak and he believed the message was brought by you. You have made use of your deceit and his mistaking—you have left him without house or means to support him, you are striving to destroy and to drag him to entire ruin. I will not help you, I would rather see him die in his trance and go into God's hands than awake him and see

292 UNICORN FROM THE STARS

him go into hell's mouth with vagabonds and outcasts like you !

JOHNNY [*turning to* BIDDY]. You should have knowledge, Biddy Lally, of the means to bring back a man that is away.

BIDDY. The power of the earth will do it through its herbs, and the power of the air will do it kindling fire into flame.

JOHNNY. Rise up and make no delay. Stretch out and gather a handful of an herb that will bring him back from whatever place he is in.

BIDDY. Where is the use of herbs, and his teeth clenched the way he could not use them ?

JOHNNY. Take fire so in the devil's name, and put it to the soles of his feet.

[*Takes a lighted sod from fire.*

FATHER JOHN. Let him alone, I say !

[*Dashes away the sod.*

JOHNNY. I will not leave him alone ! I will not give in to leave him swooning there and the country waiting for him to awake !

FATHER JOHN. I tell you I awoke him ! I sent him into thieves' company ! I will not have him wakened again and evil things it may be waiting to take hold of him ! Back from him, back, I say ! Will you dare to lay a hand on me ! You cannot do it ! You cannot touch him against my will !

BIDDY. Mind yourself, do not be bringing us under the curse of the Church.

[JOHNNY *steps back*. MARTIN *moves*.

FATHER JOHN. It is God has him in His care. It is He is awaking him. [MARTIN *has risen to his elbow*.] Do not touch him, do not speak to him, he may be hearing great secrets.

MARTIN. That music, I must go nearer—sweet marvellous music—louder than the trampling of the unicorns ; far louder, though the mountain is shaking with their feet—high joyous music.

FATHER JOHN. Hush, he is listening to the music of Heaven !

MARTIN. Take me to you, musicians, wherever you are ! I will go nearer to you ; I hear you better now, more and more joyful ; that is strange, it is strange.

FATHER JOHN. He is getting some secret.

MARTIN. It is the music of Paradise, that is certain, somebody said that. It is certainly the music of Paradise. Ah, now I hear, now I understand. It is made of the continual clashing of swords !

JOHNNY. That is the best music. We will clash them sure enough. We will clash our swords and our pikes on the bayonets of the red soldiers. It is well you rose up from the dead to lead us ! Come on, now, come on !

MARTIN. Who are you ? Ah, I remember—where are you asking me to come to ?

PAUDEEN. To come on, to be sure, to the attack on the barracks at Aughanish. To carry on the work you took in hand last night.

MARTIN. What work did I take in hand last night ? Oh, yes, I remember—some big house—we burned it down—but I had not understood the vision when I did that. I had not heard the command right. That was not the work I was sent to do.

PAUDEEN. Rise up now and bid us what to do. Your great name itself will clear the road before you. It is you yourself will have freed all Ireland before the stooks will be in stacks !

MARTIN. Listen, I will explain—I have misled you. It is only now I have the whole vision plain. As I lay there I saw through everything, I know all. It was but a frenzy that going out to burn and to destroy. What have I to do with the foreign army ? What I have to pierce is the wild heart of time. My business is not reformation but revelation.

JOHNNY. If you are going to turn back now from leading us, you are no better than any other traitor that ever gave up the work he took in hand. Let you come and face now the two hundred men you brought out daring the power of the law last night, and give them your reason for failing them.

MARTIN. I was mistaken when I set out to

destroy Church and Law. The battle we have to fight is fought out in our own mind. There is a fiery moment, perhaps once in a lifetime, and in that moment we see the only thing that matters. It is in that moment the great battles are lost and won, for in that moment we are a part of the host of heaven.

PAUDEEN. Have you betrayed us to the naked hangman with your promises and with your drink? If you brought us out here to fail us and to ridicule us, it is the last day you will live!

JOHNNY. The curse of my heart on you! It would be right to send you to your own place on the flagstone of the traitors in hell. When once I have made an end of you I will be as well satisfied to be going to my death for it as if I was going home!

MARTIN. Father John, Father John, can you not hear? Can you not see? Are you blind? Are you deaf?

FATHER JOHN. What is it? What is it?

MARTIN. There on the mountain, a thousand white unicorns trampling; a thousand riders with their swords drawn—the swords clashing! Oh, the sound of the swords, the sound of the clashing of the swords!

[He goes slowly off stage. JOHNNY takes up a stone to throw at him.]

FATHER JOHN *[seizing his arm]*. Stop—do you not see he is beyond the world?

296 UNICORN FROM THE STARS

BIDDY. Keep your hand off him, Johnny Bacach. If he is gone wild and cracked, that's natural. Those that have been wakened from a trance on a sudden are apt to go bad and light in the head.

PAUDEEN. If it is madness is on him, it is not he himself should pay the penalty.

BIDDY. To prey on the mind it does, and rises into the head. There are some would go over any height and would have great power in their madness. It is maybe to some secret cleft he is going, to get knowledge of the great cure for all things, or of the Plough that was hidden in the old times, the Golden Plough.

PAUDEEN. It seemed as if he was talking through honey. He had the look of one that had seen great wonders. It is maybe among the old heroes of Ireland he went raising armies for our help.

FATHER JOHN. God take him in His care and keep him from lying spirits and from all delusions !

JOHNNY. We have got candles here, Father. We had them to put around his body. Maybe they would keep away the evil things of the air.

PAUDEEN. Light them so, and he will say out a Mass for him the same as in a lime-washed church.

[They light the candles.]

THOMAS *comes in.*

THOMAS. Where is he? I am come to warn him. The destruction he did in the night-time has been heard of. The soldiers are out after him and the constables—there are two of the constables not far off—there are others on every side—they heard he was here in the mountain—where is he?

FATHER JOHN. He has gone up the path.

THOMAS. Hurry after him! Tell him to hide himself—this attack he had a hand in is a hanging crime. Tell him to hide himself, to come to me when all is quiet—bad as his doings are, he is my own brother's son; I will get him on to a ship that will be going to France.

FATHER JOHN. That will be best, send him back to the Brothers and to the wise Bishops. They can unravel this tangle, I cannot. I cannot be sure of the truth.

THOMAS. Here are the constables, he will see them and get away. Say no word. The Lord be praised that he is out of sight.

CONSTABLES *come in.*

CONSTABLE. The man we are looking for, where is he? He was seen coming here along with you. You have to give him up into the power of the law.

JOHNNY. We will not give him up. Go back out of this or you will be sorry.

298 UNICORN FROM THE STARS

PAUDEEN. We are not in dread of you or the like of you.

BIDDY. Throw them down over the rocks !

NANNY. Give them to the picking of the crows !

ALL. Down with the law !

FATHER JOHN. Hush ! He is coming back. [*To CONSTABLES.*] Stop, stop—leave him to himself. He is not trying to escape, he is coming towards you.

PAUDEEN. There is a sort of a brightness about him. I misjudged him calling him a traitor. It is not to this world he belongs at all. He is over on the other side.

MARTIN [*standing beside the rock where the lighted candles are*]. *Et calix meus inebrians quam praeclarus est !*

FATHER JOHN. I must know what he has to say. It is not from himself he is speaking.

MARTIN. Father John, Heaven is not what we have believed it to be. It is not quiet, it is not singing and making music, and all strife at an end. I have seen it, I have been there. The lover still loves but with a greater passion, and the rider still rides but the horse goes like the wind and leaps the ridges, and the battle goes on always, always. That is the joy of Heaven, continual battle. I thought the battle was here, and that the joy was to be found here on earth, that all one had to do was to bring again the old

wild earth of the stories—but no, it is not here ; we shall not come to that joy, that battle, till we have put out the senses, everything that can be seen and handled, as I put out this candle. [*He puts out candle.*] We must put out the whole world as I put out this candle [*puts out another candle*]. We must put out the light of the stars and the light of the sun and the light of the moon [*puts out the rest of the candles*], till we have brought everything to nothing once again. I saw in a broken vision, but now all is clear to me. Where there is nothing, where there is nothing—there is God !

CONSTABLE. Now we will take him !

JOHNNY. We will never give him up to the law !

PAUDEEN. Make your escape ! We will not let you be followed.

[*They struggle with CONSTABLES ; the women help them ; all disappear struggling. There is a shot. MARTIN stumbles and falls. BEGGARS come back with a shout.*]

JOHNNY. We have done for them, they will not meddle with you again.

PAUDEEN. Oh, he is down !

FATHER JOHN. He is shot through the breast. Oh, who has dared meddle with a soul that was in the tumults on the threshold of sanctity ?

300 UNICORN FROM THE STARS

JOHNNY. It was that gun went off and I striking it from the constable's hand.

MARTIN [*looking at his hand, on which there is blood*]. Ah, that is blood ! I fell among the rocks. It is a hard climb. It is a long climb to the vineyards of Eden. Help me up. I must go on. The Mountain of Abiegnos is very high—but the vineyards—the vineyards !

[*He falls back dead. The men uncover their heads.*]

PAUDEEN [*to BIDDY*]. It was you misled him with your foretelling that he was coming within the best day of his life.

JOHNNY. Madness on him or no madness, I will not leave that body to the law to be buried with a dog's burial or brought away and maybe hanged upon a tree. Lift him on the sacks, bring him away to the quarry ; it is there on the hillside the boys will give him a great burying, coming on horses and bearing white rods in their hands.

[*NANNY lays the velvet cloak over him.*]

They lift him and carry the body away singing :

Our hope and our darling, our heart dies with you,
You to have failed us, we are foals astray !

FATHER JOHN. He is gone and we can never know where that vision came from. I cannot know—the wise Bishops would have known.

THOMAS [*taking up banner*]. To be shaping a lad through his lifetime, and he to go his own way at the last, and a queer way. It is very queer the world itself is, whatever shape was put upon it at the first.

ANDREW. To be too headstrong and too open, that is the beginning of trouble. To keep to yourself the thing that you know, and to do in quiet the thing you want to do. There would be no disturbance at all in the world, all people to bear that in mind !

THE GREEN HELMET

AN HEROIC FARCE

PERSONS IN THE PLAY

LAEGAIRE

CONALL

CUCHULAIN

RED MAN, *a Spirit*

EMER

LAEGAIRE'S WIFE

LAEG, *Cuchulain's chariot-driver*

HORSE BOYS and SCULLIONS

BLACK MEN, etc.

THE GREEN HELMET

AN HEROIC FARCE

SCENE: *A house made of logs. There are two windows at the back and a door which cuts off one of the corners of the room. Through the door one can see low rocks which make the ground outside higher than it is within, and beyond the rocks a misty moon-lit sea. Through the windows one can see nothing but the sea. There is a great chair at the opposite side to the door, and in front of it a table with cups and a flagon of ale. Here and there are stools.*

At the Abbey Theatre the house is orange red and the chairs and tables and flagons black, with a slight purple tinge which is not clearly distinguishable from the black. The rocks are black with a few green touches. The sea is green and luminous, and all the characters except the RED MAN and the BLACK MEN are dressed in various shades of green, one or two with touches of purple which look nearly black. The BLACK MEN all wear dark purple and have eared caps, and at the end

their eyes should look green from the reflected light of the sea. The RED MAN is altogether in red. He is very tall, and his height increased by horns on the Green Helmet. The effect is intentionally violent and startling.

LAEGAIRE. What is that ? I had thought
that I saw, though but in the wink of an
eye,

A cat-headed man out of Connaught go
pacing and spitting by ;
But that could not be.

CONALL. You have dreamed it—there's
nothing out there
I killed them all before daybreak—I hoked
them out their lair ;
I cut off a hundred heads with a single stroke
of my sword,
And then I danced on their graves and carried
away their hoard.

LAEGAIRE. Does anything stir on the sea ?

CON. Not even a fish or a gull :
I can see for a mile or two, now that the
moon's at the full. [*A distant shout.*

LAEGAIRE. Ah—there—there is some one
who calls us.

CON. But from the landward side,
And we have nothing to fear that has not
come up from the tide ;
The rocks and the bushes cover whoever
made that noise,

But the land will do us no harm.

LAEGAIRE. It was like Cuchulain's voice.

CON. But that's an impossible thing.

LAEGAIRE. An impossible thing indeed.

CON. For he will never come home, he has
all that he could need

In that high windy Scotland—good luck in
all that he does.

Here neighbour wars on neighbour and why
there is no man knows,

And if a man is lucky all wish his luck away,
And take his good name from him between a
day and a day.

LAEGAIRE. I would he'd come for all that,
and make his young wife know

That though she may be his wife, she has no
right to go

Before your wife and my wife, as she would
have done last night

Had they not caught at her dress, and pulled
her as was right ;

And she makes light of us though our wives
do all that they can.

She spreads her tail like a peacock and praises
none but her man.

CON. A man in a long green cloak that
covers him up to the chin

Comes down through the rocks and hazels.

LAEGAIRE. Cry out that he cannot come in.

CON. He must look for his dinner else-
where, for no one alive shall stop

308 THE GREEN HELMET

Where a shame must alight on us two before
the dawn is up.

LAEGAIRE. No man on the ridge of the
world must ever know that but us two.

CON. [*outside door*]. Go away, go away, go
away.

YOUNG MAN [*outside door*]. I will go when
the night is through

And I have eaten and slept and drunk to my
heart's delight.

CON. A law has been made that none shall
sleep in this house to-night.

YOUNG MAN. Who made that law ?

CON. We made it, and who has so
good a right ?

Who else has to keep the house from the
Shape-Changers till day ?

YOUNG MAN. Then I will unmake the law,
so get you out of the way.

[*He pushes past CONALL and goes into house.*

CON. I thought no living man could have
pushed me from the door

Nor could any living man do it but for the
dip in the floor ;

And had I been rightly ready there's no man
living could do it,

Dip or no dip.

LAEGAIRE. Go out—if you have your wits,
go out,

A stone's throw further on you will find a
big house where

Our wives will give you supper, and you'll
sleep sounder there,
For it's a luckier house.

YOUNG MAN. I'll eat and sleep where I will.

LAEGAIRE. Go out or I will make you.

YOUNG MAN [*forcing up LAEGAIRE'S arm,
passing him and putting his shield on the
wall over the chair*].

Not till I have drunk my fill,
But may some dog defend me for a cat of
wonder's up.

Laegaire and Conall are here, the flagon full
to the top,

And the cups—

LAEGAIRE. It is Cuchulain.

CUCHULAIN. The cups are dry as a bone.
[*He sits on chair and drinks.*]

CON. Go into Scotland again, or where you
will, but begone

From this unlucky country that was made
when the devil spat.

CUCH. If I lived here a hundred years,
could a worse thing come than that

Laegaire and Conall should know me and bid
me begone to my face?

CON. We bid you begone from a house
that has fallen on shame and disgrace.

CUCH. I am losing patience, Conall—I
find you stuffed with pride,

The flagon full to the brim, the front door
standing wide;

310 THE GREEN HELMET

You'd put me off with words, but the whole
 thing's plain enough,
 You are waiting for some message to bring
 you to war or love
 In that old secret country beyond the wool-
 white waves,
 Or it may be down beneath them in foam-
 bewildered caves
 Where nine forsaken sea queens fling shuttles
 to and fro ;
 But beyond them, or beneath them, whether
 you will or no,
 I am going too.

LAEGAIRE. Better tell it all out to the
 end ;

He was born to luck in the cradle, his good
 luck may amend
 The bad luck we were born to.

CON. I'll lay the whole thing bare.
 You saw the luck that he had when he pushed
 in past me there.

Does anything stir on the sea ?

LAEGAIRE. Not even a fish or a gull.

CON. You were gone but a little while.
 We were there and the ale-cup full.

We were half drunk and merry, and mid-
 night on the stroke,
 When a wide, high man came in with a red
 foxy cloak,
 With half-shut foxy eyes and a great laughing
 mouth,

And he said when we bid him drink, that he
had so great a drouth
He could drink the sea.

CUCH. I thought he had come for one
of you
Out of some Connaught rath, and would lap
up milk and mew ;
But if he so loved water I have the tale
awry.

CON. You would not be so merry if he
were standing by,
For when we had sung or danced as he were
our next of kin

He promised to show us a game, the best
that ever had been ;

And when we had asked what game, he
answered, ' Why, whip off my head !

Then one of you two stoop down, and I'll
whip off his,' he said.

' A head for a head,' he said, ' that is the
game that I play.'

CUCH. How could he whip off a head when
his own had been whipped away ?

CON. We told him it over and over, and
that ale had fuddled his wit,
But he stood and laughed at us there, as
though his sides would split,
Till I could stand it no longer, and whipped
off his head at a blow,
Being mad that he did not answer, and more
at his laughing so,

And there on the ground where it fell it went
on laughing at me.

LAEGAIRE. Till he took it up in his hands—

CON. And splashed himself into the sea.

CUCH. I have imagined as good when
I've been as deep in the cup.

LAEGAIRE. You never did.

CUCH. And believed it.

CON. Cuchulain, when will you stop
Boasting of your great deeds and weighing
yourself with us two,
And crying out to the world whatever we say
or do,

That you've said or done a better?—Nor is
it a drunkard's tale,

Though we said to ourselves at first that it
all came out of the ale,

And thinking that if we told it we should be
a laughing-stock

Swore we should keep it secret.

LAEGAIRE. But twelve months upon the
clock.

CON. A twelve month from the first time.

LAEGAIRE. And the jug full up to the brim :
For we had been put from our drinking by
the very thought of him.

CON. We stood as we're standing now.

LAEGAIRE. The horns were as empty.

CON. When
He ran up out of the sea with his head on his
shoulders again.

CUCH. Why, this is a tale worth telling.

CON. And he called for his debt and
his right,
And said that the land was disgraced because
of us two from that night
If we did not pay him his debt.

LAEGAIRE. What is there to be said
When a man with a right to get it has come
to ask for your head ?

CON. If you had been sitting there you
had been silent like us.

LAEGAIRE. He said that in twelve months
more he would come again to this
house
And ask his debt again. Twelve months are
up to-day.

CON. He would have followed after if we
had run away.

LEGAIRE. Will he tell every mother's son
that we have broken our word ?

CUCH. Whether he does or does not,
we'll drive him out with the sword,
And take his life in the bargain if he but dare
to scoff.

CON. How can you fight with a head that
laughs when you've whipped it off ?

LAEGAIRE. Or a man that can pick it up
and carry it out in his hand ?

CON. He is coming now, there's a splash
and a rumble along the strand
As when he came last.

CUCH. Come, and put all your backs
to the door.

*[A tall, red-headed, red-cloaked man
stands upon the threshold against the
misty green of the sea ; the ground,
higher without than within the house,
makes him seem taller even than he is.
He leans upon a great two-handed
sword.]*

LAEGAIRE. It is too late to shut it, for there
he stands once more
And laughs like the sea.

CUCH. Old herring — You whip off
heads ! Why, then
Whip off your own, for it seems you can clap
it on again.
Or else go down in the sea, go down in the
sea, I say,
Find that old juggler Manannan and whip
his head away ;
Or the Red Man of the Boyne, for they are
of your own sort,
Or if the waves have vexed you and you would
find a sport
Of a more Irish fashion, go fight without a rest
A caterwauling phantom among the winds of
the west.
But what are you waiting for ? into the water
I say !
If there's no sword can harm you, I've an
older trick to play,

An old five-fingered trick to tumble you out
of the place ;

I am Sualtim's son Cuchulain—what, do you
laugh in my face ?

RED MAN. So you too think me in earnest
in wagering poll for poll !

A drinking joke and a gibe and a juggler's
feat, that is all,

To make the time go quickly—for I am the
drinker's friend,

The kindest of all Shape-Changers from here
to the world's end,

The best of all tipsy companions. And now
I bring you a gift :

I will lay it there on the ground for the best
of you all to lift,

[He lays his Helmet on the ground.]

And wear upon his own head, and choose for
yourselves the best.

Oh, Laegaire and Conall are brave, but they
were afraid of my jest.

Well, maybe I jest too grimly when the ale is
in the cup.

There, I'm forgiven now—

[Then in a more solemn voice as he goes out.]

Let the bravest take it up.

*[CONALL takes up Helmet and gazes at
it with delight.]*

LAEGAIRE *[singing, with a swaggering stride].*

Laegaire is best ;

Between water and hill,

316 THE GREEN HELMET

He fought in the west
With cat heads, until
At the break of day
All fell by his sword,
And he carried away
Their hidden hoard.

[*He seizes the Helmet.*

CON. Give it me, for what did you find in
the bag

But the straw and the broken delf and the bits
of dirty rag

You'd taken for good money ?

CUCH. No, no, but give it me.

[*He takes Helmet.*

CON. The Helmet's mine or Laegaire's—
you're the youngest of us three.

CUCH. [*filling Helmet with ale*]. I did not
take it to keep it—the Red Man gave it
for one,

But I shall give it to all—to all of us three or
to none ;

That is as you look upon it—we will pass it
to and fro,

And time and time about, drink out of it and
so

Stroke into peace this cat that has come to
take our lives.

Now it is purring again, and now I drink to
your wives,

And I drink to Emer, my wife.

[*A great noise without and shouting.*

Why what in God's name is that noise ?

CON. What else but the charioteers and
the kitchen and stable boys
Shouting against each other, and the worst
of all is your own,
That chariot-driver, Laeg, and they'll keep it
up till the dawn,
And there's not a man in the house that will
close his eyes to-night,
Or be able to keep them from it, or know
what set them to fight.

[*A noise of horns without.*

There, do you hear them now? such hatred
has each for each
They have taken the hunting horns to drown
one other's speech
For fear the truth may prevail.—Here's your
good health and long life
And, though she be quarrelsome, good health
to Emer, your wife.

[*The CHARIOTEERS, STABLE BOYS, and
KITCHEN BOYS come running in.
They carry great horns, ladles, and
the like.*

LAEG. I am Laeg, Cuchulain's driver, and
my master's cock of the yard.

ANOTHER. Conall would scatter his feathers.

[*Confused murmurs.*

LAEGAIRE [*to CUCHULAIN*]. No use, they
won't hear a word.

CON. They'll keep it up till the dawn.

ANOTHER. It is Laegaire that is the best,

318 THE GREEN HELMET

For he fought with cats in Connaught while
 Conall took his rest
 And drained his ale pot.

ANOTHER. Laegaire—what does a man
 of his sort
 Care for the like of us? He did it for his
 own sport.

ANOTHER. It was all mere luck at the best.

ANOTHER. But Conall, I say—

ANOTHER. Let me speak.

LAEG. You'd be dumb if the cock of the
 yard would but open his beak.

ANOTHER. Before your cock was born, my
 master was in the fight.

LAEG. Go home and praise your grand-dad.
 They took to the horns for spite,
 For I said that no cock of your sort had been
 born since the fight began.

ANOTHER. Conall has got it, the best man
 has got it, and I am his man.

CUCH. Who was it started this quarrel?

A STABLE BOY. It was Laeg.

ANOTHER. It was Laeg done it all.

LAEG. A high, wide, foxy man came where
 we sat in the hall,
 Getting our supper ready, with a great voice
 like the wind,
 And cried that there was a helmet, or some-
 thing of the kind,
 That was for the foremost man upon the
 ridge of the earth.

So I cried your name through the hall

[*The others cry out and blow horns,
partly drowning the rest of his speech.*

but they denied its worth,
Preferring Laegaire or Conall, and they cried
to drown my voice ;

But I have so strong a throat that I drowned
all their noise

Till they took to the hunting horns and blew
them into my face,

And as neither side would give in—we would
settle it in this place.

Let the Helmet be taken from Conall.

A STABLE BOY. No, Conall is the best man
here.

ANOTHER. Give it to Laegaire that made
the murderous cats pay dear.

CUCH. It has been given to none : that
our rivalry might cease,

We have turned that murderous cat into a
cup of peace,

I drank the first ; and then Conall ; give it
to Laegaire now.

[CONALL *gives Helmet to* LAEGAIRE.

That it may purr in his hand and all of our
servants know

That since the ale went in, its claws went out
of sight.

A SERVANT. That's well—I will stop my
shouting.

ANOTHER. Cuchulain is in the right ;

I am tired of this big horn that has made me
hoarse as a rook.

LAEG. Cuchulain, you drank the first.

ANOTHER. By drinking the first he took
The whole of the honours himself.

LAEG. Cuchulain, you drank the first.

ANOTHER. If Laegaire drink from it now
he claims to be last and worst.

ANOTHER. Cuchulain and Conall have
drunk.

ANOTHER. He is lost if he taste a drop.

LAEGAIRE [*laying Helmet on table*]. Did you
claim to be better than us by drinking
first from the cup?

CUCH. [*his words are partly drowned by the
murmurs of the crowd though he speaks
very loud*]. That juggler from the sea,
that old red herring it is

Who has set us all by the ears—he brought
the Helmet for this,

And because we would not quarrel he ran
elsewhere to shout

That Conall and Laegaire wronged me, till
all had fallen out.

[*The murmur grows less so that his
words are heard.*]

Who knows where he is now or who he is
spurring to fight.

So get you gone, and whatever may cry aloud
in the night,

Or show itself in the air, be silent until morn.

THE GREEN HELMET 321

A SERVANT. Cuchulain is in the right—I am tired of this big horn.

CUCH. Go !

[*The SERVANTS turn towards the door but stop on hearing the voices of WOMEN outside.*]

LAEGAIRE'S WIFE [*without*]. Mine is the better to look at.

CONALL'S WIFE [*without*]. But mine is better born.

EMER [*without*]. My man is the pithier man.

CUCH. Old hurricane, well done !

You've set our wives to the game that they may egg us on ;

We are to kill each other that you may sport with us.

Ah, now, they've begun to wrestle as to who'll be first at the house.

[*The WOMEN come to the door struggling.*]

EMER. No, I have the right of place for I married the better man.

CONALL'S WIFE [*pulling EMER back*]. My nails in your neck and shoulder.

LAEGAIRE'S WIFE. And go before me if you can.

My husband fought in the West.

CONALL'S WIFE [*kneeling in the door so as to keep the others out who pull at her*]. But what did he fight with there

But sidelong and spitting and helpless shadows of the dim air ?

322 THE GREEN HELMET

And what did he carry away but straw and
broken delf?

LAEGAIRE'S WIFE. Your own man made up
that tale trembling alone by himself,
Drowning his terror.

EMER [*forcing herself in front*]. I am Emer,
it is I go first through the door.
No one shall walk before me, or praise any
man before
My man has been praised.

CUCH. [*putting his spear across the door so
as to close it*]. Come, put an end to their
quarrelling :

One is as fair as the other, each one the wife
of a king.

Break down the painted boards between the
sill and the floor

That they come in together, each one at her
own door.

[*LAEGAIRE and CONALL begin to break
out the bottoms of the windows, then
their wives go to the windows, each
to the window where her husband is.*
EMER *stands at the door and sings
while the boards are being broken out.*

EMER.

Nothing that he has done ;
His mind that is fire,
His body that is sun,
Have set my head higher
Than all the world's wives.

Himself on the wind
 Is the gift that he gives,
 Therefore women-kind,
 When their eyes have met mine,
 Grow cold and grow hot
 Troubled as with wine
 By a secret thought,
 Preyed upon, fed upon
 By jealousy and desire,
 For I am moon to that sun,
 I am steel to that fire.

[*The windows are now broken down to floor. CUCHULAIN takes his spear from the door, and the three WOMEN come in at the same moment.*]

EMER. Cuchulain, put off this sloth and awake :

I will sing till I've stiffened your lip against
 every knave that would take

A share of your honour.

LAEGAIRE'S WIFE. You lie, for your man
 would take from my man.

CONALL'S WIFE [*to LAEGAIRE'S WIFE*]. You
 say that, you double-face, and your own
 husband began.

CUCH. [*taking up Helmet from table*]. Town
 land may rail at town land till all have
 gone to wrack,

The very straws may wrangle till they've
 thrown down the stack ;

The very door-posts bicker till they've pulled
 in the door,

324 THE GREEN HELMET

The very ale-jars jostle till the ale is on the floor,

But this shall help no further.

[*He throws Helmet into the sea.*]

LAEGAIRE'S WIFE. It was not for your head,

And so you would let none wear it but fling it away instead.

CONALL'S WIFE. But you shall answer for it, for you've robbed my man by this.

CON. You have robbed us both, Cuchulain.

LAEGAIRE. The greatest wrong there is On the wide ridge of the world has been done to us two this day.

EMER [*drawing her dagger*]. Who is for Cuchulain ?

CUCH. Silence.

EMER. Who is for Cuchulain, I say ?

[*She sings the same words as before, flourishing her dagger about. While she is singing, CONALL'S WIFE and LAEGAIRE'S WIFE draw their daggers and run at her, but CUCHULAIN forces them back. LAEGAIRE and CONALL draw their swords to strike CUCHULAIN.*]

LAEGAIRE'S WIFE [*crying out so as to be heard through EMER'S singing*]. Deafen her singing with horns !

CONALL'S WIFE. Cry aloud ! blow horns ! make a noise !

THE GREEN HELMET 325

LAEGAIRE'S WIFE. Blow horns, clap hands, or shout, so that you smother her voice !

[*The HORSE BOYS and SCULLIONS blow their horns or fight among themselves. There is a deafening noise and a confused fight. Suddenly three black hands come through the windows and put out the torches. It is now pitch dark, but for a faint light outside the house which merely shows that there are moving forms, but not who or what they are, and in the darkness one can hear low terrified voices.*

A VOICE. Coal-black, and headed like cats, they came up over the strand.

ANOTHER VOICE. And I saw one stretch to a torch and cover it with his hand.

ANOTHER VOICE. Another sooty fellow has plucked the moon from the air.

[*A light gradually comes into the house from the sea, on which the moon begins to show once more. There is no light within the house, and the great beams of the walls are dark and full of shadows, and the persons of the play dark too against the light. The RED MAN is seen standing in the midst of the house. The black cat-headed MEN crouch and stand about the door. One carries the Helmet, one the great sword.*

326 THE GREEN HELMET

RED MAN. I demand the debt that's owing.
 Let some man kneel down there
 That I may cut his head off, or all shall go to
 wrack.

CUCH. He played and paid with his head
 and it's right that we pay him back,
 And give him more than he gave, for he
 comes in here as a guest :
 So I will give him my head.

[EMER *begins to keen.*

Little wife, little wife, be at rest.
 Alive I have been far off in all lands under sun,
 And been no faithful man ; but when my
 story is done
 My fame shall spring up and laugh, and set
 you high above all.

EMER [*putting her arms about him*]. It is
 you, not your fame that I love.

CUCH. [*tries to put her from him*]. You are
 young, you are wise, you can call
 Some kinder and comelier man that will sit
 at home in the house.

EMER. Live and be faithless still.

CUCH. [*throwing her from him*]. Would you
 stay the great barnacle-goose
 When its eyes are turned to the sea and its
 beak to the salt of the air ?

EMER [*lifting her dagger to stab herself*]. I,
 too, on the grey wing's path.

CUCH. [*seizing dagger*]. Do you dare, do
 you dare, do you dare ?

Bear children and sweep the house.

[Forcing his way through the servants who gather round.]

Wail, but keep from the road.

[He kneels before RED MAN. There is a pause.]

Quick to your work, old Radish, you will fade
when the cocks have crowed.

[A black cat-headed MAN holds out the Helmet. The RED MAN takes it.]

RED MAN. I have not come for your hurt,
I'm the Rector of this land,

And with my spitting cat-heads, my frenzied
moon-bred band,

Age after age I sift it, and choose for its
champion-ship

The man who hits my fancy.

[He places the Helmet on CUCHULAIN'S head.]

And I choose the laughing lip

That shall not turn from laughing whatever
rise or fall,

The heart that grows no bitterer although
betrayed by all ;

The hand that loves to scatter ; the life like
a gambler's throw ;

And these things I make prosper, till a day
come that I know,

When heart and mind shall darken that the
weak may end the strong,

And the long-remembering harpers have
matter for their song.

THE HOUR-GLASS

(IN VERSE)

PERSONS IN THE PLAY

WISE MAN.

BRIDGET, *his wife.*

TEIGUE, *a fool.*

ANGEL.

CHILDREN and PUPILS.

THE HOUR-GLASS

When played at the Abbey Theatre the stage is brought out into the orchestra so as to leave a wide space in front of the stage curtain. Pupils come in and stand before the stage curtain, which is still closed. One pupil carries a book.

FIRST PUPIL. He said we might choose the subject for the lesson.

SECOND PUPIL. There is none of us wise enough to do that.

THIRD PUPIL. It would need a great deal of wisdom to know what it is we want to know.

FOURTH PUPIL. I will question him.

FIFTH PUPIL. You ?

FOURTH PUPIL. Last night I dreamt that some one came and told me to question him. I was to say to him, ' You were wrong to say there is no God and no soul—maybe, if there is not much of either, there is yet some tatters, some tag on the wind—so to speak—some rag upon a bush, some bob-tail of a god.' I will argue with him—nonsense though it be—according to my dream, and

you will see how well I can argue, and what thoughts I have.

FIRST PUPIL. I'd as soon listen to dried peas in a bladder, as listen to your thoughts.

[FOOL *comes in.*

FOOL. Give me a penny.

SECOND PUPIL. Let us choose a subject by chance. Here is his big book. Let us turn over the pages slowly. Let one of us put down his finger without looking. The passage his finger lights on will be the subject for the lesson.

FOOL. Give me a penny.

THIRD PUPIL [*taking up book*]. How heavy it is.

FOURTH PUPIL. Spread it on Teigue's back, and then we can all stand round and see the choice.

SECOND PUPIL. Make him spread out his arms.

FOURTH PUPIL. Down on your knees. Hunch up your back. Spread your arms out now, and look like a golden eagle in a church. Keep still, keep still.

FOOL. Give me a penny.

THIRD PUPIL. Is that the right cry for an eagle cock?

SECOND PUPIL. I'll turn the pages—you close your eyes and put your finger down.

THIRD PUPIL. That's it, and then he cannot blame us for the choice.

FIRST PUPIL. There, I have chosen. Fool, keep still—and if what's wise is strange and sounds like nonsense, we've made a good choice.

FIFTH PUPIL. The Master has come.

FOOL. Will anybody give a penny to a fool?

[One of the pupils draws back the stage curtains showing the Master sitting at his desk. There is an hour-glass upon his desk or in a bracket on the wall. One pupil puts the book before him.]

FIRST PUPIL. We have chosen the passage for the lesson, Master. 'There are two living countries, one visible and one invisible, and when it is summer there, it is winter here, and when it is November with us, it is lambing-time there.'

WISE MAN. That passage, that passage ! what mischief has there been since yesterday ?

FIRST PUPIL. None, Master.

WISE MAN. Oh yes, there has ; some craziness has fallen from the wind, or risen from the graves of old men, and made you choose that subject.—*Diem noctemque contendo, sed quos elegi, quos amavi, in tirocinium vel hi labuntur.*

FOURTH PUPIL. I knew that it was folly, but they would have it.

THIRD PUPIL. Had we not better say we picked it by chance ?

SECOND PUPIL. No ; he would say we were children still.

FIRST PUPIL. I have found a sentence under that one that says—as though to show it had a hidden meaning—a beggar wrote it upon the walls of Babylon.

WISE MAN. Then find some beggar and ask him what it means, for I will have nothing to do with it.

FOURTH PUPIL. Come, Teigue, what is the old book's meaning when it says that there are sheep that drop their lambs in November ?

FOOL. To be sure —everybody knows, everybody in the world knows, when it is Spring with us, the trees are withering there, when it is Summer with us, the snow is falling there, and have I not myself heard the lambs that are there all bleating on a cold November day—to be sure, does not everybody with an intellect know that ; and maybe when it's night with us, it is day with them, for many a time I have seen the roads lighted before me.

WISE MAN. The beggar, who wrote that on Babylon wall, meant that there is a spiritual kingdom that cannot be seen or known till the faculties, whereby we master the kingdom of this world, wither away like green things in winter. A monkish thought, the most mischievous thought that ever passed out of

a man's mouth.—Virgas ut partus educant colligunt aves, mens hominis nugas.

FIRST PUPIL. If he meant all that, I will take an oath that he was spindle-shanked, and cross-eyed, and had a lousy itching shoulder, and that his heart was crosser than his eyes, and that he wrote it out of malice.

SECOND PUPIL. Let's come away and find a better subject.

FOURTH PUPIL. And maybe now you'll let me choose.

FIRST PUPIL. Come.

WISE MAN. Were it but true 'twould alter everything
Until the stream of the world had changed
its course,
And that and all our thoughts had run
Into some cloudy thunderous spring
They dream to be its source—
Aye, to some frenzy of the mind ;
And all that we have done would be undone,
Our speculation but as the wind. [*A pause.*
I have dreamed it twice.

FIRST PUPIL. Something has troubled him.
[*Pupils go out.*

WISE MAN. Twice have I dreamed it in a morning dream,
Now nothing serves my pupils but to come
With a like thought. Reason is growing dim ;

A moment more and Frenzy will beat his
drum

And laugh aloud and scream ;

And I must dance in the dream.

No, no, but it is like a hawk, a hawk of the air,
It has swooped down—and this swoop makes
the third—

And what can I, but tremble like a bird ?

FOOL. Give me a penny.

WISE MAN. That I should dream it twice,
and after that, that they should pick it out.

FOOL. Won't you give me a penny ?

WISE MAN. What do you want ? What can
it matter to you whether the words I am
reading are wisdom or sheer folly ?

FOOL. Such a great, wise teacher will not
refuse a penny to a fool.

WISE MAN. Seeing that everybody is a fool
when he is asleep and dreaming, why do you
call me wise ?

FOOL. O, I know,—I know, I know what
I have seen.

WISE MAN. Well, to see rightly is the whole
of wisdom, whatever dream be with us.

FOOL. When I went by Kilcluan, where the
bells used to be ringing at the break of every
day, I could hear nothing but the people
snoring in their houses. When I went by
Tubbervanach, where the young men used
to be climbing the hill to the blessed well,
they were sitting at the cross-roads playing

cards. When I went by Carrigoras, where the friars used to be fasting and serving the poor, I saw them drinking wine and obeying their wives. And when I asked what misfortune had brought all these changes, they said it was no misfortune, but that it was the wisdom they had learned from your teaching.

WISE MAN. And you too have called me wise—you would be paid for that good opinion doubtless—Run to the kitchen, my wife will give you food and drink.

FOOL. That's foolish advice for a wise man to give.

WISE MAN. Why, Fool?

FOOL. What is eaten is gone—I want pennies for my bag. I must buy bacon in the shops, and nuts in the market, and strong drink for the time the sun is weak, and snares to catch the rabbits and the hares, and a big pot to cook them in.

WISE MAN. I have more to think about than giving pennies to your like, so run away.

FOOL. Give me a penny and I will bring you luck. The fishermen let me sleep among their nets in the loft because I bring them luck; and in the summer time, the wild creatures let me sleep near their nests and their holes. It is lucky even to look at me, but it is much more lucky to give me a penny. If I was not lucky I would starve.

WISE MAN. What are the shears for?

FOOL. I won't tell you. If I told you, you would drive them away.

WISE MAN. Drive them away ! Who would I drive away ?

FOOL. I won't tell you.

WISE MAN. Not if I give you a penny ?

FOOL. No.

WISE MAN. Not if I give you two pennies ?

FOOL. You will be very lucky if you give me two pennies, but I won't tell you.

WISE MAN. Three pennies ?

FOOL. Four, and I will tell you.

WISE MAN. Very well—four, but from this out I will not call you Teigue the Fool.

FOOL. Let me come close to you, where nobody will hear me ; but first you must promise not to drive them away. [WISE MAN *nods.*] Every day men go out dressed in black and spread great black nets over the hills, great black nets.

WISE MAN. A strange place that to fish in.

FOOL. They spread them out on the hills that they may catch the feet of the angels ; but every morning just before the dawn, I go out and cut the nets with the shears and the angels fly away.

WISE MAN [*speaking with excitement*]. Ah, now I know that you are Teigue the Fool. You say that I am wise, and yet I say, there are no angels.

FOOL. I have seen plenty of angels.

WISE MAN. No, no, you have not.

FOOL. They are plenty if you but look about you. They are like the blades of grass.

WISE MAN. They are plenty as the blades of grass—I heard that phrase when I was but a child and was told folly.

FOOL. When one gets quiet. When one is so quiet that there is not a thought in one's head maybe, there is something that wakes up inside one, something happy and quiet, and then all in a minute one can smell summer flowers, and tall people go by, happy and laughing, but they will not let us look at their faces. Oh no, it is not right that we should look at their faces.

WISE MAN. You have fallen asleep upon a hill, yet, even those that used to dream of angels dream now of other things.

FOOL. I saw one but a moment ago—that is because I am lucky. It was coming behind me, but it was not laughing.

WISE MAN. There's nothing but what men can see when they are awake. Nothing, nothing.

FOOL. I knew you would drive them away.

WISE MAN. Pardon me, Fool,
I had forgotten whom I spoke to.
Well, there are your four pennies—Fool you
are called,
And all day long they cry, 'Come hither,
Fool.'
[*The FOOL goes close to him.*]

Or else it's, 'Fool, be gone.'

[*The FOOL goes further off.*

Or, 'Fool, stand there.'

[*The FOOL straightens himself up.*

Or, 'Fool, go sit in the corner.'

[*The FOOL sits in the corner.*

And all the while
What were they all but fools before I came?
What are they now, but mirrors that seem men
Because of my image? Fool, hold up your
head. [FOOL *does so.*

What foolish stories they have told of the
ghosts

That fumbled with the clothes upon the bed,
Or creaked and shuffled in the corridor,
Or else, if they were pious bred,
Of angels from the skies,
That coming through the door,
Or, it may be, standing there,
Would solidly out-stare
The steadiest eyes with their unnatural eyes,
Aye, on a man's own floor.

[*An angel has come in. It may be played
by a man if a man can be found with
the right voice, and in that case 'she'
should be changed to 'he' throughout,
and may wear a little golden domino
and a halo made of metal. Or the
whole face may be a beautiful mask, in
which case the sentence in lines 14 and
15 on page 339 should not be spoken.*

Yet it is strange, the strangest thing I have known,

That I should still be haunted by the notion
That there's a crisis of the spirit wherein
We get new sight, and that they know some trick

To turn our thoughts for their own ends to frenzy.

Why do you put your finger to your lip,
And creep away ?

[FOOL goes out.]

[WISE MAN sees ANGEL.] What are you ?
Who are you ?

I think I saw some like you in my dreams,
When but a child. That thing about your head,—

That brightness in your hair—that flowery branch ;

But I have done with dreams, I have done with dreams.

ANGEL. I am the crafty one that you have called.

WISE MAN. How that I called ?

ANGEL. I am the messenger.

WISE MAN. What message could you bring to one like me ?

ANGEL [*turning the hour-glass*]. That you will die when the last grain of sand
Has fallen through this glass.

WISE MAN. I have a wife,
Children and pupils that I cannot leave :
Why must I die, my time is far away ?

ANGEL. You have to die because no soul
has passed
The heavenly threshold since you have
opened school,
But grass grows there, and rust upon the
hinge ;
And they are lonely that must keep the
watch.

WISE MAN. And whither shall I go when I
am dead ?

ANGEL. You have denied there is a pur-
gatory,
Therefore that gate is closed ; you have
denied

There is a heaven, and so that gate is closed.

WISE MAN. Where then ? For I have said
there is no hell.

ANGEL. Hell is the place of those who have
denied ;
They find there what they planted and what
dug,

A Lake of Spaces, and a Wood of Nothing,
And wander there and drift, and never cease
Wailing for substance.

WISE MAN. Pardon me, blessed Angel,
I have denied and taught the like to others.
But how could I believe before my sight
Had come to me ?

ANGEL. It is too late for pardon.

WISE MAN. Had I but met your gaze as
now I meet it—

But how can you that live but where we go
In the uncertainty of dizzy dreams
Know why we doubt? Parting, sickness,
and death,

The rotting of the grass, tempest, and drouth,
These are the messengers that came to me.

Why are you silent? You carry in your
hands

God's pardon, and you will not give it me.

Why are you silent? Were I not afraid,
I'd kiss your hands—no, no, the hem of
your dress.

ANGEL. Only when all the world has
testified,

May soul confound it, crying out in joy,
And laughing on its lonely precipice.

What's dearth and death and sickness to the
soul

That knows no virtue but itself? Nor
could it,

So trembling with delight and mother-naked,
Live unabashed if the arguing world stood
by.

WISE MAN. It is as hard for you to under-
stand

Why we have doubted, as it is for us
To banish doubt—what folly have I said?
There can be nothing that you do not know:
Give me a year—a month—a week—a day,
I would undo what I have done—an hour—
Give me until the sand has run in the glass.

ANGEL. Though you may not undo what
you have done,
I have this power—if you but find one soul,
Before the sands have fallen, that still believes,
One fish to lie and spawn among the stones
Till the great fisher's net is full again,
You may, the purgatorial fire being passed,
Spring to your peace.

Pupils sing in the distance.

Who stole your wits away
And where are they gone ?

WISE MAN. My pupils come,
Before you have begun to climb the sky
I shall have found that soul. They say they
doubt,
But what their mothers dinned into their
ears
Cannot have been so lightly rooted up ;
Besides, I can disprove what I once proved—
And yet give me some thought, some argu-
ment,
More mighty than my own.

ANGEL. Farewell—farewell,
For I am weary of the weight of time.

[ANGEL goes out. WISE MAN makes a
step to follow and pauses. Some of
his pupils come in at the other side of
the stage.]

FIRST PUPIL. Master, master, you must
choose the subject.

[*Enter OTHER PUPILS with FOOL, about whom they dance ; all the PUPILS may have little cushions on which presently they seat themselves.*

SECOND PUPIL. Here is a subject—where have the Fool's wits gone ? [singing.

Who dragged your wits away
Where no one knows ?
Or have they run off
On their own pair of shoes ?

FOOL. Give me a penny.

FIRST PUPIL. The Master will find your wits.

SECOND PUPIL. And when they are found, you must not beg for pennies.

THIRD PUPIL. They are hidden somewhere in the badger's hole,

But you must carry an old candle end

If you would find them.

FOURTH PUPIL. They are up above the clouds.

FOOL. Give me a penny, give me a penny.

FIRST PUPIL [singing]

I'll find your wits again,
Come, for I saw them roll,
To where old badger mumbles
In the black hole.

SECOND PUPIL [singing]

No, but an angel stole them
The night that you were born,
And now they are but a rag,
On the moon's horn.

WISE MAN. Be silent.

FIRST PUPIL. Can you not see that he is troubled? [*All the PUPILS are seated.*]

WISE MAN. Nullum esse deum dixi, nullam dei matrem : mentitus vero : nam recte intellegenti sunt et deus et dei mater.

FIRST PUPIL. Argumentis igitur proba ; nam argumenta poscit qui rationis est particeps.

WISE MAN. Pro certo habeo e vobis unum quidem in fide perstitisse, unum altius quam me vidisse.

THIRD PUPIL. You answer for us.

THIRD PUPIL [*in a whisper to FIRST PUPIL*].

Be careful what you say ;

If he persuades you to an argument,
He will but turn us all to mockery.

FIRST PUPIL. We had no minds until you made them for us.

WISE MAN. Quae destruxi necesse est omnia reaedificem.

FIRST PUPIL. Haec rationibus nondum natis opinabamur : nunc Vero adolevimus : exuimus incunabula.

WISE MAN. You are afraid to tell me what you think

Because I am hot and angry when I am crossed.

I do not blame you for it ; but have no fear
For if there's one that sat on smiling there,
As though my arguments were sweet as milk

Yet found them bitter, I will thank him for it,
If he but speak his mind.

FIRST PUPIL. There is no one, Master,
There is not one but found them sweet as
milk.

WISE MAN. The things that have been told
us in our childhood
Are not so fragile.

SECOND PUPIL. We are not children now.

FIRST PUPIL. Non iam pueri sumus ; cor-
pus tantummodo ex matre fictum est.

SECOND PUPIL. Docuisti ; et nobis per-
suadetur.

WISE MAN. Mendacia vobis imbui, men-
tisque simulacra.

SECOND PUPIL. Nulli non persuasisti.

OTHER PUPILS [*speaking together*]. Nulli,
nulli, nulli.

WISE MAN. I have deceived you—where
shall I go for words—
I have no thoughts—my mind has been
swept bare.

The messengers that stand in the fiery cloud,
Fling themselves out, if we but dare to
question,
And after that, the Babylonian moon
Blots all away.

FIRST PUPIL [*to other PUPILS*]. I take his
words to mean
That visionaries, and martyrs when they are
raised

Above translunary things, and there en-
lightened,
As the contention is, may lose the light,
And flounder in their speech when the eyes
open.

SECOND PUPIL. How well he imitates their
trick of speech.

THIRD PUPIL. Their air of mystery.

FOURTH PUPIL. Their empty gaze.
As though they'd looked upon some winged
thing,

And would not condescend to mankind after.

FIRST PUPIL. Master, we all have learnt
that truth is learnt

When the intellect's deliberate and cold,
As it were a polished mirror that reflects
An unchanged world ; not when the steel
dissolves

Bubbling and hissing, till there's naught but
fume.

WISE MAN. When it is melted, when it all
fumes up,

They walk, as when beside those three in the
furnace

The form of the fourth.

FIRST PUPIL. Master, there's none among us
That has not heard your mockery of these,
Or thoughts like these, and we have not
forgot.

WISE MAN. Something incredible has hap-
pened—some one has come

Suddenly like a grey hawk out of the air,
And all that I declared untrue is true.

FIRST PUPIL [*to other PUPILS*]. You'd think
the way he says it, that he felt it.

There's not a mummer to compare with
him.

He's something like a man.

SECOND PUPIL. Argumentum, domine,
profer.

WISE MAN. What proof have I to give, but
that an angel

An instant ago was standing on that spot.

[*The PUPILS rise.*]

THIRD PUPIL. You dreamed it.

WISE MAN. I was awake as I am now.

FIRST PUPIL [*to the others*]. I may be dream-
ing now for all I know.

He wants to show we have no certain proof
Of anything in the world.

SECOND PUPIL. There is this proof
That shows we are awake—we have all one
world

While every dreamer has a world of his
own,

And sees what no one else can.

THIRD PUPIL. Teigue sees angels.
So when the Master says he has seen an
angel,

He may have seen one.

FIRST PUPIL. Both may still be dreamers ;
Unless it's proved the angels were alike.

SECOND PUPIL. What sort are the angels,
Teigue ?

THIRD PUPIL. That will prove nothing,
Unless we are sure prolonged obedience
Has made one angel like another angel
As they were eggs.

FIRST PUPIL. The Master's silent now :
For he has found that to dispute with us—
Seeing that he has taught us what we know—
Is but to reason with himself. Let us
away,
And find if there is one believer left.

WISE MAN. Yes, Yes. Find me but one
that still can say :
Credo in patrem et filium et spiritum sanctum.

THIRD PUPIL. He'll mock and maul him.

FOURTH PUPIL. From the first I knew
He wanted somebody to argue with.

[*They go.*
WISE MAN. I have no reason left. All
dark, all dark !

[*Pupils return laughing. They push
forward* FOURTH PUPIL.

FIRST PUPIL. Here, Master, is the very
man you want.

He said, when we were studying the book,
That maybe after all the monks were right,
And you mistaken, and if we but gave him
time,

He'd prove that it was so.

FOURTH PUPIL. I never said it.

WISE MAN. Dear friend, dear friend, do
you believe in God ?

FOURTH PUPIL. Master, they have invented
this to mock me.

WISE MAN. You are afraid of me.

FOURTH PUPIL. They know well, Master,
That all I said was but to make them argue.
They've pushed me in to make a mock of me,
Because they knew I could take either side
And beat them at it.

WISE MAN. If you can say the creed
With but a grain, a mustard grain of faith,
You are my soul's one friend.

[PUPILS laugh.
Mistress or wife
Can give us but our good or evil luck
Amid the howling world, but you shall give
Eternity, and those sweet-throated things
That drift above the moon.

[*The PUPILS look at one another and
are silent.*

SECOND PUPIL. How strange he is.

WISE MAN. The angel that stood there upon
that spot,
Said that my soul was lost unless I found
One that had faith.

FOURTH PUPIL. Cease mocking at me,
Master,
For I am certain that there is no God
Nor immortality, and they that said it
Made a fantastic tale from a starved dream

To plague our hearts. Will that content you, Master ?

WISE MAN. The giddy glass is emptier every moment,
And you stand there, debating, laughing and wrangling.

Out of my sight ! Out of my sight, I say.
[*He drives them out.*]

I'll call my wife, for what can women do,
That carry us in the darkness of their bodies,

But mock the reason that lets nothing grow
Unless it grow in light. Bridget, Bridget.
A woman never gives up all her faith,
Say what we will. Bridget, come quickly,
Bridget.

[*BRIDGET comes in wearing her apron.
Her sleeves are turned up from her
arms which are covered with flour.*]

Wife, what do you believe in ? Tell me the truth,

And not—as is the habit with you all—
Something you think will please me. Do you pray ?

Sometimes when you're alone in the house,
do you pray ?

BRIDGET. Prayers—no, you taught me to leave them off long ago. At first I was sorry, but I am glad now, for I am sleepy in the evenings.

WISE MAN. Do you believe in God ?

BRIDGET. Oh, a good wife only believes in what her husband tells her.

WISE MAN. But sometimes, when the children are asleep
And I am in the school, do you not think
About the martyrs and the saints and the angels,

And all the things that you believed in once ?

BRIDGET. I think about nothing—sometimes I wonder if the linen is bleaching white, or I go out to see if the crows are picking up the chickens' food.

WISE MAN. My God,—my God ! I will go out myself.
My pupils said that they would find a man
Whose faith I never shook—they may have found him.

Therefore I will go out—but if I go,
The glass will let the sands run out unseen.
I cannot go—I cannot leave the glass.
Go call my pupils—I can explain all now,
Only when all our hold on life is troubled,
Only in spiritual terror can the Truth
Come through the broken mind—as the pease burst

Out of a broken pease-cod.

[*He clutches BRIDGET as she is going.*

Say to them,
That Nature would lack all in her most need,
Could not the soul find truth as in a flash,
Upon the battle-field, or in the midst

Of overwhelming waves, and say to them—
But no, they would but answer as I bid.

BRIDGET. You want somebody to get up
an argument with.

WISE MAN. Look out and see if there is any
one

There in the street—I cannot leave the glass,
For somebody might shake it, and the sand
If it were shaken might run down on the
instant.

BRIDGET. I don't understand a word you
are saying. There's a crowd of people
talking to your pupils.

WISE MAN. Go out and find if they have
found a man

Who did not understand me when I taught,
Or did not listen.

BRIDGET. It is a hard thing to be married
to a man of learning that must always be
having arguments. *[She goes out.]*

WISE MAN. Strange that I should be blind
to the great secret,

And that so simple a man might write it out
Upon a blade of grass with the juice of a
berry ;

And laugh and cry, because it was so simple.

[Enter BRIDGET followed by the FOOL.]

FOOL. Give me something ; give me a
penny to buy bacon in the shops and nuts in
the market, and strong drink for the time
when the sun is weak.

BRIDGET. I have no pennies. [*To WISE MAN.*] Your pupils cannot find anybody to argue with you. There's nobody in the whole country with religion enough for a lover's oath. Can't you be quiet now, and not always wanting to have arguments. It must be terrible to have a mind like that.

WISE MAN. Then I am lost indeed.

BRIDGET. Leave me alone now, I have to make the bread for you and the children.

[*She goes into kitchen.*]

WISE MAN. Children, children !

BRIDGET. Your father wants you, run to him. [CHILDREN *run in.*]

WISE MAN. Come to me, children. Do not be afraid.

I want to know if you believe in Heaven,
God or the soul—no, do not tell me yet ;
You need not be afraid I shall be angry,
Say what you please—so that it is your
thought—

I wanted you to know before you spoke,
That I shall not be angry.

FIRST CHILD. We have not forgotten,
father.

SECOND CHILD. Oh no, father.

BOTH CHILDREN [*as if repeating a lesson*].
There is nothing we cannot see, nothing we
cannot touch.

FIRST CHILD. Foolish people used to say
that there was, but you have taught us better.

WISE MAN. Go to your mother, go—yet
do not go.

What can she say ? If am dumb you are lost ;
And yet, because the sands are running out,
I have but a moment to show it all in.

Children,

The sap would die out of the blades of grass
Had they a doubt. They understand it all,
Being the fingers of God's certainty,
Yet can but make their sign into the air ;
But could they find their tongues they'd
show it all ;

But what am I to say that am but one,
When they are millions and they will not
speak— [CHILDREN *have run out.*
But they are gone ; what made them run
away ?

[*The FOOL comes in with a dandelion.*

Look at me, tell me if my face is changed,
Is there a notch of the fiend's nail upon it
Already ? Is it terrible to sight
Because the moment's near ? [*Going to glass.*

I dare not look,
I dare not know the moment when they come.
No, no, I dare not. [*Covers glass.*] Will
there be a footfall,

Or will there be a sort of rending sound,
Or else a cracking, as though an iron claw
Had gripped the threshold stone ?

[*FOOL has begun to blow the dandelion.*

What are you doing ?

FOOL. Wait a minute—four—five—six—

WISE MAN. What are you doing that for ?

FOOL. I am blowing the dandelion to find out what hour it is.

WISE MAN. You have heard everything, and that is why

You'd find what hour it is—you'd find that out,

That you may look upon a fleet of devils
Dragging my soul away. You shall not stop,
I will have no one here when they come in,
I will have no one sitting there—no one—
And yet — and yet — there is something
strange about you.

I half remember something. What is it ?
Do you believe in God and in the soul ?

FOOL. So you ask me now. I thought when you were asking your pupils, ' Will he ask Teigue the Fool ? ' Yes, he will, he will ; no, he will not—yes, he will.' But Teigue will say nothing. Teigue will say nothing.

WISE MAN. Tell me quickly.

FOOL. I said, ' Teigue knows everything, not even the green-eyed cats and the hares that milk the cows have Teigue's wisdom ' ; but Teigue will not speak, he says nothing.

WISE MAN. Speak, speak, for underneath the cover there

The sand is running from the upper glass,
And when the last grain's through, I shall be
lost.

FOOL. I will not speak. I will not tell you what is in my mind. I will not tell you what is in my bag. You might steal away my thoughts. I met a bodach on the road yesterday, and he said, 'Teigue, tell me how many pennies are in your bag ; I will wager three pennies that there are not twenty pennies in your bag ; let me put in my hand and count them.' But I gripped the bag the tighter, and when I go to sleep at night I hide the bag where nobody knows.

WISE MAN. There's but one pinch of sand,
and I am lost
If you are not he I seek.

FOOL. Oh, what a lot the Fool knows, but he says nothing.

WISE MAN. Yes, I remember now. You spoke of angels.
You said but now that you had seen an angel.
You are the one I seek, and I am saved.

FOOL. Oh no. How could poor Teigue see angels ? Oh, Teigue tells one tale here, another there, and everybody gives him pennies. If Teigue had not his tales he would starve. [*He breaks away and goes out.*]

WISE MAN. The last hope is gone,
And now that it's too late I see it all,
We perish into God and sink away
Into reality—the rest's a dream.

[*The FOOL comes back.*]

FOOL. There was one there—there by the

threshold stone, waiting there ; and he said, 'Go in, Teigue, and tell him everything that he asks you. He will give you a penny if you tell him.'

WISE MAN. I know enough, that know
God's will prevails.

FOOL. Waiting till the moment had come
—That is what the one out there was saying,
but I might tell you what you asked. That
is what he was saying.

WISE MAN. Be silent. May God's will
prevail on the instant,
Although His will be my eternal pain.
I have no question :

It is enough, I know what fixed the station
Of star and cloud.

And knowing all, I cry

That what so God has willed

On the instant be fulfilled,

Though that be my damnation.

The stream of the world has changed its
course,

And with the stream my thoughts have run
Into some cloudy thunderous spring

That is its mountain source—

Aye, to some frenzy of the mind,

For all that we have done's undone,

Our speculation but as the wind. [*He dies.*

FOOL. Wise man—Wise man, wake up
and I will tell you everything for a penny.
It is I, poor Teigue the Fool. Why don't

you wake up, and say, 'There is a penny for you, Teigue'? No, no, you will say nothing. You and I, we are the two fools, we know everything, but we will not speak.

[ANGEL *enters holding a casket.*

Oh, look what has come from his mouth !
Oh, look what has come from his mouth—
the white butterfly ! He is dead, and I have
taken his soul in my hands ; but I know why
you open the lid of that golden box. I must
give it to you. There then [*he puts butterfly
in casket*], he has gone through his pains, and
you will open the lid in the Garden of Para-
dise. [*He closes curtain and remains outside
it.*] He is gone, he is gone, he is gone, but
come in everybody in the world and look at
me.

I hear the wind a blow,
I hear the grass a grow,
And all that I know, I know.

But I will not speak, I will run away.

[*He goes out.*

THE PLAYER QUEEN

PERSONS IN THE PLAY

DECIMA.

SEPTIMUS.

NONA.

THE QUEEN.

THE PRIME MINISTER.

THE BISHOP.

THE STAGE MANAGER.

THE TAPSTER.

AN OLD BEGGAR.

OLD MEN, OLD WOMEN, CITIZENS, COUNTRYMEN,
PLAYERS, etc.

SCENE ONE : An open space at the meeting of three streets.

SCENE TWO : The Throne Room.

THE PLAYER QUEEN

SCENE I. : *An open space at the meeting of three streets. One can see for some way down one of these streets and at some little distance it turns, showing a bare piece of wall lighted by a hanging lamp. Against this lighted wall are silhouetted the heads and shoulders of two old men. They are leaning from the upper windows, one on either side of the street. They wear grotesque masks. A little to one side of the stage is a great stone for mounting a horse from. The houses have knockers.*

FIRST OLD MAN. Can you see the Queen's castle? You have better sight than I.

SECOND OLD MAN. I can just see it rising over the tops of the houses yonder on its great rocky hill.

FIRST OLD MAN. Is the dawn breaking? Is it touching the tower?

SECOND OLD MAN. It is beginning to break upon the tower, but these narrow streets will be dark for a long while. [*A pause.*] Do

you hear anything? You have better hearing than I.

FIRST OLD MAN. No, all is quiet.

SECOND OLD MAN. At least fifty passed by an hour since, a crowd of fifty men walking rapidly.

FIRST OLD MAN. Last night was very quiet, not a sound, not a breath.

SECOND OLD MAN. And not a thing to be seen till the tapster's old dog came down the street upon this very hour from Cooper Malachi's ash-pit.

FIRST OLD MAN. Hush, I hear feet, many feet. Perhaps they are coming this way. [*Pause.*] No, they are going the other way, they are gone now.

SECOND OLD MAN. The young are at some mischief,—the young and the middle-aged.

FIRST OLD MAN. Why can't they stay in their beds, and they can sleep too—seven hours, eight hours. I mind the time when I could sleep ten hours. They will know the value of sleep when they are near upon ninety years.

SECOND OLD MAN. They will never live so long. They have not the health and strength that we had. They wear themselves out. They are always in a passion about something or other.

FIRST OLD MAN. Hush! I hear a step now, and it is coming this way. We had best

pull in our heads. The world has grown very wicked and there is no knowing what they might do to us or say to us.

SECOND OLD MAN. Yes, better shut the windows and pretend to be asleep.

[They pull in their heads. One hears a knocker being struck in the distance, then a pause and a knocker is struck close at hand. Another pause and SEPTIMUS, a handsome man of thirty-five, staggers on to the stage. He is very drunk.]

SEPTIMUS. An uncharitable place, an un-Christian place. *[He begins banging at a knocker.]* Open there, open there. I want to come in and sleep.

[A THIRD OLD MAN puts his head from an upper window.]

THIRD OLD MAN. Who are you? What do you want?

SEPTIMUS. I am Septimus. I have a bad wife. I want to come in and sleep.

THIRD OLD MAN. You are drunk.

SEPTIMUS. Drunk! So would you be if you had as bad a wife.

THIRD OLD MAN. Go away.

[He shuts the window.]

SEPTIMUS. Is there not one Christian in this town. *[He begins hammering the knocker of the FIRST OLD MAN, but there is no answer.]* No one there? All dead or drunk maybe—

366 THE PLAYER QUEEN

bad wives. There must be one Christian man.

[He hammers a knocker at the other side of the stage. An OLD WOMAN puts her head out of the window above.]

OLD WOMAN *[in a shrill voice]*. Who's there? What do you want? Has something happened?

SEPTIMUS. Yes, that's it. Something has happened. My wife has hid herself, has run away, or has drowned herself.

OLD WOMAN. What do I care about your wife! You are drunk.

SEPTIMUS. Not care about my wife! But I tell you that my wife has to play by order of the Prime Minister before all the people in the great hall of the Castle precisely at noon and she cannot be found.

OLD WOMAN. Go away, go away! I tell you, go away. *[She shuts the window.]*

SEPTIMUS. Treat Septimus, who has played before Kubla Khan, like this. Septimus, dramatist and poet! *[The OLD WOMAN opens the window again and empties a jug of water over him.]* Water! drenched to the skin—must sleep in the street. *[Lies down.]* Bad wife—others have had bad wives, but others were not left to lie down in the open street under the stars, drenched with cold water, a whole jug of cold water, shivering in the pale light of the dawn, to be run over, to be

trampled upon, to be eaten by dogs, and all because their wives have hidden themselves.

Enter TWO MEN a little older than SEPTIMUS.

They stand still and gaze into the sky.

FIRST MAN. Ah, my friend, the little fair-haired one is a minx.

SECOND MAN. Never trust fair hair—I will have nothing but brown hair.

FIRST MAN. They have kept us too long—brown or fair.

SECOND MAN. What are you staring at?

FIRST MAN. At the first streak of the dawn on the Castle tower.

SECOND MAN. I would not have my wife find out for the world.

SEPTIMUS [*sitting up*]. Carry me, support me, drag me, roll me, pull me, or sidle me along, but bring me where I may sleep in comfort. Bring me to a stable—my Saviour was content with a stable.

FIRST MAN. Who are you? I don't know your face.

SEPTIMUS. I am Septimus, a player, a playwright and the most famous poet in the world.

SECOND MAN. That name, sir, is unknown to me.

SEPTIMUS. Unknown?

SECOND MAN. But my name will not be unknown to you. I am called Peter of the Purple Pelican, after the best known of my

368 THE PLAYER QUEEN

poems, and my friend is called Happy Tom.
He also is a poet.

SEPTIMUS. Bad, popular poets.

SECOND MAN. You would be a popular poet if you could.

SEPTIMUS. Bad, popular poets.

FIRST MAN. Lie where you are if you can't be civil.

SEPTIMUS. What do I care for any one now except Venus and Adonis and the other planets of heaven !

SECOND MAN. You can enjoy their company by yourself. [*The TWO MEN go out.*]

SEPTIMUS. Robbed, so to speak ; naked, so to speak—bleeding, so to speak—and they pass by on the other side of the street.

[*A crowd of CITIZENS and COUNTRYMEN enter. At first only a few, and then more and more till the stage is filled by an excited crowd.*]

FIRST CITIZEN. There is a man lying here.

SECOND CITIZEN. Roll him over.

FIRST CITIZEN. He is one of those players who are housed at the Castle. They arrived yesterday.

SECOND CITIZEN. Drunk, I suppose. He'll be killed or maimed by the first milk-cart.

THIRD CITIZEN. Better roll him into the corner. If we are in for a bloody day's business, there is no need for him to be killed

—an unnecessary death might bring a curse upon us.

FIRST CITIZEN. Give me a hand here.

[They begin rolling] SEPTIMUS.

SEPTIMUS *[muttering]*. Not allowed to sleep ! Rolled off the street ! Shoved into a stony place ! Unchristian town !

[He is left lying at the foot of the wall to one side of the stage.]

THIRD CITIZEN. Are we all friends here, are we all agreed ?

FIRST CITIZEN. These men are from the country. They came in last night. They know little of the business. They won't be against the people, but they want to know more.

FIRST COUNTRYMAN. Yes, that is it. We are with the people, but we want to know more.

SECOND COUNTRYMAN. We want to know all, but we are with the people.

[Other voices take up the words, ' We want to know all, but we are with the people,' etc. There is a murmur of voices together.]

THIRD CITIZEN. Have you ever seen the Queen, countryman ?

FIRST COUNTRYMAN. No.

THIRD CITIZEN. Our Queen is a witch, a bad evil-living witch, and we will have her no longer for Queen.

370 THE PLAYER QUEEN

THIRD COUNTRYMAN. I would be slow to believe her father's daughter a witch.

THIRD CITIZEN. Have you ever seen the Queen, countryman?

THIRD COUNTRYMAN. No.

THIRD CITIZEN. Nor has any one else. Not a man here has set eyes on her. For seven years she has been shut up in that great black house on the great rocky hill. From the day her father died she has been there with the doors shut on her, but we know now why she has hidden herself. She has no good companions in the dark night.

THIRD COUNTRYMAN. In my district they say that she is a holy woman and prays for us all.

THIRD CITIZEN. That story has been spread about by the Prime Minister. He has spies everywhere spreading stories. He is a crafty man.

FIRST COUNTRYMAN. It is true, they always deceive us countrypeople. We are not educated like the people of the town.

A BIG COUNTRYMAN. The Bible says, Suffer not a witch to live. Last Candlemas twelve-month I strangled a witch with my own hands.

THIRD CITIZEN. When she is dead we will make the Prime Minister King.

SECOND CITIZEN. No, no, he is not a king's son.

SECOND COUNTRYMAN. I'd send a bellman through the world. There are many kings in Arabia, they say.

THIRD COUNTRYMAN. The people must be talking. If you and I were to hide ourselves, or to be someway hard to understand, maybe they would put some bad name on us. I am not against the people, but I want testimony.

THIRD CITIZEN. Come, Tapster, stand up there on the stone and tell what you know.

[*The TAPSTER climbs up on the mounting-stone.*]

TAPSTER. I live in the quarter where her Castle is. The garden of my house and the gardens of all the houses in my row run right up to the rocky hill that has her Castle on the top. There is a lad in my quarter that has a goat in his garden.

FIRST CITIZEN. That's strolling Michael—I know him.

TAPSTER. That goat is always going astray. Strolling Michael got out of his bed early one morning to go snaring birds, and nowhere could he see that goat. So he began climbing up the rock, and up and up he went, till he was close under the wall, and there he found the goat and it shaking and sweating as though something had scared it. Presently he heard a thing neigh like a horse, and after that a something like a white horse ran by, but it was no horse, but a unicorn. He had his pistol, for he had thought to bring down

a rabbit, and seeing it rushing at him as he imagined, he fired at the unicorn. It vanished all in a moment, but there was blood on a great stone.

THIRD CITIZEN. Seeing what company she keeps in the small hours, what wonder that she never sets foot out of doors.

THIRD COUNTRYMAN. I wouldn't believe all that night rambler says—boys are liars. All that we have against her for certain is that she won't put her foot out of doors. I knew a man once that when he was five and twenty refused to get out of his bed. He wasn't ill—no, not he, but he said life was a vale of tears, and for forty and four years till they carried him out to the churchyard he never left that bed. All tried him—parson tried him, priest tried him, doctor tried him, and all he'd say was, 'Life is a vale of tears.' It's too snug he was in his bed, and believe me, that ever since she has had no father to rout her out of a morning she has been in her bed, and small blame to her maybe.

THE BIG COUNTRYMAN. But that's the very sort that are witches. They know where to find their own friends in the lonely hours of the night. There was a witch in my own district that I strangled last Candlemas twelvemonth. She had an imp in the shape of a red cat, that sucked three drops of blood from her poll every night a little before the

cock crew. It's with their blood they feed them ; until they have been fed with the blood they are images and shadows ; but when they have it drunk they can be for a while stronger than you or me.

THIRD COUNTRYMAN. The man I knew was no witch, he was no way active. 'Life is a vale of tears,' he said. Parson tried him, doctor tried him, priest tried him—but that was all he'd say.

FIRST CITIZEN. We'd have no man go beyond evidence and reason, but hear the Tapster out, and when you have you'll say that we cannot leave her alive this day—no, not for one day longer.

TAPSTER. It's not a story that I like to be telling, but you are all married men. Another night that boy climbed up after his goat and it was an hour earlier by his clock and no light in the sky, and when he came to the Castle wall he clambered along the wall among the rocks and bushes till he saw a light from a little window over his head. It was an old wall full of holes, where mortar had fallen out, and he climbed up, putting his toes into the holes, till he could look in through the window ; and when he looked in, what did he see but the Queen.

FIRST COUNTRYMAN. And did he say what she was like ?

THE TAPSTER. He saw more than that.

374 THE PLAYER QUEEN

He saw her coupling with a great white unicorn. [*Murmurs among the crowd.*]

SECOND COUNTRYMAN. I will not have the son of the unicorn to reign over us, although you will tell me he would be no more than half a unicorn.

FIRST COUNTRYMAN. I'll not go against the people, but I'd let her live if the Prime Minister promised to rout her out of bed in the morning and to set a guard to drive off the unicorn.

THE BIG COUNTRYMAN. I have strangled an old witch with these two hands, and to-day I will strangle a young witch.

SEPTIMUS [*who has slowly got up and climbed up on to the mounting-stone which the TAPSTER has left*]. Did I hear somebody say that the unicorn is not chaste? It is a most noble beast, a most religious beast. It has a milk-white skin and a milk-white horn, and milk-white hooves, but a mild blue eye, and it dances in the sun. I will have no one speak against it, not while I am still upon the earth. It is written in "The Great Bestery of Paris" that it is chaste, that it is the most chaste of all the beasts in the world.

THE BIG COUNTRYMAN. Pull him out of that, he's drunk.

SEPTIMUS. Yes, I am drunk, I am very drunk, but that is no reason why I should permit any one to speak against the unicorn.

SECOND CITIZEN. Let's hear him out. We can do nothing till the sun's up.

SEPTIMUS. Nobody shall speak against the unicorn. No, my friends and poets, nobody. I will hunt it if you will, though it is a dangerous and cross-grained beast. Much virtue has made it cross-grained. I will go with you to the high tablelands of Africa where it lives, and we will there shoot it through the head, but I will not speak against its character, and if any man declares it is not chaste I will fight him, for I affirm that its chastity is equal to its beauty.

THE BIG COUNTRYMAN. He is most monstrously drunk.

SEPTIMUS. No longer drunk but inspired.

SECOND CITIZEN. Go on, go on, we'll never hear the like again.

THE BIG COUNTRYMAN. Come away. I've enough of this—we have work to do.

SEPTIMUS. Go away, did you say, and my breast feathers thrust out and my white wings buoyed up with divinity? Ah! but I can see it now—you are bent upon going to some lonely place where uninterrupted you can speak against the character of the unicorn, but you shall not, I tell you that you shall not. [*He comes down off the stone and squares up at the crowd which tries to pass him.*] In the midst of this uncharitable town I will protect that noble, milk-white, flighty beast.

376 THE PLAYER QUEEN

THE BIG COUNTRYMAN. Let me pass.

SEPTIMUS. No, I will not let you pass.

FIRST COUNTRYMAN. Leave him alone.

SECOND COUNTRYMAN. No violence—it might bring ill-luck upon us.

[*They try to hold back the* BIG COUNTRYMAN.

SEPTIMUS. I will oppose your passing to the death. For I will not have it said that there is a smirch, or a blot, upon the most milky whiteness of an heroic brute that bathes by the sound of tabors at the rising of the sun and the rising of the moon, and the rising of the Great Bear, and above all, it shall not be said, whispered, or in any wise published abroad by you that stand there, so to speak, between two washings ; for you were doubtless washed when you were born, and, it may be, shall be washed again after you are dead.

[*The* BIG COUNTRYMAN *knocks him down.*

FIRST CITIZEN. You have killed him.

THE BIG COUNTRYMAN. Maybe I have, maybe I have not—let him lie there. A witch I strangled last Candlemas twelve-month, a witch I will strangle to-day. What do I care for the likes of him ?

THIRD CITIZEN. Come round to the east quarter of the town. The basket-makers and the sieve-makers will be out by this.

FOURTH CITIZEN. It is a short march from there to the Castle gate.

[They go up one of the side streets, but return quickly in confusion and fear.]

FIRST CITIZEN. Are you sure that you saw him ?

SECOND CITIZEN. Who could mistake that horrible old man ?

THIRD CITIZEN. I was standing by him when the ghost spoke out of him seven years ago.

FIRST COUNTRYMAN. I never saw him before. He has never been in my district. I don't rightly know what sort he is, but I have heard of him, many a time I have heard of him.

FIRST CITIZEN. His eyes become glassy, and that is the trance growing upon him, and when he is in the trance his soul slips away and a ghost takes its place and speaks out of him—a strange ghost.

THIRD CITIZEN. I was standing by him the last time. 'Get me straw,' said that old man, 'my back itches.' Then all of a sudden he lay down, with his eyes wide open and glassy, and he brayed like a donkey. At that moment the King died and the King's daughter was Queen.

FIRST COUNTRYMAN. They say it is the donkey that carried Christ into Jerusalem and that is why it knows its rightful sovereign. He goes begging about the country and there is no man dare refuse him what he asks.

378 THE PLAYER QUEEN

THE BIG COUNTRYMAN. Then it is certain nobody will take my hand off her throat. I will make my grip tighter. He will be lying down on the straw and he will bray, and when he brays she will be dead.

FIRST COUNTRYMAN. Look ! There he is coming over the top of the hill, and the mad look upon him.

SECOND COUNTRYMAN. I wouldn't face him for the world this night. Come round to the market-place, we'll be less afraid in a big place.

THE BIG COUNTRYMAN. I'm not afraid, but I'll go with you till I get my hand on her throat.

[They all go out but SEPTIMUS. Presently SEPTIMUS sits up; his head is bleeding. He rubs with his fingers his broken head and looks at the blood on his fingers.]

SEPTIMUS. Unchristian town ! First I am, so to speak, thrown out into the street, and then I am all but murdered ; and I drunk, and therefore in need of protection. All creatures are in need of protection at some time or other. Even my wife was once a frail child in need of milk, of smiles, of love, as if in the midst of a flood, in danger of drowning, so to speak.

[An OLD BEGGAR with long matted hair and beard and in ragged clothes comes in.]

THE OLD BEGGAR. I want straw.

SEPTIMUS. Happy Tom and Peter of the Purple Pelican have done it all. They are bad, popular poets, and being jealous of my fame, they have stirred up the people. [*He catches sight of the OLD BEGGAR.*] There is a certain medicine which is made by distilling camphor, peruvian bark, spurge and mandrake, and mixing all with twelve ounces of dissolved pearls and four ounces of the oil of gold ; and this medicine is infallible to stop the flow of blood. Have you any of it, old man ?

THE OLD BEGGAR. I want straw.

SEPTIMUS. I can see that you have not got it, but no matter, we shall be friends.

THE OLD BEGGAR. I want straw to lie down on.

SEPTIMUS. It is no doubt better that I should bleed to death. For that way, my friend, I shall disgrace Happy Tom and Peter of the Purple Pelican, but it is necessary that I shall die somewhere where my last words can be taken down. I am therefore in need of your support.

[*Having got up he now staggers over to the OLD MAN and leans upon him.*]

THE OLD BEGGAR. Don't you know who I am—aren't you afraid ? When something comes inside me, my back itches. Then I

380 THE PLAYER QUEEN

must lie down and roll, and then I bray and the crown changes.

SEPTIMUS. Ah ! you are inspired. Then we are indeed brothers. Come, I will rest upon your shoulder and we will mount the hill side by side. I will sleep in the Castle of the Queen.

THE OLD BEGGAR. You will give me straw to lie upon ?

SEPTIMUS. Asphodels ! Yet, indeed, the asphodel is a flower much overrated by the classic authors. Still, if a man has a preference, I say for the asphodel——

[They go out and one hears the voice of SEPTIMUS murmuring in the distance about asphodels.]

[The FIRST OLD MAN opens his window and taps with his crutch at the opposite window. The SECOND OLD MAN opens his window.]

FIRST OLD MAN. It is all right now. They are all gone. We can have our talk out.

SECOND OLD MAN. The whole Castle is lit by the dawn now, and it will soon begin to grow brighter in the street.

FIRST OLD MAN. It's time for the Tapster's old dog to come down the street.

SECOND OLD MAN. Yesterday he had a bone in his mouth.

CURTAIN

SCENE II.: *The throne-room in the Castle. Between pillars are gilded openwork doors, except at one side, where there is a large window. The morning light is slanting through the window, making dark shadows among the pillars. As the scene goes on, the light, at first feeble, becomes strong and suffused, and the shadows disappear. Through the openwork doors one can see down long passages, and one of these passages plainly leads into the open air. One can see daylight at the end of it. There is a throne in the centre of the room and a flight of steps that leads to it.*

The PRIME MINISTER, an elderly man with an impatient manner and voice, is talking to a group of players, among whom is Nona, a fair, comely, comfortable-looking young woman of perhaps thirty-five; she seems to take the lead.

PRIME MINISTER. I will not be trifled with. I chose the play myself; I chose "The Tragical History of Noah's Deluge" because when Noah beats his wife to make her go into the Ark everybody understands, everybody is pleased, everybody recognises the mulish obstinacy of their own wives, sweethearts, sisters. And now, when it is of the greatest importance to the State that every-

body should be pleased, the play cannot be given. The leading lady is lost, you say, and there is some unintelligible reason why nobody can take her place ; but I know what you are all driving at—you object to the play I have chosen. You want some dull, poetical thing, full of long speeches. I will have that play and no other. The rehearsal must begin at once and the performance take place at noon punctually.

NONA. We have searched all night, sir, and we cannot find her anywhere. She was heard to say that she would drown rather than play a woman older than thirty. Seeing that Noah's wife is a very old woman, we are afraid that she has drowned herself indeed.

[DECIMA, *a very pretty woman, puts her head out from under the throne where she has been lying hidden.*

PRIME MINISTER. Nonsense ! It is all a conspiracy. Your manager should be here. He is responsible. You can tell him when he does come that if the play is not performed, I will clap him into jail for a year and pitch the rest of you over the border.

NONA. Oh, sir, he couldn't help it. She does whatever she likes.

PRIME MINISTER. Does whatever she likes—I know her sort ; would pull the world to pieces to spite her husband or her lover. I know her—a bladder full of dried peas for

a brain, a brazen, bragging baggage. Of course he couldn't help it, but what do I care. [DECIMA *pulls in her head.*] To jail he goes—somebody has got to go to jail. Go and cry her name everywhere. Away with you! Let me hear you cry it out. Call the baggage. Louder. Louder. [*The players go out crying, 'Where are you, Decima?'*] Oh, Adam! why did you fall asleep in the garden? You might have known that while you were lying there helpless, the Old Man in the Sky would play some prank upon you.

[*The QUEEN, who is young, with an ascetic timid face, enters in a badly-fitting state dress.*]

Ah!

QUEEN. I will show myself to the angry people as you have bidden me. I am almost certain that I am ready for martyrdom. I have prayed all night. Yes, I am almost certain.

PRIME MINISTER. Ah!

QUEEN. I have now attained to the age of my patroness, Holy Saint Octema, when she was martyred at Antioch. You will remember that her unicorn was so pleased at the spectacle of her austerity that he caracoled in his excitement. Thereupon she dropped out of the saddle and was trampled to death under the feet of the mob. Indeed, but for

the unicorn, the mob would have killed her long before.

PRIME MINISTER. No, you will not be martyred. I have a plan to settle that. I will stop their anger with a word. Who made that dress ?

QUEEN. It was my mother's dress. She wore it at her coronation. I would not have a new one made. I do not deserve new clothes. I am always committing sin.

PRIME MINISTER. Is there sin in an egg that has never been hatched, that has never been warmed, in a chalk egg ?

QUEEN. I wish I could resemble Holy Saint Octema in everything.

PRIME MINISTER. What a dress ! It is too late now. Nothing can be done. It may appear right to those on the edge of the crowd. The others must be conquered by charm, dignity, royal manner. As for the dress, I must think of some excuse, some explanation. Remember that they have never seen your face, and you will put them in a bad humour if you hang your head in that dumbfounded way.

QUEEN. I wish I could return to my prayers.

PRIME MINISTER. Walk ! Permit me to see your Majesty walk. No, no, no. Be more majestic. Ah ! If you had known the Queens I have known—they had a way

with them. Morals of a dragoon, but a way, a way. Give the people some plain image or they will invent one. Put on a kind of eagle look, a vulture look.

QUEEN. There are cobble-stones — if I might go barefoot it would be a blessed penance. It was especially the bleeding feet of Saint Octema that gave pleasure to the unicorn.

PRIME MINISTER. Sleep of Adam ! Barefoot—barefoot, did you say ? [*A pause.*] There is not time to take off your shoes and stockings. If you were to look out of the window there, you would see the crowd becoming wicked every minute. Come ! [*He gives his arm to the QUEEN.*]

QUEEN. You have a plan to stop their anger so that I shall not be martyred ?

PRIME MINISTER. My plan will be disclosed before the face of the people and there alone.

[*They go out.*]

[*NONA comes in with a bottle of wine and a boiled lobster and lays them on the middle of the floor. She puts her finger on her lip and stands in the doorway towards the back of the stage.*]

DECIMA [*comes cautiously out of her hiding place singing*].

‘ He went away,’ my mother sang,
 ‘ When I was brought to bed.’
 And all the while her needle pulled
 The gold and silver thread.

She pulled the thread and bit the thread
And made a golden gown,
She wept because she had dreamt that I
Was born to wear a crown.

[She is just reaching her hand for the lobster when NONA comes forward holding out towards her the dress and mask of Noah's wife which she had been carrying over her left arm.]

NONA. Thank God you are found! *[Getting between her and the lobster.]* No, not until you have put on this dress and mask. I have caught you now and you are not going to hide again.

DECIMA. Very well, when I have had my breakfast.

NONA. Not a mouthful till you are dressed ready for the rehearsal.

DECIMA. Do you know what song I was singing just now?

NONA. It is that song you're always singing. Septimus made it up.

DECIMA. It is the song of the mad singing daughter of a harlot. The only song she had. Her father was a drunken sailor waiting for the full tide, and yet she thought her mother had foretold that she would marry a prince and become a great queen. *[Singing.]*

'When she was got,' my mother sang,
'I heard a seamew cry,

THE PLAYER QUEEN 387

I saw a flake of yellow foam
That dropped upon my thigh.'

How therefore could she help but braid
The gold upon my hair,
And dream that I should carry
The golden top of care.

The moment ago as I lay here I thought I could play a Queen's part, a great Queen's part ; the only part in the world I can play is a great Queen's part.

NONA. You play a Queen's part ? You that were born in a ditch between two towns and wrapped in a sheet that was stolen from a hedge.

DECIMA. The Queen cannot play at all, but I could play so well. I could bow with my whole body down to my ankles and could be stern when hard looks were in season. Oh, I would know how to put all summer in a look and after that all winter in a voice.

NONA. Low comedy is what you are fit for.

DECIMA. I understood all this in a wink of the eye, and then just when I am saying to myself that I was born to sit up there with soldiers and courtiers, you come shaking in front of me that mask and that dress. I am not to eat my breakfast unless I play an old peaky-chinned, drop-nosed harridan that a foul husband beats with a stick because she won't clamber among the other brutes into

his cattle boat. [*She makes a dart at the lobster.*]

NONA. No, no, not a drop, not a mouthful till you have put these on. Remember that if there is no play Septimus must go to prison.

DECIMA. Would they give him dry bread to eat ?

NONA. They would.

DECIMA. And water to drink and nothing in the water ?

NONA. They would.

DECIMA. And a straw bed ?

NONA. They would, and only a little straw maybe.

DECIMA. And iron chains that clanked.

NONA. They would.

DECIMA. And keep him there for a whole week ?

NONA. A month maybe.

DECIMA. And he would say to the turnkey, 'I am here because of my beautiful cruel wife, my beautiful flighty wife.'

NONA. He might not, he'd be sober.

DECIMA. But he'd think it and every time he was hungry, every time he was thirsty, every time he felt the hardness of the stone floor, every time he heard the chains clank, he would think it, and every time he thought it I would become more beautiful in his eyes,

NONA. No, he would hate you.

DECIMA. Little do you know what the love of man is. If that Holy Image of the Church where you put all those candles at Easter was pleasant and affable, why did you come home with the skin worn off your two knees ?

NONA [*in tears*]. I understand—you cruel, bad woman—you won't play the part at all, and all that Septimus may go to prison, and he a great genius that can't take care of himself.

[*Seeing NONA distracted with tears DECIMA makes a dart and almost gets the lobster.*]

NONA. No, no ! Not a mouthful, not a drop. I will break the bottle if you go near it. There is not another woman in the world would treat a man like that and you were sworn to him in Church—yes, you were, there is no good denying it. [*DECIMA makes another dart, but NONA, who is still in tears, puts the lobster in her pocket.*] Leave the food alone ; not one mouthful will you get. I have never sworn to a man in Church, but if I did swear I would not treat him like a tinker's donkey—before God I would not—I was properly brought up ; my mother always told me it was no light thing to take a man in Church.

DECIMA. You are in love with my husband.

NONA. Because I don't want to see him jailed you say I am in love with him. Only

a woman with no heart would think one can't be sorry for a man without being in love with him. A woman who has never been sorry for anybody, but I won't have him jailed, if you won't play the part I'll play it myself.

DECIMA. When I married him, I made him swear never to play with anybody but me, and well you know it.

NONA. Only this once and in a part nobody can do anything with.

DECIMA. That is the way it begins and all the time you would be saying things the audience couldn't hear.

NONA. Septimus will break his oath and I have learnt the part. Every line of it.

DECIMA. Septimus would not break his oath for anybody in the world.

NONA. There is one person in the world for whom he will break his oath.

DECIMA. What have you in your head now?

NONA. He will break it for me.

DECIMA. You are crazy.

NONA. Maybe I have my secrets.

DECIMA. What are you keeping back? Have you been sitting in corners with Septimus? giving him sympathy because of the bad wife he has and all the while he has sat there to have the pleasure of talking about me?

NONA. You think that you have his every thought because you are a devil.

DECIMA. Because I am a devil I have his every thought. You know how his own song runs. The man speaks first—[*singing*.

Put off that mask of burning gold
With emerald eyes,

and then the woman answers—

Oh no, my dear, you make so bold
To find if hearts be wild and wise
And yet not cold.

NONA. His every thought—that is a lie. He forgets all about you the moment you're out of his sight.

DECIMA. Then look what I carry under my bodice. This is a poem praising me, all my beauties one after the other—eyes, hair, complexion, shape, disposition, mind—everything. And there are a great many verses to it. And here is a little one he gave me yesterday morning. I had turned him out of bed and he had to lie alone by himself.

NONA. Alone by himself !

DECIMA. And as he lay there alone, unable to sleep, he made it up, wishing that he were blind so as not to be troubled by looking at my beauty. Hear how it goes ! [*sings again.*]

O would that I were an old beggar
Without a friend on this earth
But a thieving rascally cur,
A beggar blind from his birth ;
Or anything else but a man

Lying alone on a bed
Remembering a woman's beauty,
Alone with a crazy head.

NONA. Alone in his bed indeed. I know that long poem, that one with all the verses ; I know it to my hurt, though I haven't read a word of it. Four lines in every verse, four beats in every line, and fourteen verses—my curse upon it !

DECIMA [*taking out a manuscript from her bodice*]. Yes, fourteen verses. There are numbers to them.

NONA. You have another there — ten verses all in fours and threes.

DECIMA [*looking at another manuscript*]. Yes, the verses are in fours and threes. But how do you know all this ? I carry them here. They are a secret between him and me, and nobody can see them till they have lain a long while upon my heart.

NONA. They have lain upon your heart, but they were made upon my shoulder. Ay, and down along my spine in the small hours of the morning ; so many beats a line, and for every beat a tap of the fingers.

DECIMA. My God !

NONA. That one with the fourteen verses kept me from my sleep two hours, and when the lines were finished he lay upon his back another hour waving one arm in the air, making up the music. I liked him well

enough to seem to be asleep through it all, and many another poem too—but when he made up that short one you sang he was so pleased that he muttered the words all about his lying alone in his bed thinking of you, and that made me mad. So I said to him, ‘Am I not beautiful? Turn round and look.’ Oh, I cut it short, for even I can please a man when there is but one candle. [*She takes a pair of scissors that are hanging round her neck and begins snipping at the dress for Noah’s wife.*] And now you know why I can play the part in spite of you and not be driven out. Work upon Septimus if you have a mind for it. Little need I care. I will clip this a trifle and re-stitch it again—I have a needle and thread ready.

[*The STAGE MANAGER comes in ringing a bell. He is followed by various players all dressed up in likeness of various beasts.*

STAGE MANAGER. Put on that mask—get into your clothes. Why are you standing there as if in a trance?

NONA. Decima and I have talked the matter over and we have settled that I am to play the part.

STAGE MANAGER. Do as you please. Thank God it’s a part that anybody can play. All you have got to do is to copy an old woman’s squeaky voice. We are all here now but

Septimus, and we cannot wait for him. I will read the part of Noah. He will be here before we are finished I daresay. We will suppose that the audience is upon this side, and that the Ark is over there with a gangway for the beasts to climb. All you beasts are to crowd up on the prompt side. Lay down Noah's hat and cloak there till Septimus comes. As the first scene is between Noah and the beasts, you can go on with your sewing.

DECIMA. No, I must first be heard. My husband has been spending his nights with Nona, and that is why she sits clipping and stitching with that vainglorious air.

NONA. She made him miserable, she knows every trick of breaking a man's heart—he came to me with his troubles—I seemed to be a comfort to him, and now—why should I deny it?—he is my lover.

DECIMA. I will take the vainglory out of her. I have been a plague to him. Oh, I have been a badger and a weasel and a hedgehog and pole-cat, and all because I was dead sick of him. And, thank God! she has got him and I am free. I threw away a part and I threw away a man—she has picked both up.

STAGE MANAGER. It seems to me that it all concerns you two. It's your business and not ours. I don't see why we should delay the rehearsal.

DECIMA. I will have no rehearsal yet. I'm too happy now that I am free. I must find somebody who will dance with me for a while. Come we must have music. [*She picks up a lute which has been laid down amongst some properties.*] You can't all be claws and hoofs.

STAGE MANAGER. We've only an hour and the whole play to go through.

NONA. Oh, she has taken my scissors, she is only pretending not to care. Look at her ! She is mad ! Take them away from her ! Hold her hand ! She is going to kill me or to kill herself. [*To STAGE MANAGER.*] Why don't you interfere ? My God ! She is going to kill me.

DECIMA. Here, Peter. Play the lute.

[*She begins cutting through the breast feathers of the Swan.*]

NONA. She is doing it all to stop the rehearsal, out of vengeance ; and you stand there and do nothing.

STAGE MANAGER. If you have taken her husband, why didn't you keep the news till the play was over ? She is going to make them all mad now. I can see that much in her eyes.

DECIMA. Now that I have thrown Septimus into her lap, I will choose a new man. Shall it be you, Turkey-cock ? or you, Bullhead ?

STAGE MANAGER. There is nothing to be

396 THE PLAYER QUEEN

done. It is all your fault. If Septimus can't manage his wife, it's certain that I can't.

[He sits down helplessly.]

FIRST PLAYER *[who is in the four legs of the Bull]*. Come live with me and be my love.

DECIMA. Dance, Bullhead, dance. *[The Bull dances.]* You're too slow on your feet.

FIRST PLAYER. Although I am slow I am twice as good as any other, for I am double—one in the forelegs and one behind.

DECIMA. You are heavy of build and that means jealousy, and there is a sort of melancholy in your voice; and what a folly, now that I have found out love, to stretch and yawn as if I loved.

SECOND PLAYER *[who is in the form of a Turkey-cock]*. Come live with me and be my love, for as everybody can see from my ruff and my red wattle and my way of strutting and my chuckling speech, I have a cheerful appetite.

DECIMA. Dance, dance. *[The Turkey-cock dances.]* Ah, Turkey-cock, you are lively on your feet and I would find it hard to hide if you followed. Would you expect me to be faithful?

SECOND PLAYER. No, neither I nor you. I have a score of wives.

NONA. You are a disgrace.

SECOND PLAYER. Be content now that you have a man of your own.

THE PLAYER QUEEN 397

DECIMA. You are quick of mind, Turkey-cock. I see that by your bright eyes, but I want to let my mind go asleep. All dance, all, all, and I will choose the best dancer amongst you.

FIRST PLAYER. No, let us toss for it. I understand that better.

DECIMA. Quick, quick, begin to dance.
[*All dance round* DECIMA.]

DECIMA [*singing*].

Shall I fancy beast or fowl,
Queen Pasiphae chose a bull,
While a passion for a swan
Made Queen Leda stretch and yawn,
Wherefore spin ye, whirl ye, dance ye,
Till Queen Decima's found her fancy.

Chorus.

Wherefore spin ye, whirl ye, dance ye,
Till Queen Decima's found her fancy.

DECIMA.

Spring and straddle, stride and strut,
Shall I choose a bird or brute?
Name the feather or the fur
For my single comforter?

Chorus.

Wherefore spin ye, whirl ye, dance ye,
Till Queen Decima's found her fancy.

DECIMA.

None has found, that found out love,
Single bird or brute enough;

Any bird or brute may rest
An empty head upon my breast.

Chorus.

Wherefore spin ye, whirl ye, dance ye,
Till Queen Decima's found her fancy.

STAGE MANAGER. Stop, stop, here is Septimus.

SEPTIMUS [*the blood still upon his face and but little soberer*]. Gather about me, for I announce the end of the Christian Era, the coming of a New Dispensation, that of the New Adam, that of the Unicorn; but alas, he is chaste, he hesitates, he hesitates.

STAGE MANAGER. This is not a time for making up speeches for your new play.

SEPTIMUS. His unborn children are but images; we merely play with images.

STAGE MANAGER. Let us get on with the rehearsal.

SEPTIMUS. No; let us prepare to die. The mob is climbing up the hill with pitchforks to stick into our vitals and burning wisps to set the roof on fire.

FIRST PLAYER [*who has gone to the window*]. My God, it's true. There is a great crowd at the bottom of the hill.

SECOND PLAYER. But why should they attack us?

SEPTIMUS. Because we are the servants of the Unicorn.

THE PLAYER QUEEN 399

THIRD PLAYER [*at window*]. My God, they have dung-forks and scythes set on poles and they are coming this way.

[*Many players gather round the window.*

SEPTIMUS [*who has found the bottle and is drinking*]. Some will die like Cato, some like Cicero, some like Demosthenes, triumphing over death in sonorous eloquence, or, like Petronius Arbiter, will tell witty, scandalous tales ; but I will speak, no, I will sing, as if the mob did not exist. I will rail upon the Unicorn for his chastity. I will bid him trample mankind to death and beget a new race. I will even put my railing into rhyme, and all shall run sweetly, sweetly, for, even if they blow up the floor with gunpowder, they are merely the mob.

Upon the round blue eye I rail,
Damnation on the milk-white horn.

A telling sound, a sound to linger in the ear—hale, tale, bale, gale—my God, I am even too sober to find a rhyme. [*He drinks and then picks up a lute*]—a tune that my murderers may remember my last words and croon them to their grandchildren.

[*For the next few speeches he is busy making his tune.*

FIRST PLAYER. The players of this town are jealous. Have we not been chosen before them all, because we are the most

famous players in the world? It is they who have stirred up the mob.

THIRD PLAYER. When we played at Kz nadu, my performance was so incomparable that the men who pulled the strings of the puppet-show left all the puppets lying on their backs and came to have a look at me.

FOURTH PLAYER. Listen to him! His performance indeed! I ask you all to speak the truth. If you are honest men you will say that it was my performance that drew the town. Why, Kubla Khan himself gave me the name of the Talking Nightingale.

FIFTH PLAYER. My God, listen to him! Is it not always the comedian who draws the people? Am I dreaming, and was it not I who was called six times before the curtain? Answer me that.

SIXTH PLAYER [*at window*]. There is somebody making a speech. I cannot see who it is.

SECOND PLAYER. Depend upon it, he is telling them to put burning wisps upon dung-forks and put them into the rafters. That is what they did in the old play of the Burning of Troy. Depend upon it, they will burn the whole house.

FIFTH PLAYER [*coming from window*]. I will stay here no longer.

OTHER PLAYERS. Nor I, nor I. [*Exit.*

THE PLAYER QUEEN 401

FIRST PLAYER. Must we go dressed like this ?

SECOND PLAYER. There is no time to change, and besides should the hill be surrounded, we can gather in some cleft of the rocks where we can be seen only from a distance. They will suppose we are a drove of cattle or a flock of birds.

[*All go out except SEPTIMUS, DECIMA, and NONA. NONA is making a bundle of Noah's hat and cloak and other properties. DECIMA is watching SEPTIMUS.*]

SEPTIMUS [*while the players are going out*]. Leave me to die alone ? I do not blame you. There is courage in red wine, in white wine, in beer, even in thin beer sold by a blear-eyed potboy in a bankrupt tavern, but there is none in the human heart. When my master the Unicorn bathes by the light of the Great Bear, and to the sound of tabors, even the sweet river-water makes him drunk ; but it is cold, it is cold, alas ! it is cold.

NONA. I'll pile these upon your back. I shall carry the rest myself and so we shall save all.

[*She begins tying a great bundle of properties on SEPTIMUS' back.*]

SEPTIMUS. You are right. I accept the reproach. It is necessary that we who are the last artists—all the rest have gone over

to the mob—shall save the images and implements of our art. We must carry into safety the cloak of Noah, the high-crowned hat of Noah, and the golden face of the Almighty, and the horns of Satan.

NONA. Thank God you can still stand upright on your legs.

SEPTIMUS. Tie all upon my back and I will tell you the great secret that came to me at the second mouthful of the bottle. Man is nothing till he is united to an image. Now the Unicorn is both an image and beast; that is why he alone can be the new Adam. When we have put all in safety we will go to the high tablelands of Africa and find where the Unicorn is stabled and sing a marriage song. I will stand before the terrible blue eye.

NONA. There now I have tied them on.

[She begins making another bundle for herself.]

SEPTIMUS. You will make Ionian music—music with its eyes upon that voluptuous Asia—the Dorian scale would but confirm him in his chastity. One Dorian note might undo us, and above all we must be careful not to speak of Delphi. The oracle is chaste.

NONA. Come, let us go.

SEPTIMUS. If we cannot fill him with desire he will deserve death. Even unicorns can be killed. What they dread most in the world

is a blow from a knife that has been dipped in the blood of a serpent that died gazing upon an emerald.

[NONA *and* SEPTIMUS *are about to go out, NONA leading SEPTIMUS.*

DECIMA. Stand back, do not dare to move a step.

SEPTIMUS. Beautiful as the unicorn but fierce.

DECIMA. I have locked the gates that we may have a talk.

[NONA *lets the hat of Noah fall in her alarm.*

SEPTIMUS. That is well, very well. You would talk with me because to-day I am extraordinarily wise.

DECIMA. I will not unlock the gate till I have a promise that you will drive her from the company.

NONA. Do not listen to her ; take the key from her.

SEPTIMUS. If I were not her husband I would take the key, but because I am her husband she is terrible. The Unicorn will be terrible when it loves.

NONA. You are afraid.

SEPTIMUS. Could not you yourself take it ? She does not love you, therefore she will not be terrible.

NONA. If you are a man at all you will take it.

SEPTIMUS. I am more than a man, I am extraordinarily wise. I will take the key.

DECIMA. If you come a step nearer I will shove the key through the grating of the door.

NONA [*pulling him back*]. Don't go near her; if she shoves it through the door we shall not be able to escape. The crowd will find us and murder us.

DECIMA. I will unlock this gate when you have taken an oath to drive her from the company, an oath never to speak with her or look at her again, a terrible oath.

SEPTIMUS. You are jealous; it is very wrong to be jealous. An ordinary man would be lost—even I am not yet wise enough. [*Drinks again.*] Now all is plain.

DECIMA. You have been unfaithful to me.

SEPTIMUS. I am only unfaithful when I am sober. Never trust a sober man. All the world over they are unfaithful. Never trust a man who has not bathed by the light of the Great Bear. I warn you against all sober men from the bottom of my heart. I am extraordinarily wise.

NONA. Promise, if it is only an oath she wants. Take whatever oath she bids you. If you delay we shall all be murdered.

SEPTIMUS. I can see your meaning. You would explain to me that an oath can be broken, more especially an oath under compulsion, but no, I say to you, no, I say to you,

certainly not. Am I a rascally sober man, such a man as I have warned you against? Shall I be foresworn before the very eyes of Delphi, so to speak, before the very eyes of that cold, rocky oracle? What I promise I perform, therefore, my little darling, I will not promise anything at all.

DECIMA. Then we shall wait here. They will come in there and there, they will carry dung-forks with burning wisps. They will put the burning wisps into the roof and we shall be burnt.

SEPTIMUS. I shall die railing upon that beast. The Christian era has come to an end, but because of the machinations of Delphi he will not become the new Adam.

DECIMA. I shall be avenged. She starved me, but I shall have killed her.

NONA [*who has crept behind DECIMA and snatched the key*]. I have it, I have it!

[DECIMA *tries to take the key again but*

SEPTIMUS *holds her.*

SEPTIMUS. Because I am an unforesworn man I am strong : a violent virginal creature, that is how it is put in "The Great Beastery of Paris."

DECIMA. Go, then. I shall stay here and die.

NONA. Let us go. A half hour since she offered herself to every man in the company.

406 THE PLAYER QUEEN

DECIMA. If you would be faithful to me, Septimus, I would not let a man of them touch me.

SEPTIMUS. Flighty, but beautiful.

NONA. She is a bad woman.

[NONA runs out.

SEPTIMUS. A beautiful, bad, flighty woman I will follow, but follow slowly. I will take with me this noble hat. [*He picks up Noah's hat with difficulty.*] I will save the noble, high-crowned hat of Noah. I will carry it thus with dignity. I will go slowly that they may see I am not afraid. [*singing.*

Upon the round blue eye I rail
Damnation on the milk-white horn.

But not one word of Delphi. I am extraordinarily wise. [*He goes.*

DECIMA. Betrayed, betrayed, and for a nobody. For a woman that a man can shake and twist like so much tallow. A woman that till now never looked higher than a prompter or a property man. [*The OLD BEGGAR comes in.*] Have you come to kill me, old man?

OLD BEGGAR. I am looking for straw. I must soon lie down and roll, and where will I get straw to roll on? I went round to the kitchen and 'Go away' they said. They made the sign of the cross as if it were a devil that puts me rolling.

DECIMA. When will the mob come to kill me ?

OLD BEGGAR. Kill you ? It is not you they are going to kill. It's the itching in my back that drags them hither, for when I bray like a donkey, the crown changes.

DECIMA. The crown ? So it is the Queen they are going to kill.

OLD BEGGAR. But, my dear, she can't die till I roll and bray, and I will whisper to you what it is that rolls. It is the donkey that carried Christ into Jerusalem, and that is why he is so proud ; and that is why he knows the hour when there is to be a new King or a new Queen.

DECIMA. Are you weary of the world, old man ?

OLD BEGGAR. Yes, yes, because when I roll and bray I am asleep. I know nothing about it, and that is a great pity. I remember nothing but the itching in my back. But I must stop talking and find some straw.

DECIMA [*picking up the scissors*]. Old man, I am going to drive this into my heart.

OLD BEGGAR. No, no ; don't do that. You don't know what you will be put to when you are dead, into whose gullet you will be put to sing or to bray. You have a look of a foretelling sort. Who knows but you might be put to foretell the death of kings ; and

bear in mind I will have no rivals, I could not endure a rival.

DECIMA. I have been betrayed by a man, I have been made a mockery of. Do those who are dead, old man, make love and do they find good lovers ?

OLD BEGGAR. I will whisper you another secret. People talk, but I have never known of anything to come from there but an old jackass. Maybe there is nothing else. Who knows but he has the whole place to himself. But there, my back is beginning to itch, and I have not yet found any straw.

[He goes out. DECIMA leans the scissors upon the arm of the throne and is about to press herself upon them when the QUEEN enters.]

QUEEN *[stopping her]*. No, no,—that would be a great sin.

DECIMA. Your Majesty !

QUEEN. I thought I would like to die a martyr, but that would be different, that would be to die for God's glory. The Holy Saint Octema was a martyr.

DECIMA. I am very unhappy.

QUEEN. I, too, am very unhappy. When I saw the great angry crowd and knew that they wished to kill me, though I had wanted to be a martyr, I was afraid and ran away.

DECIMA. I would not have run away. Oh

no, but it is hard to drive a knife into one's own flesh.

QUEEN. In a moment they will have come and they will beat in the door, and how shall I escape them ?

DECIMA. If they could mistake me for you, you would escape.

QUEEN. I could not let another die instead of me. That would be very wrong.

DECIMA. Oh, your Majesty, I shall die whatever you do, and if only I could wear that gold brocade and those gold slippers for one moment, it would not be so hard to die.

QUEEN. They say that those who die to save a rightful sovereign show great virtue.

DECIMA. Quick ! the dress.

QUEEN. If you killed yourself your soul would be lost, and now you will be sure of heaven.

DECIMA. Quick, I hear them coming.

[DECIMA puts on the QUEEN's robe of state and her slippers. Underneath her robe of state the QUEEN wears some kind of nun-like dress.

The following speech is spoken by the QUEEN while she is helping DECIMA to fasten the dress and the slippers.

QUEEN. Was it love ? [DECIMA nods.] Oh, that is a great sin. I have never known love. Of all things, that is what I have had most fear of. Saint Octema shut herself up

in a tower on a mountain because she was loved by a beautiful prince. I was afraid it would come in at the eye and seize upon me in a moment. I am not naturally good, and they say people will do anything for love, there is so much sweetness in it. Even Saint Octema was afraid of it. But you will escape all that and go up to God as a pure virgin. [*The change is now complete.*] Good-bye, I know how I can slip away. There is a convent that will take me in. It is not a tower, it is only a convent, but I have long wanted to go there to lose my name and disappear. Sit down upon the throne and turn your face away. If you do not turn your face away, you will be afraid. [*The QUEEN goes out.*

[*DECIMA is seated upon the throne. A great crowd gathers outside the gates. A BISHOP enters.*

BISHOP. Your loyal people, your Majesty, offer you their homage. I bow before you in their name. Your royal will has spoken by the mouth of the Prime Minister—has filled them with gratitude. All misunderstandings are at an end, all has been settled by your condescension in bestowing your royal hand upon the Prime Minister. [*To crowd.*] Her Majesty, who has hitherto shut herself away from all men's eyes that she might pray for this kingdom undisturbed, will henceforth show herself to her people.

[To PLAYER QUEEN.] So beautiful a queen need never fear the disobedience of her people [*shouts from crowd of 'never.'*]

PRIME MINISTER [*entering hurriedly*]. I will explain all, your Majesty—there was nothing else to be done—This Bishop has been summoned to unite us [*seeing the QUEEN*]; but, sleep of Adam!—this—who is this?

DECIMA. Your emotion is too great for words. Do not try to speak.

PRIME MINISTER. This—this!

DECIMA [*standing up*]. I am queen. I know what it is to be queen. If I were to say to you I had an enemy you would kill him—you would tear him in pieces. [*Shouts 'we would kill him,' 'we would tear him in pieces,' etc.*] But I do not bid you kill any one—I bid you obey my husband when I have raised him to the throne. He is not of royal blood, but I choose to raise him to the throne. That is my will. Show me that you will obey him so long as I bid you to obey. [*Great cheering.*]

[SEPTIMUS, who has been standing among the crowd, comes forward and takes the PRIME MINISTER by the sleeve. Various persons kiss the hand of the supposed QUEEN.]

SEPTIMUS. My Lord, that is not the queen; that is my bad wife. [DECIMA looks at them.]

PRIME MINISTER. Did you see that? Did

you see the devil in her eye. They are mad after her pretty face, and she knows it. They would not believe a word I say ; there is nothing to be done till they cool.

DECIMA. Are all here my faithful servants ?

BISHOP. All, your Majesty.

DECIMA. All ?

PRIME MINISTER [*bowing low*]. All, your Majesty.

DECIMA [*singing*].

She pulled the thread, and bit the thread
And made a golden gown.

Hand me that plate of lobster and that bottle of wine. While I am eating I will have a good look at my new man.

[The plate and bottle of wine are handed to her. The bray of a donkey is heard and the OLD BEGGAR is dragged in.]

BISHOP. At last we have found this impostor out. He has been accepted by the whole nation as if he were the Voice of God. As if the crown could not be settled firmly on any head without his help. [*Shouts from the mob of 'impostor,' 'rogue,' etc.*]. It's plain that he has been in league with the conspirators, and believed that your Majesty had been killed. He is keeping it up still. Look at his glassy eye. But his madman airs won't help him now.

PRIME MINISTER [*shaking* SEPTIMUS]. Do you understand that there has been a miracle, that God or the Fiend has spoken, and that the crown is on her head for good, that fate has brayed on that man's lips. [*Aloud.*] We will hang him in the morning.

SEPTIMUS. She is my wife.

PRIME MINISTER. The crown has changed and there is no help for it. Sleep of Adam, I must have that woman for wife. The Oracle has settled that.

[*Take him away to prison.*]

SEPTIMUS. She is my wife, she is my bad, flighty wife.

PRIME MINISTER. Seize this man. He has been whispering slanders against her Majesty. Cast him beyond the borders of the kingdom and find the company of players he belongs to. They also are banished and must not return on pain of death. Now, my Lord Bishop, I am ready.

DECIMA [*singing*].

She wept because she had dreamt that I
Was born to wear a crown.

[*She flings the lobster's claw at the*

PRIME MINISTER.

Come—crack that claw.

NOTES

NOTES

(1) THE LEGENDARY AND MYTHOLOGICAL FOUNDATION OF THE PLAYS

THE greater number of the stories I have used, and persons I have spoken of, are in Lady Gregory's *Gods and Fighting Men* and *Cuchulain of Muirthemne*. If my small Dublin audience for poetical drama grows to any size, whether now or at some future time, I shall owe it to these two books, masterpieces of prose, which can but make the old stories as familiar to Irishmen at any rate as are the stories of Arthur and his Knights to all readers of books. 'I cannot believe that it is from friendship that I weigh these books with Malory, and feel no discontent at the tally, or that it is the wish to make the circumstantial origins of my own art familiar, that would make me give them before all other books to young men and girls in Ireland. I wrote for the most part before they were written, but all, or all but all, is there.

The foundations of *Deirdre* and of *On Baile's Strand* are stories called respectively the 'Fate of the Sons of Usnach' and 'The Son of Aoife' in *Cuchulain of Muirthemne*. *The Green Helmet* is founded on an old Irish story, *The Feast of Bricriu*, given in that work also, and is meant as an introduction to *On Baile's Strand*.

The King's Threshold is founded upon a middle-Irish story of the demands of the poets at the Court of King Guaire of Gort, but I have twisted it about and revised its moral that the poet might have the best of it. It owes something to a play on the same subject by my old friend

Mr. Edwin Ellis, who heard the story from me and wrote of it long ago.

I took the Aengus and Edain of *The Shadowy Waters* from poor translations of the various Aengus stories, which, new translated by Lady Gregory, make up so much of what is most beautiful in both her books. They had, however, so completely become a part of my own thought that in 1897, when I was still working on an early version of *The Shadowy Waters*, I saw one night standing at my bedside, as it seemed, two beautiful persons, who would, I believed, have answered to those names. The plot of the play itself has, however, no definite old story for its foundation, but was woven to a very great extent out of certain dream experiences.

The Hour-Glass is founded upon a story—*The Priest's Soul*—recorded by Lady Wilde in *Ancient Legends of Ireland*, 1887, vol. i. pp. 60-67.

(2) CATHLEEN NI HOULIHAN

MY DEAR LADY GREGORY—When I was a boy I used to wander about at Rosses Point and Ballisodare listening to old songs and stories. I wrote down what I heard and made poems out of the stories or put them into the little chapters of the first edition of *The Celtic Twilight*, and that is how I began to write in the Irish way.

Then I went to London to make my living, and though I spent a part of every year in Ireland and tried to keep the old life in my memory by reading every country tale I could find in books or old newspapers, I began to forget the true countenance of country life. The old tales were still alive for me indeed, but with a new, strange, half-unreal life, as if in a wizard's glass, my head was full of fables that I had no longer the knowledge and emotion to write. Then you brought me with you to see your friends in the cottages, and to talk to old wise men on Slieve Echtge, and we gathered together, or you gathered for me, a great number of stories and traditional beliefs.

You taught me to understand again, and much more perfectly than before, the true countenance of country life.

One night I had a dream almost as distinct as a vision, of a cottage where there was well-being and firelight and talk of a marriage, and into the midst of that cottage there came an old woman in a long cloak. She was Ireland herself, that Cathleen ni Houlihan for whom so many songs have been sung and about whom so many stories have been told and for whose sake so many have gone to their death. I thought if I could write this out as a little play I could make others see my dream as I had seen it, but I could not get down out of that high window of dramatic verse, and in spite of all you had done for me I had not the country speech. One has to live among the people, like you, of whom an old man said in my hearing, 'She has been a serving-maid among us,' before one can think the thoughts of the people and speak with their tongue. We turned my dream into the little play, *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, and when we gave it to the little theatre in Dublin and found that the working-people liked it, you helped me to put my other dramatic fables into speech. Some of these have already been acted, but some may not be acted for a long time, but all seem to me, though they were but a part of a summer's work, to have more of that countenance of country life than anything I have done since I was a boy.

W. B. YEATS.

Feb. 1903.

This play was first played on April 2, 1902, in St. Teresa's Hall, Dublin, with the following cast:—Cathleen, Miss Maude Gonne; Delia Cahel, Miss Maire ni Sheublagh; Bridget Gillan, Miss M. T. Quinn; Patrick Gillan, Mr. C. Caufield; Michael Gillan, Mr. T. Dudley Digges; Peter Gillan, Mr. W. G. Fay.

Miss Maude Gonne played very finely, and her great height made Cathleen seem a divine being fallen into our mortal infirmity. Since then the part has been twice

played in America by women who insisted on keeping their young faces, and one of these when she went to the door dropped her cloak, as I have been told, and showed a white satin dress embroidered with shamrocks. Upon another—or was it the same occasion?—the player of Bridget wore a very becoming dress of the time of Louis the Fourteenth. The most beautiful woman of her time, when she played my Cathleen, ‘made up’ centuries old, and never should the part be played but with a like sincerity. This was the first play of our Irish School of folk-drama, and in it that way of quiet movement and careful speech which has given our players some little fame first showed itself, arising partly out of deliberate opinion and partly out of the ignorance of the players. Does art owe most to ignorance or to knowledge? Certainly it comes to its deathbed full of knowledge. I cannot imagine this play, or any folk-play of our school, acted by players with no knowledge of the peasant, and of the awkwardness and stillness of bodies that have followed the plough, or too lacking in humility to copy these things without convention or caricature.

The lines beginning ‘Do not make a great keening’ and ‘They shall be remembered for ever’ are said or sung to an air heard by one of the players in a dream.—1907.

(3) THE POT OF BROTH

I did not include this play in Mr. Bullen’s collected edition of my work as it seemed too slight a thing to perpetuate, but I found a little time ago that my own theatre had put it into rehearsal without asking my leave; and that some American had written for rights in it, and another American produced it without rights. I have therefore retouched it a little, and changed a song that I had always hated, and once more admit it to my canon. If it has a lasting interest, it is that it was the first comedy in dialect, of our movement, and gave Mr. William Fay his first opportunity as a comedian. I have no record of

the cast on its first production in, I think, 1902, for that was before the Abbey Theatre and its records; except that Mr. William Fay was Tramp, and played it not only with great humour but with great delicacy and charm. In some country village an audience of farmers once received it in stony silence, and at the fall of the curtain a farmer stood up and said nobody there had ever seen a play. Then Mr. William Fay explained what a play was, and the farmer asked that it might be performed again, and at the second performance there was much laughter and cheers. I hardly know how much of the play is my work, for Lady Gregory helped me as she has helped in every play of mine where there is dialect, and sometimes where there is not. In those first years of the Theatre we all helped one another with plots, ideas, and dialogue, but certainly I was the most indebted as I had no mastery of speech that purported to be of real life. This play may be more Lady Gregory's than mine, for I remember once urging her to include it in her own work, and her refusing to do so. The dialect, unlike that of *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, which was written about the same date, has not, I think, the right temper, being gay, mercurial, and suggestive of rapid speech. Probably we were still under the influence of the Irish novelists, who never escaped, even when they had grown up amid country speech, from the dialect of Dublin. The dialect of *Cathleen ni Houlihan* is, I think, true in temper but it has no richness, no abundance. The first use of Irish dialect, rich, abundant, and correct, for the purposes of creative art was in J. M. Synge's *Riders to the Sea*, and Lady Gregory's *Spreading the News*.

(4) THE HOUR-GLASS (in prose)

The Hour-Glass was first played in The Molesworth Hall, Dublin, on March 14, 1903, with the following cast:—Wise Man, Mr. T. Dudley Digges; His Wife, Miss M. T. Quinn; The Fool, Mr. F. J. Fay; Pupils, Messrs. P. J. Kelly, P. Colum, C. C. Caufield. It has

since become a regular part of the repertoire of the Abbey Company, and has of recent years been played before screens designed by Mr. Gordon Craig, scene and costume being copied as far as possible from the designs by Mr. Craig in my *Plays for an Irish Theatre* (1911) and from sketches sent me at the time. The early version of the Play, which was only too effective, converting a music-hall singer and sending him to Mass for six weeks, made me ashamed, but I did not know till very lately how to remedy it. I had made my Wise Man humble himself to the Fool and receive salvation as a reward, but now I have given it a new end which is closer to my own thought as well as more effective theatrically. The Fool too, when it is now played at the Abbey Theatre, wears a mask designed by Mr. Gordon Craig which makes him seem less a human being than a principle of the mind.

One sometimes has need of a few words for the Pupils to sing at their first or second entrance, and I have put into English rhyme three of the many verses of a Gaelic Ballad.

I was going the road one day
 (O the brown and the yellow beer),
 And I met with a man that was no right man
 (O my dear, O my dear).

'Give me your wife,' said he
 (O the brown and the yellow beer),
 'Till the sun goes down and an hour of the clock'
 (O my dear, O my dear).

'Good-bye, good-bye, my husband
 (O the brown and the yellow beer),
 For a year and a day by the clock of the sun'
 (O my dear, O my dear).

1907-1922.

(5) THE KING'S THRESHOLD

The King's Threshold was first played October 7, 1903, in the Molesworth Hall, Dublin, by the Irish National Theatre Society, and with the following cast :—

Seanchan	F. J. FAY
King Guaire	P. KELLY
Lord High Chamberlain	SEUMUS O'SULLIVAN
Soldier	WILLIAM CONROY
Monk	S. SHERIDAN-NEILL
Mayor	WILLIAM FAY
A Cripple	PATRICK COLUM
A Court Lady	HONOR LAVELLE
Another Court Lady	DORA MELVILLE
A Princess	SARA ALLGOOD
Another Princess	DORA GUNNING
Fedelm	MAIRE NI SHIUBHLAIGH
A Servant	P. MACSHIUBHLAIGH
Another Servant	P. JOSEPHS
A Pupil	G. ROBERTS
Another Pupil	CARTIA MACCORMAC

It has been revised a good many times since then, and although the play has not been changed in the radical structure, the parts of the Mayor, Servant, and Cripple are altogether new, and the rest is altered here and there. It was written when our Society was beginning its fight for the recognition of pure art in a community of which one half is buried in the practical affairs of life, and the other half in politics and a propagandist patriotism.—1911.

When I wrote this play neither suffragette nor patriot had adopted the hunger strike, nor had the hunger strike been used anywhere, so far as I know, as a political weapon.

I have given the play the tragic end I would have given it at the first, had not a friend advised me to 'write comedy and have a few happy moments in the theatre.' My friend meant that tragic emotion, depending as it does upon gradually deepening reverie, is so fragile, that it is

shattered by a wrong movement or cadence, or even by a light in the wrong place.—1922.

(6) ON BAILE'S STRAND

On Baile's Strand was first played, in a version considerably different from the present, on December 27, 1904, at the opening of the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, and with the following cast :—

Cuchulain	. . . . .	F. J. FAY
Conchubar	. . . . .	GEORGE ROBERTS
Daire (<i>an old King not now in the play</i>)		G. MACDONALD
The Blind Man	. . . . .	SEUMUS O'SULLIVAN
The Fool	. . . . .	WILLIAM FAY
The Young Man	. . . . .	P. MACSHIUBHLAIGH

The old and young kings were played by the following :—R. Nash, A. Power, U. Wright, E. Keegan, Emma Vernon, Miss Garvey, Dora Gunning, Sara Allgood. It was necessary to put women into men's parts owing to the smallness of our company at that time.

The play was revived by the National Theatre Society, Ltd., in a somewhat altered version at Oxford, Cambridge, and London a few months later. I then entirely rewrote it up to the entrance of the Young Man, and changed it a good deal from that on to the end, and this new version was played at the Abbey Theatre for the first time in April, 1906.—*Collected Works*, 1907.

The Blind Man and Fool should, I think, wear grotesque masks and that designed for a Fool's Mask by Mr. Gordon Craig in *Plays for an Irish Theatre* (1911) was intended for this play as well as for *The Hour-Glass*. I have a fine unpublished design for a Blind Man's mask by Mr. Gordon Craig. The Fool in both plays is perhaps the Fat Fool of Folk-lore, who is 'as wide and wild as a hill' and not the Thin Fool of modern romance.—1922.

(7) SHADOWY WATERS (stage version)

This version of the longer play which is in *Later Poems* was first played in Dublin at the Abbey Theatre in 1906. Mr. Sinclair took the part of Aibric, Mr. Frank Fay that of Forgael, while Miss Darragh played that of Dectora. The scenery with its decorated boat and sail in green and gold and copper was designed by Mr. Robert Gregory.

(8) DEIRDRE

This play was first played at the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, on November 26, 1906, with the following cast :—

Musicians	.	.	.	.	{	MISS SARA ALLGOOD
					{	MISS MAIRE O'NEILL
					{	MISS BRIDGET DEMPSEY
Fergus	.	.	.	.	.	ARTHUR SINCLAIR
Naisi	.	.	.	.	.	F. J. FAY
Deirdre	.	.	.	.	.	MISS DARRAGH
Messenger	.	.	.	.	.	U. WRIGHT
Conchubar	.	.	.	.	.	J. M. KERRIGAN
Executioner	.	.	.	.	.	A. POWER

Since then the principal part has been taken by Miss Mona Limerick, Miss Sara Allgood, and Miss Maire O'Neill, and Mrs. Patrick Campbell, who played it in Dublin and London with the Abbey Company in 1907 and 1908, as well as playing it with a company of her own in London in the autumn of 1907. I have revised it a good deal of recent years, especially this last year.—1922.

(9) THE UNICORN FROM THE STARS

I wrote in 1902, with the help of Lady Gregory and another friend, a play called *Where there is Nothing*, but had to write at great speed to meet a sudden emergency.

Five acts had to be finished in, I think, a fortnight, instead of the five years that would have been somewhat nearer my natural pace. It became hateful to me because, in desperation, I had caught up from a near table a pamphlet of Tolstoy's on the Sermon on the Mount, and made out of it a satirical scene that became the pivot of the play. The scene seemed amusing on the stage, but its crude speculative commonplaces filled me with shame and I withdrew the play from circulation. That I might free myself from what seemed a contamination, I asked Lady Gregory to help me turn my old plot into *The Unicorn from the Stars*. I began to dictate, but since I had last worked with her, her mastery of the stage and her knowledge of dialect had so increased that my imagination could not go neck to neck with hers. I found myself, too, stopped by an old difficulty, that my words never flow freely but when people speak in verse; and so after an attempt to work alone I gave up my scheme to her. The result is a play almost wholly hers in handiwork, which is so much mine in thought that she does not wish to include it in her own works. I can indeed read it after the stories of *The Secret Rose* and recognise thoughts, points of view, and artistic aims which seem a part of my world. Her greatest difficulty was that I had given her in my reshaping of the plot—swept as I hoped of dogmatism and rhetorical arrogance—for chief character, a man so plunged in trance that he could not be otherwise than all but still and silent, though perhaps with the stillness and silence of a lamp; and the movement of the play as a whole, if we were to listen, if we were to understand what he said, had to be without hurry or violence. The strange characters, her handiwork, on whom he sheds his light, delight me. She has enabled me to carry out an old thought for which my own knowledge is insufficient, and to commingle the ancient phantasies of poetry with the rough, vivid, ever-contemporaneous tumult of the roadside; to share in the creation of a form that otherwise I could but dream of, though I do that always, an art that

murmured, though with worn and failing voice, of the day when Quixote and Sancho Panza, long estranged, may once again go out gaily into the bleak air. Ever since I began to write I have awaited with impatience a linking all Europe over of the hereditary knowledge of the countryside, now becoming known to us through the work of wanderers and men of learning, with our old lyricism so full of ancient frenzies and hereditary wisdom ; a yoking of antiquities ; a Marriage of Heaven and Hell.

The Unicorn and the Stars was first played at the Abbey Theatre on November 23, 1907, with the following cast:—

Father John	ERNEST VAUGHAN
Thomas Hearne	ARTHUR SINCLAIR
Andrew Hearne	J. A. O'ROURKE
Martin Hearne	F. J. FAY
Johnny Bacach	W. G. FAY
Paudeen	J. M. KERRIGAN
Biddy Lally	MAIRE O'NEILL
Nancy	BRIDGET O. DEMPSEY

(10) THE GREEN HELMET

A prose version of this play called *The Golden Helmet* was produced at the Abbey Theatre on March 19, 1908, and the present version on February 10, 1910, when Mr. Kerrigan took the part of Cuchulain and Mr. Sinclair and Mr. O'Donovan those of Conall and Laegaire respectively. Miss Allgood, Miss O'Neill, and Miss Magee were the three queens.

In performance we left the black hands to the imagination, and probably when there is so much noise and movement on the stage they would always fail to produce any effect. Our stage is too small to try the experiment, for they would be hidden by the figures of the players. We staged the play with a very pronounced colour-scheme, and I have noticed that the more obviously decorative is the scene and costuming of any play, the more it is lifted

out of time and place, and the nearer to faeryland do we carry it. One gets also much more effect out of concerted movements—above all, if there are many players—when all the clothes are the same colour. No breadth of treatment gives monotony when there is movement and change of lighting. It concentrates attention on every new effect and makes every change of outline or of light and shadow surprising and delightful. Because of this one can use contrasts of colour, between clothes and background or in the background itself, the complementary colours for instance, which would be too obvious to keep the attention in a painting. One wishes to make the movement of the action as important as possible, and the simplicity which gives depth of colour does this, just as, for precisely similar reasons, the lack of colour in a statue fixes the attention upon the form.—1911.

(11) THE HOUR-GLASS (in verse)

First performed at the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, on November 21, 1912, with Mr. Nugent Monck in the principal part.

Since then I have changed it a good deal, and got Mr. Alan Porter to put into mediaeval Latin certain passages, as I found that in performance verbal repetitions which did not get on the nerves in the prose version, did so when all the first half of the play was in verse. We listen more intently to verse than to prose, and therefore notice verbal repetition more quickly. Nothing said in Latin, necessary to the understanding of the play, cannot be inferred from who speaks and who is spoken to.—1922.

(12) THE PLAYER QUEEN

I began in, I think, 1907, a verse tragedy, but at that time the thought I have set forth in *Per Amica Silentia Lunae* was coming into my head, and I found examples of

it everywhere. I wasted the best working months of several years in an attempt to write a poetical play where every character became an example of the finding or not finding of what I have called the Antithetical Self; and because passion and not thought makes tragedy, what I made had neither simplicity nor life. I knew precisely what was wrong and yet could neither escape from thought nor give up my play. At last it came into my head all of a sudden that I could get rid of the play if I turned it into a farce; and never did I do anything so easily, for I think that I wrote the present play in about a month; and when it was performed at the Stage Society in 1919 I forgot that it was my own work, so completely that I discovered from the surprise of a neighbour, that, indignant with a house that seemed cold to my second act (since much reformed), I was applauding. If it could only have come into my head three years earlier. Since then the play has been revived twice at the Abbey Theatre.

It is the only play of mine which has not its scene laid in Ireland. While at work at the Abbey Theatre I had made many experiments with Mr. Gordon Craig's screens (see *The Tragic Theatre* in *The Cutting of an Agate*), and both the tragedy I first planned, and the farce I wrote, were intended to be played in front of those screens. My *dramatis personae* have no nationality because Mr. Craig's screens, where every line must suggest some mathematical proportion, where all is phantastic, incredible, and luminous, have no nationality.—1922.

MUSIC FOR PLAYS

THE MUSIC FOR USE IN THE PERFORMANCE OF THESE PLAYS

ALL the music that is printed here is of that kind which I have described in *Samhain* and in *Ideas of Good and Evil*. Some of it is old Irish music made when all songs were but heightened speech, and some of it, composed by modern musicians, is none the less to be associated with words that must never lose the intonation of passionate speech. No vowel must ever be prolonged unnaturally, no word of mine must ever change into a mere musical note, no singer of my words must ever cease to be a man and become an instrument.

The degree of approach to ordinary singing depends on the context, for one desires a greater or lesser amount of contrast between the lyrics and the dialogue according to situation and emotion and the qualities of players. The words of Cathleen ni Houlihan about the 'white-scarfed riders' must be little more than regulated declamation; upon the other hand, Cathleen's verses by the fire, and those of the pupils in the *Hour-Glass*, and those of the beggars in the *Unicorn*, are sung as the country people understand song. Modern singing would spoil them for dramatic purposes by taking the keenness and the salt out of the words. The songs in *Deirdre*, in Miss Farr's and in Miss Allgood's setting, need fine speakers of verse more than good singers; and in these, and still more in the song of the Three Women in *Baile's Strand*, the singers must remember the natural speed of words. If the lyric in *Baile's Strand* is sung slowly it is like church-singing, but if sung quickly and with the right expression it becomes an

incantation so old that nobody can quite understand it. That it may give this sense of something half-forgotten, it must be sung with a certain lack of minute feeling for the meaning of the words, which, however, must always remain words. The songs in *Deirdre*, especially the last dirge, which is supposed to be the creation of the moment, must, upon the other hand, at any rate when Miss Farr's or Miss Allgood's music is used, be sung or spoken with minute passionate understanding. I have rehearsed the part of the Angel in the *Hour-Glass* (prose version) with recorded notes throughout, and believe this is the right way; but in practice, owing to the difficulty of finding a player who did not sing too much the moment the notes were written down, have left it to the player's own unrecorded inspiration, except at the 'exit,' where it is well for the player to go nearer to ordinary song.

I have not yet put Miss Farr's *Deirdre* music to the test of performances, but, as she and I have worked out all this art of spoken song together, I have little doubt but I shall find it all I would have it. Mr. Darley's music was used at the first production of the play and at its revival last spring, and was dramatically effective. I could hear the words perfectly, and I think they must have been audible to any one hearing the play for the first or second time. They had not, however, the full animation of speech, as one heard it in the dirge at the end of the play set by Miss Allgood herself, who played the principal musician. It is very difficult for a musician who is not a speaker to do exactly what I want. Mr. Darley has written for singers not for speakers. His music is, perhaps, too elaborate, simple though it is. I have not had sufficient opportunity to experiment with the play to find out the exact distance from ordinary speech necessary in the first two lyrics, which must prolong the mood of the dialogue while being a rest from its passions. Miss Farr's music will be used at the next revival of the play.

W. B. Y.

March, 1908.

Since I wrote these words I did test in performance Miss Farr's *Deirdre* music, she herself taking the part of chief musician, and I approved of it though not strongly, but I do not recommend it to any producer of the play; for I have never found but three people, Miss Farr, a certain Miss Taylor whom I have not met for years, and Miss Sara Allgood who could chant or sing modern poetry. When others who have been trained to be musical instruments, however perfect, instead of simple men and women, attempt to sing or chant to notes like those Miss Farr and Miss Allgood have made for *Deirdre*—Miss Allgood's are entirely right to my mind—they make a more detestable noise than if they sang to modern music and turned my words to honey and oil in the modern way. I print Miss Farr's music because now that she is dead it cannot be amended, and it is part of an attempt, which seemed to me important, to recover an art once common and now lost.

I have not reprinted in this edition the music by Mr. Darley mentioned in the note dated March 1908.

W. B. Y.

May 1, 1922.

THE KING'S THRESHOLD

THE FOUR RIVERS

FLORENCE FARR

The four rivers that run there, Through well-mown level ground,
Have come out of a blessed well, That is all bound and wound
By the great roots of an apple, And all fowl of the air
Have gathered in the wide branches And keep singing there.

The musical notation for 'The Four Rivers' consists of four staves of music in G major (one sharp) and 4/4 time. The melody is simple and folk-like, with a mix of quarter and half notes. The lyrics are written below the staves, with line breaks corresponding to the musical phrases.

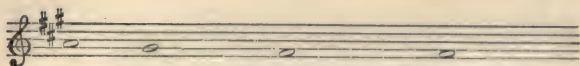
ON BAILE'S STRAND

THE FOOL'S SONG

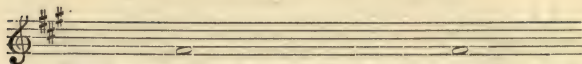
FLORENCE FARR

Cuchulain has killed kings, Kings and sons of kings,
Dragons out of the water, and witches out of the air,
Banachas and Bonachas and people of the woods.

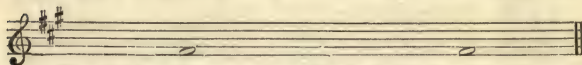
The musical notation for 'The Fool's Song' consists of three staves of music in D major (two sharps) and 4/4 time. The melody is simple and folk-like, with a mix of quarter and half notes. The lyrics are written below the staves, with line breaks corresponding to the musical phrases.



ON BAILE'S STRAND



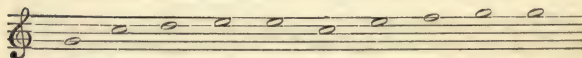
May the sword-blades drink their fill Of the home-brew there, until



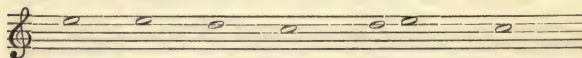
They will have for masters none But the threshold and hearthstone.

THE FOOL'S SONG—II.

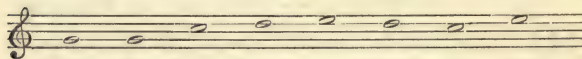
FLORENCE FARR



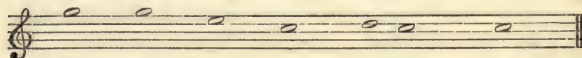
When you were an a - corn on the tree - top,



Then was I an eagle - cock ;



Now that you are a withered old block,



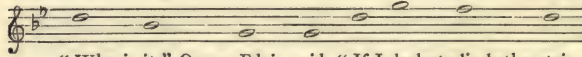
Still am I an eagle - cock.

DEIRDRE

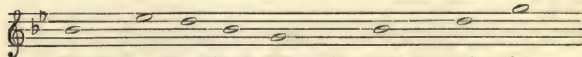
MUSICIANS' SONG—I.

FIRST MUSICIAN

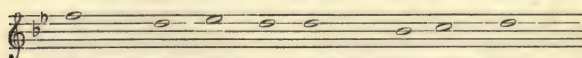
FLORENCE FARR



"Why is it," Queen Edain said, "If I do but climb the stair



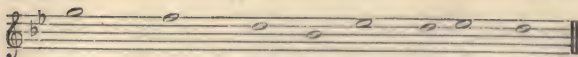
To the tower overhead When the winds are calling there,



Or the gannets calling out, In waste places of the sky,

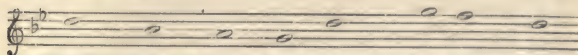
DEIRDRE

44 I

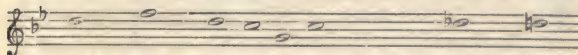


There's so much to think about That I cry, that I cry ? "

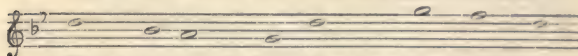
SECOND MUSICIAN



But her goodman answered her : " Love would be a thing of naught



Had not all his limbs a stir Born out of immoderate thought ;

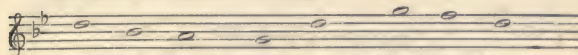


Were he any-thing by half, Were his measure running dry.

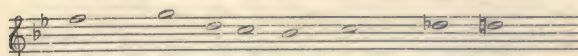


Lovers, if they may not laugh, Have to cry, have to cry."

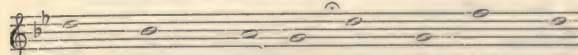
THE THREE MUSICIANS TOGETHER



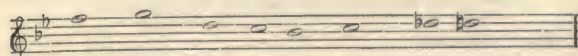
But is Edain worth a song Now the hunt begins anew ?



Praise the beautiful and strong ; Praise the redness of the yew ;



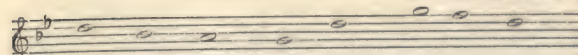
Praise the blossoming apple-stem. But our silence had been wise.



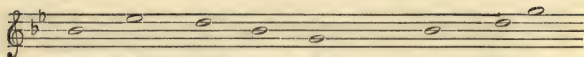
What is all our praise to them That have one another's eyes ?

MUSICIANS' SONG—II.

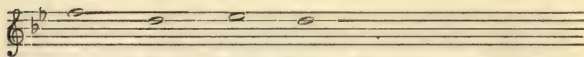
FLORENCE FARR



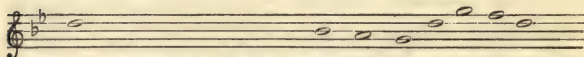
Love is an immoderate thing And can never be content,



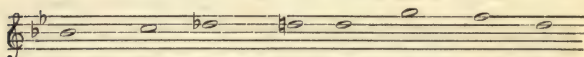
Till it dip an ageing wing, Where some laughing element



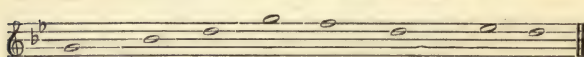
Leaps and Time's old lanthorn dims. What's the merit in love-play,



In the tumult of the limbs That dies out before 'tis day,



Heart on heart or mouth on mouth, All that mingling of our breath,

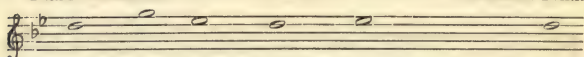


When love-longing is but drouth For the things come after death?

MUSICIANS' SONG—III.

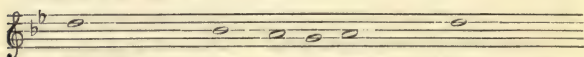
FIRST MUSICIAN

FLORENCE FARR



They are gone, they are gone. The proud may lie by the proud.

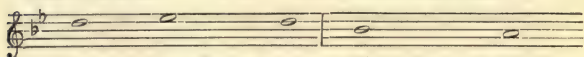
SECOND MUSICIAN



Though we were bidden to sing, cry nothing loud.

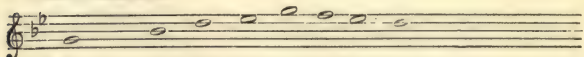
FIRST MUSICIAN

SECOND MUSICIAN



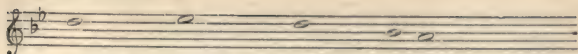
They are gone, they are gone. Whispering were enough.

FIRST MUSICIAN



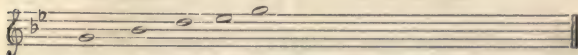
Into the secret wil - der - ness of their love.

SECOND MUSICIAN



A high, grey cairn. What more is to be said ?

FIRST MUSICIAN

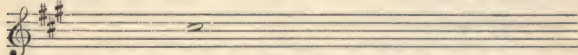


Eagles have gone into their cloudy bed.

MUSICIANS' SONG—III.

FIRST MUSICIAN

SARAH ALLGOOD



They are gone, they are gone. The proud may lie by the proud.

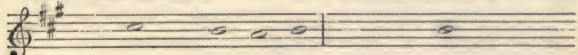
SECOND MUSICIAN



Though we are bidden to sing, cry nothing loud.

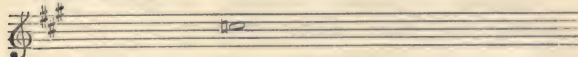
FIRST MUSICIAN

SECOND MUSICIAN



They are gone, they are gone. Whispering were enough.

FIRST MUSICIAN



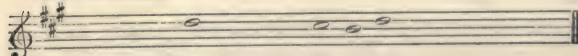
Into the secret wilderness of their love.

SECOND MUSICIAN



A high, grey cairn. What more is to be said ?

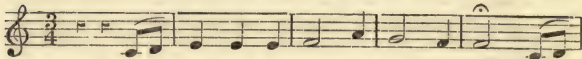
FIRST MUSICIAN



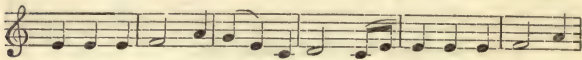
Eagles have gone into their cloudy bed.

POT OF BROTH


POT OF BROTH



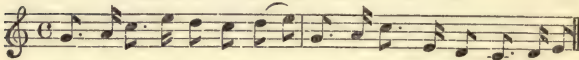
There's broth in the pot for you, old man, There's




broth in the pot for you, old man, There's cabbage for me and




broth for you, And beef for Jack the jour - ney - man.



Philomel, I've listened oft To thy lay, nigh weeping willow.

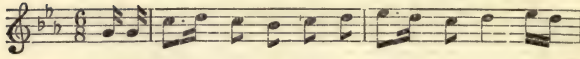
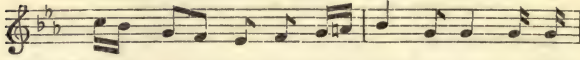
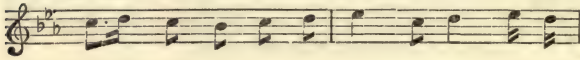


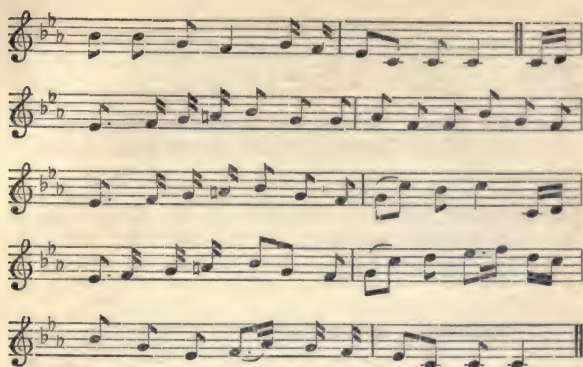
'Twas at the dance at Der - mo - dy's, that



first I caught a sight of her

PAISTIN FIONN



THE UNICORN FROM THE STARS

IRISH TRADITIONAL AIRS

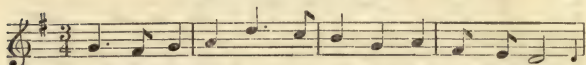
THE AIRY BACHELOR

 Five staves of musical notation in D major (two sharps) and 6/8 time. The melody is written in treble clef. The first staff ends with a double bar line. The second staff has a key signature change to F major (two flats). The third staff continues the melody. The fourth staff continues the melody. The fifth staff ends with a double bar line.

Oh come, all ye ai - ry bach-e-lors, A warning take by
me. A ser-geant caught me fowl - ing And he
fired his gun so free. His com - rades came to
his re - lief, And I was soon tra - panned, And
bound up like a woodcock That had fal - len in - to their hands.

446 UNICORN FROM THE STARS

JOHNNIE GIBBONS



1. Oh Johnnie Gib-bons, my five hundred healths to you, It's
2. Oh Johnnie Gib-bons, it's you were the prop to us,



long you're a - way from us o - ver the sea!
You to have left us, we're fools put a - stray.

THE LION SHALL LOSE HIS STRENGTH



Oh the lion will lose his strength, And the



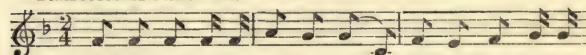
brack - et this - tle pine, And the harp shall sound sweet,



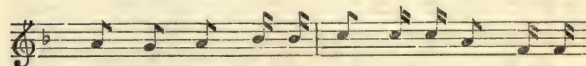
sweet at length Be - tween the eight and nine.

THE HOUR-GLASS

TRADITIONAL ARAN AIR



I was go-ing the road one day . . O! the brown and the



yel - low beer, And I met with a man that was

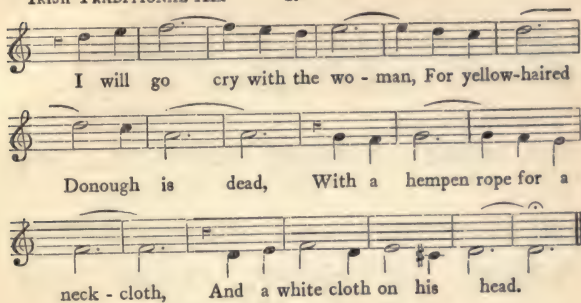


no right man . . . O my dear, my dear.

CATHLEEN NI HOULIHAN 447

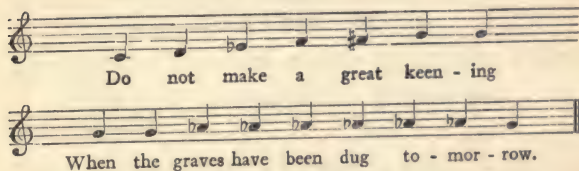
CATHLEEN NI HOULIHAN

IRISH TRADITIONAL AIR I.



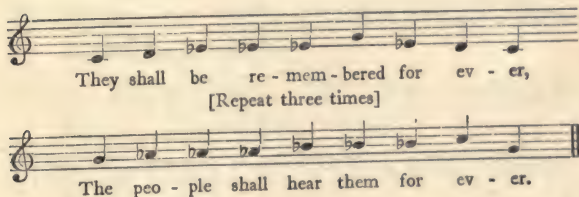
I will go cry with the wo - man, For yellow-haired
Donough is dead, With a hempen rope for a
neck - cloth, And a white cloth on his head.

II.



Do not make a great keen - ing
When the graves have been dug to - mor - row.

III.



They shall be re - mem - bered for ev - er,
[Repeat three times]
The peo - ple shall hear them for ev - er.

WORKS BY
WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS

FOUR PLAYS FOR DANCERS. Illustrated by EDMUND DULAC. Fcap. 4to. 10s. 6d. net.

THE PLAYER QUEEN. Globe 8vo. Paper Cover. 2s. net.

LATER POEMS. Crown 8vo. 10s. 6d. net.

THE WILD SWANS AT COOLE. Poems. Crown 8vo. 5s. net.

RESPONSIBILITIES AND OTHER POEMS. Crown 8vo. 6s. net.

REVERIES OVER CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH. Illustrated. Crown 8vo. 6s. net.

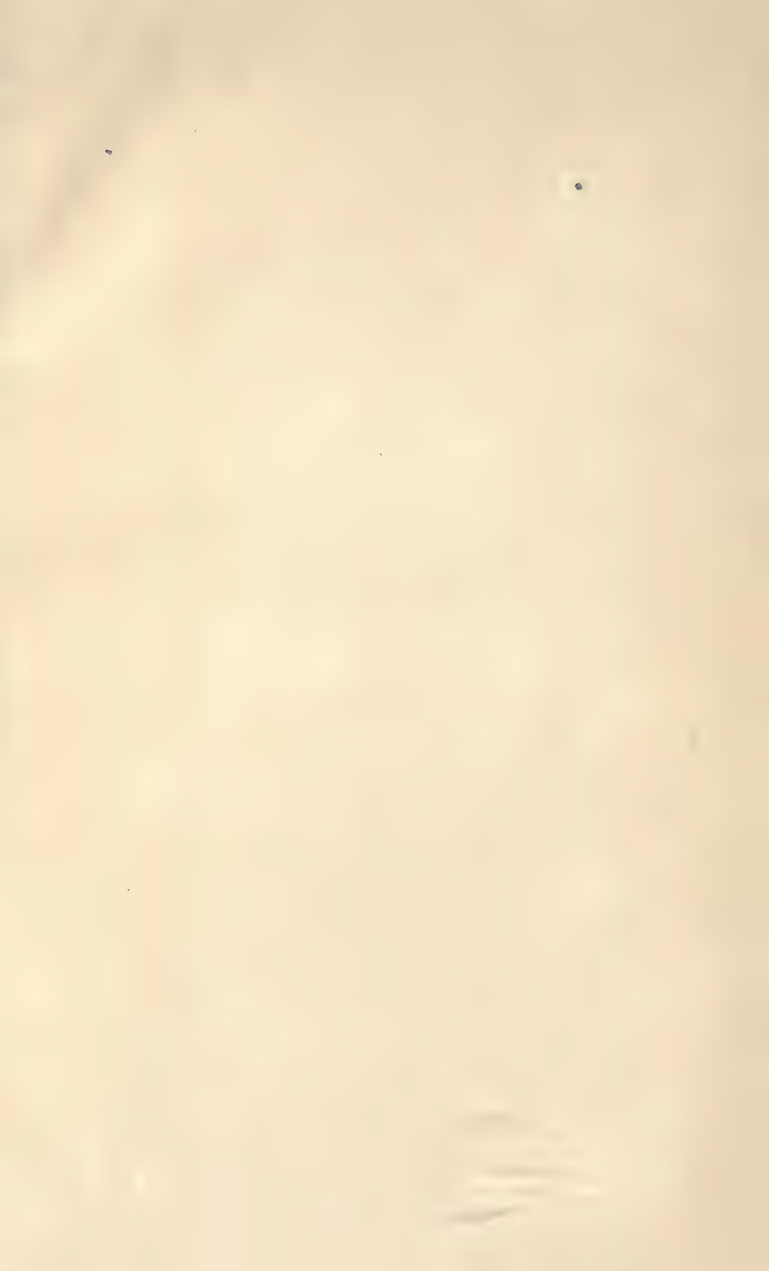
IDEAS OF GOOD AND EVIL. Crown 8vo. 6s. net.

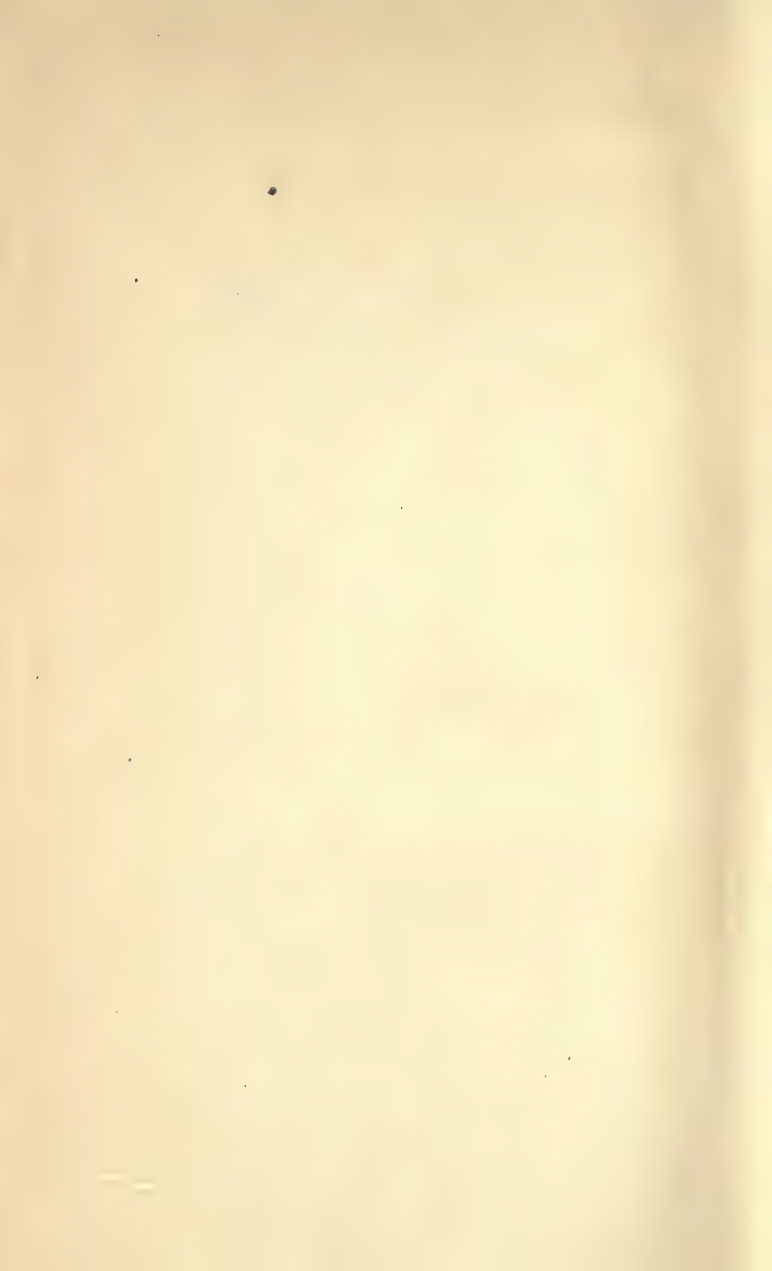
STORIES OF RED HANRAHAN, Etc. Crown 8vo. 6s. net.

THE CUTTING OF AN AGATE. Essays. Crown 8vo. 6s. net.

THE TABLES OF THE LAW. Crown 8vo. 3s. net.

LONDON: MACMILLAN AND CO., LTD.







PR 5902 1922 SMC

Yeats, W. B. (William
Butler), 1865-1939.
Plays in prose and verse
: written for an Irish
AMT-6852 (mcsk)

