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256 c. 15047

THE WORKS  
OF  
ISRAEL ZANGWILL

*EDITION DE LUXE*

VOL. XI

THE WAR GOD  
THE NEXT RELIGION









WOLMARK - 1925

Frithof, nay, a fiend who'd float his warship on the tears of Mothers, build our  
Glory on a Million Graves

# THE WAR GOD

A TRAGEDY IN FIVE ACTS

# THE NEXT RELIGION

A PLAY IN THREE ACTS

BY

ISRAEL ZANGWILL

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**THE WAR GOD**





## Note to First Edition

I CANNOT send "The War God" to press without recording my gratitude to Sir Herbert Tree, not only for the admirable cast with which he has interpreted the play at His Majesty's Theatre, and for his own beautiful performance of Frithiof, but also for more than one happy suggestion, and even line of verse struck out in the white heats of rehearsal, which on the well-known principle of Molière I have incorporated in my text. If I desire also to refer to Mr. Arthur Bouchier, it is less to add another to the countless tributes his impersonation of Torgrim has called forth than to thank my "Chancellor" for the generous praise he has publicly lavished upon the author of his being. And I am grateful to Miss Lillah McCarthy for lending Norna her polished art at a time when she was already playing ten performances a week.

It had been my intention to say a few words on the technical question of blank verse in modern plays, and to nail up the thesis that the Elizabethan use of a mixture of prose and verse makes but a hybrid art-form and that the lilt of metre should never be dropped even in the homeliest or most humorous episodes. But Mr. William Archer has anticipated my heresy in so spirited a defence that by his kind permission I reproduce his words here rather than multiply words of my own.

All the great scenes of the play are,  
and ought to be, and cannot help being,  
rhetorical; why should the author deny



himself the swing and resonance of verse? "But," it may be said, "all the scenes are not 'great scenes.' In many of them the dialogue is quite commonplace and unrhetical. Why should not they, at any rate, have been in prose?" Here, again, I unhesitatingly defend Mr. Zangwill. In spite of Elizabethan precedent, there is nothing more irritating on the modern stage than the drama which is couched in two mediums. It gives the verse passages an air of pompous self-consciousness, as though the author said, "Look you, now! I am going to be eloquent and impressive." As for the so-called "rhythmic prose," which is in fact bad and ear-baffling blank verse, it is an abomination. Mr. Zangwill did entirely right in adopting his medium and sticking to it; but—mark this!—he did right because he happened to have a peculiar art of writing smooth, easy, flowing blank verse, without contortions, without Elizabethan echoes. He makes the most ordinary talk (not even excluding slang) fall naturally and without incongruity into the iambic movement. I will go further and say that he uses the verse wittily—that he extracts from it some of the effects of emphasis, antithesis, and flashing rapier-play which a French dramatist extracts from the Alexandrine.

While fully sensible to this praise, I must yet permit myself the comment that the bulk of Elizabethan blank verse outside Shakespeare is as free from "contortions," as homely in homely situations, and as instantaneously intelligible to the man in the pit as my own, whatever the difference at high-water mark. The reverence for blank verse as for a medium debased by anything but the finest poetry is the mere superstition of the semi-literate.

I. Z.

*November 20, 1911.*



Cast of the First Performance at His  
Majesty's Theatre on the afternoon  
of November 8, 1911.

KING OF GOTHIA	CHARLES MAUDE
DUKE OF POMBERG	J. H. BARNES
COUNT TORGRIM	ARTHUR BOURCHIER
COUNT FRITHIOF	HERBERT TREE
BARON KONRAD	ROSS SHORE
OSRIC	BASIL GILL
KARL BLUM	GERALD LAWRENCE
BROG	A. E. GEORGE
SERVANT	HAROLD MELTZER
PRINCESS ELSA OF HUNLAND	LAURA COWIE
THE LADY NORNA	LILLAH McCARTHY
MARTHA	CLARA GREET

Revolutionists: W. B. ABINGDON, CLIFFORD HEATHERLEY,  
CYRIL SWORDER

Lords and Ladies of the Court, Lackeys, &c., &c.

Overture, Entr'actes, Choruses and Incidental Music by  
S. COLERIDGE TAYLOR

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## Act I

*The private study of COUNT TORGRIM, Chancellor of Gothia, a large businesslike room on the second floor of the Chancellery, which is situated in Graaf, the capital of Gothia, at the top of a hilly street, so that through the great open casement in the back wall a range of snow mountains is seen looming on the far horizon in the light of a sunny September morning. The room is furnished with Spartan simplicity—a large central paper-littered writing-table, with revolving chair and waste-paper basket, a few hard chairs, rows of pigeon-holes and a locked desk on the right, belonging to the confidential secretary. A high screen stands horizontally towards the left of the back wall, hiding an old settee. The walls, where not occupied with pigeon-holes and maps of Gothia and the world, are lined with bookshelves containing heavy volumes and Blue-books, and decorated with portraits of the dynasty and of Holk, the conqueror of Hunland. A door at the back on the right leads to an ante-room, and a door at the side to a corridor giving on the house-keeper's region. In the left wall, up a few steps, is a door leading to a corridor and the Chancellor's bedroom. Over the mantel of the fireplace in the left wall is a painting of the Chancellor's dead wife, a sweet, sad-looking, middle-aged lady, with an expression of having been crushed by his rise to greatness. A perpetual light burns as a tribute beneath it. A large extinguished lamp stands on the table, and the only concession to modernity is a*



*speaking-tube over the table connecting this sanctum with the busy bureau below. KARL BLUM, the sole confidential secretary, is seated at the writing-table, opening and arranging correspondence and throwing envelopes into the waste-paper basket. He is forty-five, spare, and Semitic in appearance, with gold eye-glasses; he is very carefully dressed and wears a flower in his button-hole. Suddenly a shrill whistle vibrates from the speaking-tube. He starts up, annoyed, looking round nervously towards the screen, then speaks into the tube.*

BLUM

Don't whistle up—the Chief's asleep! . . . Yes, yes, I'll bring down all the documents by ten.

*[Steals on tiptoe towards the screen, and looks over]*

He's flame awake, asleep he's Polar ice.

*[Reassured, he returns to his work, takes up a long quill and dips it into the ink. The housekeeper's door opens and MARTHA, a motherly housekeeper of sixty-five, plump and well-preserved, appears. He exclaims testily]*

What now?

MARTHA *[Holding up eight fingers, breathes]*

Eight more have come.

BLUM

I cannot hear!

MARTHA *[Slightly louder, holds fingers higher, tiptoes nearer]*

Eight more—

BLUM

Stop pantomiming on your toes!  
You will not wake him.

*[A babble penetrates through the ante-room door]*

MARTHA

But that cackle will!  
The ante-room's areek with lordlings! Phaugh!  
These new Court perfumes mingling with their  
breaths——

BLUM *[With an imperious wave of the hand]*  
Clear it! And well for them the Dragon sleeps  
Whose flaming jaws would snap their scented pates  
His mood last night was diabolical.

MARTHA

Not one will budge without the Master's ear.

BLUM *[impatiently]*

Well, let them know the Chancellor's abed.

MARTHA *[loudly]*

Not I! I keep his follies to myself.

BLUM *[Looks nervously towards the screen]*

Hush! Hush!

MARTHA *[Louder]*

Exactly! Would you have me blab  
He snoozes on that mouldy couch of his  
Like my late husband, sleeping off his beer?

BLUM

But 'tis a bout of work he's sleeping off.

MARTHA

So much the sillier. Why should rich men work?

All night he slaved. He wearied out the stars.

Not one could wait to see his lamp go out.

At six I found him snoring like a pig—

[*Correcting herself at his glance round*]

I mean I found him sleeping like a lamb,

So drew the screen and——

BLUM [*waving quill with a gesture of dismissal*]

So you said before.

I'm busy.

MARTHA

So am I. [*Picks up the lamp.*]

Dear Osric's room

Must bloom with roses for his coming home.

'Tis you who chatter so.

[*A sudden spasm of quarrel comes from the ante-room.*

BLUM *throws down his quill angrily and jumps up.*]

BLUM

I did expect

One hour at least of calm with all the Court

Meeting the ship to greet their future Queen.

MARTHA

God bless her! [*Smiling.*] But you see each gallant

hoped

To earwig Master in the other's absence.

BLUM [*Grumpily*]  
But Master might be prancing in the pageant  
Beside His Majesty.

MARTHA [*Setting down lamp and settling to fresh  
gossip*]

They know too well  
His love of lying low, though even I ne'er dreamed  
He'd lie as low as that settee. Besides  
[*Unrolling a long scroll from her pocket*]  
The Order of Procession!

BLUM

Ah, of course.  
[*Sits down and resumes quill and work.*]

MARTHA [*Forgetting herself as she surveys the scroll*]  
God bless King Olaf and his beauteous——

BLUM

Hush!

MARTHA [*Reading ecstatically*]  
First drums and trumpets, then with lance at rest  
Ten princes on white horses, then the guards  
In scarlet——

BLUM

Peace! As if this feather here  
Had not grown leaden, plodding through it all.  
Heigho! E'en this the Master stage-directs.  
Nothing's too little for his mighty brain.

MARTHA [*Laughing*]  
Except his nightcap. That is much too small.

BLUM [*Writing busily*]  
Why don't you make a new one?

MARTHA

Oh, good Lord !

As well expect him change his dressing-gown,  
Or with electric-light replace this lamp,  
Or take a second wife for her who died,  
    [*Looks at picture over the mantel*]  
Or get a better secretary.

BLUM [*Hardly listening, but now startled*]  
What ?

MARTHA [*Smiling*]  
You know he fought against that speaking-tube.  
He wants to-morrow to be yesterday.

BLUM [*Smiling*]  
Oh, Martha ! How you sum the politician !  
But you forget his zest for airships.  
    [*Sudden distant multiple boom is heard, re-echoed from  
    the mountains.*]

MARTHA

God !

Is that a bomb ?

BLUM

You've bombs upon the brain.

MARTHA [*Wringing her hands*]  
Oh! why was Brog the anarchist let out?

BLUM  
For just the reason that those guns went off!  
In honour of the landing——

MARTHA [*Excited*]

Oh, it's that!  
The King has met his sweet Princess. Hurrah!  
[*Joy bells begin to clash. Martha becomes uncontrollable.*]  
God bless His Majesty! God bless his bride!  
God bless the reign of Peace!

BLUM [*Sarcastically*]

God send it here!

MARTHA  
He sleeps through guns and bells, he'll sleep through  
me.

BLUM  
Best shut them out.

[*She closes the casement; the bells dwindle.*]

You too.

[*She goes out through her door, carrying the lamp.*  
BLUM goes again to screen and looks behind it.]

God! How serene!

A carven saint upon his worshipped tomb,  
Who would divine a man of blood and iron?  
What things of steel and flame he said last night!

I'll post my diary while they flash and burn.

*[He goes to his desk, cautiously unlocks it and extracts a black volume.]*

Full up! Have I a new one?

*[Finds one and writes]*

Volume twenty.

*[Startled at a noise behind the screen, he slips the book away, but reassuring himself that the Chancellor still sleeps soundly, he takes it out again and writes. Re-enter MARTHA. He exclaims testily.]*

Again?

MARTHA *[In awed tones]*

The Duke of Pomberg.

BLUM *[Equally impressed]*

Not the General? *[She nods.]*

The military governor of Graaf? *[She nods again.]*

His place is with the troops to keep the streets!

MARTHA

He tried to cross my palm with gold. But two Doorkeeping rules of Master I hold holy—  
Never to take a bribe or tell the truth.

BLUM

Let the Duke come. *[She goes.]*

What can the windbag want

So keenly as to scatter gold on Martha?

*[Enter the DUKE OF POMBERG, a blinking, moon-*

*faced, pompous man in a Gotbian general's uniform,  
with a cuirass and spurs. BLUM rises and bows.]*  
Your Highness honours us. Be seated, pray.

POMBERG

Pray, sit yourself. My horse fumes at the door.

BLUM

The Chancellor——

POMBERG

Keeps holiday, I know.  
But I as lief would parley with yourself  
[*With significant smile*]  
Who are the trumpet to his deafish ear.

BLUM [*Looking round nervously at the screen, then  
with a forced smile*]  
You may speak lower then. What shall I tell him?

POMBERG [*Tendering a roll of notes*]  
But first accept my best apology  
For this intrusion on a gala day.

BLUM [*Refusing it*]  
To serve your Highness makes a gala day.

POMBERG [*Pressing it on him successfully*]  
Then keep it as a memorandum till  
That grimmer gala day for Gothia's foes  
When our great captain falls.



BLUM [*Surprised*]

The day Holk dies?

POMBERG

God guard his life—it means perhaps our country's.

BLUM

But Holk is well and Gothia now at peace.

POMBERG

Is life a state of peace? Our Cæsar ages,  
And death comes swifter e'en than Cæsar's marches.  
One must take measures lest in that sad hour  
Of scatter-brain when headless stands the army,  
The Chancellor beset by candidates,  
By scrambling carpet-knights, self-seeking, void  
    [*Drawing himself up pompously*]  
Of genius, science, presence, magnetism,  
Whose only skill lies in besieging him——

BLUM [*Rising nervously*]

You want the chief command.

POMBERG

Nay, it wants me.

The honour of the army needs *noblesse*.

Let civil posts be stuffed with parvenus.

[BLUM *looks round uneasily*. POMBERG *hastens to correct himself*.]

I do not mean your Chief—*he* rose to us

By real merit. . . . I must gallop back.

[*Going. At door*]

You need not say that I——  
[*Hesitates. The bells heard clashing.*]

BLUM [*With discreet smile*]

*My bell is tongueless.*

[*Bows. Exit Duke through ante-chamber, from which a babble is still heard when the door is opened.*

*BLUM counts and smells notes*]

This lucre is not filthy but fine smelling.

My diary and I are both enriched. [*Writes*]

*Distinguished visitor.*

[*Murmurs into silence as he writes on, absorbed. A stir is evident behind the screen, and presently the CHANCELLOR, COUNT TORGRIM, gradually emerges, yawning, in a floral, greasy threadbare dressing-gown and old carpet slippers. The hair on his massive head is grey, and his strong face, without beard or moustache, is deeply furrowed with thought and work. He shuffles silently towards the table, then suddenly wrinkles his nose.*]

CHANCELLOR

I smell the Duke of Pomberg.

BLUM [*Startled*]

*Eh?*

[*He drags a newspaper over his diary. Then turns.*]

*You've woke!*

CHANCELLOR

I smell the Duke of Pomberg. So he knows  
Already that poor Holk——

BLUM

Not dead?

CHANCELLOR [*Shuddering*]

God keep us!

The bells should not thus jiggle e'en to-day  
Were our great soldier stiff. 'Tis that old fever.  
I bade them hush it up—not spoil the day.

[*Takes out his snuff box*]

The news came after you had dropped asleep.

BLUM [*Deprecatingly*]

It was my eyelids, not my will!

CHANCELLOR [*Clapping him affectionately on the  
shoulder*]

Poor Karl!

I saw the civil war betwixt the two.  
You fought as hard as ever Holk in Hunland.  
You should have used this powder.

[*Takes snuff, then sneezes*]

Tschew! Not noiseless!

[*Chuckles.*]

BLUM

Methinks short sleep is better for your spirits.

CHANCELLOR

Why, Karl! My son returns to-day from Hunland,  
My Osric with his eyes of morning light,  
And in his baggage Hunland's proud princess,  
Labelled, "The King of Gothia; this side up."

The minx's marriage welds our warring realms  
In Christian peace, unites us to expunge  
Perfidious Alba from the map of Europe.  
Could but dear Holk bestride his old white horse,  
This were my topmost day! Let's hear the bells.

*[He flings open the casement and leans out, listening to their louder chime. BLUM profits by the opportunity stealthily to lock away the diary in his desk. Then he goes to the CHANCELLOR.]*

BLUM

Too chill for you. *[Closes casement.]*

CHANCELLOR *[Sniffing]*

It cleared the ducal taint!

*[Raging suddenly]*

Curst civet-cat without the civet's spunk!  
I'll drum him out of e'en his sub-command,  
Dares he come crawling——

BLUM

Sha'n't I get your coffee?

CHANCELLOR

A rotten breed, these Pombergs, not the sap  
Whence springs a soldier! What he seeks is honours,  
Not honour, damn him! Deaf is he to duty—  
God's trumpet-answer to life's dreary riddle.  
Would Holk, think you, have won our war with  
Hunland

Without the faith that kept our fathers strong,  
And based our Empire on the rock of Christ?

No, no—when Holk grows weary with the weight  
Of war, a Christian shall succeed him—Osric.

BLUM

Your son ! But he's so young !

CHANCELLOR

Napoleon

Played bowls with Europe's thrones at thirty ; Cæsar  
Was dead at forty-four. This reverence  
For palsied age is but a modern folly.  
Besides, dear Holk will live and Osric grow.

[ *Going to his wife's picture* ]

Ah, sweetheart, why could *you* not stay and watch  
Our little rogue climb up, as swiftly as  
He climbed the pear-tree in our cottage garden ?

[ *Wipes his eyes. Then gruffly* ]

What's in my letters ?

BLUM

Count, your breakfast first.

CHANCELLOR

I feed on news. How go the warships ?

BLUM

Three

Will be delivered in the spring.

CHANCELLOR [ *Pounding the table* ]

Too late !

By God, I will not wait beyond this Christmas

To strike at Alba ! O these scurvy shipwrights !  
To build on builders is to build on bubbles.  
Command them double shifts, let night and day  
Hear hammers ring that knell the island's doom.  
These ships shall be the coffin of her glory !

BLUM  
The guns are promised sooner.

CHANCELLOR  
Good ! And airships ?

BLUM  
They cannot guarantee safe voyages.  
The newest bird-of-war is shipwrecked, sunk,  
With all its hands, upon the air-sea's bottom,  
Smashing its keel.

CHANCELLOR  
Perdition !  
[ *Takes snuff furiously.* ]  
But the Press ?  
It dances to my piping ?

BLUM  
Merrily !  
The talk is all of Europe's peace assured  
By this conjunction of erst hostile realms  
In holy matrimony. E'en the journals  
We do not underprop intone Amen.  
I almost feel our money thrown away.

CHANCELLOR [*Flicking BLUM's nose playfully*]  
Aha! The Jew lurks still beneath the wash  
Of holy water. O my Hebrew godson,  
Economy with editors is waste. The Press,  
So great an engine for good government,  
Becomes a peril in the People's hands.

BLUM [*Hiding his resentment, takes up other papers*]  
But e'en the rags that hate you praise this union.

CHANCELLOR  
Because I've made them think I hated it,  
And that the Pope has wrought this work of peace.  
[*Chuckling*]  
He, he! I use their hate.

BLUM  
You're wonderful.

CHANCELLOR  
And Alba's journals? Still without suspicion  
I only marry Gothia and Hunland  
To crush them with a double army?

BLUM  
Quite!

[*Passing him a newspaper*]  
They seem as blind as all the rest of Europe.  
'Tis cabled they rejoice with us and bless  
This royal marriage, bringing peace on earth.

CHANCELLOR [*Clucking ana rubbing bis bands*]

What will they say at Christmas when they find  
Our wedding was their funeral . . . ?

[*With sudden transition as bis eye falls on another  
newspaper*]

Damnation!

Who dared to change my phraseology?  
And in our country's leading organ too!

BLUM [*Picking up a letter, deprecatingly*]

The editor explains he kept the sense.

CHANCELLOR

No, sir, he kept *no* sense: one altered word  
Discolours all. To shape opinion needs  
A sculptor's fine-felt touches. Tell the beast  
I stop his subsidy if but one comma——

[*Chokes with wrath*]

Now in to-morrow's number bid him print,  
As coming from his Paris correspondent,  
My very words and not his tomfool——

[*Enter MARTHA with tray of coffee, bread-and-butter,  
and an egg. He stops short.*]

MARTHA [*Severely*]

There!

Your Excellence need not roar—I've brought it  
twice.

CHANCELLOR [*Mildly*]

I was not roaring—not at least for breakfast.



MARTHA

Well, breakfast is a remedy for roaring.

*[Stands tray on table while BLUM clears away papers.]*

CHANCELLOR *[Pinching her cheek]*

You should have wakened me at six as usual.

MARTHA

Thank God I'm not so silly as my master.

You're not the first child I have nursed. Sit down.

*[Pressing him into chair and tying on his napkin.]*

CHANCELLOR

This coffee smells delicious—after Pomberg.

MARTHA

Then let me see you drink—that I may run

To catch a bit at least of the procession.

CHANCELLOR *[Taking up cup]*

Ha! Which of us is now the child? *[Exit MARTHA]*

Good soul!

*[As he talks he drinks and eats with a peasant's uncouthness, speaking occasionally with a full mouth.]*

Our Gothia stands on such sweet, sturdy women.

Your mincing jades, in shape an hourglass—pah!

Praise God, I've found our lovèd sovereign

A buxom bride to bear him bouncing children.

You know the curse with queens is they are—women.

They love to play the angel of mercy. Gad!

18

How many war-plans have these meddlers marred!  
But Princess Elsa is not sentimental.

BLUM  
You have not seen her?

CHANCELLOR  
No, but I have seen  
Her pedigree. Prize stock—a bulldog strain.  
Our princes will be fighters. Which reminds me.  
When will *your* boy be baptized?

BLUM  
Sunday week.

CHANCELLOR  
I must be there. [*Pats his shoulder*]  
Dear Karl, it warms my heart  
To see my saving of your soul reach out  
Unto the second generation.  
[*He picks up a newspaper.*]

I suppose  
You'll call him Isaac.

BLUM [*Flushing, startled*]  
Isaac?

CHANCELLOR  
After you! . . . .  
To hell!

BLUM  
What now?

CHANCELLOR

Read that!

BLUM

“Count Frithiof”?

CHANCELLOR

Curse him!

BLUM

“Has taken up his staff and is *en route*  
To see the King; and everywhere the peasants  
Gather to crave his blessing.”

[*The CHANCELLOR snatches at the paper and tears it up.*]

You'll arrest him?

CHANCELLOR

Will *that* arrest him? No! That's Pomberg's way.  
Better arrest the King.

BLUM [*Amazed*]

The King?

CHANCELLOR [*Smiling*]

Keep *him* shut up  
Against the madman. You're as dense as Osric.  
God bless my pair of lambs—no sense of humour!

BLUM

I've more than your beloved spy in Alba.  
Look at his letter—and, forsooth, in cypher!  
A huge concern is formed, your gossip writes,  
To buy the fields round Eastport, there to grow

[*Explodes into laughter*]

Tomatoes!

CHANCELLOR [*Alarmed*]

What?

BLUM [*Laughing on*]

Such vegetarian perils  
Demand indeed a sleuth-hound . . . !

CHANCELLOR [*Springing up*]

Silence, fool!  
This means another port to land our soldiers.

BLUM [*Taken aback*]

*Tomatoes, not torpedoes!* Look!

CHANCELLOR

Torpedoes  
Throughout the harbour would guard Alba less  
Than miles of glasshouse blocking up those fields  
Across which Holk and I have oft in fancy  
Galloped our cavalry to Alba's heart. [*Fuming*]  
The map! The map of Eastport!

[BLUM *brings it from a special pigeon-hole. The*  
CHANCELLOR *groans.*]

As I thought!  
We can't invade them there. Unless our airships—  
[MARTHA *runs in, excited.*]

MARTHA

O Excellence, they're coming here!

CHANCELLOR [*Looking up vaguely*]

Here? Who?

MARTHA [*Waving scroll, confused*]  
The King, his bride, the princes on white trumpets—  
I mean the great procession is to pass  
This way.

CHANCELLOR [*His face grows black*]  
Who dared to change my route?

MARTHA

The King!  
The King himself, to do you honour. Look!  
How swift the mob comes flying at the news  
To seize the street.

[*Confused hum of a multitude approaching.*]

CHANCELLOR [*With a tremulous, beautiful smile*]  
You see, if you had waited—

[*He snuffs himself, then wipes away a tear*]

O Karl, this touches me. To think that he,  
God's chosen sovran of our ancient realm,  
Whose blood flows royal for a thousand years,  
Who incarnates the spirit of our race,  
And that dread mystery of majesty,  
Should think of *me* on this his day of days—  
Of me, a humble yeoman's son!

MARTHA

Nay, more!

He's coming up.

CHANCELLOR  
What's that?

MARTHA

To bring his bride.

CHANCELLOR

The devil! I'm not shaved!

MARTHA

Nor dressed.

CHANCELLOR

Not dressed?

*[He feels his dressing-gown, becomes conscious of his slippers, and, shedding them as he goes, rushes from the room, up the steps, and through his door.]*

MARTHA *[Calling after him as she hurriedly throws things behind screen]*

You see what comes of sleeping like a heathen!  
Even our street's not dressed to meet its monarch.  
That table, too, unshaved—a ten days' growth.

*[Clearing off litter]*

Why, God forgive him! Here's his egg uneaten.

*[Taking things on tray and going to door of ante-room]*

Way for our future Queen! Make way! Avaunt!

*[OSRIC, a tall, soldierly figure of some thirty years with a spiritual face, rushes from the ante-room, almost into her arms.]*

OSRIC

O Martha, what a welcome!

MARTHA

OSRIC [ *Catching it and kissing her over it* ]  
Osric ! [ *Drops tray.* ]  
Saved !

But where's my father ?

BLUM

Welcome home !

OSRIC

Ah, Blum !

[ *They shake hands* ]  
His Majesty, aware I was a-yearn  
To hug my father in sweet privacy,  
Deputed me his herald.

MARTHA

You're too late.  
I brought the glorious news : he's shaving. Stay !  
[ *OSRIC is rushing in* ]  
Or he'll forget his sovereign in you !

OSRIC [ *Returning obediently* ]  
Dear father !

[ *Exit MARTHA to her kitchen* ]  
Blum, was ever such a day  
Of holy happiness ! Those dreadful wars  
Are laid for ever. Oh, I'm young again,  
Almost as young as father, whose stout heart  
Was never torn like mine by doubt of God.  
'Twas I who feared that Frithiof dreamed in vain.

BLUM

You saw the naked fighting !

OSRIC

That is true.

Father ne'er saw the earth a charnel-heap  
Whose sun was but a bloodshot eye, whose moon  
A blanchèd stare at leagues of bleaching bones.  
But yet when every home in Gothia wailed  
Its dead, and mother died of wanting me,  
He might have well lost faith like me. But no!  
He knew the world of poets would come back,  
Grass, sea, and sky a-shimmer with that radiance  
Which is the lovelight in the eyes of God.  
He held this war the path to lasting peace,  
And grimly he ensued it.

[MARTHA *re-enters unmarked, and continues tidying up*]

Was it not  
A rare revenge upon my faithless moods  
To send *me* on this embassy of peace?

BLUM [*Drily*]  
Your father always was ingenious.

OSRIC [*Moving nearer his father's door*]  
God! What a giant! All we others—dwarfs!

BLUM [*Murmuring*]  
Or puppets!

CHANCELLOR [*Without*]  
Is that Osric's voice?

OSRIC

O father!

[*He rushes up the steps.*]



MARTHA [*Angrily*]

O lather! You'll be slobbered, face and coat,  
With soap and tears and kisses.

[BLUM, *picking up documents, is following OSRIC*]  
You go too?

BLUM

I told the bureau I——

MARTHA

What! I alone

Receive the King!

BLUM [*Smiling*]

I'll send you Osric back.

[*Exit* BLUM. *The noise of procession nearing, bands, horses trotting, troops. OSRIC hurries back. MARTHA stops him and wipes faint soapsuds off his face ere he goes out through ante-room; then with a sudden thought she goes to a drawer, takes out stars and other insignia, and exit towards the bedroom. Marshalled pompously by POMBERG and headed by the elderly BARON KONRAD, the Chamberlain, a procession of lords- and ladies-in-waiting enters, which lines up on either side to receive the King. Most conspicuous of these ladies stands the LADY NORNA, a beautiful girl with a rather shy, sweet expression. She wears a red scarf thrown over her shoulders, and seems to be particularly friendly with BARON KONRAD, with whom she talks sotto voce. Finally OSRIC re-enters backwards, bowing in reception of the young KING OF GOTHIA, who is in a gorgeous cavalry uniform, and the PRINCESS ELSA OF*

HUNLAND, *a spirited-looking lady in magnificent driving costume. As the royal couple enter, the band without is heard playing the Gotbian National Anthem, and all bow or curtsy.*]

OSRIC

Your Majesty must pardon——

[*The Chancellor's door opens*]

Ah, he comes!

[*MARTHA is seen pinning the last star on the impatient CHANCELLOR as he issues from his door, sticking a large strip of plaister to his face. He has changed to Court costume, and wears white gloves and a sword. MARTHA remains peeping through the door.*]

CHANCELLOR

Forgive me, Majesty!

KING

You've cut yourself.

CHANCELLOR

A scratch! [*Bowing low*]

Thrice welcome, royal lady!

[*Half to himself*]

Gad!

You're lovelier than I bargained for.

[*All smile; the PRINCESS is pleased.*]

KING [*To the PRINCESS*]

Behold

That giant brain and soul whose sleepless toil

Built one great Gothia out of shards of States. . . .  
Heavens! [*Sensation among courtiers*]

You wear your latest order wrong!

[*Awesome pause. The courtiers are thrilled. The  
KING graciously adjusts the error*]

My sainted father loved him : I account him  
The greatest part of my inheritance,  
And my own pride, no less than gratitude,  
Impelled me in your earliest peep at Gothia  
To show you her chief glory.

CHANCELLOR [*Breaks down*]  
Majesty!

PRINCESS [*Extends her hand, which he kisses blub-  
beringly*]

Count Torgrim, I am prouder hence to rule  
O'er you than all the kingdom else. In Hunland,  
In those sad days now dead, thank God! and dim,  
When our two realms in needless warfare clashed,  
It was not Gothia's vaster armaments  
We grudged her : not her frowning fortresses,  
Nor legions coiling like an endless snake,  
Nor monstrous armoured ships and massy guns,  
But you—you only.

CHANCELLOR  
Madam, you forget [*Points to portrait*]

Holk was the man—if you must talk of war—  
Holk led those legions, ay, and steered those ships;  
Holk's was the brain of ice, the heart of fire;  
Holk ploughed your towns and blew your ships to

h—

KING

Count!

This is no fitting hour to harp on Holk.

CHANCELLOR [*Aflame*]

It is the hour Holk tosses in that fever  
Caught in the Hunland marshes. Damn my soul  
If I stand by and——

[*Recollecting himself, bowing his head humbly*]  
Pardon, Majesties!

KING [*Coldly*]

This festal day, when prison doors are opened,  
Our royal pardon gives itself more lightly——

CHANCELLOR

Not on *such* grounds, sire, do I ask it. Nay,  
You know I deprecate this prison-vomit  
Which floods the realm with anarchists like Brog.  
The gallows is the best triumphal arch!

PRINCESS

You man of iron!

POMBERG

There is sentiment!

[*Pompously drawing himself up*]

I take the full responsibility!

CHANCELLOR [*Glaring fiercely at the Duke*]

And will your anarchists show sentiment?  
'Twas brutes like Brog who splashed the bridal dress  
Of Spain's young queen with blood——

KING [*Shocked and offended*]

Enough!

POMBERG [*Inflating chest again*]

I take——

PRINCESS [*Changing conversation tactfully*]

So this is where you spin your grim designs.  
What secrets lie beyond that mystic screen?  
What mighty web of State is weaving now?

CHANCELLOR [*With bland irony*]

No web but one of filmy gossamer  
To lap your reign in fleecy folds of peace,  
And swathe you softer than the summer air  
Enslumbers earth with leafy lullabies,  
Till in your rich, delicious drowsihead,  
Your sweet, faint sense of bees and swooning roses,  
Holk's iron deeds grow dim as ancient dreams.  
In brief, we touch those promised days when lion  
And lamb shall lie together.

[*To BLUM, who has entered above the staircase with papers*]

Eh, dear Blum?

BLUM

Shall lie together. [*He goes back uneasily.*]

OSRIC [*Involuntarily*]

Dearest father!

KING

Thanks!

We go the happier for this fresh assurance  
The world is bettered by our happiness.

CHANCELLOR

Let my escort amend my tardy welcome.

*[Trumpeters in the corridor sound; he precedes the KING backward. The Gotbian Anthem starts again. The procession files out, POMBERG flirting with a maid-of-honour. All go except the LADY NORNA and BARON KONRAD, the elderly Chamberlain, the latter of whom, marshalling the procession out, contrives to remain a moment with her.]*

CROWD *[Without]*

Long live the King! Long live the Princess Elsa!  
Long live the Chancellor! Hurrah! Hurrah!

NORNA *[Whispers excitedly]*

What heavenly luck! Go cover up my absence!

BARON *[Sotto voce]*

What would you do?

NORNA *[Sotto voce]*

Map out the monster's lair.

BARON *[Sotto voce]*

What need? Brog knows already how a bomb——

NORNA

Bombs spatter death upon the innocent  
And graze the guilty. No, this man of iron,

*[Takes up a steel paper-knife]*

Accursèd arch-priest of the God of War,

Demands an individual doom.

*[Leaves the knife quivering in the table]*

Go, Baron!

*[He goes out through the ante-room. She examines the table, and finding nothing but documents in cypher, tries BLUM'S desk, but it is locked. Then she steals cautiously up the steps and turns the door-handle.]*

MARTHA *[Entering from her door opposite]*

Sweet lady, here's the door.

NORNA *[Smiling]*

May not one see the shrine of Gothia's hero?

A single peep were worth a life's remembrance!

MARTHA *[Smiling back]*

No doubt you *would* remember till your death

His bedroom, like a chamber after earthquake,

But that is not on show. As for his staircase,

'Tis bare as bones.

NORNA

There is a private staircase?

MARTHA

Only to dodge the leeches stuck on this.

NORNA

You comic creature!

*[Turns door-handle again]*

MARTHA

No, 'tis strict forbidden.

NORNA [*With fascinating smile*]  
For fear we pilgrims filch mementoes?

MARTHA

Nay,  
But in these days of anarchists and bombs  
Some red-scarfed ruffian——

NORNA [*Laughing*]

Why, *my* scarf is red.

[MARTHA and LADY NORNA *laugh merrily together.*  
*Enter OSRIC hurriedly from ante-room.*]

OSRIC

Ah, Lady Norna, the Princess is asking——

NORNA

A jest delayed me.

OSRIC [*With lover-like emphasis*]

Would that I had shared it!

NORNA

That were indeed the grimmest jest of all.

OSRIC

You grow more mocking and mysterious daily.

[*Booming of another royal salute heard*]

The crowd is dangerous—pray, take my arm.

NORNA [*Evading his arm*]

A woman's safer if she goes *unarmed*.



*[Both laugh. Re-enter CHANCELLOR and BLUM. The CHANCELLOR, chuckling low, watches with a gesture of paternal benediction the laughing exit of the couple.]*

CHANCELLOR  
A merry mating to our turtle-doves!

BLUM  
You mean these two to pair!

CHANCELLOR *[Rubbing his hands]*  
Why else did I  
Enship them to escort our coming Queen?  
A ship's a matrimonial agency.  
Eh, Karl?  
*[Digs him in ribs in high good-humour]*  
What say you to the match?

BLUM  
Like all  
Your recent combinations, 'tis prodigious,  
And robs me of the breath wherewith to say!

CHANCELLOR  
Well said!  
*[Slaps him on the back]*  
So you approve my choice of daughter——

BLUM *[Smiling]*  
Of Gothia's fairest maid and mightiest heiress?

CHANCELLOR

Pooh! What to me are wealth or beauty? Say  
Her blood is ducal!

BLUM

Well-nigh royal!

CHANCELLOR [*Vebemently*]

Ay!

My grandsons shall not rank one inch below  
That putrid Pomberg's. I shall found a house  
On firmer rock than parvenu Count Torgrim—  
Nay, nay, I know what's said behind my back!  
I'll twine our stem round Gothia's oldest trunk.  
There's only one small drawback. [*Sits at table.*]

BLUM

What is that?

CHANCELLOR [*Absent-mindedly draws out the paper  
knife sticking in the table*]

The Lady Norna is an anarchist.

BLUM

Good God!

CHANCELLOR [*Smiling*]

Why not? My son's a Socialist!

Dear little doves that play at being hawks.  
It is the riot of their springtide blood,  
The riot meant for mating, which I still  
By pairing them, so in their happy cooings,  
Nest-buildings and soft gurglings o'er their brood,  
They learn to leave the world's affairs to God.

BLUM [*Drily*]  
And you!

CHANCELLOR [*Quietly*]  
And me, His earthly servant!  
[*Lays hand affectionately on BLUM'S shoulder.*]  
There!  
You now possess my sole surviving secret.

BLUM  
But how did you discover Lady Norna's?

CHANCELLOR  
By reading Baron Konrad's correspondence.

BLUM  
*He* too?

CHANCELLOR  
The philosophic species—harmless;  
Or rather, useful.

BLUM  
What! A spy at Court!

CHANCELLOR  
Precisely, spies for *me!* Brog writes to him.  
I know their code.

BLUM  
He's leagued with Brog!

CHANCELLOR  
Most handy!

How else could I remain in touch with Brog?  
That's how I caught the brute—though fools have  
loosed him.

BLUM

And I imagined I knew everything!

*[The CHANCELLOR slaps BLUM on back in high glee and bursts into Homeric laughter, which is suddenly interrupted as MARTHA enters from her door, carrying a telegram. The CHANCELLOR sniffs like a war-horse scenting battle.]*

CHANCELLOR

Ha!

The answer from the shipyard!

*[He snatches it]*

Quick! The cypher!

*[BLUM brings the code while the CHANCELLOR is snapping fingers impatiently over the telegram. They both bend over the code—BLUM transcribing. The CHANCELLOR gives a triumphant cry]*

Aha! The dogs have yielded!

BLUM

No, indeed.

For double speed they ask a million more.

CHANCELLOR

And what's a million with the world at stake?

BLUM

The world?

CHANCELLOR [*Feverishly*]

Write, write "Agreed." Not babble  
echoes.

[BLUM *writes the reply telegram, consulting code  
again. The CHANCELLOR hands it to MARTHA.*]

Here, give the messenger—nay, he may loiter.

Take it downstairs and tell a secretary

To seize the line.

[*She is running out through the ante-room, he pulls  
her towards the staircase, leaving the ante-room  
door ajar.*]

You snail! Through here is quicker!

[*Exit MARTHA with comic gesture.*]

BLUM [*Sullenly*]

The fate of Alba cannot hang on clock-ticks.

CHANCELLOR [*Sharply*]

Had Blucher lingered, what of Waterloo?

Each second counts. . . . Run after her and add:  
"Another million if another cruiser."

We'll raise new taxes. Bustle, bustle, blockhead!

[BLUM *hurries up staircase*]

Once Alba's vanquished, Europe's at our feet,

And have we Europe, then—

[*Runs after BLUM, snatching up the cypher book*]

The code, you camel!—

[BLUM'S *hand takes it and disappears. The  
CHANCELLOR finishes his sentence with unctuous  
slowness and triumphal loudness*]

Then the world is ours.

[COUNT FRITHIOF, a noble white-bearded figure in a peasant's smock and leggings, leaning on his staff, appears at the ante-room door, left open by MARTHA.]

FRITHIOF

What shall it profit a race to gain the world  
And lose its soul?

CHANCELLOR [*Turning in amaze*]

Why, what are you?

FRITHIOF

My name

Is Frithiof—maker of peace it means, you know.

[*Enters.*]

CHANCELLOR

Of course! Of course! That peasant's masquerade!  
I should have recognised the crazy Count,  
Who, having squeezed life's pleasures dry, blas-  
phemes

Against his rank, sex, country, king and God.

Sir, were you sane, I'd ask how dared you enter.

FRITHIOF

Sir, were *you* sane, I had no need to enter.

But for your sake and Christ's I left my hut  
And tramped to this mad city and this mad house,  
Where you, a passing shadow, dare to forge  
God's thunderbolts and doom a brother nation.

CHANCELLOR [*Amazed and angry*]

Why, who has told——?

[*Stops. Another royal salute booms.*]

. . . Poor Count ! Do you not know  
To-day is Gothia's feast of peace and love ?

FRITHIOF

I hear the cannon booming peace and love.  
Poor soul ! I came in love to bring you peace,  
That peace of God which passeth understanding.  
Why squat here spinning crafty labyrinths,  
Jetting your filthy network o'er the globe ?  
You think to bind the future ? Poor grey spinner !  
Fate, the blind housewife, with her busy broom  
Shall shrivel at one sweep your giant web  
And leave a little naked scuttling spider !

CHANCELLOR [*White with passion*]

Be dumb, sir ! Hence ! Lest I forget our years !

FRITHIOF

Nay, best remember them—how near to death !  
Go, wash your hands of blood and make you clean  
For the last robing !

CHANCELLOR [*Advancing threateningly*]

Out, you graveyard owl !

FRITHIOF

Lift not your hand on me who love you. Smite  
Your enemy—yourself ! Your iron heart  
Smite till it melt to take the stamp of Christ.

CHANCELLOR [*Fiercely*]

I *am* a Christian.

FRITHIOF

Nay, a fiend who'd float  
His warships on the tears of mothers, build  
Our glory on a million graves.

CHANCELLOR

Enough!

[*Lays hand on sword*]  
Madman or clown, such words you must defend!

FRITHIOF

Touch not your sword. I do not fight.

CHANCELLOR

You shall!

[*He deliberately removes his glove and smacks it in challenge across FRITHIOF'S right cheek. The COUNT silently turns the other cheek and stands with calm eyes of love. The CHANCELLOR drops the glove and staggers back a little. The curtain falls, then rises to show FRITHIOF picking up the glove and handing it courteously to the CHANCELLOR.*]



## Act II

*An afternoon at the end of the following May. The scene shows a stone terrace with embrasures in a royal castle some fifteen miles from Graaf, overlooking a wide shining river which comes winding in sunshine from the snow-mountains in the background. Below the parapet, which is crowned at intervals with grotesque stone griffins and other fabulous monsters, runs a broad stone seat, in whose embrasures cushions are disposed. A small cushioned seat stands towards the left. An exit on the right leads to the interior; the grounds are reached through an archway giving on an old oaken door on the left. The LADY NORNA sits reading to the QUEEN. NORNA looks pale; the QUEEN, who wears a loose-flowing robe, is peevish. A faint sound of military music comes from without, and there are occasional bugle-calls, giving a sense of the pervasive Gothian militarism.]*

NORNA [*Reading from a magazine*]

“Sad maidens shut from sunshine and from love.”

QUEEN

Now comes the rhyme with dove. How poets lie!  
Rhyme steals their reason—kiss must lead to bliss  
Instead of headaches . . . tell all moping maidens  
They must be glad, not sad. . . . Pray read no  
more!

I'll turn the pictures. [*Stretches out hand.*]

NORNA [*Retaining magazine*]

Madam, there are none  
. . . Unless mere snapshots.

QUEEN

They at least are true.

[*She takes the magazine and turns pages languidly;  
then bursts out again*]

Look at that river dancing in her diamonds!  
I call it heartless of her.

NORNA

Heartless, madam?

QUEEN

Are she and I not sisters come from Hunland,  
From Hunland's hills—the far blue hills of Hun-  
land?

She might have worn a sympathetic black.  
Heigho! To flow back, back unto my hills!

NORNA

Shall I not sing to you?

QUEEN

There are no songs  
But lying love-songs. . . . Have *you* ever loved?

NORNA [*Confused and blushing guiltily*]

I, madam? No.

QUEEN

Yet you, unlike a queen,  
May love a man and not a policy,  
And have a son and not a State-creation  
Swaddled in parchments. . . . So! I wondered  
why  
You got this magazine.

NORNA [*Flushing more furiously*]  
Your Majesty!

QUEEN  
But Osric is far prettier than that!

NORNA  
Young Torgrim's picture there? Ah, yes, of course!  
A mere appendage to the Chancellor's!  
He gave it me to read his father's praises.

QUEEN [*Laughing*]  
A novel way to give a girl one's picture!  
Upon my soul, the rogue dispels my vapours!  
He'll have you struggling in his net before——

NORNA [*Rising*]  
Madam, this talk of love displeases me  
As song or tale of love your royal self.

QUEEN [*Rising even more angrily*]  
Indeed! A queen and may not have her jest!  
'Tis little else I am permitted here.  
What next?  
[*Hurls magazine over the parapet and walks towards  
her rooms.*]

NORNA  
Shall I attend you, madam?

QUEEN [*Furiously*]  
No!  
Can I not even walk without a wardress?

I'll send for Osric and prolong my jest.

[*Recalling her royal dignity*]

We are displeased.

[*Exit majestically.*]

NORNA [*Leaning over the parapet, calls as to far below*]

Ho, sentinel! Her Majesty has dropped

That book among the reeds. Pray send it up.

[*She stands looking towards the river. Enter BARON KONRAD from the castle. He comes up behind her.*]

KONRAD [*In low tones*]

Why came you not to council on the mountain?

We waited till the moon grew white again.

NORNA

I could not slip away.

KONRAD

A thousand pities!

Our comrade Brog had planned a *coup*.

NORNA [*Listlessly*]

Indeed!

KONRAD

It needed gold.

NORNA

Command me!

KONRAD

'Tis too late!

With but a hundred hirelings shrewdly scattered,  
Brog would have seized to-day to make a rising.

NORNA [*Faintly interested*]  
To-day?

KONRAD  
The opening of Parliament!

NORNA

Ah, yes!

KONRAD  
The triumph of the People's candidates,  
The surging mobs to view the King's procession,  
Here's touchwood for the flame—and for the match  
The news I spied out that the royal speech—  
Though slurring o'er that Torgrim has been building  
Beyond his means a fleet to rival Alba's—  
Foreshadows taxes for new armaments.  
You do not listen.

NORNA [*With a start*]  
Yes, new armaments.

KONRAD  
And does that match not fire you too? I thought  
To see war-beacons shooting from your eyes.  
Why, what has changed you? Can it be that Osric?

NORNA  
How dare you, sir?

KONRAD [*Smiling*]

Ah, now I see the beacons!  
I only meant your converse is so copious,  
Perhaps his views——

NORNA [*Scornfully*]

*His* views! A parrot's views!

KONRAD

Precisely what I meant—his father's views.

NORNA

'Tis not his father whom he apes, but Frithiof.  
Resist not evil—fighting's wrong, and so forth.

KONRAD

One Frithiof seems to make a many fools!

NORNA

Osric's no fool—philosophers should weigh things—  
But just a child, too credulous of good,  
And with a child's trust in his father.

KONRAD

No fool to love both Frithiof and his father?  
To be a soldier and to call war sinful?

*[Enter through the archway a powdered and gilded  
lackey, carrying a muddy magazine on a silver salver.]*

NORNA

Ah, sir, the human heart contains four chambers,  
So surely there is room for contradictions.

LACKEY

Too muddy for your ladyship.

NORNA

Why, no!

Tear off the cover!

*[The lackey gingerly removes cover, fearing to stain his white gloves.]*

There! Quite stainless! Thanks.

*[She takes the magazine. Exit lackey carrying the dirty covers on the salver.]*

KONRAD

No doubt the seat of folly *is* the heart! . . .

But Osric's brainlessness avails us!

NORNA

How?

KONRAD *[Lowers voice]*

Because we need not kill him with his father!

NORNA *[Dropping magazine]*

Kill *him?*

KONRAD

I said there is no need. *[Picks it up.]* But if  
The man of iron left a son of steel——

*[Gives her the magazine; she takes it with shaking hand]*

Why, you are white!

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NORNA

I did not sleep. I pray you——  
[*Turns away.*]

KONRAD

I'm sorry. But remember it was you  
Who dragged me from my theories to join  
To Brog's crude courage and your gold my brain!

NORNA

Why this reminder? Have I flinched a moment?  
Can I forget my oath to war on war,  
Made and renewed on twenty putrid fields  
Areek with blood and sulphur and agape  
With hasty pits where mothers' sons were piled  
Pell-mell and nameless!

KONRAD [*Staring*]

How have you seen fighting?

NORNA

Have you forgot our nine years' war with Hunland?  
I was once captain of the Red Cross Army.

KONRAD

Indeed? Those days I was so busy writing  
My Peace-Philosophy——

NORNA [*Scornfully*]

And so you thought  
Me merely nourished on your secret writings  
Like that young parrot on Count Frithiof's works?



No! No! My deep-set hate of Governments  
Had redder root in Hunland's sodden soil,  
When in the train of Butcher Holk I sped,  
After the war had doubly orphaned me.

KONRAD

Doubly? I knew your father's heroic death——

NORNA

Heroic! That's a word I guard for mother,  
Dying at home upon the rack of doubt,  
And with no cry save Gothia and glory!  
Ah, me! Her shadowed sweetness, tear-dimmed  
grace!

Not mercifully widowed, wedded rather,  
Instead of husband, to a silent fear  
That sat with her by day and lay by night.  
Not you, but those slow-creeping, shrouded years  
When we three, mother, I, and that grey shadow,  
Kept house together, sowed the seed matured  
On Hunland's battlefields. Ah, God! the pictures,  
Corpses and carcasses, that in my brain  
Are ever mingling in a blood-red mist  
Whence hollow groans resound and horses' screams  
That sting my soul to blow the world to pieces!  
And strange to say 'tis horses more than men  
Obsess my days and dreams—the poor dumb horses  
We spur upon the maddened horns of war  
And disembowel for no ends of theirs.

KONRAD [*Coldly*]

All this—without the crudity of contact—  
You might have gleaned from my Philosophy.

NORNA

I found a simpler Peace-Philosophy—  
Cut off the heads of war and war collapses.  
The peoples hate it, monarchs are but pawns,  
'Tis always statesmen—heaven save the mark!  
So death to statesmen!

KONRAD

So you did persuade me.  
But now 'tis you who seem to shrink from——

NORNA

No!  
Let's leave the Court and burrow in the mountains  
With comrade Brog!

KONRAD

Nay, Brog is better served  
By our connivance here.

NORNA

It seems like cheating.

KONRAD

All's fair in love and——

NORNA

Hist!

[*Enter OSRIC from the castle hurriedly.*]

KONRAD

Why, what's this haste?  
You wear a cloud.

OSRIC [*To* NORNA]  
I came to say good-bye.

NORNA  
Good-bye? Why do you flee her Majesty?

OSRIC  
The telephone has summoned me to Graaf.  
There's some uprising!

KONRAD  
What!

NORNA  
Uprising? Whose?

OSRIC  
Some anarchists, I think—the telephone  
Was fuzzy at this distance, but the voice  
Was Blum's, directing, in my father's name,  
I haste defend the capital. Thank God  
For motor-cars! In half an hour——

KONRAD [*Hurrying into the castle*]  
Here's news!

OSRIC  
Stop! Do not tell the Queen!

KONRAD  
Am I a fool!

I go to telephone for fuller facts.  
[*Exit.*]

NORNA  
You must not fight.

OSRIC  
Not fight?

NORNA  
You said 'twas sinful.  
Let pagan soldiers do it. Where is Holk?

OSRIC  
I do not know, but I must do what's ordered.

NORNA  
A pretty follower of Frithiof! Fie!

OSRIC  
Think you my conscience is not torn enough?  
But some contend we may resist the evil  
Aimed not at us, but others!

NORNA  
How men quibble!  
I never knew a man of single will.  
Even your Christian steers 'twixt God and devil.

OSRIC  
My father promised me an end of wars.  
But this is not his fault. How can I leave  
The palace at these lawless ruffians' mercy?  
Just think! *You* might have been within!

NORNA

What then ?

OSRIC

What then ! Then how could I *not* fight ? My God !  
Were foul hands laid on you, I'd kill myself !

NORNA [*Touched. Half smiling through tears*]  
And make bad worse. How strange are men !

OSRIC

What's strange ?

How could I live without that aureole  
Which playing round your head makes all things  
holy ?

NORNA [*Frightened*]

Go, go—your duty calls you—go, good-bye !  
There's no such nimbus round my head, while in it  
Are thoughts which you would be amazed to know.

OSRIC

Not I ! Do I not know how white doves flit,  
How morning dew lies fresh upon the grass,  
What fairy fragrance breathes from hawthorn buds ?  
O Norna, dearest Norna !

NORNA [*Faintly*]

Touch me not !

[*She droops into his arms.*]

OSRIC

Fear no profaning—I am in a shrine !

'Tis adoration draws me nearer still,  
And in an ecstasy of reverence  
I bend towards you thus.

[*His lips just rest on hers. She tears herself away.*]

NORNA

No, no, not thus!

This is no time for idling.

OSRIC

You are right.

Some magic perfume drowsed my brain. Good-bye!

[*Hurries towards oaken door.*]

NORNA

Good-bye—good-bye—and never come again.

OSRIC

Not come again! Oh, Norna, see, my feet  
Come of themselves!

NORNA

They are your enemies.

[*He advances*]

No! No! *We* must not think of love.

OSRIC [*Dazed*]

Not think——?

NORNA

I have my work to do.

OSRIC

What *is* your work?

NORNA

Enough that it divides us—like a sword.

OSRIC

Divides us, dearest? Nay, I'll help you.

NORNA [*Shuddering*]

God!

You know not what you say. . . . It is your father

OSRIC

Father!

NORNA

Who stands between us.

OSRIC [*With boyish relief*]

You are wrong!

His praise of you sounds oftener than our bugles.

NORNA [*Grimly*]

I would he were more silent! Go! Forget me!

OSRIC

You used to mock me laughing, now 'tis crying.  
And yet you say 'tis men are strange.

NORNA

Pray leave me!

[*A bugle-call heard without.*]

OSRIC

My duty I obey—not you!

[*Exit.*]

NORNA [*Yearning after him*]

O Osric!

[*She picks up the magazine and lets herself fall on the stone seat, pressing her face against his picture.*

*Re-enter* BARON KONRAD]

KONRAD

O glorious news! Most glorious! Holk is shot!

NORNA [*Turning a dazed face*]

Holk shot!

[*Rising slowly like a somnambulist*]

Shot! Butcher Holk!

KONRAD

Stone dead.

NORNA

Stone dead!

[*As the news fully penetrates her brain, her face is transfigured, she stands upright with flashing eyes, the magazine clenched in her hand*]

That Titan of Artillery is shot!

[*Half-consciously tears up the magazine at every line*]

Whose cannon spat at all our hopes is shot!

That sportsman with the biggest bag is shot!

The Butcher Holk is butchered! Then indeed

The Judgment Day begins!

[*Hurls magazine fragments over the parapet*]

Who fired the shot?



KONRAD  
Why, who but Brog?

NORNA  
Oh, how I envy Brog!  
But more! Oh, tell me more!

KONRAD  
'Twas while the crowd  
Stood waiting for the King's return in state  
From Parliament. Holk sat his old white horse,  
Heading the pageant. Suddenly there spread  
Two evil rumours—one the tax for warships,  
And one the King had shirked his state return—  
In fact had sneaked away. The cheated mob,  
Inspired by Brog, put one and one together,  
And made eleven—that he feared to meet  
His tax-crushed subjects.

NORNA  
And it looks eleven.

KONRAD  
Seizing this sullen moment, Brog took aim!

NORNA  
*Vive Brog!* That shot will rank with William Tell's!

KONRAD  
Thank God it may! for with the death of Holk  
The pall of terror that has hung o'er Graaf  
Was rent, and with a roar of glee the mob

Made for the palace. Some built barricades,  
And some with flaming torches sought the convents—  
And there the story stops!

NORNA

But how can *you*?

Let us go down——

KONRAD

To see?

NORNA

To fight!

KONRAD

What folly!

*We* are the brains behind!

NORNA

Yes, far behind!

Brog's brusque performances outshoot and shame  
Our long-laid projects. . . . Hist!

[*Loud and with feigned laughter*]

O Baron!

[*Re-enter the QUEEN, rather angrily*]

Madam,

Can I do aught?

QUEEN

What have you done with Osric?

NORNA [*Indignant*]

Am I your Osric's keep——

KONRAD [*Hurriedly*]  
His father, madam,  
Called him to Graaf upon some public business.

QUEEN  
The Chancellor! Again the Chancellor!  
Always the Chancellor!  
[*Enter the DUKE OF POMBERG by the archway.*]

POMBERG  
Not always, Madam. You are now beset  
Only by worship.  
[*Bows low, arranges cushions*]  
Will you sit?

QUEEN [*Pettishly*]  
No, stand!

POMBERG  
Most fit! Of old stood lovely statues here,  
And I, at risk of sounding treasonable,  
Could wish you fixed for ever like Lot's wife.

QUEEN [*Sweetly*]  
Dear Duke!  
[*To NORNA*]  
Why do you smile?

NORNA  
Lot's wife was salt!

QUEEN  
Pray leave me with the Duke!  
[*NORNA and BARON bow and exeunt within in  
animated conversation. QUEEN sits*]

Why are you not  
In Graaf, escorting your liege sovereign  
To Parliament ?

POMBERG [*Resentfully*]

Ah, Madam, that's precisely  
What brings me from the joyous bannered city  
To seek redress. My place by blood must be  
The pageant's head, but lo! the Chancellor  
Stuck up his crony Holk on plea the people  
Must see and cheer their hero after sickness !

QUEEN

Count Torgrim's finger seems in every pie.

POMBERG

I would not say, were he a real Count,  
Or e'en a gentleman, or had he talents——

QUEEN [*Rising suddenly*]

What is that red that glimmers on the sky-line ?

POMBERG [*Following her gaze*]

Most strange—too soon for sunset.

QUEEN

There are fires

Not lit by God.

POMBERG

'Tis some mirage !

QUEEN

Go see !

POMBERG [*Going*]

Fear nothing, madam. Is not Pomberg here?

*[Exit through the archway. The QUEEN stands gazing anxiously at the line of red. The KING, in the uniform, glittering with orders, in which he has opened Parliament, enters, and seeing her rapt he steals behind her on tiptoe and flings his hands round her eyes.]*

KING

Three guesses!

QUEEN

Fool! You should not startle me!  
Who but his Majesty would dare—or be  
So inconsiderate?

*[The KING removes his hands, crestfallen]*

No, do not kiss me!

You're wondrous early.

KING

I escaped the crowd—  
A side-door and a common motor-car!  
Such haste methinks deserved a warmer welcome.

QUEEN

But was it wise to disappoint the people?

KING

They had their hero Holk—and bands and banners.

QUEEN

Ah Holk, I gather, got more cheers than you.

KING

Not more. My head still feels nid-nodding.

QUEEN

Did Parliament receive your speech?

How

KING

New taxes seldom rouse enthusiasm.

So-so!

QUEEN

Then why propose them?

KING

You speak as if I wrote my speech myself!  
Ask the Chancellor!

QUEEN

Long live the clockwork king with phonograph!

KING

Hush, Elsa! You are come from happy Hunland,  
Where Parliaments, new-fledged, more fall than fly.  
Your royal sire is King and Pope in one.  
But look how other kings are led in leash  
Before you murmur at my freer fate.  
I can make war and peace and——

QUEEN

*You!* Good luck!

You blind yourself—if me you failed to blind.  
[*With a sudden mischievous inspiration she puts  
her hands round his eyes*]

Three guesses! Who makes war and peace?

KING

Why, I!

QUEEN

Guessed wrong! Who married us?

KING

The Pope!

QUEEN

Still wrong!

Last guess. Who chose my maids of honour?

KING

You!

QUEEN

Then I pack Norna off; she's blasphemous!

KING

But, Elsa dear, the Chancellor——

QUEEN

Correct!

In four!

KING

You mean——? Absurd!

[*POMBERG hurries back.*]

POMBERG

Your Majesties,  
They say it is a convent burning.

KING [*Surprised*]

Where?

QUEEN

That rim of fire!

KING [*Looking towards it*]

How sad an accident!  
Count Torgrim must compose a Royal message.

QUEEN

Since women are concerned, 'twere best from *me!*

KING [*Icily*]

The King includes the Royal consort.

QUEEN [*Flushing*]

So!

I knew my status here was less than nothing,  
My only function to produce the heir!

[*She throws herself sobbing on the cushions. POMBERG  
begins stealing out.*]

KING

Hush! Pomberg is discreeter far than you.

QUEEN

Why, let him hear! Does not the whole world  
gabble?

Is not the date the journals' speculation



Beside a horse's prospects or a stock's?  
Does not your Press collect for christening-cups  
In hopes you'll knight the Jew-proprietors?  
Are women not subscribing silver rattles  
Or some such lewd reminder?

KING [*Seizing her band*]  
Dearest Elsa,  
It is their love, their loyal——

QUEEN  
Let me be!  
I want no love that puts me to such shame.  
My God! a cat may have its young in private!  
[*She flings out hysterically. The KING calls to  
POMBERG, who is just cautiously disappearing.*]

KING  
Don't go! I have been praising your discretion.

POMBERG  
Most royal sire, I am a married man.  
These periods are distressing.

KING [*Sitting*]  
Let us talk  
Of lighter matters. Why did you not hang  
Count Frithiof?

POMBERG  
It was Torgrim set him free,  
And bids me still ignore his treason-teaching.

I said: who talks of kings as "sinful mortals"  
Corrupts the source of order (see St. Peter),  
Nay, seats himself upon a rival throne,  
And even puts himself above the Chancel—  
    [*Pretends to bite his tongue.*]

KING  
Nay, speak!

POMBERG  
    It was a slip.

KING  
                                    I love the truth!

POMBERG  
Your Majesty, the rumours that Count Torgrim,  
Backed up by Holk, designs Dictatorship  
Are, in my judgment, mischievous inventions.  
But—ne'ert heless——

KING  
                                    You mean—if not in name—  
Torgrim usurps my place!

POMBERG  
                                    Not only yours.  
Graaf's safety lies upon *my* shoulders, yet  
He frees this Frithiof demagogue whose gospel  
Would turn our soldiers from their pride of arms.

KING  
But why does Holk not shoot the madman down?

POMBERG

Holk! Holk! The man is feeble after fever,  
And at his best was but a tool of Torgrim.

KING

That scarce does justice to his victories.

POMBERG

With such resources you or I had won them!

KING

Not *I!*

POMBERG

I call "your Majesty" "your Modesty."  
Who plans a ballet can arrange a battle.  
God, who has giv'n you every gift—save godhead,  
If you will pardon a rude soldier's bluntness—  
Has granted you what e'en Napoleon lacked.  
Did you not show me why he lost at Leipsig?

KING [*Pleased*]

Well, well—I thank God most for giving peace.

[*Death-bells begin to toll faintly afar*]

What's that?

[*They strain their ears to the horizon.*]

POMBERG

It sounds like death-bells.

KING

Those poor burnt nuns!

[*Enter the lackey.*]

Ah,

LACKEY

His Excellence Count Torgrim  
Craves audience !

KING

Here? Methought to-day at least  
I'd done enough of State-work. . . . Bid him come.

*[Exit lackey]*

The nigger-driver !

POMBERG

Oh, your Majesty !  
Let me dismiss the brute.

*[Hurries towards door]*

KING

No !

*[POMBERG bows and goes to other exit. The KING  
calls him back]*

Stay with me !

Mayhap he's vexed I cut the pageant short.

POMBERG

Sire ! If that bulldog barks before my sovrän—

*[He puts his hand on his sword and draws himself  
up bombastically ; the KING likewise stiffens him-  
self as if to receive cavalry. Enter by the arch-  
way the CHANCELLOR with dragging step, an old,  
weary man, clad in Court dress, with sword, and  
bearing the seal of State in its cardboard box.]*

CHANCELLOR

Your Majesty !

KING

Why, what is ill with you ?

CHANCELLOR

I come to lay my seal within your hands.

KING

Resign?

POMBERG

Resign?

*[His eyes light up eagerly. His hand half unconsciously takes the seal.]*

KING

But why?

CHANCELLOR

I am unworthy.

I have not kept your capital in peace.

Besides, Holk's death has broken me.

KING

Holk's death ?

CHANCELLOR

You do not know that Holk is foully murdered ?

KING

Great God !

POMBERG [*Less outraged than pleasantly agitated*]

How ? How ?

CHANCELLOR [*In tears*]

That soul of chivalry,  
That saint who saw in war God's highest service,  
That prince of bold emprise, the people's idol,  
And more his soldiers' father than their chieftain,  
My old yoke-fellow . . .

[*Half fiercely*] Sire, have you no word  
Of thanks for him to warm this wintry bosom?

KING

I spoke of him but now—his mighty deeds.

POMBERG

And I! His place will be with Julius Cæsar's.

CHANCELLOR

Ay, and like Cæsar he is butchered!

[*Covers his face. The bells heard tolling*]

Ha!

All Gothia's death-bells toll as I enjoined.  
The humbler dead will profit by his honours.  
You see he serves his fellows dead as living.  
But I am jealous there should be in Gothia  
A heart to-day with room for other grief.

KING

Yet I must send a message *re* the nuns.

CHANCELLOR [*Puzzled*]

Which nuns?

KING

The dead!

CHANCELLOR

KING [Looking towards the red line] But why nuns only?

There other victims?

Are

CHANCELLOR

The fighting—— Christ receive their souls!

KING AND POMBERG [*Involuntarily placing their  
hands on their swords*]  
Fighting?

CHANCELLOR

Or I had guessed you still in peaceful darkness.  
The revolution—— I'm bemused to-day,

KING

Revolution!

POMBERG

Christ!

This comes of letting Frithiof out.

CHANCELLOR [*Leaping into sudden vitality and  
thunder*]

This comes of letting out those gallows-birds,  
Your Brog and Co., against my solemn warning,  
The day our royal lady——

KING [*Coldly*]

                                These are bygones !  
Back to the city, Pomberg, take your place !

POMBERG [*Sbrinking*]

My place is here to guard your royal safety !

CHANCELLOR [*Drily*]

There is no need for Pomberg ! Osric's gone.

POMBERG [*Recovering his fierceness*]

You sent your stripling o'er my head ?

CHANCELLOR

  How so,  
If here's the place of glory ? And indeed  
I fear yon rim of blood upon the sky  
Portends the rebels are advancing.

POMBERG

  God !  
This castle was not built to be a fortress,  
And powder fails us !

CHANCELLOR [*Grimly*]

                        They will blow up less.  
[*Singing of "Marseillaise" heard afar, courtiers  
heard running to and fro and ladies screaming.*]

POMBERG

Oh, let me bear your Majesties to safety !



KING [*Taking the seal from his outstretched hand and turning to the CHANCELLOR*]

I cannot take your seal at such a moment.

I pray you——

[*Tenders seal back.*]

CHANCELLOR [*Taking it, holds it uncertainly*]

Sire, how *can* I guard the State

When every scurvy scribe and Socialist

May all unpunished flout me and my taxes !

KING

But Parliament has passed them !

CHANCELLOR

Parliament !

Five hundred babblers chosen for their skill

To gull the fifty million simpler fools

Yclept the People. 'Tis a true King's duty

To save the People from the Parliament——

God strike it dumb ! Sire, had your hallowed father

Not bid me plant my heel on Parliament,

Grim Hunland's heel would be to-day on Gothia,

Parliament and all——

[*OSRIC runs in breathlessly through the archway, BLUM more slowly behind him.*]

OSRIC

O father !

[*The CHANCELLOR turns with black surprise. OSRIC perceives the KING*]

Pardon, sire !

KING

Speak! Speak! Your face shows better tidings.  
Speak!

OSRIC

Sire, glorious and the hand of God! But Blum—  
With me 'tis hearsay—Blum will tell it better!  
Our cars half-way to Graaf well-nigh collided!

BLUM

Your Majesty, except stray gangs still roam  
The suburbs, Graaf is peaceful—thanks to Frithiof!

OMNES

To Frithiof?

BLUM

He before the palace sudden  
Was seen prophetic with uplifted hands,  
Bidding both parties throw their weapons down.  
His standing thus serene 'twixt double fires  
With brow of thunder and with eyes of love  
Wrought strangely on the superstitious mob—  
I mean we Gothians are at root good Christians!  
In vain Brog marseillaised—his spell was broken.  
He fled to the hills.

OSRIC [*Enthusiastically*]

So Frithiof is our saviour!  
And we have brought him up to see the King.

CHANCELLOR [*Thunderstruck*]

You've brought him up!

OSRIC

Ay, and the people press  
To kiss his garment.

[*The CHANCELLOR makes a movement of protest.*]

KING

I should like to see him.

OSRIC [*Going towards archway*]  
Count Frithiof! Long live Frithiof!

VOICES [*Outside*]

Long live Frithiof!  
Long live Count Frithiof! Long——!  
[*Enter FRITHIOF, a little blood dabbled on his  
forehead.*]

FRITHIOF [*Turning in rebuke*]  
Nay, long live Peace!  
Its blessing on you, King!

KING  
I thank you, Count, for loyal service.

FRITHIOF  
I bring you service yet more loyal—Truth!  
[*Murmurs of protest from the courtiers.*]

KING  
Nay, let him speak. Has he not bled for me?

FRITHIOF

Not for you, King, but for the famished mob  
Your troops were shooting down. That's govern-  
ment—

When people ask for bread to give them tombstones!  
Brog's way is evil, but his cause is just.

[*More murmurs.*]

POMBERG

Rank anarchy!

FRITHIOF

Your people faint beneath  
The tax for warships.

KING

Warships keep them safe!

FRITHIOF

The path of safety is the road to ruin.  
This monstrous impost bulking vaster yearly  
As rivals pile up armaments and debts  
Must bankrupt all.

CHANCELLOR

What do *you* know of figures?

FRITHIOF

Enough to read the Day of Reckoning.

CHANCELLOR

Dear Count, who've proved yourself our prop and  
bulwark,  
We must protect our growing commerce.

FRITHIOF

Our growing conscience.

Nay,

KING

True.

CHANCELLOR [*Getting angrier*]

Our growing people !  
We need new homes for our expanding breed.

FRITHIOF

Our breed expands not in your Afric swamps ;  
It builds its own homes—in America.

CHANCELLOR

Yet e'en our Afric swamps are coveted.  
To safeguard peace we must prepare for war.

FRITHIOF

I know that maxim ; it was forged in hell.  
This wealth of ships and guns inflames the vulgar  
And makes the very war it guards against.  
How often, as the mighty master said, the sight  
Of means to do ill deeds makes ill deeds done !

KING

Did I say that? How true !

[BLUM *turns aside with a suppressed laugh.*]

POMBERG

How wonderful !

CHANCELLOR [*To KING*]

You meant it otherwise.

[*Turns furiously to FRITHIOF, righteous indignation  
sweeping away craft*]

Ill deeds forsooth !

Count, you blaspheme against the God of War,  
Great Mars, whose priests in shining armour danced,  
Whose service still is jubilant and splendid  
With glory of faith and high heroic deeds !

FRITHIOF

The God of War is now a man of business—  
With vested interests.

[*The CHANCELLOR is about to protest.*]

KING [*Puzzled but arrested*]

Expound yourself.

FRITHIOF

So much sunk Capital, such countless callings,  
The Army, Navy, Medicine, the Church—  
To bless and bury,—Music, Engineering,  
Red-tape Departments, Commissariats,  
Stores, Transports, Ammunition, Coaling-stations,  
Fortifications, Cannon-foundries, Shipyards,  
Arsenals, Ranges, Drill-halls, Floating Docks,  
War-loan Promoters, Military Tailors,  
Camp-followers, Canteens, War Correspondents,  
Horse-breeders, Armourers, Torpedo-builders,  
Pipeclay and Medal Vendors, Big Drum Makers,  
Gold Lace Embroiderers, Opticians, Buglers,  
Tent-makers, Banner-weavers, Powder-mixers,  
Crutches and Cork Limb Manufacturers,

Balloonists, Mappists, Heliographers,  
Inventors, Flying Men, and Diving Demons,  
Beelzebub and all his hosts, who, whether  
In Water, Earth, or Air, among them pocket  
When Trade is brisk a million pounds a week !

KING [*Overcome. The death bells are heard again.*]  
Then where's the hope this trade in death will die?

FRITHIOF

There *is* none while this social order lives.  
The man of business is the God of War,  
And gold pulls all the strings and all the triggers.

KING

No hope in Arbitration and The Hague?

FRITHIOF

Good soothing powders in war-fever. Better  
Cut out the festering hates that feed the fever.  
The world must rest on love, not force and greed.  
Brog's way is mad.

CHANCELLOR

Yours madder.

FRITHIOF

Yours most mad.

Brog, you and I—we three—contest the world.  
Let the King mark which shall the strongest prove,  
Brog lawless, you with law, or I with love.

[*Bows and offers his hand to the KING, who takes it  
in astonishment. Then, pointing towards the death-  
bells, exit, escorted by OSRIC, and cheered without.*]

CHANCELLOR

This man must die !

KING

Must die ? Who saved the State !

CHANCELLOR

We cannot run the State by miracles.  
My Osric had sufficed to quell the riot.  
Brog's followers are few, but Frithiof's many.  
He will demoralise both Church and Army,  
And sap the pillars of your greatness.

POMBERG [*Triumphant*]

Ha !

What did I say !

CHANCELLOR

You said the *State* must kill him.

A fatal step ! We should create a martyr,  
A martyr would create a new religion,  
A new religion would oppose the old,  
And shake the State—and all for what ? No, no !  
I'd gladly choke the Count with these two hands—  
He dared to turn his other cheek to me  
With a superior, sanctimonious air—  
But I must put the State before my pleasures.

KING

Then we must let him live ?

CHANCELLOR

That does not follow.

He might be killed—by other hands than ours.



KING  
By whose?

CHANCELLOR

Ah, sire! Leave Providence the work!  
You saw it used the Count to baffle Brog,  
And Brog, be sure, will have revenge! Leave all  
To Providence—with just a little push.  
And mark how Providence is provident:  
One single stroke will rid us of the zealot  
And turn the vengeance of his followers  
Against our other foes—the anarchists.

[*Turns smiling to BLUM*]

This is what Karl would call a combination!

[*Confused shouting. Re-enter BARON KONRAD.*]

KONRAD

Count Frithiof, sire, harangues the royal guards,  
Telling them arms are sins against the spirit.  
Should Pomberg not again arrest him?

KING [*Looking helplessly at CHANCELLOR*]

Answer!

CHANCELLOR

Arrest the man who saved the State? O Baron!  
Just think! Why, Brog would now be President!  
Ah, sire! While Frithiof lives your throne is safe.

KONRAD

While Frithiof lives?

CHANCELLOR

Poor Konrad seems perturbed.

[*Shouting at him*]

Ay, long live Frithiof!

KONRAD [*Quaveringly*]

Long live Frithiof!

[*Re-enter OSRIC, with glowing face.*]

OSRIC

Ay,

God save Count Frithiof!

CHANCELLOR [*Turning savagely upon his son*]

Sir, you at least might show the grace of silence!  
Get back at once to Graaf—and place yourself  
Under arrest!

OSRIC

Arrest! For speaking?

CHANCELLOR

No!

For leaving Graaf unguarded and uncaptured!

OSRIC

But Blum said——

CHANCELLOR

Blum might be in league with Brog.  
How could you know? There *have* been anarchists  
With friends at Court. Am I not right, dear Baron?

KONRAD [*Uneasily*]

One cannot be too careful.

[*Exit hurriedly through archway.*]

CHANCELLOR

But for Blum

You would have captured Brog!

BLUM [*Terrified, falls on his knees*]  
O sire, I swear——

KING  
Rise, fool!  
[*Draws his sword.*]  
I knight you for your tidings.

BLUM [*Rises as in a dream, murmurs involuntarily*]  
God  
Of Abraham!  
[*Almost puts on his high hat, then snatches it off.*]

CHANCELLOR [*Murmurs furiously*]  
Is no one safe? That sword  
Is dangerous.

KING  
But as for you, Sir Osric,  
A soldier's duty is obedience!

OSRIC  
Yes, sire, but to his chiefs! My father is  
Civilian.

CHANCELLOR  
You dare chop logic, sir!  
'Twas the Duke's order!

POMBERG [*Amazed*]  
Eh?

CHANCELLOR [*Eyeing POMBERG dominantly*]  
His Highness' order!

Himself selected the more arduous post  
To guard the sacred person of the monarch.  
Your Highness does remember that ?

POMBERG

Most plainly !

[*Bows to CHANCELLOR, who bows even lower.*]

[*To OSRIC*] You are arrested, sir ! Give me your  
sword.

[*OSRIC dazedly surrenders his sword.*]

Repair to Graaf for disobedience,  
And cowardice !

[*OSRIC flushes indignantly at the last word and starts forward towards POMBERG, then controls himself and looks at his father as for redress, but meeting only the same stern, unchanging gaze, salutes and exit slowly in dazed wrath. As the oaken door bangs behind him the CHANCELLOR turns on POMBERG like a tiger.*]

CHANCELLOR

How dare you call

My boy a coward !

[*His sword, leaping out like lightning, clashes against OSRIC'S sword in POMBERG'S hand, which has leapt up in instinctive defence.*]

KING [*Holding up his hand*]  
Count !

CHANCELLOR

Your pardon, sire !

[*He stands with bowed head. The curtain falls quickly.*]

### Act III

*A grassy plateau in the mountains. Tents showing the camp of the Revolutionaries, who lie or stand around, carousing, singing, fiddling, playing cards. One digs at the back. Around rise snow-clad peaks. A full moon floods the landscape with light and peace, and overhead the sky palpitates with countless stars, obscured only at one edge by a creeping cloud. On the outermost rim of the plateau (which is seen to end almost in a precipice) a sentry paces unbrokenly throughout the Act. Upon a grassy knoll sits BROG, a man of the people, with a powerful head; near by BARON KONRAD and the LADY NORNA.*

BROG [*Going to the digger at the back, says quietly*]  
Well, have you dug his grave?

DIGGER

'Tis dug.

BROG [*Resuming seat*]

Then silence!

Bring in the prisoner.

[*A drum rattles. From a tent COUNT FRITHIOF is seen emerging, surrounded by picturesque figures armed with rifles.*]

Why, who unbound him?

FIRST REVOLUTIONIST

Why, Captain, cords are wasted on this crank!

[*Gives FRITHIOF a violent push forward with the butt-end of his rifle. FRITHIOF staggers forward*]

*and comes to a standstill without the voluntary movement of a muscle.]*

You see! Tied hand and foot!

FRITHIOF [*To BROG, &c.*]

God save you, friends!

BROG

We need no saving! That's for you!

FRITHIOF

Not so.

Saved once for all was I, and ever since  
I float serenely in a sea of light  
Which Death itself can never change to darkness.

BROG [*Sniggering*]

That must be comforting! [*Turns to KONRAD*]  
D'ye hear that, comrade?

KONRAD [*Frightened, thinking his name has been mentioned*]

No names!

BROG

I called you "comrade."

KONRAD

Ah, of course!

All men are equal—that's philosophy.

BROG [*Putting his arm round BARON KONRAD, who shudders at his touch*]

Our comrade here is just a trifle squeamish  
About our sending you to Kingdom Come;  
He'll be relieved to hear you like the country.

KONRAD

I only said the Count must have fair trial.

FRITHIOF

“ Judge not lest ye be judged ”—I spurn your trial.

KONRAD

Nay, arguments and pleas demand their due.  
Like you, Sir Count, I am philosopher ;  
'Twixt you and me the law of reason rules.  
My wish is you should own your sentence just.  
Friend Brog was premature to mention Death.

BROG

It was the Count that mentioned Death, not I.

FRITHIOF

I mentioned Death but as a form of life.  
You cannot kill me !

BROG

Oh, good Lord ! Excuse me !  
That's really killing ! Ha, ha, ha ! How's that ?  
[Gives him a blow on the mouth. The crowd jeers.]

NORNA [*Starting forward*]

How dare you, Brog ? This man is on his trial.

BROG

I thought he was a Christian scientist—  
A chap without the feelings of a Christian.  
There seems to be some very Christian blood.

[*Laughter.*]

NORNA

Pray let me wipe your mouth !

[*Takes out her handkerchief and wipes the blood.*]

FRITHIOF

O gentle lady,  
By some gross aberration here, whose words  
And touch fall softer than this moonlight——

BROG

Silence !

KONRAD

If Life and Death are one, why, all the better.  
The court is opened. Brog, you have the word.

BROG

But you the words ! The gift of gab is yours.  
What's there to say ? This Governmental tool  
Has squashed our country's finest chance of freedom.

[*Truculent shouts.*]

KONRAD

A masterly indictment ! You, Count Frithiof,  
Professing, like ourselves, the love of peace,  
Have yet propped up a Government of blood  
For war with Alba !

FRITHIOF

It is false !

NORNA

How false ?

Your Christian crutch *does* prop the Government,  
Which grinds our poor with taxes for new warships  
Which in their turn will scatter death and doom.



FRITHIOF

O gentle lady, consequences rest  
With God alone—ours but to do the right,  
To go on Christian crutches, as you say,  
Seeing we lack the strength to go unaided.  
What comes is God's concern—our human foresight  
Purblindly would forecast effects. To-day  
I *may* appear a prop to Government,  
To-morrow this same teaching may uproot it.  
*Resist not evil, but reform yourself.*

NORNA

Such teaching is miasma to the will,  
And fosters poison-plants to ranker growth.  
If *we* resist not evil, evil triumphs.

FRITHIOF

Not over God.

NORNA

  There is no God except  
The God in us who yearns to right the wrong.  
And war will never cease from off the earth  
Unless we end the Torgrims and the Holks.

FRITHIOF

No, no! In righting wrong you wrong the right  
And wound the universal soul of good.

NORNA

The universal soul of good, forsooth!  
Could universal good make such a world?

FRITHIOF

Have you experience then in making worlds?

[*Looks up*]

I would not trust you with the smallest star  
That safely nestles in the lap of space,  
But though *He* slay me, yet I trust in Him!

NORNA

O gentle saint, in monstrous aberration—  
You see I but return your compliment—  
Whether or not there be this soul of good,  
Assuredly there is that soul of evil  
Our ancestors compactly christened Devil.  
And you by bidding us to bear with evil  
Are of the Devil's servants, worth a host  
Of all his common rogues, who being rogues  
May some day be exposed, while you, dear saint,  
Invincibly immaculate, bid fair  
To undermine the People's revolution

[*Menacing cries*]

Unless we silence you.

FRITHIOF

And then?

KONRAD

Why then——

FRITHIOF

My voice will cry the louder.

BROG

Oh, indeed!

The pig being dead yet squeaketh! We shall see.

[*Loud laughter.*]

KONRAD

Judge Brog, solemnity beseems a trial.

FRITHIOF

Nay, friend, all human trials are farcical.  
What do we know of one another's souls ?

NORNA

We know your soul too well ; it is transparent.  
We see it twisted out of shape. In lieu  
Of fighting on our side, you spike our guns.  
*We* kindle righteous wrath against the war-fiend,  
*You* throw upon the flames your holy water.  
By book and speech and now at last by action  
You sap man's will and leave a jelly-fish  
Afloat upon the so-called will of God,  
Which is an ocean circumfusing life,  
A welter purposeless, unsoundable !  
Man's will is mightier than this mindless ocean—  
We must be fire and steel to cut the waves,  
Regardless of their roaring push against us,  
To crash across tumultuary chaos  
And frolic in the thunder-bursts of spray,  
Finding in fighting Evil—happiness.

FRITHIOF

Only with God and Peace is happiness.

NORNA

You serve not God and Peace, but War and Devil.  
The Prince of Darkness has no subtler henchman.  
Your service must give Satan satisfaction.

KONRAD [*Grimly*]  
It certainly gives Torgrim satisfaction.

FRITHIOF  
The contrary. He told me I blaspheme  
Against my rank, sex, country, King and God!

KONRAD  
That's but his craft. Why else did he release you?  
Your teaching is an army at his back,  
And while you live the Throne and Church are safe.

FRITHIOF  
You are deceived concerning Torgrim's views.

KONRAD [*Angrily*]  
Indeed! I heard him tell his Majesty—

FRITHIOF  
So you're at Court!  
[*Sensation in crowd.*]

KONRAD [*Flushing, confused, frightened*]  
Who said . . .? . . . This man must die!

FRITHIOF  
Wise judge, I do admit my sentence just.

KONRAD  
How do you mean?

FRITHIOF  
You hoped I would—I do!

NORNA  
Count, you must die—not as you mocking hint,

Because we fear your testimony. No !  
For I, the Lady Norna——  
[*A greater sensation in crowd*]

FRITHIOF

Ah, I felt  
When first your nursing fingers touched my face  
That angel-presence of the camps of Hunland.

NORNA

*You were in Hunland?*

FRITHIOF

Through the war. 'Twas there,  
Beneath such stars as these, with death as near,  
I learnt to know how we bemock God's will  
At every turn, in Peace no less than War,  
Seeing we build the pomp of Peace on Death,  
On starved and frozen workers, as the ancients  
Laid in their basements human sacrifices.  
You talk of killing off the Holks and Torgrims,  
Blind instruments of blinder social systems!  
But first kill off your Christless Church and State,  
Your standing hosts of soldiers, landlords, lawyers—  
And, worst of all, the evil in yourself.  
Reformers must begin with self-reform—  
'Tis not so pleasant as reforming others.  
So thinking, and to God's will all-surrendered—  
Perceiving in *myself* the primal fault—  
I threw away all books, save only one,  
[*Draws out and returns to his breast a small, thick,  
leather-bound Bible with silver clasps*]  
Became a peasant, turned my sword to ploughshare.

NORNA

And I, beneath such stars, by death surrounded,  
Made oath to turn all ploughshares into swords,  
To strike at all who with the peasants' taxes  
Turn ploughshares' products back again to swords.

FRITHIOF

Ah, see the vicious circle—sword and sword  
In ceaseless bloody swirl! How true the text!  
Who takes the sword shall perish with the sword,  
This, lady, is your loathsome fallacy,  
To combat sin—but by another sin!  
You are the evil which you fight against,  
You answer hate with hate, not hate with love.

BROG

You'll answer one another until cockcrow.  
I thank the fates I'm no philosopher,  
Else Holk were still alive—and kicking us!

KONRAD

Brave Brog, your words are truly philosophic.

BROG [*With a facetious wry face*]

O Lord! Well, let us get to business. Comrades!  
You've heard the speeches *pro* and *con* (too many).

KONRAD

And bear in mind a jury must be impartial.

BROG

And don't forget our pals now lying speechless,  
Shot down by soldiers through this fool's intrusion.

[Shouts of rage. One pushes FRITHIOF forward with  
the butt-end of his gun.]

But don't let *me* affect your judgment.

REVOLUTIONISTS

No! [*Some laugh.*]

BROG

Have you considered well your verdict ?

REVOLUTIONISTS

Ay!

BROG

What is the sentence ?

REVOLUTIONISTS

Death!

BROG [*Turning to KONRAD*]

Do you agree ?

KONRAD

I answered with my comrades.

BROG

Good!

[*To NORNA*] And you ?

NORNA

Death! Death! To save from death ten thousand  
others.

These prattling prophets ever drenched the world  
With blood; the nobler they the more the blood.

Was it not said of old, " I bring not peace,  
I bring a sword " ? Sir Saint, you are a peril,  
More deadly than the snow upon yon peak,

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Whose stainless purity does not debar  
Its rolling down as avalanche to crush  
The humble villages below. And thus  
To save calamities we stay you here,  
For ever white and harmless on your height.  
Death, therefore, death!

FRITHIOF

O sweet and ill-starred lady,  
I pity you—you know not what you do.

BROG

Hush! Prisoner, you are condemned to death.

FRITHIOF

My brother—so are you and every man.  
Farewell, then, brother shadows—till we meet.

BROG

Stop sermonising, sir! Our lady friend,  
Like Cinderella, must be home by midnight.  
You were a soldier once: so you shall die  
With military honours—lead instead  
Of rope.

REVOLUTIONISTS

Ay, ay!  
[*Rattle of rifles.*]

FRITHIOF

Ah, comrades, so you think



That lead or rope can make an end of me  
On such a night of stars . . .?  
[*Moves, looking up.*]

BROG

Take care !

FRITHIOF

Of what?

BROG

Star-gazers seldom see what's at their feet.

FRITHIOF

What is that pit?

BROG

It is your grave.

FRITHIOF

I thank you

For such a courtesy when this abyss——

BROG

What! Have your body found and then our foot-  
path?

We're no such fools!

FRITHIOF

I thank you all the same

For giving me a mountain-top to cry from!

KONRAD

Except the eagle, there is none to hear,  
Or lonely chamois.

FRITHIOF

You yourselves shall hear me,  
And airships by this highway bear my message.

BROG [*Laughs*]

He *has* you there. But he in turn forgets  
We'll stuff his mouth with clods of earth.

FRITHIOF [*Stooping and picking up a clod from his  
grave*]

With earth?

Earth is the element through which upsprings  
What lies in every seed. The tender grass,  
The tiniest blade, has strength to push through stones,  
And *I* should be too frail to reach the light!

BROG

Oho! You think of rising up again!  
I'll throw an extra shovelful myself.

FRITHIOF [*Picking up spade from the grave*]

With *this*? You think this tool can cover *me*?  
Me linked to all the stars, and one with God?  
Why, roll these mountains on me, and I rise!  
My spirit spreading through all Time to come,  
Shall leaven nations, races, breeds unborn,  
Till at the grave of War all peoples stand  
And plant the rose of universal Love.

NORNA

That day will come—through us—you but delay it.



BROG [*Impatiently*]  
The day will come through both of you. Come,  
bustle!  
Or else that cloud will cover up the moon.  
The firing squad!  
[*Some Revolutionists on the left step forward*]  
Good! Under weigh at last!  
Bandage his eyes.

FRITHIOF  
No, no, it is your friend,  
Who needs a bandage, poor philosopher.  
[*Pointing to BARON KONRAD, who, unable to witness  
death, has turned his back on the scene.*]

BROG  
That's true! [*Laughs*] Philosophy! . . . Well,  
stand from him  
And let him flop upon his marrow-bones  
And make—how runs their cant?—his peace with  
God.  
Three times our sentry shall pace to and fro,  
And then—the volley!

REVOLUTIONISTS  
Ay!  
[*Rattle of rifles.*]

FRITHIOF  
At one with God  
In every hour, I have no peace to make.  
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One pacing of the sentry will suffice ; one look  
Of love and trust at all God's throbbing worlds !

[*Walks away from all and looks up at the stars*]

Worlds without end—eternal Time—and Love  
In all, through all. Amen.

VOICES [*On his left*] Amen.

ONE SOLITARY VOICE [*On his right*] Amen.

BROG [*Angrily*]

The firing squad—by the right, quick march, halt,  
front !

[*To FRITHIOF*]

Where are you going?

FRITHIOF

To my grave.

[*He faces it. To the firers*]

*Now shoot !*

My forward fall will save your arms my burden.

Good-night, dear friends. God bless you with more  
light.

FIRST REVOLUTIONIST [*Throws down gun*]

I cannot shoot !

BROG

To hell ! White-livered skunk !

FIRST REVOLUTIONIST

This is no man !

BROG [*Producing his revolver*]

God damn you! Take your gun!

[*The fellow sullenly and with trembling hand picks up the gun*]

Take steady aim, and when I give the word——

[*Turns fretfully on KONRAD, who has covered his face*]

You shake their nerves, behaving like a woman—  
I beg the lady's pardon—*she's* a man.

KONRAD

*She* is familiar with the battlefield.

BROG

Oho! we baptize you in blood to-day!

All ready, men? Present arms! Fire!

[*The volley rings out sharply. For an instant all is obscured by smoke, then as it clears away FRITHIOF is seen standing with the same serene look of love.*]

OMNES

Not dead!

FIRST REVOLUTIONIST

I said this was no man!

BROG [*Raging*]

You bat-eyed brutes,

To miss that size of target at ten paces!

Reload at once!

FIRST REVOLUTIONIST

Not I! [*Throws down gun.*]

SECOND REVOLUTIONIST

Nor I! [*Throws down gun.*]

THIRD REVOLUTIONIST

Nor I! [*Throws down gun.*]  
He said we could not kill him.

BROG

Death and thunder!  
And so you swallowed that, you sons of witches!  
Such shivery-shaky shots would miss yon mountain!  
Reload, I tell you!

ALL THE FIRING SQUAD

No!

BROG

To hell! I'll show you  
If he is powder-proof, you——

[*Fires almost point-blank at FRITHIOF'S heart.  
FRITHIOF stands serenely as before*]

Christ!

[*After a moment of awe BROG pulls himself furiously  
together*]

To hell!

Some traitor-swine has drawn my ball. . . . Great  
God!

There's still five bullets in the cursèd thing.

[*His finger trembles as he cocks the pistol*]

You've set my nerves on edge, you filthy——

[*The pistol slips from his grasp, he totters back on  
the mound, wiping his brow and muttering hoarsely*]

Blast it!

That pistol picked off Holk at fifty yards.

KONRAD [*Strung up and frightened lest FRITHIOF  
escape*]

So these are they would baptize me in blood !  
This comes of having no philosophy.

Clearly each lout, priest-ridden, superstitious,  
Fired wide, relying on his neighbours' bullets.

[*The firing squad looks guilty*]

And you—you fired point-blank into his Bible !

[*BROG stares at FRITHIOF*]

Give me that dagger—daggers cannot miss !  
I've never killed, but kill I must to-night,  
If but to vindicate Philosophy.

[*He lifts the dagger which he has snatched from  
BROG'S belt. FRITHIOF looks serenely at him, eye  
to eye. The dagger drops to the ground with a little  
thud. NORNA springs forward and snatches up  
BROG'S pistol.*]

NORNA

And these are men !

KONRAD [*In an instantaneous ecstasy of belief*]

No, no, we cannot kill him !

NORNA

I can and must, alas ! since Fate has doomed me  
To execute the judgment.

[*She fires. FRITHIOF staggers, mortally wounded.*]

KONRAD [*Sobbingly supporting the body*]

Master !

## FRITHIOF

Peace!

Only my body dies: my spirit is with you

Always . . .

*[He dies. The curtain falls. It rises again and shows NORNA standing rigid. The cloud has crept over the moon, and in the sombre starlight BROG and his men are seen shovelling earth into the grave, towards which KONRAD and a few others gaze in reverence. For the rest, the carousing, singing, fiddling, and card-playing as before. Life goes on. A little later all is silence and the lonely grave lies unmarked in the moonlight. The white peaks loom ghostly. The sentry paces.]*



## Act IV

*The castle terrace as before on an afternoon of the following September. The Court is rehearsing a ballet composed by the KING in honour of the birth of a Prince. The KING is discovered, wielding the conductor's baton, the centre of a glittering throng.*

KING

No, no, the sea-nymphs whirl the other way!  
You spoil my plot—to wit, that ocean too  
Partakes the joy at birth of Gothia's prince  
To rule our fleet. . . . You, mermaid number three,  
Must dance with both feet joined to feign a tail.

*[Dances.]*

So, so, flop-flop! It needs imagination!

*[The DUKE OF POMBERG is ushered in through the oaken door, but the KING takes no notice of him till the dance is finished.]*

Divinely danced, dear Lady Ingeborg!

Well, Duke! What brings you from the city?

POMBERG

The dearth of wisdom, sire! I've come to seek  
Your royal counsel.

KING *[With gesture of dismissal]*

'Tis at your command.

To-morrow, ladies, when I hope the stage  
Will be quite ready . . .

*[Exeunt dancers, courtiers, and musicians. The KING lights a cigarette.]*

Now, dear Pomberg, speak

POMBERG

Your Majesty remembers how Count Torgrim  
Arranged for Frithiof's death.

KING

Nay, scarce arranged :  
Foresaw, perhaps.

POMBERG

I loathe these cryptic methods.  
Some day—who knows?—they will be turned on us.

KING

Count Torgrim's loyalty is not in question.

POMBERG

Most true ! But with his years his blunders grow.  
To-day's the birthday of the vanished Frithiof,  
And how to quiet his disciples beats me.  
To-night these Frithians—nicknamed so for short—  
With torch and hymn parading, clad in smockfrocks,  
Will trample, singing, on my stern decree  
Against processions !

KING

Why not let them walk ?

POMBERG

Who knows the walk would not become a run,  
The run a riot ? All the streets are fevered  
With bawlers of his picture and the badge.

KING  
What badge?

POMBERG  
Why, this! A dove with olive branch.

KING  
A pretty curio! [*Pockets it.*]

POMBERG  
Too many flaunt it.

KING  
Leave them at peace, since I am friend of peace.

POMBERG  
All problems melt within your plumbless wisdom.  
May I, before I go, most humbly tender  
Congratulations on the Prince?

KING [*Radiant*]  
You've seen him!

POMBERG  
And felt him! Gad! Put out his little fists  
And smote me in the face—a warrior!  
You would not need to look for Holk's successor  
Were he but grown.

KING  
I look no longer, Duke!  
Since you and I reviewed Holk's chief campaigns,  
I have arrived at *your* conclusion——

POMBERG [*Astonished and happy*]

Sire!

KING

He had no talents not possessed by—others.

[*Smiles.*]

POMBERG [*Obviously thinking the KING means him*]

Your Majesty's agreement overwhelms me!

KING

I've sent for Torgrim. He shall learn that I  
Can choose, myself.

POMBERG

He *will* be angry.

KING

What!

Shall not his King by right divine, to whom  
The nation newly owes a Prince . . .

[*Clapping his hands*]

*Brava!*

The Queen has left her rooms.

POMBERG

And but six weeks!

What royal courage!

[*To himself, turning away joyously*]

Ah, at last I can

Reform the army—change those uniforms.

[*Four lackeys appear, carrying the QUEEN in a long cushioned chair; AZRA, a maid of honour, attends her and arranges cushions.*]

KING

*Brava!* Most welcome! Are you comfortable?  
Or is there anything you wish?

QUEEN

The baby!

KING

Go, bring the Prince!

QUEEN

No, no, they'll drop him! Azra!

*[Exeunt attendants.]*

How beautiful to see again this river—  
I hope he'll have his best Valenciennes!

POMBERG

Madam, he shall—whatever that may be.

*[Exit hastily into the castle.]*

KING

O Elsa, I am happy! Peace at home—  
And Peace abroad—a son and heir—and you!

QUEEN *[Repulsing him coldly]*

Four things—but all good things, they say, are three.  
Pray leave me out! My *rôle* is now fulfilled!

KING

I do not understand you.

QUEEN

The Alliance  
'Twixt Gothia and Hunland is achieved.  
Your dynasty, moreover, is assured.  
Count Torgrim's combination is complete.

KING

You speak as you and I were puppets!

QUEEN

Worse!  
Puppets lack hearts or nerves to agonise—  
Your Chanc'llor carves his will in quiv'ring flesh!  
You must dismiss him.

KING

What!

QUEEN

Ah, see, you fear him!

KING

By God, you libel me! This very hour  
I mean to drive my royal will o'er his  
In choice of Holk's successor.

QUEEN

And you choose?

KING

Myself.

QUEEN

Yourselves? What do you know of war?

KING

I'll *have* no war!

[*The QUEEN bursts into a fit of gay laughter.*]

Nay, but you twist my meaning!  
Listen! 'Tis Pomberg's counsel—he's an expert.

QUEEN [*Laughing on*]

You'll have no war! But what is Torgrim weaving?

KING

Torgrim is but the agent of my will,  
And I will set my foot upon his warships.

QUEEN [*Laughs on*]

As Admiral as well as General?

KING

You call me puppet, yet when I grow iron—  
[*Enter POMBERG.*]

POMBERG

What happiness reigns here! His Royal Highness  
Laughs also in his best Valenciennes!

But I was nearer tears to think of all

The people's love of which our laureate sings—

The loyal love that like a springtide flood,

Crashing and foaming, streams towards his cradle

To float it high as—[*breaks down; KING prompts  
him*]*—Ararat—not only*

From Gothia or Hunland's dimmest hamlet,

But from strange Afric sands or far—[*breaks down;  
again KING prompts him*]*—Brazil,*

Wherever beats a Gothian heart responsive  
To all that long divinity of blood.

KING

Ah, here he comes!

*[Enter AZRA with the baby Prince, whose linen is stamped with a royal crown. POMBERG, snatching the baby to his cuirass, obsequiously hands him to the QUEEN.]*

QUEEN

And how's my ickle sweeting?

POMBERG

With what majestic dignity he lies!  
Imperial calm is stamped upon his brow.

PRINCE

La-la! Boo-hoo! La-la! Boo-hoo! Boo-he!

POMBERG

What did I say? He makes his presence felt  
Already, though so young.

KING

Hush, little man!

*[Tries to soothe him by showing him the Fritbian badge.]*

PRINCE *[More loudly]*

La-la! La-la! Boo-hoo! Boo-hoo! Boo-he!



QUEEN

You make him worse! There! There! His  
mother's pet!

KING

Which of us, Pomberg, do you think he favours?

QUEEN

He is too naughty. [*To AZRA*] Take him back.

KING

*Let me!*

I never seem to hold him.

QUEEN

Can I trust you?

[*POMBERG again obsequiously transfers the baby to  
the KING. Exeunt all save QUEEN and POMBERG.  
The PRINCE continues to howl as he is borne out.*]

POMBERG

What music in that cry—how silver-bell-like!

QUEEN

If but the bell would ring a little less!

POMBERG

Imperial infants always scream like that!

QUEEN

Touching the question, Duke, of Holk's successor,  
His Majesty has surely no experience.

POMBERG

Precisely why he turns to *me*.

QUEEN

But you  
Should not have so advised him.

POMBERG

Then should I  
Have let Count Torgrim push his Osric up?

QUEEN

He dare not—over Osric's seniors.

POMBERG

He dared to send his brat to quench Brog's rising!  
But luckily my measures stamped it out  
Before the cub had even reached the scene.  
Is this the man to follow mighty Holk?  
Nay, surely I myself—

QUEEN [*Perceives KING returning*]

We'll talk anon.

[*Re-enter KING, flicking at his breast with a handkerchief.*]

KING

Torgrim has come—I bade them send him here  
To pay you homage and congratulation.

QUEEN [*Starting up*]

I will not meet the boor !

[POMBERG *rushes towards interior to beckon the lackeys.*]

KING

Then I must come

And tell you how I've met and mastered him,

[*She smiles. Enter the four lackeys.*]

And cut down ships and taxes ! Puppet, forsooth !

[*The QUEEN breaks again into her mocking laughter, which continues as she is carried out, and which*

*POMBERG reflects in a parasitic grin.*]

What twists your face ?

POMBERG [*Terrified, making off*]

Neuralgia, sire !

KING

Remain !

POMBERG

My presence, sire, would give Count Torgrim  
umbrage,

As though I were a part of Majesty

Whose very shadow is too bright for me.

KING

You *must* explain your choice of Holk's successor.

POMBERG

Sire, modesty forbids.

KING

But I command!

[CHANCELLOR *beard without on the right, sneezing.*]  
How hot it is!

POMBERG

There's thunder in the air!

[*Enter the CHANCELLOR, walking firmly.*]

KING

Ah, Count!

[*The CHANCELLOR bows low in reply.*]

POMBERG

How well your Excellence is looking!

CHANCELLOR [*Sniffing as if at an unbearable scent*]

Good morrow, Duke . . .

[*Long embarrassing pause. The three men twiddle thumbs and hum tunes.*]

Your gracious Majesty

Has sent for me.

KING

Yes . . . What a pretty view!

[*All turn and look at the view.*]

CHANCELLOR [*Grimly*]

Unless the sky is red!

POMBERG [*Hastily*]

Why, sunset's best!

[*Another embarrassing pause. More humming and twiddling.*]

CHANCELLOR

Your Majesty desires . . . ?

KING [*With an inspiration*]

'Tis Pomberg who desires.

CHANCELLOR [*Fixing POMBERG with fierce eye*]

Ah, so!

[*POMBERG is reduced to nervous silence.*]

KING

Why surely, Pomberg, you recall the theme  
We were discussing——

POMBERG [*With a rival inspiration*]

Ah, to-night's procession.

KING

Eh? What?

POMBERG [*Quickly to CHANCELLOR*]

You said that Frithiof's death would serve  
To smash the anarchists.

CHANCELLOR

My son will smash them.

POMBERG

But Frithiof's disappearance, soul and body,  
Has made a legend of his flight to heaven.

CHANCELLOR

At least the Government's not given hell.

POMBERG

A nice decapitation of the hydra!  
There sprout upon his stump a thousand heads!

CHANCELLOR

Until the time arrives to brand the stump  
With red-hot irons, then by God! I will.

KING

But why destroy these friends of peace?

CHANCELLOR

Because,

No less demoralising than their Master,  
They sap the Army and the Church—if he  
Was marked out for destruction, why not they?  
His followers must surely follow him!

*[ Chuckles grimly at his jest. ]*

KING

But I myself am friend of arbitration,  
Which, bringing States like man and man to justice,  
Forms the next stage in human evolution.  
Frithiof was right—why cannot we with Alba  
Limit our armaments?

CHANCELLOR

May your humble servant  
In reverence suggest, your innocence  
By Alba's crafty, canting diplomats  
Has been abused. Why, here has Europe played  
All night at cards, and now that Alba holds  
The balance of the winnings she's to cry,  
"Let's play no more—'tis wicked—let us pray!"  
Let your converted gambler first disgorge  
Her spoils before she shuts up Monte Carlo.

KING

*We've* won enough—my reign shall be of Peace.

CHANCELLOR

And just because beneath your peaceful sway  
Our commerce grows, we need more ships of war.  
These Frithians but invite the war you ban.  
"Resist not evil" means "resist not Alba."

KING

No doubt we must protect our growing commerce.

CHANCELLOR

Your Majesty's imperial wisdom hits it!  
I had not thought of putting it so patly.  
And therefore—since at any moment Alba  
May choose to strike and paralyse our commerce—  
I beg we now appoint dear Holk's successor.

KING [*Sbrinkingly*]

Oh, is it so imperative?

CHANCELLOR

Most urgent.

KING [*Looking desperately at POMBERG, who coughs*]  
Pomberg, I think, has some suggestion.

POMBERG

Sire!

Should we not first request the Chancellor's?

KING

His counsel—first or last—is worth our hearing.  
I pray you, Count.

CHANCELLOR

Much meditation, sire,  
Confirms my view that for heroic ventures  
Not old but young blood answers best the trumpet!

KING

O excellent! The young are best! Eh, Pomberg?

POMBERG [*In puzzled surprise*]

Assuredly . . . except of course in war.

KING

In war! What mean you? Most of all in war!  
Why wait to dim the eagle eye, replace  
Napoleonic grip by toothless bulldog?

CHANCELLOR

Your Majesty's apt phrasing beggars mine.



POMBERG  
Bull-puppies, too, are blind and toothless.

KING [*Enraged and amazed*]

Duke!

POMBERG  
I only mean, sire, one may be *too* young.

CHANCELLOR  
Why scarcely, Duke. I lack his Majesty's  
Poetic gift. I can but say in prose  
That Alexander died at thirty-two  
With no more worlds to conquer.

KING

What's the reason?

[*They listen as to an oracle.*]  
Not old but young blood answers best the trumpet.

CHANCELLOR  
How true! The last word, sire, of wisdom.

KING [*Beaming*]

And so

To follow Holk I choose—myself.

POMBERG AND CHANCELLOR  
Yourself!

POMBERG [*Ghastly*]  
I am rejoiced.

KING [*To* CHANCELLOR]  
You too, I hope?

CHANCELLOR [*With a low sardonic bow*]  
Profoundly !  
Who more recalls the war-horse clothed in thunder?  
Provided Osric do the dray-horse work,  
The humdrum dragging of the daily burden.  
Osric must organise the force you lead.

KING [*Pleasantly*]  
Why not?

POMBERG [*Outraged*]  
That needs an old and trained——

CHANCELLOR [*To* KING]  
Ah, yes  
Some red-tape man to flaunt his crude experience  
Against your flash of intuition.

KING  
Ha !

CHANCELLOR [*Bowing*]  
I thank——

POMBERG  
But this is nepotism !

CHANCELLOR  
What !  
Did I not let you mure him in a fortress?

POMBERG

The which he quits to-day. How can he step  
From prison to such pride of place?

KING

Ah, true!

[POMBERG *beams.*]

CHANCELLOR

We shall observe the due gradations. First  
He wipes out Brog, who holds the hills against you.  
Thus grows a general, and so by——

KING [*Impatient*]

Splendid!

The Queen expects me. She will be relieved  
To find your view agrees with mine.

CHANCELLOR

O sire, what wisdom marks your every choice!

[*Exit KING hastily into the castle, POMBERG vainly trying to secure his attention and talking simultaneously with the CHANCELLOR, who then turns his back on POMBERG, and moves towards the archway.*]

POMBERG [*Half drawing his sword*]

I'll challenge him, by God! I'll challenge——

[*The CHANCELLOR turns his head a moment.*]

No!

His blood's too low-born, it would stain my sword.

[*Exit into the castle, humming with careful carelessness.*]

CHANCELLOR

Lord God of Battles! Thou hast made  
My son the sword of Gothia's greater glory,  
Which is to greater glory of Thy name.  
Deliver Alba, Lord, into his hand,

[NORNA appears from within the castle, and takes  
out a pocket pistol.]

And let him grind Thine enemies to dust . . .  
Now in his Lady Norna's youthful heart  
Put out the last red ashes of revolt . . .  
*Domine sanctissime* . . .

[His head sinks, his lips murmur in silent prayer as  
he paces out. NORNA takes aim. Enter from the  
castle BARON KONRAD.]

KONRAD [*In hoarse whisper*]

In God's name!

[*Catches at her pistol.*]

NORNA [*In low angry tones as she turns*]

You? Philosopher turned Frithian!

KONRAD

Philosopher means wisdom-lover. Why  
May one not change his wisdom? Ah, my sister,  
Would God you too would doff your pride of brain  
And cry to Frithiof for forgiveness!

NORNA [*Scornfully*]

I?

Who saw him safely buried!

KONRAD

*Is he buried?*

That face—those eyes—that look that loosed  
The dagger from my grasp and burnt away  
Philosophy for ever—these are buried?  
Buried like Brog or any common clay?  
If death could decompose that face divine,  
Why does its sweetness hover o'er the world?  
Why streams a light from that lone mountain grave?

NORNA

His grave? What profits all your dead religion?  
Processions, ay, and hymns of love—but Peace?  
This pious canter mocks your dreams—this snake,  
With double tongue, coiled for the spring at Alba.  
His death alone will stave off war. Behold!

*[Produces a manuscript book.]*

KONRAD

What's that?

NORNA

Blum's diary—black with proof  
Against his chief. I stole it from his desk,  
Crammed with so many like it, he'll not miss it.  
*[Grimly]* I have, you see, the entry to the monster,  
Yet wished full proof of his perpended murders.

*[As BARON KONRAD and NORNA are going into the castle the CHANCELLOR paces prayerfully back across the scene and meets them.]*

CHANCELLOR [*To KONRAD, sardonically*]  
So you've turned Frithian! What was on your  
conscience?

KONRAD [*Uneasily*]  
What do you mean?

CHANCELLOR  
A joke! Resist not humour!  
[*Buckles.*]  
[*Exeunt BARON and NORNA. Enter OSRIC from the  
other direction. He starts to see his father—hesitates  
as in fear of him.*]

CHANCELLOR  
My Osric!

OSRIC  
Father!  
[*They embrace.*]

CHANCELLOR  
So you recognise  
That disobedience is fitly punished.  
[*Pinches his cheek.*]

OSRIC  
Most gratefully, for in my leisured pacings  
I saw obedience is the primal virtue.  
'Tis that which God before all else demands.

CHANCELLOR

Brave Osric! *Now* you are become a man,  
And worthy of the work God gives to you,  
Which is to carve your name and Gothia's  
Upon the world with such a sacred sword  
As never Cæsar nor Napoleon wielded.  
This hour consoles me for that dreadful day  
When I lost Holk, and you the chance I gave you  
To follow him——

OSRIC [*Dazed*]

The chance to follow Holk!

CHANCELLOR

But you shall yet avenge him and succeed him!  
And compensate us for the sad postponement  
His sickness, then his murder, brought our plans.

OSRIC

Succeed him? I?

CHANCELLOR [*Patting his sboulder lovingly*]

I like you to be dazed.

Yet who but you could be to me like Holk?  
My bosom is a narrow place: my plans  
Fill it so full there is no room for strangers.

OSRIC

But, father dear, it is impossible.

CHANCELLOR [*Smiling*]

So Pomberg said, but not his Majesty.

OSRIC

But I have just been writing to headquarters,  
Resigning my commission.

CHANCELLOR

Malediction!

You dared this step without consulting me!

OSRIC

You froze me, sir; I dared not break the silence.

CHANCELLOR

To hell! The letter's gone?

OSRIC

Not yet.

CHANCELLOR

Thank God!

That stinkard would have risen on your ruins.  
Let's go and get the letter.

OSRIC

It is here!

*[His left hand takes it from a pocket.]*

CHANCELLOR

Then tear it in a thousand pieces.

OSRIC

No!

*[Their eyes meet. The CHANCELLOR masters himself.]*



CHANCELLOR  
Your reason, pray ?

OSRIC  
Did I not say I saw  
That God demands from us obedience?  
This trade of bloodshed violates His law.

CHANCELLOR [*Furious*]  
Frithiof again !

OSRIC  
Sir, in the fortress I  
Re-read his books and thought of my backslidings,  
And when they gave me back my sword it scorched.  
Then, coming out, I heard of his ascension.

CHANCELLOR  
So you believe he went up like Elijah !

OSRIC  
His coming is more marvel than his going.

CHANCELLOR  
What fudge! He fought himself with Holk in  
Hunland.

OSRIC  
Those were his days of sin before he broke  
His sword and donned the smock of brotherhood.

CHANCELLOR

Oh, blast your brotherhood! Some wax doll spawned  
This puling generation fed on pap  
And barley-sugar-sticks of sentiment!  
What! Shall I call a lousy bumpkin brother,  
And slobber o'er him in fraternal cuddlings?  
That makes me lousy and himself no cleaner.

OSRIC

He is your brother all the same in soul.

CHANCELLOR

Neither in soul nor body. Dominance—  
There rings the password of the universe.  
Who knows it, he is free of every camp.  
Equality, your level, endless cornfield,  
However fat and fair and golden-stalked,  
Would set us pining for the snow-topped peaks  
And barren glaciers. Life is fight, thank God!  
Come, bare your forehead to the fierce salt Truth.  
Take war away and men would sink to molluscs,  
Limpets that wait the tide to wash them food.  
The nations would grow foul with lazy feeding.  
What Heaven loves is breeds with life a-tingle,  
Swift-gliding, flashing, darting death at rivals,  
Men fearing God and with no other fear.  
Thus were the Albans, now the turn is ours  
To be the chosen people of Jehovah.

OSRIC

*Our* mission is the nobler work of Peace.

CHANCELLOR

And how fulfil it save we change this cockpit,  
This continent into a greater Gothia?  
One faith, one rule, one tongue, one endless Peace!

OSRIC

I know, dear father, that your dream and mine  
Are one, but love and not the sword shall bring it.

CHANCELLOR

And meantime Alba in her fierce ambition,  
With fire and sword invading *us*, roots out  
Our faith, rule, tongue, peace (not to mention  
mission)  
While we tend stomachs to be ripped like pigs  
And throw our women to the soldiery!  
A tender morsel, now, like Lady Norna——

OSRIC [*Putting his hand involuntarily to his sword*]  
There's no such danger!

CHANCELLOR

Ask our spies.

OSRIC [*Struggling with himself*]

But meantime

I must be loyal to the Master.

CHANCELLOR

Loyal?

And leave him unavenged?

OSRIC

What mean you?

CHANCELLOR

Fool! Learn the truth the State has learnt. Your  
Prophet  
Ascended—ay, but on the wings of murder!

OSRIC

Murder? What fiend would dare——?  
[*Draws sword.*]

CHANCELLOR

What fiend slew Holk?

That sword-leap is the answer to your prattling.  
Your single stroke shall deal a double vengeance.  
Cut Brog and all his desperadoes down,  
Ay, hew them down like the Amalekites,  
Sparing no soul alive!

[*He goes round and takes the letter from OSRIC'S  
now passive left hand and tears it up. He moves away,  
then impulsively returns to clasp OSRIC to his breast*]

God bless you! . . . Ha!

And here God's blessing comes—your Lady Norna.  
[*Gestures significantly and exit humming a gay  
tune, which winds like a tragic coil round OSRIC  
and NORNA, who now re-enters, holding the diary,  
while OSRIC stands dazed with drawn sword.*]

NORNA

What means this sword?

OSRIC

It leapt to slay a monster.

NORNA

What, here?

OSRIC

I stand rebuked.

[*Sheathes sword.*]

I am distraught

By news that Brog had murdered Frithiof.

NORNA

Brog?

OSRIC

Pray let it rest. How can I look at you  
And think of blood?

[*She moves off.*]

Nay, let me look at you,

For I would cleanse my thoughts from this black  
world

In your pure eyes.

NORNA

I have forbid your coming.

OSRIC

As well forbid the moth to seek the flame.

NORNA

Most aptly said! What *am* I but a flame,

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To scorch your life-sap, shrivel up your wings?  
O use them while there's time!

OSRIC

                                You are not flame,  
But vitalising sunshine—all my soul  
Is burgeoning in the radiance.

NORNA

                                So feels  
The moth before his dash at death!

OSRIC

                                Come death!  
I still shall feel the splendour round my heart  
Close, close a moment ere the sting begins.

NORNA [*Overcome*]  
O, Osric!

OSRIC

    Norna! [*Embraces her.*] This is life, not death.

NORNA [*Breaking away*]  
'Tis neither! 'Tis mirage and mockery.  
Tempt me no more with dreams of happiness.  
I was not born for pasture in the valley,  
A trumpet calls me to the mountain-top,  
And I must battle where a whirling snow  
Blinds every track and gap. My only light  
A great red sun that, monstrous through a mist,  
Looms like a giant gout of blood: I walk

Alone, unguided, chartless, footsore, frozen.  
Then comes a mocking mountain-fiend——

OSRIC

That's I?

NORNA

Yes, you! A mountain fiend who cries:  
Rest, weary wanderer, your journey's over.  
This glacier is a cosy, glowing hearth,  
This precipice a couch from which to peer  
Into the ruddy fire and see sweet pictures,  
This mound of snow a stool to prop your feet.  
Oh go! Do you not see you make still bleaker  
The mountain waste, the snow, the sun of blood,  
And that lone path which I must tread alone?

OSRIC

I only see that you are sad and strange.  
Dear, let us leave the world that makes you so,  
And, far from Courts and camps, turn simple peasants,  
Following the Master.

NORNA [*With a strange laugh*]  
Frithiof?

OSRIC

Where's the jest?

NORNA

It is a jest that shakes not ribs but brain,  
Even to madness.

[*Sinks upon the stone bench.*]

OSRIC [*Uneasily*]

Madness?

NORNA [*Draws him to her side with a semi-involuntary gesture*]

Yet I smile

To think of you and me in peasant costume—  
A smock-frock yours, a cap and kirtle mine!  
You plough our bit of ground, I make the butter.  
I fatten pigs and calves, you market them!  
We dance together on the village green,  
And kneel together in the village church.  
When old, we sit a-sunning in the porch  
Those droning summer Sunday afternoons,  
A long clay pipe between your wrinkled lips,  
A big black Bible on my ancient lap,  
And tears of faith behind my spectacles.  
Grandchildren clamber up our shrivelled knees,  
Their faces shine with soap and innocence.  
Thus drowsy-sweet the days slip by till we  
Nid-nod into the deeper peace of God,  
And hand in hand we fall asleep—in Frithiof!

[*Springs up hysterically.*]

Was ever feigned so comical a picture?

Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha!

OSRIC

Your cheek is wet. Your laugh is false. Dear love,  
At heart of hearts you like the picture.

NORNA

No!

Off, off, you weakling! Would you make me weak?  
I hated Frithiof and his sapless teachings.



OSRIC

You hated Frithiof, hated holiness?

NORNA

It is not holiness to suffer evil.

Resisting evil is the holiness :

War against war, war to the knife against

The lords of war! When Brog shot Holk I gloried.

OSRIC

You glor—— Nay, see I know your paradoxes.

Dear, smile with me—or at me as of old.

NORNA [*Stamps foot*]

My paradoxes! Holk may slay his thousands,

And be a nation's hero. But who saves

His tens of thousands by a single death

You style assassin!

OSRIC [*Puts his arms protectively round her*]

This is not yourself.

NORNA

It is that Alpine self you do not know;

The self that slew your prating prophet, Frithiof.

OSRIC

Ah, now I know you try me! That was Brog.

NORNA

Brog failed in nerve The glorious shot was mine.

OSRIC [*Releasing her, moving back rigidly*]  
You . . . shot . . . the Master! No, she's mad,  
thank God!  
It is hallucination.

NORNA

For your sake  
I almost melt to wish the deed undone.  
But we lone seekers of the mountain-top  
Must leave our hearts below. Now draw and slay me  
Before I slay another of your idols.

OSRIC

O God!

[OSRIC staggers back half-fainting. NORNA holds out her hands towards him, half in yearning, half to support him. Shuddering at her touch, he utters a terrible cry and throws her off.]

OSRIC

Back, sacrilegious murderess!  
[Exit frenziedly. She swoons and the diary drops from her hand. The curtain falls.]

## Act V

*The CHANCELLOR'S study. Late the same afternoon. The room is as in Act I, save that the screen is now moved and the old settee visible, with his dressing-gown lying on it, and a fire burning in the grate. BLUM is busy deciphering a wire. From without, the CHANCELLOR is heard humming the same tune with which he left the castle, and presently, unfolding a muffler from his throat as if fresh from the street, he throws open the door and enters hilariously.*

CHANCELLOR

Sir Karl! Still stodging! Throw your quill away. We have a toast to drink to Holk's successor.

BLUM [*Smiling*]

It can't be Pomberg, then.

CHANCELLOR [*Laughing*]

Ha! Ha! Poor Pomberg!

Ho! Martha!

[*MARTHA looks in.*]

Bring champagne!

[*MARTHA disappears.*]

We drink to Osric!

BLUM

Appointed?

CHANCELLOR

Ay, and Pomberg *disappointed.*

[*Laughs heartily, and slaps BLUM on the back.*]

Come, whistle to your underlings to cease,  
I will not work them overtime to-day.

BLUM [*Whistling and speaking down the tube*]  
His Excellence gives holiday . . . [*Smiling*] They  
cheer.

[*Enter MARTHA with a bottle of champagne and two  
glasses on a tray.*]

CHANCELLOR  
And here is cheery Martha . . . What is this?  
Two glasses only? Where is mine? Nice treat  
ment!

MARTHA [*Bewildered*]  
Am *I* to drink?

CHANCELLOR  
Unless you would insult me.  
Our Osric is to head the army.

MARTHA [*Joyously*]  
Osric!

CHANCELLOR  
And what is still more brave—to head a household!  
I hope his son will pull less hard than mine.

MARTHA [*Ecstatic*]  
He's marrying?

CHANCELLOR  
God bless him!

MARTHA

And his bride.

But who's the lucky lady?

CHANCELLOR [*Mysterious, taking a pinch of snuff*]

Ah, perhaps

Himself when he comes home will tell you that:  
I left them at the settling-point. Sir Karl  
Might make a guess.

BLUM

The Lady Norna?

CHANCELLOR

Wizard!

MARTHA

That lovely lady who adores you so?

CHANCELLOR

Not *me*!

MARTHA

Yes, you. The day the King came here  
She spoke as if your rooms were holy ground,  
E'en those the royal foot had left untrod.  
I thought her rather silly.

CHANCELLOR [*Chuckling*]

Then be sure

'Twas Osric's step not mine made holy ground.

Go, get my glass.

[*Exit MARTHA. Standing at the table, he begins  
opening the wine.*]

BLUM

So that is settled, too!  
But how about the lady's anarchism?

CHANCELLOR

Holk's death and Osric's love have cured her bravely.  
E'en Konrad has deserted her for Frithiof.

BLUM

Then *all* the threads are woven to your pattern!

CHANCELLOR

Except the threads I spin in air—those lame  
Aerial battleships.

BLUM

Nay, even those  
Fly high at last—the wire is just deciphered!

CHANCELLOR [*Snatching eagerly at the papers*]  
Ah! God be praised! Now all my life flies high!  
[*Enter MARTHA with glass. He pulls out the cork.*]  
And all is sparkle! [*Pours wine.*]

Now in these three glasses  
A threefold toast we have the bliss to drink:  
To Osric—Osric's bride—and death to Alba!  
[*They touch glasses. BLUM puts his glass to his lips  
but sets it down untasted.*]

BLUM

I cannot drink to war to-day

CHANCELLOR [*About to drink*]  
Damnation!

BLUM  
It would profane the Master's birthday.  
[*Throws back his coat and shows the FRITHIOF badge  
over his heart.*]

CHANCELLOR  
What!  
[*The glass falls from his hand and smashes.*]  
You too!

MARTHA  
O dear, such costly drink!  
[*Goes down on her knees to pick up fragments.*]

CHANCELLOR [*Fiercely*]  
Let be!  
I have to settle with this Frithian fool.  
[*Exit MARTHA, with hastily gathered fragments.*]  
I've had enough to-day of Frithiof drivel.  
His birthday! Pah! [*Seizes MARTHA'S glass.*]  
Here's to the God of War!  
Pick up your glass and drink my toast, or go!  
I'll not be preached at by a dirty Jew.

BLUM  
Ha! dirty Jew—although you had me washed  
In Graaf's cathedral font. But it is true.  
I never turned a Christian.

CHANCELLOR  
What! You mocked!

BLUM

Mocked you, your Church, and most of all, myself.  
Had Christians handled us with Christliness,  
There would not be a single Jew in Europe.  
We should have melted in your love as I  
Have melted in Count Frithiof's. Since, however,  
You Gothians shut us out from every post,  
Dishonour is our only door to honour.  
I knew your weakness for converting Jews,  
So played upon it.

CHANCELLOR

Lying, faithless dog

I from the Ghetto raised to Christian knighthood!

BLUM

The world's your puppet, why not make you mine?

CHANCELLOR

And I have loved you as a second son.  
But what's your lovelessness for me beside  
Your blasphemy before the throne of Christ!

BLUM

Whose blasphemy was greater, yours or mine—  
I, the pretended, you, the self-thought Christian,  
Usurping God's place, using men as pawns,  
And ending by believing *your* plans *His*?

CHANCELLOR

God's word and hand have always guided me.  
This you should know who day by day have sat——



BLUM

And squirmed to see your Christless soul perpending  
Such giant crimes as needs must crucify  
Afresh my gentle ancestor.

CHANCELLOR

What crimes?

BLUM

Whate'er I touch incriminates you. Look!

*[Picks up cypher telegram.]*

Man wins the realm of air and might have been  
An eagle with a soul; you make him harpy,  
More murderous than dragons of the ooze.  
I tell you, we outsiders see the game,  
We Jews, who bidden rise *beyond* the code  
Of eye for eye, must rub both eyes to see  
Not e'en eye-justice done in Christendom,  
Whose cannons thunder 'gainst both God and Christ.

CHANCELLOR

Enough! The cannon is the *voice* of God!  
But how should you Jew-skulkers understand  
Whose only god is gold!

BLUM

Indeed! Then take

My savings.

*[Unlocks his desk and pulls out an uncounted heap  
of black volumes.]*

CHANCELLOR

Eh? What's this?

BLUM

My diary !

[*Raining the books on the table all through his speech.*]

The fruit of years of patient penmanship,  
Volume on volume of your private talk  
To set all Europe blazing and to loose  
Such hordes of stinging insects round your head  
As would avenge your insults to my race.  
But as a faithful Frithian I forgo  
Revenge and gold alike.

CHANCELLOR [*Occupied in examining one*]  
You Judas !

BLUM

Ay,

Peruse them carefully before you burn,  
And having seen yourself as I have seen you,  
Repent, and in your turn become a Frithian !

CHANCELLOR [*Absorbed in diary*]  
You camel ! Here's my jest about the Queen  
Set down in serious earnest.

BLUM

As I said,

The book would ruin you, if published.

CHANCELLOR

Viper !

BLUM

I too should come off ill, unedited.  
I've taken many a bribe to mould your mind

And, though I've often failed—or failed to try,  
Yet often too I've reigned in Gothia.

CHANCELLOR  
*Reigned, Ghetto-brat?*

BLUM  
*You ruled his Majesty,*  
And *I* ruled you, and so the Ghetto-brat  
Has been the sovereign of Gothia.

CHANCELLOR  
She-devil's spawn!  
*[Throws book on fire.]*

BLUM  
But now, thank God, a Frithian,  
And waiting *your* conversion.  
*[Lays his badge significantly on the table.]*

CHANCELLOR  
Back to hell!

BLUM [*Smiling*]  
I will await you.

CHANCELLOR  
Do you mock at me?  
Another word, I fling you through the window.

BLUM  
I know these rages.

CHANCELLOR

Do you? Then by God!—

*[Flings open the casement. A chant is heard from without as of men moving solemnly.]*

“Miserere, Domine,

Take his spirit unto Thee!”

What's that?

BLUM

White Frithians carrying a brother—

I know the voices.

CHANCELLOR

May they chant for you!

BLUM

That day may I be worthy of a grave

Upon yon snow-peak, where the Master lies

*[Menacingly]* By your connivance.

*[Softening]*

God be with you, friend.

*[Exit.]*

CHANCELLOR

Damned Jew! Thank God I have a real son!

*[The procession chants louder, as if passing under the window. He bangs the casement to.]*

O stop your squallings! I must make a law

Against alfresco howlings. . . .

*[Looks at the diaries.]*

Heap of filth!

You'll choke my grate up. Martha! Where is  
Martha?

Am I deserted, then, by all the world?

[*Throws open housekeeper's door. MARTHA appears with tragic face.*]

Ah, Martha! Throw those books—— What's wrong?

MARTHA

O master!

They bring it here.

[*Trembles all over.*]

CHANCELLOR

Bring what here? Speak, you silly!

MARTHA

The coffin!

CHANCELLOR

Eh? Their coffin? Are you crazy?

I'll see to it. . . . Go, gather up those books  
And throw them all upon your kitchen fire.

[*He closes the ante-room door on her with a nervous bang.*]

MARTHA

O God in heaven! whom can they be bringing?

[*The chant is heard now from the ante-room, with the tramp of feet.*]

"Miserere, Domine,

Hallowed through eternity."

[*The sound is heard as of a heavy coffin being deposited on the floor. Then a terrible cry.*]

CHANCELLOR [*Without*]

My son!

MARTHA [*Sobbing*]

It's Osric!

[*She falls half-fainting against the table. There is a sound of talk and of a coffin being lifted again, the chant recommences.*]

“Miserere, Domine,

Take his spirit unto Thee.”

[*Chant fades away. Twilight has gradually fallen in the room. A slow dragging footstep is heard, and the CHANCELLOR, ashen and looking years older, but bolding his head erect, re-enters.*]

MARTHA [*Sobbing*]

O master! I——

CHANCELLOR

Why have you not obeyed me?

Gather those books and make a kitchen bonfire.

MARTHA

O Excellence——

CHANCELLOR

Those books, I say!

[*She heaps them up in her arms. As she is going out, sobbing silently, he says gently*]

And do not go

To Osric's room. . . . He lies there in a box.

A proper coffin will arrive to-morrow.

MARTHA  
O Osric, little——

CHANCELLOR  
Silence! He has sinned—  
Slunk from his post ere God relieved his guard,  
And with the sword he held in trust for Heaven  
Spirted his life-blood in his Maker's face.  
Unconsecrated ground will take his body.  
We are cut off from him eternally.

MARTHA  
O God, have mercy on him!

CHANCELLOR  
And us all!  
Now leave me. I must work for Gothia!  
[*Sits at table.*]

MARTHA [*At exit, sobbing*]  
Poor Osric!

CHANCELLOR  
Oh, and Martha! Send the Jew  
Any of his belongings lying here.  
I'll not replace him—I'm too old for strangers.  
[*With faint tremulous smile.*]  
We shall be all alone, you see, we two.

MARTHA [*Coming to him*]  
O Master!

CHANCELLOR [*Stroking her hand*]

Loyal Martha! . . . But to work!  
If I am childless, yet I have my country,  
My Gothia, God be thanked! to make yet greater.  
These next few weeks I must be very busy.  
You shall arouse me every morn at five;  
Long winter evenings, too, are coming soon.

MARTHA [*Drying her eyes*]

You'll want your lamp already——

CHANCELLOR [*Sweetly*]

If you please.

[*Exit MARTHA. He slips off his coat and gets with painful slowness into his old dressing-gown, sits and rummages at table and stares at a paper. MARTHA re-enters with lighted lamp and draws the curtains.*]

Ah, that is better! . . . Now let none disturb me  
Unless they come about the funeral.

[*MARTHA goes out silently. The CHANCELLOR writes feverishly. MARTHA re-enters.*]

What now?

MARTHA

The Duke of Pomberg——

CHANCELLOR [*Starting up*]

Graveyard ghoul!

By God, he shall not rise on Osric's body!  
Say I am not at home.



MARTHA

He knows you are !  
And bears a message from his Majesty.

CHANCELLOR

His gracious Majesty? How good of him  
With such precipitance to soothe my grief!  
[*Wipes his eyes for the first time.*]  
Our royal house was ever strong in heart,  
If weak in will ; and that's the better thing,  
For we, its servants, can supply the will,  
While hearts are irreplaceable. . . . I'll see him.

MARTHA

But not like that.  
[*Points to dressing-gown.*]

CHANCELLOR

Oh, let me be !  
[*Exit MARTHA. He sits, with heaving shoulders.*  
MARTHA shows in POMBERG, and exit.]

POMBERG

Ah, Count !  
Believe me how my heart is rent for you.  
At such a moment I had not intruded  
But for my duty to my sovereign.

CHANCELLOR [*Tremulously, on the brink of fresh tears*]

I thank his Majesty for his condolence,  
And you for bringing it.

POMBERG

I beg your pardon?  
His Majesty as yet is unaware——

CHANCELLOR [*Changing from tears to thunder*]  
Then what in hell——?

POMBERG

Respect your sovereign,  
And me his designated Chancellor.

CHANCELLOR  
What? What?

POMBERG

I did not mean to be so curt.  
'Twas your own grossness forced me to the point.  
His Majesty, considerate and gracious,  
Permits you to resign.

[*The CHANCELLOR leaps up as if stung*]

I said, resign!

[*The CHANCELLOR subsides into his chair, his head sinks lower and lower as POMBERG proceeds, but he replies only by grunts, which POMBERG interprets as words*]

I may not *wholly* fill the giant gap,  
But this at least I bring my sovran lord,  
More loyal service. . . . Nay, the game is up!  
He knows you lulled him with your peaceful purrings  
While bent to stake all Gothia's gains and glories  
Upon a mad adventure. . . . *What* adventure?

Invading Alba! Do not waste your breath  
To contradict your henchman's diary.

[*Throws diary on table. The CHANCELLOR, who is  
by now curled into a crumpled ball, lets an articulate  
grunt escape him.*]

CHANCELLOR

The Judas!

POMBERG

'Twas not we that paid the silver.  
The Lady Norna dropped this when she swooned—  
Doubtless at reading of the war you brew.  
I marvel only that his Majesty  
Did not faint too—but he was too inflamed  
By your profanities toward his person,  
Your japes that spared not e'en his sacred consort.  
Yet, in a nigh divine forbearance, he  
Still leaves to you the option of resigning;  
And I, though still more scurrilously handled,  
Now match the royal magnanimity  
By counsel you should use poor Osric's death  
As cloak to cover your retirement.

CHANCELLOR [*Leaping up, thunderously*]

No!

By God, he shall dismiss me! Let men know  
That after I have given soul and brain,  
And night and day and happiness itself,  
To feed the splendour of his royal house,  
And borne the burden of his people's hate,  
And fronted all the world's malignancy,  
And tamed his immemorial rival, Hunland,

And left an Empire where I found a jungle,  
He "sacks" me as one "sacks" a thieving valet,  
Or as I turn his cringing envoy out.

*[Throws open door of ante-room.]*

POMBERG *[Going]*

I will report your answer to him.

*[Outside the door he turns and glares back at the  
CHANCELLOR. Exit slamming the door. The  
CHANCELLOR collapses.]*

CHANCELLOR

God!

Now Gothia's glory gutters and goes out,  
Leaving a stink behind. Two popinjays  
Replacing Holk and me. O God, my country!  
But I must work.

*[Sits at desk. His quill drops from his fingers and  
falls on the floor.]*

What work have I to do?

All's dark, without a ray.

*[Turning out lamp]*

Out, my old companion!

Grow dark with me—we both are useless now.

*[The lamp goes out. Only the fire throws a red glow.  
A fainter illumination comes from the perpetual light  
under his wife's picture. His head sinks forward on  
the table. The door of the little staircase opens  
silently and LADY NORNA appears at the head of the  
stairs, pistol in hand. She wears a red cross pinned  
on her dress.]*

CHANCELLOR [*Without raising his head*]  
Who's there?

NORNA [*Covering him with her pistol*]  
Death!

CHANCELLOR  
Death?  
[*He looks up quickly, then wheels his chair round and faces her*]  
Humph! Lady Norna!  
Who let you in?

NORNA  
Myself.

CHANCELLOR  
But how? Which door?

NORNA  
As death comes mostly, by the private staircase.

CHANCELLOR  
Why would you murder me?

NORNA  
My Red Cross shows  
I am a servant of humanity.  
Unless I kill you now, you mean to drag  
The flower of our youth to die in Alba.

CHANCELLOR  
Alas! This glorious death I cannot give them.  
I am no longer Chancellor, dear lady.

NORNA [*Startled, then coming down to him*]  
You will not save your life by stratagems.  
I know your ways—I've read Blum's diary.

CHANCELLOR

You have not read it then with understanding  
If you believe I'd lie for *such*-like trifles.  
How often have I longed to cast off life  
Like this soiled dressing-gown and creep to bed!  
But I have never been so tired as now.

NORNA

This crafty whine will not impose on me.

CHANCELLOR

You've come to kill me? What is left to kill?  
Ha! Ha! A little naked scuttling spider! . . .  
Who called me that? Ah, yes, 'twas Frithiof!  
And—ha! a light leaps through this darkness—*you*  
It was who killed him.

NORNA

Yes.

CHANCELLOR

My one mistake!  
I thought 'twas Konrad by his strange conversion.  
Well, that's a faint relief—for I could never  
Have let my Osric wed a murderess,  
Even if he had lived.

NORNA

If he had lived! [*Her hand shakes*]  
No! No! You shall not spoil my aim with lies!

CHANCELLOR

You say I lie—'tis Osric lies—[*chuckles piteously*]—he!  
he!

You do not see the jest! Within his coffin!  
His bosom bears a gash he made to prove  
Through what a petty chink the soul can fly.  
Go to his room—I meant for nuptial chamber—  
You'll find *him* lying—[*chuckles*]—he! he! he!—not  
*me!*

NORNA

I will not go—until I see *you* lying!  
Then with my last shot I will go to him.  
O Osric! dearest Osric! very soon.

CHANCELLOR [*Ignoring her*]

They told me he had died an hour ago,  
But when I raised the lid and saw his face  
I felt he had been dead a million years,  
Such infinite of silence lay between us.  
Never to speak to me—ah, God!—again,  
Never to smile with those great gentle eyes—  
[*Sobs aloud for the first time.*]

NORNA [*Approaching him*]

Oh, hush! Count, hush!

CHANCELLOR

When he was one year old  
I used to hear him croon himself to sleep—

Did you know babies croon like that? To-night  
He did not croon before he went to sleep,  
But cursing me who made him false to Frithiof——

NORNA

No! no! 'twas me he cursed, my dreadful deed. . . .  
But what is one man's life? Your son is dead.  
You killed a hundred thousand sons of others.

CHANCELLOR

Yes, come to think, there must have been their  
fathers.  
A hundred thousand—did you say?—like me?  
And I dared put myself in place of God?  
No—some one else said that! Ah, yes, the Jew.  
You too, poor child, would play at Providence!  
But Life's too big and tangled for our meddlings.

NORNA

I *must* work out your doom and mine. What else  
In such a tragic maze remains to do?  
[*Takes aim again.*]

CHANCELLOR [*Ignoring pistol*]

I'm glad at least his mother did not live  
To see him in that box—she was so tender.  
She could not bear it when he fought in Hunland,  
And of the fear that he would die she died.

NORNA

How like *my* mother!



CHANCELLOR [*Laying his hand paternally on her shoulder*]

Ah! You see her picture  
Upon the mantel—but her eyes were softer,  
The same as Osric's. . . .

[*With sudden exultant cry as both are gazing at the picture*]

Ah, *she* will redeem him!  
God cannot torture her by banning him  
To outer darkness. No, for here on earth  
My angel had so little happiness.  
She felt, far more than I, the flaming hate  
With which the People rings the souls that serve it.  
Then too my work and journeys parted us  
Long months and years; but all is o'er, thank God!  
To-night we'll meet again—all three together.  
And I was thinking I had still so long  
To wait and wait . . . such empty, endless years!

NORNA [*Lowering pistol*]  
*We are condemned—to live!*

CHANCELLOR [*In convulsive protest*]  
To live?

NORNA

God help us!  
[*She goes out by the ante-chamber with bent head and dragging steps. The CHANCELLOR drops back wearily on his chair. The glow of the fire has almost died down. Suddenly a sound of soft choral singing of men and women, led by a rich male voice, surges up from the street. He lifts his head and listens. The*

*procession of Frithians approaches nearer and nearer,  
thousands of tramping feet.]*

FRITHIANS [*Singing without*]

Frithiof is risen,  
The Prophet of Love ;  
Earth laughs beneath us  
And Heaven above.

*[The CHANCELLOR rises and flings open the case-  
ment. The room is flooded with moonlight and  
triumphant choral song, while on high shine the  
stars and afar on the horizon loom the snow-peaks,  
recalling the death of FRITHIOF. The CHANCELLOR  
stands gazing out into the night while the procession  
passes.]*

Green lie the valleys,  
No more to be red,  
Love shall be living  
And War shall be dead.

Death shall be sated,  
Destruction be gorged,  
Hell shall recover  
The cannons she forged.

Rulers of iron  
To splinters are hurled.  
Laugh, O ye mothers,  
Your babes rule the world.

Deaf men shall hear it,  
Shall see it, the blind.  
Hail to all peoples  
And peace to mankind!

Frithiof is risen,  
The Prophet of Love ;  
Earth laughs beneath us  
And Heaven above.

*[The music is passing away in an exquisite peace  
as the curtain slowly falls.]*

# THE NEXT RELIGION

TO  
FREDERICK WHELEN  
THE CHIVALROUS CHAMPION  
OF ALL FORLORN HOPES  
FROM PERSIA TO THE BRITISH  
DRAMA

## FOREWORD TO THE SECOND EDITION

I TAKE the opportunity of a reprint of this play to insert the cast of its stage-representation as privately given at a music-hall, and to thank "The New Players," and particularly Miss Adeline Bourne, for their courageous championship of my work against the Lord Chamberlain. Perhaps an even more striking rebuke to the Censor has been administered by the parsons and ethical preachers who have made the play the subject of sermons or addresses. The notion that the susceptibilities of any particular sect have to be protected by the State is opposed to the constitutional right of free speech, and seems to rest on an assumption that those likely to be offended are driven into the theatre as the Jews of the Roman Ghetto were driven into the church to be shocked by sermons. There is, on the contrary, a bar of silver to keep them out. In this instance there is, moreover, a warning title, so that even those who do not follow the safe practice of avoiding first nights could not have been taken un-awares. The commercial management of our theatres, the frivolity of the public, and the dearth of criticism are surely a sufficient safeguard against serious work upon our stage. There needs no outer line of defence in the shape of a Censorship.

I. Z.

CAST OF THE FIRST PERFORMANCE AT THE LONDON  
PAVILION, ON THE AFTERNOON OF APRIL 18, 1912

CHARACTERS :

Rev. Stephen Trame		J. FISHER WHITE
Sir Thomas McFadden		HERBERT BUNSTON
Hal McFadden, M.D., M.R.C.S., &c.		FREDERICK LLOYD
The Bishop of the Soudan		BASSETT ROE
Squire Rowley		WILLIAM FARREN
Silas Burr		HORACE HODGES
Eli Oakshott		FREDERICK GROVES
Wilfred Trame	(Acts I and II Act III.)	DOROTHY TURNER
Old Gaffer		BASIL HALLAM
Claribel Malling		LANCELOT LOWDER
Joanna Burr		MRS. THEODORE WRIGHT
Sophia		BLANCHE STANLEY
Mary Trame		MURIEL CARMEL
		ADELINE BOURNE

Villagers : Messrs. BRUCE ALLEN and CHARLES H. G. MOTTRAM ; and  
the Misses BERTHA GRAHAM, ADA HATCHWELL, EDITH PITHER,  
MARY SHAW and VERA TSCHAIKOWSKY.

Choristers : Messrs. REGINALD BACH and FREDERICK KALLENBORN ; and  
Masters BAKER, COCKIN, EDWARDS, GIBSON, IRELAND, KNIGHT,  
LUCY, NUNTON, SCHMIDT, and WAYRE.

The play produced by CHARLES CARTWRIGHT.

## Act I

*The study and best room of Dymthorpe Parsonage on a sunny September morning—a charming old-world room with oaken beams giving by a diamond-paned casement on a piece of sward which leads to the churchyard and the village church. Another window R.C. with a cushioned seat. In the L. corner of the room is a cosy corner; in the R. corner a cottage piano; in the centre a writing-table holding a litter of papers, a spectacle-case, a microscope on its R. side, and a typewriter in the middle. The door R. down stage leads to the passage, the door L.C. to the Rev. Stephen Trame's bedroom. Round the sides of the room are bookshelves with books preponderantly massive and old. The few pictures are of a religious cast, including one photograph of a group of black savages in top-hats.*

SOPHIA, *a rustic servant in cap and apron, appears at the door R. ushering in an elegant, clever-faced gentleman of thirty-two with a pointed moustache, an air of youth and gaiety, and a shade of dissipation. HAL MCFADDEN, an M.D. who does not practise, holds in his hand a motoring cap with goggles attached.*

SOPHIA

Oh, I thought the Vicar was here. I'll look in the church—it be only a few rods. [Exit R.]

HAL

Thank you. Oh [*He follows her*] and will you please tell my chauffeur—[*The door bangs in his face.*] Why are



pretty girls always in such a hurry? . . . Never mind! [*Goes to window R.C., opens it and calls*] Parker!

CHAUFFEUR [*Outside*]  
Yessir?

HAL  
While I'm waiting, you might get some petrol in the village.

CHAUFFEUR [*Outside*]  
Looks too sleepy, sir.

HAL  
That blacksmith we just passed will tell you. [*A lark sings. Then there is the sound of the car driving off R. HAL closes the window, and turning espies the microscope*] He's still got my wedding present. . . . And there's something on the slide too! [*Peers into it.*] Tubercle bacilli—who's got consumption, I wonder?

[*Door L.C. opens gently; a spectacled, stooping, scholarly figure appears in rather dusty clerical costume, reading a book held close to his eyes. The REV. STEPHEN TRAME is scarcely older than his visitor, yet has none of his youth. His hair is streaked with grey, his face lined with thought. Surprised to find an apparent stranger bent over his microscope, he stops, and coughs to draw his attention.*]

HAL [*Looking up with a start*]  
Oh, I beg your pardon!

STEPHEN [*Eagerly*]  
That's never Hal's voice !

HAL  
Yes it is, you blooming bat.

STEPHEN [*Laughingly*]  
Well, I'm glad to *hear* you.  
[*Approaches him and shakes hands affectionately.*]

HAL  
I hope my microscope hasn't made your eyes worse.

STEPHEN  
No more than my telescope.

HAL  
You've got a telescope too ? Sounds still more un-  
professional . . . Though after all [*Laughing*] Heaven  
is your speciality. And how's Mrs. Trame ?

STEPHEN  
Splendid—always so sunny. I'm sorry she's out on  
her charity rounds. You see the Squire's lady has  
such low spirits that all the parish work falls on  
Mary. And to-night, too, is our Harvest Thanks-  
giving, and the choir is so backward she has to practise  
the hymns in their dinner-hour.

HAL  
Is she the organist also ?

STEPHEN  
Of course.

HAL  
When does she find time for the children ?

STEPHEN  
Oh, there's only the boy !

HAL  
What ! A British parson and only one kid !

STEPHEN  
Unfortunately ! Mary has had an illness—I can tell *you* as a doctor—there will be no more children.  
Won't you sit down ? [Offers arm-chair.]

HAL [*Murmuring*]  
I'm sorry. [*Sits.*] Well, and is the boy turning out a genius like his father ?

STEPHEN [*Smiling*]  
Not like his father. But he's got music from his mother. Really he's a bit of an infant prodigy.

HAL  
How jolly !

STEPHEN  
And you—after all these years ?

HAL  
Is it all these years ? Yes, I suppose it is ! You and I left Oxford when *The Merry Milliner* was running.  
[Begins whistling a waltz tune.]

STEPHEN [*Holding up hand*]  
Please! And your father? Still inventing those  
dreadful guns?

HAL  
Yes—and still wanting me to practise my profession.  
As an antidote to his, I suppose! Poor old dad. He's  
in the States now worrying over armaments for  
aeroplanes.

STEPHEN  
And of such murderers our civilisation makes million-  
aires.

HAL [*Laughingly*]  
I see you haven't changed!

SOPHIA [*Opening door R.*]  
I can't find him—oh, there he be. [*Retreats.*]

HAL [*Who is near R., rising*]  
Why, what's your hurry? [*Door bangs in his face.*]

STEPHEN  
I see *you* haven't changed either.

HAL  
Oh yes, I have—I'm a changed man!

STEPHEN  
I'm glad to hear it.

HAL  
Ha! You think I've found religion!

STEPHEN  
Haven't you?

HAL  
No—something better—a bride!

STEPHEN [*Starting up*]  
*You! You* going to be married?

HAL  
Yes, me! That's what I've come to you for . . .

STEPHEN  
Come to me for?

HAL  
I want you to tie the knot.

STEPHEN  
I marry *you!* *You* whose sneers at Holy Matrimony were only second to your sneers at Holy Church!

HAL  
Oh well, marriage is like death—we all come to it.

STEPHEN  
I shouldn't mind *burying* you.

HAL  
Thank you!

STEPHEN

I don't mean it unkindly—but a corpse can't help itself. But as for marrying you, why in heaven's name should you want *my* services ?

HAL

Precisely in heaven's name. Helen—Miss Munro—doesn't believe that marriage outside a church is registered in heaven.

STEPHEN

But London is not destitute of churches.

HAL

No, they're almost as thick as beershops.

STEPHEN

Then, why—— ?

HAL

Because—oh, confound it, old chap—don't you see that as a free-thinker I've got *my* scruples too ! And to hear a clergyman go through all that canting stuff would spoil my wedding-day.

STEPHEN

But am *I* not a clergyman ?

HAL

No—you're an old pal. I'm used to *you* talking nonsense. I can pretend to Helen I *must* have my dear old college chum to see me through. But a church—O Lord ! [*Shudders.*]

STEPHEN

Perhaps you'll deny next that mine is a church !

HAL

It isn't a church—it's the country. [*Goes to side-window and points.*] Your ivy-clad tower rises from that sunlit grass like a piece of nature, almost like another tree. We could get a special licence and motor down—it would be more like a picnic than a prayer-meeting. Do, old chap ; I've set my heart on it.

STEPHEN

No really, Hal, you must excuse me.

HAL

But why ?

STEPHEN

Because— [*Hesitates.*] Well, I'd rather not.

HAL

You are robbing your poor-box.

STEPHEN

Money that comes out of cannon ! My poor-box would spue it up.

HAL

Not if Helen put it in—*her* money comes out of millinery—no, no, not *Merry Millinery*—she's the heiress of Munro's Emporium—most respectable Church of England people.

STEPHEN

And all this while I've forgotten to congratulate you.  
[*Shakes his hand.*] I hope you'll be happy.

HAL

Thank you. Then you *will* marry me.

STEPHEN [*Dropping his hand*]

No! No! No! It would be a mockery.

HAL

I know I've been a butterfly. But what about the joy in heaven over the sinner that repenteth?

STEPHEN

You don't believe in heaven and you haven't repented.

HAL

I've repented of being a bachelor. And what I believe is my own affair. Look here! You are taking advantage of your private knowledge of me. The Church has not the right to refuse me. I was baptized.

STEPHEN

Were you? I thought your father hates Christianity.

HAL

Hates it like poison—like poison sold as food. But mother had me christened—she was dying, you know, and he couldn't resist her.



STEPHEN

Humph! And so it goes . . . Rotten through and through, the whole system. [*The door r. flies open abruptly and a pretty little curly-headed boy of six appears. Impatiently*] What is it now, Wilfred?

WILFRED

I want to play the piano. [*Goes to it.*]

STEPHEN

No, no, don't you see there's a visitor? [*The boy retreats sulkily.*] Come and say how do you do?

WILFRED [*Retreating*]

I'm too busy.

HAL [*His whole manner softening*]

Oh, come and give me a kiss.

WILFRED

Don't want to.

STEPHEN

Don't be rude, Wilfred. Say how do you do, like a little gentleman.

WILFRED [*Smiling mischievously*]

How do you do like a little gentleman? [*Opens piano.*]

STEPHEN

No, no, not now. Run away and play.

WILFRED

I'm playing. [*Strikes opening chords of harvest hymn.*]

HAL

Ha! Ha! Ha! [*Pats his head affectionately.*] Can you play *The Merry Milliner*?

STEPHEN [*Shutting the piano with paternal authoritativeness*]

We are talking—you shall look down my microscope.

WILFRED [*Blubbing*]

But I want to play the harvest hymns.

STEPHEN [*Leading him to the door*]

Yes, dear, later on.

WILFRED [*Crying*]

But I want to play now.

STEPHEN

Well, play your trumpet—not too near here.

[*Putting him outside.*]

WILFRED [*Blubbing*]

But I want to play the piano.

STEPHEN [*Calling at door*]

Sophia! Do keep Master Wilfred quiet!

SOPHIA [*Outside*]

Come along, dearie, I've got a goody!

WILFRED [*Screaming*]  
Don't want goodies! [STEPHEN *closes the door on him.*]

HAL [*Smiling at the screams*]  
There's no doubt he's musical! . . . [*Resuming argument.*] So you see, I being a member of the Church of England, you have no option. And I want the ceremony got through before dad returns from the States.

STEPHEN [*Decisively*]  
I cannot marry you. It would be a mockery, I tell you.

HAL  
Because I'm not really a Christian?

STEPHEN  
No! Because [*He looks round nervously, then closes casement, which slightly darkens the room*], because I'm not really a Christian!

HAL [*Whistling*]  
Whew! . . . You're not serious?

STEPHEN  
As serious as Dante when he came up out of hell. The Church seems to me like one of those inland ports from which the sea has receded. The tides of Truth beat elsewhere.

HAL  
You've come round to *my* views? What fun!

STEPHEN

No. I have *not* come round to *your* views. But you always had for me the fascination of opposites. Do you know that in my High Church Oxford days I looked on you as a temptation from the devil—nay, sometimes almost as the devil himself!

HAL [*Facetiously*]  
The devil you did!

STEPHEN

Mephisto casting his baleful shadow over the mediæval sanctities of spire and tower. And yet behind all your terrible sophistry there was truth.

HAL  
I am glad you give the devil his due.

STEPHEN

Yes, but the devil's truth comes by denying—God's truth by affirming. From more faith, not from less! The next religion will be larger than Christianity, not smaller; harder, not easier.

HAL  
The next religion! What the dickens is that?

STEPHEN

The religion all honest men are coming to—the religion the world is thirsting for——

HAL  
Go on, go on—I'm thirsting now.

STEPHEN

The religion that accepts the Revelation of Science.

HAL [*Disappointed*]

Science! Why, that's only what dad believes in.

STEPHEN

I'm glad your father believes in *something*.

HAL

Yes—because science is the enemy of religion.

STEPHEN

Only so long as religion neglects to *love* its enemy.  
Only so long as religion refuses to acknowledge the true God.

HAL

And which of man's many gods is that?

STEPHEN

The only one that has never been accepted—the God of Law. The God who will send tuberculosis even through the Communion chalice. [*Points to microscope.*] Those bacilli you were looking at came from mine.

HAL

I see my microscope has done its work.

STEPHEN

Yes, but not in *your* sense. Why we should give up

God because He is shown to be infinitely larger than the God of our fathers I cannot imagine. All we are entitled to deny is that He coddles the individual or doles out death and life in answer to prayer.

HAL

Ha! Then in the next religion there won't be any prayer.

STEPHEN

Not in the sense of asking for favours. What favours *can* there be in a universe of law? Can you save the plague-stricken millions of India by prayer, or will the famine in China abate under our psalms?

HAL [*Smiling*]

Just what I used to ask *you*! Only at that rate you can't have thanksgivings either—these harvest hymns—what?

STEPHEN

Of course not. As if heaven scared the crows and counted the ears of corn! Ugh! [*Shudders.*] And then you come to me and ask me to read the Marriage Service over you!

HAL

Why not? You read it over others.

STEPHEN

Over my flock, sheep as they are. Over my brainless gentry, and my bovine clodhoppers. I can just bear

doing that—habit has dulled the edge of hypocrisy. But do you think I could look *you* in the face and babble that obsolete stuff? Could I ask a blessing on *your* marriage from the God of Abraham, that Mesopotamian polygamist? Could I exhort you to live as faithfully with Helen Munro as Isaac with Rebekah?

HAL

O Lord! Do *they* come into it?

STEPHEN

Even Adam and Eve come into it.

HAL

Really? Naked and unashamed?

STEPHEN

Don't jest. I who know that the sun is only one of the twenty million stars of the Milky Way, and the Milky Way itself only a pin-point in the endless universe, have to prate of the creation of Adam and his rib on this poky little planet. Talk of spoiling your wedding-day—don't you see how this sort of stuff spoils *all* my days?

HAL

Then why not chuck it?

STEPHEN

Ah, if I only could! If I could be the prophet of the next religion!

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HAL

What blocks the way ?

MARY [*Singing as she passes by door R.*]

“Come, ye thankful people, come,  
Raise the song of Harvest Home,” &c. &c.

[*Song dies away gradually.*]

STEPHEN

There's your answer.

HAL

Your wife ?

STEPHEN

It would break her heart.

HAL

So you break yours instead.

STEPHEN

That is my only consolation. That I suffer. That I do not stagnate like the majority of us parsons. That the truth I dare not utter is a fire burning inside me.

HAL

Cheer up ! In the Middle Ages it would have been a fire burning *outside* you.

STEPHEN

I could have welcomed the stake—to stretch my arm into the flame like Cranmer, if only I could kindle it into a torch.



HAL [*Patting his shoulder*]

Dear old Steve, the more you change, the more you are the same.

STEPHEN

Dear old Hal—if you only knew what a relief it is to confess myself to you !

HAL

What fun ! I came to find a priest and you make *me* one. . . . [*Resignedly*] Then I suppose I must marry *myself*.

STEPHEN [*Eagerly*]

Of course you must. What right has any other man to pretend he can sanctify you and your doings ? The same Holy Ghost is in us all.

HAL

Ha ! So the Holy Ghost comes into the next religion.

STEPHEN

How could there be a religion without it ?

HAL

And is that *all* the salvage from the bankruptcy of the creeds ?

STEPHEN

What more do we want ?

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HAL

Well, most people want to survive the grave.

STEPHEN

Absurd! They can't even manage *this* life—as you used to say.

HAL

Well—do you know?—since I met Helen I've sometimes fancied there may be a survival of the fittest.

STEPHEN

Fancy *you* saying that! No, Hal, I'm afraid——

[*The casement is pushed open from without. MARY TRAME appears—a sweet-faced woman of nearly thirty, holding an armful of chrysanthemums. Her voice is anxious.*]

MARY

Is Wilfy with you?

STEPHEN [*Startled, blinking at the increased light*]

No, dearest, but an old friend. Come in!

MARY [*Not coming, but bowing slightly*]

How do you do? Sophia says he ran out into the road screaming, but I can't see him. You said you'd keep your eye on him.

STEPHEN [*Smiling*]

I haven't much eye to keep.

MARY [*With fresh anxiety—steps in*]  
Oh dear, did you put in your drops at eleven ?

STEPHEN  
I can't remember.

MARY  
Hold these a moment.  
[*Gives him the flowers and goes through door L.*]

STEPHEN  
Now she's gone to get my eye-drops.

HAL  
Seems to keep *her* eye on everything.

STEPHEN  
She's a saint. How can I tell her that these chrysanthemums she's dressing up the church with are only a relic of Greek paganism ? [Drops them on table.]

HAL  
I suppose she would arise and go unto her father, the converter of cannibals.  
[*Looks up at picture of savages in top-hats.*]

STEPHEN  
Don't laugh. My poor Mary !

HAL  
I'm not laughing. I rather admire the old bishop. It requires some pluck to preach to people who regard you more as a meal than a minister.

STEPHEN

He risks his life, he won't risk his brains. He never thinks.

HAL

I suppose those are the Christian fathers of the Congo.  
[*Re-enter MARY L., shaking a phial at her husband.*]

MARY

You shameless sinner! You haven't used a drop!

STEPHEN [*Introducing*]

Dr. McFadden, son of the famous inventor—Mrs. Trame.

MARY [*Almost ignoring HAL, with a faint bow*]

Sit down, dear! Your friend will excuse me when he knows that on the best Wiesbaden authority only these drops stand between you and blindness.

HAL

Certainly. Go ahead. [*MARY quietly begins dropping drops along the glass rod into her husband's eyes.*] That's a jolly little boy you've got.

MARY [*Pausing in relief*]

Oh, then he was here just *now*?

STEPHEN

Of course, Mary, you're always so nervous.

MARY

Well, with these horrid motorists about!

HAL [*Bowing*]  
Thank you.

MARY  
I didn't mean——

HAL  
No, but I assure you the only person I've ever damaged  
was myself.

STEPHEN  
There's not much trace of that.

HAL  
No. Thanks to X-rays. Was unconscious for twenty-  
four hours, and even now I can't remember the actual  
smash. It's a death I can recommend.  
[*Noise of car returning R.*]

MARY [*Alarmed*]  
There's another.

HAL  
No, only mine coming back. I must be off.

STEPHEN  
Nonsense, stay to lunch.

HAL  
No, thank you. [*Goes to window and looks R. Car  
heard panting.*] There, Mrs. Trame, you can satisfy  
yourself there is no gore on *my* wheels.

MARY [*Half hysterically*]  
Don't, please.

STEPHEN  
Why won't you lunch with us? You're not angry  
because I——?

HAL  
No, no, I quite feel *with* you——

STEPHEN  
Then why——?

MARY [*Purposely interrupting*]  
Open a little wider! [STEPHEN *dilates his eyes.*]

HAL  
Good-bye, Mrs. Trame.

MARY  
Good-bye. [*Busily dropping drops.*] Excuse my not  
shaking hands—you can go out by the window.

HAL  
Thank you. So long, Steve! I'll send you an invita-  
tion. [*Exit by casement, goes R.*]

STEPHEN  
You might have pressed him to lunch.

MARY  
That brute? [HAL *passes window R.*]

STEPHEN

Sh ! He's a fine chap at bottom.

MARY

A man who could joke about Wilfy's blood on his wheels. Besides, he has a sneering, unchristian face.

STEPHEN

*You* were unchristian not to ask him to lunch.

MARY

I almost wish now I had.

STEPHEN [*Triumphant*]

Ha !

MARY

Because there isn't any . . . [*Finishes phial business, straightens herself*] except bread and cheese. Cook's ill.

STEPHEN

Ill ? [*Car heard driving off R.*] You don't mean drunk again ?

MARY

I put her to bed so she shouldn't spoil your harvest sermon. I hope you've thought it out. [*Takes up chrysanthemums, goes to casement, stepping out.*] As soon as I've found Wilfy and finished in church I'll be ready to type the heads.

STEPHEN

Bother my sermon ! How can I keep my thoughts spiritual with a drunken cook in the house ?

MARY [*Turning*]

By remembering, dear, that she has an immortal soul.

STEPHEN

Cook immortal ? What is she going to do with her eternity ?

MARY [*Surprised and gently reproving*]

What are we all going to do with our eternity ?

STEPHEN

I'm sure I don't know.

[*Peers half absently into microscope.*]

MARY [*Shocked*]

You don't know ?

STEPHEN

Do you ? . . . Millions and millions and millions of years !

MARY [*Disconcerted*]

Well, of course, we see but through a glass darkly.

STEPHEN [*Peering into microscope*]

Quite so. . . . [*She steps out again. He murmurs to himself*] An eternity to get drunk in !



MARY [*Turning again*]  
Did you say anything, dear ?

STEPHEN [*Uneasily*]  
I ? . . . Oh, how was your old washerwoman ?

MARY  
Mrs. Glossop ? Poor thing ! The sooner she's taken  
the better. But *she* knows how she'll spend eternity—  
away from the wash-tub.

STEPHEN  
That's only a negative idea.  
[*Peers again into microscope.*]

MARY  
I know—but wasn't it quaint and pathetic ? “I'll  
soon be in heaven, mum,” she said, “where there's no  
white dresses !”

STEPHEN [*Smiling*]  
Hardly the conventional heaven.

MARY [*Smiling*]  
No ! . . . But don't make yourself blinder, dear,  
with that miserable——

[ELI OAKSHOTT, *the blacksmith, in his apron and  
holding a big hammer in his right hand, appears  
behind her from R. leading WILFRED by his left  
hand. The blacksmith is a brawny giant, who looks  
the soul of good nature.*]

OAKSHOTT [*Cheerily*]  
Here he be, mum !  
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MARY [*With a cry of joy*]

Wilfy!

[*Drops the chrysanthemums on a chair and folds him in her arms.*]

OAKSHOTT

He *will* stand too near the forge, mum.

MARY

O Wilfred, I told you——

WILFRED

But I like to watch the sparks.

OAKSHOTT

Ay, it be a glorious sight—always minds me of the souls in hell. But we don't want little boys to burn. Well [*Going*], God bless you all.

WILFRED [*Breaking from his mother and catching the blacksmith round the leg*]

No, no, I don't want you to go.

OAKSHOTT

I've got my work, sonny.

WILFRED

Well, let me hold your hammer a moment.

OAKSHOTT [*Giving it*]

There!

MARY

No, no. It's too heavy. [*To blacksmith, reproachfully*]  
How could you? [*Takes it from child and returns it.*]

OAKSHOTT

I can't resist the little 'uns, 'specially when I thinks of what our Lord said about suffering 'em to come to Him. Good-bye, sonny. [*Kisses him and exit to R.*]

MARY

You silly boy, suppose it had dropped on your little toeses.

WILFRED

Toes, Sophia says, not toeses.

MARY

Toeseses!

[*Catches him up and kisses the tips of his shoes.*]

STEPHEN [*In paternal superiority*]

Well, talk of licking people's shoes!

MARY

You hug your microbes, you old grizzly-growler. You don't deserve to have such a son. [*Going.*]

STEPHEN

Don't forget the chrysanthemums. [*Picks them up.*]

WILFRED [*Struggling down*]

I'll carry them.

[*Takes them.*]

MARY [*Taking his hand*]

And we must hurry, petsy, or the Squire will be down to see the decorations.

STEPHEN

Old meddler ! He always reminds me of that verse in Genesis—the Lord God walking in the garden. [*Sits.*]

MARY

Don't be profane, dear—even the Squire has his cross to bear.

STEPHEN

You mean his gout.

MARY

I mean his wife.

STEPHEN [*Smiling*]

Poor lachrymose lady ! What will *she* do with her Eternity ? She has to play patience every night to get rid of Time ! And how is the Squire going to be happy in heaven unless the cherubs curtsy ?

MARY

Come along, Wilfy, your father is getting flippant.

[*Leads child out.*]

STEPHEN [*Tragically*]

Flippant ! [*Lets his head fall in his hands.*]

MARY [*Turning on the grass and catching up WILFRED and kissing his toes in gay defiance—they make a pretty picture, the boy holding the flowers.*]

Ha ! Ha ! Ha !

[STEPHEN *raises his head wearily and drops it again. She sings sunnily*]

“ Let Thy Saints be gathered in,  
Free from sorrow, free from sin.”  
Sing up, Wilfy—wake the sluggard up.

WILFRED }  
MARY } [Singing]  
“ All upon the golden floor  
Praising Thee for evermore.”

MARY  
Join in the harvest hymn, Daddy! It'll inspire your  
sermon.

WILFRED }  
MARY } [Singing louder.]  
“ Come with all Thine angels, come——”

STEPHEN [*Jumping up*]  
Mary, I cannot stand it any longer.

MARY [*Laughingly*]  
Do we sing so badly as all that?

STEPHEN  
Those played-out stage properties—Angels, Squalling  
Saints, Golden Floor!

MARY [*Her laughing face growing suddenly frozen and  
ashen*]

Put the flowers by the altar, Wilfy—I'll come in a  
moment.

[*Exit WILFRED by sward R. MARY'S eyes on him a  
few seconds.*]

STEPHEN [*To himself*]  
Good God! What have I said . . . ? [*Falls back into his chair.*] My poor Mary!

MARY [*Coming to him*]  
My poor Stephen! Have you seen Dr. Rogers lately?

STEPHEN  
I saw him in church Sunday evening [*Babbles nervously*], and it fidgeted me. I always expect to see the verger beckon him out to a birth or a—

MARY  
You know what I mean. Have you consulted him?

STEPHEN  
You think I am ill—mad perhaps.

MARY  
I think your nerves are overstrung—you cry out in your sleep—I've been apprehending a breakdown.

STEPHEN  
That was why you made me leave my books and dig in the garden?

MARY  
That and your eyes.

STEPHEN  
Digging made me worse. Every scoop of my spade sliced through a red writhing worm. People prate of  
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the peace of Nature. Every square inch of Nature is packed with struggle and sorrow. Oh, when I think of these blind wriggling creatures labouring on our soils, bringing the fine mould to the top and making passages for the rains and dews, I feel it is to the worms we should be singing our harvest hymns.

MARY [*Feeling his forehead*]  
Yes, yes, how hot your head is !

STEPHEN  
You think I am ill because I dare to face life as it is — to see the tears of things !

MARY  
It is *because* you are ill that I have acquiesced in your *not* facing them, that I have gone in your place to comfort old Mrs. Glossop on her bed of cancer.

STEPHEN  
Comfort her ! Poor old washerwoman ! Sixty years of drudgery, eleven children born in agony and reared on bread and dripping—and now to lie crucified with cancer ! And I have to comfort her by telling her her God took a day off.

MARY [*Appalled*]  
Stephen ! What are you saying ?

STEPHEN  
A day off the joy of His eternal omnipotence—one single day of suffering—they call it Good Friday.

MARY [*Breathes*]  
My God !

STEPHEN  
The real Good Friday would be that which gave us  
the cure for cancer.

MARY  
You make my blood run cold.

STEPHEN  
*Let* it run cold. Cold is great, cold is life-giving. Lazzaroni of religion, we have drowsed too long in a tropical theology, that has enervated and unmanned us. We talk as if scrofulous babies dropped from heaven, and poverty and disease were providential opportunities for prayer. But just as the millions who died of yellow fever might have been saved if instead of looking to the skies they had wiped out the mosquito, so we might have cleaned out our swamp of misery and evil centuries ago if we hadn't looked to some gigantic genie in the clouds to do all our dirty work and give us golden floors to squat on into the bargain.

MARY [*With white set face*]  
And do you say there is *nobody* in the skies ?

STEPHEN  
I say there is somebody in ourselves. Once wolves howled where now our garden flowers. As our ancestors cleared out the wolves so we must clear out



every cruel and evil force outside us and within us  
till all earth becomes a garden.

MARY

Even my father would say "Amen" to that.

STEPHEN

With his lips. But his eyes are fixed on salvation in a  
world beyond. "One world at a time," say I.

MARY

But we must look to the next, too.

STEPHEN

No! It's this cloudy belief that everything will be  
somehow cleaned up in another world that makes us  
tolerate all these miseries and injustices. Besides, who  
knows that there *is* a next world? Where was Hal  
McFadden after his motor accident—during those  
twenty-four hours of unconsciousness? No, let us  
have the courage to grasp our nettle. Let us recognise  
that death is death.

MARY [*Dazed*]

Death is death?

STEPHEN

What else makes its blackness and its beauty, its terror  
and its tranquillity? Why else these tears?

[SOPHIA *opens the door R.*]

SOPHIA

Please, mum, the choir.

MARY [*Dazed*]

The choir ?

SOPHIA

They be waiting for the organ.

MARY

Oh, the choir-practice ! Yes, yes, say I'll come in a minute. [*Exit SOPHIA.*] Oh, I felt that that McFadden was an evil influence. And you—God's ordained !

STEPHEN

God's ordained ! Of, if that was true—if I were the man ordained to bring the next religion !

MARY [*Overwhelmed*]

The next religion ?

STEPHEN

Yours was not always in the world—the next must begin some time too.

MARY [*Breaking down in tears*]

O blessèd Jesus, help my husband in this his sore trial and temptation !

STEPHEN

Calm yourself, dear—the choir is waiting.

MARY [*Struggling with herself*]

Yes, yes, I am exciting your poor tired brain. Come, darling. [*Tries to lead him to his bedroom L.*] My pet

shall lie down and mummy will take off his horrid glasses.

STEPHEN

Mary, do try and realise I'm neither insane nor an infant. Just as Luther was called to make the religion you now hold, so am I called to make the religion of our children.

MARY

The religion of Wilfred—O my God!

*[The organ and choir burst out joyously R.]*

CHOIR

“Come, ye thankful people, come,  
Raise the song of Harvest Home,” &c. &c.

*[The hymn continues as an undercurrent to the conversation.]*

STEPHEN

Why, who is playing the organ?

MARY *[Ecstatic]*

It must be Wilfy!

STEPHEN

The little rascal!

MARY

The little angel! That is God's answer to your blasphemy! Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings!

STEPHEN

Yes, indeed. It is Wilfred that has taught *me*.

MARY

You! Why, you hardly ever take any notice of him.

STEPHEN

It is his childish questionings about God and man—  
how shall I answer him?

MARY

As your father answered *you*.

STEPHEN

Exactly. My father answered me as truly as he knew.  
Shall *I* give answers I know to be false?

MARY

How do you know they are false?

STEPHEN

O Mary, do you think I have not agonised to find  
them false? I have been to the bottom of things.

MARY

Are you sure it was the bottom? You're so short-  
sighted.

STEPHEN [*Relieved*]

Ah, now you are your old teasing self! Go to your  
choir, dear!

MARY

To my choir ? To tell them they are singing a lie ?  
That all this holy peace around us is a mockery ?  
[*Goes to window.*] Look at these stones of the dead  
who fell asleep in Christ—will you dare to say their  
faith was false ? You may as well question the sunshine  
and the sweet grass.

STEPHEN

It is no sweeter than their sleep.

MARY

And they will never wake ?

STEPHEN

We wake in our children. Before Wilfred came, life  
did sometimes seem a blind alley leading to a tomb—  
now through *his* eyes I look beyond, and crying to  
the new generation “ God-speed,” I shall be content,  
after the heat and burden of the day, to fold my hands  
in sleep.

MARY [*Passionately*]

And where is the reward for the heat and burden,  
the struggle and the suffering ?

STEPHEN

The struggle is its own reward, the joy of battle. To  
fight for the right is to share God’s work. Do you  
want a lubberland of eternal lollipops ?

MARY

I want to be with God.

STEPHEN

You are with God now—or never. We have only our moment of life—let us make it the highest.

MARY

Is that the next religion ?

STEPHEN

That is its essence.

MARY

And death ends all ?

STEPHEN

Death softens and renews all, as night softens and renews the day . . . You are shivering—I'll shut the window. *[Moving to it.]*

MARY

No! It is your Arctic religion.

STEPHEN

Its glacial truths will breed a sturdier race than your tropical theology. We can't drug ourselves any longer with the dreams and myths of our fathers. Man rose from the brute, not fell from the angel, and the Holy Ghost that urged him upwards still breathes in us and urges us to heights yet more divine.

MARY [*Passionately*]

Yes, to seek God through Christ.

STEPHEN

We can only seek Him through ourselves.

MARY

But why should we worship a God who ignores us ?

STEPHEN

Why do you worship Beethoven or Bach or lose yourself in a great landscape ? Worship enlarges us. We are like shore-sponges—we may saturate ourselves in the infinite salt-flowing sea around us or be left on the beach dry and gritty and small.

MARY

Your religion is terrible !

STEPHEN

Life is terrible. God is terrible. The whole creation groaneth and travaileth—what religion ever said otherwise ? *Your* religion is terrible.

MARY

Mine ?

STEPHEN

To those who really believe it. Listen.

*[Selects an old folio from the shelves.]*

MARY

What book is that ?

STEPHEN

“ St. Fulgentius on the Faith ”—a highly esteemed

4°

work of the sixth century. [*Searching for the page.*]  
I will translate the Latin: "We must believe beyond doubt that not only men who are come to the use of reason but infants, whether they die in their mother's womb or after they are born—unless they have been baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost—are punished with everlasting punishment in eternal fire."

MARY

Fulgentius was a fool—an old monk who never had a child. That is not *my* religion.

STEPHEN

But you saw how hurriedly I had to christen Mrs. Mason's baby because it was dying. And even *you* are fearing *I* shall be eternally damned because I am no longer a Christian.

MARY

I will baptize you again with my tears.

STEPHEN

You see! You're just as foolish as Fulgentius. [*Takes her hand.*] Now do exercise your reason, dear. Because I can't credit a Resurrection about which even the Apostles contradict themselves——

MARY [*Snatching her hand away*]

You make me feel—home-sick. [*Breaks down in fresh tears.*] And I thought this was my home.

[*Going out distractedly at casement.*]



STEPHEN

Where are you going ?

MARY

I want my Wilfy. The world is falling to pieces around me. I want something solid to hold by.

[*Is outside.*]

STEPHEN

Yes, dear, but dry your eyes.

MARY [*Turning*]

Stephen, if what you say were true, if there is no heaven for old Mrs. Glossop after her life of toil and pain, you ought to hush it up, as we hushed up the suicide of her son in Canada. How are these poor souls to bear it ?

STEPHEN

Those who cannot bear it will not believe it. But you—you will be strong.

MARY

I ?

STEPHEN

You and I together. We will strengthen each other. We will go out and teach the strong.

MARY

Go out ?

STEPHEN

I cannot stay here and eat the bread of hypocrisy.

MARY

Stephen! Your levity amazes me.

STEPHEN

My levity?

MARY

What else is it? You're like a child with a new toy. You think of nothing but your new religion.

STEPHEN

Why, what else should I think of?

MARY

Of your parishioners, of your boy, even of me. What is to become of us?

STEPHEN

My sheep will get another shepherd. You and I and Wilfred will live in London—the place of large thoughts.

MARY

And what shall we live *on*?

STEPHEN

It is that sordid question of loaves and fishes that keeps the Church stagnant, infested with gagged ministers; who believe as few of the Thirty-Nine Articles as I do. I will not hear it.

MARY

But you *shall* hear it. You know I can only typewrite.

STEPHEN  
I'll find something.

MARY  
What thing ?

STEPHEN  
Well—er—I can write for the papers.

MARY  
With *your* eyes—— ?

STEPHEN  
I can coach.

MARY  
There's as much competition in coaching as in typing.

STEPHEN [*Impatiently*]  
I will earn our bread.

MARY  
By preaching the next religion ?

STEPHEN  
God forbid ! The next religion will not petrify itself  
by a paid priesthood.

MARY  
Then you'll earn our bread in the *intervals* of preach-  
ing it ?

STEPHEN  
I suppose so.

MARY  
Really, Stephen, you've no more sense than a baby.  
No ! Here we are and here we stay.

STEPHEN [*Piteously*]  
You won't go *with* me ?

MARY [*Decisively*]  
Nor you without me.

STEPHEN  
I must.

MARY  
You would leave me ?

STEPHEN  
It is you that would leave me. You took me for better  
or worse.

MARY  
My vows before God's altar cannot bind me to spread  
atheism.

STEPHEN [*Passionately*]  
It's not atheism.

MARY  
St. Paul says : " Be ye not unequally yoked together  
with unbelievers." I shall go to my father.

STEPHEN

Just what McFadden predicted.

MARY

McFadden ! I knew he was behind it all. And never a thought of my father—of the pain to him, the harm to his reputation ! Think how he's encouraged and admired you—ever since you were an orphan boy in Christ's Hospital.

STEPHEN

I've thought of everything, Mary. But I can't hurt anybody more than I hurt myself.

MARY

Yes, you do—you hurt *me* more—immeasurably more. [Sobs.]

STEPHEN

O Mary, Mary dear, don't, don't !

MARY

You don't consider me one bit.

STEPHEN

My darling——

MARY

All our lovely home broken up—Wilfy taken from this splendid air to some miserable London street . . . only last week I finished the new altar cloth [*Sinks sobbing on cosy corner*]. And this cosy corner just fitted up !

STEPHEN

You put your cosy corner before my conscience ?

MARY [*Rising*]

You've got no conscience. Where's your duty to me and Wilfred ? Promise me you'll do nothing rash !

[*Clings to him.*]

STEPHEN

My dearest—— !

MARY

Promise me you'll—— !

SQUIRE ROWLEY [*Outside window R.*]

Now, you boys—get off that tree !

STEPHEN }  
MARY } The Squire !

[*Drying her eyes, MARY hurries out door R.*]

SQUIRE [*Appearing at casement with a great string of bananas*]

You in, Parson ?

[*The SQUIRE is a century older than his years : he wears a white square bowler and corduroy breeches and sports a great florid face.*]

STEPHEN

Yes, Mr. Rowley.

SQUIRE

Then perhaps you'll take these beastly bananas.

STEPHEN

Eh ?

[*Takes them in peering bewilderment.*]

SQUIRE

Can't have *them* in the church. Never heard of such harvest decorations.

STEPHEN

Mrs. Trame thought that as they were sent from the Manor——

SQUIRE

Yes, that's what comes of letting to London stock-brokers. Sheafs of corn the Almighty looks for—flowers, apples, carrots, potatoes, even grapes as long as they're grown here. But bananas! The Lord wouldn't know His own church.

STEPHEN [ *Holding bananas uncertainly* ]

But the donors will expect to see them.

SQUIRE

Will they, by Gad! It was bananas that brought the mosquitoes here.

STEPHEN

Really ?

SQUIRE

Came in the banana boxes. Look at that bite on my arm! [*Rolls up sleeve.*] One might as well live in a Catholic country!

[*Enter SOPHIA R.*]

SOPHIA [*To STEPHEN*]

Please, sir, Farmer Burr be come to see you.

SQUIRE

Be he indeed, the rascalion! Then *I'll* go back to the choir-practice. I'll have no truck with atheists.

[*Exit by window and goes R.*]

STEPHEN

Show Farmer Burr in.

[*Organ breaks out in greater volume with the more joyous hymn "We plough the fields and scatter" as MARY replaces WILFRED.*]

SQUIRE [*Turning his head back to STEPHEN*]

Ah! that's better! I thought the organ was sounding a bit thin!

[*Disappears. STEPHEN puts bananas on table and closes the window, reducing the hymn to a vague undercurrent. Enter FARMER BURR in his best black clothes, awkwardly holding a high hat. He has an honest face with large doglike eyes.*]

STEPHEN

Good day, Burr. Won't you sit down?

BURR [*Disregarding invitation*]

You're surprised to see me, Parson.

STEPHEN

Why? This isn't church.



BURR

'Tis next door to it—and about as near as Silas Burr will ever get.

STEPHEN

Oh no, the churchyard is still nearer.

BURR

Pooh! You can't fright *me* with your scarebugs. I'm going to be cremated. That's real ashes to ashes.

STEPHEN

Very sensible.

BURR

Yes—and dodges your hell, Parson.

STEPHEN

How do you know what my hell is? You never come to church.

BURR

But I know what Squire's hell is—for he tells me to go there. And yours can't be so different or you'd lose the living.

STEPHEN [*Wincing*]

Have you come to talk about my hell?

BURR

No offence, Parson—we've all got to live. What

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I've come for is to see if you believe in your own sermons.

STEPHEN [*Rather alarmed*]  
If I believe—— ?

BURR  
In coals of fire. No, no, not hell *this* time. I want to see if you'll put 'em on my head in a manner of speaking—if you'll plead for me with the Squire.

STEPHEN  
Plead for you ? What about ?

BURR  
Yesterday, being Michaelmas Day, danged if his baily didn't give me notice. Me whose fathers have been on the farm before the Rowleys were in the county at all.

STEPHEN  
Then surely you've got a lease ?

BURR  
No. Us had a yearly tenancy, and the longer it ran the more solid it seemed ! Oh, it's cruel hard ! And the farm and the bit of river with its poplars and ellums all twisted round my heart in a manner of speaking !

STEPHEN  
Can't you offer more rent ?

BURR

It bain't more rent he wants, it's more religion. Plague-spot he calls me. Which I *am* in a manner of speaking—and proud of it.

STEPHEN

Well, why not keep your pride? There's much better land in the next county.

BURR

I don't want to go to foreign parts, with their new-fangled machines.

STEPHEN

Ha! As conservative in farming as you are radical in religion.

BURR

I bain't conservative—I sold my bees for silver and now my missus will have it that that's what brought all the ill-luck.

STEPHEN

Ah, Mrs. Burr told me your sheep didn't do well.

BURR

Rotted away, half of 'em. And then folk go yowling hymns. When Joanna talks to *me* of Providence, I say "Rot." [*Laughs bitterly.*] Ha! Ha! Ha!

STEPHEN [*Quietly*]

And yet is there anything more providential than sheep-rot?

BURR

Providential, Parson ?

STEPHEN [*Smiling*]

In a manner of speaking. One man's meat is another man's poison, and your sheep's rot is the liver-fluke's riot.

BURR

The liver-fluke ?

STEPHEN

That's the parasite that makes the rot. A tiny, hairy thing I've had under that glass there ! It swims about in your pond and its only chance of life is to wriggle inside the lung of a fresh-water snail.

BURR

What's the snail to do with my sheep ?

STEPHEN

Wait ! If the fluke gets inside the snail's lung it settles down and has a family, and the youngsters move over into the snail's liver. There they live happily many generations till one day they produce a long-tailed filibuster which emigrates out of the snail and swims back into the grass at the edge of the pond. Your poor sheep eats that grass and the canny fluke founds a great colony in its liver—and that's what *you* call rot.

BURR

And so it is ! All that to kill my sheep ! . . . Then

'tis a devil that runs the world in a manner of speaking  
—a great spider devil.

[*The hymn has stopped. The organ begins a little  
voluntary.*]

STEPHEN [*Rising solemnly*]

Spider or devil, it spins so wonderfully, Farmer Burr,  
with all Time for its woof and all Space for its warp—  
its web is so boundless, so majestic, so mysterious,  
stretched from star to star through the infinities,  
that reverence becomes us better than criticism.

[*Organ stops.*]

BURR [*Doggedly*]

Well, *I* call it rot. A sheep has more rights than an  
insect.

STEPHEN

Why? God's universe is a democracy. Physically  
man himself counts no more than the flea which  
infects him with the plague it sucks from rats.

BURR

Then there *bain't* no God's universe.

SQUIRE [*Reappearing*]

That scabby sheep still here?

BURR [*Incensed*]

Plague-spot, if you like, but not——

[*Lifts his clenched fist.*]

SQUIRE

Put down your hand, or, by Gad, I'll have you arrested  
for contempt of court.

BURR

This bain't a court.

SQUIRE

But I'm a magistrate !

STEPHEN

This is hardly the way, Farmer, to get concessions.

SQUIRE

He thinks because he can insult the Almighty with impunity, he can defy *me* !

STEPHEN

Don't you think, Mr. Rowley, it would be more Christian to be as patient with him as the Almighty is ? Let him stay on his farm.

SQUIRE

And infect all your flock ?

STEPHEN

Your Christianity might disinfect *him*.

SQUIRE

Fiddlesticks . . . Humph ! Look here, Farmer !

BURR

I'm looking.

SQUIRE

You come to the Harvest Service to-night, and I'll take back my notice.

BURR  
I'll see you damned first !

SQUIRE [*To Parson*]  
What do you say to that ?

STEPHEN [*Faintly smiling*]  
Sounds Christian enough.

SQUIRE [*Deafly*]  
Eh ? Not Christian enough ? Humph ! Well, you  
come to the service and I'll give you a seven years'  
lease.

BURR  
No !

SQUIRE  
Fourteen !

BURR  
No !

SQUIRE  
Twenty-one !

BURR  
No !

SQUIRE  
Then go to hell !

BURR [*To PARSON*]  
What do you say to *that*?

STEPHEN  
I say you're a real Christian.

[*Holds out hand.*]

BURR [*Smacks it away*]  
I can stand being called a plague-spot, but damned if I'll be called a Christian!

[*Claps on high hat and exit R. by casement.*]

SQUIRE  
What do you mean, sir, by calling him a Christian?

STEPHEN  
I didn't say a Christian—I said a real Christian, a man who gives up everything for his ideal.

SQUIRE  
Ideal? Damn it all, Mr. Parson, if you had talked like that when your father-in-law came a-begging for this living——

STEPHEN [*Amazed and wounded*]  
The Bishop of the Soudan——?

SQUIRE  
Yes, sir, through my aunt's secretary—the brother of one of his Uganda underlings.

STEPHEN  
Uganda is not in the Bishop's diocese——



SQUIRE

Well, Ashanti—what the devil! At any rate, my aunt Lady Betty—

MARY [*Screaming outside R.*]

Stop! [*Sound of a body falling.*] O my God!  
[*Noise and babble of a crowd.*]

STEPHEN [*Rushing out through casement*]

Mary! What's happened to you?

SQUIRE

That scabby sheep has been butting into her. What did I tell you?

MARY [*Outside*]

Stand away—give him air.

STEPHEN [*Outside*]

Get him out of this crowd—bring him inside. Keep back, please.

[*Two adult members of the choir carry in the senseless FARMER BURR and place him on the floor. He is bareheaded and his huge watch hangs out by its chain. Others of both sexes, including strange ancient gaffers, gather round, the girls curtseying as they catch sight of the SQUIRE. WILFRED, gazing with open eyes at the body, is in foreground.*]

SQUIRE

Farmer Burr!

MARY

The blacksmith felled him with his hammer.

SQUIRE

Good God! [*Touches FARMER BURR's hair. His fingers get dabbled in blood.*] But this is murder!

MARY

No, no! I think he's only stunned.

STEPHEN

My wife's shriek unnerved the stroke.

MARY

But it was his hat that saved him. The cut is not deep. That cushion please! [STEPHEN *brings it from the cosy corner. She places FARMER BURR's head on it and unloosens his collar.*] A glass of water.

[*Somebody runs R. WILFRED produces a tin trumpet and begins blowing.*]

STEPHEN [*Angrily*]

Hush, Wilfred.

WILFRED

I'm playing the Dead March.

MARY [*Sweetly*]

No, no, petsy.

WILFRED

Well, the last trump then—that'll wake him up.

MARY

You little cherub! You shall run and get daddy's

sticking-plaster. [*Exit WILFRED door L. SOPHIA with great eyes of alarm comes by door R. with water, and MARY puts it to BURR's lips, then bathes his wound with her handkerchief. WILFRED returns with plaster.*] Thank you, darling. Sophia, my smelling-salts!  
[*SOPHIA hurries out R. MARY adjusts plaster over the FARMER's cranium.*]

SQUIRE [*Fuming*]  
But the blacksmith—where's the policeman? Always somewhere else.

OAKSHOTT [*Stepping forward from background with his hammer as before, but his face fanatically transfigured*]  
Oh, I haven't run away. . . . I have bruised the serpent's head, as Genesis commands—I have done the will of God!

STEPHEN [*Furiously*]  
Damn your theology!

CROWD  
Oh, oh! Parson swore!

OAKSHOTT [*To STEPHEN*]  
I was just bringing back your little lad for the second time when I meets the swine coming out of this window in his Sunday togs and topper. "Oho," says I, joyed and surprised. "So you've been to  
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make your peace with God." "Peace with God," he snorts, "it takes two to make a quarrel and two to make a peace, and t'other party don't exist. If he do, let him prove it by a thunderbolt!"

CROWD [*Horried*]

Oh!

[*They spurn the prostrate body with their feet.*]

MARY [*Fiercely*]

Stand back, please. [SOPHIA brings smelling-salts.]  
Thank you.

[MARY puts them to FARMER BURR'S nose.]

OAKSHOTT

And with that he whips out his watch and cries,  
"Half-past twelve! I give t'other party——"

BURR [*Opening eyes*]

Joanna! . . . Why, where *be* I?

MARY

Thank God!

STEPHEN

You're here—in my house.

BURR [*Rubbing his forehead*]

I feel fuzzy . . . Hairy flukes, did you say, in my brain-pan?

OAKSHOTT [*Starting forward with raised hammer*]

You son of Belial! [*Agitation in crowd.*]

MARY [*Springing up*]  
Back! [*His hammer falls slowly under her gaze.*]

BURR [*Sitting up*]  
Ah, I mind me now. [*Looks at his dragging watch, and puts it in the fob in the waistband of his trousers.*]  
Eli there thought he was God.

STEPHEN  
Yes, Thor with his hammer.

SQUIRE  
God can do His own work, Eli Oakshott. Think yourself lucky you've escaped the gallows.

OAKSHOTT  
I'd go to the gallows for God any day.

SQUIRE  
You'll have to go to gaol for assault *this* day.

BURR [*Struggling to his feet*]  
And what good will that do *me*? I won't prosecute the village idiot. [*BLACKSMITH makes menacing move.*]  
And what else *be* you in a manner of speaking? There's always summat wanting in a bachelor-man—he's got no troubles so he has to make 'em. Where's my hat?

AN OLD GAFFER  
Here it be!  
[*Hands forward the high hat, an inglorious wreck, with a great gash in the middle. Titter of crowd.*]

BURR [*Surveying it ruefully*]  
Holey! . . . Like the blacksmith's Bible.

SQUIRE  
Silence, man! After Mrs. Trame has——

OAKSHOTT  
I wish I'd bashed his brains out.

BURR  
You agree with Squire—this bain't no place for a man with brains!

SQUIRE [*To OAKSHOTT*]  
You'll buy him a new hat at least.

BURR  
I wouldn't *take* his hat. I'll keep this as a trophy of Christian love in a manner of speaking—hand it down to my childer's childer—[*Sticks his finger through it*] to keep it holey. Ha! Ha! Ha!  
[*Exit, twirling it on his finger.*]

SQUIRE  
Get along, you pack of idlers. [*Crowd vanishes with curtseying and pulling of locks.*] Well, blacksmith, what are you waiting for?

OAKSHOTT  
For the handcuffs. I made 'em myself.

SQUIRE  
Go back to your forge.

OAKSHOTT

As you please. But I tell you, Squire, every spark I beat out will seem a soul sent to hell through that Satan-serpent.

*[Exit by casement.]*

STEPHEN

Oh, this cursèd theology.

*[Exit abruptly into his room.]*

SQUIRE

What's the matter with your husband ?

MARY

He— *[Picks up cushion from floor]* he's been over-working.

SQUIRE

Send him out with the guns. We begin to-morrow on the pheasants and my dogs'll—

MARY

No, no, he can't bear hurting things.

*[Replaces cushion.]*

SQUIRE

Fiddlesticks. What did God Almighty make pheasants for ?

WILFRED

Squire !

*[Pulls his coat.]*

SQUIRE

Yes, my lad.

*[Patting his head.]*

WILFRED

Why won't you be happy in heaven unless the cherubs  
curtsey ?

SQUIRE [*Reddening*]

Why—what ?

MARY [*Blushing, confused*]

You silly boy. Here—eat a banana. [*Hastily.*] And  
then you see my husband's eyes are not much use  
for shooting.

SQUIRE

Well, he wants *something* for his liver. [*Paternally.*]  
Try squills [*Shakes her hand in genial farewell. At*  
*window*] or sarsaparilla. [*Exit.*]

MARY

You naughty boy! And to go again to that forge!  
[*His face gets distorted.*] No, don't cry. My petsy  
played the organ beautifully. [*Snatches him to her*  
*breast.*] Oh, Wilfred, promise me you will *always* say  
your prayers!

WILFRED [*Munching banana*]

Of course, mummy.

MARY

My sweetest! Say them now.

WILFRED [*Munching*]

But I said them this morning.



MARY  
Then say to-night's prayers.

WILFRED [*Munching*]  
But it's morning.

MARY  
Oh, say them !

WILFRED [*In a breathless murmur*]  
Our Father, which art in Heaven, Hallowed be thy  
Name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in  
earth, As it is in Heaven. Give us this day our daily  
bread. And forgive us our trespasses, As we forgive  
them that trespass against us. And lead us not into  
temptation ; But deliver us from evil : For Thine is  
the kingdom, The power and the glory, For ever and  
ever—— [*Resumes banana.*]

MARY [*Who has followed with her lips, especially  
emphasising "temptation," ends with him, sobbingly*]  
Amen !  
[*Catches him up and covering him with kisses carries  
him towards R. door.*]

WILFRED [*In tearful alarm*]  
But I'm not going to *bed* ?

MARY  
No, no, pet—but your hair want's brushing. It's like  
Struwwelpeter's.  
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WILFRED [*At exit*]

But I won't say 'em again to-night.

[*Exeunt. After a brief pause door L. opens and STEPHEN peeps in. Reassured he lets the door close, then returns somewhat stealthily with a shabby kit-bag, takes a book here and there and throws it in.*]

STEPHEN

Ah, my spare glasses! [*Picks up case from table, then starts as at a creaking door. Again reassured, he throws in a little box.*] Paper pins are always useful. [*Peers around.*] There's my slippers!

[*Picks them up under a chair. Re-enter MARY door R.*]

MARY

Stephen! What *are* you doing?

STEPHEN [*Disconcerted, slippers in hand*]

I meant to spare you the pain of parting.

MARY

You are going away?

STEPHEN

I can bear it no longer.

MARY [*Hysterically*]

You don't love me!

STEPHEN

You know it isn't that. You'll have Wilfred to love.  
Sell what you like and I'll send you all I can.

MARY

Because the blacksmith struck Farmer Burr! You  
want to pretend that's Christianity!

STEPHEN

It's one sort of Christianity!

MARY

Have *I* ever struck anybody with hammers?

STEPHEN

Don't be childish. In my heart of hearts I envied the  
blacksmith.

MARY

Envied him?

STEPHEN

Dare *I* strike a blow for God?

MARY

God forbid! I'd rather see you struck down like  
Farmer Burr.

STEPHEN

Yes, Mary, if I could be struck down *like* him—in  
defence of my real belief. [*Puts slippers in bag.*]  
A small farmer and a blacksmith—and they put me  
to shame!

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MARY

You shall not go.

[*She snatches at the bag.*]

STEPHEN

I follow the Holy Ghost.

MARY

And break your marriage vow.

STEPHEN

No—you break that.

MARY

I ?

STEPHEN

Didn't you quote St. Paul ?

MARY [*Wincing*]

Stephen, do you remember that day in Madrid—the day you bought me the mantilla ?

STEPHEN

How can I forget our honeymoon ?

MARY

And now I and the child are nothing to you.

STEPHEN

“ Unless a man hateth his father and his mother—— ! ”

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MARY

That's what our Lord said. But you don't believe in Him.

STEPHEN

I do more—I repeat his experience, however humbly. I see that every reformer must repeat his Passion.

MARY

And what about *my* suffering ?

STEPHEN

It is part of the price.

MARY

The price of what ?

STEPHEN

Of establishing the next religion.

MARY

*You* establish the next religion ! You can't even pack your bag. Look at it !

STEPHEN

Oh, it'll do.

MARY

One sock ; where's the other ?

STEPHEN

It's there somewhere.

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MARY [*Feeling*]

Where? [*Pulls out a book.*] What do you want with that?

STEPHEN [*Fretfully*]

My *Pilgrim's Progress*! Let it be.

MARY

*Pilgrim's Progress*! My crochet-patterns. [*Throws it out half in laughter, half in tears. Feeling further.*] I don't see that sock. [*Seriously*] Good heavens! Your sponge has sopped your nightshirt. [*Brings shirt out.*] You can't wear that!

STEPHEN

Yes, I can. [*Takes it from her and thrusts it back.*] My landlady will dry it.

MARY

And who's *she*?

STEPHEN

How should I know? Somebody in Bloomsbury, I suppose, near the British Museum.

MARY

That's all you're fit for—a museum! [*Brings out the tin trumpet.*] And that ought to be exhibited, too!

STEPHEN

What's the matter with my shoe-horn?

MARY [*Blows it with a wan smile*]  
Wilfred's trumpet. I thought it was for the next religion—to call the faithful together. [*Throws it aside.*] And *here's* the comb I lost last Christmas! I suppose *that's* for the Bloomsbury landlady. I wonder you didn't pack these bananas for her table. And where's your eye-medicine?

STEPHEN [*Sullenly*]  
I forgot about that.

MARY  
Packs Wilfy's trumpet and forgets his eyes! [*Finds phial on mantel.*] And who'll drop it in? The Bloomsbury landlady? She'll have a pack of more paying lodgers. [*Puts phial in bag.*] You'll be lucky if she doesn't pour it into your soup.

STEPHEN  
Don't let us talk of such trifles.

MARY [*Hysterically*]  
Trifles!  
[*Pulls out wet sponge and goes to window to squeeze it.*]

STEPHEN [*Sullenly*]  
After all I did travel before I was married.

MARY  
But I hope you travelled with clothes on?

STEPHEN  
With clothes ?

MARY  
What are you going to wear on the journey ?

STEPHEN  
But I've got clothes on.

MARY  
Yes, the livery of the last religion. [*He starts and feels his coat.*] Are you going to wear the clothes of hypocrisy ?

STEPHEN  
I never thought of that.

MARY  
What *have* you thought of? [*Vicious squeeze of sponge.*] Have you thought of me left alone with an intoxicated cook ?

[*Wrings sponge.*]

STEPHEN [*Embarrassed*]  
I—I——

MARY  
Have you thought of to-night's congregation waiting for their pastor ? [*Final squeeze of sponge.*] There ! Dry and gritty and small—much better sometimes. [*Packs sponge in bag.*] Have you thought of how



I'm to explain you've eloped with a new religion ?  
Even if you're a prophet you can be a gentleman !  
[Closes bag with vicious snap and gives it to him.]

STEPHEN [Only half taking it]  
But what else can I do ?

MARY  
Do ? If you *must* go away, let us do it as St. Paul  
teaches—in a seemly and due order.

STEPHEN [Drops bag]  
Let us do it ? Then you *will* come ?

MARY [With a half-sob]  
I took you for better or worse—for wiser or sillier !

STEPHEN  
My saint ! My angel !

MARY [Evading his embrace]  
Hush ! No played-out theatrical words.

STEPHEN  
You give them fresh meaning. [MARY sits down at  
table and types rapidly.] What are you typing ?

MARY  
The text of your harvest sermon.

STEPHEN [Peering down curiously]  
“That Thou givest them they gather : Thou openest  
Thine hand, they are filled with good.”

MARY

Psalm 104. Won't that be a splendid text ? Come along now, dictate the heads.

STEPHEN

The heads ? [*Passes hand wearily over brow.*] My head is splitting.

MARY [*Half rising*]

Oh, poor darling ; go in and lie down.

[*He moves towards L. As she sees him safely passing through his door she drops into her seat. Click ! Click ! Click ! Click ! of typewriter, writing his sermon.*]

CURTAIN

## Act II

*A November morning over two years later. A poorly furnished room over a tobacconist's shop in the Whitechapel Road, giving on a bedroom to the right and on a staircase to the left. In the back wall are two windows, cheaply curtained, with a fireplace in between. The grate is empty and over the mantel are china dogs and a pen and ink. As the curtain rises, a church clock strikes eleven and STEPHEN in shabby lay attire is discovered sitting disconsolately with his head on a dirty table-cloth, still littered with the remains of breakfast. He has grown an untrimmed beard. The typewriter on the floor near door R. is the sole remainder and reminder of the old household goods. There is a knock just before the church bell finishes, of which he takes no notice; it is repeated more loudly, and MRS. BURR, a buxom, rosy-faced woman, looks in with a tray and draws back a little at the sight of him.*

STEPHEN

Oh, come in, Mrs. Burr.

MRS. BURR

Excuse me coming up so terrible late, but there's the Monday washing, and half the childer be in bed with colds.

STEPHEN [*Abstracted, rubbing his hands*]

Yes, *very* cold.

MRS. BURR [*Clearing table*]

My man says as we shall have snow, and London snow, says Silas, be the same colour as London fog. Gracious, but the cold's given you an appetite! Don't want *me* to clear away the breakfast! Not even a lump of sugar.

[*Shows empty basin.*]

STEPHEN [*Uneasily*]

Wilfred must have pocketed them when he went to school. I hope Farmer Burr's dyspepsia is better.

MRS. BURR

Oh, it bain't Silas's stomach, bless you, 'tis the man's heart.

STEPHEN

His heart? I thought——

MRS. BURR

Oh, I don't mean the heart as doctors thumps with a telescope: I mean the heart as we can only hear from inside. Silas's heart be a-pining for his farm; he wasn't brought up to sell pipes and 'baccy in a poky Whitechapel shop.

STEPHEN

He *would* come to London.

MRS. BURR

He's not the only donkey.

STEPHEN [*Naively*]

What do you mean?

MRS. BURR

Them as the skin fits can wear it.

[Goes to staircase door, clattering tray.]

STEPHEN [Flushing]

I strongly advised Farmer Burr to take another farm.

MRS. BURR

As if he'd give up being near you ! Calls you Seer and Master, the loony, and jabbers about hairy flukes in his liver.

[Opens door.]

STEPHEN

In the sheep's liver, you mean.

MRS. BURR

The sheep or the donkey's, what's the difference ? First the jackass gets his headpiece cracked for braying as there bain't no God, now he keeps trumpeting as God be that gigantic the blacksmith's God be a baby by comparison. Poor Silas ! That blow on the brain-pan was the finish of *him* ! [Exit with tray. During her momentary absence a few flakes of snow are seen through the windows ; they very gradually increase. She returns with a broom and dust-pan.] Ah here *be* the snow. Shan't I light a fire ?

STEPHEN

No, no, it's quite warm. . . .

MRS. BURR

And not a single lump of coal in the scuttle.

[Waving it.]

STEPHEN [*Pretending surprise*]  
Isn't there ?

MRS. BURR [*Severely*]  
I suppose Master Wilfred pocketed 'em ! [*Sets down scuttle with a bang.*] Oh, it bain't no use, Parson. It don't need half an eye to see what's happening and I've got four half-eyes. I shall bring up some sausages.

STEPHEN [*Distressed*]  
Nonsense ! I forbid you ! Mrs. Trame will be marketing on her way home.

MRS. BURR  
Oh, it's bitter hard the way us women be dragged at the heels of our donkeys. There was I, milking my cows and curing my bacon, when smack ! jolt ! off goes the donkey-cart to the New Jerusalem !

BURR [*Outside, below*]  
Come down, Joanna ! You'm disturbing the Seer !

MRS. BURR  
Nothing of the sort, Silas.

BURR  
What be all that jaw about donkeys ?

MRS. BURR  
And mayn't I talk about my own husband ?

BURR

Come down ! The Master's got holier things to think about.

MRS. BURR

You mind your pipes and pouches. If you hadn't sold your bees for silver——

*[Bangs door and starts sweeping viciously.]*

STEPHEN *[Coughing at the dust]*

I'd better go into the bedroom.

*[Exit by door R., stumbling over the typewriter on the floor.]*

MRS. BURR

Seer, indeed ! *[Sweeps still more furiously. A knock comes at the door.]* Be that Silas ?

ANDREWS *[Outside]*

No !

MRS. BURR

Then come in !

*[Enter distractedly ANDREWS, a young man with an earnest intelligent face. There are a few flakes of snow on his neat black overcoat.]*

ANDREWS

I want to see the Master.

MRS. BURR

Here's another of 'em ! Excuse me, sir, did any one hit you with a hammer ?

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ANDREWS

Worse.

MRS. BURR

I thought so.

[*Sweeps viciously.*]

ANDREWS [*Brushing off the few flakes*]

I'm Wilfred Trame's teacher at the Board School  
—at least I was.

STEPHEN [*Reappearing at bedroom door, surprised*]

Do I hear Andrews ?

ANDREWS

Yes, Master !

STEPHEN

In school hours ?

ANDREWS

I'm dismissed.

STEPHEN

Dismissed ?

ANDREWS

A month's salary in lieu of notice.

STEPHEN

My poor boy ! Not because of— ? [ANDREWS *nods.*]

Oh, I'm sorry. You shouldn't have——



ANDREWS

I *had* to, Master. The Holy Ghost wouldn't let me rot in cowardice and lying. There isn't a teacher at the school—no, not the Headmaster himself—who believes in the Fall of Man, and every single one I've lent your book to agrees that the Rise of Man is a far better religion. But they all lie low, and I'm left as the black sheep.

STEPHEN [*With clenched fist*]

Oh, it is scandalous the way untruth—[*Enter MARY in bonnet as from street, her cloak just spotted with snow.*] Oh, Mary, do you hear this? Andrews has been—Why you're all snowy!

MARY [*Brushing her cloak with her hand*]

It's nothing, it's only just started. What has happened?

STEPHEN

Andrews has been dismissed by people of *your* religion for professing *mine*.

MARY [*To ANDREWS*]

But surely under the Code you have liberty of conscience.

ANDREWS

The School Managers pretended I fought in Victoria Park.

MARY

And didn't you?

STEPHEN

It was to save me from the hooligans who were guying my open-air preaching. He got a black eye.

MARY

Well, liberty to get a black eye hardly suits a school teacher.

STEPHEN

You defend them! Don't you see that it is all one great conspiracy to bolster up their creed, a remorseless use of every social weapon to stifle——

[*Chokes with rage.*]

MRS. BURR [*Who since MARY'S entrance has been sweeping unobtrusively at back*]

Don't you stifle, Parson.

STEPHEN

Oh, it's too dreadful. [*To ANDREWS*] And all because you were so kind to Wilfred that I sent you my book.

ANDREWS

Don't worry about *me*, Master. Don't you always say that suffering is the price of truth? Well, I'm glad to pay my share.

MARY

And your wife and child—are *they* glad to pay? [*ANDREWS hangs his head.*] Why did you marry if you wanted to fight the world?

[*STEPHEN buries his face in his hands.*]

MRS. BURR

Ay, that's what I tell *my zany*.

*[Exit angrily with broom and dust-pan.]*

MARY [*To ANDREWS*]

But if you promised not to attend open-air meetings?

ANDREWS

They'd find some other excuse. You don't know these Christians.

MARY

I *am* one.

ANDREWS

Yes, one in a thousand. Oh, Master . . . ! [*STEPHEN does not raise his head. To MARY*] Tell the Master we'll struggle through. We've got a month to look round. [*Abrupt exit.*]

STEPHEN [*Groaning*]

My one follower.

MARY

No, dear, there's Farmer Burr.

STEPHEN

I don't count *him*. The ground was ready. The old religion was weeded out. After two years' work—one follower.

MARY

Yes, dear, but two eyes still—and I've been so afraid——

STEPHEN

I know I've that to be thankful for—but only to you.  
If I had had to write out my book——

MARY [*Smiling*]

Then not even the printers could have understood a  
word of "The Next Religion."

STEPHEN

Laugh at me as you like—I shall never forget your  
goodness in typing what you disapproved of——

MARY

It's not the only book I've typed that I disapprove of.  
The trouble is I can't get more to disapprove of.

[*Drops dejectedly into a chair.*]

STEPHEN

What! They didn't give you that socialist novel  
after all!

MARY

I oughtn't to have stood out on Saturday for sixpence  
a thousand; the moment I left it was snapped up at  
fivepence halfpenny.

STEPHEN

How horrible! The labour market is a jungle of wild  
beasts.

MARY

I've often explained to you, dear, that typing is a  
job poor gentlewomen can do in their spare time. I've  
been a blackleg myself.

[*Rises.*]

STEPHEN

Where are you going ?

MARY

I must pawn this cloak.

STEPHEN [*Horried*]

With winter on us ?

MARY

What else is left ? Wilfy must find *something* to eat when he comes home from that horrid school. I was hoping the second post would have brought you the publisher's account. There's the typewriter—but we must keep that to the last. [*Feels cloak.*] Yes, this cloak will cover a multitude of meals.

STEPHEN

No! No!

MARY [*With forced smile*]

What do *you* know of pawnbrokers' prices ? Why, we shall gorge on this for days—like great moths. I only wish I had pledged it last week instead of the mantilla.

STEPHEN

I'm glad you didn't.

MARY [*Coming to him and stroking his face*]

Silly Stephen! Growing a beard hasn't made you any wiser. Will you never understand that the

mantilla you gave me on our honeymoon warms me more than all the cloaks in— Your teeth are chattering—let me wrap it round *you*.

STEPHEN

No! [*Fending her off*] I am aflame—aflame with anger against the world—publisher, public, and reviewers alike.

MARY

There were fifteen thousand books published last year, dear, in England alone.

STEPHEN

I doubt if there were fifteen—real books I mean. But I was blind and foolish to use up our money in paying the publisher to publish mine—why did you let me?

MARY

You would have gone melancholy mad if I hadn't. But there *must* be *some* sales.

STEPHEN

If only I could get the account out of the publisher; even my threats of legal proceedings produce, you see, no reply.

[*A knock at the door.*]

MARY

Come in!

[*Enter FARMER BURR with a letter.*]

BURR

An express letter, Master! I signed for it.

STEPHEN [*Taking it*]  
Thank you ! My publisher !! [Opening it.]

MARY [*Smiling joyously*]  
Talk of the devil !

BURR  
Excuse me not bringing it up on a tea-tray, but  
Joanna's in a tantrum.

MARY [*Her eyes eagerly on the letter*]  
What has the tantrum to do with the tray ?

BURR  
Well, the trays be in the kitchen, and so be Joanna.  
She's frying sausages like Old Scratch—in a manner of  
speaking. Any answer, Master ?

STEPHEN [*With ecstatic face*]  
No, thank you. Mary, read this !  
[Exit FARMER BURR.]

MARY [*Reading*]  
“ John Skewton, in account with Stephen Trame, Esq.  
‘ The Next Religion.’ Printed 1000 cop——”

STEPHEN [*Eagerly interrupting*]  
And none left !! Truth will out, even in England.

MARY [*Reading*]  
“ Reviewers' copies, 71, author's copies 6, Royalty on  
923 copies at 1s. a copy, 13 taken as 12, £42. 12s.”  
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STEPHEN [*Rapturously*]  
Oh, Mary! [*Takes her hand*] We are saved!

MARY [*Reading on dryly*]  
“Accounts payable six months after statement.”

STEPHEN  
What! [*Peers at paper.*] Oh, but this is absurd!  
I'll go to him at once—he'll surely advance me five  
pounds out of the hundreds I paid him.

MARY  
But you can't walk in this weather. Telephone to  
him from the post office.

STEPHEN  
What a good idea! . . . [*Feeling in pockets.*] Have  
you got twopence?

MARY  
Not a farthing.

STEPHEN  
Well, I don't mind borrowing of Farmer Burr now.  
[*Throws open door.*]

MARY  
Wait! Your scarf!  
[*Gets it and wraps it round his throat.*]

STEPHEN  
Courage, Mary!  
[*Exit excitedly, forgetting to close door.*]



MARY

Courage? [*Falls into a chair.*] When only the success of an anti-Christian book stands between us and starvation. O God!

*[Repressing a sob, she rises, takes off her bonnet, and lifts the typewriter strainingly on to the table. The sound of WILFRED'S laughter turns her head towards the open door in surprise.]*

WILFRED [*From below*]

Ha! Ha! Ha! Caught you, Farmer Burr!

BURR [*Below*]

No, no, Master Wilfred—put down that snowball! You'll smash the clay pipes.

*[A little clatter of smashing pipes is duly heard.]*

WILFRED [*Below*]

Ha! Ha! Ha! You can send daddy the bill. [*He is heard running merrily up the stairs and bursts in, an impetuous schoolboy, far better dressed than his parents, with a smart new overcoat spotted with snow, satchel on shoulder.*] Isn't it jolly, the snow? Why, where's daddy?

MARY

Just gone out, dear. How is it you're so early?

WILFRED

Bonynose—I mean the Headmaster—dismissed our class; we had a new teacher, a smug who couldn't keep discipline. We all want Boggles back.

*[Throws off satchel.]*

MARY  
Boggles ?

WILFRED [*With lofty superiority*]  
*You call him Andrews.*

[*Unbuttons overcoat.*]

MARY  
No, don't take that off—unless it's wet. [*Brushes off  
the dry snow.*] You'll catch cold.

WILFRED  
What ! No fire ?

MARY  
We've been out.

WILFRED  
I call it beastly. And that piano of ours is a jolly  
long time mending ; really there's nothing for a fellow  
to come home *for*.

MARY  
I wish, dear, you wouldn't use those common words.

WILFRED  
Well, not even daddy to talk to—it does give a chap  
the 'ump.

MARY  
Hump, dear. You drop the "h," and I wish you'd  
drop the "u, m, p," too.

WILFRED

Well, Bonynose drops his h's—" 'Old out your 'and," he screams.

MARY [*Alarmed*]

The Headmaster has not been caning you again ?

WILFRED

I *don't* think. Why, he lets me play the harmonium for the hymns. Will the grub be ready soon ?

MARY

Well, you see you're so early, dear. [*Lifts his chin.*] Why, you've cut your lip ! [*He jerks his head away.*] You've been fighting !

WILFRED

Well, I can't let the chaps say Boggles got the sack through daddy's dirty books.

[*A knock at the door.*]

MARY

Yes ?

[*MRS. BURR appears at door with dish of fried sausages.*]

MRS. BURR [*Advancing apologetically*]

Seeing the young gentleman come home before the meal was ready, I thought as a few sausages—

MARY [*Taken aback*]

It's very kind of you, Mrs. Burr, but—

WILFRED [*Alarmed, pulling her dress*]

Oh, but sausages are scrumptious.

[*FARMER BURR rushes in excitedly and nearly overturns the dish.*]

MRS. BURR [*Angrily*]

Gawkim !

BURR [*Ignoring her*]

There's a blooming Bishop to see you !

MARY

A blooming—— ?

BURR

Excuse my language, but 'tis as weak as I can make it when I see blackbeetles in gaiters.

MARY [*Faintly smiling*]

Well, you might have said a blessèd Bishop.

BURR

Not when I see sanctimonious side-whiskers riding in carriages.

MARY

Side-whiskers ?

BURR

And a mothers' meeting kind of old lady with a face like a harvest moon.

MARY [*Dazed*]

It can't be my . . . Mrs. Burr, do you mind giving Master Wilfred the sausages in the kitchen ?

WILFRED

But I want to see the side-whiskers.

MRS. BURR [*Taking WILFRED by one hand and holding the dish in the other*]

Well, it's side-whiskers or sausages—you can't have both.

WILFRED

I did have whiskers once in a sausage.

MRS. BURR [*Leading him out*]

A London sausage, I'll go bail. [*Fiercely*] Silas !  
You'm leaving the shop unguarded !

[*Exit with WILFRED.*]

BURR [*Humorously*]

Good heavens ! And a Bishop about ! Shall I send the blessed blackbeetle up ?

MARY

Yes, but not rudely, please—you must call him “ my lord.”

BURR [*Focosely*]

*My lord !*

[*Exit*]

[*MARY hurriedly tidies STEPHEN'S papers, takes WILFRED'S satchel off chair and puts it in bedroom. A knock at the door.*]

MARY

Come in !

[Enter the BISHOP OF THE SOUDAN, a stern sun-bronzed ecclesiastic, imposing in episcopal costume, with grey side-whiskers, and with earnest eyes that redeem the narrow fanatical forehead. With him is his wife, MRS. MALLING, a stout comfortable old lady with a tawny round face. MARY advances half incredulously to meet them.]

Father ! Mother ! You in England !

[Goes towards them.]

BISHOP

And you in Whitechapel ! [Fends her off.] No Judas kisses ! First tell me, are you still a Christian ?

MARY

Because I'm in Whitechapel ?

BISHOP [*Angrily*]

She prevaricates !

MRS. MALLING

Now, now, petticums, you promised not to bang the tom-tom.

BISHOP [*More angrily*]

Who is banging the tom-tom ? I only ask if——

MRS. MALLING

The idea of Mary being a heathen ! How *are* you dear ? [*Kisses her.*] And how is little Wilfred ?

MARY

Wilfred is quite big now. He's in the—the dining-room. When did you get back from Africa ?

MRS. MALLING

Friday.—And how delightful to see snow after the glare and the mosquitoes !

BISHOP [*In sincere reproof*]

Always forgetting, Claribel, the joy of salvation.

MRS. MALLING

*You* see the Christians, *I* see the crocodiles.

MARY

Has father been making many Christians ?

MRS. MALLING

Yes, and braving many crocodiles. While his clergy were snoring through the hot season, he went up a backwater of the Niger into unexplored cannibal country, all alone.

MARY

That's like my father !

[*She goes and takes his hand, he strokes hers half unconsciously.*]

MRS. MALLING

Yes, he has practically won a new territory for Christ and the British flag.

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BISHOP

Under Providence. Not that I *meant* to enlarge our Empire.

MRS. MALLING

Nor your liver. But you've done both, I'm afraid.

BISHOP

We are in the Lord's hands.

MRS. MALLING

Stuff and nonsense. If you had worn your cholera-belt and changed your wet socks——

MARY

But he's looking all right.

MRS. MALLING

Yes, after the sea-voyage. If we can only stay here! Luckily they're thinking of making him a home Bishop. That was why we hurried back.

BISHOP

Pardon me, Claribel. That was why *you* hurried back. It's Stephen's and Mary's souls that drew me. [*Releases MARY's hands as with stern remembrance.*] Mary, some two years ago you wrote me you were leaving Dymthorpe. Your husband was going into journalism and literature.

MARY

Yes.



BISHOP

Pained as I was to think of his giving up the Lord's work——

MRS. MALLING

We thought he might be bettering himself. [BISHOP glares.] Well, the living *was* very poor.

BISHOP

But now—what do I find ? Scandal, deceit, godlessness—— !

MRS. MALLING

Impecuniosity ! !

BISHOP

Blasphemy ! ! !

[*Produces book.*]

MARY

Stephen's book ? Who sent you that ?

BISHOP

My publisher—John Skewton.

MARY

John Skewton ? Did he publish *your* sermons, too ?

BISHOP

Handsomely.

MARY

How much did you pay him ?

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BISHOP

Eh ?

MRS. MALLING

Handsomely, Mary. Handsomely.

BISHOP

We are not talking of sermons but of Stephen ! *My* son-in-law ! What a tit-bit for the Free-thinkers to get hold of—— !

MRS. MALLING

Or his rivals for the home bishopric !

BISHOP

Only this morning Canon Jenkins, who is a School Manager in Whitechapel, told me they had sacked a teacher for circulating a filthy book by an unfrocked clergyman, called Trame. Fortunately he did not remember a daughter of mine had married a Trame.

MRS. MALLING

Yes, it's lucky we had *ten* daughters.

BISHOP

I rushed off to John Skewton—it was from him I got your address—and besought him to suppress the book, the nature of which he could not have realised. But that wouldn't be fair to the author, he said, and with an obduracy that I did not expect in a Churchman and a subscriber to missions, he insisted I must buy up the edition.

MARY

So it was *you* who bought it up! What for?

BISHOP

For a bonfire, of course.

MARY

Oh no, no—is *that* fair to the author? You must not—you shall not——

BISHOP

Surely a bonfire of books is better than a bonfire of souls——

MRS. MALLING

And its getting into the hands of his rivals.

MARY

But this book—it is written with his heart's blood.

BISHOP

So, according to tradition, are all contracts with the Evil One.

MARY

You don't understand. It is his life.

BISHOP

You mean his damnation.

MARY

No, no. Full of heresies as it is, even blasphemies if

you will, it is also full of noble thoughts. Christ will yet redeem him.

BISHOP

Then you still believe ! Thank God !

MARY

Yes, I believe. But my husband too believes, though it is in some strange glacial God whose love cannot overcome His law ; believes, though his belief is a sword between his soul and mine ; believes, though he is a voice crying in the wilderness. Oh, father, you are a brave man, who have never valued your life when there were souls to be saved, cannot you respect another brave man, who dares to preach here amid street-hooligans as you among savages ?

BISHOP

Respect an atheist ?

MARY

He is *not* an atheist !

BISHOP

A man who mocks at my Master !



MARY

He does *not* mock at our Master.

BISHOP

On every page.

MARY  
Not in a single line.

BISHOP  
You've *read* this blasphemy ?

MARY  
I *wrote* it !

BISHOP [*Overwhelmed*]  
You wrote it !!

MARY  
On this typewriter.

BISHOP  
On this—— !                    [*Seizes it as if to dash it down.*]

MRS. MALLING  
Now, *petsicums*, that's delicate.

BISHOP  
I—I— [*Takes book frenziedly.*] Where is your fire ?  
Why haven't you a fire ?

MARY  
Because of Stephen's belief—he goes cold and hungry ;  
soon he will have no place to lay his head.

MRS. MALLING  
Oh, Mary, you must come to *us*. We're in our old  
rooms off Piccadilly.

BISHOP  
Not with that man !

MARY  
I will not come without him.

BISHOP  
But how can I harbour him ? Think of the scandal.

MARY  
How can I leave him ? He is my husband.

BISHOP  
St. Paul says : “ Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers.”

MARY  
St. Paul says : “ But the greatest of these is Charity.” His eyes are failing—who will look after him ?

MRS. MALLING  
Oh, poor Stephen !

BISHOP  
Let him throw himself upon the Bosom that bled for him—let him recant his blasphemies.

MARY  
They are too new. You must give him time.

BISHOP  
Then do you expect me, a Bishop, to consort publicly with sinners ?

MARY  
Your Master did.

BISHOP  
My Master said : “ I came not to send peace but a sword.” We are here to fight Satan not to feed him.

MARY  
Who asks for your food ? I’d sooner starve. Oh, I hadn’t realised what *your* sort of Christianity—  
[STEPHEN *abruptly opens door and enters—his scarf has worked up uncouthly round his neck.*]

STEPHEN  
My poor Mary ! The publisher is in Paris.

MARY  
He’s a liar. My father saw him this morning.

STEPHEN [*Amazed*]  
Your father ? [*Peering.*] Oh, ah, ah—I wondered at the carriage ! . . . How do you do ?  
[*Extends hand.*]

BISHOP [*Ignoring it and producing book*]  
What have you to say for yourself, sir ?

MRS. MALLING [*Seizing and shaking STEPHEN’S hand*]  
There ! Don’t get angry, Stephen !

BISHOP  
Don’t call him by his Christian name. He has dishonoured it—and us.

STEPHEN

Ah, so *that's* what's brought you.

BISHOP

Yes, sir, *that's* what's brought us. [*Thumps the book.*]  
"The Next Religion," forsooth! You, the nurseling  
of Christ's Hospital, the pet pupil, have the blas-  
phemous audacity to teach the next religion.

STEPHEN

And pray, my lord, what are *you* teaching in Africa?

BISHOP

The Gospel, sir, of course.

STEPHEN

Well, isn't *that* the next religion—in Africa?

BISHOP

I sincerely hope so—though these miserable Moham-  
medan missionaries are fighting every inch of the  
ground. And they got in a thousand years ahead  
of——

MARY

You miss Stephen's point, father. He means why  
should he not missionarise here as you do in Africa?

BISHOP

What! Are we savages?



STEPHEN

Yes, my lord ! Precisely what you are in *my* eyes. As sunk in superstitions, in fetishes and taboos as the blackest African.

BISHOP [*Smiling loftily*]

At least we're not cannibals.

STEPHEN

Not in the flesh—I'm not so sure as to the spirit.

MARY

This is nonsense, Stephen. Let me fix your scarf.

STEPHEN

I'm too hot. [*Pulls it off and throws it down.*] Your father ought to know that the cannibals of his diocese only eat human flesh to acquire the virtues of the victim ; it's not a mere meal, it's a sacrament—as solemn to them as——

MARY

Oh hush, Stephen !

BISHOP

You dare suggest—— !

STEPHEN

Your own black proselyte, the Director of the Niger Delta Mission, confessed at the Congress of Races here in London how uneasy he feels when he has to say to converted cannibals : “ Take, eat, this is My body ! ”

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BISHOP

Tell that to the Roman idolaters—you know very well that *our* Twenty-Eighth Article——

STEPHEN

Yes, Tweedledum and Tweedledee.

BISHOP

Oh, this is too horrible. While we sweat and fever in the tropics to wrestle with Islam and iniquity, infidelity ramps and rages at home.

MARY

Then why don't you stay at *home*, father ?

MRS. MALLING

That's what *I* say, Mary—cholera, crocodiles, white ants—— [Grumbles on.]

BISHOP

There are three hundred millions in Africa, Mary, perishing for want of light. Three hundred millions. The number weighs on me as I go to sleep, and when I open my eyes, my lips murmur, "Three hundred millions."

MARY

Well, father, three millions is more than any *one* man can convert—and that number of heathens you'll find easily enough in England. The sights one sees in Whitechapel alone !

STEPHEN  
Or Piccadilly.

BISHOP  
I know, Mary, that the devil does not neglect England. It is thoughts like these, Claribel, that reconcile me to the home bishopric. But wherever the Lord calls His servant I will go.

MRS. MALLING  
Well, I hope the Lord will call you where *I* can get servants.

MARY  
Servants, mother ? With all those millions of tame natives ?

MRS. MALLING  
Your father won't have one in the house.

BISHOP  
Don't make me out a tyrant ! You know they're all thieves and liars.

MRS. MALLING  
Yes, I don't know which are worse—the Christians or the crocodiles.

STEPHEN  
Ha ! Ha ! Ha ! Ha ! Ha !

BISHOP [*In dignified rebuke*]  
To me, sir, that seems a *sad* state of things.

STEPHEN

And to me, my lord, a *mad* one. You make millions of Christians and they're all thieves and liars.

BISHOP

We—we—we can't raise them in one generation.

STEPHEN [*Vehemently*]

No, but we can lower them. That's what we *do*. Destroy all their race-pride and traditions and local loyalties and moral standards, corrupt their physique with gin and their innocence with clothes, and teach them to call the whole past of their people "debbil-debbil."

BISHOP

It *is* debbil-debbil—and our Lord died to save them from it.

STEPHEN

Well, it has taken nineteen hundred years for the news to reach them.

BISHOP

The more reason then we should speed up salvation.

MARY

Father, you don't mean that all the generations in between were lost!

BISHOP

If they were saved, where would be the need of *us*?

STEPHEN  
Hear, hear !

MARY  
But how *could* they believe ? They were ignorant !

BISHOP  
Ignorance is no excuse.

STEPHEN  
It is the only one I can allow *you*. And for spreading such libels on the universe you are the hero of the collecting-box. And every cottage home in England has its little bookshelf stuffed full of you and your likes. The grotesque vanity of it ! These village brains exporting their narrow creed to save the world.

BISHOP  
Come, Claribel. Ephraim is joined to idols.

MRS. MALLING  
But I want to see Wilfred.

BISHOP  
Let them alone, I say. They are dead to us.

MRS. MALLING  
Don't be silly, petsicums.

BISHOP [*Thunderously*]  
Woman, hold your peace !

MRS. MALLING

Now he's going up the Niger. Nobody can hold him now. I'll come to-morrow.

BISHOP

You will *not* come to-morrow.

MRS. MALLING

Don't bang your tom-toms at *me*.

BISHOP

I forbid it !

[*Opens door.*]

MARY

Go, mother, and I won't let you in to-morrow. You shan't quarrel on my account.

BISHOP

I'm *not* quarrelling. I'm commanding.

MRS. MALLING

Hoity-toity ! I'm not your chaplain. I wish I hadn't ordered my Court gown !

BISHOP

You mean you won't go with me to my sovereign ?

MRS. MALLING

I mean I could have sent Mary a cheque.

III

BISHOP { [*Speaking*] } You shall do nothing of——  
STEPHEN { *all* } We are not beggars——  
MARY { [*together*] } Oh no, mother, you——  
[FARMER BURR *appears at the open door. He carries a hat-box.*]

BURR [*Respectfully*]  
My lord!

BISHOP  
What's this?

BURR [*Coming forward*]  
I've brought your lordship a trophy of Christian love.

BISHOP [*Taking it wonderingly*]  
A trophy of Christian love?

BURR  
In a manner of speaking.

BISHOP [*Drawing out the battered high hat, grows pale with passion*]  
What do you mean, sir? How dare you!  
[*Dashes hat on ground.*]

MARY [*Reproachfully*]  
Farmer Burr!

BURR [*Picking up hat, sticking his finger in hole and twisting it round*]  
Holey! Ha! Ha! Ha!

BISHOP [*Bashing in hat-box with his foot*]  
Claribel, if you had come at once, I should not have had to keep this command over my temper.

[*Drags her out and bangs door.*]

BURR [*Twirling hat*]  
Ha ! Ha ! Ha ! Ha ! Ha !

MARY  
Hush, Mr. Burr, I told you not to be rude. That was my father.

BURR [*Suddenly frozen*]  
Well, I'm—blest ! [*Recovering.*] But you can't deny this *be* a trophy of Christian love.

MARY  
I do deny it—the blacksmith was a religious maniac.

BURR  
That's what *I* tell him.

STEPHEN [*Puzzled*]  
You *tell* him ?

BURR  
In my letters. [*Picks up and straightens out the hat-box.*]

MARY  
You *write* to Eli Oakshott ? Why ?

BURR  
To convert him, of course. I sent him “The Next Religion.”



MARY

You know you'll never convert him and you are very silly to provoke him.

STEPHEN

And it certainly won't conduce to his conversion to call him a maniac.

BURR

I'm sorry, Master. [*Puts hat in box.*] But I did reckon your book would take the flukes out of his brain, in a manner of speaking.

MARY

Nonsense, Farmer Burr, you will only scandalise the village. I hope he doesn't answer you according to your folly.

BURR [*Meekly*]

No, ma'am. Nothing but silly texts like "Flee from the wrath to come" and "They shall lick the dust like a serpent," all written in red ink.

MARY

Let sleeping dogs lie. And throw that hat into the dustbin.

BURR [*Outraged*]

Into the dustbin, ma'am ?

MARY

That's all it's fit for.

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BURR

Ashes to ashes and dust to dust. But this hat be a martyr's crown in a manner of speaking—a sign and symbol of persecution.

STEPHEN

The very reason for the dustbin. Let the *old* religions brood over the past—the next looks to the future.

BURR

I see, Master. Then I'll give it to your boy for a cockshy. 'Twill save my pipes.

MARY

Ah yes, he broke some, didn't he ? Put it down to our account.

BURR

Oh, 'twas only two churchwardens crossed. Look on the smashed cross as a sign and symbol of Christianity and I can rejoice in the lad's being one of us—in a manner of speaking.

MARY

Oh no! no! You must not say such things. And never, please, do anything to upset Master Wilfred's faith.

BURR

Never fear, ma'am, 'tis for his faither to do that.

STEPHEN [*Uneasily*]  
Your shop must be wanting you, surely.

BURR  
Yes, Master. [*Takes out little notebook.*] Then I'll mark you down thrippence for the pipes and your lad can stick the pieces in a snow-man's mouth with this old goss [*taps box*] on top!

MARY  
Thank you—and how much do we owe you altogether?

BURR [*Putting book away hurriedly*]  
Oh, it bain't the price of a pedigree bull!

MARY  
But I'm sure you're needing it. I never see many customers in the shop.

BURR [*Shifting hat-box uneasily*]  
Lots come in for a light.

MARY  
That's not business.

BURR  
It sometimes leads to it—when Joanna's around.

MARY  
Well, may I ask how much you've taken this morning?

BURR

I—I— [*Twirls hat-box*] I've sold two pipes.

MARY

Yes—as we've sold a thousand books. I'm afraid your little savings won't last much longer.

BURR

Oh well, the rent bain't due till Christmas. And we've got to go anyway then.

MARY

Go ?

BURR

Oh, I didn't mean to blab—my tongue wants a sheep-dog. [*Looks anxiously at STEPHEN.*]

STEPHEN [*Raising his head*]

You've got to go ?

BURR

Well, you see, Master, it's the big 'baccy firm, Sampson and Steinberg, that stocks thousands of these here little shops on spec, and I'm only the agent in a manner of speaking. And they say I've got to run a 'baccy-shop not a book-shop.

STEPHEN [*Puzzled*]

A book-shop ?

MARY

You mean you *will* display my husband's book in your window.

BURR

It's my big placard they object to most—"A Religion Without Smoke." You see, ma'am, that blooming Canon Jenkins—I mean that blessed Canon Jenkins—went to them and complained I was spreading the gospel of antichrist.

MARY

But aren't Sampson and Steinberg Jews ?

BURR

In a manner of speaking.

MARY

Well, but Jews don't worship Christ.

BURR

No, ma'am, but they worships Christians.

STEPHEN

But why didn't you promise to remove the book and the placard ?

BURR

Oh, Master !

[*Exit in silent dignity.*]

MARY

Now you've ruined *him* too !

STEPHEN

He was pining to get back to the land, Mrs. Burr says.

MARY

But what land has he to get back to? Unless you mean his grave.

STEPHEN

He'd be happier as a shepherd.

MARY

His only happiness is to be near you. You've hypnotised what little brain he has. [*The windows shake in the swelling storm and snowflakes drive past quickly.*] Oh, but what am I babbling about when winter is howling at the door? What is to become of us all? Even our chance of sponging on these poor people will be over at Christmas. [*She goes to the door.*]

STEPHEN [*Springing up*]

You can't go out in this storm.

MARY

You can't be without food. [*Turns door-handle.*]

STEPHEN [*Catching hold of her cloak*]

You shan't pawn it—you and the boy must go to your father.

MARY

How *can* I—after defying him?

STEPHEN

*I defied him—not you !*

MARY

Before you came—we had a scene.

STEPHEN

You defended me ?

MARY

Of course not. But I couldn't have him call you an atheist.

STEPHEN

Dear Mary—[*Takes her hand*—you are broadening.

MARY [*Snatching her hand away*]

No, I am not. It's father that must have narrowed—cut off from civilised thought. He is a hero and I respect him—but I couldn't live with him.

STEPHEN

Well, *some* of your sisters live in England.

MARY

Only the two who are married to curates—and they've both got large families.

STEPHEN

But you could take your typewriter with you—work *must* turn up.

MARY

Every meal would be spiced with sniffs at my godless spouse—their food would choke me. Besides, what would become of *you* ?

STEPHEN

I shall manage.

MARY

So you said when you dragged us from Dymthorpe.

STEPHEN

There are forty-two pounds twelve.

MARY

In six months—or six centuries.

STEPHEN

In either case I shall be all right.

MARY

I have no patience with you. One would think you believed in a Providence after all.

STEPHEN

I believe in my book. All those thousand seeds flowering !

MARY

Those thousand seeds ! Oh, my poor Stephen—flaring, not flowering.



STEPHEN [*Dazed*]  
Flaring ?

MARY  
Like stubble—it was father who bought them up to  
make a bonfire.

STEPHEN [*Tragically*]  
WHAT ! [*Pulls out publisher's account.*]

MARY  
He told me so. Father never lies.

STEPHEN  
But this is worse than lying—it is criminal.

MARY  
Surely the purchaser of a book can do what he likes  
with it.

STEPHEN  
No he can't. He dare not destroy my work.

MARY  
There's always the copy in the British Museum.

STEPHEN [*Eagerly*]  
Yes, and at Oxford and Cambridge ! And there were  
seven copies sold on the day of publication—don't you  
remember ? Your father couldn't have bought those.

MARY

No, but in all probability Farmer Burr did.

STEPHEN

An auspicious omen ! It's the farmer that plants the seeds.

MARY

He isn't a farmer, he's a tobacconist—it'll end in smoke—that's the real omen—the smoke of the bonfire.

STEPHEN

No !! Seven seeds are saved from the burning. They will take root, they will germinate. Do you realise, Mary, the power of a little seed ? To undermine buildings, to throw off the weight of earth, to shoot up living branches towards the sky ? And I have *seven* seeds scattered.

MARY [*Sceptically*]

What faith !

STEPHEN

Yes—that is my faith.

MARY

It seems to me as insane as Eli Oakshott's.

STEPHEN

On the contrary, it rests on reason—on the fact that a spiritual truth is indestructible.

MARY  
If yours *is* a truth.

STEPHEN  
It *is*—by every law of earth and heaven it *is*.

MARY  
Well, anyhow, *you're* not indestructible.

STEPHEN  
What does *that* matter ?

MARY  
A great deal. Before the seed has flowered you'll be frozen.

STEPHEN  
What does *that* matter ?

MARY  
And if the seed *never* flowers ?

STEPHEN  
It *will* flower. [*The windows rattle again.*]

MARY  
Oh, my poor Stephen ! [*She goes to a window that shows only a blinding whirl of snowflakes.*] Look at these endless people, like white regiments marching and counter-marching, urged along by affairs that even this storm cannot interrupt ; look how the snow-cruled umbrellas scurry and swirl, each covering a head full of

its own business; look at the packed omnibuses with their struggling spotty-white horses, the ugly, muffled-up crowds fighting for the tramcars, the hurrying, jostling traffic. And you think that in this mad rush and roar there is room for the still small voice of Stephen Trame!

STEPHEN

Yes! Beneath all the roar and rush, there is an emptiness, a spiritual hunger. Their old creeds fade. They *must* listen to me.

MARY

I tell you, Stephen, that compared to you Eli Oakshott is sane and sober. There are moments when, coming home heart-sick from the vain quest for work, I stand at this window, gazing at this grim street as a little bird gazes at the serpent that is to swallow it up. In those moments I feel that we count as little in this great inexorable London as the sparrows that must find food or freeze. And in those moments your striving to alter the world's religion appears to me so puny, so pitiful, so hopeless, that I cry over you more as over a baby than a blasphemer.

STEPHEN

Then it is you who have lost faith, not I. Your religion claims that the very hairs of our heads are numbered.

MARY [*Staring into vacancy*]

Did I ever *have* faith? I lived so sheltered, so

protected. Was my faith more than words ? Now, when I have lived for months with the naked realities, with the pitiless earth and the deaf sky, fighting to keep off hunger and cold, and seeing Wilfy growing coarser and coarser in that dreadful school, pray as I will to a Power above, I feel as if only I—this frail body—stood between my boy and the abyss, and that if my foot should fail, we shall all go down into that human underworld where the sound of children weeping is the worst horror of the darkness.

STEPHEN

You have not really lost faith, Mary—you are gaining it—faith in the true Power that is not only above us but in us and around us, fulfilling Its boundless Being in that eternal and universal order which is our security.

MARY [*Shivering*]

Such a God ! A glacier, rather. A God who would not move a finger to save me from seeking our bread on that street—among the other women.

STEPHEN

Hush, Mary ! What a thought !

MARY

You are outraged. So was I the first time the thought burnt through me. But one gets used to strange thoughts when one is at bay. And some day—who knows ?—when Wilfy is crying for bread——

STEPHEN

For God's sake, Mary, pull yourself together. Remember you are a Christian.

MARY

I am a mother !

STEPHEN

This is madness !

MARY

Yes it *is*, it *is* madness. The blacksmith and I are a pair. And you—you make the trinity. We are all mad together. Ha ! Ha ! Ha ! Oh, my God, forgive these horrible thoughts, these dreadful doubts. Help us, oh, help us ! [*Falls on her knees.*] Send us deliverance from these evil straits, grant us——

STEPHEN

What are you praying for ?

MARY [*Fiercely*]

For bread.

STEPHEN

That is just as mad.

MARY [*Frenziedly*]

Grant us this day our daily bread—why is not my faith as sane as yours ?

STEPHEN

Because mine rests on reason ; yours contradicts it. If bread could come by prayer, why trouble to plough ? I thought you were learning that this is a universe of law.

MARY

The Power that made the law can break it.

STEPHEN

That would break up the universe. We must have stability.

MARY

Yes—the confidence of being in God's hands.

STEPHEN

God's hands uphold the law, not the individual. What of the sparrows that must find food or freeze ?

MARY

I blasphemed. Not a sparrow falls to the ground without our Father. [*Folds her hands again in prayer.*] O Father, which art in heaven, look down upon us, Thy suffering children, send us a redeemer, send us a redeemer——

STRANGER [*Outside, in a great hearty voice with a somewhat Scotch accent*]

Thank you, I'll find my way.

[*A masterful knock at the door. MARY looks up transfixed.*]

STEPHEN [*Murmuring to MARY*]  
Who's that ?

STRANGER [*Outside*]  
Can I come in ?

STEPHEN [*Whispering*]  
Get up, Mary. [*She remains dazed with ecstasy—he helps her to her feet.*] Yes, come in !

[*Enter a burly white-haired presence in a fur overcoat, overflowing with geniality and the sense of power. The whole atmosphere instantly changes to sunniness and security. MARY remains tranced, not speaking for some time.*]

STRANGER [*Inquiringly*]  
Mr. Stephen Trame, author of "The Next Religion" ?

STEPHEN [*Rather dazed*]  
Yes—and my wife.

STRANGER  
Sir ! Ma'am ! [*Shoots out a hand to each.*] This is the proudest moment of my life. [*Pumps at their hands.*] You see before you a man as free from superstition as his smelted iron from slag ; a man absolutely without prejudice—a man who inherited neither his opinions nor his millions but has made both by the sweat of his brow. Can you wonder if your book fell on me as seed on fruitful soil ?



STEPHEN [*Still more dazed, murmurs*]

Seed ?

[*MARY's hand drops the STRANGER's ; her ecstasy is shot with bewilderment.*]

STRANGER

Sir, I have the honour to beg you to enrol me as your first disciple !

[*Pumps again at STEPHEN's hand.*]

STEPHEN

I fear I can't do *that*.

STRANGER [*Disconcerted, dropping his hand*]

And why not ?

STEPHEN

There's a farmer and a school-teacher before you.

STRANGER [*Reassured*]

Oh, *that* calibre ! *They* don't count ; they can't scrap Christianity and limber up your religion for quick firing, eh ?

STEPHEN

They do their best.

STRANGER

Ha ! Ha ! Ha ! And their best leaves you over a Whitechapel tobacconist's. No, sir ! The next religion has got to hum, as the Yankees say. [*Takes both their hands again.*] To-night you sleep in Belgravia, the honoured guests of Sir Thomas McFadden.

MARY  
Sir Thomas McFadden ?

SIR THOMAS  
Yes, ma'am.

STEPHEN  
Not the inventor of guns—Hal's father ?

SIR THOMAS [*Dropping their hands*]  
Don't mention that scallawag !

STEPHEN  
Why, what has he done ?

SIR THOMAS  
Done, sir ? Haven't you heard ?

STEPHEN  
No, he never even acknowledged my book.

SIR THOMAS  
I don't wonder ! After the thousands I've spent to make a decent modern man of him ! Takes advantage of my absence in the States to bring my grey hairs in sorrow to the grave.

MARY [*Half to herself*]  
I felt something shifty about him.

STEPHEN  
But what has he *done* ?

SIR THOMAS  
He's become a Christian !!

STEPHEN  
Is it possible ? . . . But he was always such a sophist.

SIR THOMAS  
Oh, I knew that if he married that hymn-screeching Helen he would be a lost soul. First the cat gets him to marry in a church, then she gets the baby baptized, and then *facilis descensus*—down he slides into the pit.

STEPHEN  
I think it only fair, Sir Thomas, to tell you that *my* wife—

MARY  
Oh, leave *me* out, *please*. I agree with Sir Thomas. A man who only becomes a Christian to please his wife is contemptible.

SIR THOMAS  
Contemptible isn't the word for him, ma'am. *Every* Christian is *that*. But look at the advantages Hal has had—the chance of growing up as free from prejudice as his father. However, he'll have to pay dearly for pew. Three millions.

MARY [*Puzzled*]  
Three millions ?

SIR THOMAS

Three million pounds, ma'am. Fifteen million dollars, in Yankee lingo. That's the fortune I've cut him out of. And it would have been bigger if I hadn't had to sell my guns to *Christian* Governments; millions they've done me out of. Ah, ma'am, if I could have my life over again, I'd deal very differently, I assure you.

STEPHEN

I hope you wouldn't make guns at all.

SIR THOMAS

You bet your boots I wouldn't; there's much more money in motor-cars. However, with three millions we can give Truth a pretty good leg-up, eh? That miserable Popish Cathedral in Westminster only cost one million.

STEPHEN

But I hope Hal won't starve.

SIR THOMAS

Starve? No such luck! That Christian cat of his has more dollars than I—Munro's millinery, you know. And now the scoundrel has started practising his profession and earning thousands; just to spite me. However, I've no prejudice against him—I shall always be grateful to him for sending me your book, though when the New York Custom House charged me a dollar on it, I cussed like a Christian.

[Smiles.]

STEPHEN

Was it *Hal* sent it ?

SIR THOMAS

It was, sir. With your inscription to *him* in it. Ha! Ha! Ha! No doubt the cat wouldn't let him have it in the house. "In return for the shilling you cut me off with," he added on sarcastically. A shilling, indeed! Sir, as I told your publisher just now, when he gave me your address, all the Church plate in the world couldn't pay for that book—though I'd like to see it all melted down. Ha! Ha! Ha! [*Beams, and begins looking through his pocket-book.*] My precious offspring little thought he was sending me a mission for my declining years.

MARY [*Dazedly*]

Do I understand, Sir Thomas, you wish to devote your fortune to my husband's religion ?

SIR THOMAS

A double-acting steam-hammer couldn't have hit the rivet more precisely. I've got nobody to leave it to—I can't take it *with* me—and I want to enjoy seeing it work before I fizzle out in the crematorium. *I* had to work for *it*—now let it work for *me*. Ha! Ha! Ha!

MARY

You mean, work at remoulding Christianity ?

SIR THOMAS

*Remoulding*, ma'am ? [*Searching in his pockets.*] If you'll come to my blast-furnaces you'll see that to run into new moulds things have got to have some *substance* to 'em. [*Looking through his pocket-book again.*] Dear me ! What *can* I have done with it ?

MARY

Have you lost anything ?

SIR THOMAS

It must have got among my business papers. Will you excuse me while I look through the hand-bags in my car ?

STEPHEN

Can't *I* bring them up ? [*Going politely to door.*]

SIR THOMAS [*Hurrying in front of him*]

I couldn't dream of it, Master. You don't mind my calling you Master ?

[*Exit.*]

MARY [*With shining eyes*]

O Stephen ! How happy you must be !

STEPHEN

Happy ? When the devil takes me up to a high mountain——

MARY [*Murmurs*]

The devil ?

STEPHEN

And shows me all the kingdoms of the world ?

MARY [*Alarmed*]

You are not going to *refuse* his millions ?

STEPHEN

How can I accept them ? The man doesn't understand the next religion one iota.

MARY

How can you say that ?

STEPHEN

Didn't you hear the allusion to the Roman Catholic Cathedral ? His only idea is to build buildings, with paid priests no doubt, and a ritual that will run as mechanically as his steam-rollers.

MARY

But how else *can* a religion—— ?

STEPHEN

And you have typed my book !

MARY

If *I* haven't understood it, how do you expect the world—— ?

STEPHEN

Haven't I devoted two chapters to show the corruptions that creep into all religions, and another chapter

to show how alone they can be avoided ? The Temple must be of the spirit, not built by hands ; even the religion must be more of a groping than a grasping, it can't be crystallised to suit a congregation, it must be for the individual soul. Paid priests would bring back hypocrisy or—worse !—dogmas ; cast-iron dogmas appropriately blasted in Sir Thomas's furnaces and run into his moulds. A pretty reform !

MARY

But you believe *something*.

STEPHEN

Yes—something flowing, like life, not fixed—like death : the continuous inspiration of the Holy Ghost broadening from age to age with the growth of knowledge and civilisation.

MARY

But even if the *faith* is not fixed, the *believers* must be. They must be organised round a centre and they must stand shoulder to shoulder, if only against persecution. Think of poor Andrews.

STEPHEN

And who is to guarantee the believers won't persecute in *their* turn ?

MARY

That is your look-out. Keep the Holy Ghost *alive* in them. But there must be a Church Visible. Organised,



too, they can do some of that swamp-cleaning you talk of. Single scavengers with brooms won't do much—you want gangs and steam-dredgers.

STEPHEN [*Stubbornly*]  
*Works* can be organised, not faith.

MARY  
Then go ahead with the works. And *you* are responsible for Andrews—you can give him a post, save his wife and child.

STEPHEN  
He wouldn't want to be saved—at the cost of the religion.

MARY  
But he'd want your book saved—it would rise like a phoenix from father's bonfire. You could publish tens of thousands in every language, scatter your seeds through the world.

STEPHEN  
There's something in *that*.

MARY  
And Andrews is a born preacher. You owe him a better pulpit than Victoria Park.

STEPHEN  
But *I* should be the preacher.

MARY

Yes, but you will want assistants. And there'll be your Training College for your clergy.

STEPHEN [*In horror*]

Build up a new priestcraft ?

MARY

You can't organise the believers without a building, and the building must have ministers as much as charwomen and doorkeepers.

STEPHEN

Paid priests are the curse of religion. Every man must be his own priest.

MARY

And a pretty job the amateurs will make of it. I know those sects with their drab decorations and dull orations. Think of those weird Dissenters at Dymthorpe with their little tin chapel—you never went in or you'd know what inspired greengrocers are like. Surely religion needs the noblest words and the finest music.

STEPHEN

If the words are *true* !

MARY

That is *your* affair. No, my dear Stephen, the fact is, you haven't thought out the next religion one bit.

STEPHEN

Not thought it out ? With a book of four hundred pages !

MARY

Pure theory ! When it comes to practice you're as much a baby in religion as in business. Because institutions grow corrupt if not looked after, you cry, "Away with institutions !" As well say, "Away with families—there's so much sickness it's healthier not to be born."

STEPHEN

But even granting institutions are unavoidable, I'm not going to found my Church on guns.

MARY

What finer foundation ? "And they shall beat their swords into ploughshares"—that's holy prophecy.

STEPHEN

You're as terrible a sophist as Hal himself. But I'll be no party to disinheriting him.

MARY

He was disinherited before Sir Thomas ever heard of you.

STEPHEN

Anyhow I won't be backed by a gunmaker.

MARY

Weren't the Nobel prizes founded by the inventor of dynamite? Sir Thomas made guns as he'd make mowing machines. What would you have him do with his money? The poor man perhaps wishes to atone for having made *man*-mowing machines. And you—a religious teacher— Here he comes. Better let *me* arrange with him.

STEPHEN [*Dazed*]

You?

[*Enter SIR THOMAS, flourishing a cheque; he hands it to STEPHEN.*]

SIR THOMAS

There, Master! That's for the first expenses.

STEPHEN

Ten thousand pounds! Oh, but this is too——

MARY

Give it to me, Stephen, and I'll open an account with it. [*Takes it from him.*] Oh, just sign it on the back. [*She brings the pen and ink from the mantelpiece and he signs dazedly.*] And how, Sir Thomas, do you wish this expended?

SIR THOMAS

Well, what I figured was half of it for your husband's first year's salary as general organiser——

STEPHEN [*In horror*]

No! No!

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SIR THOMAS [*In apologetic misunderstanding*]  
Well, call it High Priest—I've no prejudices. My  
tongue fires off business words—that's all.

MARY [*Hastily*]  
And the other five thousand ?

SIR THOMAS  
Well, you see, I calculated that a Temple tip-top  
enough to wipe out that shrine of superstition in  
Westminster would take years. So while the archi-  
tects and artists and painters and paperhangers are  
planning and perspiring—and we'll get all the eighty-  
ton talent in Europe, you bet—I concluded we had  
best buy up an old church or hall to start our services  
slap-bang. I've got my eye on a workmanlike little  
place in a commanding position with a ten-year lease—  
it was in the Baptist line before but I'm a man without  
prejudices. And if your husband will come right along  
with me and look at it——

MARY  
Yes—yes—go, Stephen. [*She picks up his scarf.*]

SIR THOMAS [*Intervening*]  
Allow me, Master.  
[*Takes off his fur coat and puts it reverently round*  
STEPHEN.]

STEPHEN [*Resisting*]  
But what will you do ?  
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SIR THOMAS

Oh, there's always a coat in the car. There! Makes you look *twice* the prophet. Come along, Master, good-bye, Mrs. Trame—this is a great day in history!

[*As they near the door it flies open.*]

WILFRED [*Bursting in*]

Where's my satchel?

SIR THOMAS [*Catching him in his arms*]

And who's this?

[*WILFRED hangs his head, surprised into bashful silence.*]

STEPHEN

That's my little boy.

SIR THOMAS [*Lifting up WILFRED's chin*]

What a bright little chap! We'll bring him up to follow his father in the Temple. Good-bye, little High Priest. [*Exeunt SIR THOMAS and STEPHEN.*]

MARY [*Hoarsely, as the door closes*]

No! No! [*She snatches WILFRED to her breast.*] Oh, Wilfy, what have I done? What have I done? But it was for your sake, dear, for your sake and your father's!

[*She bursts into a fit of sobbing over the bewildered WILFRED as the Curtain falls.*]

### Act III

*An October afternoon nearly ten years later. The vestry of St. Thomas's Temple, a spacious, handsome, brand-new room, with coloured windows in which Mazzini, Emerson, and Swinburne appear like saints, and brand-new carved oaken presses for the clerical robes, and brand-new oaken chairs, and all along the wall at back a great table completely covered by a brand-new richly dyed cloth, reaching to the ground, on which stand unlit many tall wax candles in newly wrought golden candlesticks. A perpetually lit taper burns before a portrait of SIR THOMAS. There is a door R. down stage, which swings towards the Cathedral in opening, and a door L. in the middle of the wall, giving on the street and swinging towards the vestry, but now locked and bolted. SILAS BURR, the Sacristan, in an imposing gown of blue with silver spots and carrying a great staff of office, stands by the table looking towards door R. His hair and beard are sprinkled with grey and his face like that of all the characters bears marks of the passage of ten years. As the curtain rises, there comes from the Temple the singing of "Amen—Amen—Amen" in long-drawn fugal melody to the accompaniment of the organ, and ere the last "Amen" dies away BURR throws open door R. and there enters from the Temple a procession of youths in golden mantles bearing palms, each youth alternating with a maiden in white carrying Madonna lilies. BURR goes back to the great table and the procession moves across front of stage to L., then curves round towards*

*the table and as each member passes BURR, he or she gives him the palms or lilies and he lays them between the candlesticks ; the procession then winds round to the door of entry and goes out, the organ still playing the Finale. At the rear of the procession enters STEPHEN, now a white-bearded prophetic figure in ample and flowing robes of creamy satin, with a long train borne by WILFRED, now a youth of eighteen or so, and ANDREWS, now in maturer manhood. Both WILFRED and ANDREWS wear gold fillets on their heads and Greek togas. These three figures do not curve round with the procession, but STEPHEN, who has now discarded spectacles, being blind, leads the way with firm step to a chair and sits on it. Then, while WILFRED kneels by his side lovingly, and he holds and smooths WILFRED'S hand, ANDREWS goes to a press and gets a purple robe which he brings back on his arm. By this time the procession has gone back to the Temple, BURR closes the door, and the organ winds up the Finale.*

WILFRED [*His face shining with enthusiasm*]  
Well, father, didn't the Dedication go splendidly ?

STEPHEN  
Thanks to your music, my dear Wilfred.

ANDREWS  
Oh, Master, but if you could have *seen* it all .

STEPHEN  
I did see it all, dear Andrews, with my inner eye.



Nay, I almost think that being blind made me realise all the wonder and holiness of it more than if I had been distracted by the sight of the ladies' bonnets or the men's neckties. I saw only the souls—the souls united in the divine ecstasy of consecrating this Temple of the future.

BURR

Ay, Master, and such thousands of souls and all their faces wet as you pronounced the Benediction. Do you know I had to bolt yon door against the crowd in the street—they would have invaded the vestry. Ah, if only Eli Oakshott could have seen it!

WILFRED [*Smiling*]

You've still got the blacksmith on the brain.

BURR

Well, didn't he *hammer* himself on my brain, in a manner of speaking? [*At door R., opening it.*] Shall I tell you, Master, when the five minutes are up?

ANDREWS

Ten minutes this morning, Burr, for the silent communion with the Infinite. We must mark the day.

WILFRED

And give father a little time to rest and meditate his sermon.

STEPHEN

My sermon needs no meditation. The True Immor-

tality is a theme that sets all my blood aglow. Ah, friend Burr, if only *he* could have seen it all!

BURR

You mean Sir Thomas.

[*Sighs as he goes into the Temple.*]

STEPHEN

Yes, that is the man who should be in all our minds to-day—our great Founder; not a crack-brained blacksmith. Fortunately my memorial sermon will bring him back to us all.

ANDREWS

The name of our Temple surely does that.

STEPHEN

Words grow so meaningless. Thousands will talk of St. Thomas's with no grateful vision of that large genial figure.

WILFRED

Does that matter, father? Why should we want to live on in people's memories any more than in a future world? Enough that Sir Thomas lives on in all the high thoughts and deeds inspired by this holy building.

STEPHEN [*Playfully pinching his ear*]

My successor anticipates my sermon. Would he like to preach it instead of me? [*WILFRED shudders.*] Well, you'll have to some day.

WILFRED [*Rising*]

Don't, father. Andrews is waiting with your pulpit robe.

ANDREWS [*Smiling*]

And it's rather large for Wilfred.

STEPHEN [*Smiling*]

And besides, Wilfred will want something more decorative.

WILFRED

Oh no, father. We must keep to a tradition.

STEPHEN

I'm only jesting. Really, Wilfred, you've quite converted me to the value of decoration and symbolism. [*They slowly take off his Dedication robe.*] Changing into my ordinary robe now—like the choir putting away their palms and lilies—how well it symbolises the fact that St. Thomas's is now consecrated and the plain everyday work must begin. Not to mention that in ascending the pulpit I should probably have tripped over that train.

WILFRED [*As they put the purple robe on him*]

Hadn't we better lead you, in any case?

STEPHEN

*Lead* me? When I know every inch of my new Temple as though I had never preached anywhere else! How proudly and thankfully I've paced every

corridor, every stairway. Give me the Consecration robe, I will put it away myself. [*Walks firmly to an oaken press and hangs it up.*] You see!

ANDREWS

Then we will leave you.

STEPHEN

Let Wilfred stay with me.

[*Feels for WILFRED's hand and holds it.*]

WILFRED [*To ANDREWS*]

Then will you see that the organist starts my Requiem the moment father comes in?

ANDREWS

You mean "Rejoice, the righteous cannot die."

WILFRED

Yes—the prelude to his sermon.

ANDREWS [*Going into the Temple*]

I'll arrange a signal.

WILFRED

Thank you, Boggles.

[*Exit ANDREWS.*]

STEPHEN

And thank *you*, my dear son. [*Kisses him.*] Your jubilant music will lift me to the pulpit.

WILFRED

Dear father ! Now at last your religion is built on a rock. This glorious Temple guarantees permanence.

STEPHEN

No. *You* guarantee that.

WILFRED

I sometimes tremble at the responsibility, far off though it is.

STEPHEN

Do not tremble. [*Lays his hand on WILFRED's head.*] I say to you, as Moses said to Joshua, be strong and of a good courage.

WILFRED

But perhaps Andrews would make a stronger successor.

STEPHEN [*Uneasily*]

Andrews ? You don't think he was jealous in saying the robe was too large for you ?

WILFRED

Oh no ! He's quite satisfied with his position as head of the Training College. Still the robe *would* fit him better.

STEPHEN

Well, you've time to grow—like our religion. You won't be always eighteen. Oh dear ! [*Snaps fingers.*]

WILFRED  
What is it ?

STEPHEN  
I left those cables in my Consecration robe.

WILFRED [*Going to the oaken press*]  
What do you want with them ? You can't read them.

STEPHEN  
No, but I can finger them as I preach—my pores can suck in their electric stimulus. Ah ! [*Clutches the sheaf of cables from WILFRED'S hand as a miser clutches bank-notes.*] Think of it, Wilfred. Hardly a capital in civilisation without a branch or a cognate church or at least a disciple ! [*Cramming them into a pocket of the robe.*] Fermentation everywhere. Everywhere the old thought decays and dies, the new is burgeoning and blossoming. I can only see the start, you will live to see all civilisation under your banner.

WILFRED  
But am I not rather the artist of the movement—the banner-weaver, not the banner-bearer ?

STEPHEN  
Because you show us the holiness of beauty, cannot you also show us the beauty of holiness ? No, no, dear Wilfred [*Patting his head*], I am quite happy about you.

WILFRED

And about everything, I hope.

STEPHEN

Well, you know the one cloud.

WILFRED

You mean mother.

STEPHEN

I suppose I ought to be thankful she joins in our social work. But her standing out all these years against our religion is like a deadening symbol of the forces we have still to subdue. If only *she* could have been here to-day!

WILFRED

She *is* here! [STEPHEN *starts convulsively.*] Oh, but perhaps I oughtn't to have spoiled the surprise.

STEPHEN [*Transfigured*]

Here! Mother here!

WILFRED

Yes, sitting just by this door.

STEPHEN

But she said she was going to the Church Bazaar.

WILFRED

At the last moment she came here.

STEPHEN [*Depressed again*]

Ah, I understand—to hear your new music.

WILFRED

Not entirely, I think.

STEPHEN

Then it was to see the Temple!

WILFRED [*Shaking his head*]

As you passed her just now, she caught the end of your robe that I was bearing and kissed it.

STEPHEN

Wilfred! Is there some dazzling light here, or am I still blind.

WILFRED

I could read in her face she would have liked to follow you in but feared to tire you.

STEPHEN

Your angel-mother! As if anything could quicken me more than to hear from *her* lips the confession of our faith. But no! it cannot be true.

WILFRED [*Opening door, whispers and beckons*]

Mother!

[*MARY glides in, her head covered by a black mantilla, and clasps WILFRED in a swift loving embrace.*]



MARY [*Cooingly*]  
My little musician!

[*She releases him and he glides into the Temple.*]

STEPHEN [*Yearning towards her*]

Mary! [*Opens arms gropingly; MARY falls into them.*]

MARY  
Stephen!

STEPHEN

Then it is true? You *have* come to us?

MARY

How could I hold back any longer?

STEPHEN [*Releasing her, hurt*]

You mean because the Temple is built, my faith made visible in stone.

MARY

Oh, Stephen, I feared you would think that, and it has kept me from you—all this newspaper noise, this blare and flare of glory. But I nerved myself to face your contempt—I felt I owed you the truth.

STEPHEN

Forgive my doubting, dearest—the truth was so dazzling.

MARY

No, I deserve your doubt—oh, why did I not come

over to you when you were starving in Whitechapel—when you stood alone against the world? What comfort my conversion would have brought you then! How shall I ever forgive myself?

STEPHEN

Darling, your coming over to us to-day is such a consummation, such a climax, that I almost feel I would not have had it earlier. Oh, Mary, to think I have converted you at last.

MARY

No, Stephen—it is not *you* who have converted me.

STEPHEN

Not *I*? Why, who then?

MARY

Wilfy.

STEPHEN

Wilfred?

MARY

Didn't you magnanimously leave his religious training to *me*?

STEPHEN

Because I felt that the woman who has all the suffering in the birth of a child has the real parental right.

MARY

I know your reason, dear. Well, you have your reward. Despite all my pious lessons and catechisms, despite all Wilfy's church-going, you know how his heart turned more and more to your teaching.

STEPHEN

I knew it was a great grief to you, though you said nothing.

MARY

Yes, it was a great grief, but it was also one of those sorrows that educate. For I said to myself, if the heart of *youth* goes towards this religion, then surely this religion is blessed of God to be the next religion, and we that are old and set must cast off our prejudices, we must try to look through the eyes of youth.

STEPHEN

Excellently argued, dearest. Yes, children train us more than we them, and through Wilfred's eyes you have seen what these old blind ones could not show you.

MARY

But they are wonderful eyes. [*Kisses them.*] They saw the young truth such years and years ago. Oh, I could go down on my knees to you—I stood out against you, I fought you, I embittered you, perhaps it was I who stole the light from you.

STEPHEN

Hush—never say that ! But for you the light would have faded years before.

MARY

But I lived with a king of men and did not know his greatness—I worried when I should have worshipped. Oh, it was right of you to reproach me ! Now that the world is at your feet, now that your star has risen over mankind, I come fawning and grovelling. [*Sinks at his feet.*] But do not cast me off—let me, too, call you Master ! [*Clings to his knees.*]

STEPHEN [*Raising her*]

Dearest, dearest, but for you it could all never have been.

MARY

That's what I sometimes dare to tell myself—it was in answer to *my* prayer that poor Sir Thomas came.

STEPHEN [*Releasing her, more coldly*]

I did not mean that. Our religion acknowledges no such answers to prayer.

MARY

But surely the answer *did* come—and it has worked in my mind that God wished your religion to be.

STEPHEN

You must hear my sermon, Mary, you must learn more of your new religion.

MARY [*Humbly*]  
Yes, yes, I will go back.     [*Turns to the Temple door.*]

STEPHEN  
Dear Mary [*Takes her hand again*], don't you see that the only prayer is work? It is just because there is *no* caprice in God's universe, just because the hammer will *always* hit the anvil if the hand is steady, that our Church can look forward to beating our planet into the shape of our yearning—a world of purity, peace, and brotherhood.

MARY  
I see, Master.

STEPHEN  
Good-bye for a little, then.  
    [*He lays his hands on her head in silent blessing.*]

MARY  
Good-bye . . . [*She goes. At the door she turns with a sob.*] And you never noticed what I was wearing!

STEPHEN  
How could I, dear?

MARY  
Your *hands* were upon it.

STEPHEN  
Do you mean your mantilla?  
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MARY [*Comes nearer*]  
*Your* mantilla, Stephen—the mantilla you bought me  
in Madrid—on our honeymoon. [*Sadly.*] You don't  
remember.

STEPHEN  
Of course I remember.

MARY [*Eagerly going to him.*]  
And you understand why I put it on to-day ?

STEPHEN  
Yes, dearest, and I kiss my saint's aureole.  
[*He kisses the mantilla.*]

MARY [*Smiling happily*]  
Aureoles are *golden*.  
[*Enter BURR.*]

STEPHEN [*Pricking up his ears*]  
Is it time ?

BURR  
Nearly, Master. But there's a new worshipper who  
takes *me* for the Infinite, in a manner of speaking.

STEPHEN  
What do you mean ?

BURR  
Keeps communing with *me*. Wants me to bring him  
to *you*. There's his card.

MARY [*Taking card and reading it*]  
“Must run away—give me one minute. Hal  
McFadden, M.D., M.R.C.S., &c.” That dreadful  
man! You must not see him.

STEPHEN  
The son of our Founder! I can hardly refuse.

MARY  
Not now—after the service. He will tire you.

STEPHEN  
But suppose he too has joined us! What a wonderful  
climax and inspiration!

MARY  
If he had joined us, why should he be running away?

STEPHEN  
Doctors are not their own masters. . . . But strictly  
for a minute, tell him, Burr.

MARY  
And then you must rest a few moments—don't come  
sooner. Wilfy shall summon you—I'll tell him. And  
meantime Andrews can read a Psalm.

STEPHEN  
No, no, not a Psalm.

MARY [*Quietly*]  
Psalm 104—the one I took a text from for your harvest

sermon. It just suits our religion—not a word about prayer, nor a future life.

STEPHEN

No more there is! A great cosmic poem!

MARY [*Smiling*]

And long, too.

STEPHEN [*Smiling back*]

Wonderful woman! You've only just joined us and already you're running the service. You'll soon be in my pulpit.

MARY

Why not? Since you have sex-equality! [*Door opens; HAL appears with BURR.*] Here comes your friend.

*[She bows to HAL, who bows back, and she goes out with BURR, while HAL comes forward and the door closes. His face has grown far finer with maturity; a touch of grey in the hair makes it almost spiritual.]*

HAL [*Semi-sarcastically*]

Well, Stephen!

STEPHEN

Glad to see you, Hal—sit down!

HAL

No, thanks—I must fly to my wife; I promised to pick her up at the Church Bazaar and take her to Evensong.



STEPHEN [*Disappointed*]  
Ha ! Then you *haven't* come over to us ?

HAL  
I ? God forbid ! I came out of curiosity.

STEPHEN  
To see the Temple ?

HAL  
To see what had become of my money !

STEPHEN  
Ah yes—I had almost forgotten. Well—you have seen.

HAL  
That's just what I haven't.

STEPHEN  
I'm afraid I don't understand.

HAL  
Seen nothing, I mean, to justify all the trumpeting  
and squandering.

STEPHEN  
To justify it ? Of course not. Not if you really turned  
Christian.

HAL  
Oh, it isn't so much as a Christian that I grumble,  
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it's as a man who sees his millions wasted—millions that might have served some great purpose.

STEPHEN [*Coldly*]  
I beg to think ours *is* a great purpose.

HAL  
No—only a great mistake. Unless to split the Church wantonly be a great purpose.

STEPHEN [*Angrily*]  
Wantonly ?

HAL  
And unjustifiably. You have a Temple beautiful indeed, but not so beautiful as St. Paul's or the Abbey. I see priests and choristers, pomp and pageantry, but your ritual, like your building and your furniture, lacks the historic glamour which comes with centuries of tradition.

STEPHEN [*Hotly*]  
And the historic error !

HAL  
Let me finish. I see a hymn-book, but free as it is from the crudities which unfortunately disfigure our Christian hymn-book, your liturgy cannot compare with the massive majesty of the Bible.

STEPHEN  
Now you have caught yourself out. Though we draw

on all the great writers, we preserve wherever possible the language of the Bible.

HAL

The less reason, then, for cutting away from us. As for your music——

STEPHEN [*Murmuring*]

Wilfred's music——

HAL

Wilfred is a genius, I don't question. But even *you* would scarcely class his work with Bach's Passion music.

STEPHEN [*Sternly*]

At least we do not glorify the Passion.

HAL

You glorify self-sacrifice—is there so much difference ?

STEPHEN

You can't be a very orthodox Christian if you say that.

HAL

Was Christ such an orthodox Christian ?

STEPHEN

I am not talking of Christ's Christianity, but of Christianity as it really is : your wife's Christianity, for example.

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HAL [*Quietly*]  
You thought Helen had converted me.

STEPHEN  
So your father understood.

HAL  
My father understood nothing—well, to give the dead their due, nothing but mechanics. I don't say Helen didn't *influence* me—one can't live with a reverential nature like hers and remain spiritually untouched—but what really turned me back to the fatherhood of God was my own experience of fatherhood.

STEPHEN  
It was just that experience that drove *me* to the next religion.

HAL  
The *next* religion? Before we've worked out the last? What have you found more beautiful or uplifting than the words of Christ? And this religion has the advantage of being already organised—it carries the inspiration and consecration of the centuries.

STEPHEN  
And their encrustation of error! And their petrifications!

HAL  
Then vivify it, scour it, bring it back to the Founder.

Perhaps Christ's own religion has never had a chance—perhaps *that's* the next religion.

STEPHEN

I prefer Truth, fresh and living, new-risen from the well.

HAL

New-risen ? Oh, my dear Stephen, what is there new that is true ? Time, Space, Life, Death, Soul, Body—what old, old mysteries, what terrible brand-new realities, as strange under the electric light as they were under the stars of the ancient East. Think what Science shouted when you and I were at Oxford, and how one dogma after another has broken down. How much is left even of Darwin and Herbert Spencer ?

STEPHEN

Their spirit is left—the revelation of Science is a method, not a dogma.

HAL [*Sneeringly*]

The revelation of Science ! I, a man of science, and a doctor, tell you that we know nothing.

STEPHEN

I don't wonder any longer you turned Christian. My only wonder is you don't turn Catholic.

HAL

I am not so near Catholicism as you !

STEPHEN

As I ?

HAL

These palms, lilies, candles, canticles——

STEPHEN

Things of beauty are joys for ever—and for everybody !  
Why should false religions monopolise them ?

HAL

Yes, or make a corner in Saints ? St. Thomas ! Ha !  
Ha ! Ha ! My blessèd father !

STEPHEN

I wanted it called the Minister of the Holy Ghost—it  
was my congregation that wanted St. Thomas——

HAL

Yes—and one day they'll want St. Stephen.

STEPHEN

*That* I shall forbid.

HAL

They will only think you all the greater Saint

STEPHEN

Even so they will be thinking of my life, not of my  
dead bones performing miracles.

HAL [*Grimly*]  
Wait! You haven't died yet.

STEPHEN  
Don't talk nonsense! My followers follow Truth, not me.

HAL [*Sarcastically*]  
So you actually think your triumph has been the triumph of Truth!

STEPHEN  
Of what else? Ah, you mean your money.

HAL  
No. Money alone can do little. With millions behind them newspapers and theatres fail—so why not churches?

STEPHEN  
Then it *was* my vision of the Truth——

HAL  
On the contrary. It was your blindness—your sheer physical blindness.

STEPHEN  
Eh?

HAL  
Oh, I've watched your career. Your eloquence and *my* money brought you a decent crowd. But it wasn't

till you stood in the pulpit, blind, that you were a sensation. That made you a sort of martyr—and the more you denounced Christianity the more you illustrated its principle of suffering and self-sacrifice.

STEPHEN [*Sneering*]

What wonderful sophistry! Then according to you I might as well have remained a Christian.

HAL [*Cheerfully*]

Precisely. But on second thoughts I don't regret my millions. You have shown that Christianity can't be improved on—the lesson was cheap at the price. Good-bye. [*Clasps STEPHEN'S hand.*]

STEPHEN [*Detaining his hand*]

No—I can't let you go, saying that.

WILFRED [*Opening the Temple door*]

The Psalm is over, father.

STEPHEN [*Impatiently*]

Just a moment. [*WILFRED disappears, the door closes.*] With the same Satanic sophistry that in your Oxford days sapped my old belief, you now try to show that I have nothing new to teach. You forget that I have thrown overboard the Christian demand for personal immortality and taught mankind to meet life with love and death with dignity.

HAL

To do good without hope of reward makes you even more Christian than the Christians.



STEPHEN

*More* quibbling! To give up a heaven is to give up Christianity.

HAL

How about "The Kingdom of God is *within* you"? That doesn't say much about a *future* heaven.

STEPHEN

You are incorrigible!

HAL [*Going to the street door*]

So Helen will say if I don't turn up at the Church Bazaar. Can I get out through this door? I don't want to disturb the congregation.

STEPHEN

You'll have to unbolt it, I think.

HAL [*Shooting back the bolt*]

Thank you.

[*Turns back the key.*]

STEPHEN

But surely you ought to stay for my sermon. It's a tribute to your father.

HAL

To my father?

STEPHEN

A memorial sermon—could I do less on this Day of

Dedication ? And Wilfred has written a Requiem—but of jubilation : “ Rejoice, the righteous cannot die.”

HAL [*Slightly opening the street door*]  
You and Wilfred owe a tribute to my father. But what do *I* owe him ?

STEPHEN [*Sternly*]  
Christian charity !

HAL [*Closing the street door*]  
I am rebuked.

*[He goes back silently to door R., opens it, and returns to the Temple. As the Temple door swings to, the street-door L. is thrown open from without, and ELI OAKSHOTT's frenzied figure appears with his hammer ; he is older and greyer and fiercer, and without his apron, but essentially unchanged. He slams the door behind him.]*

STEPHEN [*Wheeling at the sound*]  
Who's there ?

OAKSHOTT  
The Lord has delivered you into my hands ! [*He raises his hammer*] . . . Why don't you flinch, curse you ? . . . Ah, you are blind ! I can't strike a man who is blind. [*Lowers hammer.*]

STEPHEN  
Why should you strike any man ?

OAKSHOTT

*You* ask me that! You Judas, who have built this Temple of antichrist.

STEPHEN

Ha! You are Eli Oakshott.

OAKSHOTT

Yes, curse you.

STEPHEN

I thought I knew the voice.

OAKSHOTT

I've waited here for hours to bash your brains out, and now the Lord has paralysed my hand.

STEPHEN

Then down on your knees and thank Him.

OAKSHOTT

Yes, when that serpent Burr has licked the dust.

STEPHEN

Go home: go back to Dymthorpe. Farmer Burr is not here.

OAKSHOTT

Farmer Burr *be* here. He goaded me to come. And every spark that flew up from my anvil cried out: Go up—go up, for this is the day of the Lord God of Hosts, a day of vengeance.

WILFRED [*Looking in*]  
Father, you *must* come——

OAKSHOTT

A-a-ah ! The *son* of Belial !

*[With a great raucous cry he raises his hammer and darts at the astonished WILFRED, who flees back but cannot close the door before the blacksmith is through. As it closes on the couple, WILFRED'S voice rings out in a scream of alarm.]*

WILFRED [*Outside*]

Mother !

*[There is a responsive shriek in MARY'S voice, the thud of a falling body, a great panic-stricken hubbub.]*

STEPHEN

Mary ! Who is hurt ? Wilfred ! Mary !

*[He hurries towards the door, but in his distraction strikes against an obstacle and remains groping.]*

VOICES [*Shouting outside*]

Hold him ! Tie his arms !

HAL [*Shouting outside*]

No violence ! Take him out to a constable.

*[The hubbub and the sound of the struggle go on for a few moments, then the door half opens.]*

HAL [*At door*]

Make room, please ; carry him in here.

MARY [*Outside, in a tragic but firm voice*]

Wait, let me cover his face.

*[A pause ; then the sound of another fall.]*

HAL [*At door*]

She has fainted. Carry her to a window. Bring him through here !

STEPHEN [*Groping*]

Wilfred ! Where is Wilfred ?

*[ANDREWS and BURR, weeping, carry in the body of WILFRED, a black mantilla thrown over the face. A noise of voices and of weeping comes from the congregation ; the door closes, shutting it out.]*

HAL

Set him down here.

*[They lay the body in the centre of the floor.]*

STEPHEN

Hal ! Hal ! What is happening ?

HAL

Your wife has fainted.

STEPHEN

She's not hurt ?

HAL

No. She was very brave.

STEPHEN

But Wilfred ?

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HAL

My poor Stephen ! [*He takes his hand.*] Your boy is sorely stricken.

STEPHEN [*Hoarsely*]

Not dead ?

HAL

His skull is fractured ; he is unconscious.

STEPHEN [*Frantically*]

But not dead ?

HAL

I will feel his pulse again. [*Kneels by body ; a pause.*]

STEPHEN [*Frenziedly*]

Not dead ?

HAL [*Rising*]

God give you strength !

STEPHEN

Wilfred ! Where are you ? Take me to him !

[*Gropes.*]

ANDREWS

Oh, Master !

[*Guides him.*]

HAL

He died instantaneously ; that's a mercy.

STEPHEN [*Falling sobbing on body*]

Oh, my son, my son ! [*Feels mantilla, but does not lift it.*]

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HAL

I must see to your wife, and then I must notify the death. Christ comfort you, Stephen.

*[Exit to Temple.]*

BURR *[Sobbing]*

Eli will be hanged, but the crime was mine in a manner of speaking. I wish I could die instead of him.

ANDREWS *[Checking his own sobs]*

Tears are useless now, Burr. Throw open the great doors ; let the congregation go !

STEPHEN

No ! *[Rises in majestic stoicism.]* The service must go on—as the world must go on. Let the youths make the choir-circuits for the dead. Andrews—you know where the candles are. Otherwise change nothing. The Requiem to begin when I enter *[His voice breaks.]*—it will be his own Requiem now. *[Firmly again.]* Then I shall preach.

ANDREWS

As you will, Master.

*[Exit to Temple.]*

*[BURR, weeping more restrainedly, takes the perpetually burning taper, and lights up all the candles in the great golden candlesticks.]*

STEPHEN *[Half collapsing again]*

If I had only listened to Mary, and not let Hal come !

*[Unconsciously his hands pull the congratulatory cables from the pocket of his robe, and crumple them. BURR, the taper still in his hand, goes to the*

*door and opens it for the procession and STEPHEN draws himself up rigidly, but his hands continue to crumple the cables into a smaller and smaller ball. The youths in their golden mantles re-enter, each carrying a tall lighted candle. The door remains open so that the noise of outside wailing is heard as a ground bass for the chant. They circle slowly once round the body and back to the Temple.]*

ANDREWS [*As he enters*]

**Man that is born of a woman hath but a short time to live and is full of misery.**

YOUTHS

**He cometh up and is cut down like a flower. He fleeth as it were a shadow, and never continueth in one stay.**

ANDREWS

**But Thou, O Eternal, wert, before the mountains were brought forth.**

YOUTHS

**Or eber the earth and the world were made.**

ANDREWS

**For a thousand years in Thy sight are but as yesterday:**

YOUTHS

**Seeing that is past as a watch in the night.**



ANDREWS

Yet in the briefest life of man may be divine greatness and glory.

Youths

And in short measures life may perfect be.

*[The procession has now arrived at door R.]*

ANDREWS *[Leading it back into the Temple]*

Man that is born of a woman—

*[The litany is repeated till the door closes on them with BURR bringing up the rear, the sounds from without sink to an inarticulate chanting on a ground bass of sobbing which goes like a musical accompaniment through the scene, only rising to articulateness as the procession in its ambit passes near the door.]*

STEPHEN *[Relaxing his rigidity as the door closes]*

Oh, why was I not stricken down instead!

*[His head sinks on his breast, he is shaken with sobs. After a moment or two the Temple door slightly reopens.]*

HAL *[Outside]*

No, no, Mrs. Trame, don't go in.

MARY

I am better, I tell you. Let go the handle. I *must* go in.

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HAL [*Pulling the door to*]  
You will only faint again.

[*Key heard turning outside.*]

MARY [*Shrieking outside*]  
How dare you keep me from him ?

STEPHEN [*Murmurs*]  
God help her ! [*Moves half-consciously towards door.*]  
[*A weird silence. Then three great bangs at the door with a fist.*]

MARY [*Without*]  
Wilfy ! Let me in !

STEPHEN [*Near door, loudly*]  
She *must* come to her dead !  
[*The door opens and closes again. MARY with the tearless look of a somnambulist comes through and seeing her husband's agonised face goes straight to him.*]

MARY  
Oh, Stephen ! My poor Stephen.  
[*Embraces him, pressing her face to his.*]

STEPHEN  
Don't think of *me* !

MARY  
All your pride and happiness gone, all the glory of the day destroyed.

STEPHEN

Your face is dry and burning—cry, Mary, cry your heart out on mine.

MARY

He called out “ Mother ” when the blow fell. Didn’t you hear it ? Just like when he was a little boy and something frightened him. That was his last word—“ Mother ! ”

STEPHEN

Yes, yes ; I heard.

MARY

I’ve put my mantilla over his face, do you see ? I used to put it over his cradle at Dymthorpe to keep off the mosquitoes. When you bought it on our honeymoon, you never thought of the use it would be put to—as a mosquito curtain, did you ?

[*Smiling wanly.*]

ANDREWS [*As the procession is passing outside*]

Man that is born of a woman hath but a short time to live and is full of misery.

MARY [*Her smile dying*]

What is he saying ?

YOUTHS

He cometh up and is cut down like a flower. He fleeth . . .

[*The chant dies inarticulately away.*]

MARY [*Tragically, and as though struggling to awake*]  
Cut down ? Who *else* is cut down ?

STEPHEN

Nobody else, dear. They are going round the choir.  
Didn't you see them ?

MARY

I saw nothing but a closed door. What are they going  
round for ?

STEPHEN

It is one of our ceremonies. The death-circuit.

MARY [*As if awaking*]

For *Wilfred* ? And they will *bury* him ? [*Screams  
terribly*] A-h-h-h ! Wilfy is dead ! My little son is  
dead ! They will take him from me !

STEPHEN

No, no ! [*Takes her hands.*] They will not bury him  
yet. [*She frees her hands.*] Yes, go to him ; you can  
still hold him in your arms.

MARY [*Kneeling beside the body*]

Wilfy !

[*She takes the passive hand, then drops it with a  
shudder as of mortal cold. Her hand hovers over  
the mantilla, but unable to bear to unveil the face,  
she draws her hand back and covers her own face  
instead. Then she rises resolutely and walks to the  
table.*]

STEPHEN

Where are you going ?

MARY

God has not given me your merciful blindness.

*[She gathers up palms and lilies.]*

STEPHEN

What is that rustling ?

MARY

I am covering him up with palms and lilies.

*[Lays them on the body.]*

STEPHEN

I understand. You wish to keep the face you knew.

MARY

Yes ; all his faces but this.

STEPHEN

*All his faces ?*

MARY

You do not know them ? *[Arranges palms and lilies as she speaks in happy dreamy retrospection.]* First, the teeny tiny face with shut eyes, and hair like a faint golden dust ; then the merry-eyed little mite of a face with curls ; then the sweet serious face of the little musician up in the church-loft, playing the organ ; then the schoolboy face, roguish and studious by turns, then—but they float and mingle before me, dear kissable uncountable faces, and how could I ever choose among them all, which to have in heaven ?

But God has chosen for me—Wilfy's immortal shape will be that of an eager and beautiful youth, with a golden halo round his head, ever making holy music.

STEPHEN

Yes ; that is the shape in which our beloved will always live before this congregation. And now, dear, that you are calm, I will go to my pulpit and preach of the True Immortality. Come !

[*Draws her hand.*]

MARY [*Again awaking, fiercely*]  
Leave me with my dead !

STEPHEN

Your dead is not here, dear ; but as you have just said, in your heart and soul. Come ! I was to speak of our Founder's immortality ; now I must speak even more of Wilfred's.

MARY [*Eagerly*]

And you will tell them he lives with God ?

STEPHEN

With the God in *us*. The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church, and our dear son's death will be transmuted to a higher form of life in the generations that his memory will inspire and his music uplift.

MARY [*As if dazed*]

In the generations ?

STEPHEN

Yes, I planned that he should succeed me. Fate has planned for him a truer apostolate. Sometimes, do you know, dear, the fear crossed my mind that I was unduly preferring Wilfred to Andrews, even preparing that worst of evils, an hereditary priesthood. Fate has set the balance just.

MARY

And you can think of *such* things !

STEPHEN

Now is the moment for thinking of them.

MARY [*Screaming*]

When Wilfy lies dead !

ANDREWS [*Passing outside*]

*For a thousand years in Thy sight are but as yesterday.*

YOUTHS [*outside*]

*Seeing that is past as a watch in the night.*

*[Their voices grow inarticulate again.]*

MARY

Don't you hear them ? Wilfy is dead, I tell you.  
And you can still talk *words* !

STEPHEN

But he is not dead, Mary, he will live in his music  
and his——

MARY

Stop your *words!* Can I embrace his music, and feel its heart beating against mine? Will it give me kiss for kiss and pet word for pet word?

STEPHEN

Death takes much: let us be thankful it cannot take all.

MARY

Thankful! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Thankful because it takes our beautiful boy and gives us a log!

STEPHEN

We had the joy of his rearing.

MARY

And the pain. How many nights have I sat at his bedside, sick with fear! And now, after eighteen years of anxious growth, you tell me that all the glow and genius of his young soul, all the love in his gentle eyes, have faded to—this!

STEPHEN

What else can we conceive? That he will live on in a heaven, eternally eighteen?

MARY

And why not? There *must* be people of *all* ages in heaven. [*Her face shines with a new hope.*] Yes, that is why *children* die—I never understood it before—that heaven may not lack little ones and so be less heaven;



that there shall be croonings and crowings and the smiles of babies in all that ineffable splendour.

STEPHEN

My poor Mary! Then your heaven is mere earth over again, and all the people who have once blundered into being are to be for ever. Eli Oakshott for example. Insanity is to be immortalised.

MARY [*Passionately*]

And is there not Time enough and Space enough and Power enough to set all these blunders straight? Aren't you always talking of the infinities and the eternities? Are there not stars enough, universes enough? Or do you think I cannot wait a million years and journey a million million miles, if only it was to hear Wilfred say once again—"Mother!"

STEPHEN

Such faith should move mountains. But alas! only earthquake moves them.

ANDREWS [*Passing outside*]

But thou, O Eternal, wert, before the mountains were brought forth.

YOUTHS [*Outside*]

Or ever the earth and the world were made.

[*The voices die away.*]

MARY [*Mystically*]

Before the mountains! Did you hear that? God from everlasting! And yet you say this is the end of Wilfy—this log that will soon be loathsome!

STEPHEN

You came to me just now, so confessing your belief—our belief.

MARY

Yes, before I knew *what* I was believing. As little as Wilfy knew.

STEPHEN

You knew better in your sober reason than now in your distraction.

MARY [*Fiercely*]

No! Reason is only words. Can one know love without loving? No more can one know loss without losing.

STEPHEN

I too have lost Wilfred.

MARY

And you are afraid of losing your miserable religion too! That is why you won't let your heart speak. I took your words for realities—now I see they are shadows. Now I know the truth.

STEPHEN

What truth do you know?

MARY [*Ecstatically*]

That Wilfred lives!

STEPHEN

How can you know it more than I ?

MARY

I know it here—in my heart—beneath which I carried him before you ever saw him. Do you think that that leaves no knowledge ? Do you think you can be as wise as I ?

STEPHEN

If it comforts you, dear, to believe it, believe it.  
But I—— *[Goes towards Temple door.]*

MARY *[Hysterical again]*

You are going to preach that my belief is a lie !

STEPHEN

I cannot cover up the truth with palms and lilies.

MARY

That's just what you *do* ; cover up *your* truth with flowers of speech. We can't drug ourselves, you said to me that dreadful day at Dymthorpe, we can't drug ourselves with dreams and myths. But what are all your fine words but drugs to drowse people to the dreadful thing you preach !

STEPHEN

I preach no drugs, I preach inspiring realities. My people are thinkers.

MARY

*What* inspiring realities do you preach ?

STEPHEN

I told you just now. That by our own labour we may shape this revolving wilderness to a world of peace and perfection.

MARY [*Frenziedly*]

Yes ; and the hammer will always hit the anvil ! My curse on that law !

STEPHEN

Hush ! You said you understood.

MARY [*Bursting into sobs*]

I don't want your world of peace and perfection, I want my Wilfy.

STEPHEN

You must not talk so selfishly, dear. You are only one.

MARY [*Gulping down her sobs*]

And is anybody else more ? What is the world but a collection of ones ? And if each one is doomed like me to lose his best and dearest, where is your peace and perfection ?

STEPHEN

In the hearts that accept the law. Wilfred will live on in his music.

MARY [*Grimly*]  
And where will Wilfy's music live ?

STEPHEN  
In our congregation—in all of us.

MARY  
Who will all die like Wilfy ?

STEPHEN  
Sooner or later.

MARY  
All of us turning like him into loathsome logs ! And our successors on the planet—logs in *their* turn. And so on and so on till this revolving graveyard is shrivelled up by a wandering star. And this you call an inspiring reality ! Say rather a dance of shadows—a rope of wind—a castle of cloud—a chasing of nightmares—vanity of vanities. [*Fiercely.*] What is the meaning of it all ?

STEPHEN  
It is the great procession of life.

MARY [*Sobbing again*]  
The great procession of death.

STEPHEN  
The two are one. Only the elemental atom lives for ever. The price of true life is death.

MARY

Then has God no true life ?

STEPHEN

His life, too, is an eternal weaving and unweaving.

MARY [*Frenziedly*]

But it is eternal.

STEPHEN

We are creatures of an hour. We cannot share His eternity.

MARY

And who would love a God who did not share His life with us ? A God who creates us to slay us, as pheasants are bred to be shot.

STEPHEN [*Looking up mystically*]

Though He slay us, yet must we trust in Him.

MARY

Yes ; to raise us up again ! Do you think I could bear to see even that log go from me if I thought this was the end ? Do you think I could bear to hear the earth dropping on the coffin and not go mad ? Do you think I would not run out into the streets and cry to the people : " Beware ? let there be no more marrying nor giving in marriage, for Death stalks around with his hammer, waiting to fell your children like bullocks " ? Stephen, do you really believe that

if you or I die, we shall meet no more for all eternity  
and be nothing but decaying dust ?

STEPHEN

Oh, dearest, that is why we must cling to each other  
now. Don't you see how death vitalises every  
moment ?

MARY [*Shuddering*]

Paralyses every moment, you mean. How can we set  
our love on shadows ? No ! No ! Why do you trust  
so to appearances ? You who say that this solid-  
seeming matter is only a whirl of wild forces, that the  
very rocks are alive with radium ! Surely in all these  
mysteries that encompass us there is room for hope,  
surely we may open one little window to the sun.

ANDREWS [*Passing outside*]

**Yet in the briefest life of man may be divine greatness and  
glory.**

YOUTHS [*Outside*]

**And in short measures life may perfect be.**

STEPHEN

The circuits are over.

*[He moves resolutely towards the Temple door.]*

MARY [*Frenziedly*]

And you are going to kill their hope ! No ! No !  
They have children too, husbands, wives, brothers,

sisters! You shall not! [*Throws her arms round him.*] I will not let you.

STEPHEN [*Freezingly, not struggling*]  
Mary! Remember, I am blind.

MARY [*Letting him go*]  
Yes—blind indeed! But I forbid you to infect others with your blindness.

STEPHEN [*Coldly*]  
You forbid me?

MARY  
I forbid you to make this dark world darker. Blow out the last star and I will follow you into the pulpit.

STEPHEN  
You?

MARY  
Yes, I. Let them hear a woman for once. You and your dried-up thinkers! I tell you that the great live world will never *take* your religion, and that even if you deluded all male humanity, the *mothers* would rise up and tear it to pieces. [STEPHEN *turns silently and resumes his walk to the door.*] Go into your pulpit then. But—over the body of our boy—I dare you to tell them he is dead.



STEPHEN [*Turning, as at bay*]  
And will you dare tell them he is alive ?

MARY [*In trumpet tones*]  
I will tell them that this corruptible shall put on  
incorruption and this mortal immortality, and I will  
cry, O death, where is thy sting ? O grave, where is  
thy victory ?

[STEPHEN, *his head bowed as beneath the storm,*  
*opens the door. The triumphant Requiem bursts*  
*out from organ and choir : " Rejoice, the righteous*  
*cannot die."*]

STEPHEN [*Raising his head*]  
Wilfred's music ! [*He goes in firmly.*]

MARY [*Snatching up a great lily, and uplifting it,*  
*her face ecstatically transfigured, her voice dominant*  
*even over the organ*]

The Resurrection and the Life !

[*She stands over the body that is hidden by palms*  
*and lilies. The music swells out in loftier jubilation,*  
*the Curtain slowly falls.*]

### NOTE

*The performance of this play in Great Britain is forbidden by the Lord Chamberlain. The performing rights in all other countries are strictly reserved by the author.*

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