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To Frank Pryn

With the Author's affectionate remembrance

22nd February 1912.

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SHAKESPEARE'S END
AND OTHER IRISH PLAYS

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SHAKESPEARE'S
END
AND OTHER IRISH
PLAYS

BY CONAL O'RIORDAN
(NORREYS CONNELL)



STEPHEN SWIFT
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A PREFATORY LETTER TO JOSEPH CONRAD

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MY DEAR CONRAD,

This little book I dedicate to you ; and, as you alone are likely to open it, there is no reason why it should not carry with it my private apology for connecting your name with anything so insignificant.

This is my excuse.

For all that you are a man of genius, and I am an ordinary person, we have some common ground. You do not forget that you were born a Pole, as I shall never forget that I was born an Irishman ; we both seem destined to remember that our earliest prayers were of Roman phrasing. Neither of us has, to my knowledge, any English blood in his veins ; yet our wives are English, our sons were bred in England, and we ourselves (each in his degree) are English men of letters. Except that my style is old-fashioned and rhetorical, there is little to distinguish it from that of any other servant of the Press, and your English differs from that of the best native writers only by reason of its nervous excellence. Again, we were brought together by one with whom each has worked in collaboration, whom each equally admires for his gifts and esteems for his amiable character ; and he is an English writer by choice and a foreigner by allegiance.

There is no book of yours I do not know, and you have read so much of me as I had the heart to trouble you with. I could name other sympathies that might

look bleak in print, expressed by me, so I pass to the road where we part company.

You are above all things an artist, and I, as he who runs may read, am little indeed of that.

"Art for art's sake" is to me an ideal of virginal beauty, virginal and so sterile. If I would rather have written the *Elegy in a Country Churchyard* than taken Quebec I would rather be the author of almost any one of the *Fabian Essays* of 1889 than of the collective works of Gray, Collins and Mason. I am as incapable of the clarity of the one as of the fantasy of the other, but I value even the faultiest order of day for life to come above the most perfectly expressed regrets for life that is gone.

Sad stories of the death of kings touch me, but they do not touch me so deeply as stories of the deaths of cabhorses; for kings of wont die cosily in their beds or suddenly in pride, while I suppose there never was a cabhorse but ended horribly. As kings in the main are happy and hardworking people I hope there will always be plenty of them in the world, but I find it a cheering reflection that soon there will be no more cabhorses.

The artist is to me one who can carry out a work that the world, consciously or subconsciously, demands; the great artist is one who can originate such a work and carry it out, possibly without recognition; the greatest artist is one who can originate such a work and carry it out, and force the world at once to see its need and apologise for its slowness in asking for it. Now, when you wrote *The Nigger of the Narcissus* you entered this highest circle, and nothing you have written since weakens your claim to be of it; your last book *Under Western Eyes*, I am advised by better judges than myself, strengthens your position. I, on the other hand, rank below the lowest of the three; so far have I been from originating any idea which roused the world's

interest that I have failed to write a report of a theatrical performance that even the performers themselves were wholly pleased to read. It has been at once my misfortune and my fault that I have never been in harmony with my environment.

Yet, neither do I come in the very lowest class of dullards ; for I may say that from a tender age (if four years be still reckoned a tender age) I have been used to originate ideas, the consideration of which has not yet lost interest for myself.

Some of those childish thoughts, touching on the not wholly undeserved misfortunes of my country, have grown into these little plays (which may be remembered through their association with your name, if not with mine) and one of them at least has roused the interest of Irishmen as wide apart in point of view as (to name no practising critics, university professors or legal luminaries) Mr. Bernard Shaw, Mr. W. B. Yeats, the late Mr. Synge, Mr. George Moore, Mr. Padraic Colum, Mr. Russell, Sir Hugh Lane, and Mr. Dion Boucicault, and of an Irishwoman so distinguished by force of character and creative genius as Lady Gregory. She wrote me of one of the earliest performances that it appeared to be " the history of Ireland in one act," and I have persuaded myself that she did not simply mean that it seemed interminable.

This play was " The Piper ; an Unended Argument," and I meant it, when I wrote the first rough draft on an autumn day in 1904, to be the history not only of Ireland but of democracy in arms. What was in my mind was that war is no policy but for a despot ; or, as Machiavelli would put it, only a prince can make effective war. The French Revolution itself had failed if Louis had not been humbler and more virtuous than his conquerors : it achieved no real success until it found an advocate in the master despot of his time.

Even in the civil war of Parliaments it seems that nothing can be achieved by them that will not wait and follow the bidding of one man, and the noblest cause will break in spindrift upon the rock of party discipline. That lesson I took to heart in 1890 when Parnell fell. I was then at an impressionable age, sixteen; I read day by day the attacks upon him in the Press, written or inspired for the most part by men I believed (and in some measure still believe) to have been lifted by him from the kennel. Life anywhere in those days meant bitterness for me, but in Ireland the very air seemed heavy with base vapours, and I fled, never to return, save as a visitor.

Since then I have learned many things, and not the least is that the sin of Ireland was merely that which all human nature has inherited from Adam—treachery. The Scots, I am of opinion, are the trustiest people in these islands, but you remember Buckle's damning indictment of them: "There have been more rebellions in Scotland than in any other country, and their rebellions have been very sanguinary as well as very numerous. The Scotch have made war upon most of their kings, and put to death many. To mention their treatment of a single dynasty, they murdered James I and James III. They rebelled against James II and James VII. They laid hold of James V and placed him in confinement. Mary they immured in a castle and afterwards deposed. Her successor, James VI, they imprisoned; they led him captive about the country, and on one occasion attempted his life. Towards Charles I they showed the greatest animosity . . . they sold him to the English for a large sum of money, of which they, being very poor, had pressing need. Such a sale is unparalleled in history."

I may not easily forgive the Irish their treatment of Parnell, but I can understand it, as I can understand

the ship's company of a tyrannical but successful pirate mutinying when his luck failed. Not that I regard Parnell as a pirate. He would rather have been a pirate than a nonentity, but he had genuine patriotism, such patriotism as had Paul Krüger : an extension of egoism. From that quarry of wisdom Morley's *Life of Gladstone* I take this just and sober character : " Mr. Parnell showed himself acute, frank, patient, closely attentive, and possessed of striking though not rapid insight. He never slurred over difficulties, nor tried to pretend that rough was smooth. On the other hand, he had nothing in common with that desperate species of counsellor, who takes all the small points, and raises objections instead of helping to contrive expedients. He measured the ground with a slow and careful eye, and fixed tenaciously on the thing that was essential at the moment. Of constructive faculty he never showed a trace. He was a man of temperament, of will, of authority, of power ; not of ideas or ideals, or knowledge, or political maxims, or even of the practical reason in any of its higher senses, as Hamilton, Madison, and Jefferson had practical reason. But he knew what he wanted. . . . He was a party chief, not a maker of constitutions."

I would add that even as a party chief he was more a tactician than a strategist.

My friend Yeats, in an eloquent curtain lecture, has declared that he sees in Black Mike the figure of Parnell ; and certainly his story was in my mind when I wrote the play ; but Black Mike is not only Parnell. He is many men braver and less fortunate ; his bones do not lie in any trim necropolis ; they crumbled in rain and wind on the hillsides or in quicklime in the prison yards. Black Mike is the type of noble fools, who for their country suffered ignoble deaths ; as the Piper is the symbol of their thought that no death

could be so ignominious as the life of slaves. Black Mike is the rebel who, placing liberty above the Ten Commandments, is denied by the respectable; but not by me.

There is no sadder recollection of my youth than the deplorable tragedy which opened in the Phoenix Park, Dublin, on a May evening in 1882, when an Irish Government official, of whom I will say nothing, was struck down by certain conspirators; and an English nobleman, courageously striving to defend him, perished in the medley. The ringleader in this purely political crime was one Joe Brady; and he and all his companions, one of them a boy in his teens, were hanged for it. I will not defend such acts of war; but I will say that I know no truer verse than Juvenal's:

“ *Ille crucem sceleris pretium tulit;—hic diadema* ”

And I would rather pass eternity chained to Joe Brady's wrist than in that choir of angels who have Beaconsfield on their side.

So much for *The Piper*. You may not like it, but I like it, if only for the reason that when I read it to Shaw (the first person outside my own door to whom I read it), he sang me the *Shan van Vocht* right through, not only in his natural voice but as he remembered to have heard it sung in Dublin, in his boyhood.*

The second piece in this volume is an attempt to treat the same theme in a lighter and more popular form. The best that can be said of it is that it succeeded in its object; for, although *The Piper* had to face the hostility of many audiences at the Abbey before they grasped its meaning, *An Imaginary Conversation* at once became popular.

* My use of it as a *leitmotif* in this play was suggested by Mr. James Glover's most impressive introduction of the *Transvaalsche Volkslied* in a drama of Mr. Raleigh's ten years ago at Drury Lane.

Some of the critics, however, blamed me for letting Tom Moore talk slipshod English ; and, indeed, I cannot prove that in his youth he talked slipshod English, but I can prove that he wrote it in his maturity ; for there are eight volumes of his *Journal* to put in evidence.

I make him talk at seventeen as I have heard Trinity boys of that age talk in my own time. This is how he wrote at thirty-nine :—

“ 12th September, 1819 (Paris). Went, a little after eleven, to the cemetery of Père la Chaise, and have seldom been more affected than I was at this very interesting place, which throws a sort of charm over death, and is highly creditable to the domestic feelings of the French. . . . Went to a show to see canaries fire off little cannons, stand on their heads, pretend to be dead, etc., etc.

“ 28th October (Rome). In the evening went to the Princess Borghese’s—a fine creature in her way : delighted to find I knew her friends Ladies Jersey, Holland, and Lansdowne. Showed her beautiful little hands, which I had the honour of kissing twice, and let me feel her foot, which is matchless. Led us through the rooms of her newly furnished villa, which is done with much taste ; her bedroom and bath very elegant, and even comfortable. Asked me for Sunday evening next.”

You might judge from this that Moore was irredeemably silly. Yet he was not, but a kindly, amiable, often witty fellow. Like Hazlitt, he was unwilling to face the facts of life, and his wisdom was book wisdom ; yet there was something modest in his vanity, and Mr. Stephen Gwynn has pleaded his case so well,* that it is possible to think of him as a patriot in porcelain.

Emmet was of sterner stuff, and, despite a theatrical

* In *The English Men of Letters* (Macmillan).

bias which made him think rather of uniforms than weapons, he had the spirit though not the mind of a warrior; he had, too, the wistful dignity as well as the futility of Quixote. His last words: "When my country shall have taken her place among the nations of the earth, then, and not till then, let my epitaph be written," are not too rhetorical to ring true. I sympathise with that instinct of the Irish people which prompts them to love him better than some more effectual patriots, and I was gratified by the applause that told me I had shown them their hero as they would see him.

And now we come to the third play, of which I doubt that even you will turn a page. . . . Yes, I hear you ruffle the leaves and murmur "My dear Conal! What is this? . . . Why Shakespeare? . . . Why poetry?" and then with an exasperated sigh: "It is not Shakespeare, it is not poetry, not even vaudeville . . . it is nothing."

Quite true, my dear Conrad, it is nothing. The nothing that in seven and thirty years of life I have learned and not forgotten. It is the brief epitome of me. The first writing begotten of me which I sign in the name of them who begot me.

As for Shakespeare, I have pressed him in my service for the reason that the author of *Everyman* enlisted Adonai; because the mere name facilitates the treatment of the fable. And I have borrowed the trappings of poetry because the thoughts I value came to me with the throb of verse, and for the sake of form I had to beat the whole to one measure. Like Gladstone I am enough a poet to know myself no poet; but dramatic blank verse does not concern itself with subtleties, and I hope that if you rank mine below Shaw's *Admirable Bashville*, you may find it no worse than Tennyson's *Queen Mary*.

Of course, there are some who think it disrespectful to present Shakespeare on the stage; as there are others who think it impious to present George IV. No pigmy dramatist of our time is allowed capable to suggest the genius of the one or the gentlemanliness of the other. Now I am afraid I cannot share Byron's view that Shakespeare was "a damned humbug," but it is noncontentious to declare that the term adequately describes more than one of his admirers. I know little about Shakespeare, infinitely less than Mr. Frank Harris, less perhaps than a thousand people: but I am positive that I know more about him than do forty millions in this country alone; and, if this little book should accidentally fall into their hands, they will learn from it at least as much about Shakespeare as he could tell them about Julius Cæsar. As Shakespeare found Cæsar of use to keep the wind away, so do I find Shakespeare. The protagonists of my play are the two Passengers: the English seaman and the Irish priest; Shakespeare, Jonson, and the other poets are purely subsidiary characters, scarcely more than a Chorus to turn strophe and antistrophe.

Not a very good arrangement this for the English stage, you will say? . . . No, truly it is not. Had I borne the canons of English taste in mind when I was writing it, I would have provided a love scene for Judith and the Young Poet, a sword and dagger fight for the two Passengers, and a final direction that the body of Shakespeare should be hoisted up into the flies by seraphim in pink overalls.

Knowing as you do that, while I patiently abide by every law my self-respect will suffer me to bear with, I would not accept salvation at the cost of liberty, you may think it strange that I should make a hero of a priest, and a Jesuit priest . . . well, my philosophy of history does not show me that a priest is necessarily

an enemy of freedom. Clericalism has been the deadliest of poisons in hands so unscrupulous as Metternich's; but Metternich would cheerfully have seen England hang every priest she could find in Ireland. Many as the evils to be laid at their doors, I believe that priests, take them for all in all, are worthier than the men who are not priests; I believe that, in the main, their labours have tended to justice between man and man. And, under correction and well knowing that my experience and my reading may not suffice for judgment, I advance the opinion that the Jesuits have been the worthiest of priests. I cannot dismiss the suspicion that cunning men to-day are using them for foul purposes in Spain, and I will not pretend that they have not been so used in the past; but I am confident that their own conscious purpose, however childish, never has been evil. I believe that they have more often fought for liberty than against it. It is true that they first entered the field to combat Luther and Calvin, but what worse enemy had liberty than this pretty pair—the one an oppressor of the poor, the other a non-conformist Torquemada? If they were right then Erasmus was wrong, and I cannot find that it is so.

I will give you at least one good reason for thinking that the Jesuits have rarely been obstinate towards the spirit of the age and the ever-widening concept of liberty. Who was more heroically tolerant than Voltaire? Was he not educated by the Jesuits? Did he not retain his friendship for them throughout his long life, and, if he ridiculed, did he not praise them? Above all, did he not stand by and protect them in their hour of need? Let me recall to you these phrases from his letter to Father Porée S.J., covering a copy of his tragedy *Œdipe*, and dated Paris, 7th January, 1729:

“ Vous m'avez appris à faire une guerre d'honnête homme. . . Voilà comme les gens de lettres devraient se

combattre ; voilà comme ils en useraient, s'ils avaient été à votre école. . . .

“ Adieu, mon cher et révérend père ; je suis pour jamais à vous et aux vôtres, avec la tendre reconnaissance que je vous dois.”

I, too, owe something to the Jesuits, I owe them much evil and much good. I have not feared to tell them of the evil. I do not fear to tell the world of the good ; and, if I have drawn an Irish Jesuit as a saint, it is because I believe there have been saints among them.

But in *Shakespeare's End* it is not the priest who speaks for me, it is rather Ben Jonson. My religion concerns itself with the practical morality of life, and, so far, there are but three things I receive as certain :

It is no more true that one man is the equal of another than that a shire-horse is the equal of an Arab.

But if it be wrong for a strong man to rob the weak, it is not less wrong for a clever man to enrich himself at the cost of a dull one.

And what is wrong for any one man must be wrong for all the men in the mob which, viewed from its varnished side, we call a nation.

And now, my dear Conrad, if you have read so far, you know more about me, and my works and pomps, than any one else in the world (excepting the discreet Printer) is ever likely to suspect.

But you do not know how profoundly

I am,

Your admirer,

CONAL O'RIORDAN.

POSTSCRIPT

THIS little book must not go forth to you as a bearer of melancholy. I am a stoic but no pessimist. Even Poland I see whole and stalwart; and if the English cannot claim a place among the pioneers of civilization they have not the Russian pride of being its camp-followers. England has her drunken hours, but I myself have seen them grow less frequent. Despite the pitfalls they have been flung into by arrogant proconsuls, the more intellectual Parliamentarians on both sides show a will to goodness. When I was a child the last thing thought of by the Irish Secretaries was the good of Ireland. Since then we have had a Morley, a Wyndham, and a Birrell, men of dissimilar temperament but all possessed of the desire to understand; all, I am proud to reflect, men of letters. Add to their names that of the ex-leader of the Opposition. He was a despot, but a high-minded despot; and I believe most Irishmen have long since forgiven him his trespasses; I dare not say they have forgotten them.

As for His Majesty the King, I have seen him twice, first when I was a little boy and he was a big one. I remember well how, despite my antipathy to his House (then represented in Ireland by a fair-dealing coal merchant of abominable name), I was so carried away by the promise of that bright and kindly face that I cheered him as heartily as anyone. Again I saw and cheered him on his wedding day; but only a curmudgeon would have refused him that courtesy. Most to the point is this; I believe the promise of his youth is fulfilled, and that he is the most whole-heartedly benevolent, most truly worthy of them whose duty it has been to co-ordinate the thoughts and words and deeds of that Empire, heavy with reproach, but yet, I think, the least unhappy of the world.

EALING, *New Year's Day*, 1912.

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THE PIPER
AN UNENDED ARGUMENT

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*First Performance at the Abbey Theatre, Dublin,
13th February, 1908, and at the County Theatre,
Manchester, 18th February, 1909.*

CAPTAIN TALBOT . . .	ARTHUR SINCLAIR.
AN ENGLISH ENSIGN . . .	V. WRIGHT.
LARRY THE TALKER . . .	J. M. KERRIGAN.
TIM THE TRIMMER . . .	J. O'ROURKE.
BLACK MIKE	A. POWER.
PAT DENNEHY	S. MORGAN.
THE PIPER	SARA ALLGOOD.
REBELS, SOLDIERS

THE PIPER

Ere the curtain rises "The Shan Van Vocht" is played softly; then suddenly a cannon speaks and musketry crackles, while "The British Grenadiers" is beaten out in swelling tones as by a military band. This equally suddenly ceases, and the sound of firing dies away. After an instant's silence "The Shan Van Vocht" wails out again on a single pipe.

The Curtain Rises.

An hundred years ago and more. The last light from a sinking sun glows on the head of a green Irish hill, while amidst a babble of chattering and angry voices there enter, climbing over the crest of the hill, LARRY THE TALKER, carrying a green flag, TIM THE TRIMMER, PAT DENNEHY, and a dozen others ragged and dirty and armed with odd weapons. At their head limps THE PIPER, leading CAPTAIN TALBOT, who is wounded and roughly bandaged across the head, a prisoner. On either side of him men with scythes. Last of all comes BLACK MIKE with a heavy blackthorn. BLACK MIKE and PAT DENNEHY are stalwart men of the same age, rather less than forty, and the same build, but MIKE runs to muscle, DENNEHY to fat. TALBOT is a staff-officer, an Englishman of intelligence above the average, who has found life not too easy to live and yet more difficult to understand. He is mentally and physically the oldest person on the stage. All the men save MIKE,

TALBOT, and THE PIPER (*who is singing in an undertone "The Shan Van Vocht"*) are arguing. As each of the leading characters opens an idea the Chorus worry it between them until they catch a fresh one.]

LARRY [*to PIPER as he stops at the top of the hill to take breath*]

There, where are ye going? That's enough. Stay where ye are.

PIPER

Leave us alone. [*Lies down on grass like a weary dog, TALBOT standing over him.*]

LARRY

Well, there ye are now, there ye are; it was a glorious victory, a glorious victory, a glorious victory. By God, it was a glorious victory.

CHORUS

Be God, it was a glorious victory. Indeed, it was a glorious victory. Be God, it was a glorious victory.

BLACK MIKE [*sullenly holding himself aloof from the others*]

We were bet. [*All turn to look at him. He nods.*] We were bet.

LARRY [*speaking at the second effort*]

Bet! Who says we were bet? I'd like to see the man who says we were bet.

CHORUS [*in indignation*]

Bet! Bet! Who says we were bet? Bad scran to the man who says we were bet.

TIM

Faith, to say we were bet. . . . Faith, to say we were bet. . . . Faith, that's not the thing to say at all.

BLACK MIKE

I repeat, we were bet. www.libtool.com.cn

LARRY [*with dignity*]

And I repeat it was a glorious victory.

TIM

That sounds better.

CHORUS

Hear, hear. Of course it was a victory.

BLACK MIKE

We were bet.

LARRY

D'ye know what ye are? It's unpatriotic—that's what ye are, Black Mike.

CHORUS

That's it . . . Black Mike's unpatriotic.

TIM

O dear! O dear! to think that Mike! Black Mike's unpatriotic.

LARRY

Ye know, Black Mike, ye're always on the side of the English.

BLACK MIKE

[*Grimly pointing to his left arm swathed in a bloody bandage*] And they gave me this bayonet thrust for a reward.

LARRY

I never said they gave ye a reward . . . and what sort of a reward would they give ye, the English? I said ye were unpatriotic . . . ye are unpatriotic, ye know ye are. I repeat it . . . unpatriotic.

BLACK MIKE

How?

LARRY

I didn't say how, but I will say how. I repeat, ye're unpatriotic. Ye're unpatriotic in . . . in your speech. [*Triumphantly.*] Ye talk as if ye were unpatriotic—that's what it is.

TIM

Yes, that's it, that's it. He's not so much unpatriotic as that he talks as if he was unpatriotic. I wonder what'ud become of us if we all talked like that. . . . I hate a man to talk unpatriotic. Better any day a man should think unpatriotic than say it.

BLACK MIKE

Better say unpatriotic than do it.

TIM

I question that, Black Mike.

BLACK MIKE [*looking at him for the first time*]
Where were you during the fight, Tim?

TIM [*taken by surprise*]

That's a question to ask a patriot! Where was I during the fight . . . where was I, ye ask me! Me, of all men! Where was I? To think of it!

BLACK MIKE

Well, where were ye?

TIM

Where do ye suppose I was ?

BLACK MIKE

I don't suppose anything when I'm fighting, Tim. I'm done with supposing then. I'm sure I didn't see you do any fighting, that's all.

TIM

How could ye see me, ye omadhawn, unless ye'd eyes in the back of your head ?

BLACK MIKE

O . . . that's where ye was. I thought as much.

TIM

Wherever I was I tell ye I'd as good a share in the victory as you.

BLACK MIKE

Ye had a better share than me, Tim—in being bet.

TIM

Ye hear that, gentlemen ! He says we were bet.

LARRY

O, shame on Black Mike ! He says we were bet.

CHORUS

Shame on Black Mike . . . he says we were bet.

TIM

There is but one way, General Larry, to know the truth. Let us put it to the vote whether we were bet or not.

LARRY

Yes, that's fair. Let us hear the popular voice. Let us know by the votes of the people whether we're bet or not. Them who says we were bet—if there be a cowardly dastard present what dares do it—hold up your hands. [*Only BLACK MIKE holds up his hand.*] One says we were bet. Them as says we were not bet—they true patriots who love their country and know she never was bet—hold up your hands. [*All save BLACK MIKE, THE PIPER, and CAPTAIN TALBOT hold up their hands.*] Carried unanimously. Gentlemen, I beg to inform you that we were not bet.

CHORUS

Hurrah! We were not bet.

TIM [*frightened*]

Don't cheer so loud.

LARRY [*to TALBOT*]

Why didn't ye hold up your hand, ye rogue?

TALBOT

I was unaware I had a vote.

LARRY

Everyone that took part in the victory is entitled to vote.

TALBOT

But I belong to the other victorious party—I mean, the other party that took part in the victory.

LARRY [*interrupting him*]

The only party that took part in the victory was our party.

TALBOT

But I . . .

LARRY

Ye now belong to our party. As such ye are entitled to vote.

TALBOT

I esteem the privilege. But I have observed that your . . . bandmaster does not vote. In the circumstances I did not presume.

LARRY

The Piper's an innocent and knows no better. How would the like of him know whether he's bet or not?

TALBOT

In that he bears an interesting resemblance to the British bulldog . . . perhaps I should say to the British bulldog of tradition.

LARRY [*darkly*]

D'ye mean to insinuate you're not bet?

TALBOT

O, speaking for myself I'm quite bet, thank you—dead bet. You see, I'm not used to your Light Infantry drill.

LARRY

What d'ye mean by Light Infantry drill?

TALBOT

I mean that your movements so far as I have observed them have been performed at the double, and, indeed, if you've quite done running for the moment I should be gratified to be allowed to sit down. This damp grass of yours is bad for rheumatism but . . .

LARRY [*producing pistol*]

If I thought ye were laughing at us, I'd blow your soul to hell to laugh there.

TALBOT

I had no idea the Irish sense of humour was so lively.

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LARRY

I'll teach you that I've no sense of humour.

TALBOT

I beg of you on no account to give the matter another thought.

LARRY

Lie down, ye dog. [TALBOT *gingerly does so.*] One of ye tie the two legs of him.

TIM

I'll tie his legs. I'm the man to tie his legs. I've got a bit of rope. [*Produces it.*]

TALBOT

Enough to hang yourself, I hope.

LARRY

Keep a civil tongue in your head, or we'll hang you with it.

TALBOT

Not with my tongue, I beg.

LARRY

Your tongue's long enough.

TALBOT

But otherwise unsuited.

LARRY

I warn ye.

[TIM binds TALBOT.

TALBOT

Thank you. If you can see your way to leave me in charge of my head a little longer, I shall endeavour to be responsible for its contents.

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LARRY

Ye're a rare one to talk, ye are.

TALBOT

Not rare, my dear sir.

LARRY

Hold your whisht . . . ye're dreadful loquacious.

TALBOT

Something in your air—I'm sorry. May I talk to the bandmaster?

LARRY

Bandmaster! I'll have ye know there's no master here but me.

TALBOT [*waving his hand*]

I mean the . . . the music.

LARRY

If it's the Piper ye're after colloquing with, I'd have ye know it's little ye'll get out of him. But ye may address your observations to him if ye like . . . only no treachery, if ye value your immortal soul. [*Turning to his men.* The army will halt till it's time to go on again. [*As the men go off.*] Any man that likes can pile his arms. [*Plants flag.*] There's my head-quarters. Wherever the flag is you'll find me.

TIM

General, dear, hadn't we better hide the flag when we're not fighting?

LARRY

Hide the flag, is it? And how would we remember what we're fighting about if we hadn't the flag there to remind us? Sure, ye can't die for a flag ye can't see. [As TIM goes over to the flag.] What are ye doing there?

TIM

Only windin' up the folds to keep the dust out of it.

LARRY

If anyone touches that flag but me, I don't know what I'll do to him.

TIM [*reluctantly rising*]

Sure, it's shamed we'd be if the flag got dirty.

LARRY

I'm General, and it's for me to treat the flag as I please.

TIM

Indeed and it is, General, dear.

LARRY

Then what makes you go to say that I'd let it get dirty?

BLACK MIKE

Better the green had gone down in the blood and dirt than that we'd been bet.

TIM [*glad of this diversion*]

There ye are, Black Mike . . . Glory be to God, ye can't respect even the flag.

PAT DENNEHY [*in a deep unctuous voice*]

Glory be to God! It's thanking God we ought to be for preservin' us this day.

LARRY

Ay, I'm not the one to deny Him His share in our victory.

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BLACK MIKE

For the beatin' we have received, may the Lord make us truly thankful. [*To DENNEHY*] Why don't ye say Amen?

DENNEHY

Only an Orangeman would say a grace like that.

BLACK MIKE

Tell us how you thank God, then.

DENNEHY [*down to him*]

I promised Father Hanrahan to join in no prayer of yours. . . . Ye're not a Christian man, Black Mike, and I'll thank God for nothing He gave you.

BLACK MIKE

And I'll thank God for nothing till He gives me my death.

DENNEHY [*lifting his hand in warning*]

Ye'll repent them words at the gate of hell, Black Mike.

BLACK MIKE

I passed the gates of hell down there behind.

[*Pointing down the hill*]

DENNEHY [*moving away*]

Ye're a bad man, Black Mike, and I'll not be seen speaking with ye. I'll thank God by myself.

TIM

There, there, there, don't be talkin' like that. It'll be high time to thank God when the country's free.

DENNEHY [*turning on him*]

The like of you'll never set the country free.

TIM

If ye talk to me like that I'll tell Father Hanrahan on ye.

DENNEHY

Then let him judge between you and me.

[*Turns away contemptuously*]

TALBOT

[*Who has been somewhat ruefully considering his plight*]
By the way, Mr. . . . Mr. General . . . you'll excuse the observation . . . my only object in making it is that I don't want to be shot by accident by my own men—don't you think it would be so much . . . so much cosier here if you threw out a sentry or two?

LARRY

A sentry . . . a sentry, is it? A sentry . . . is it to stop the enemy?

TALBOT

Well, not essentially to stop the enemy, but shall we say to tell us when they see them coming?

LARRY [*scratching his head*]

Sentries . . . Arrah—is it sentries . . . to tell us when the enemy's coming. Sure we'll know soon enough if the enemy's coming.

TIM

I'm always preachin' to ye to throw out sentries. I'd like to see a sentry everywhere as long as ye have sentries between you and the enemy ye know ye're safe.

LARRY [*sternly*]

I want no man to come between me and my enemy.

TIM

But troth, man, it's the only way to avoid the enemy.

CHORUS

True for him . . . it's the only way to avoid the enemy.

LARRY

Ye say that, man, ye say that . . . ye stand there lookin' at me sayin' that . . . yet not one of ye goes.

BLACK MIKE

You're the General—'tis for you to send them.

LARRY

For me to send them! Is it . . . is it indeed. . . . my place indeed. . . . Ye call me the General—the Supreme Commander-in-Chief—a kind of king—and then in the face of that ye expect me to think of everything . . . to do the smallest thing . . . the very smallest thing . . . to send out even the sentries. How can ye expect me—the General—to trouble about such things? Man alive! d'ye expect me to think of everything?

BLACK MIKE

Ye can talk of everything.

LARRY

And if I talk of everything, doesn't that make it the more unreasonable to expect me to do everything? Let alone to think of everything. I'll tell you what it is. . . . I'm hard worked enough already. Ye see that flag there? I've carried that these three days . . . I'll do no more. I'll tell ye what it is . . . the gift of eloquence is mine. It's been in my family since the days of Saint Patrick . . . since the days of my ancestor Niall of the Bull Throat, who was Antiquary to King Cormac, and all but converted Saint Patrick, if it hadn't been for Saint Patrick convertin' him.

DENNEHY [*solemnly*]

Saint Patrick! Is it the priests ye're attackin', Larry Meagher?

LARRY [*disturbed*]

The priests! Is it me attack the priests . . . me who love and reverence the priests . . . with their rich round periods . . . the fine orators! 'Tis not for an orator to attack orators—for I am an orator too.

TIM

Indeed ye are, Larry. 'Tis the fine orator ye are . . . 'tis beautiful to hear ye.

CHORUS

Yes, yes, the General's the fine orator . . . 'tis beautiful to hear him . . . we've been hearin' him all day.

LARRY

Thank ye, Tim . . . thank ye, gentleman. As you say, I can address my army. . . . I can inspire it with my clarion voice as I lead it in the hour of victory . . .

BLACK MIKE

As ye have done to-day.

LARRY

As I have done to-day. As I will do to-morrow. . . . And as I will do every day until, and if I'm spared by the blessing of God, long after Ireland shall be free.

CHORUS

Hurrah for Larry Meagher! We'll follow him anywhere, any time . . . for he's an orator.

LARRY

Thank ye, gentlemen. . . . But I cannot and will not undertake to send out sentries. If ye want sentries ye'd better find them for yourselves. For my part I despise sentries. Leave sentries and all dirty tricks to the oppressors, say I . . . to them cowardly English, over whom I led you to that glorious victory to-day.

BLACK MIKE

We were bet.

LARRY

If we were bet, where are the enemy?

BLACK MIKE

They're close behind us.

LARRY

They're behind us—yes. Well, and doesn't that show we've won? They were in front of us before the fight. I defy ye to say, unpatriotic as ye are, that they were not in front of us before the fight.

BLACK MIKE

They'll be in front of us again soon, as well as behind, if we stay talkin' here.

TIM

Yes, yes . . . sure the yeomanry have horses . . . it's not fair fighting men upon horses . . . horses are a dirty trick, like sentries . . . we have no horses, but we can post sentries. Posting sentries is the only way to escape.

LARRY

Escape! Who says escape? Who wants to escape?

TIM

No one wants to escape . . . but it's only reasonable to want to be able to escape. Ye know your old mother, Larry, would be easier in her mind if she knew ye could always escape to . . . to save the flag. And there's no way like posting sentries. Who'll volunteer to be a sentry? The sentry's is the post of honour. I think some of the young lads would be wantin' to volunteer to learn to be sentries. It's really not safe to be without sentries durin' retreat. [*He shrinks from LARRY'S blazing eye.*] I mean . . .

LARRY

Retreat! Who says retreat? I won ye a glorious, golden victory . . . and now ye talk about retreatin' . . . Who says it was not a victory?

BLACK MIKE

We were bet.

LARRY

Whg says we were bet ?

TIM

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We were not bet, General Larry—not us here. But some of us was bet—them we left behind when we retreated.

BLACK MIKE

No! them were not bet—they were the dead—they were not bet. It's us who are now alive . . . us, us, us, that are bet. . . . [*Short silence. Only the PIPER is heard humming "The Shan Van Vocht."*] Have I shamed you to think we are not dead with them ?

TIM [*the first to think out an answer*]

'Tis easy to see ye're not a family man, Black Mike.

BLACK MIKE

No, I never bred slaves to be bet by the Sassenach.

LARRY

Speak for yourself, man . . . I wasn't bet. . . . And if ye don't breed slaves, 'tis only because no decent girl would marry ye.

CHORUS [*regaining composure*]

Sure, no decent girl 'ud marry Black Mike.

LARRY

If we were bet, how is it we have a prisoner? . . . Tell me that.

BLACK MIKE

Think of all the prisoners they have. They're marchin' them off by now to hang them on the lamp-posts of Dublin.

CHORUS

Be God now . . . think of them being marched off and hanged on the lamp-posts of Dublin !

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TIM

Let's send out the sentries before we talk any more. . . . No man likes to be hanged . . . the sentries is the thing. Let's vote for who'll be sentries. I volunteer . . . I volunteer to count the votes.

LARRY

Well, if they hang their prisoners we're as good as them any day—we can hang ours. We have a prisoner here—can't we hang him ?

CHORUS

We have a prisoner too. . . . We can hang him. . . . We're as good as them any day.

TALBOT

I beg you, gentlemen, to discuss this matter in a more academical spirit. I am in a sense your guest—

TIM

Think of him being in a sense our guest !

CHORUS

Think of him being our guest !

LARRY

He'll only be our guest till he's hanged.

TALBOT

If you must hang me—you must. I make no attempt to bias your judgment . . . but any little grace you can give me——

LARRY

Much grace your fellows gave us.

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I apologise for our shortcomings. None of us are professionals. For myself I will ask you to believe me I would rather be hanged than hang.

LARRY

It's easy to say that.

TALBOT

Apparently difficult for you to understand. But never mind . . . that is not my point. I only ask you to consider my feelings for the remainder of my stay with you. You are hardy fellows . . . most athletic . . . I admire you. I, alas! am of a somewhat delicate constitution, and all this . . . this unwonted exercise . . .

LARRY

Hold your gab! I say, fellow-countrymen all, we have a prisoner here I tuk with my own hand.

TIM

Ye did, indeed. I helped ye.

DENNEHY

Ye both of you lie. Thanks be to God, I took the prisoner.

CHORUS [*excitedly*]

No, I took him . . . it was me . . . etc.

TIM

That's queer. . . . I was almost sure ye took him, General. If it wasn't you, I'm sure it was some of you here. Whoever it was, I'm sure I helped.

LARRY

Once for all, it was I took him and no one helped me. Surrender! says I. And he surrendered. Didn't I say Surrender! Captain?

CHORUS

No, Captain, ye surrendered to me. Say it was to me. . . . Ye know it was me . . .

TALBOT

Gentlemen, I have not the smallest shadow of doubt—apart from your assurance—that I surrendered to all of you. Collectively and individually, gentlemen, I have the honour to be your prisoner.

BLACK MIKE

Who did ye give your sword to?

TALBOT

To the best of my recollection you broke my sword with your stick, and I gave the poor remains to the bandmaster here. I thought, as he is not very big, he might be able to use it as a baton.

CHORUS

He gave his sword to the Piper. Where's the sword?

TALBOT

The boy threw it away. I fear it did not please him.

LARRY

Ye shouldn't have thrown away the sword, Shan.
If ye throw away any more swords I'll beat ye . . .

PIPER

Leave us alone . . . leave us alone.

LARRY

I've never had an officer's sword in my hand.

CHORUS

The innocent threw away the officer's sword . . .
the beautiful sword. . . . Have ye ever seen an officer's
sword ?

TIM

Sure if he threw it away it's easy to find it again.
When the country's free we'll go look for it.

LARRY

I've a mind to go look for it now. Why didn't
someone pick it up ?

BLACK MIKE

Because we were bet and running away.

LARRY

Shame on ye to say we were bet ! Before the officer
too. Shame on ye ! . . . And there's not a word of
truth in it. [*To TALBOT*] Had the march here begun
when I took ye ?

TALBOT

Well, at the time you and all these other gentlemen
did me the honour to insist upon my company, I was
under the impression I was leading a pursuit. I gather
from your conversation that this was an illusion. But

I think it fair to warn you that my impression was shared by our troops generally. Hence my suggestion that you should post sentries.

LARRY [*doubtfully*]

'Tis an English trick, this posting sentries. I'm agin' posting sentries. And 'tis an Englishman says it.

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TIM

Perhaps he let himself be took of purpose to betray us.

CHORUS

Perhaps he let himself be took of purpose to betray us.

DENNEHY

I vote for hanging him now. That'll be one Englishman the less to fight.

CHORUS

That'll be one Englishman the less.

TALBOT

And one crime the more.

LARRY [*with real passion*]

Is it crime ye talk of? Ye spawn of hell! What about England's crimes?

TALBOT [*bitterly*]

Sir, I do not endeavour to justify England any more than a Bow Street runner endeavours to justify the law. I am merely an English gentleman paid to cut throats in Ireland.

LARRY

Ye'd have done well to go cut them somewhere else.

TALBOT

Two years ago I was cutting them in India. Perhaps next week I shall be cutting them in France.

DENNEHY [*glaring down on him*]

Next week ye'll be cutting them in hell.

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TALBOT [*shrugging his shoulders*]

That may be as it may be. My point is that I am not a politician, and that I bear none of you the least ill-will.

LARRY [*sarcastically*]

Not even when we're hangin' ye ?

TALBOT

Not even when you hang me. [*Slight pause.*] I beg you, if you hang me, not to embitter the last moments of our intercourse by confusing me with your political opponents.

LARRY

Do ye go for to say that ye're not one of them yeomen ?

TALBOT [*annoyed*]

No, sir, I am not. . . . Even if . . .

LARRY [*doubtfully*]

Are ye quite sure ye're not a yeoman ?

TALBOT

If you will be so good as to consider the shabbiness of my uniform, you will at once perceive that I could not afford to belong to that distinguished body.

LARRY

A distinguished body, ye call them? I call them the worst blackguards on the face of the earth. Have ye anything to say to that?

TALBOT

I think you forget the militia.

LARRY

O the villains! the murdering Orangemen. . . . Yet they're your friends . . . they're your friends.

TALBOT [*soberly*]

Alas! that it should seem so. I quite understand that you want to hang me, and I understand why.

LARRY

'Tis my eloquence has done it all.

CHORUS

'Tis the General's eloquence.

TALBOT

I am ready for the rope. But *in articulo mortis* . . .

LARRY

In what?

TALBOT

In the hour of death, I would say I would rather be an Irish rebel than an English yeoman.

CHORUS

Did ye hear what the officer says? He'd rather be an Irish rebel than an English yeoman.

LARRY .

Sure, what's the good of talking now ?

TIM

It's all right to hear what they say. . . . I wouldn't believe a word of it.

BLACK MIKE [*coming forward to TALBOT*]

You talk fair, yet you trade in slaves.

TALBOT

I'm a slave myself. We're all the slaves of the fool with the money-bag—and he's the slave of his money.

BLACK MIKE [*passionately*]

D'ye think this earth beneath us is no more to me than money ?

TALBOT

Ireland is your money. Your symbol of wealth. The something no man has.

BLACK MIKE

That no man has. . . . [*Trying to think.*] I have . . . I have myself.

TALBOT

For how long, my friend, how long ?

BLACK MIKE

You're beyond me . . . but your blood's on my hands.

TALBOT

And yours on mine. [*They grip hands.*]

BLACK MIKE

The eyes of me are clear.

TALBOT

And mine.

LARRY

There, ye see now for yourselves. . . . Black Mike's on the side of the English.

CHORUS

Ay. Black Mike's on the side of the English.

BLACK MIKE

It's one way for you and another for me.

TALBOT

And a rope for both.

BLACK MIKE [*shaking his head*]

There'll be no hanging here.

LARRY [*shocked*]

Who says there'll be no hanging ?

BLACK MIKE

I say there'll be no hanging. . . . But we'll all be shot down like hares if we can't find someone who knows how to lead.

LARRY [*defiantly*]

I'd like to see you lead anyone.

BLACK MIKE

Ye never will—for no man dare follow me.

TIM

'Tis not so easy to follow a man and not know where he's goin'.

CHORUS

Does anyone know where Black Mike's goin' ?

BLACK MIKE

I'm going no further. I'm going to stand still.

LARRY

Who's afraid now? The brave loving souls will march on with me.

BLACK MIKE

Till you're overtook by the English and die like beasts.

CHORUS

Die like beasts, is it? . . . Die like beasts?

TIM [*who has been tearing up papers in his hat*]

Gentlemen, gentlemen, ye're never safe with them mad English. Let's draw lots for who'll be sentry.

A VOICE

That's not the way to draw lots.

ANOTHER VOICE

It's easy to see Tim never draws lots.

THIRD VOICE

I'll show ye how to draw lots.

TIM

Draw lots in your own way and give me back my hat.

LARRY [*authoritatively*]

I'm General, and it's for me to decide how ye draw lots. It's to be done in Tim's way.

A VOICE

But Tim won't draw himself.

ANOTHER VOICE

Tim won't go sentry himself.

TIM [*plausibly*]

We can't all go sentry. . . . What does it matter who goes sentry, so long as some of ye goes ?

CHORUS

What does it matter who goes sentry ?

DENNEHY

Let's send Black Mike. He said we were bet.

CHORUS

That's true . . . Black Mike said we were bet. Let him go sentry. . . . Serve him right.

BLACK MIKE

All right. I'll go sentry . . . to save you from being worse bet.

CHORUS

We're not bet. We never was bet . . . we'll never be bet.

BLACK MIKE

Well, then, one of ye lend me a musket. [*Pause. No one stirs.*] Ye wouldn't have me go sentry with no more than my wattle in my hand ? General, where's your authority ?

LARRY

I'm the General . . . and I command one of you boys to lend Black Mike his musket. [*Pause.*] Pat Dennehy, lend Black Mike your musket.

DENNEHY [*sharply*]

I won't. [*Then, slowly and solemnly*] I borrowed it from Father Hanrahan, and he made me swear never to lay it down before the Sassenach was drove out of the country.

LARRY [*much impressed*]

That's a fine oath. . . . I'd have no man break so fine an oath as that. . . . It's a credit to Father Hanrahan . . . and any oath to a priest is sacred in my eyes. Keep your musket, Pat Dennehy, and keep your oath. You're a true patriot. Keep your musket. . . . [*Recovering from his emotion.*] Tim, you're better at advice than fightin' . . . maybe you'll lend Black Mike your musket.

TIM [*with great fervour*]

General, it's hard for a brave man to part with his musket . . . more by token it was my mother gave it me. By the same token Black Mike has shown himself no friend of mine. But if it's for the cause, General dear . . . there's my musket, Black Mike—take it.

BLACK MIKE

[*Takes the musket, looks at it, and throws it down*]
Bad end to ye for a rogue, Tim the Trimmer! . . . there's no lock to it.

TIM

It's ill to look a gift horse in the mouth, Black Mike.

LARRY

Indeed it is. Ill is it? Ill to look a gift horse in the mouth, Black Mike? How can ye expect any man to lend you his musket when you treat it like that?

BLACK MIKE [*desperately*]

I tell you the musket has no lock to it.

LARRY

And how many of our muskets have locks to them, I'd like to know? How many of us have muskets at all, let alone having locks to them? . . . Answer me that, Black Mike.

TIM

There's no pleasin' Black Mike.

CHORUS

That's it. . . . That's true for him. How many of us have muskets at all, let alone havin' locks . . . there's no pleasing Black Mike.

[The discussion as to the comparative merits of muskets with and without locks is pursued on the skyline.]

TALBOT [*to the PIPER*]

Why do you keep on humming to yourself like that, my lad? You make a most dismal noise. Why not give us instead a little tune on the pipes?

PIPER [*shaking his head*]

Leave us alone, leave us alone!

TALBOT [*taking up pipes*]

I really wish you'd give us a tune . . . it would do us both good, for you don't seem in great spirits, and I confess that unless your friends hang me pretty soon, you'll find me so depressed as to be downright bad company. Take your pipes, lad, and strike up. I don't mind what it is provided it drowns that conversation which I find far from exhilarating. I'll give you a guinea—or owe you a guinea—for one little air. . . . Why, what's this? [*Something drops from the pipes.*]

By the living Jingo! a Bess bullet . . . and a big hole in the pipes. No wonder you can't play on them. My young friend, you've been very near to death . . . and you're not so innocent as to want to die, are you? [*Testily*] O, stop that droning . . . or if you must sing, sing out loud, and let's hear what you're singing.

[*The PIPER leaps to his feet and sings, with his eyes looking into space.*]

PIPER

O, the French will come again,
Says the *Shan Van Vocht*,
And they'll bring ten thousand men,
Says the *San Van Vocht* ;
And with powder and with ball
For our rights we'll loudly call,
And who'll deny us then,
Says the *Shan Van Vocht*?

[*His voice, faint at first, gains power as he sings*]

O, the country will be free,
Says the *Shan Van Vocht*.
Yes, the country will be free,
Says the *Shan Van Vocht*.
Sure the country shall be free
From the centre to the sea ;
Then Hurrah! for Liberty,
Says the *Shan Van Vocht*.

LARRY

[*Sweeping down angrily ere the last line be sung*]
Whisht with your singing, lad! 'Tis no time for singing,
ye fool. We can't hear ourselves talk.

THE PIPER [*painfully*]

Leave us alone, leave us alone!

BLACK MIKE

And so no one will lend me a musket . . . no one'll trust me with a musket, though it's to save you all.

DENNEHY

Who are ye that we should trust ye, Black Mike?

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TIM

Trust him or not, someone ought to be doing something . . . either send out sentries, or, better still, go on with the retreat. . . . I'm for going on with the retreat.

[As he slinks off as if to go he meets Larry, who flings him back.]

LARRY

Retreat! don't name the word retreat.

[Altercation as before. THE PIPER loses his rigidity and sinks to earth.]

TALBOT

So that's the *Shan Van Vocht*, is it? Well, it's quite a good song—plenty of go—unfortunately for you it's on the wrong side . . . for you know the French won't come again . . . they're not such fools. No one would ever come to this pestilent country if they could help it. . . . Hulloo! my lad, what's the matter with you? You're not going to faint . . . *[He edges nearer to him.]* Why, that bullet must have hit you. . . . *[Calling to TIM, who has crept towards them.]* I say, you fellow there . . . this poor lad has been heavily hit . . . it must be looked to at once.

TIM *[coming over]*

Serve the omadhawn right for going where he wasn't wanted. I'm all agin' these fights . . . I'm all agin'

bloodshed, but no one will ever listen to me . . . if they'd only listen to me nothing would ever happen. You'll remember that, Captain, won't you? See here now, Captain . . . if I let you go now, now that no one's looking and ye can escape easy—I tied the two legs of ye myself that ye might escape easy—if I let ye go now, what'll you do for me later on?

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TALBOT

I should dearly like to give you what you deserve.

TIM [*on his knees, shocked*]

But ye wouldn't do such a cruel thing, Captain, dear . . . not me that's willing to save ye!

TALBOT

You canting dog! I'd like to see you swept off the face of the earth; but if instead of talking to me you bandage up the boy there, I'll try to persuade your judges that you did one good action in your miserable life.

[*He struggles to slip out of his knot.*]

TIM

Your honour's honour . . . there's no helping them that won't be helped. [*Approaching the boy.*] The lad's only meechin'.

THE PIPER [*furiously, when TIM touches him*]

Leave us alone! Leave us alone!

TIM [*recoiling*]

It's not for the like of us to help him, Captain.

BLACK MIKE [*on crest of hill*]

So none of you will trust me . . . not one of you

with his blasted musket. I that am willing to die for you. . . . Am I not willing to die for you ?

CHORUS

Ay, ay, he's a bad man, but he showed he's willing to die for us.

BLACK MIKE

Then why won't you trust me . . . why won't you trust me, I say ?

DENNEHY

Father Hanrihan says we're not to trust ye.

CHORUS

That's true. . . . Father Hanrihan said we wasn't to trust ye.

BLACK MIKE

And why am I not to be trusted . . . dare any man tell me that ?

DENNEHY [*after slight pause*]

Father Hanrihan said ye were a renegade.

BLACK MIKE

A renegade !

DENNEHY [*with deep solemnity*]

He said ye hadn't made your Easter duty.

BLACK MIKE

[*Waving his shillelagh to emphasise his words*] Curse Father Hanrihan for a meddling fool, say I. Curse Father Hanrihan ! Bloody end to him, say I.

TIM [*holding up his hand*]

Whist !

[*A panicstricken pause.*]

VOICE BELOW THE RIDGE

Steady, men! Wait for the word. Aim low. By Platoons. Number one! Ready! Fire!

[*Slight rattle of musketry. BLACK MIKE falls dead. TIM rushes off, followed by a few.*]

DENNEHY [*impressively as one in an ecstasy*]

'Tis the judgment of Heaven for cursin' the holy priest.

VOICE BELOW THE RIDGE

Platoon Number Two. Not so damned eager. . . . Keep your muzzles down. Ready! Fire!

[*More shots. DENNEHY falls, the others, except LARRY, take to their heels.*]

LARRY [*vainly seeking to rally them*]

Ye cowards! ye cowards! Ye cowards! Follow me! I will lead ye to another glorious victory!

[*He goes to the flag and takes it. Aims his pistol, which misses fire.*]

VOICE BELOW THE RIDGE

Platoon Number Three. As before! Ready! Fire!

[*More shots. At the word "Fire," LARRY flings his pistol at the soldiers, turns to run, but is hit in the back and falls dead, dropping the flag. THE PIPER leaps to his feet, and going to the flag picks it up again. TALBOT, still struggling with his knot, crawls over to him.*]

TALBOT

You crazy young fool! Drop that flag or they'll shoot you.

VOICE BELOW THE RIDGE

Number One, are you not reloaded yet?

TALBOT

Drop that flag! No harm will be done you if you drop the flag . . . I swear it on my honour.

THE PIPER [*furiously repulsing him*]

Leave us alone! Leave us alone!

VOICE BELOW THE RIDGE

Are you ready, Number One?

TALBOT [*creeping to edge and shouting down*]

Don't fire . . . there's no one here but myself and a mad piper.

THE PIPER [*waving the flag and singing madly*]

Yes, the country will be free,
Says the *Shan Van Vocht* ;
Sure the country shall be free,
Says the *Shan Van Vocht*.
Sure, the country shall be free
From the centre to the sea.
Then Hurrah! for Liberty,
Says the *Shan Van Vocht*.
Then Hurrah! for liberty . . .

VOICE BELOW THE RIDGE

[*Speaking through the song*] Number One . . . as before. Ready! Fire! [*More shots. The Flag and the PIPER go down together.*] Fix bayonets!

TALBOT [*struggling frantically to his feet*]

I tell you, you zanies, there was but a piper here and you've killed him.

VOICE BELOW THE RIDGE

[While TALBOT is still speaking] Cheer and charge !

[The soldiers, with a cheer, rush up the hill, bayonet the PIPER, and seize the flag.]

TALBOT

[Driven forward by their impetus, turns on them furiously] Damn your eyes ! Halt !

[The SOLDIERS halt instinctively, huddled together amidst the bodies of the dead and dying.]

ENSIGN

[Appearing and planting the Regimental Colour where the green flag had stood] I claim this hill for the Warwick Fencibles.

TALBOT [*grimly*]

Permit me to offer you my congratulations. A brilliant victory. . . . Gad's my life !

ENSIGN [*taken aback*]

Why . . . the hill was occupied by the croppies, wasn't it ? And we've proved ourselves the best men. . . . [*Sarcastically.*] Or perhaps you'd taken it before we came . . . perhaps you're the best man ?

TALBOT

Young gentleman, I make no claim. . . . Some ragged, but worthy, persons lie beneath your feet. One in particular perished through an overweening contempt for the marksmanship of your distinguished corps. [*Snatching the green flag angrily from the soldier who had taken it.*] You'll oblige me by burying his coat of arms with him. . . . He seemed to like it. [*Spreading out the flag, and looking at it deprecatingly.*] Queer taste. Hereditary, we must presume.

ENSIGN

But the flag, sir, is a trophy—it goes with the hill.

TALBOT

Don't be demn'd ridiculous! If you won't bury the lad, I'll do it myself. Lend me a, what-d'ye-call-it? . . . thing you turn the earth with. . . . Pioneers carry 'em . . . spade . . . spade.

ENSIGN

I beg your pardon, sir, they're already digging a trench below.

TALBOT

Never mind what they're doing below, sir, we'll bury him here.

ENSIGN

There are no pioneers with this company, nor a pick nor spade within half a mile. [*Bugle blows.*] And that's the Recall. . . . Fencibles! Fall in!

[*The SOLDIERS fall into rank. The SERGEANT aligns them with his halberd.*]

TALBOT

Then we'll leave him here till we can bury him, for here on the crest of the hill, where your men so successfully shot him, his bones shall lie. You take me, young gentleman? [*Covers the body with the green flag, then in a voice of thunder*] Fencibles! 'Shun! Prepare to salute!

ENSIGN [*aghast*]

Salute what?

TALBOT [*controlling himself with difficulty*]

This lasting memorial of the valour of the Warwick Fencibles. . . . Present arms! [*To the ENSIGN*]

Dip your colours, sir ! [*The SOLDIERS obey ; then he turns again to the ENSIGN*] You may march your men away.

ENSIGN

Port arms ! Shoulder arms ! Form fours ! Left face ! Quick march !

[*They descend the hill. For a moment TALBOT stands lost in thought. Then, vaguely wondering why the world was made, he approaches the body of the PIPER. Curiosity prompts him to look closely upon the face of the dead. He bends to lift the flag, but as he touches it he hears, or thinks he hears, again the lilt of the "Shan Van Vocht." Then his courage fails him, his nerves break, and thinking only that it is not good for a British officer to be alone on an Irish hill with the ghost of a rebel tune he puts his hands to his ears, and hastens to rejoin his fellows.*]

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AN IMAGINARY CONVERSATION

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*First Performance at the Abbey Theatre, Dublin,
13th May, 1909, and at the Court Theatre, London,
9th June, 1909.*

KATE MOORE	.	.	.	SARA ALLGOOD.
TOMMY	.	.	.	J. M. KERRIGAN.
EMMET	.	.	.	FRED O'DONOVAN.

AN IMAGINARY
CONVERSATION

[The characters in the play are all young: EMMET, the eldest, is rather less than twenty.]

SCENE.—Tommy Moore's room over his father's shop in Aungier Street, Dublin, May, 1797.

TOMMY MOORE, seated at the piano picking out "Let Erin Remember," stops suddenly as the door opens and MR. ROBERT EMMET enters in riding costume.]

MOORE

Hulloa !

EMMET

Hulloa ! Tommy, how goes it ?

MOORE

Grand, Bob, thank ye kindly. You look hot.

EMMET

Yes, I'm hot with riding. How is it you have the window closed a fine day like this ? . . . Are you afraid of fresh air, Tommy ?

MOORE

The air's not so fresh as all that in Aungier Street. [Opens window.] I never thought of seeing you.

EMMET

Driven away the Muse, have I? What was that you were playing when I came in?

MOORE [*confused*]

O, nothing, nothing . . . only one of them old Irish airs I'm trying to put words to.

EMMET

'Twill be well worth it, I was thinking, as I came upstairs . . . if the words are as good as the tune. . . .

MOORE [*scratching his head*]

That's the difficulty. . . . Sit down, won't you? Anything I can do for you, Bob?

EMMET [*sitting down and looking in front of him*]

Yes. I've thoughts on my mind that want music. Play me the *Marseillaise*, Tom.

MOORE [*doubtfully*]

Play you the *Marseillaise*? . . . the *Marseillaise* hymn?

EMMET

Yes, don't shut the instrument. Play the *Marseillaise*, Tom, and sing it.

MOORE

O, sure I've got no voice.

EMMET

Don't be so modest. You can stir the heart when you please.

MOORE

O, it's Kate you ought to hear sing the *Marseillaise*.

EMMET

Let Kate come and sing it then.

MOORE

Kate's out and won't be home.

EMMET

Then you sing it, Tom.

MOORE

I don't rightly know the words.

EMMET

But I've heard you sing it, man. Within the walls of old Trinity itself. It's a wonder they didn't fall down.

MOORE [*anxious to change the subject*]

That'd be the fine sight now. . . . Not but I'm proud of being a Trinity boy myself.

EMMET

So am I—there's plenty to be proud of there. Swift and Goldy and Burke—only Burke's a traitor. . . .

MOORE

Is he now? I never heard that.

EMMET [*fiercely*]

The age of chivalry is dead, said he . . . when the age of chivalry for all but a few fine ladies and gentlemen is only beginning.

MOORE

O, the Revolution . . . 'tis a bloody beginning, Bob.

EMMET

All beginnings are bloody, Tom. You and I and all of us began in blood.

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MOORE [*shocked*]

Where did you hear that, Bob?

EMMET

You'll find it in Ezekiel, Tom.

MOORE

Ah, one of them old Jews. . . . Anyhow, you've queer notions, Bob. My mother doubts they're not quite gentlemanly.

EMMET

My compliments to her, Tom, and they're not at all gentlemanly. Write me down a low fellow, and sing me the *Marseillaise*.

MOORE [*uncomfortable*]

Ah, now, what's the good of singing the *Marseillaise*?

EMMET

Read the papers, Tom, and see the good it did France.

MOORE

I don't much like the goings on in France myself.

EMMET

Since when have you changed your mind about that?

MOORE

O, since I've been thinking about it, and hearing what people say, and—[catches EMMET's eye]—and anyhow, Ireland isn't France.

EMMET

No, and I'm not one to wish her a province of France any more than a province of England. For me, Ireland is always Ireland still . . . and she might be greater than England, and as great as France, only if . . . if we had something to stir the heart of Ireland as the *Marseillaise* stirred the heart of France.

MOORE

O, you think that, do you?

[Looks uneasily at piano.]

EMMET

Do I think it? [Shrugs his shoulders.] At least let me dream it. And now, Tommy, there's a good little Irishman—[patting him on the back]—though we're not free ourselves, though we never may be free, let us rejoice in the freedom of others. Come, let's have the *Marseillaise*.

MOORE

[Disengaging himself, and moving about the room anxiously] You see, my mother's in the house.

EMMET

Well, let's have her in. She's proud of your singing, isn't she?

MOORE

O, yes, she likes me to do a bit of music, but . . .

EMMET

She seemed pleased enough when I said you would be able to do for the cause what no other man could do.

MOORE

O, she'd like to hear you say a thing like that.

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EMMET

She's proud to know that her dear boy can do as much as the pikes or the muskets, or even the cannon, Tom.

MOORE

O, yes, she's very pleased I'm able to do things as long as I don't do them, but she hates to hear me sing the *Marseillaise*. She says she doesn't want to have her head cut off like Queen Marie Antoinette, and the Princesse de Lamballe, and Madame Elisabeth, and the Duchesse de—

EMMET

But what has the fate of all these poor women—Lord, have mercy on them!—to do with your mother?

MOORE

Well, that's what I keep on saying to her.

EMMET

She's not afraid, even if there were such goings on in Ireland—and you know yourself it's impossible—she's not afraid of sharing the doom of the tyrants, the aristocrats—call them what you will?

MOORE [*dubiously*]

Well, my father's not exactly an aristocrat, of course—my mother often reminds him that he's just plain

Mr. John Moore, the merchant. . . . But her own people, my mother's people, the Codd—her name was Codd, you know ; she was a Miss Codd, the Codd of Wexford—they were highly respected. In a sense, I may say the Codd family as a whole . . . the late Mr. Tom Codd especially, of the Corn Market, Wexford . . .

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EMMET

Well, the late Mr. Codd is safe. There'll be no guillotine for him. And even though the Lord-Lieutenant, and the Lord Chancellor, and a few more, should perish, I promise you, Tom, that as long as Providence can spare Mrs. Moore she's safe, with the whole of her family.

MOORE

O, I'm not afraid of anything, Bob. But she's my mother ; I owe her my obedience and respect, and she doesn't like me to be mixed up in anything dangerous.

EMMET

Quite right, Tom. Always obey your mother, and avoid dangerous things so long as you feel it your duty to tell your mother about them. [*Rising.*] But if the songs of Liberty are never more to be heard in this house, I think I'd better get out of it. I'm always humming them to myself, you see, and your mother might hear me.

MOORE

Stay, Bob, I'm with you entirely. It's only for my mother's sake. . . . Maybe she's gone out by this. I thought I heard the door bang. I'll go see.

[*He goes to open the door, and meets his sister KATE coming in. She is a fashionable young lady, brightly dressed.*]

KATE [*bursting in without seeing EMMET*]

O, Tom, I saw such a lovely officer in Capel Street—riding towards the Castle. Was he an aide-de-camp, d'you think?

MOORE

[*Anxious, indicating EMMET with the corner of his eye*] Ah, how should I know?

KATE [*startled, perceiving EMMET*]

La! Mr. Emmet, how you frightened me! Is that you?

EMMET [*bowing with grave politeness*]

I believe it is, Miss Moore.

KATE

Get along with your humbugging, Mr. Emmet! You know well you're yourself.

EMMET [*shaking his head*]

Not every man knows himself nowadays, Miss Moore.

KATE

But you're so thoughtful, Mr. Emmet.

EMMET [*smiling*]

Always thinking about myself, you mean.

KATE [*shaking her finger at him*]

Ah, now, Mr. Emmet; you're fishing, you are. I only meant you're not like poor Tommy here. He never thinks about anything, do you, Tom?

MOORE

I don't think about the things you young ladies think about. . . . Nor yet do I think about the things Bob thinks about. But I think a lot, I think a lot.

EMMET [*with irony*]

Tommy has a mother to think about. [*Then seeing MOORE wince*] He has also a particularly charming sister to think about.

KATE

There, Mr. Emmet, when you talk like that I do protest you remind me of the officers—humbugging fellows—but there, you're not interested in the military, are you?

EMMET

I'faith, Miss Moore, I'm more interested in them than you, or perhaps they, imagine, and I quite agree with your opinion of them.

KATE

There, Tom, you hear that? And mother would be telling us Mr. Emmet's a rebel. But I told her no gentleman could be against the Government. They couldn't, could they, Mr. Emmet?

EMMET

That depends upon the Government, I imagine. But ask your brother here. He knows more about polite society than I.

MOORE

O, never mind about these things now. We thought of having a little music, Kate. [*With an affectation of indifference.*] D'you know, is mother in or out?

KATE

She's out to Mrs. Alderman Broderick's in Rutland Square. A fine mansion the alderman has there, and him only an attorney. [*With her best society manner*] It's a great thing that Catholics can go to the Bar now, isn't it, Mr. Emmet?

EMMET

Is it, Miss Moore?

MOORE

What's the use of talking to him like that, and Bob a Protestant?

KATE [*slightly shrinking*]

Indeed, now, Mr. Emmet, I never thought of you as being a Protestant.

EMMET

Never think of me as being anything but what pleases you, Miss Moore.

KATE

I won't, Mr. Emmet . . . thank you, Mr. Emmet. It's yourself would look grand in a wig and gown.

EMMET [*laughing*]

O, dress me up, indeed!

KATE [*disappointed*]

You wouldn't like to go to the Bar, Mr. Emmet?

EMMET

To be tried for high treason, Miss Moore?

KATE

O, what an odious imagination you have, Mr. Emmet !
As if I'd hint at a thing like that. [*Suddenly dropping
her voice to a great tenderness of tone*] If you ever came
to that, Mr. Emmet, it's more than one of us'd be
breaking our hearts for you.

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EMMET [*bowing politely*]

Your very obliged and obedient, Miss Moore.

KATE [*softly to him*]

Call me Kate, Mr. Emmet.

EMMET

Well, Kate, as I'm not hanged yet, what say you
to a little music?

KATE [*joyously*]

I'll sing to you with a heart and a half. [*Sits down
at piano and strikes a chord.*] Anything I know—take
your choice.

EMMET

There's only one tune I want—the *Marseillaise*.

KATE

Ugh! that's so old-fashioned. [*Coaxingly.*] Sure,
if you want something French, why can't I sing you
Rousseau's Dream?

EMMET

Rousseau is a good name too, but I want my own
dream. . . . Kate, I want the *Marseillaise*. . . .
Kate . . .

KATE

Ah, then . . . 'tis an odious air, but when you call
me by my name like that I can't refuse you anything.

Here goes. . . . [*Leading MOORE over to the piano.*]
Tommy, you accompany me. Yes, in F. [*Sings*]

Allons, enfants de la patrie,
Le jour de gloire est arrivé ;
Contre nous de la tyrannie
L'étendard sanglant est levé
L'étendard sanglant est levé.
Entendez vous dans les campagnes
Mugir ces ferores soldats ;
Ils viennent jusque dans vos bras
Egorger vos fils et vos compagnes.

Aux armes, citoyens,
Formez vos bataillons !
Marchons ! Marchons !
Qu'un sang impur
Abreuve nos sillons.

[*EMMET and TOM join in the repeated lines*]

Marchons ! Marchons !
Qu'un sang impur
Abreuve nos sillons.

EMMET [*excitedly*]

By God ! that's what I call the song ! Don't you see Barbaroux and his fellows marching all the long leagues to Paris singing that ?

MOORE

Yes, and I see them being guillotined at the journey's end.

EMMET

Yes, they died, but can't you hear them singing it still, even as the steel fell ? Can't you hear it ringing over Paris as their souls soared to God ?

KATE [*pouting*]

O, you're so dismal, Mr. Emmet.

EMMET [*mildly surprised*]

Yes, I'm dismal, Miss Kate.

KATE [*in a low voice*]

Not Miss—plain Kate.

EMMET

I'm so dismal I can hear it break through the thunder of the Austrian guns at Valmy. I can hear it yelling behind the tails of the Duke of York and his handsome officers across Flanders. I am so dismal I can hear it echo in my heart. . . . [*Putting his hand under her chin to study her.*] . . . Can't you hear it too? . . . Kate, doesn't it make you dismal too, to think of Ireland and compare her with France?

KATE [*her eyes in his*]

When I said you were dismal, I protest I only meant you were poetical.

EMMET [*groaning to himself*]

O God! O God! [*Turns away.*]

KATE

[*Bites her lip, and after a moment's pause*] Would you drink some tay, Mr. Emmet? [*As he does not answer*] Mr. Emmet, would you drink a cup of tay?

MOORE [*to her softly*]

There now, don't bother the poor creature. . . . Don't you see he's thinking?

KATE [to MOORE]

That's not the way for a young gentleman to behave.
[Goes over to him.] Mr. Emmet, I was asking if you'd
drink a cup of tay?

EMMET [*rousing himself*]

A thousand pardons! Would you not sing me
the song again?

MOORE

Come, Bob, let me sing you a little thing of my
own.

KATE

Yes, let's have that new thing of yours.

MOORE

That's what I was thinking of. But what do you
know of it?

KATE

Why, I mean that about Love when you're young—
Love's young Dream—isn't that what you call it?

MOORE [*disappointed*]

O, that! Bob won't care for that. I've tried him
with it.

KATE

O, you've tried him! that's nothing. Let me try.
. . . . You'd like me to sing Love's young Dream to
you, Mr. Emmet?

EMMET [*politely, but without interest*]

Anything about love from you, Miss Moore . . .

KATE [*reproachfully*]

Kate! . . .

EMMET

. . . Kate, Kate . . . will be highly agreeable. . . .
Tom's words too . . . exquisite!

KATE

You don't deserve to have me wasting my time on
you, Mr. Emmet.

EMMET [*moodily*]

No . . . Kate.

MOORE

If you're ready, come on.

KATE

[*Sings, much moved by her brother's words and her own
voice*]

O, the days are gone when beauty bright
My heart's chain wove!
When my dream of life from morn till night
Was love, still love!
New hope may bloom and days may come
Of milder, calmer beam,
Yet there's nothing half so sweet in life
As love's young dream.
No, there's nothing half so sweet in life
As love's young dream.

[*At the close of the first verse there is silence. The
brother and sister look at each other. She is eager to
sing on, but MOORE checks her.*]

MOORE [*testily*]

There, there, that's enough. I told you he'd heard it
before. What's the good of plaguing him with things
he doesn't understand?

KATE

How could I know he wouldn't understand it?

MOORE

Didn't I tell you I'd sung it for him myself? You remember hearing it before, don't you, Bob?

EMMET [*moodily*]

I've heard a very good song to that air.

KATE [*pouting at him*]

Have you nothing better to say than that, Mr. Emmet?

EMMET [*rousing himself*]

Exquisite . . . exquisite . . .

KATE

'Tis easy to see you don't care for fine sentiments, Mr. Emmet.

EMMET

Quite so.

KATE

True poetry is nothing to you, is it, Mr. Emmet?

EMMET

I dare not differ from you, Miss Moore.

KATE

'Tis a terrible thing to be that stony-hearted music won't affect one at all.

EMMET

I think there are few so unfortunate, Miss Moore. Even I, as you may have seen, am stirred by the *Marseillaise*.

KATE

O, but what's that, Mr. Emmet? 'Tis a vulgar tune, not fit for gentlefolks. Why, the mob love naught better than the *Marseillaise*.

EMMET

And I love what the mob loves.

MOORE

The mob is made up of men and women, Bob.

KATE

And men and women love each other, don't they? . . . Mr. Emmet, don't they?

EMMET

I have heard so.

KATE

We're commanded to love one another, Mr. Emmet.

MOORE

Bob won't hear of being commanded.

EMMET

There are some commandments . . .

KATE

If you were a Catholic you'd obey them all, Mr. Emmet.

EMMET

Well, I'm not converted yet, Miss . . .

KATE

When you are, I hope you'll marry and settle down, Mr. Emmet. [*He shrugs his shoulders.*] Do you never think of marrying, Mr. Emmet ?

EMMET

This is no time for marrying and giving in marriage.

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KATE

La ! are you afraid of the Deluge, Mr. Emmet ?

EMMET [*looking in front of him*]

I am afraid sometimes that, after all, there may be no Deluge.

MOORE

I'm afraid if there was, there'd be no Ark.

KATE

Well, I'd be sorry myself if the Liffey overflowed.

MOORE

Or ran with blood.

KATE [*looking from her brother to EMMET*]

Mr. Emmet, dear, what has the Deluge to do with you ?

EMMET

If Tom's to be believed—drown me.

KATE

Mother and I don't understand what you and Tom do be talking about, up here alone.

MOORE

O, talking about old songs and things . . .

KATE

And new songs we hear the mob sing. . . . [To EMMET] What has the mob to do with you ?

EMMET

I don't rightly know yet . . . I'm only thinking about that.

KATE

What is it that you and the mob love ?

EMMET

Liberty.

KATE

It's very pretty when you say it like that, Mr. Emmet ; but can you think of nothing better to love than Liberty ?

EMMET [*looking at her*]

No.

KATE [*dropping her eyes*]

La ! don't look at me so. I'm not saying a word against Miss Liberty. I'm sure she's a very fortunate young lady . . . but I've not seen her look very pretty. Is she at all pretty, Mr. Emmet ?

EMMET

She's the most beautiful mistress a man can have.

KATE

And young still, Mr. Emmet ?

EMMET

No, she's as old as history.

MOORE

And I'll tell you something more about her. She's

a cold, cruel devil, worse than the Assyrian queen that has been killing her lovers all the time. Has it ever occurred to you, Bob, that you're not the first, eh?

EMMET

I hope I'll not be the last, Tom.

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MOORE [*turning away*]

O, I despair of you, Bob . . . you're a lost man.

EMMET

That may be. You see, I had no mother to keep me from loving Liberty.

MOORE [*turning angrily back again*]

O, damn it all, Bob, I can't stand this! I love Liberty as well as you—and many a one I've told of it.

EMMET

Yes, you've given her words in plenty.

MOORE

What more can I give? I'm not a big, stout fellow to . . . carry a—carry a banner . . .

EMMET

If you won't give Liberty your body, Tom, won't you at least give her a song?

MOORE [*overcome with excitement*]

I have, Bob! I've done it! [*Pointing to the piano.*] I was just playing it over when you came in. I'll sing it for you now, if you like. [*Hesitating and turning to*

his sister]. You're sure mother's out of the house, aren't you? [*Sits down to piano, and rises again.*] I'll just close the window so that it mayn't be heard in the street.

EMMET

Why may it not be heard in the street?

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MOORE

[*Having closed the window, sits down at the piano*] Whisht! You'll know in a minute. The tune's *The Red Fox*. [*He sings in rather a quavering little voice*]

Let Erin remember the days of old,
Ere her faithless sons betrayed her,
When Malachy wore the collar of gold
That he won from the proud invader . . .

[*At this point KATE comes behind her brother, and reading the music over his shoulder, lifts the end of the verse with her ringing voice*]

When her sons with standards of green unfurled
Led the Red Branch knights to danger,
Ere the emerald gem of the western world
Was set in the crown of a stranger. . . .

[*MOORE crashes off the symphony to well-marked march time, and then springs to his feet triumphantly.*] There, Bob, what have you to say to that?

EMMET

[*Starting up with tremendous vehemence*] O, that I were at the head of twenty thousand men marching to that!

[*A moment's pause. MOORE, scared, closes the piano.*]

MOORE

I think that'll do for to-day. We'll have the window open again. *[He rises to open it.]*

EMMET

Why do you stop—is that all?

MOORE

I hear my mother coming in again.

[Opens the window, while EMMET sits down in his chair and buries his face in his hands.]

KATE

Well, anyhow, if you won't have any tay, Mr. Emmet, you'll have a glass of sherry wine and a bit of barm brack? *[Receiving no answer, she looks at him amazed.]* La! Tom . . . I protest, Mr. Emmet is crying.

[MOORE shrugs his shoulders, and stares through the window.]

CURTAIN

A NOTE FOR FOREIGNERS: Upon the twentieth day of September, 1803, in Thomas Street, Dublin, Mr. Emmet was hanged by the neck until he was dead. About this time Mr. Moore sailed for the Bermudas to fill an office of emolument under the Crown.

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SHAKESPEARE'S END

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The persons in the play are :—

SHAKESPEARE

DRAYTON

JONSON

AN OLD POET

A MIDDLE-AGED POET

A YOUNG POET

MISTRESS SHAKESPEARE

JUDITH

A PASSENGER

ANOTHER PASSENGER

The object of the play is not to portray dead men but to set forth living ideas which, the author believes, may be associated with their names.

SHAKESPEARE'S END

PROLOGUE

*To be spoken by the Player who takes the part of Judith
(a child of thirteen or fourteen years) to a darkened audi-
torium, after a flourish of stringed music.*

I pray you give me audience while I speak
The faltering phrases I am here to say.
The poet sends poor me, 'cause I am meek,
Patience to crave for his presumptuous play.
The semblance of great men shall tread our stage,
Sorry their language as the beards they wear ;
Condemn them not to judgment in your rage :
Have mercy on them for the names they bear.
We shall make Shakespeare die before your eyes
With barbarous blank verse and jingling rhyme ;
But he did sanction this dread sacrifice,
For he slew Cæsar once upon a time.
I play his daughter Judith, and I feel
The presence of his spirit in this place,
That not in vain our mystery appeal,
I pray thee, gentle father, lend thy grace !

[SCENE.—*New Place, Stratford. Shakespeare's fifty-second birthday, April, 1616. The hour approaches midnight. The room is dimly lighted by the fire at one side, and on the other six half-burnt-out candles, so that the stage grows darker as the action proceeds. At the table are seated SHAKESPEARE, with an OLD POET on his right, a MIDDLE-AGED POET and DRAYTON. On his left, a YOUNG POET and BEN JONSON. Except BEN JONSON no man is quite sober, and the OLD POET is already tipsy. MRS. SHAKESPEARE and JUDITH are sewing by the fire; MRS. SHAKESPEARE on settle, and JUDITH at her feet. The table has meat, bread, wine, and beer on it.*]

OLD POET

Willie, once more, your health !

SHAKESPEARE

And yours.

[*To DRAYTON*] This antick pledges me so constantly,
Methinks he counts at last to drink me down.

DRAYTON

For every drop I wish you yet a year ;
Many a more birthday to you, old Will.

SHAKESPEARE [*shaking his head*]

Ah, Michael, you and I have had too many.

MRS. SHAKESPEARE [*with asperity*]

Who talks of growing old ?

BEN JONSON [*with irony*]

Your husband, madám.

MRS. SHAKESPEARE

Did Will not drink he would not feel his age.

JONSON

Did Will not drink he might not stay at home.

MRS. SHAKESPEARE

He doth not drink at home, but when you come
To tempt him.

OLD POET

Ha ! we bring Will Shakespeare joy.

SHAKESPEARE

Ay, merry friends, you bring Will Shakespeare joy.

JUDITH

Father, doth not your Judith give you joy ?

SHAKESPEARE [*tenderly*]

Ay, and my Judith's mother gave it me
When she gave Judith.

[*JUDITH rises, and goes over to him*]

MRS. SHAKESPEARE

I have borne you others.

SHAKESPEARE

Ay, marry, Ann, we'll never talk of them.

MRS. SHAKESPEARE

'Tis not my fault that Hamnet withered young.

OLD POET

Nor Will's, perhaps, he ever came to flower.

MRS. SHAKESPEARE

You do abuse my husband worse than me.

OLD POET

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I could not well abuse him worse than you.
You married him. 'Twas an ungracious act
To do a poet, madam! Fie, for shame!

MRS. SHAKESPEARE

Will, can you suffer me to be made light
Before these people?

OLD POET

People we are not—
We're poets, madam.

MRS. SHAKESPEARE

Out on poetry!
Will doth not drink but when you poets come,
Nor use his wife despitefully but when
He drinks.

SHAKESPEARE

Sweet Ann, wilt not to bed, and leave
This varlet husband to such rogues as are
His compeers? Go, my lily white, to bed,
And radiant dreams illuminate the dark.
Dream that King James hath made your man a knight.

MRS. SHAKESPEARE

If that his gracious Majesty should do't—

SHAKESPEARE

'Twere but a friendly act 'twixt sot and sot.

MRS. SHAKESPEARE

It were a sottish act to make you knight.

SHAKESPEARE

Since thirty years I've knighted your domain,
A lordship fairer than our good King hath
In Anne of Denmark. Gentle kisses come,
To bed, sweet chuck.

MRS. SHAKESPEARE [*relenting, yet annoyed*]

Willy, you child me still.

SHAKESPEARE

It is a way that poets have with women.

JONSON

And God with poets.

MRS. SHAKESPEARE

Give you all good night.

SHAKESPEARE

Take Judith with you. Go with mother, love.
[*Softly to her*] And, Judith, promise me you will not
wed

Unless with one whose mind will run with yours
And keep an even pace like coupled hounds.

JUDITH

I think that women marry as they must.

SHAKESPEARE

Good night. Go, pray for father.

JUDITH

Father, dear,
If God loves music, He would rather hear
Your prayers than mine. Good night.

ALL [*as MRS. SHAKESPEARE and JUDITH go out*]
Good night. Good night.

DRAYTON [*as they draw to the table*]

She hath a little of her father's voice.

SHAKESPEARE

'Twere well that she should have no more of him.

JONSON

Why not his mind ?

SHAKESPEARE

'Tis not for women that.

JONSON

She has her mother's ?

SHAKESPEARE

No, I think it came
From faery land. Yes : it is passing strange.
But children's souls seem never to grow up.
Their bodies wax, but their souls only change,
I never knew a girl who grew to be
A woman ; who can rede me, why is that ?

YOUNG POET

They say that Philip Sidney was a boy
The day he was struck down by Zutphen dyke.

JONSON

A boy? A coxcomb! Never talk to me
Of children's souls plumped out in adult form;
The thing is common, no phenomenon,
But simply what we call an idiot.

SHAKESPEARE

At times I wish I were an idiot.

JONSON

Posterity may save that crown for thee.
I have known schoolmen who called Chaucer dunce.

SHAKESPEARE

I'm more than Chaucer.

JONSON

Ay, more idiot.

SHAKESPEARE

Why do you wound me, Ben?

JONSON

As barbers bleed—

To pass thy vanity in bloody flux.
He of our tribe that cries, "I am the man,
I'm more than he who's dead," cries fool, and fool
Upon himself and every living one
That pushes pen; 'tis as an earthbound saint
That cries "I'm holier far than they in Heaven."

SHAKESPEARE

Though I am not in Heaven, I am dead ;
I am with Chaucer, I shall write no more.

DRAYTON

Tut, Willy, man, what words to give your friends !

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YOUNG POET

Were those words buzzed to London, they would set
The Bankside in a roar.

SHAKESPEARE

I do not think
That one beyond the players there would care
If Shakespeare died to-night, and only they
Would miss a cunning maker of fat parts.

OLD POET

Not so.

YOUNG POET

Not so.

MIDDLE-AGED POET

What of these noble lords
We often marked to clap thee on the back,
Making us proud that we might do the like ?

SHAKESPEARE

Shakespeare, to these light popinjays, is but
A journeyman to cobble up their verse.
'Twere easier task to make fresh verses for 'em.
But let that pass ; poets feed not on air,
And Fame is but a windy, milkless nurse.
I could not build this house on reputation ;

No, nor the takings of the theatre.
Here's to the lords ! It is their place to give
What they have got, that wiser men may live.

OLD POET

Willie, my lad, you made a rhyme just now !

SHAKESPEARE

A rhyme ? That's what the lords call poetry.

YOUNG POET

God save the lords ! and save us from their verse.

JONSON

And God forbid that we ourselves write worse.

YOUNG POET

Sooth ! Mr. Jonson, sir, I know my place.

JONSON

I beg, then, keep it with a better grace.

SHAKESPEARE

Nay, Ben, don't fret the boy. There, let him be ;
Time was you were worse impudent than he.

YOUNG POET

I can be reverent when Shakespeare speaks,
But who's Ben Jonson ? Was he not a mime
Who slew his fellow and then fled the stage ?

JONSON

'Twas a sad error. You, young malapert,
Would slay us all a purpose with your trash
Of *Ding a Ding*, and *Fa la la*, and stuff.

SHAKESPEARE

There is much music in a *Ding a Ding*,
And *Fa la la* is true philosophy.
So *Ding a Ding* and *Fa la la* at once
Are pure quintessence of all poetry.

JONSON

And Shakespeare, quintessence of poet fools.

SHAKESPEARE

And Jonson, emperor of surly guests.

YOUNG POET

His empire here is only o'er himself,
None can be surly where Will Shakespeare smiles.

JONSON [*to* YOUNG POET]

True word, true lad, now here's my hand for thee,
And here's a bumper to thy poetry.

SHAKESPEARE

To all young poets, all young poetry !
Give us a wish, young poet, ere we drink.

YOUNG POET [*rising timidly*]

May men remember not what I have writ,
May men remember not what I may write,

May men forget the place where I did sit. . . .
But when my little day is lost in night,
May men give me my place in poetry,
Because Will Shakespeare drank a health to me.

POETS [*drinking*]

Well said !

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JONSON

Well said ! young poet, though Ben Jonson's name
Might serve thee better in a critic age ;
Shakespeare's a poet, but no judge of verse.

SHAKESPEARE

Jonson a judge of what he cannot do.

JONSON

Too good a judge on that to answer you.
I'm no Osiris that I judge the dead.

OLD POET

Marry, friends, since the women went to bed
The talk grows tomb-like. Keep we his birthday,
Or are we come to Shakespeare's funeral ?

SHAKESPEARE

Not Mr. Shakespeare's—not him of New Place ;
He's of good health, a thriving gentleman.
But there is one dead that you better knew :
Will Shakespeare, who took, thirty years ago,
The road to London ; that Will Shakespeare who
Roamed empty-bellied round the theatres
By Finsbury and Shoreditch ; that same Will
Who thanked my lord to let him hold his horse

While he enjoyed the play. Such plays, good lack !
Babble of Greene and such ; there was no play
Till Kit Marlowe and I sat down to write 'em,
And Kit Marlowe's are bombast.

JONSON

Gently, Will.
Shakespeare the poet's dead we well believe ;
We may suspect the reason why he died.
We may suspect, I say, yet need not have
Ill-nature to report it ; only think,
Had Fortune's dagger slain him long ago,
So that his years did not exceed the years
At which Kit Marlowe, hapless, was cut off,
Then certain 'tis that our great Shakespeare's name
Had fallen short of Marlowe's.

SHAKESPEARE

Say 'tis true.
Say I did wrong that hero of our tribe—
It may be true, and so I bid you drink
To his fair memory. Here's to Kit Marlowe !

ALL

Here's to the memory of Kit Marlowe !

SHAKESPEARE

You see that I have knowledge of my faults,
And generosity for other men ;
Allow me, then, to know my virtues too.
Had I died young, as died poor Kit Marlowe,
I had not left behind so fair a name.
But had Kit Marlowe lived so long as I,
He had not won the fame I now possess. [Drinks.]

JONSON

How can you say he had not bloomed like you ?
'Twas a fair flower, though blasted in the bud.

SHAKESPEARE

'Twas a fair flower, but cankered at the root.
I knew Kit Marlowe whom you never saw,
I say I knew him, and I worked with him.
I saw the sickness in his genius,
And knew perfection must outlive his age,
Though he should live an hundred years and more.

JONSON

How did your youth so featly measure out
Kit Marlowe's never-lived maturity ?

SHAKESPEARE

I knew his thoughts, his inmost shrine of soul
Was all unbared to me, and well I used
This knowledge in my plays, when I would paint
The character of one who hath no hope
Of Heaven as he hath no fear of Hell.

JONSON

Who now hath hope of Heaven, or fear of Hell ?

MIDDLE-AGED POET

I have the hope of Heaven.

OLD POET

I fear Hell.

SHAKESPEARE

Marlowe denied them both, yet, not content
With present life, he longed to spread his sails
Upon the waters of eternity.

JONSON

That says he had the greater heart than you.

SHAKESPEARE

He had no heart to seek success as I
Have sought success ; he did disdain the world ;
He had a passion for infinity.

YOUNG POET

So do all poets quest for Avalon.

SHAKESPEARE

Now I love life and all life's pageantry,
So am I fit long draughts of life to drink,
And follow this too quick procession far
Until exhaustion loses me my place,
And I go down unwillingly to death.
When Mr. Shakespeare's carried to his grave—
I mean Sir William Shakespeare of New Place——

MIDDLE-AGED POET [*much impressed*]

Sir William Shakespeare—has it come to that ?

SHAKESPEARE

It has not, but I know that it must come,
For I have pawned my laurels and bought land.
There's money in this room that would go far
To pay my patent—mark ye, in this room.
I am already esquire, and must be
A knight when they forget I've been a poet.

YOUNG POET

England will end ere that can be forgot.

SHAKESPEARE

You cannot put posterity in pledge ;
They will forget, remember and forget.
When I am dead and deftly laid away
In Stratford chancel, you may bury there
All memory of me. I leave no son
To carry on my name ; I cannot think
What virtue lies in immaterial things,
Or in the life one lives in effigy.
Having no son, I stand now to enjoy
My own in all I can, until old age
Muddies the stream of pleasure, and at last
Dams up the source and chokes vitality.
What follows neither I nor anyone
Can tell, but I do think Death knows his work.

OLD POET

Let us not think, let's fill ourselves with wine.

MIDDLE-AGED POET

I cannot see that poetry has aught
To do with things transcendent. To my mind
We should confine our genius to things
That all men understand ; find comely words
To cover thoughts that common men may think,
Yet not so well express. What is the use
Of poetry that poets understand,
And no one else ?

SHAKESPEARE

Indeed, there is no use
In poetry at all. Had I been less

A poet than I am, then richer far
Were Mr. William Shakespeare of New Place.

JONSON

Had you been less a poet than you are,
Then Stratford never had been left behind ;
Here would you be a mincing shopkeeper.

SHAKESPEARE

A thriving shopkeeper. I always knew
The use of money ; I have never thrown
A groat away. I saw how fools do lose
Their credit when I saw my father break
His bargains. Had I stayed in Stratford here,
Then Stratford's warmest burgess had I been.

YOUNG POET

How can the greasy alderman's gold chain
But shame the greatest poet in the world ?

SHAKESPEARE

A poet's greatness scarcely bulks beyond
The venues of the playhouse. Think, had I
Turned this same greatness to a grateful task,
I might have been the banker of the world.
Not Fugger, nor Throgmorton, nor Spinola,
But might have sought my discount with their bills.

OLD POET [*testily*]

This is not Silver Street . . . pray, none of this.
If we may not be poets, be we sots.

JONSON

Is luxury to be preferred to fame ?

SHAKESPEARE

Not luxury I seek with money, I ;
But neither do I value idle fame ;
But fame with power, that can money buy,
As Fugger bought the consciences of kings,
And Nick Throgmorton forced his will on Bess,
Spinola set his armies in the field,
My brain to theirs—Dorado to a doit !
Could furnish forth the lordship of the earth—
Power and fame as honourably won
As by the sword.

JONSON

Time was that I did seek
Such fame and power in the Low Country wars.
Stoutly I carried pike and harness there,
And many leagues I tramped, but never Fame
Lit on my banner. I saw paladins
Perish like rats, but never honest deed
Win honest pay. Treason I saw enthroned,
Weighed down with bullion ; and the plumèd crest
Of honour decorate the brows of men
Whose brows had better worn the hangman's clout.
For war has this advantage over peace,
She opens Fame's gate to the criminal.

SHAKESPEARE

You rode a tilt at high adventure, Ben,
To win some moon crown from an airy nymph ;
Bellona's chosen devotees are men
Who seek their own advantage ; had you sought
Untiringly your ends, then you had found—

JONSON

I had found naught to justify my search.

SHAKESPEARE

There disappointment speaks, for men whose fame
Surpasses yours, and even may pass mine,
Have trenched a path to glory with their steel ;
While you, in scrupulous obscurity,
Wearied of what you set your hand to do.

[*Rising in half-drunken pride, and going to fire-place*]

Had I been ploughboy, I had ploughed world deep ;
Had I been soldier, you had seen me crowned
With Mars' own helmet.

JONSON [*ironically*]

Were you sailor, Will——

SHAKESPEARE [*excitedly*]

Had I been sailor, now by sun and sea,
England had never known such admiralty.

JONSON

Had you been ploughboy, never husbandman
Had squandered precious seed so wantonly.
Had you been soldier, in some wormy ditch
Your bones would rot ; or had you gone to sea,
Some barracout had battened on your flesh.
Remember, I have stood upon the field
That held your pomp and circumstance of war.
Ay, God forgive me, I have pointed pike
Against my brother's breast and seen him die.
Once by a fool's act I slew man in peace,
And thrice by devil's act slew men in strife.
Had I been better poet than I am
'Twere I who died, and not the kerns I slew.
They knew no better, but Ben Jonson knew,
When he laid brick by brick and course on course,

Header on stretcher, seeing palaces
Arise beneath his hands, how beautiful
Creation is, and, too, how beautiful
Destruction may be when it comes with time,
Crumbling in majesty of age away.

OLD POET [*to Young Poet*]

I like that word—the majesty of age.
Young man, remember majesty has age,
And I have age, so I have majesty.

YOUNG POET

Is there not prouder majesty in death
That sweeps the great to ruin in their youth ?

JONSON

I do not plead for death, I plead for life.

SHAKESPEARE

And I plead so, I'm still in love with life.

JONSON

The life you plead for, Will, is but your own,
Sparing the world that it may serve your ends.

SHAKESPEARE

You wrong me, Ben, for I do love my friends ;
My all is theirs ; but for the world at large
I hold it to be nothing but a mine,
Where men who have the strength may dig for ore.
My sympathy sailed with those mariners,
Who with their cannon won the wealth of Spain
And carried it in triumph to our marts.

These were true poets ; I have heard of men
Who in one single venture quarried more
Than I in all my years of labour won,
Whether as actor, or as poet, or
As sycophant to courtiers. 'Tis a trade
More fit for zanies, this we poets ply.
Had I my life again I'd be a Drake,
And England's eyes should follow in my wake.
Not Bankside only then would know my fame,
But the whole world would tremble at my name.

JONSON

*[approaching him, and laying his hands affectionately
on his shoulders]*

Be thankful, Will, for thy fame's gentler breath.
Thy poet soul in action had won death.

SHAKESPEARE *[half pitifully, yet desperately]*

I fall to dust at Stratford. . . . That once more
The roaring world might beat upon my door !

[A knock is heard.]

MIDDLE-AGED POET

A knock ! A knock ! Some night-bird haunts without.

SHAKESPEARE *[thrilled and half frightened]*

It is a bird of omen.

[Summons up his courage and opens the door]

Even so !

*[The FIRST PASSENGER pushes into the room, then,
seeing there are several there, falls into a suppliant attitude.
He is a sinister-looking man, past middle age, dressed
like a sailor more or less, and wears a big knife slung
by a lanyard round his neck.]*

FIRST PASSENGER

Your pardon, sir, I did not think to find
Such noble company.

JONSON [*to* DRAYTON]

That he had company. 'Tis well for Will
See you that knife?

SHAKESPEARE

What are you, fellow, and what seek you here ?

FIRST PASSENGER

I am an honest Christian out of work.

SHAKESPEARE

What is your work ?

FIRST PASSENGER

I'm good for any work
Your Reverence may put me to.

SHAKESPEARE

You say,
" Your Reverence." I am no parson, man.

FIRST PASSENGER

I thought you was, because you asked me questions
And never offered nothing in exchange.

JONSON [*to* DRAYTON]

The man has wit.

SHAKESPEARE

I asked no more than why
You should want work.

FIRST PASSENGER

I am a man of peace ;
I ask for nothing but for food and drink ;
My masters, you have wine there, do I ask
For wine ? No, no, I have no taste for wine—
Such wine as comes to England—no, not I.
Rich cates you have, I only ask for bread ;
For bread and cheese, and beef and beer, such fare
As is the right of every Englishman.

DRAYTON

This is an upright man, or sturdy beggar.

SHAKESPEARE

What have you done for England you should claim
The right of Englishmen ?

FIRST PASSENGER

What have you done ?

SHAKESPEARE

That's neither here nor there. 'Tis I who have
The bread and cheese and beef and beer to give.
'Tis you who ask it. Say, what you have done
To earn it ; have you fought for England ? Say.

FIRST PASSENGER

For England fought I ? Marry, sir, did I.
With belted Howard, Earl of Effingham,
I help to drive the Dons from off the sea.
Which, Heaven fighting ever on our side,
Was speedily accomplished.

JONSON [*to* DRAYTON]

This man's cant
Disgusts me. Mark ye how he holds his hand,
The fingers clenched. I'll swear to hide a brand.

DRAYTON

And Willie listens to him like a child!
The greatest poet is the easiest gulled.

SHAKESPEARE [*putting food on settle by fire*]

There's bread, and beef, there's cheese, and there is
beer.

There sit ye down, be warm and make good cheer,
Empty those dishes; when your meat is done
Tell us your tale of battles fought and won.

JONSON

What harebrained whimsey makes you treat him so?
He would have robbed you had you been alone.

SHAKESPEARE

No, no, you wrong him, this poor mariner
Whom Fate has washed ashore to seek my house
And carry me the glamour of the seas. . . .
Seas I can never hope to roam, since I
Wasted life's heritage in narrow streets.
Let us enjoy in this safe theatre
The thrill of seeing great armadas lost
Who never saw a pinnacle founder yet. [*To* FIRST PASS.]
Is't long since, friend, you came from your last voyage?

FIRST PASSENGER [*his mouth full*]

'Tis fifteen year.

SHAKESPEARE

So long? Can you recall
What port you cleared from—whither you were bound?

FIRST PASSENGER

From Cork to Bristow.

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SHAKESPEARE

'Tis not very far.

FIRST PASSENGER

'Twas far enow for me when past my prime.

SHAKESPEARE

But you made longer voyages when young?

FIRST PASSENGER

Ay, I was fool enow for that when young.

SHAKESPEARE

And your first voyage—whither were you bound?

FIRST PASSENGER

From Plymouth to the Guinea coast we went
To take a freight of slaves, and thence we bent
Our course across th' Atlantic to Virginia.

YOUNG POET

What was your cargo, said ye?

FIRST PASSENGER

Black men, sir.
Slaves for the planters in America.

YOUNG POET

I did not think that such a trade was plied
In good Queen Bess's reign.

FIRST PASSENGER

Lord bless ye, sir,
Our ship was the Queen's ship—why she was called
The Virgin Queen in honour of her name.

YOUNG POET

This was an Iron Virgin, crueller
Than she of Nuremburg.

SHAKESPEARE

Now tell us what
You do remember of your maiden voyage.

FIRST PASSENGER

The bread was full of weevils.

SHAKESPEARE

Is that all?

FIRST PASSENGER

I say the cask held weevils more than bread.

SHAKESPEARE

You did not go to sea to think of bread.

FIRST PASSENGER

'Twas not for weevils that I went to sea.
Have you ate weevils?

SHAKESPEARE

Tell us of other things.

FIRST PASSENGER

An honest man tells but what he has seen.

SHAKESPEARE

His honesty can never blind his eyes
To the splashed colours of the firmament.
Tell us of roaring seas that roll across
The world, and toss tall Spaniards to their doom.
Of swirling winds that ply their circuits round
The universe, and cool the flaming sun,
Robbing his heat to comfort the cold earth,
Or lifting icebergs from the Arctic Sea
To carry them to Heaven, whence again
They fall in gentle rain on thirsty fields.

FIRST PASSENGER

I never thought to follow wind or rain,
To ask them what their business was with me.

SHAKESPEARE

Then if not learned in cosmogony,
Tell us of all the glories thou hast seen,
The thousand lands that England's mariners
Have lifted from the ocean. Men as you
Build empires ; surely, then, it is but meet
That you should teach us poets empiry.

FIRST PASSENGER

Ay, I build empires, but, by Pharaoh's foot !
I never heard before of empiry.
I am a poor old honest sailor man,
Bred in the wars. I tell thee what I know,
And that is how to cut a Dago's throat.

SHAKESPEARE

Sing, then, the joy of battle—how great ships
Did close each other, while pavilions waved,
And cannon crackled, and tarpaulins cheered,
And iron balls beat against wooden walls,
Or bounced through cross-fights, slaying admirals,
While spars came tumbling amidst hellish rumbling,
Till the Greek fire-blaze through the battle haze
Showed the foe flying, his decks with dying
And dead men lumbered. England outnumbered,
But yet victorious, her ever-glorious
St. George's ensign blazoned over all.

FIRST PASSENGER

Ay, ay, such things may be, I never saw
Much more than smoke and gory, gaping wounds,
Ne'er found myself on foreign deck but once.
Off the Azores served I on a ship
Hight the *Revenge*. One out of Devon then—
Grivelle, or Groville—some such name he had
Hoisted his flag on her . . .

SHAKESPEARE

Man, did you say
You fought in dauntless Grenville's doomed *Revenge*?

FIRST PASSENGER

Grinville, or Grenville—ay, Sir Richard Grenville.

SHAKESPEARE

Tell us of that heroic man whose fame
Shall flower as long as England's ships shall sail.
This hand hath served him? Let me take it then.

FIRST PASSENGER

This hand doth bear his mark.

SHAKESPEARE

Now tell us what

You know of Grenville.

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FIRST PASSENGER [*reflectively*]

A' was a bloody fool.

JONSON

Why, this description's common to all men,
Poets as well as warriors may claim it.

SHAKESPEARE

What did he do that you should call him fool ?

FIRST PASSENGER

Why, when he lay there, hurted to the death
Beyond all hope of mending, he durst bid
The whole of his ship's kippage, who stood up
Alive and well with hope of lusty years
If but the Spaniards suffered us to live,
To fire the powder in the magazine,
And blow our souls to hell along with his.

SHAKESPEARE

Ay, that was folly to bid men to die
Who willed to live. But have you nothing more
To say of Grenville ?

FIRST PASSENGER

Well, sir, Lord forbid
I should abuse my betters. All that I

Can call to mind—'tis six-and-twenty year
Since he is dead—all that I call to mind
Is that his honour was so foul of mouth
That never one of our ship's company
Could out-blaspheme him, even had we dared
To bandy words with one so choleric.
But Davy Jones has had him by the tail
So long that I for one do bear no malice—
Though I do bear his malice in my hand
Who branded me while I was but a lad.

SHAKESPEARE

Of all the years that you have been to sea,
Can you recall nothing worth memory ?

FIRST PASSENGER

Ay, that I can. The sailor's lot is hard,
But now and then God gives him happiness ;
Once I remember on the Spanish Main
We sacked a town, and in a convent there
Me and my watch lay full a sen'night snug.
Lost to the world, enjoying everything
That man may hope for. There we had rich food,
And costly wines and gaudy, gay attire.
I wore the silks and satins that the priests
Wear at the altar when their Mumpsimus
They mumble in that foul idolatry
They call the Mass. Ay, we had women too.
I own I do not love a lass the less
That she should come unwilling to the clip
And think her soul lost. As for the men, the priests
That would not fight or flee, we nailed them out
On their own crosses. Blessed be the day,
And may it quickly come—I drink to it—
We carry pure religion into Spain.

[He goes on drinking.]

JONSON [*after a moment's silence, to SHAKESPEARE*]
Your hero has found words, his eloquence
Outshouts us all, and yet you seem to take
His tale but ill.

MIDDLE-AGED POET [*to FIRST PASS.*]
www.libtoob.com Pray tell the company
More of the convent. Were the women young,
Were they well favoured? Did the tropic sun——?

SHAKESPEARE

I think that you would ask him did the sun
Stand still below the earth rather than shine
Upon such infamy?

MIDDLE-AGED POET

You do forget
That these were Spaniards, that their women were
The captives of our English bow and spear;
They had no right to other treatment than
This genial seaman gave them.

SHAKESPEARE

Hush! I say,
Or I will take you by the ears and thrust
You from my door.

MIDDLE-AGED POET

Gadzooks!

JONSON

Be patient, Will.
Had you been less a poet than you are
You might have sung this hymn of hate and lust.

SHAKESPEARE

I am ashamed to think what foolishness
I spoke. O, call me poet, call me that,
Or call me anything but Englishman.

JONSON

Nay, gentle Will, your mind is feverish!
You are beside yourself ; sit down, sit down,
And think no more on't.

SHAKESPEARE

Fill my cup with wine.

JONSON

You've had enough.

SHAKESPEARE

No, no, a cup to wash
This hideous tale from out my memory.

MIDDLE-AGED POET [*to* DRAYTON]

I think he must be ill that he should use
A friend thus ; never did I think to bear
So gross an insult. Will, I overlook
Your insolence, and once more drink your health.
Your wine is better than your courtesy.

SHAKESPEARE

And makes me worthy of such company
As yours. . . .

MIDDLE-AGED POET

I thank you, Will.

SHAKESPEARE [*indicating* FIRST PASS.]

As yours—and his.

FIRST PASSENGER

God's glory's ale. Sleep whelms me . . . I am
gone. . . . [Snores]

OLD POET

Vainglorious hound ! to touch the goal of sleep
While better men stay sober. Wine, more wine,
Red wine, red wine . . .

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FIRST PASSENGER [*starting up in his sleep*]

Red ooze, red ooze, red ooze.
Forty-five fathoms, ooze, red ooze, red ooze. . . .
Luff ! or we stave our strakes upon the ice.

SHAKESPEARE

What terror lifts the bristles of this hog ?

JONSON

Dreams carry him to northern latitudes,
His teeth are chattering in Arctic frosts.

SHAKESPEARE

There let him perish clinging to the Pole,
Lost in the cold there !

FIRST PASSENGER [*clawing the settle*]

Gold . . . and palm trees . . . gold. . . .
The monkeys mock us . . . water ! water ! . . .
gold . . .

JONSON

Now he sails south again—mark how his brow
Breaks forth in sweat ; he stifles at the Line.

SHAKESPEARE

Let the sun burn him and consume his bones ;
Let it melt up these features of a man

That hide his brutishness. The air is rank
Within this chamber since he entered it. . . .
Open the casement . . . open . . . I am faint. . . .

[*His head falls on his breast. There is some slight commotion among the Poets; the YOUNG POET goes to the window and opens it. BEN JONSON comes over and stands by SHAKESPEARE, who revives.*]

JONSON

Art better, Will?

SHAKESPEARE [*pensively*]

Better? Why . . . yes, and no.

YOUNG POET [*at window*]

How sweet it is to scent the breath of spring,
That wafts regeneration to the earth.

SHAKESPEARE

[*Interested, rouses himself and goes to window*]

Would that spring's spirit entered into man,
That he might be reborn with his fresh fields!

[*He stretches out his arms and draws a deep breath, then sits by the window and stares out into the night, while the other poets watch him curiously and anxiously. The OLD POET and the MIDDLE-AGED POET sit drinking. The FIRST PASSENGER snores and rolls over on to the floor as the curtains close.*]

[The stage presents the same appearance as before, only that the candles are now nearly all burnt out, and one by one they flare up and die, save a couple which give a little light to the end of the play. SHAKESPEARE still sits by the window, the YOUNG POET standing beside him as if he had no care but to watch over and protect him. JONSON, on the settle by the fire, from which the sailor has rolled, lying huddled on the hearth with the beer stoup in his hand, DRAYTON sits making notes on his tablet and toying with the wine. For a moment there is no sound but that of the sailor steadily snoring, and the OLD POET and the MIDDLE-AGED POET steadily drinking.]

JONSON [*spurning the FIRST PASSENGER
with his foot*]

This fellow snores as loud as Cerberus
Must bark to keep the damned awake in Hell.

OLD POET

Ay, he disturbs my drinking. [*Reels over and kicks
him.*]

Hog! have done.

FIRST PASSENGER [*half awake*]

The watch! The watch! Master! Kind gentleman!
[*Rolls over, but ceases snoring.*]

SHAKESPEARE [*rising*]

Why did you kick him ?

OLD POET [*reeling to the table*]

Out of friendship, Will,

Lest I be moved to flesh my sword in him.

His snoring spoilt the flavour of my wine.

You were asleep—you did not hear him snore.

SHAKESPEARE

I did not sleep, I am awake to-night,
More open-eyed than I have ever been.

[*Going over to the FIRST PASSENGER*]

This thing has called himself an Englishman.

I have been proud to be an Englishman,

So should be proud to call this beggar brother.

Let me at least, then, act the brother's part.

[*Lifting the sailor's head so that it rests against the settle*]

Come, Jacko, come.

FIRST PASSENGER

[*hitting him with his clenched hand across the face*]

Take that, and blast thee, Poll !

Ass that I was to couple up with thee,

Thou'st won me from the gorgeousest of dreams.

SHAKESPEARE [*half stunned*]

And thou hast won me from a gorgeous dream.

YOUNG POET [*fiercely, with naked steel in hand*]

Bid me to slay him !

SHAKESPEARE [*recovering himself*]

Friend, put up thy sword.
Let Shakespeare with Ben Jonson plead for life.
He called me by a woman's name, mayhap
He thought I played Delilah to his Samson
And did betray his sleep. Put up thy sword.

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YOUNG POET

But thou art hurt, maestro. [*Putting up his sword*]

SHAKESPEARE

Not so hurt
By this man's hand as by his deadly tongue.
Wine will soon soothe my bruises.

[*Goes to table and drinks.*]

Never wine
Bring balm to the sore tissues of my soul.

OLD POET

Wine doth work wonders. Why, sir, look at me—
I'm the most miserable dog unchanged
When sober, perishing of love for some
Fat wife of Southwark. Let me have good wine,
And I'll have every wife that loves her husband.

SHAKESPEARE [*pointing to FIRST PASSENGER*]

Have you no vision this man doth not share?

OLD POET

Plague on it, Willy, I share nought with him
Except this wild fantastic mood of yours.

SHAKESPEARE

But you and I and all of us must learn
To share the visions of this Englishman,
Unless we teach this Englishman to share
Our visions.

JONSON www.libtool.com.cn

Will! what visions have you now,
Now that you say your eyes are opened wide?

SHAKESPEARE

This, that as sure as we love England here,
And hold her for the salt of all the earth,
We carry her incomparable good
To the receding ends of ocean's bounds,
To all the nations thirsting for one rule.

[*Pointing to FIRST PASSENGER*]

That is our task, this is our clumsy tool
That works in darkness, learns to love the dark
And breaks in it at last, and never knows
To what great end he worked—Is such a tool
Worthy to drive a road for England's wheels?
We have none other, we must work with this;
We must not, like the adaged artisan,
Lay blame for bungled work upon our tools.
The law is terrible that histories teach.
The path to empire leads through battle-fields
And fallen cities lined with charnel-houses.
The pioneers must carry tiger-hearts
That know not mercy, must be cruel men,
Or they would fail and falter on the way.
But in the end carnage shall have its day,
And little England over-lord the world—
Then comes the reign of Peace . . .

JONSON

. . . And Englishmen
Will turn the charnel-houses into shops.
How know you we shall war to peace at last ?
Is it not wine that promises ?

SHAKESPEARE [*draws JONSON to window*]

Look out !
How placidly the stars look down on us ;
The moonbeams light so softly on the land.
Can you deny on such a night as this,
When peace illuminates the universe,
And the clouds float like angels in the sky,
Trailing a gauzy filament below
That we may climb to join them ?

JONSON

Is't Shakespeare's mood to join the angels now,
And leave this comfortable world behind ?

SHAKESPEARE

I am the child of April, and I feel
Ethereal passions buoyant in my veins,
I feel my body lighter

JONSON

Can your fame
Lift you upon its pinions from our midst
To flit awhile in interstellar space ?
Then fare you well ; and if Kit Marlowe's ghost
Should board you in the ocean atmosphere,
Give him my homage.

SHAKESPEARE

You have irony
For me who love you ! What have I ever done
To keep me out of Heaven, if Heaven there be ?

JONSON

The world holds your reward. www.libtool.com.cn

FIRST PASSENGER [*muttering*]

Gold . . . monkeys . . . gold . . .

SHAKESPEARE [*startled*]

What said the fellow ?

JONSON

Nightmare gibberish
He mumbled . . . Watchman, say, what of the night ?
What of the night, O, poet sentinel ?

SHAKESPEARE

The moon turns homeward ; radiant Mercury
The morning star's awake ; and soon the lark
Will soar from yonder tuft to call the dawn,
While kindly robin sings the night to sleep . . .
[turning away from the window]
And then the sun and bell . . .

JONSON

Hist ! dost not hear
The footstep of some weary passenger ?

MIDDLE-AGED POET

A man of no respectability
To be abroad at such an hour of night.
I prithee shut the window.

OLD POET

Can it be
My ear deceives me . . . Doth he drag a leg ?
If so, it is Old Nick, and we are lost.

SECOND PASSENGER [*without*]

Pray you, good people, may I rest me here ?

SHAKESPEARE

Who begs Will Shakespeare's hospitality
Commands it. [*Opening the door.*] You are very
welcome, sir,
Whether to sleep or feast—away the night ;
I only ask who 'tis that I may serve ?

SECOND PASSENGER [*entering*]

I bear the Light of the world.

OLD POET

This man is drunk.

SHAKESPEARE

This is no house of fools, what do you claim ?

SECOND PASSENGER

I only claim that I do bear on me
The Flame which lights the world, and lest that Flame
Be dimmed by my unworthiness that bear it,
I give you warning, ere I enter here,
That if you harbour me, or comfort me,
Or suffer me to rest my weary limbs
Beneath your roof an hour, your charity
Commits a breach against the statute law.

MIDDLE-AGED POET

I knew him for an outlaw.

SHAKESPEARE

Sir, be frank.

You are a Jesuit ?

SECOND PASSENGER

Sir, I am one

Of Jesu's company. I am a priest.

MIDDLE-AGED POET

A Mass priest ! We were mad to ope the door,
This villain will undo us—pack him hence.

OLD POET

An he undo thee he shall have my wine ;
Thou'rt done beyond redemption.

SHAKESPEARE [*to* MIDDLE-AGED POET]

If you do fear to breach of formal law
To be accessory, then get you gone.

MIDDLE-AGED POET [*looking out*]

The night is dying down to flee the dawn,
The darkness lies so heavy on the road
I dare not go.

SHAKESPEARE [*to* SECOND PASS.]

Draw to the table, sir,
Your paleness tells of hunger. Good sir, eat.

MIDDLE-AGED POET

I will not sit at table with this man.

SHAKESPEARE

Then crouch beneath it like a surly dog.

SECOND PASSENGER [*drawing back his chair*]

Nay, let me break my crust in place apart :
This gentleman stands but upon his right ;
For who would sit at table with his slave ?

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JONSON

Your Roman Church of old had more pretence ;
I ne'er knew priest that called himself a slave.

SECOND PASSENGER

Not though that priest be called by such a name
Whose countrymen are bound in England's bonds ?

JONSON

Come you from Ireland ?

SECOND PASSENGER

No, I come from Spain,
And so I dare walk fetterless awhile.
But when I cross the Channel, then the chains
Of England's tyranny shall close on me.

JONSON

Why go to Ireland ?

SECOND PASSENGER

Why, to save my soul,
To save the souls of them I love, to save
Ireland herself, if Heaven's will it be
That she be saved from England.

MIDDLE-AGED POET [*to* OLD POET]

This is treason

To question whether it is Heaven's will
England rules Ireland.

OLD POET

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Faith, perhaps in Heaven

They do not know the law so well as you ;
Instruct them of their error in a sonnet.
Send a fair copy of it to the King—
He will reward you, you may give me half.

SHAKESPEARE

[*Who has been walking about, stops in his stride*]

You are my guest, sir, but I will not hear
Aught ill of England.

SECOND PASSENGER

Have I spoken ill ?

Then I have outraged hospitality ;
Let me go hence at once, I beg your leave.

SHAKESPEARE

Stay yet, I may have spoken hastily.
My brain gropes blindly, but I heard you say
That man were better born to be a slave
Than to be born to be an Englishman.

JONSON [*to* SHAKESPEARE]

Your truant fantasy plays tricks on you.

SECOND PASSENGER

I did not say it, and I do not think it.
It is not well, sir, to be born a slave,

Though one were happier born in slavery
Than from a freeman's fall to slave's estate.

DRAYTON

Ah, sir, you know not Christianity,
The Christian slave learns to embrace his chain,
Contentment sweetens his captivity.

SECOND PASSENGER

The slave contented with his master's will,
That never seeks the reason of his chain,
Is a mere brute that has no soul to save.
And so Our Lord who died on Calvary,
Though born in poverty, was yet born free.
Lowly he was at heart, but never felt
The bondman's false humility of fear.

SHAKESPEARE

Now I remember what it was you said—
That England had bound Ireland as her slave.
And I reply to you that this is false.
There is no slavery beneath the flag
Of England.

JONSON

You are overheated, Will,
You do forget your sailor friend but now
Told of the slaver picaroon he sailed
To our plantations.

SHAKESPEARE

Bah ! I do not talk
Of stinking black men.

SECOND PASSENGER

One of the Magian Kings,
That carried odorous spice to Bethlehem
To strow among the rushes for the Babe,
Was black.

SHAKESPEARE

I will not so be put aside
We spoke of slavery, and I declare
That England holds no slaves in Ireland. No—
Nor claims a right in that unhappy isle
That falls not justly to the conqueror.
Tell me what right that England doth enjoy
She might extend to Ireland and yet hold
Her sovereignty?

MIDDLE-AGED POET

Come answer, Carrion!

SECOND PASSENGER

I think that England can enjoy no right
Since right was banished from England's shores
By recreant Tudor's wrong.

MIDDLE-AGED POET

This impious wretch
Speaks evil of the dead . . . Harry the Eighth,
That pious prince, Defender of the Faith,
Who chose from the religions of the world
That was best suited to the English people.

SECOND PASSENGER

Was it best suited to the English people?
There you condemn your countrymen, not I.

JONSON

Think you our obstinate and stiffnecked English
Would change their coats by order of the King ?

SECOND PASSENGER

I do believe this change was forced on them
By every cunning known to tyranny.
I say, the King debased your holy faith
To colour his usurped authority
As he debased the coinage that he might
The closer grind the faces of the poor.

MIDDLE-AGED POET

He loved his country, and he forced the poor
To love her too, and never count the cost.
He spoiled the abbeys to build forts and ships——

SECOND PASSENGER

And threw down monasteries to build leaping-houses,
And flung down charity to make a place
For Mammon on your altars.

SHAKESPEARE

Since his time
England has learned to labour. . . .

SECOND PASSENGER

Since his time
Riches ride roughshod over poverty,
For pelf becomes first article of faith,
And men seek money rather than salvation.

SHAKESPEARE

England will never turn again to Rome
To seek salvation from some harlot pope,

Who will forgiveness and his blessing sell
For money given to the pander priests
Who go between him and the superstitious.
England knows popes and priests for what they are—
Hucksters and conjurers for all their faith.

SECOND PASSENGER

O, never think that I pretend to prove
There is no demon who can play the pope,
Or that his triple crown daunts Lucifer.
I say, without the Pharos of the Faith,
England has lost herself in her own fog.

SHAKESPEARE

Stubborn against the truth ! Do not her ships
Break day by day fresh solitudes of wave,
And pile on coasts that fringe immensities
The stone to build the tower of her dominion ?

SECOND PASSENGER

The tower the after ages shall call Babel.

SHAKESPEARE

What shall the after ages call your Church ?

SECOND PASSENGER

After the Church no age shall come to pass.

JONSON

I wronged you, Jesuit, you have your pride.

SECOND PASSENGER

Sir, I am only proud you listen to me,
For now I know I am inspired to speak
Who have not wit to lift my voice of wont.

MIDDLE-AGED POET

They say the rack makes sudden orators.

SECOND PASSENGER

I hope one day to learn what it may teach,
If thus perhaps my voice may reach your soul.

OLD POET

You do misjudge him, sir, he has no soul.
When he dies he'll go rhyming i' the void.
The fittest place, sir, for such rhymes as his.

MIDDLE-AGED POET

I have a soul, sir, above superstition.

SECOND PASSENGER

Sir, you are fortunate in your possession.
I pray you may not lose it.

OLD POET

If he does,
I hope I may be saved ; I could not bear
His company in any place I could not drink.

SECOND PASSENGER

Dear sir, my mind's eye sees a pleasant stream
Where every man may cool his thirst for aye,
If he but dare abandon worldly wealth.

JONSON

Not we of England only worship wealth.

SECOND PASSENGER

I do not say that England only breeds
Such miscreants as rear their hopes on wealth,
But England only dares to say that wealth
Is a religion in itself. www.libtool.com.cn

MIDDLE-AGED POET

She gives
The Holy Bible to the world to read.

SECOND PASSENGER

But for her own choice reading she reserves
Accompt books, journals, chronicles of fraud
Made honourable by the name trade use.
Trade use, trade custom. What are these customs but
To filch away the little most men have
To fill the maws of few ?

MIDDLE-AGED POET

A man with talent
Must use his talents to the best advantage.

SECOND PASSENGER

And let out God's good gifts at usury.
The cutpurse hath his talent—what of him ?

MIDDLE-AGED POET

He is the enemy of all society.

SECOND PASSENGER

But what a puny enemy is he !
A single rich man in a winter's day

Takes with the blessing of a Christian Church,
Which has forgotten Christ, a thousand times
The booty of a thousand petty thieves.
Why should the cutpurse hang and not the lord,
Whose justice sends him to seek mercy where
No rich man enters? I will tell you why—
There is no faith, nor hope in England now,
Nor charity. 'Tis the Old Testament
Read with the blind eyes of the Pharisee
That serves for chart to steer your state to doom.

SHAKESPEARE

'Tis our misfortune, sir, and not our fault
We have not the intelligence of Jews.

SECOND PASSENGER

What did the Jews' intelligence avail
When Cæsar's whelps came yelping at their gates?

JONSON

Tut! 'twas Greek luxury that ruined them;
The Jews love one another well enough.

SECOND PASSENGER

There was one Jew they could not learn to love.

SHAKESPEARE [*to* JONSON]

Who was this Jew?

JONSON

He was no Shakespeare, Will,
Nor actor, nor a poet, nor a man.

If he was anything, he something was
That will not be again,
Unless 'twas some poor crazy carpenter
The poets glorified.

SHAKESPEARE

And yet he did the State some service, eh?

SECOND PASSENGER

He did the State the service to destroy her,
As England now hastes to destroy herself.

MIDDLE-AGED POET

O, ignorant! The credit of the State
Stands higher in the measure of the world
Than ever in the memory of man.

SECOND PASSENGER

England grows rich, but what of Englishmen?
Is it my jealous eye that makes me think
I see them starving in your roads and streets
While England prospers? Is it fantasy,
Or do I see an Englishman lie there
Whose country has denied him, and who finds
No one to shelter him, unless kind men
Like you, mine host, who shelter even me—
An Irish enemy?

SHAKESPEARE

This man hath served
In England's wars.

MIDDLE-AGED POET

Ay, Spain hath felt his hand.

SECOND PASSENGER

How fortunate this soldier was to win
The right to slumber on an English hearth ;
He had slept better had he cheated her.

SHAKESPEARE

You say we English cheat our country ?

SECOND PASSENGER

No.

All Englishmen are cheated by delusions ;
You threw away your spiritual meat
To snap like dogs at a material shade.
You all chase bubbles, every one of you,
Except a few among the very rich,
A few among the poor.

SHAKESPEARE

They say in Spain
There are more beggars than in England.

SECOND PASSENGER

But Spanish beggars are respected men ;
Do you not know these Spanish beggars starve
That they may send an alms to Englishmen ?

SHAKESPEARE

I must not call you liar, Jesuit !

SECOND PASSENGER

Is it not true the guardians of your State
Are pensioners of Spain ?

MIDDLE-AGED POET

The poorer Spain—
The richer England. What is there in that ?
'Tis but a tribute paid our policy,
For Spain gains nothing by it.

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SECOND PASSENGER

Ay, she gains
Example that to break the chain with Rome
Is not to link oneself with honesty.
Spain knows corruption ; ay, and France and Rome,
It flourishes beneath the Papal chair,
And no anathema can drive it thence.
But Spain and France and Rome do call it yet
Corruption ; England calls it purity.
She teaches crimes which suit her policy
Are to be known by name of honesty,
And that which doth oppose her sovereignty
Are devilish hate and witchcraft and rebellion.

MIDDLE-AGED POET

You Irish are against all government.

SECOND PASSENGER

Ay, and I pray that we shall ever be
Against all government but that of God.

MIDDLE-AGED POET

Rude churl ! no more I'll bandy words with you,
For I have heard wild Irishmen like you,
Being worsted in the heat of argument,
Will draw their skeans and stab their vanquishers.

JONSON [*to* MIDDLE-AGED POET]

You run immune from risk of such a fate,

[*To* SECOND PASSENGER]

And yet meseems your argument is weak,
For let us say, what I do not admit,
That England suffered from her breach with Rome.
'Tis England you should pity, but instead
You pull a mournful face o'er Ireland's fate
Conquered by England. Now, 'twas bluff King Hal
That conquered Ireland, he the heretic
Who drove your papist countrymen to bay.
Is faithless England miserable when
She wears the crown of conquest? Ireland, then,
Should find a ghostly comfort in her chains.

SECOND PASSENGER

If Ireland yet remained the isle of Saints
The antiquaries tell us she has been,
Then Irishmen might kiss this present cross,
Knowing it were not laid on them for aye.
But we are breathing men who suffer pain,
And can imagine happiness and love.
Our woe is not assuaged to know this chain
Is wrought with sweat of England's misery.
Yet we poor Irish, as I think, would be
Rather ourselves than like rich Englishmen,
Men who deny their kinship with the poor,
Not only in this world, but in the next.
"We that have grace," say they, "were sent to earth
To prey upon the knaves that have no grace.
Jehovah bade us bind the Philistines—
Which are all men that we can overreach—
And hold them as our bondsmen. What are they
But chattels in our goodly commonwealth?"

We know he hath not grace that hath not gold,
His misery is proof the Lord averts
His countenance from him ; if he found grace
The Lord would pour His bounty in his lap."

SHAKESPEARE

You, too, believe that wealth gives happiness
To him that has it ?

SECOND PASSENGER

No, but it makes mad
Him who accumulates it. Have you seen
How rich men struggle with their cursed load,
Seeking to lift it ever upwards lest
It fall away for ever ? So at last
They sink beneath the burden ; they oppress
The poor that they themselves may be oppressed
With the undying dread of poverty.

JONSON

But by your showing, then, the poor man's lot
Is best, the rich man suffers for his crime,
The poor man scarcely feels the sting of it.

SECOND PASSENGER

No, for the scandal of it breeds fresh ill.
The driven slave dreams in his haunted sleep
That driving slaves is highest happiness.
Better were Ireland called to judgment now
Than she should learn that creed in England's school.

MIDDLE-AGED POET

Ireland is more the school for treachery.

SECOND PASSENGER

Ireland has not as yet betrayed her faith.

SHAKESPEARE

No, but the Spaniards that would help her keep it—
The wrecked Armada's sailors she betrayed ;
Robbed them and murdered them. Can'st credit that ?

SECOND PASSENGER

That Irishmen slew Spaniards I believe,
For I have heard of Sussex men who did
No less to men of Kent whose ships they lured
With falsely flaming lights upon the rocks.
But there, that was not treachery, but trade,
And I do not defend my countrymen
As being more humane than Englishmen.

SHAKESPEARE

Spenser said Irishmen were less than human—
And Spenser was a man to be believed.

SECOND PASSENGER [*with a change of tone*]

Was this the Spenser wrote the Faerie Queene ?
Lord Grey of Wilton's secretary in Ireland ?

SHAKESPEARE

That was the man—a truthful, gentle poet.

DRAYTON

A very perfect, proper Englishman
Incapable of an unworthy thought.

SECOND PASSENGER

Did not this poet Spenser qualify
As Saviour, Judge, Redeemer of the world,
Confusion's god, the lustful, goat-legged Pan ?

SHAKESPEARE

Did he do this ?

DRAYTON

But that was poetry.

SECOND PASSENGER

And that notorious king who for his ends,
Concupiscentious and vainglorious,
Flung his fond lieges to the maw of Hell . . .

SHAKESPEARE

Think you my spirit fears to enter Hell ?

SECOND PASSENGER

Dare your proud spirit naked haunt the earth
With the gross comforts of the body gone ?

SHAKESPEARE

Why, if you'd have us think this earth is Hell,
Where then is Heaven ? Is that, too, on earth ?

SECOND PASSENGER

Ay ! it lies hidden in the putrid clay
That rots away the glory of the world.

SHAKESPEARE

Then Heaven and Hell roll in one crowded sphere.

SECOND PASSENGER

They are an atom in the vast of God :
Hell but the flashing of triumphant self,
And Heaven the sinking of all thinking in one thought.

JONSON

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Your mind is running on Lucretius.

SECOND PASSENGER

My mind is running to the cross where Christ
Died, pitying the misery of them
That nailed Him there . . .

SHAKESPEARE

But you would nail on this same cross with Christ
The happiness of man.

SECOND PASSENGER

When holy Austin trod Milano's streets,
Bubbling to offer Valentinian praise
And so win praise for Austin, all agog
With expectation of his rich reward,
Did he not see a drunken beggar-man
Who with a groat had purchased happiness
That Austin, no nor Austin's emperor,
Not Valentinian himself, could know
While he stayed sober ?

SHAKESPEARE

Now I seem to see
Some light at last.

SECOND PASSENGER

My friend, if all you seek
Be earthly happiness, why not be drunk ?

JONSON

There is more happiness in poetry.

SECOND PASSENGER

Earth holds no happiness for sober men,
For they are ever thinking of the end.

SHAKESPEARE

For you it is your happiness to do so.

SECOND PASSENGER

That is the comfort left an Irishman.

MIDDLE-AGED POET

We wander from the point—now, good King Hal . . .

SECOND PASSENGER

Did not your Spenser even call him Pan ?

JONSON

Spenser was no true poet, he was more
A rare musician, one who tuned a note
For other men to sing their songs upon.
Himself he saw the world but in a mist
Of faery ; true poets must see true
Though they need not see far.

SECOND PASSENGER

Spenser could see
Main well into the mists of faery
When he saw Fortune flying in the moil.

JONSON

What can you know of Spenser and his fortunes ?

SECOND PASSENGER

He built his fortunes on the ruins of
My family.

JONSON

You are a Desmond ?

SECOND PASSENGER

Ay.

I'm of that sept. The first thing I recall
From out the dread vault of my memory
Is the red sky above my father's house,
Kindled to flame by gentle Spenser's torch.
My father perished 'neath the gentle swords
Of Spenser's servitors. Gentle, I call those swords,
For they were gentler than the men who held them.
My mother's shrieks were ringing in my ears,
And shall I tell you why my mother shrieked ?
I would not wrong your hospitality.
But this I say, her shriek was in my ears
As my old nurse fled with me in her arms
To seek the ship that carried me to Spain.
The last sound that I heard in Ireland was
My mother's cry, and but too well I know
The first sound I shall hear in Ireland now
Will be the cry of women echoing that—
The note your gentle Spenser tuned for us.

[The poets fall silent.]

JONSON

This is a tale to silence argument.

SHAKESPEARE

What magic is there in the seas to turn
Our honest Englishmen to tusked swine?
O Spenser ! by what sorcery wert thou
Transformed into a ravening and horrid wolf ?
Confess that Ireland grows enchanted herbs,
Insidious as mandrake in their poison,
Whose scent is deadlier than Circe's breath——
What is the shamrock ?

SECOND PASSENGER

'Tis the blessed plant,
The three-leaved symbol of the Trinity,
That Ireland fed on when all other food
Was ravaged and consumed by England's hate.

SHAKESPEARE

This Ireland is the land of mystery.

SECOND PASSENGER

A mystery you may not hope to solve.

SHAKESPEARE

Yes, I will understand it, give me time,
With you I will devote myself to it.

SECOND PASSENGER

Ireland is but a corner of the world
Christ died to save. I am the weakest
Of the militia mustered in His cause.

Most holy Antony of Padua
Was proud that he might preach to birds and fish,
How dare I hope to move a mind like yours,
Which, pardon me, holds some transcendent thought
My creeping intellect can vaguely guess.
I have not brain enough to comprehend
The vastness of the empire of my lord.
I only know I seek a battlefield
Where victory is easy. Ireland keeps
The Faith, her spiritual citadel,
Though her material bastions are shot down.
My country is to me the rendezvous
Named by my General, at his command
I go ; I have no purpose of my own.

SHAKESPEARE

Your tale has stirred a tumult in my mind.
Tell me of Ireland, tell me more of her.

SECOND PASSENGER

Beyond what you have heard she is to me
A scent of turf smoke drifting on wet wind,
A glimpse of green, green fields through driving rain ;
No raindrop falls but I do pray for her.

SHAKESPEARE

You pray for her, but why not take your sword
To fight for her, to drive us English out ?
You seek to save your soul and nothing more.

SECOND PASSENGER

O, gladly would I burn in endless fire
To thrust an arm up from Abaddon's pit

To point the way to sanctuary. [*Rising*] Lord !
Forgive my idle words, my wantonness,
My boast of services forbid to me ;
I linger here while there are souls to save,
And men unshriven tending to the grave.

[*Turning at the door, he says humbly*]

I would not seem inopportune, but if
There's one among you that would make his peace
With God, my humble services are his. [*To OLD POET*]
You seem the oldest . . . speak.

OLD POET [*startled*]

Excuse me, sir,
I take great interest in theology,
But am too fuddled to confute you now.

DRAYTON [*civilly*]

I beg your leave a Protestant to be.

SECOND PASSENGER [*to MIDDLE-AGED POET*]

And you, sir ?

MIDDLE-AGED POET

I will have no traffic with you.
Were you not Mr. Shakespeare's guest, I would
Lay information to the justices
And jail you.

YOUNG POET

O believe that would not I !
Your words have waked amazement in my breast,
If I dared follow you, if I but dared . . .

SECOND PASSENGER

Your way lies not towards Ireland, but towards Rome.
So young, 'tis sure you have not greatly sinned.

YOUNG POET

I have sinned greatly ; often have I took
The name of God in vain

SECOND PASSENGER

But not always
In vain. Shun vanity and be forgiven. [To JONSON]
Your heart looks hardly through your eyes, I fear
You do not deem me worth your confidence.

JONSON

Nay, sir, if ever I am moved to make
Confession, I'll seek such a priest as you.
Meanwhile, I wish you all that you deserve
In Ireland.

SECOND PASSENGER

Wish me more than my desert,
Or I shall run my venture on a rock. [To SHAKESPEARE]
My kindly host, have you no word for me ?

SHAKESPEARE [*vaguely*]

I do confess the tables of the law
All broken by me saving only one ;
This hand was never raised in wrath against
My fellow man, this heart has never known
The pang of envy, this tongue never spoke
Evil of others but in vanity.
But for unnumbered sins of vanity,
For idle words and lechery and greed,
I crave oblivion.

SECOND PASSENGER

If true penitence
Stirs in your heart, then Heaven will heed of it.
I counsel you a paternoster say
Once every hour throughout the night and day
For one full month. Further, that you divide
A tenth part of your substance with the poor
And last, that resolutely you abstain
From eating flesh meat and from drinking wine
From now to Michaelmas.

OLD POET

I breathe again !
He's spared to eat his goose. I truly hope
England will staunchly combat against Rome,
If Rome sets Britons to such tasks as this.

SHAKESPEARE [*wandering about the room*]

My brain is cracking ! Am I not at home
In my own house at Stratford ?

JONSON [*grimly*]

Maybe not.

SHAKESPEARE

I would do something . . . what is't I would do ?

[*Opens cupboard and takes out small bag.*]

Sir, ere you go, I beg you pardon me . . .
Your journey's costly—here is wherewithal
Will help to furnish you, here's money, gold.

FIRST PASSENGER [*muttering*]

Gold, palm trees, gold.

SECOND PASSENGER

I want no money, sir.

I trust the charity of humble men
To bear me stage by stage upon my way.

[Going, but turns]

But may I be your envoy to the poor?

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SHAKESPEARE

The money's for your journey, but 'tis yours.
Spend it upon your Irish, tell them that
An English poet sent it, one who thought
Mayhap another English poet wronged 'em.

SECOND PASSENGER

This money is a witness of fair will,
And blessed be the hand that offers it.
Yet it is not for me, nor for my flock.
Ireland wants nothing from you but herself.

SHAKESPEARE

Sir, I have given it, it is not fit
That I should take it back.

SECOND PASSENGER

Why, give it then
To your own countrymen. Leave mine to me.

SHAKESPEARE

I know not whom to trust. I dare not trust
Even myself—for I, believe me, too,
Have known the hungry roads and thirsty streets.
I have grown greedy with long thinking on
My youth's starved days, and so it is that I

Who was not born ungenerous only think
Of adding to my present ample store.
Take, then, this money now in charity,
Or morning sees it lent at usury.

SECOND PASSENGER

I take it, then, to spend on these poor men
Who walk your hungry roads and thirsty streets
And cannot hope to flee their misery,
Because they are not poets. For myself
My thanks be with you for my countrymen,
And I shall pray for poets while I live,
And intercede for them if I be saved.
Bear with this blessing from a grateful heart :
*Benedicat vos omnipotens Deus, Pater, et Filius, et
Spiritus Sanctus.*

JONSON, SHAKESPEARE, DRAYTON

Amen.

SECOND PASSENGER

[*Lost in darkness up stage, turning at door for the last
time*]

Gloria Patri, et Filio, et Spiritui Sancto.

ALL THE POETS

[*except the MIDDLE-AGED POET rise and respond
mechanically*]

*Sicut erat in principio et nunc et semper et in saecula
saeculorum.*

SECOND PASSENGER

Amen.

[*EXIT. He is not seen in the dim light : only the door
is heard to close behind him.*]

MIDDLE-AGED POET

This was rank treason.

JONSON

What was rank treason, man ?

MIDDLE-AGED POET

Why, to pray God in Latin.

JONSON

Tut ! who heard ?

FIRST PASSENGER

I heard, my masters, but I'll never tell.

[rising and shaking himself]

And you, I think, will never tell on me. *[Goes to door.*
Good night.

SHAKESPEARE *[stopping him]*

Wherefore so suddenly away ?

FIRST PASSENGER

To ply my trade upon this Roman beast.
I'll see your charity distributed,
I promise you . . .

SHAKESPEARE

You dare not lay your hand
Upon that man. I'll rouse the watch . . .

FIRST PASSENGER

To save
An outlaw from an honest man. Hands off !
I have a knife.

SHAKESPEARE

You are a murderer.

FIRST PASSENGER

I am an Empire-builder, by your leave.

[Thrusts him aside and] EXIT.

SHAKESPEARE

[pulling himself together and making for door]

Follow him ! After him !

JONSON *[stopping him]*

Will, where would you go ?

SHAKESPEARE

This man would slaughter Heaven's angel.

JONSON

Stay !

If he be Heaven's angel, Heaven will see
He does not come to harm, but as for you,
Who certes are no angel, Heaven will not
Be pained to turn the knife-point from your throat.

SHAKESPEARE

But let us poets sally forth together. *[To DRAYTON]*
Michael, come with me.

DRAYTON

Will, I am too old.

I am a minstrel, not a constable,
I doubt we have the law upon our side.

SHAKESPEARE

Soft sluggard! [*To OLD POET*] You, are you as well
too old?

OLD POET [*jumps up*]

I'm not too old. [*Sits down again.*] But I'm too full
of wine.

And could not use my rapier, not to-night.
Another time right gladly will I go
To fight for any of your angel friends.

MIDDLE-AGED POET

These are destroying angels that Rome sends
To ruin England. The stout mariner
Will but regain the gold the sly mass priest
Cheated from Shakespeare in his tipsiness.
'Tis so much saved for England that had gone
To comfort Irish rebels. Damned dog!
I would not lift my thumb to save his throat.

SHAKESPEARE

Jonson, you were a soldier, come with me
And be a soldier now—we'll save him yet.

JONSON

I will not go, nor shall I let thee go.
Better the priest should perish in his cause
Than we who have no share therein should suffer.

SHAKESPEARE

I shall not fear to lose my life with him.

JONSON

'Tis not your life I value, but your mind.
I would not have that stricken in chance medley.

SHAKESPEARE

We are not poets if we let that just man die.

JONSON

The poet was not given strength to stir
A puddle in the world, tho' he has eyes
To see the world's monstrosity . . .

SHAKESPEARE

Let go !

There's murder done while we stand trifling here.

JONSON

The poet may see murder done before him,
And never seek to stay it, even may
Refuse to name the culprit to the judge :
But murder he must paint so horrible
That murderers reading his awful word
Shall stand indicted by their consciences,
And call red justice down upon themselves.

SHAKESPEARE

You are a rhetorician and a coward. Death
Outstares thee. Let me go ! Young poet, come !
Your lighted eye tells of high-purposed mood.
Come, youth, with me . . . what ! dost thou fail me
too ?

YOUNG POET [*as in an ecstasy*]

I would not rob him of his martyr's crown.
He goes to disillusion if he lives :
Dying, he wins to Paradise.

SHAKESPEARE

His task

Is unachieved.

YOUNG POET

Ah, no, his work is done,
For he has taught us poets why to live
And how to die.

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JONSON [*looking out at door*]

The road is empty, I
Can hear no sound. . . . I think he's safe away.
[*Coming back in room*]
I think he's safe . . .

YOUNG POET

I think that he is dead.
Now his sweet sacrifice is made, his soul
Has taken flight already. Hark! his wings
Beat above Stratford. . . .

SHAKESPEARE

Fond imaginings!
If he is dead, then he hath died in vain,
Just like a fool, a fool, a fool in a forest.
Better like Touchstone had he ta'en a wench
And so been happy.

JONSON

Nay, the happier fool
Is he who looks to Heaven for his reward.

SHAKESPEARE

But this man did not labour for reward.
He only sought to serve his fellow-men.

JONSON

And failed in the attempt.

SHAKESPEARE

He failed . . .

Has this man failed ? O, that my life were spent
In failure ! that one moment I might feel
My soul repose in such tranquillity
As stirred the gentle passion of his mouth
And trembled in the cadence of his voice.
To-morrow I go forth to serve the world,
In his strait path I follow, and his task
I take upon my shoulders.

JONSON

Moonery !

You had been merchant, soldier, husbandman,
And sailor not an hour since, now you'd be
The world's redeemer, or apostle, or
Some other wildfowl ; presently you'll say
I will be king or emperor or pope—
I will be anything but what I am—
A poet.

SHAKESPEARE

What a thing it is to be
A poet, good for nothing in the world.

JONSON

But good to move the world : the poet stands
Aloof from all the world that he may use
The leverage of his all-powerful thought,
For which he finds a fulcrum in his verse—
The fulcrum Archimedes could not find—
To lift the world from out the pit of time
That men may gaze into eternity.

SHAKESPEARE

Warriors and doctors, emperors and popes,
Are they the poets' larger instruments,
The actors that impersonate his thoughts ?

JONSON

Life warred with chaos till the poet's song,
Rousing the soul of music, gave the sense
Of time and order to the multitude.
The fountain of the law sprang forth from him,
The twin concepts of truth and holiness. . . .

SHAKESPEARE

What truth or holiness is there in me ?

JONSON

If lesser poets have achieved such ends,
The hand that roused the Tempest, might it not
Blow England in a whirlwind of white fire
To purge herself of inhumanity ?

SHAKESPEARE

That tempest drove me from my anchorage,
And I am stranded on the shoal of doubt.
I never questioned wealth would bring me joy,
Yet cannot find it. Though I cling to life
I have not now the happiness of old
When I went posy gathering as a boy,
Or took the road to London as a youth,
Or won my way with wenches as a man.
Is it because I'm old and past the love
Of women I know happiness no more ?

JONSON [*harshly*]

It is because you know no other love.

SHAKESPEARE [*appalled*]

Since you, my friend, say that I do despair.

JONSON [*relenting, takes his hand*]

Nay, Will, the morning's up. Awake! Awake!

SHAKESPEARE [*shaking his head in abject misery*]

I cannot wake my mind. . . . I do despair.

OLD POET

Dost thou despair? Then, like a gentleman,
Despair with us in wine and merriment.

SHAKESPEARE

[*gently disengaging himself from JONSON and joining them again at head of table, while JONSON goes and stands by the fire*]

Most apt philosopher, I am with you.

OLD POET

While the priest prattled I have made a song
To Moll of Deptford. 'Tis pure sentiment.

POETS

Let's have the song to Moll of Deptford. Sing.

OLD POET

[*reading hoarsely in a sing-song voice*]

Come hither, Moll, and clipped with me

Win beauty in my fantasy.
Although it be thy very breath
Shall puff me down the hill of death,
Where blanchèd poets walk in night,
And mock the verse of Virgil's sprite.
Though the foul plague of India tear
My flesh, while now I see thee fair,
Time's frenzied wheels unheald shall roll,
While I pretend to wreck thy soul.
While I pretend thy slobbering lips
Are those that launched a thousand ships . . .

MIDDLE-AGED POET [*interrupting*]

Hold ! I have written such a line myself.

OLD POET [*angrily*]

Ay, and maybe have kissed poor Mollie too.
But never had the courtesy to praise her.

DRAYTON

Come, make an end of this pure sentiment.

OLD POET [*reading as before*]

. . . Are those that launched a thousand ships.
Thy body hold more frantic joy,
Than hers whose shame gave fame to Troy.
Doth not thy silly head go round
That thou hast such a lover found ?
Whose poet's fancy can thee dress
In all the sheen of loveliness.
Now all fair women shalt thou be
While lying in the arms of me,
And dreaming as you swoon and die,
Not one, but every man am I.

[*The sing-song ceases. There is a moment's silence.*]

DRAYTON

The candles gutter down. Let's have more light.

OLD POET

Nay, nay, we shall drink deeper in the dark.
Fill every horn, and so salute the day.

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SHAKESPEARE [*whose heart is cracking*]

I have a word to say before I drink,
A thought that may escape when I have drunk.
God put good tools into my hand to make
A world, and I have made a coat of arms
And a trim house at Stratford. Ay, my friends,
God chose me for His angel, but I chose
Rather to be an English gentleman
Who hopes, an he live long, to be a knight.

DRAYTON

Ay, merry Will, but we're not gentlemen,
We're but poor poets.

SHAKESPEARE

So was Shakespeare once ;
But that's all done with : at his table here
You can pretend that you are gentlemen.

POETS

We can pretend that we are gentlemen.

SHAKESPEARE [*lifting his wine*]

Let us be drunk !

OLD *and* MIDDLE-AGED POET

Let us be drunk !

ALL *but* JONSON

Let us be drunk !

JONSON [*starting up*]

I heard a cry . . .

SHAKESPEARE [*dropping his cup*]

I am forbid to drink . . .

[*Rising and standing rigidly*]

O God ! O God ! O God !

DRAYTON

What ails thee, Will ?

SHAKESPEARE [*distantly*]

What if I should not live to be a knight ?

[*He falls forward on the table, the poets laugh.*]

OLD POET

With all his pride he had no head for wine.

MIDDLE-AGED POET

But, lord ! what pride to think old Will should call
Himself a gentleman.

JONSON [*coming over*]

Dullest of dolts !

Thou knowest not the language of despair.

OLD POET

Doth he despair that he may be a knight ?

MIDDLE-AGED POET

Why, who is he the King should make him knight?
Though we be poets we must not forget
We're common men.

JONSON [*bending over* SHAKESPEARE]

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Ay, common men in sooth

Are poets, and the commonest of all
Was Shakespeare here, for you and I, my friends,
Do share a little with our fellow-men.
But Shakespeare is the common of the world,
Where all who have their eyes and ears may feed:
This head of his doth hold four continents.

OLD POET

Four continents of wine? nay, not so much,
But certain 'tis that he is very drunk.

YOUNG POET

He cannot have remained in his fair mind
When he denied that he was one of us.
Shall Shakespeare say he was not poet, then
All poetry's denied—the treasured gold
Of wroughten verse transmuted into brass.

MIDDLE-AGED POET

'Tis certain never gentleman or poet
Was beastlier drunk than your Will Shakespeare here.

JONSON

Nothing is certain, even not his fame.
Let's take him to his bed. . . . Come, my sweet Will.

SHAKESPEARE

[*half consciously as JONSON and the YOUNG POET lift him*]

When that I was and a little tiny boy . . .

[*Sinks his head on JONSON's shoulder.*]

JONSON [*tenderly*]

Soft, soft, O Poets, he's of us again ;

All will be well to-morrow.

SHAKESPEARE [*raising his head a moment*]

In manus tuas Domine.

JONSON

[*As SHAKESPEARE's head sinks again on his shoulder and he feels the dead weight in his arms*]

O, Will !

[*He and the YOUNG POET lower SHAKESPEARE gently into his chair, and as the others gather round in silent terror, masking the body from the audience, the bedroom door opens and JUDITH enters in her night-dress, carrying a lighted taper.*]

JUDITH

Father . . . where is my father ? Father, dear !

[*There is a moment's absolute silence.*]

JONSON [*mastering his emotion*]

What is thy trouble, why art thou astir

While other birds yet cuddle in their nests ?

JUDITH

I dreamt that God had sent a messenger

To call my father to Him. . Where is he ?

JONSON

Honey, go back to bed, and dream that he
Went with the messenger to sing to God.

[As JUDITH stands staring at him with half-compre-
hending eyes, he takes the taper from her trembling hands.
Outside the lark is heard singing joyously as it ascends.
JUDITH, suddenly understanding, falls a-weeping as the
curtains close.]

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