Galsworthy was a serious observer of life. For him the world was the English society of his time. His heart was touched at the sight of his fellow-beings suffering all round him due to various reasons. In his view the culprit responsible for their sufferings was that inhuman and invisible force called society. A thief is made, not born. It is society that drives people to commit crimes and then drives them to their destruction.

“Galsworthy’s *The Silver Box* holds an important place in the realistic social drama, it established him as a significant dramatist.”¹ Galsworthy found that the legal system was so full of flaws that true justice could not be expected from the law courts. A person having a long purse could easily twist the law in his favour. This moved Galsworthy to tremendous indignation: “*The Silver Box*, the author’s first dramatic work, a three-act comedy, written after he had been writing novels for ten years, already reveals Galsworthy as an original and full-fledged dramatist.”²

The play *The Silver Box* was written in the year 1906. It indicts society for its contrasting treatment of two men, the one rich and the other poor. The play deals with social injustice. As Leon Schalit remarks:

The plot is the struggle of an individual against Society, the vain onslaughts of a rebel against a closed phalanx. No less than ten of his dramas are in some way connected with justice, and, in six of them, a criminal case with its
essential thrills and pursuit of the law-breaker is used to develop the characters, and work out the dominant ideas. Police, lawyers, turning and twisting of the law, a court of justice, the sentencing of the weaker, a certain ironic hopelessness—all this we find in his very first drama.³

According to Schalit: “The ‘Silver Box’ shows us human nature as it is, human institutions as they are; suddenly seeing them naked we are shaken and go away thinking: ‘What are we going to do about it?”⁴ The play is a plea for sympathy and understanding of the difficulties of the poor. Law is ruthless and unjust towards the weak and helpless. Jack is the son of John Barthwick, a wealthy Member of Parliament. One night he comes home dead drunk. In sheer fun he has stolen the purse of a woman with whom he passed the evening. He is so drunk that he cannot find the key-hole of the door of his house. With the help of Jones, an unemployed loafer, he opens the door and gets him inside the house. Jack, in his drunken state, carries a sky-blue velvet lady’s reticule. Jones is also drunk but not so much as Jack. Jack offers Jones a drink as he helped him to open the door. Jack introduces himself that he is the son of John Barthwick, a Liberal Member of Parliament. He says that he too is a Liberal and asks who he is. Jones introduces himself as a Conservative and tells that his wife is working as a charwoman in their house. Jack says, “We’re all equal before the law—th’a’s rot, th’a’s silly” (4). This is proved in the course of the play. Jack offers Jones a drink and falls asleep. Jones takes the advantage of the
situation and steals the purse and the silver cigarette box which is lying on the table and quietly goes out of the house. “Out of wayward spite the rich man’s young son has taken the ‘lady’s’ purse, out of wayward spite, the out-of-work proletarian takes ‘the silver box.’” The cases of Jack and Jones are almost similar. Both commit the theft when they are heavily drunk. Their aim is not to get illegal gain. But there the similarity ends. Jack is rich and Jones is extremely poor. The next day morning Mrs. Jones enters the room and finds Jack asleep. Wheeler, a maid servant, enters the room and tells Mrs. Jones that her husband is there outside the “Goat and Bells” (5). maybe he is waiting for her to get the money for the drink. Mrs. Jones replies that she is vexed with her husband. He is out of work, comes late night to the house, beats her, and is always drunk. She wants to leave him but she is afraid of what he would do to her as he is a violent man. Wheeler gives her a suggestion to get him locked up but Mrs. Jones tells him that he is not bad always. When he is out of work he turns violent or else he is alright with his children. Mrs. Jones is calm, meek, and patient. In the course of casual conversation with Wheeler and Marlow, she gives us important information about her life and the conduct of her husband. Mrs. Jones ascribes his misconduct to heavy drinking and continued unemployment. While they are talking, they see Jack lying on the sofa. Wheeler goes out to bring Marlow. Mrs. Jones continues her work in the room. Jack gets disturbed and wakes up. He sees Mrs. Jones and tells
her not to tell anyone that he had slept there last night. Jack goes out and Marlow enters the doorway. He talks to her about her husband. While talking to her he finds the cigarette box lost and asks if she has seen the silver box kept on the tray. She replies no, just then Wheeler enters the room. Marlow asks him if he has seen the silver box. Wheeler says no. Marlow tells him that he had put it on the tray last night. He finds the ends of the two half smoked cigarettes in the tray. He confirms by seeing it that Jack had smoked last night and he cannot have it taken upstairs. He searches for the box in Jack’s coat but cannot find it. He tells them to have a good look in Jack’s room when he comes down.

Marlow asks Wheeler who was in the room and Wheeler replies that he and Mrs. Jones were cleaning the room. Mrs. Jones is the only person known to have been in the room when the box was lost. She is suspected of having stolen the silver box. The theft of the silver box becomes the mainspring of the dramatic action. Suspicion rests on Mrs. Jones. Wheeler tells that the master should be told about it. Barthwick, his wife, and son are seen discussing the matters in the newspaper. Barthwick, reading his paper, talks about the labour man. Then Mrs. Barthwick makes a comment, “Those Socialists and Labour men are an absolutely selfish set of people. They have no sense of patriotism, like the upper classes, they simply want what we’ve got” (8). Mrs. Barthwick believes that education has increased discontent and dissatisfaction among
the lower classes and they have begun clamouring for their rights. Even servants have started giving themselves airs of superiority. Mr. Barthwick, however, professes to be a Liberal does not appreciate his wife’s notions. They exchange their opinions about the low class people. They receive a letter from Moss and Sons tailors that they had not received forty pounds from Jack. When John Barthwick asks about the forty pounds, Jack says that he does not have any money. Jack says that he is suffering from a beastly headache and he escapes. He is a criminal but is shielded by his indulgent mother. Mrs. Barthwick goes along with him. She is devoted to her son and overlooks his faults and lapses. Just then Marlow enters and informs Barthwick that a lady has come to meet him. Barthwick tells Marlow to send the lady in. A young lady enters the room. She feels nervous before Barthwick. He asks the purpose of her coming. She replies that she has come to meet Jack as he had snatched her reticule the previous night. She says that she does not want to make any fuss but wants the money kept in her crimson silk purse. Jack is called. Jack says that he does not know about it and he does not remember anything. The unknown lady tells him that they had a quarrel the previous night and he snatched her reticule. She wanted to ask him there but could not as he was in a drunken state. Later she saw his address in his overcoat and has come there to ask for the money in her purse. After hearing this Jack remembers something and goes to his room to see the crimson silk purse and reticule. He comes
back with the empty reticule and tells that he could not find the purse. The young lady says that she has seven pounds and twelve in that purse and is all that she has in the world. She says that she is in need of money as she has to pay the rent that day. Jack replies that he does not have money and that he is suffering from a headache. The unknown lady claims her money and accuses him of stealing her money. His father again comes to his rescue. Jack is a spoiled son of his rich parents. John Barthwick interferes and calms the situation by giving her eight pounds including the price of the purse and cab fares. The unknown lady thanks him stores the money in the reticule and leaves. Barthwick scolds his son for not having any principles in his life, he is a nuisance to society and his conduct is unjustifiable. Mr. Barthwick felt uneasy and assured his son that would overlook his misconduct and say nothing about it. He says that he will not help him next time. Mr. Barthwick is seen reading the newspaper. Marlow enters and tells him that the silver box is lost. Mr. Barthwick asks Marlow who was there in the room when the silver box was lost. Marlow replies that Mrs. Jones was there cleaning the room. John Barthwick calls Mrs. Jones and asks about her family and where they live. She is closely cross-examined by Mr. Barthwick. Mr. Barthwick comes to know that they are leading a miserable life as her husband is out of work. He asks her if she has seen the silver box. She assures them that she has not noticed the box. But Mrs. Jones is suspected of having stolen the silver box as no one
was in the room. Robert Snow is appointed to investigate the case. In his house, Mr. Jones bewails the sad fate of the unemployed: “Jones, you come and join the demonstration; come and ‘old a flag, and listen to the ruddy orators, and go ‘ome as empty as you came” (20). “I’m not arskin’ for any treat. A man wants to sweat hisself silly and not allowed—that’s a rum start, ain’t it? A man wants to sweat his soul out to keep the breath in him and ain’t allowed—that’s justice—that’s freedom and all the rest of it” (20). “What makes you stand like that—you long-sufferin’, Gawd-forsaken image—that’s why I can’t keep my hands off you. So now you know. Work! You can work, but you haven’t the spirit of a louse!” (21). Mr. Jones has a just grievance against society which has condemned him to poverty and destitution. His bitter disappointment corrodes his heart and soul. All the misery of enforced idleness is voiced by Mr. Jones, who hates the rich with his whole heart and gets more and more irritated by his wife’s patience, when he relates to her his unsuccessful efforts to find work. Mrs. Seddon, a land-lady, comes to collect the rent. Mrs. Jones apologizes for the delay. Mr. Jones takes out fourteen shillings from the crimson purse and throws it to his wife. She gives it to Mrs. Seddon, who fumbles for a change. Mr. Jones tells her not to mention it. As Mrs. Seddon leaves, Jones pulls out the crimson purse and says that it is the lost property of a lady. Jones tells his wife that he is planning to go to Canada with that money. He tells her to look after their children. An argument takes
place between them and suddenly he sees his wife shaking out the coat. The silver box drops from the pocket, scattering the cigarettes upon the bed. Thus the box is discovered in Mrs. Jones house. She wants to return it. “Suddenly Destiny enters in the shape of a detective who comes to arrest Mrs. Jones on a charge of theft...” Snow arrests her for stealing the box. She replies that she has not taken the box and she does not know anything about it. Seeing his wife arrested, Mr. Jones confesses his guilt and assaults Snow for laying hands wrongfully on his wife. “The keynote of Jones is smouldering revolt. The keynote of Mrs. Jones is passivity and she must not be played pathetically, only be pathetic from force of circumstances.” “The whole incident passes with great rapidity; it is as though evil, personified by justice, pounces on two beings to crush them.” Mr. Jones is brought for trial before a police magistrate. Mr. John Barthwick does not want his son to be involved in the case. A court case follows. The magistrate hears the case of two little girls dressed in rags. Roper, Mr. Barthwick and Jack are also present. They watch the proceedings very attentively. Theresa Livens and Maud Livens are found wondering in the streets. They are homeless vagrants. They have been deserted by their mother. Their father has no work and is unable to support them. Their aunt has eight children of their own and cannot afford to look after them. Vagrancy or begging is not permitted in England. Hence, the two little girls are arrested and brought to the court. All homeless beggars have to go to
poor houses where they are made to work and are looked after by the local government. The officer who is responsible for the destitute and homeless has taken the two little girls into custody. Their father, Livens, is produced before the magistrate and closely cross examined. Livens tells the magistrate that his wife is a woman of easy morals and addicted to drinks. She has pawned the things of the house and disappeared with another man. Livens further says that he is unable to maintain his two daughters as he has failed to find work in spite of all possible efforts. He is a strong man and willing to work hard but never has a chance. Livens is prepared to give his guardianship of his daughters and permit them to be taken to the poor house. He is ready to forego his rights and claims over his own children. The magistrate remands the girls to police custody for a week. He declares that he would deprive Livens of the guardianship of his children and send the girls to the poor house after a week.

Seeing this painful case, Mr. Barthwick gets distressed and decides to champion the cause of the destitute and homeless in the Parliament. The case of the Livens sisters is not irrelevant to the main theme. It is not directly connected with the dramatic action but has an artistic purpose and significance. It gives us an impression of common suffering and distress and puts us in the right mood for understanding the moral of the play.
There is a close parallelism between Jones and Livens. Jones is also unable to earn anything. Jones and Livens win our sympathy and compassion. They are the victims of gross injustice.

After this, Jones and Mrs. Jones are brought in. Jones is escorted by policemen. Jack’s father engages a clever solicitor named Roper to deal with the case. The visit of Mr. Roper increases the fears of an M.P. and his wife on the open scandal. “Roper, you must keep that purse out of the paper… he implores.” Barthwick is upset as the whole thing has been against his principles: “Rubbish! You haven’t any! Your principles are nothing in the world but sheer—fright!” (35). Mr. Barthwick is ready to wash his hands from this whole affair if Jack said anything about bringing Jones into the house to give him drink. “As to Mrs. Barthwick, you don’t seem familiar with the type—a fairly and increasingly common one in the upper middle and upper class—the greymare the better horse. The hard-mouthed woman.” “The keynote of Mrs. Barthwick is want of imagination. Her imagination is only once aroused, and that by a personal touch, viz. by the child’s crying at the end of Act II.” Roper tells Barthwick senior what to say in the court. John Barthwick does what he can to hush up or suppress his son’s connection with the affair, as he is most anxious to keep his own name out of the papers. “Despite his liberal views, he and his family are really predatory in the community, for they do not hesitate to destroy a weaker family that gets in their way.”
He is a wolf in sheep’s clothing. Through his solicitor Roper, he yields his political powers to win over the magistrate. Every now and then he comes forward to withdraw the case, saying that he does not want to be harsh to the poor Jones. The real intention of Barthwick’s offer is to escape from the consequences of Jones exposure of Jack. Barthwick represents the majority of corrupt politicians in England of Galsworthy’s time. As he is an M.P. he does not want to lose his reputation before the public. “The worst character is John Barthwick, M.P. who loves fine phrases and loudly professes Liberal principles, in the tone of a man making speeches to his constituents, but who promptly turns cad the moment his interests are threatened or his name is likely to be associated with public scandal.”

Professor R.H. Coats regards him as the worst character in the play. His Liberalism is a mere mask. He shivers at the prospect of an open scandal. Hence, he is ready and willing to drop proceedings against Jones family. He even induces his son to hide the truth and deny all knowledge of the incidents of the previous night. “In the end, when Mrs. Jones turns to her former employer and says, “Oh! Sir!” (47) in the most pleading tones, Barthwick can only turn tail and slink away. His hypocrisy and meanness are unmasked.”

Mr. Barthwick’s hypocrisy, selfishness and cowardice are clearly exposed in the above scene. According to Leon Schalit:

After the solicitor leaves, Mrs. Barthwick bursts into sobs. The doughty M.P. and his wife have words together. ‘As
though stifling, he throws the window open. The faint sobbing of a child comes in.’ (35). Mrs. Barthwick’s nerves cannot support the crying, the butler must shut the window. That is as good an example of Galsworthy’s suppressed symbolism as can well be found. It is the charwoman’s little boy who has come there to look for his mother. And suddenly moved, she says: ‘John, we oughtn’t to go on with this.’ ‘It’s out of our hands,’ (35) returns Mr. Barthwick. The crying outside begins again. The Liberal representative of the people ‘covers his ears with his hands.’

The child’s weeping was a strain on Mrs. Barthwick’s nerves and she asked her husband not to proceed with the case against Jones. Barthwick replies that the whole affair was now out of their hands. He shuts the window to avoid child’s crying. There was an expression of distress on Mrs. Barthwick’s face. “The woman was a decent, well brought-up mother. Her maternal instincts—of any woman—would let her know that a slice of cake was not a fitting substitute for a mother’s care.”

The crimes of Jack and Jones are alike. Both are drunk when they commit the crimes. Both say that they had no intention to steal but took the objects out of spite or sudden resentment. “The cases of Jack and Jones are almost but not quite parallel; and that, where the parallel fails, the difference is in favour of Jones.”

The juxtaposition of these two purloinings was exactly what Galsworthy needed to enable him to develop his theme; it was important
that the two cases should be almost exactly similar, neither the rich man nor the poor man guilty of any but a technical offence; it was important that the lives of the two sets of characters should be interwoven, so that the structure of the play might be more compact and the moral the more poignant. In the court, all the arguments put forward by Jones, are rejected by the magistrate. Jones first argument is that he cannot held responsible for the theft that he committed in a drunken state. The magistrate says sarcastically that, if this argument is accepted, a man can deliberately get drunk and later commit a crime with impunity. His second argument is that his act cannot be branded ‘stealing.’ For, he did not do it with any deliberate planning. He merely ‘took’ the silver box in an impulsive manner. This argument is also rejected by the magistrate who points out that taking an object that does not belong to one is tantamount to stealing. The magistrate pooh poohs Jones’s third argument that he stole Jack’s box in order to spite him. But the magistrate does not allow Jones to put forward his last argument. As he does not have any job and as he was intoxicated he stole it out of resentment. Mr. Jones asks the magistrate why Mr. Jack is not put the same question as he committed the same crime. The magistrate smiles when Jack tells him that he had a lot of champagne in supper. The magistrate tells Jones and his wife that: “drunkeness is no excuse” (47). The magistrate again asks Jones why he had struck the police officer. Jones accepts it and tells him that the officer had laid his hands wrongfully on his wife.
as she had done no mistake. He says that he would again give him a blow if he did the same thing. The magistrate is prejudiced against Jones because of his naked threat to the police. Jone’s way of answering makes himself more against the case and he could not help it. He was unable to defend himself. He was helpless. The constable silences Jones but does nothing to silence Jack. Brainwashed by Jack’s solicitor, the magistrate concludes that Jones is mentally deranged and sentences him to a month’s rigorous imprisonment. This clearly shows that he had been either bribed or influenced the social position of Jack’s father. The result is that Jack goes scot-free while poor Jones is convicted to one month’s hard labour for theft and assault. “Galsworthy turned the knowledge gained through his legal training to excellent uses; it served equally well his artistic powers and his social conscience; and it provided him with many of his most dramatic situations and effective scenes.”

The play shows the disparity between the have-nots and the injustice done to the poor. In the end, after a rapid enquiry, the theft of Jack is passed over and Jones is condemned to one month’s hard labour. Mrs. Jones loses her job and her children starve. The chief sufferer, the poor man’s wife, is completely innocent of any misdemeanour. “Galsworthy’s impartiality is shown not by putting everybody in the right, but by making the instruments of the law behave like human beings, without vindictiveness. It is the machine, Law, which is at fault, and it is futile to argue with a machine. Change it, or scrap
Thus a rich man who is really guilty escapes while a poor man is condemned for the same crime and his family is completely ruined. The poor are helpless before the law. The law is blind to the causes of the crime. For example the law does not bother to take into consideration Jones’s unemployment which is the root cause of all his crimes. The law is concerned only with tracing who committed a crime and how a crime was committed but never with why a crime was committed. The defective functioning of the legal machinery is the major theme of *The Silver Box*. The law discriminates between the rich and the poor, condoning the former and condemning the latter. “Moral of the tale: the eternal truth that in practice if not in theory there are different laws for rich and poor: if the poor go wrong they can’t get back; from the outset they lack the means to carry on successful lawsuits. Or expressed still more popularly; the rich may steal a horse, and the poor mayn’t look over the door.”

Society and the institutions present in society follow one law for the rich and another for the poor. It is social injustice done to the poor. “God knows what will happen—for it will send away hundreds of persons with the conviction that play-writing is as easy as reading a police report.”

“Strangely enough, *The Silver Box* is described as a comedy, perhaps because we are left at the end smiling a wry smile at the unfairness of the world.” The very principle underlying the legal system is questioned in the play. “His legal training has undoubtedly
been of great advantage to him... it has taught him to see both sides of a case and to present them without prejudice." It exposes the deteriorated morale of the system which has become so corrupt that it fails to be impartial anymore, thus striking at the very roots of the principles it is working on. According to Hermon Ould:

Perhaps the thing which chiefly distinguished the play, and proclaimed that a new personality had entered the English theatre, was the introduction into the dramatis personae of an impersonal force—the law, as much a character as Mrs. Jones herself. The parts which the Gods played in the works of the great Greek dramatists, are played in Galsworthy’s plays by abstract forces and institutions. The Law dominates more than one of his plays; the Mob dominates others; the Sense of Property, others.

When we study the themes of his plays we will notice that he chooses the graver aspects of contemporary life and he lays strong emphasis on incidents as the outcome of forces, stronger than the individuals. Ibsen too adopted the same method but he concentrated on the individual only while Galsworthy gave more emphasis on the forces of nature as Skemp remarks:

For Galsworthy the individual problem leads always to the fundamental problem of the general relations between individuals within the social organism.

*The Silver Box* marked a new epoch in the history of English drama with its superior sense of dramatic economy and restraint. “Naturalism—whether in material or in technique—in the island realm
was then still in leading-strings, and Galsworthy made a breach in the ‘respectability’ of the British drama—indeed he revolutionized it by his realism!”

“Galsworthy’s aim when he wrote *The Silver Box*, was to produce a play throughout which there should be no movement, no gesture, no word, no scene, no furniture that would not be there in real life if the fourth wall were removed from the rooms in which the play was staged, and at the same time, of course, so to select these movements, gestures, words, e.t.c., that they brought out not merely scenes of everyday life, but the essence of human nature in significant situations.”

Through this play Galsworthy wants to present the idea of the society which have different rules for the two sections of society. The play is realistic and so there is no melodramatic painting nor do we find a trace of conscious wickedness. Barthwick is not a villain. The judge is not a wicked person yet the actions of Jack and Jones receive different treatment.

“There is consummate art in the close of *The Silver Box*, where the good and evil characters (if so they may be termed) are finally brought together, and the unspeakable wrong and sorrow of the play are condensed into a single look.”

The play poses the problem of social injustice and implies the need for an improved life for the poor. Galsworthy’s technique draws out the realities of class divisions and social inequalities. In *A History*
Of The Theatre edited by G. Freedley and J.A. Reeves, one reads: “After a successful career as a novelist, his [Galsworthy’s] first play, The Silver Box (1906), was presented at the Court Theatre. This example of realistic drama is characteristic of all his plays, for in this he shows his concern for the plight of the poor. He had a real humanitarian interest in his people, both the haves and the have-nots.”

The reality of the problem of social inequality is revealed most dramatically in the court scene when Jones is sentenced to one month hard labour while Jack is fair to return to his life of leisure. Such is the realism with which Galsworthy deals. “Social justice and equity are impossible within a class structure—inequity and injustice are taken for granted, more or less, by both master and servant.”

In The Silver Box Galsworthy has dealt with the problem of underdogs. Thus his plays are the plays of social themes and are known as drama of ideas. Thus he is a great humanist full of intimate pity for human suffering. Galsworthy stands for fair play, human understanding and fellow feeling. His studies of the Contemporary English society and its inherent conflicts and maladjustment are valuable human documents of considerable historical and artistic importance. Galsworthy sets forward the theme with exact faithfulness to reality: “We are made aware that there is one law for the rich and one for the poor, but that does not imply by any means that Barthwick is a villain or Jones a blameless hero.”
Galsworthy selected simple situations and worked to develop his theme, adding a dramatic structure that was skillfully wrought and drawn up in excellent prose. Eric Gillett writes: “The main theme of the play is the operation of the law as it affected rich and poor.” According to Eric Gillett:

There are two distinct social groups: the first is the prosperous, consequential Barthwicks, with their good-for-nothing son Jack, typifying outward respectability and dominated by the belief that their ‘Pharisee-like-façade’ must not and cannot be damaged; and the second is the poor Jones family, miserable down-at-heel, with no defences. Sheer poverty drives the latter into an indefensible position and in the end Jones is sentenced to hard labour in prison while Jack who was guilty of taking the unknown lady’s purse, gets off with impunity. Jack Barthwick is aware of the reality of inequality. He knows that equality is not reality when he compares his situation with that of Jones’s.

Galsworthy’s management of the opportunities for pity and irony afforded him by the central situation was, for the theatre of time, fresh and remarkable. “To the critics, the play, with its complete lack of sensation and sentimentality, seemed uncontrived, almost casual, so original was the dramatist’s treatment ... A revival, over thirty years later proved that The Silver Box remain a good play and a penetrating study of life in its time. Generations to come may regard it as a picture of almost unbelievable conditions in Edwardian England.”
Salerno, in 1968, considered the theme of *The Silver Box* “as topical today as it was at the turn of the century.”35 “The theme of the double standard between classes was used by Galsworthy to elucidate the problems confronting society.”36 Some of these problems are shown in the portrayal of a society with class distinction. Unemployment goes hand in hand with poverty and leads to labor demonstrations and unrest; it also causes character disintegration as shown through Jones. Other tragic outcomes of unemployment are prostitution and drinking. The machine is indicated as an unemployment factor. Unemployment can be of at least two kinds: that of the out-of-work poor and that of the idle rich. Undoubtedly, Jack’s idleness is in a part a cause of his loose behaviour. While the poor are faced with eviction and starvation, the rich have comfort and luxury. The judge smiles at Jack who confesses to too much champagne but glares at Jones who was unable to carry liquor. All these problems are, in large part, the result of the socio-economic-political situation which is the basis of the theme of the problem plays. *The Silver Box* dramatizes the controversial social question of the unequal treatment of the rich and the poor. As F.W. Chandlar remarks:

*The Silver Box* is called by its author a “social comedy” but it is comic only in the irony of its central theme and in the satirical portraits of the bogus liberal, his unscrupulous wife, and his good for nothing son. For poor Mrs. Jones and her children it is a ‘Social Tragedy’, for in spite of complete innocence they are the victims of a horrible, within-the-law miscarriage of justice.37
The Silver Box is a real masterpiece. It is a triumph of the naturalistic technique in drama. F.W. Chandler affirms:

The Silver Box is one of the earliest successful applications of the extreme naturalistic method in English drama. The author succeeds in creating such an illusion of actual life passing on the stage as to compel the spectator for the moment to lose all sense of artifice, to think, talk and move with the people he sees thinking, talking and moving in front of him.\(^{38}\)

Character is the mainspring of action in The Silver Box. The characters in this play are ordinary men and women. There is no villain among them. Professor Allardyce Nicoll says:

It is not of Macbeths and Hamlets that Mr. Galsworthy writes, not even of Dr. Stockmanns or of Nans; his characters are all ordinary, commonplace men and women such as we might meet with everyday. Sometimes indeed, instead of being above they seem to be below the general average of human intellect and of human power.\(^{39}\)

The Silver Box is a gallery of interesting characters. Here Galsworthy has proved to be a highly skilled artist who had the knack to create living characters. Galsworthy “views his characters not with the cold objectivity of a scientist but in the manner of a father who reluctantly throws his children into the world and then observes their struggles in helpless anguish. There are no totally despicable characters in Galsworthy and no characters whose degradation is so great as to excite only our disgust.”\(^{40}\)
This statement is true concerning the characters discussed in this chapter. *The Silver Box* is a realistic drama. Salerno says, “...that is, the language and the characterizations approximate the ordinary.”

Galsworthy is fair and just to all characters. He paints the dark as well as the bright side of life. He presents shadows as well as sunshine, virtues as well as vices. He is not partisan or propagandist. His aim was to set forth the phenomena of life and character, selected and combined, but not distorted by his own outlook. He shows balance and restraint and takes care to eliminate bias and partiality. He is a profound student of contemporary life and society. He paints life in its true colours and is scrupulously fair. Galsworthy was a literary disciple of the continental naturalists.

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The play *Justice* was composed in 1907 and produced in 1910. Galsworthy was interested in several social problems to improve the conditions of workers, women, children, and prisoners. In his play *Justice*, he embodied his reformatory zeal in respect of prison reformation. Galsworthy was interested in the abolition of solitary confinement and wanted to see improvement in the conditions of the English jails. The play *Justice* is a social tragedy. The cause of the tragedy is the social evil in the form of its institutions and organizations.
In *Justice* we find the portrait of Justice smiling ironically watching human beings pretend to be one another’s judges. It is Galsworthy’s The second “Crusade” (247) against injustice according to H. V. Marrot, the first being *The Silver Box*. The playwright himself explains the theme: “*Justice* tried to paint a picture of how the herd (in crude self–preservation) gore to death its weak members— with the moral of how jolly consistent that is with a religion that worships ‘Gentle Jesus!’”

The ironic contradiction between the ethical principles underlying the existence of an institution and its practical working methods, is a recurring theme in Galsworthy’s plays. Institutions, as aggregate bodies of individuals, should be extremely human and personal, but it is an inevitable case of irony that any contact with the institution of Law leads to a total wreckage of the families or the individuals concerned. We find people intelligent, highly qualified, occupying executive positions, but the essential human touch is lacking in them. Galsworthy proves how this tragic flaw in the system frequently leads to morbid tragedy. The very principle underlying the legal system is questioned in *Justice, The Silver box, and The First and the Last*.

The theme of the play is that Law is blind and inhuman. It does not take into consideration human psychology and innate human infirmities. In short, *Justice* is a study of the machinery of justice and of punishment in modern society.
The play *Justice* opens in Cokeson’s room. Cokeson is a managing clerk in the office of the solicitors, James How and his son Walter How. Cokeson is sixty years, wearing glasses, with a bald head and an honest face. He is seated at his table verifying the figures in the bank pass book.

Sweedle, the office boy comes to him and tells him that some party has come to see Falder. Cokeson replies that Falder is not there and asks him who has come. Sweedle tells him that a woman has come. Cokeson permits her to come in.

The lady enters the room. She is Mrs. Ruth Honeywill. She is a tall and pretty woman of twenty six. Cokeson tells her that Falder is out and asks her the purpose of her visit to the office. Ruth says that it is a private matter. Cokeson tells that it is not a place to discuss the private matter and asks her to leave a message. Ruth is anxious to meet Falder. She had been to Falder’s private address. But she could not find him: “It’s a matter of life and death” (220). So she informs Cokeson that her meeting with Falder is a matter of life and death and she has come there with her two children waiting outside. At this moment Falder enters. He is a pale, good looking young man of twenty three years. He is a junior clerk in the office of James How and Walter How. Cokeson allows them to talk and leaves the room. Ruth tells her tragic story. She tells him that her husband has come last night. She tells that her husband has drunk last night and has tried to cut her throat. She tells
him that she has come with her children and she does not dream of going back to her house again. Falder informs her that everything is ready for the night. He asks her to meet him at the booking office at 11:45 that night. He requests her to give the impression that they are husband and wife. Falder and Ruth kiss each other and they fly apart as Cokeson re-enters. Ruth leaves the office.

Cokeson tells Falder to make use of office premises properly and gives him a pamphlet “Purity in the Home” (221). He next cautions Falder about the work that he has been neglecting for his private life. Falder goes into his room and Cokeson is just setting down to write when Walter How enters the office. Walter is thirty five years old, modern, progressive with a pleasant voice. He is the son of James How. While Walter and Cokeson are discussing some legal case. James How enters the room. He is a short-statured man, with white side-whiskers, grey hair, sharp eyes and golden spectacles. He is rigidly conservative and unbending. Cokeson tells James that they are discussing about Boulter’s lease and is about to give the papers to Falder to draft the case.

James How asks his son how it is that there is only 351 pounds as the firm’s balance, while he said that it was over four hundred pounds just the day before. Walter produces the cheque-book. Both of them check the counterfoils. Walter says that the balance was four hundred pounds. They verify the entries in the cheque-book. The shrewd
eyes of James falls on the figure ‘ninety’ and he asks his son what it is. Walter replies that it was the cheque drawn by him on Friday 7th July. But he says that he drew only nine pounds and not ninety. James keenly observes the cheque for ninety and asks his son if the ‘ty’ is his. Walter sees and says that it is not his writing and says that his ‘y’ curl back a little. Walter tells his father that Cokeson is responsible for cashing the cheque.

When Cokeson is asked about this cheque, he says that it was for nine pounds. James gives him the cheque book. Cokeson is surprised. He says that he gave the cheque to Davis and Davis brought the amount back. Cokeson verifies other cheques but he is unable to find the word ‘nine’. James tells him that Davis is not there and he has gone to Australia. He says that there is some foul play in the matter. Three of them come to a conclusion that it is clear case of forgery. Cokeson is confused and says that never in his twenty nine years of service, such a mistake is done.

James is very serious about the matter and he warns Walter not to leave any space after the figures in the cheque. James asks the name of the ship by which Davis sailed. Walter replies that it is ‘City of Rangoon’. James tells them that they should send a telegraphic message to Naples for his arrest. Cokeson is very much upset. He feels sad for young Davis and his poor wife.
James asks his son to bring the cashier of the Bank there, and ring up Scotland yard. He is worried that such a felony should be committed in that respectable office of theirs, and Cokeson is worried for young Davis.

James goes towards the partner’s room and Ruth enters through the outer office door. She tells Cokeson that she has come there to speak to Falder just for a minute. But Cokeson does not allow her and asks her to meet him during the lunch time. Walter enters with the cashier and Ruth leaves the office. Walter goes into the partner’s room. Cokeson and the cashier Mr. Cowley indulge in talk concerning the cheque: “I like people to be open and jolly together” (225).

Cowley says that the man who came to the Bank was a quite a young man and he can recognize him easily. James enters the room and asks the cashier if he can recognize the person who has cashed the cheque from his office. He says that none of them cashed the cheque.

James then enters Falder’s room. Cokeson urges on him not to disturb Falder, “a nervous young feller” (225) and who has already been upset since that morning. James says that the matter must be thoroughly cleared up. He opens Falder’s room and asks him to bring in the papers of Boutler’s lease.

Falder feels nervous. He however, advances with papers, puts them before James. Looking at the cashier’s face his jaw drops, and he turns to see Falder standing in the door way. Falder’s eyes are fixed on
Cowley, like the eyes of a rabbit fixed on a snake. He goes back in his room and shuts the door. The Bank cashier, Mr. Cowley informs James that this was the young man who cashed the cheque. James calls Falder and asks him about the cheque and to show him the cheque. Falder gives him a negative answer. James asks the young man to look it more carefully for it is the cheque cashed by him last Friday. Falder examines the cheque and says that he did cash it. He states that it was given to him by Davis to whom he gave back the cash.

James asks Falder if the cheque was exactly like that when Davis gave it to him. Falder says it was same. Walter How asks him if the cheque was cashed for nine or ninety pounds. Falder replies that it was drawn for ninety. James repeats the question and tells Falder that the cheque was altered. He suspects Davis and Falder. Falder grumbles a little and tells him that he did not do it. Walter comes close to his father and says something in a low voice. James then says that the counterfoil was altered on Tuesday or after, as the cheque book was with Walter and Davis had sailed on Monday.

James asks Falder to give an account for all these facts and asks him if he still denies himself in alteration of the cheque. Falder at last confesses his offence. He replies that he was badly in need of money and he did not know what he was doing. He promises to pay the money back. But James does not listen his words. “In Mr. How’s select office, no employee has ever been guilty of a serious offence; the blow
is therefore all the more crushing, when the head of the firm discovers that young Falder, who, until then, had behaved in an exemplary manner, has forged a cheque."  

He feels that Falder has done a crime and is to be punished for it. Walter How, urges his father, to be lenient with Falder, who has forged a cheque, and earnestly begs him to put himself in the young man’s place. Walter How and Cokeson plead for the young man in vain. James feels that: “Life’s one long temptation, Cokeson” (228). He is obdurate. Especially when he learn there is a woman in the case he becomes hard as adamant, and Falder is prosecuted for felony. James wants Falder to be arrested, tried and convicted. He says that they cannot have a such a man in their office nor can they allow him to be at large in the society. He says that Falder is a convict and it is proved by his having immoral connections with a married woman.

Meanwhile, the detective sergeant Winster enters and arrests Falder. Falder says that he did it for somebody and requests James to let him be free till the next day. But James is unmoved. “The solicitor has him arrested just as he is about to leave the office to save Ruth and her children from her husband. So he enters ‘the cage of the Law’, and the door clangs to behind him!”

Two months later the trial takes place and Falder is taken to the court. In the court, the counsel for the crown is Mr. Harold Cleaver. He is an old advocate, dried yellowish man who is not carried away by
considerations of temptations to which the accused persons may have been imposed. On the other hand is Mr. Frome the counsel for the defence. He is not concerned with the legal points as such that always lie behind the commission of a crime. He has an insight unto the character of the people and goes deeper than the mere outside of crimes, so to say. His youth enable him not merely to argue for his clients, but also to sympathise with them. He views their actions in a human manner. He does not dispute the fact that Falder altered the cheque. He only wants to show that the prisoner was not responsible for his action at that time, considering the state of mind in which he then was. He argues that the prisoner did it in a moment of alteration and distress. He pleads in eloquent words for the release of the accused.

Frome continues his arguments. The prisoner is only twenty-three. He loves a married woman Ruth, who leads a miserable life with her husband, a drunkard who habitually ill-treats her. One night her husband in a drunken state tries to cut her throat, she escapes from him and comes to her lover Falder for help. She sets all her hopes on him. Falder tells her that they would go to another country and get married. For that purpose they required money but they had nothing. He calls the witnesses and starts to argue. The first witness is Robert Cokeson. He informs the court that the prisoner had been in the employment of the firm, James and Walter How for nearly two years. According to his opinion Falder is nice, pleasant spoken young man, who never gave any
reason to suspect his honesty before that offence of forgery which came as a surprise. He says that his behaviour was somewhat uneasy, jumpy on that day i.e. 7 July. Falder was walking up and down in the room in an excited state of mind: “This is not the Zoological Gardens, Falder” (233). In the morning on which the discovery of the forgery was made, a woman came to the office and asked for Falder and said, “it is a matter of life and death” (220).

After Frome’s examination, Cleaver cross examines Cokeson: “Have you ever seen a dog that’s lost its master? He was kind of everywhere at once with his eyes” (235). To the question of Cleaver, Cokeson says that the day was hot when, Falder had his collar unbuttoned and he buttoned it when his attention went there. Cleaver sits down and Frome rises and asks Cokeson if he had ever found Falder in such a state before. Cokeson replies that the young man was always clean and quiet.

The next witness is Ruth Honeywill, who is examined by Frome. She says that she is a married woman having two children. She states that the prisoner and herself are lovers but with no sexual relations so far. She says that her husband is a drunkard and he ill treats her in all sorts of ways. She says that Falder wanted to help her. They intended to go to South America and get married. But before this, Falder is arrested.
Ruth replies that she remembers the morning of July 7 for on that morning her husband nearly strangled her that she escaped from him and went straight to Falder and told all the story. Falder felt upset he gave her money but he never told her about the cheque. She says that she loves Falder and Falder loves her. She says that on 7 July morning Falder was dumb-like, upset: “Like a fate hanging over him” (238). She thinks that her danger and unhappiness might have seriously affected him. Cleaver asks her only one question, if Falder was out of mind on 7 July morning. Ruth replies that she would not say so.

The next witness is Falder himself. Falder says that he is unmarried and that he has known Ruth for six months. Her account of the relationship between them is correct. He loves her. He came to know about her through his married sister. He knew that Ruth was very unhappy with her husband. Frome asks Falder to tell the jury what happened on the morning of Friday, July 7 Falder tells him that Ruth came to him in a miserable condition. He thought of helping her. He was thinking what he could do and could not fix his mind on anything. When Davis gave him a cheque, he got an idea of altering the cheque by adding ‘ty’ and ‘nought’. Then he would get money to help Ruth. So he altered the cheque and after that he does not remember what he did till he pushed the cheque through to the cashier under the rail. From the time Davis gave him the cheque to the time he cashed it, it was less than four minutes because he ran all the distance during these four
minutes. He does not remember anything except his running. He does not even remember adding the ‘ty’ and the ‘nought’.

Now Cleaver rises and interrogates Falder and comes to know that the prisoner remembers nothing except his running. He comes to know that adding ‘ty’ and ‘nought’ to the cheque is a mere accident done by him. But Cleaver asks about the change in the counterfoil on Wednesday morning. He asks if that was again an accident. Falder replies that he wanted to confess his offence before employers but his fear prevented him from doing so. The idea that the punishment would fall on Davis was thought later by him. Cleaver asks Falder why he did not confess his crime, when he knew that Davis is going to be punished. Falder replies that his idea was to inform his employers later when he reached South America. He says that he had also decided to pay the money back. Then Judge asks him if innocent Davis had been arrested for forgery case, what would be his reaction to it.

Falder replies that Davis is far away. He thought there would be enough time to inform before any action could be taken against Davis. He thought that it would take some time before the forgery could be detected.

The evidence for the defence is closed. Frome sums up his arguments saying that Falder committed the crime when he was mentally disturbed, when he was upset, distressed, helpless and depressed. In this disturbed mental state he did not know what he was doing. It is clear
from the face of the prisoner that he is neither strong nor vicious: “He is just the sort of man who would easily become the prey of his emotions” (243). Such a person should be treated as a patient and not as a criminal he says, “It was all the work of a moment. The rest has followed, as death follows a stab to the heart, or water drops if you hold up a jug to empty it” (243). It is impossible for anything to change what he has done. Once the cheque was altered and present, the rest has been silence. His further acts, his failure to confess, the alteration in the counterfoil, his preparation for flight are all the evidences for his weak character. “But is a man to be lost because he is bred and born with a weak character? Gentlemen, men like the prisoner are destroyed daily under our law for want of that human insight which sees them as they are, patients, and not criminals” (244). He should be treated as a patient. If he is treated as a criminal, his whole life would be lost. Already he has been in prison for two months and his suffering is seen on his face: “The rolling of the chariot-wheels of Justice over this boy began when it was decided to prosecute him” (244). His suffering has already been greater than his criminal act. In his counsel’s speech there are golden words of wisdom. “There is nothing more tragic in life than the utter impossibility of changing what you have done … If the prisoner be found guilty and treated as a criminal, he will in all probability, become one … Justice is a machine that when someone has once given it the starting push, rolls on of itself. Is this young man to be ground to
pieces under this machine for an act which at the worst was one of weakness?"

Frome sits down. Cleaver rises and he begins to sum up his arguments. He says that the defence set up by Frome is very weak and thin. It is proved from the words of the woman, Cokeson and Falder himself that he was not mad between 1:10 and 1:15 pm. He says that a man may call himself mad during this short interval only for the sake of avoiding the consequences of an offence. The plea of insanity is therefore very unsound: “Before you can come to a verdict guilty but insane, you must be well and thoroughly convinced that the condition of his mind was such as would have qualified him at the moment for a lunatic asylum” (246). In his opinion the jury is bound to record a verdict of guilty. Cleaver sits down. The judge turns to the jury and addresses them to consider the case well. He says that they should bear in mind the general conduct of the prisoner before and after the act, and the evidence given by the several witnesses.

The judge further states that the jury should not allow any consideration of youth and temptation to weigh with them in their verdict. The jury retries, Frome requests the judge to tell the reporters not to disclose the name of the woman witness in the press report. The judge accepts and considers the application.

The Jury unanimously find the prisoner guilty. The judge after mentioning how he was compelled to differ with the plea of the
defence, gives the judgement of penal servitude to the prisoner for three years including solitary confinement. The judge turns and tells that the female witness should not be reported. Ruth stands up suddenly as Falder is taken out by the warders. Falder was then forced to spend three months in solitary confinement. The oppressive monotony, the stern prohibition against exchanging a word with another human creature drives him and others almost mad. Falder, who has always been nervous, is constantly brooding on what is going on outside the prison walls.

It is Christmas eve, the Governor Mr. Danson is seen standing near his table and observing the metal saw. Wooder stand at a distance and tells the Governor of the jail that he found the saw in the mattress of the prisoner Moaney undergoing fourth penal spell. Moaney had sawed the window bar about a quarter of an inch and says that he did it because he should continue his practice of making saws. When Governor asks him why he does these things, he replies that he must have something to keep him engaged. Governor warns him that he would send him to two days solitary confinement. Governor moves to Clipton’s cell. Clipton complains that the convict next to his cell is disturbing a lot by beating the walls and doors. He asks Governor to change the cell for the other convict. Governor moves to the next cell and finds O’ Cleary and asks him why he makes noise. He replies that he feels like talking and making noise and he give up.
Governor next moves to Falder’s cell and tells him that there is no use of striking his head against the wall. He asks him to be calm and tells him not to make any sounds or noise. Falder replies that he has worst time from two O’clock in the morning. Governor asks him to remain calm and tells him to adjust himself with the jail surrounding. He tells him to have control upon himself. Just then the prison Chaplain enters and he also looks at the curious saw. The Governor invites the Chaplain to dine with him the next day which is Christmas Day. Chaplain accepts his invitation. Wooder comes in and says that the visitor has come to see Falder. The visitor is Cokeson.

Cokeson tells that he has come there to see Falder. He says that Falder’s sister came to him in distress. Her husband does not allow her to see Falder. Cokeson says that he has come there to see Falder because he couldn’t see Falder worried. The Chaplain says, “If it wasn’t for drink and women, sir, this prison might be closed” (252). The Governor replies that he, cannot see Falder as he is undergoing one month solitary confinement.

Cokeson tells the Governor that he saw Falder in acute distress when he was shut up waiting for his trial. The Governor sends the prison doctor to check Falder’s health and his mental state. The Governor asks Cokeson about Falder and his past life. Cokeson tells him all the story. He says that he loves Ruth very much and wants to help her. But after the trial she said that she would earn her living by
herself and wait for him to come out. But after a month she came again and told him how she was unable to earn a living for herself and her children. Ruth decided to go back to her husband but he stopped her.

Cokeson further says that he wants things to be pleasant for Falder during the three years of his confinement. He is afraid that the young man may turn silly being all alone by himself. He would not keep even dogs in such a lonely and miserable state: “I wouldn’t shut one of them up all by himself, week after week, not if he’d bit me all over” (253). In reply the Chaplain says that the criminal is not a dog; he has a sense of right and wrong: “It’s the same with dogs. If you treat ‘em with kindness they’ll do anything for you; but to shut ‘em up alone, it only makes ‘em savage” (253). If Falder is kept without any company it will do him harm.

The prison doctor comes in and says that Falder is alright. He has not lost weight, he is nervous and melancholy. The governor tells Cokeson that he would look after Falder. Cokeson leaves the room. As he goes out the Chaplain makes a comment: “Our friend seems to think that prison is a hospital” (254).

The governor visits Falder’s cell, feels sorry for him and advises him to get accustomed to the prison and tells him to forget the private affairs which have been afflicting him. Prison doctor comes and is asked to see Falder again. Doctor says that he is alright and there is nothing
wrong in him. The doctor replies that if the governor desires a report
can be made on the young man's state of health, but he will be
compelled to make similar reports on the other prisoners also. The
governor feels sorry for Falder and he thinks that he is helpless.

Falder is seen in his solitary confinement in the cell. He is
motionless trying to hear something. He springs suddenly upright as if at
a sound and remains perfectly motionless. Then, with a heavy sigh,
Falder moves to his work He tries his hand at the work allotted to him,
that is stitching button holes in shirts. Soon he gives up the work, and
begins pacing up and down the cell. “There is a good deal of *dumb
show* in Galsworthy’s plays, most of it very effective. The most perfect
example occurs in *Justice*, where a whole scene is enacted without a
single word being uttered. The impressiveness of this scene, in which a
convict prowls about his prison cell like a caged animal, and finally
flings himself madly against the door, may be imagined.” He moves
his head like an animal pacing its cage. He makes some silly gestures
and actions. He peeps unto a tin as if trying to make a companion of
his own face. He begins creeping nearer the door. Suddenly he raises
his clenched fists. Panting violently, he flings himself at his door, and
beats on it. “Winston Churchill, the then Home Secretary, was so
extraordinarily impressed by *Justice*, that, after bringing the matter before
Parliament for debate, he effected important reforms in the solitary
confinement and ‘ticket of leave’ systems. In this respect, Galsworthy
may be cited with Charles Dickens and Charles Reade, both of whom brought about essential reforms in English prison life."

After Falder release, he is ruined in health and reputation, however, and finds it difficult to secure employment. After meeting Ruth Honeywill once more, he applies for a job with his old firm. Once Ruth comes to the office of Walter How and James How and meets Cokeson. She tells her miserable condition to Cokeson and asks him to give job for Falder again. She begs Cokeson to give Falder another chance. He tells her that he will talk to the partner but he cannot make any promise. He takes the address of the woman and advises her not to send Falder there unless he is sent for. Ruth leaves the place.

Cokeson calls in Sweedle and asks him to keep the young Richards hankering after the clerk’s post. He suggests him to treat Falder kindly if he comes there: “When a man’s down never hit ’im. ’Tisn’t necessary. Give him a hand up. That’s a metaphor I recommend to you in life. It’s sound policy” (265). At this point Falder enters. He is thin, pale and older. He is restless. Falder timidly takes the hand of Cokeson held up to him. Cokeson tells him that the partners have not yet come: “I don’t like doing anything out of the ordinary; it’s not my habit. I’m a plain man, and I want everything smooth and straight” (265). Falder sits and waits for them. Falder requests Cokeson to give him another chance. He had paid his offence more than a thousand times. People say that he weighed more when he went in. But they
cannot weigh his feelings. He worked in some places but could not stick to the place, the trouble being with his past references: “In fact, I’m—I’m afraid all the time now” (266). Falder comes of a consumptive family and is weakly neurotic from the beginning.

Falder continues: “There were all sorts there. And what I mean, sir, is, that if we’d been treated differently the first time, and put under somebody that could look after us a bit, and not put in prison, not a quarter of us would ever have got there” (269). One of his sisters is in consumption. The other could not help him for the fear of her husband who wanted to get rid of him by giving him twenty five pounds to go to Canada. Falder declined the offer and came away. He has slept in park for three nights. But meeting Ruth he feels a different man. After Cokeson and Falder talk for some time, the two partners enter the room. Cokeson requests them to take Falder back into the job. Walter says, “The rolling of the chariot-wheels of Justice!” “I’ve never got that out of my head” (267). Falder pleads James and Walter How to give him another chance. James is firm in the beginning but Cokeson manages his feelings and softens him. James desires to know what the young man has been doing since he came out. Cokeson informs him that he has had one or two places, but could not work, being very sensitive.

James enquires about Ruth Honeywill and his relation with Ruth. Cokeson informs him that the young man has met her. She is not living with her husband. James says that he would give job to Falder only
when he cuts off his relation with her. He asks Falder to put all his past behind him and build himself a good and steady reputation: “It’s no good coming here as a victim. If you’ve any notion that you’ve been unjustly treated—get rid of it. You can’t play fast and loose with morality and hope to go scot-free. If society didn’t take care of itself, nobody would—the sooner you realize that the better” (269). Falder says that he cannot give up Ruth. She is the only one he has to look after and she is all he has got. James says that Ruth should not drag Falder down further. If he wants to marry her, it’s a different thing. Falder says it is not his fault. If Ruth has money, she can get the divorce easily. Walter says that he will help them, if at all they want divorce.

Ruth comes in. James tells her that he will take Falder back only when she cuts off her relation with Falder. Falder tells her that Walter will help them in getting the divorce. James tells Ruth to give up Falder. But Falder does not accept it. His chivalry will not permit him to do. Falder promises James that they will keep apart till the affair is over. But James does not listen his words. Ruth at last says that she will do the best for him. Falder feels sad for it. “Indeed, their love for each other is the one saving element in both their lives. Things might have gone well from this point onwards, and a divorce from her husband might have been arranged for Ruth, but a police officer presently appears and charges Falder with seeking employment by means of forged references and also failing to report himself as a ticket-of-leave man.”

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Hearing the sound of footsteps, Cokeson asks Ruth to get into the clerk’s room. Falder also follows her and Cokeson shuts the door. The detective sergeant Winster enters. He says that he has come there to arrest Falder. He informs them that Falder has failed to report himself lately. They have just heard that there was a serious matter of obtaining employment with forged reference, and they want Falder in that connection. James says if the detective wants Falder, he must find him without their help. Winster finds the cap of Falder and tells them not to give shelter for criminals. He searches for Falder. He opens the clerk’s room and finds Ruth and Falder. He goes in and soon comes out with his arm twisted in Falder’s. Walter asks the detective to leave him. But detective does not leave him. With a queer, desperate laugh Falder throws up his head and goes out through the outer office, half dragging Winster after him.

There are sounds of footsteps descending the stone stairs. Suddenly there is a dull thud and an ejaculation in Winsters voice. Ruth faints. The outer door is opened. Winster and Sweedle are seen carrying some burden. All except Ruth gather round it. Winster informs them that Falder jumped out and broke his neck. Ruth having regained consciousness listens to the voices and moves towards them. She drops on her knees by the side of the body. She cries out that he is dead. Cokeson says, “No one ’ll touch him now! Never again! He’s safe with
gentele Jesus!” (274). On these cruelly ironical and scathing words, the play ends.

From the above summary it may be gathered that at the centre of the play Justice is William Falder, a junior clerk in the office of solicitors James How and Walter How. The complication of the play issues from Falder’s forging a cheque to help a lady in distress. Besides the crime of forgery he commits another offence by planning to runaway with Ruth Honeywill. The problem gets more complicated when the forgery is discovered before his departure. Falder is sentenced to three years of imprisonment and he suffers rejection, neglect, insults and humiliation by his own fellows. Falder desperately seeks employment in the same solicitor’s office who insists that he give up Ruth Honeywill. But Falder rejects the condition and later he is arrested for forging a reference. The prospect of another imprisonment makes Falder prefer death to imprisonment.

Galsworthy in this play sets up a conflict between individual and society. Idealism and individualism are always at loggerheads with the law. Falder is an idealist and in his attempts to save a woman whom he has loved and who is harassed by her husband cannot succeed because the law is a machine which refuses to judge emotions of the human beings. The law is less interested in the causes leading to the crime than the crime itself. If law has eyes and ears, if law is human, it should consider every crime holistically and judge the criminal with a
human face. Falder has not forged the cheque out of any greed. He had done it to help out a miserable person, a woman who is a victim of her husband’s tyranny. According to Schalit:

Galsworthy’s intention was to go much further, to present a picture of the general blindness of Justice, to show in correct proportion, the problem of Society’s attitude towards the erring individual. Through the blind and compartmental working of its legal machinery, Society crushes the individual who has sinned against the Law. But a criminal having atoned through punishment, should surely have the chance to become once more a useful member of society. Added disaster is wrought by punishment; and the real tragedy of *Justice* lies perhaps less in Falder’s mental tortures in prison and moral shipwreck afterwards, than in the certainty we feel—even before his conviction—that he will not go out of prison a reformed man, but broken and unfit to cope with life!⁴⁹

Galsworthy calls *Justice* a tragedy by which he meant how the English legal system of his day was less than that. Another aspect of the play is the punishment of the victims. The solitary confinement in prisons is such that the prisoners prefer death to it. It is illustrated in the play in the form of reactions of characters. Walter, Frome and Cokeson feel that Falder should have been treated like a patient and not a criminal. There is opposing point of view represented by James that no one will protect society if it does not take steps to punish the criminals. Galsworthy presents his case most eloquently through Frome.
In this play Frome nor any other witness tells any lie. The fact of forgery is admitted. The lawyer says that background life of Falder, the palpitating life behind the commission of any crime must be kept in mind. So Frome uses Ruth as a witness before the judge. But Cleaver merely sneers at the love story and observes that Frome has tried to invest a case of ordinary forgery with a romantic glamour. The judge agrees with Cleaver. He observes that Frome has been all the while making only: “the plea for mercy” (248). He says, “The Law, is what it is—a majestic edifice, sheltering all of us, each stone of which rests on another” (248). He is concerned with the administration and points out that technically Falder can be treated with leniency only if he is proved to be insane, and to be qualified for the lunatic asylum.

It is interesting to note that Galsworthy’s Justice did not die in the theatre or in the minds of the audience. It provoked the government of the day into taking the problems seriously. The reformation of the law under prisons with reduced solitary confinement proved how effective Galsworthy’s play and its ideas were.

Galsworthy called his play as a tragedy in four acts which was a novel description. For centuries tragedy has been defined as the change of fortune of a man of rank from prosperity to adversity. Aristotle had defined it in such terms. Shakespeare tragedy like the Greek tragedies also dramatised the fall of a supremo from a great height to his death. More recently American playwrights like Miller wrote tragedies with a
middle class hero. Thanks to a number of drama critics and their
definition of a tragic hero it is now accepted that anyone irrespective of
his social or class status can become a protagonist of a tragedy. It is to
be noted that decades before the modern tragedy came into existence.
Galsworthy wrote this play *Justice* with a middle class man as a tragic
hero.

William Archer, the distinguished drama critic draws attention to
the realism of the play:

> Let us suppose it just and hopeful to say that Galsworthy
goes to work, Not with a palette and brushes, but with a
camera. If so, what an extraordinary camera it is. A
camera that selects the significant and leaves out the
irrelevant and insignificant trait. A camera that seizes upon
those moments in a story, which while absorbingly dramatic
in the present throws light most vividly and naturally upon
the past. A camera which though its lens remains absolutely
true, steady, and in focus, is yet by some strange paradox
quivering with indignation and thrilling with a passion of
humanity. 50

It must have been a matter of great satisfaction to Galsworthy
that his play had a desired effect. He records in his notebook as
follows:

*Justice* made a great sensation, especially in parliamentary
and official circles. Winston Churchill, the new Home
secretary, and Ruggles Bise, head of the prison commission,
both witnessed it, the first with sympathy, the second with
a sinking sensation. Reinforcing previous efforts, the net
result was the solitary confinement was reduced to three months for recidivists, and to one month only for intermediates and star class.\textsuperscript{51}

Allardyce Nicoll commenting on the tragic element in Galsworthy’s plays justifies the modern tragic plays:

In not one of these, (Galsworthy’s tragedies) is a true hero, yet all are full of heroes. In all the tragic impression is sure, because of this sense of super human forces and of the waste involved in their clash and conflict. In these ways Galsworthy’s drama, true as it is to the finest tradition of tragic art, is fundamentally modern, expressing to his age the spirit of the twentieth century as Shakespeare’s tragedies enshrined the spirit of the Renaissance. Our study of drama, if it is to teach us to be prepared to welcome new developments in that art which, above all others, is most sensitive to the ideals of the age in which it is born to attempt to imitate Shakespearean drama now, in its original form, would be as absurd as to plead for a return to the stage coach in place of the locomotive. Man urshes for means of conveyance in all ages, the desire was the same in ancient Egypt as it is today, but the means are different so in tragedy the fundamental passions remain unaltered from century to century, informing the work of Ibsen as they informed the work of Aeschylus, only the means which Aeschylus used to arouse those passions bear the same relation to the means of Ibsen that a chariot does to an Aeroplane. The one is the perfect expression of Grecian life the other of modern and, while we may still appreciate the worth of the more ancient, we realize that it will be inadequate to cope with the changed conditions of a modern
consciousness. The demands are the same, but the circumstances have altered the media and the deals and the means of expression.\textsuperscript{52}

The man’s suffering had such a deep effect on Galsworthy that he explains:

I felt that we ought all of us to have bowed down before him, that I, though I was free and righteous, was a charlatan and sinner in the face of that living Crucifixion….. that poor lost creature had been so sinned against that I was as dirt beneath his feet…. In the whole range of Nature. Only men and spiders torture other creatures in that long-drawn out kind of way; and only men do it in cold blood to their own species.\textsuperscript{53}

Galsworthy experiences a kind of natural revolt against restriction—spiritual or physical—on freedom. In that deeply moving sketch, \textit{The Prisoner}, he makes the narrator say: “I can’t bear things in cages; animals, birds or men. I hate to see or think of them.”\textsuperscript{54}

Galsworthy wrote to Casson about the motive spirit behind the theme,

It was at all events written with the utmost sincerity and naught set down in malice. It was conceived and written as the presentment of the spirit of the whole process and no single part of the play can justly be isolated and criticised without having regard to the sentence: Justice is a machine.\textsuperscript{55}
There has been a great controversy chiefly between the playwright, Granville Barker and Prof. Gilbert Murray about the sudden tragic ending of the play. Barker has suggested that the suicide is melodramatic in effect, and therefore it should bend with the re-arrest instead of culminating in death. But Galsworthy’s intention is different; he wants to produce an effect of catharsis a feeling that Falder is beyond the reach of Law and thus beyond earthly suffering too. In his letter to Prof. Murray, Galsworthy says:

I originally conceived a re-arrest only, then it seemed to me that only by going beyond the re-arrest to the pure emotion of something elemental could the full value be extracted…. It seems to me that you want dead and beyond that awful process going on forever; out of the hands of men. Only by giving him back to Nature can you get the full criticism of human conduct.\(^{56}\)

Gilbert Murray wholeheartedly approved of Galsworthy’s idea, “Your play is not a Blue-book or tract; it is a tragedy. And to cut the death because it is not relevant to the prison system would be to treat it as a tract.”\(^{57}\)

The unique honour of a play becoming the direct instrument for bringing about social reform goes to *Justice*. Gladstone and Sir Winston Churchill were obviously influenced by *Justice* in effecting certain prison reforms. The prison-scene, one of haunting miseries, was the immediate stimulus. In the dirty, dark, ill-ventilated cell, Falder is straining his ears...
to catch some sound from outside. Extremely high-strung in temperament, he is maddened by the solitude and silence.

In a letter to Edward Garnett, Galsworthy describes the pathetic condition of prisoners undergoing solitary confinement: “I spent last Friday and Saturday in Lewes Prison interviewing convicts undergoing solitary confinement—saw 49 in all—and thoroughly confirmed my impressions that it is a barbarous thing.”

According to Leon Schalit:

Some continental critics declare Justice old-fashioned, on the ground that it contains court-of-justice and prison scenes! But I do not think that I am guilty of exaggeration in asserting that no man of feeling who has seen this drama acted properly can fail to be swept away its overpowering effect, can never forget it, just as no man of feeling can ever forget the sketch, The Prisoner, if he has read it with a right understanding. It is Galsworthy’s deep and genuine love of humanity, his compassion for the weak and the caged, which creates the overwhelming effect that no one with any heart can resist.

Leon Schalit remarks:

Justice, the guardian of morality, has ruined not only Falder, but has also on its conscience the fate of Ruth. Thus the machinery of the Law crushes simultaneously a perhaps promising couple who might have led useful lives. Falder, in his weakness and nervousness, reminds us a little of A Lost Dog in A Commentary, and Larry Darrant, in The First and the Last. A sympathetic figure is the old clerk Cokeson, a faithful old dog, whose old-fashioned mannerisms remind one somewhat of Dicken’s characters; he
brings into the tragedy of the play a little light and humour. This part, as well as those of Ruth and Falder, need reserve in interpretation.\textsuperscript{60}

In \textit{JOHN GALSWORTHY AS A DRAMATIC ARTIST} edited by R.H. Coats, one reads:

\textit{Escape}, published in 1926, has some surface likeness to \textit{Justice}, published in 1910. Both deal with convicts who have been wrongfully imprisoned. But a comparison of the two plays brings out one very remarkable point of difference. The man who \textit{evades} the demands of justice, and escapes from prison before his time, is received by the world with open arms; the man who \textit{fulfils} the demands of justice, and remains in prison till he has expiated his offence, is cold-shouldered by the world, and further punishments are heaped upon him.\textsuperscript{61}

As Coats remarks:

But if Galsworthy’s indictment of human justice is severe, his indictment of the general harshness of the world, ‘man’s inhumanity to man,’ is still more bitter. When offenders against the social order are released from prison, and have presumably expiated to the full the crime they have committed by the punishment they have endured, are they welcomed back by the community on fair and reasonable terms and given a chance to recover their good name? Very seldom. The general attitude is well summed up by Falder, who says, ‘Nobody wishes you harm, but they down you all the same.’ \ldots On his release from prison Falder did fortunately obtain a situation in an office, but when the other clerks learned that he was a gaol-bird he was
hound out at once. All this constitutes a social punishment of the most severe kind wrongfully superadded to the legal penalty. Indeed, social ostracism may to some natures be more difficult to endure than imprisonment itself, and it is little wonder if such a reception drives the despairing culprit into crime again, so that his last state becomes a thousand times worse than his first.62

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The play *Escape* is one of the two plays that elaborate chase motif, the other being *The Fugitive*. “A man—not as in *The Fugitive*, a woman—is hunted in this play; Clare escapes by suicide, Matt Denant, the ‘hero’ of this drama, surrenders and lives. *The Fugitive* leaves the feeling that life is ugly, and mankind base; *Escape*, that, after all, life is worth living, and the greater part of mankind good.”63 The play *Escape* opens with a prostitute looking for the customers in the Hyde Park, London. A policeman in plain clothes glances at her. She tries to attract him but he approaches and recedes knowing that she is a prostitute. Two people pass without glancing her. Later she sees a man coming from the left. He is Matt Denant who is young, tall athletic, a racing person with a pair of race glasses and a cigar. She asks him for a light for her cigarette. He stops and gives her his lighter. Both of them fall into conversation. They talk about relative merits of women and horses. Matt is gentle sporting person who is resistant to the girl’s charms. He is struck by the girl’s thoughtful replies and looks upon his conversation with her as a useful contribution to his training for the priesthood.
The girl invites Matt to see her Persian cat but he refuses and leaves. Just then the plain clothes man reappears, grasps her arm and tries to arrest the girl. The girl says to the police man, “I wasn’t, I tell you; and he’ll tell you so too! Won’t you?” (990).

Matt returns and protests that he and the girl had only a friendly conversation. Matt asks the policeman to leave the girl. But the policeman refuses and threatens to arrest Matt. He tells Matt that she was carrying on her profession as she has done before and that it was the third night that she is continuing it. When the policeman does not leave, Matt hits the policeman. Policeman too hits Matt. A violent struggle takes place. Matt hits and knocks the policeman down. Policeman hits his own head on the railing and dies in an instant. Matt tries to revive him. Suddenly he looks up and sees two policemen coming from the right. They enquire about what is happening there. Policeman asks how it happened. Matt replies that there has been a row, and when he was seized, he smote him on the jaw. The policeman fell back and hit his head on the rail. Matt is arrested and gets five years of imprisonment.

A year later Matt is seen working with his fellow convict on the farm at Dartmoor prison in a thick fog. Both of them discuss their punishment. Matt tells his fellow convict that he wants to escape from the prison. He asks him to draw him a plan with a stick. The fellow convict marking the earth explains about the route. Matt clarifies his
doubts about the route. He studies the chart in the soil. The fellow convict tells him to make an attempt to escape as the place is covered with thick fog. Besides he says a convict in prison clothes can easily be recognized.

Matt keeps harvesting potatoes in the fog. The warder shouts them to complete one more row. Matt puts some potatoes in his pocket and is ready to escape. His fellow convict gives him a slice of bread. Matt takes the bread, thanks him and moves three steps away from him, stops for a while then suddenly stooping low runs to the wall, climbs over the wall and escapes. “At once the hunt is ‘up’. The main theme of the play begins here. We see human nature illustrated in a variety of scenes in which all sorts of human beings come in contact with a fellow human being escaping from justice. The author does not wish to point a moral, he only wishes to stir us up. We see ourselves, as it were, placed in a very awkward situation and we wonder what we ourselves would do.” In less than a minute, the warder finds out the absence of Matt. The warder asks the fellow convict where Matt has gone. He says that he has gone near that wall. Warder searches for him and raises an alarm.

Two prison warders are in search of Matt in utter darkness. They discuss the prisoner’s chances of making good his escape. They curse him for keeping them out in the thick fog. “Already in the prologue, there has been a certain ironic humour; this humour pervades every
following episode, up to the last two where the hunt is closing in on Matt. …Footsteps! Ah! He’s coming! One flashes his electric lamp on Matt’s face; the other seizes him! No! deuce take it! He has only got hold of his fellow warder—Matt has escaped!“65 They toss a coin to see which of them will be privileged to take their revenge on the prisoner first. They tie a rope across the road to trap the prisoner as there is no other way for him to escape but by the road. They hear the sound of the footsteps of Matt. But in confusion they grab each other instead of Matt. Thus Matt escapes from the warder’s trap. V. Dupont observes:

*Escape* is built entirely upon such lines, being a series of detached episodes in the life of the main character. Matt Denant, in the short space of time between his breaking prison and his recapture, comes in contact with various persons, none of whom has any existence in the drama other than that arising out of some momentary relationship with Denant.66

After sometime Matt enters a bedroom at an inn on the Moor. He hides under the bed for hours and is asleep. There’s a knock on the door. A lady sleeping on the bed tells to come in. A maid enters the room with a can of hot water and tells the time. The lady tells the maid that her husband is coming back that evening and she has to shift to the double room. The maid replies that she has got the information and she raises the topic of the escaped convict. They talk about his escape and later the lady gets up from the bed to take a bath. The
maid leaves. As soon as the lady goes to take bath Matt emerges out, stretches himself and glances round the room. He steps to the door. Just then the lady opens the door. Matt flattens himself against the wall, so that he will be behind the door if it is opened. The lady tells the maid to keep hot water and she moves towards the dressing table to brush her shingled hair.

Matt moves quickly to the door and has his hands on the handle, when his image passes into the mirror. The lady drops her brush, faces round and sees him in surprise. The lady asks, “Who—how—what d’you mean by coming into my room?” (1000). Matt drops the door handle, turning the key in the lock saying he is sorry. According to Leon Schalit:

There are very few writers, who would have suffered this adventurously-amusing situation to pass without making equivocal allusions and doubtful complications. In his exceedingly delicate reserved, Galsworthy has refrained from allowing one word to be uttered which could be interpreted wrongly. The word ‘sporting’ alone is constantly stressed. Matt Denant is a gentleman, and, after the first fright and doubt have been overcome, pity and admiration move the young lady.67

Suddenly the fact that he is the escaped convict strikes her mind. She tries to go to the window for help but stops by seeing his gesture. The lady asks the reason for his coming and how he reached there. Matt replies that he had been under the bed for hours and could not see
her lying on the bed. The lady asks what he was doing under her bed. He says that he fell asleep. The lady tells him that he appears to be like a gentle man and asks when he is leaving the place. Matt replies that he loves to go but says he cannot go out in those clothes. He asks the lady to give him some food and clothes. The lady is charmed by him, gives him chocolate and lets him drink water at the washstand. He even takes the opportunity of having a shave.

The lady asks him how he had entered her room. Matt says that after his escape from prison he hid up and waited till every light was out. He says that he has chosen her window because it was open and he entered the room and slid straight under the bed. Matt tells her that he wanted to take some clothes and be off before day light. But he was asleep and woke up when the maid came in.

By now the lady is prepared to be a conspirator in Matt’s escape. She will not, cannot, be disloyal to a gentleman, a man of her own class! The lady gives him some of her husband’s old clothes and fishing gear so that he will not look like an escaped convict. She gives him a flask of liquor and little money.

Matt gets behind the door, and she goes. Matt looks around the room to see if he has left any trace. He moves to the door and puts his hand on the handle of the door to open. Just then the maid opens the door. Matt again hides himself behind the door. The maid looks
curiously round the room for someone. A lady’s voice is heard then asking her to bring her clothes. The maid goes out closing the door.

Now the lady enters the room and helps Matt to go out. He thanks her and goes out whistling “Lady, be good” (1004).

Matt comes across a river and catches fish to eat and drinks from the already empty flask to look genuine. An old gentleman passing by approaches Matt and engages his conversation with Matt about the escaped convict. Matt keeps up his pretence speaking of his own experience of a first world war German prison and his escape. The old gentleman offers Matt a cigar and speaks of having been a magistrate, responsible for sending a good many people to prison in his time. They talk about the prisons, about the climate in Dartmoor. The old gentleman admires Matt’s courage and recognizes him as the escaped convict. Matt takes up his basket and lays his fish within it and says bye to the old man. The old man then says, “Good-bye, Captain Denant—I hope you’ll have a pleasant journey, especially as no one seems to have noticed our little chat” (1008). “The subtly carried on dialogue between the two men has a cat and mouse effect, for we sense that the old gentleman is soon aware of Matt’s identity. He is, however, greatly amused at the adventure, and humanity awakening in him, promises that he won’t give Matt away.”

Matt staring at the old man asks how he recognized him. The old man replies the way he looked at the trout wolfishly, his legs, his
obvious sympathy with himself made him to recognize him as an escaped convict.

Matt feels grateful for the old gentleman’s humanity and leaves saying goodbye. An hour later Matt comes upon a group of four persons who are on their picnic. They are a shop-keeper, his wife, his sister, and a ship’s captain. They have come in a car. Matt meets them and asks the way to Bovey. The shop-keeper tells him the way to Bovey. Matt gives them the fish he caught. He asks them if they have heard anything about the escaped convict. The shop-keeper’s sister hates to think of one of those dreadful men at large and cannot sleep in her bed. Hearing this the captain says not to be excited and to think of the choice he has got. The shop-keeper’s wife scanning the paper says, “Why! It’s the man that killed the poor detective in the ‘Yde Park! That villain! It says ‘ere they nearly got him—twice” (1010).

The shop-keeper feels that the escaped convict is a regular desperado and everyone is helping to catch him. According to him it is a bad case and he never believed that girl. Matt defends himself by being quite. But the shop-keeper and his wife are completely against Matt. They are unforgiving. Matt in a defensive manner says that the jury found it as a quarrel and not a murder. Besides in falling the detective hit his head on the iron rail. Hearing about the case from Matt, the shop-keeper does not accept it and says if the escaped convict had not hit him, the detective would not have fallen on the rail. Hearing
this Matt wants to clear the confusion. He talks in support of the escaped convict. He explains in a clear manner that it is the detective who had first seized the escaped convict. If he had not seized him, the escaped convict would not have hit him. Though Matt tries to defend, the shop-keeper does not accept his statements but instead he starts arguing against the escaped convict. “The trippers wax indignant, declared that the fellow ought to have been hanged, and the girl put in prison.” Later Matt talks about shop-keeper’s ford car and asks if it could go up the hills. The shop-keeper says that he would engage his car to catch the escaped convict.

The shop-keeper’s wife tells all of them to make a move. They sort out all the things and make a move. She tells them to leave the remaining of bread and bits of cake there itself. Matt with a secret movement pockets some scraps. Matt takes their leave and vanishes. The noise of the retreating car alerts the picnickers to the alarming fact that they have been conversing with a murderer and a thief. The captain is amazed. He sits down with his hands on his knees and goes off into wheezy laughter. They become helpless. They blame Matt and also themselves for being so foolish. At last they decide themselves to have a long walk home. As Hermon Ould remarks:

Galsworthy’s most popular plays are, strangely enough, those which are most serious in purpose and least lightened by humour—*Strife*, *Justice*, *The Skin Game*, *Loyalties*, *Escape* and *The Silver Box*—an answer, by the way, to the
managerial dogma that the public does not want serious plays... His is rarely the kind of humor which makes one laugh allowed; aching ribs are not his goal, but every reader of the novels must be aware of the innumerable instances—not irrelevantly tacked on but integral— which have provoked the inward smile or outward chuckle.70

After half an hour a man named Philip and his wife are seen walking on the road. His wife suddenly stops and says that she has got something in her shoe. She takes off the shoe and finds nothing. She says that it is not the shoe but it is inside the stocking. The wife standing on one leg, holding her husband removes the stocking. Just then they see a car coming towards them. The wife bends and slips the shoe on hurriedly, but her dress is short. She holds the stocking. Matt appearing asks them the way to Bovey. The man says that they are strangers and he tells the way to Heytor Rock. Matt asks, “Oh! Can you see the promised land from there?” (1014). The man’s wife replies yes, he can go up the hill and turn to the right then to the left to the gate. Matt tells them that he is going there to meet his aunts. He thanks them and makes his way. Matt has impressed the couple and particularly the man’s wife. The man’s wife remarks that Matt was gentleman as he kept his eyes off her legs. Just then a constable appears and asks them if they had seen the escaped convict. They reply that they have not seen any escaped convict but saw a gentleman moving in a car to Bovey. A diverting examination of the couple now follows; they have not only
allowed the convict to escape, but have even shown him the way! Then the constable replies that he is no other than the escaped convict himself who has stolen a car. The man’s wife could not believe it.

The constable goes on his bicycle to make a call. The man and his wife talk about the escaped convict and wife puts on her stocking. They see Matt coming back. Matt tells them that his car could not go through the hills. The man says Matt to see the police at the back. Matt replies that he has seen him. The man tells Matt that it was not his car and he was the escaped convict and asks him to surrender himself and also the car. Matt does not listen their words but instead asks them to get into the car so that he can drop them far aside. But the man does not accept it. The man’s wife is willing to get into the car saying, “I’ll come in the car. If you’re with a lady, you’ll get through without being spotted” (1017). The men argue about who is to drive the car and on what purpose. The man does not listen to Matt. So at last Matt has to threaten him with violence in order to safe-guard his freedom. Seeing this the man’s wife says Matt to leave. Hearing her, Matt feels sorry for his behaviour and leaves the place. The man tries to stop Matt but Matt moves on.

After an hour later Matt is seen lying in a gravel pit. A farm labourer sees Matt lying. He stands still gazing at him and he moves back and brings another farm labourer. Both have heard the description of the escaped convict and recognize Matt instantly. Matt asks the
labourers whom they work for. They reply that they work for the farmer Browning. The first labourer asks the second labourer to bring Browning along with him. The second labourer goes to bring Browning. The first labourer tells Matt that they had heard the news about the escaped convict who stole a car. The same old car is found just back along the ditch. Matt tries to escape by saying that he would meet their master. But the first labourer asks Matt to sit there till his master comes. Matt questions him and asks whether his talk is like a convict. He speaks lies saying that he is a fisher-man staying at Lustleigh. Matt tries to convince him but the first labourer does not believe. Matt stands suddenly. The labourer steps back and lifts his shovel. But at that moment the second labourer and the farmer with his little daughter arrive. The farmer asks Matt to tell his name, his address etc. Matt replies that he is Captain Mathew. He stays at the inn at Lustleigh. He says that they have mistaken him as an escaped convict.

The farmer tells Matt that the constable had given them the news about the escaped convict, about his appearance, and about the stolen car. Matt asks them to take him to the constable if he is there. The farmer does not allow Matt to go but instead he sends the second labourer George to bring the constable. Matt tries to persuade him that he is an innocent visitor but Browning does not accept it. Matt, at last has to admit to his true identity. Matt sits on a wheel-barrow and the little girl Elizabeth comes and asks him for an autograph. Matt writes
his name in the book and he hands over it to Elizabeth. She shakes her hand and thanks Matt. Talking with Browning Matt slowly leaps from the barrow and with a twist like a footballer escapes and runs from that place. The farmer and the labourer run after him. Little girl sees them running after him. Just then the other labourer and constable arrive and ask the girl in which way they have gone. Little girl says that she does not know. All the persons go in search of Matt and the girl is left alone. Matt Denant in *Escape*, does not take his punishment lying down and gives his pursuers a run for their money. “By an unexpected movement Matt once more eludes his pursuers and makes off. Intensely infuriated, they and the constable, in hue and cry, rush after the convict. These rustics are, as a fact, the only ones who find real pleasure in this hunt, for the sake of the hunt itself.”

Matt enters into a cottage and hides behind the curtain. It is a cottage living room of two unmarried sisters Miss. Grace and Miss. Dora. Miss. Grace is old and conservative type. She is very religious. Miss. Dora is younger, and is of thought. Miss. Dora talks about the escaped convict and Grace asks her sister if she had seen him. She replies no and says the escaped convict as a poor hunted wretch.

Miss. Grace asks, “If you think hunted things are poor, why do you go hunting?” (1022). In reply Dora says, “Foxes hunt and expect to be hunted” (1022). Both of them talk about the hunting of foxes. They think that shooting of foxes is much better than hunting. Dora comes to
a decision that she would not hunt foxes anymore. Grace asks her sister if she is attending the service with her that evening. Dora replies that she will not go to church anymore.

Grace wishes God that Dora should give up her free thought. Dora wishes God that Grace should give up religion. As they are sitting at the table drinking tea, they see a figure coming and rushing through the French window. They stare at him. Matt panting and distressed makes a sudden revealing gesture of appeal, and bolts himself out behind a window curtain. The two ladies are still in surprise, when the farmer appears at the French window. He asks the ladies in which way did the escaped convict go. Miss. Dora says that she had seen him across the lawn and over the wall at the far end. Farmer, two labourers, constable, two tourist youths pass the window in search of Matt. As they go away, Matt emerges out breathless with his hat in his hand. He thanks Miss. Dora for helping him. Miss. Grace with serious sharp looks points out her sister that she has spoken a lie for a convict.

Matt, recovering his self possession, says, “If you’ll forgive my saying so, that makes it greater. To tell a lie for an archbishop wouldn’t strain one a bit” (1023). Miss. Grace tells him not to blaspheme. Dora pouring out tea offers Matt a cup of tea. Matt dropping his hat takes the cup. He says sorry for all that he had done.

Dora asks him where he was going. He says he did not know the plan. He thanks them and makes a move. But Dora stops him and goes
out to see if they are anybody. Meanwhile Grace with her serious looks asks if he calls himself as a gentleman, why he wants her sister to involve in her matters. Just then Dora reappears and tells Matt to hide in their house. But Grace does not accept this. She does not want to take the risk of hiding Matt in their house. She tries to convince Dora. Dora does not listen to her sister’s words. She says she cannot see a soldier and a gentleman chased by the police. Grace says that it is wrong and it’s a mistake to give shelter to the escaped convict.

Both the sisters begin to argue in this matter. Seeing these sisters discussing, Matt feels that he should not give them trouble: “He does not want to sow dissension between the two, who, after all, love each other, or to bring trouble on Dora who has helped him, or drag her sister to lie against her conscience.” So he slips out of the window. These two ladies suddenly turning to Matt, does not find him. Dora looks behind the window curtain and finds the constable, farmer and labourers coming again. Constable says that they have lost the convict and want to make a search in their house. Dora says that he is not in their house. But the constable does not accept it and makes a search with the help of the labourers and farmer. When he asks whether they have seen Matt, Dora has no difficulty in saying no. Grace does have difficulty but she says no all the same. Farmer picking up Matt’s hat in their house asks what it was. Dora says that it was her brother’s old hat which she uses sometimes. But the farmer replies that it is similar to
Matt’s hat. Dora gives a covering saying that fishing hats are all the same and she takes the hat. All of them leave the room. Two sisters are left silent. Grace sits at the table covering her face with her hand. She feels sorry and guilty for telling a lie. Dora thanks Grace for telling a lie. R.H. Coats remarks:

It is not without significance that Miss Dora, who promptly and spontaneously succours Matt Denant in Escape, is no believer in organized religion; while her sister, Miss Grace, who instinctively spurns him, is a scrupulous observer of all traditional pieties. Says the parson afterwards, with a smile, ‘Yes, Miss Dora wanted to keep you and Miss Grace to throw you out. H’m! And yet Miss Dora doesn’t come to church, and Miss Grace does. Something wrong there; or is it something right?’

Within seconds, Matt enters into the vestry of the nearby church and hides behind the cassock hanging upon the peg. V. Dupont observes:

An interesting variation occurs in the last scene of Escape: we know the Parson is reluctant to lie but determined to conceal the truth; Matt Denant’s heroism alone preserves his honour.

Parson returns to the room, taking off his coat, he prepares to hang it on a peg and take a cassock, and as he reaches the highest note, he lifts the cassock from in front, Matt appears. Matt requests the parson to help him, to give him shelter or asylum as it is a tradition that when a convict escapes from justice, he takes refuge at the altar and the clergy man has to afford him protection against the severity of law.
The parson puts on the cassock as if to strengthen the priest within him. He recognizes Matt as Captain Denant. The parson says that there is no possibility for him to give sanctuary as the church was still an organization with its own revenue and constitution. He tells Matt to sit down and he locks the door. The parson says, “As man to man—who am I to give you up? One poor fellow to another! I can’t help you to escape, but if you want rest, take it” (1028).

The parson is uncertain, though whether he can help him. At the same time, he is too human to be able to give him up. Suddenly Matt says, “Wonder what Christ would have done!” (1028). The parson says, “That, Captain Denant, is the hardest question in the world. Nobody ever knows. You may answer this or that, but nobody ever knows. The more you read those writings, the more you realise that He was incalculable. You see—He was a genius! It makes it hard for us who try to follow Him” (1028). Christ’s example seems to offer no lessons in the case.

The parson offers Matt an opportunity to rest and a little brandy to revive him. They discuss Matt’s crime and trial. Parson does not judge him but he wrestles within himself as to whether he should protect him against the law. The Parson in *Escape*, who gives sanctuary to the escaped convict—also a sympathetic figure. The bell ringer knocks the door. Parson moves to the door and says that he is busy and cannot let anyone into the church as it is the service time. Matt tells
parson that he would leave. But parson stops him and says that he has service at half past six and there will be one or two gathered. So he asks him to rest.

Again there is a loud knock at the door. The constable asks the parson to open the door. Matt springs towards the cassocks and hides. Parson with a gesture of distress opens the door. The constable along with villagers including the bell ringer enter the room.

The Parson tells the bell ringer that he would not meet anyone until the service is finished. The bell ringer swears that he saw the convict enter the church. The parson tells no lies, but nor does he betray Matt. All of them search in the church. The parson remains standing at the church door. As they are about to leave after their search, farmer asks what’s behind the cassocks.

The parson with a forced smile goes towards the cassocks to see. Just then the constable calls the farmer and they return. They are all just about to leave from the church when the farmer asks the parson whether he had seen the convict. As the parson is about to give reply, Matt steps forward and says he did not see him. Matt could not allow the parson to tell a lie as he is a clergy man. As R. H. Coats observes:

The most striking instance of self-identification with another is that given, curiously enough, by Denant himself. By taking sanctuary in a church he puts the parson of it in a dilemma. Either he must deliver the convict up to the law, and be false to his own conscience and his instinct of humanity; or else he must screen the convict and be false
to the truth and his honour as a clergyman. Denant solves the difficulty by offering himself up to justice. He so puts himself in the parson’s place, that is to say, that he will not leave him in the false position of having to tell a lie to set him free. Surely imaginative sympathy can no further go.  

So Matt surrenders himself taking the blessing of parson. Thus the play ends in a tragedy. In this play Matt tries to escape but at last again he is caught in the hands of the law. As Leon Schalit remarks:

Matt Denant, who immediately espouses the ‘lost cause’ of the girl, makes us think of Courtier in *The Patrician*, and Jimmy Fort in *Saints Progress*. Attention has already been drawn to the ‘sporting’ instinct, which he has in common with Dancy in *Loyalties* and it is this which gives such an adventures spirit to the whole drama. In all other respects, he stands alone. We find figures in the novels distinctly resembling the two sisters. Admirable, the prison warders, admirable, the ‘old gentleman’ and the group of philistines very successful, too, they infuriated farmer! Finally a word as to the parson. He is in some way akin to Edward Pierson in *Saint’s Progress* and though stronger, more active, more positive and humanely Christian than that reactionary dreamer, in the stirrings of his conscience, strongly suggest him. He and Michael Strangway are fine figures in the large gallery of Galsworthian men.  

In this play the playwright shows the injustice done to Matt. Matt is considered as a murderer by the law and is punished. He has become a convict in the eyes of the law. Though he is innocent, he gets five years of imprisonment. Galsworthy here throws light on the
contemporary workers of the law. Matt knows that he is innocent of the murder or crime. So he escapes from the prison after one year. He has become an escaped convict and is noted as an escaped convict in the society. On his way to Bovey, he comes across number of people like the lady in the inn, the old gentleman, the picnickers, a man and his wife, two sisters, parson etc. In spite of Matt being an escaped convict, people at every stage of his encounter help him from being caught by the police. At last even the parson, despite his conviction to bind to his duties he tries to save Matt on the grounds of his innocence. According to R. H. Coats:

It must be noted, nevertheless, that we are dramatically predisposed to like Denant by three carefully prepared devices. In the first place, he is a lovable and gallant fellow, engaging and attractive in himself, a very hero of romance. Secondly, he is represented as at the end of his tether, a gasping fugitive, making a bid for dear life; and who would not sympathize with a man in that position? Thirdly, we know all the time that he has been most wrongfully imprisoned to begin with. These three things, on the stage at any rate, win the acclamation of all hearts.77

Galsworthy has publicly disavowed any intention of pointing a moral in Escape. Coats personally feels, “I set out to prove nothing, and I have certainly succeeded. There is a platitude at the end, of course. Out of one’s decent self one cannot escape—but, Lord bless me, if platitudes are considered to be morals, let us all lay up our pens.”78
In the story *Escape* Galsworthy gives out the biblical theme. In this story the dramatist makes use of some words like priest, promised land, Christ’s teachings, parson which are related to Bible. He takes the story in biblical direction. In *Escape* Matt is a sinner who commits sin i.e. kills the policeman knowingly or unknowingly. This sinner escapes from sin, escapes from the law. He comes across many people in his journey (escape). All the people who come across help Matt, knowing that he is an escaped convict. Matt struggles hard to go to the “promised land” (1014). Here we can say that the “promised land” (1014) is the chapel, where he meets the parson. The parson represents the priest (stands for Christ) who preaches the teachings of Christ. He is a religious, holy person who has Christ in him. Matt, the sinner who escapes from the law, at last cannot escape from the God’s law. He feels guilty for what he has done. Leon Schalit rightly says:

*Escape* therefore, despite its bitter irony, is one of the most—perhaps the most—positive Galsworthy’s plays, and opens up their by new perspectives. 79

Matt repents, confesses his sin before God i.e. in the church and he asks for His forgiveness. He cannot imagine the parson telling a lie for his sake. He feels that telling a lie by a parson is against his profession i.e. Christianity. His inner conscious does not accept it because he is a Christian, Christianity still survives in him and in future he too wants to become a priest. He does not want the priest to tell a
lie. So he obeys the God’s law and surrenders himself. According to
Leon Schalit:

Matt Denant may try to escape, and perhaps, had he been
electronically fortunate, might have succeeded; but his own
self, his conscience, he can never escape! He acts
consistently throughout. Just as in Hyde Park, in his
chivalry and love of justice, he could not do otherwise than
take the part of the poor harried girl, so he cannot tolerate
two sisters quarreling on his behalf, or a true priest of God
lying for his sake. He is a soldier and a gentleman, a
warrior in the best sense of the word. We may hope that
the return to prison and the long confinement will not break
his spirit. On his return to prison he takes with him one
positive piece of knowledge; he has personally experienced
how kind and ‘decent’ quite a number of people can be.80

Denant’s contact with each of them in the play is very brief, but
sufficient to show us their respective reactions to his presence; all either
know or guess who and what he is. In the end it is Denant that gives
himself up, in a gallant gesture by which he preserves the honour of the
Parson. According to V. Dupont:

… in *Escape*, the whole plot is in the shape of a mere
sequence of episodes, a story of adventure that shows us an
escaped convict meeting with succession of embarrassing
and dangerous situations until, the time for the final curtain
arriving, he at last falls back into the hands of his
pursuers.81
References


34. John Galsworthy, *Ten Famous Plays*, Introduction by Eric Gillett IX.


42. H.V. Marrot, *The Life and Letters of John Galsworthy*  266.


74. V. Dupont, *John Galsworthy: The Dramatic Artist* 142.


