The chapter on social plays is divided into five sections for convenience of examination. The plays covered in the sections are about fortytwo in number. The survey will include social comedy, domestic scene, social scene, social satire and lighter comedy or farce. What emerges as criticism from the plays under review does not range over a wide field but seems within its limits to be interesting. One view, commonplace enough, is that the motive of religion and of profit-making cannot co-exist in the same way as the worship of God and of mammon cannot (Joe Corrie's "Tell it not in Gath"). The disapproval of the mechanized world of to-day is presented in a fable in which the quest for a non-mechanized society is frustrated by a backward country's decision to introduce mechanization (Neil Grant's "The Age of Leisure"). An ex-soldier suffering from amnesia, instinctively returns home but is driven away by his father and brother who do not recognize him (Eric Bradwell's "There is No Return"). Here the indifference to the soldiers' lot seems to be the theme, - the hero is lost in the tramp or the beggar. Leonid Andreyev's "The Dear Departing" is an excursion into sadistic psychology.
John Galsworthy's "The Little Man" suggests the difference between love of humanity as theory and practice. A. A. Milne's "Wurzel-Plummery" is a satire on love of money which does not stop at the sacrifice of personal name and history. Gertrude Jennings's "Five Birds in a Cage" is concerned with the facade of equality, maintained by the upper class; the mask, however, being blown off whenever a situation arises calling for a convincing gesture. These satires are light-hearted and without bitterness. The criticism of human folly is hardly meant with a view to correction, the purpose being to provide entertainment.

Among the "Social Plays" the mildew of Victorian sentimentality greatly damages Alfred Sutro's "A Marriage Has Been Arranged." The plea of having never been loved is sentimentally exploited to arouse the emotion of love. Charles Lee's "Mr. Sampson" is about a case of triangular love. The problem will recur from time to time but is without solution in a monogamous society. St. John Hankin's "The Constant Lover" insists upon constancy in love but not to its object. The idea is actually a means of covering up an attitude of irresponsibility. Olive Conway's "Mimi" is a picture of Bohemian life in Paris. Other details will lengthen the account without throwing much light on the dramatic art which the plays are supposed to illustrate. Another play is concerned
with the search of a father. It ends unhappily but represents a theme exploited by Joyce in "Ulysses" and by other writers. Among lighter comedies Clifford Bax's "Silly Willy" has a good deal of dance and mirth and also reversals of the expected.

In all these plays the technical problem is not treated with any imaginative sense. The conventions are not always rigidly followed but neither are they courageously broken. Here we have a reasonably good entertainment but no concern with the question of drama's future development.

(1)

Stanley Houghton's "The Dear Departed"¹ written in prose contains six characters of whom one is a little girl. The grandfather of the girl is supposed to have died because he lay inert in bed in an upstairs room. The daughter and her husband inspect the old man and are both convinced that he is dead. News is sent to the other sister and her husband but before their arrival the old man's furniture and other belongings are moved downstairs so that the daughter living with her father may claim them as her property and thus deprive the other sister of her due share. But the old

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man revives from the drunken stupor into which he had fallen. Instead of being angry or indignant at the removal of his furniture, he approves of it because it will help him to cart it to his new home as he explains, where he will stay with his wife, his idea being to get married in a day or two. The guilty are exposed and feel bitterly their frustration at this unexpected turn of the situation and the shame to which it gives rise.

The construction of the play reveals three definite stages, each leading on to the next and is thus in accord with orthodox principle and practice. The first step in the course of the drama is the discovery of the supposed death, the second is the robbery of the dead man, the climax and denouement represent in close sequence the old man's revival and what followed. The comic element is seen in the design to defraud a co-sharer and its frustration by the supposed dead man's return to life. The changes are swift and involve a reversal of expectation on the part of those who had cunningly tried to enjoy more than their due. As criticism of human behaviour this play does not give us any situation or character peculiar to a particular society. The dialogue, however, has moments of suspense and drama.
which carry us from one unexpected point to another till the old man's surprising announcement that he is going to marry again makes us feel that the crafty daughter has been hoisted with her own petard. The social criticism is conventional but not unamusing.

2. We will take another play with a conventional theme— a case of triangular love, enlivened by local colour and cockney speech. The liveliness arises also from the intrusion of gossip and scandal which precipitate action. "Mr. Sampson" by Charles Lee contains only three characters, two of them sisters and unmarried and the third, the hero of the title. The elder of the two sisters, Catherine, return after considerable delay from her shopping and tells Caroline that people are making scandalous insinuations about their relations with their tenant Mr. Sampson. They feel too upset to understand what they should do to clear themselves in the eyes of their neighbours. Mr. Sampson proposes marriage which seems a good remedy but complicates the situation by his inability to choose one of the two sisters, liking them both equally well. He hesitates in making up his mind, and to the scandal of the sisters proposes to toss up and determine whom he should

marry. The sisters find that they are being estranged from each other and their friendship broken by the stranger. Mr. Sampson is only a boarder whom they had put up on a weekly basis. They now ask him to quit and leave them in peace, which he does without making any show of emotion and paying a week's rent in lieu of notice, he walks off.

The case of triangular love is familiar enough as a theme but it is given a humorous flavour by the way the problem is presented. The tension mounts when we see Mr. Sampson's inability to decide and his desire to marry both women. For this purpose he wished that he were a Turk.

The structural question is quite simple and we can notice here a natural movement from the scandal to the proposal of marriage and its rejection. As social criticism we find nothing but an exceptional situation, causing perplexity to a man who wants the liberty for an act of bigamy. The author has obviously no desire to suggest this as a remedy for incorporation in law. The same situation could have led to a tragic development but Mr. Sampson's words that he should have been a Turk and his resort to tossing up and lottery on biblical analogy clearly indicate that the entire business of the play is to make people laugh.
The perplexity of Mr. Sampson makes him the object of our laughter, not so much because of the predicament in which he is placed as because of the startling remedy by which he seeks deliverance from it.

Among the social comedies what strikes us most is the absence of any relevant criticism of contemporary life and behaviour. The situations are often too generic to reflect actual conditions with any accuracy and what is said is often more a picture of life in general than life in a given society. This absence of the specific, the particular in social criticism may be the outcome of the rapid assimilation of men and women to a standard which we may describe as international.

3. "A Marriage Has Been Arranged" by Alfred Sutro is a social drama, representing West - End manners. It served the purpose of a curtain-raiser. There are only two characters in the play, Crockstead and Lady Aline. The latter has aristocratic parents and a Duchess who is her aunt, but being one of several daughters she is portionless. Crockstead has been chosen by her relations as a suitable match. The two meet in a conservatory, close on midnight.

while a ball is in progress to the accompaniment of a dreamy waltz music. Crockstead assumes that the marriage has been arranged and that his three millions have already made it unnecessary for the formality of a proposal. He told her that this was her ninth season, a damaging piece of information which he had obtained from her "friends". As for himself he explained that for thirty-two years he was poor and lonely and for ten years rich and lonely. He had loved a woman who ran away with another man. Tracking him down to Texas he shot the man dead but she refused to accept him. This was his only love affair and he was not likely to love again. Aline reciprocated with a secret in her own life. For it seemed to her that the room where they were was "the Palace of Truth". She said, she was twenty-eight and was always poor. She cared for dress more than for anything else and thought Crockstead was the most vulgar man she had ever met with. There are other examples of sarcastic wit. His Christian name was "Harrison" and he said no one had ever shortened it out of familiarity or friendship upon which Aline sharply replied: "That does not surprise me: we have no pet name for the east wind" 4 Aline confided that she had loved a cousin but could not marry him because of poverty. Crockstead said that he would play "Haroun-al-Rashid" and make her beloved rich enough to marry her and

4. Ibid., p. 59.
this he would do, he explained, from "a mere vulgar desire
to make my magnificence dazzle you ....". He quoted a
French poem and said "It is the true and native language
of insincerity". He besought her help to find a suitable
bride for himself and wanted some one quite plain and
ordinary for the purpose, her only desirable quality from
his point of view being mercifulness and pity. This
rather lachrymose sentimentality served its purpose well
in winning Aline's heart and she proceeded to describe
her life more fully in the guise of that of a friend,
dear to her. The young man she had loved went to India;
in six months' time he married a rich widow. This made it
plain that she was open to his proposal, Crockstead asked
her to be his wife. She consented with the words "Yes-Harry"
By this abbreviation of the name she withdrew her former
witty attack and assented to the proposal to give him her
hand. This short-play gives a characteristic picture of an
upper-class world with the leisure and the witty conversation
belonging to it. It is a little ninetyish in the humour
to which Aline refers as "the New Humour". The theme seems
to be "love is best" and it certainly represents the aftermath

5. Ibid., p. 61.
6. Ibid., p. 62.
7. Ibid., p. 65.
8. Ibid., p. 56.
of a late Victorianism adequately. What the play shows is an
ambivalence between a desire to surrender to the power of
money, and a reluctance to do so because it seems wrong to
worship Mammon. The element of pity is introduced as a check
on the corruptibility of money and also as a mode of idealising
the relationship by marriage.

There are very clever comments in the course of the
conversation. Crockstead recites French verses, — Aline
impressed asks if he knew French. His answer is, "I am fond
of it. It is the true and native language of insincerity." 9

As a comedy it does not represent anything more than
a magnified jest; that the art lies in giving the jest a
humorous extension without being unconvincing. Sparks of
wit have been thrown about and there are clear signs showing
that there is an element of pastiche in the play's language
and construction.

4. "The Village Wooing" 10 by George Bernard Shaw has
only two characters, a man and a woman. The former is
educated and belongs to the upper-class, the latter is
merely a shop assistant. They meet on board a ship and
later on land. Shaw's favourite theme, pursuit of a man
by a woman ends as it usually does with the man's defeat

9. Ibid., p.62
10. George Bernard Shaw's "The Village Wooing", Three Modern
Plays introduced by J. Byrne and G. Johnson (Methuen's
Modern Classics, 1958).
and surrender as a result of the chase. The man has the same habits as Shaw attributes to Shakespeare in "The Dark Lady of the Sonnets". He copies scraps of conversation which he overhears. This is how one becomes a prime minister or a Shakespeare, the man explains. The essential element is the love-chase and this is seen in three conversations. They may stand for three acts and the play's inclusion, therefore, is not legitimate to our undertaking. We notice it, nevertheless, as the technical evasiveness of Shaw makes its category uncertain. In the give-and-take of conversation Shaw's brilliance does not flag and the entertainment is thus an intellectual feat enlivened by the author's unfailing comic sense.

5. "The Constant Lover" is an example of social comedy. There are two characters - Evelyn and Cecil. Cecil is found in a glade in a wood, listening to a cuckoo and obviously waiting for Evelyn, whose arrival he greets with the remark "You're awfully late!". What kept her away was the demand of her mother Mrs. Rivers, that the roses in the drawing room should be given some attention. Cecil is annoyed not against her merely but against the stupidity


of mothers in general. They sit down after a little hitch and exchange caresses, the bright landscape and the view of song birds on wing seem to heighten the romantic element in their meeting. Cecil and Evelyn represent two different attitudes. To the girl, love is preliminary to marriage with the consent of parents, and a settled life. The young man, on the other hand, thinks that life and love are the same, that love flourishes best in an unfettered condition and in the freedom of an open-air life. The girl thinks that he owes it to himself to go and tell her mother that they are engaged. The young man has no such intention, he will not submit to enquiries about his income and social position. He is, in fact, a barrister but is little inclined to accept briefs. What he desires is to meet girls when nature has an inviting look, as on the present occasion, and to make love to them. His constancy is to love and not to a beloved. The girl is a little confused by the modernity of his attitude, by his unwillingness to be responsible. She has a story to tell which reveals that there is a certain Reggie in the background paying her intermittent attention. Like the coy girl she is, she will not admit that she has any special feeling for him. But a little later, she insists upon leaving the young man. She is, in fact, going to meet Reggie at the

13. Ibid., p.258.
station at 5 P.M. To his question if she is going to accept Reggie her answer is evasive, "I wonder". Cecil prefers romance to happiness and is, therefore, little disposed to marry. Evelyn is perhaps not very modern in this claim for the freedom of romance. She may be a little too domestic. One would imagine that a certain measure of the conventional attitude still persisted in her. She is too much her "Mummy's daughter" and thus a little remote from the twentieth century young lady who often prizes above everything her freedom and individuality. Cecil is a dandy and his real period in history is the ninety's. What he says about constancy to love, about the value of some intense moments in life, represents the attitude of decadence belonging to this period. The play has some passages of marked wit and cleverness and the dialogue maintains a uniform level of cleverness interspersed with comments, and an expression of love which has considerable artistic power. An example will illustrate this: "Cecil - Let's be in love while we can. Youth is the time to be in love, isn't it? Soon you and I will be dull and stupid and middle-aged like all the other tedious people. And then it will be too late. Youth passes so quickly. Don't let's waste a second of it. They say the May-fly only lives for one day .... Think of the poor May-fly who happens to be born on a wet day! The tragedy of it!"
The philosophy is familiar; it is that of the 17th century poet (Herrick): "Gather ye rose buds while ye may". There is a sense of life's brevity, which extends much further back and was particularly felt in the mediaeval times. It then led to a religious emotion instead of goading men on to a quest for sensual gratification.

6. "Mimi" by Olive Conway. The scene is laid in a working girl's room in the Latin Quarter, Paris 1845. Mimi is a working girl and after an interval of time receives a visit from her lover Rudolph, a poet. For enjoying their society exclusively they plan to dine outside. Mimi capriciously insisted that he must have a black coat to go out, to satisfy the conventional mode. At this point somebody wants to have a painting made of himself. He had a black-coat on, which they obtained with some ingenuity for the dinner. But soon another accident made it possible for them to be alone together dining in the room, thanks, to the generosity of a friend. The picture is that of a life in which poverty seems chronic and yet little gifts from various sources make the situation tolerable for the Bohemians. What we see is a cheerful attitude facing up to every situation with courage and resourcefulness. The shiftless existence troubles no one.

and seems, on the other hand, to contribute to a gaiety of life but no serious crimes are committed. Common life and the poetry of unconventional men make contacts which in another sphere would not be possible. From this emerges the Bohemian philosophy of life which is nowhere stated in so many words and which seems, nevertheless, to be implicit in all that is said and done.

7. "And The Little Dog Laughed" by Eric Bradwell. This play accepts a companionate marriage as possible under certain circumstances. There are four characters, - Grant Walden, the novelist, Janet his wife, Fabian an artist, and a Secretary. Walden is on his own view unconventional. His favourites are advanced thinkers and novelists. In reality, however, he is shallow, self-complacent and a prig. He does not appreciate his wife's gifts as an artist and expects habitual submission from her to his comfort and convenience. Fabian who was on a visit likes Janet's paintings, his preference being accounted for by a background they had shared as fellow-artists in Paris. He spoke to her about those days when she was living as a red-haired girl in an attic in Paris. She was then his great friend and they were in love. Memories came rushing back and Janet started crying. Her marriage was a failure. She had given

it twelve years, and was now tired and dissatisfied. She clung to his neck and kissed him. The husband who had gone out re-entered the room and saw the pair of lovers exchanging caress. Although a champion of the unconventional in his novels, he did not approve of this laxity on his wife's part. There followed explanations; Janet taking the blame upon herself while Fabian insisted that he was himself responsible. Walden taking a more liberal view asked his wife to sleep off the aberration, and rise to her duties as wife the next day. She retired into her room and a few minutes later came back fully dressed. Meanwhile, Fabian was waiting outside, ready to leave for Venice immediately with Janet. The husband opposed and threatened. Janet claimed that she knew all the consequences and was prepared to face them. They went away and the play ended there. A note added to the play says that they both lived happily; the divorce was delayed but when the novelist's latest story "The Escape" proved a best-seller he grew generous and helped the lovers to obtain the divorce: Eric Bradwell thus seems to approve of a kind of loose union having the prospect to a subsequent legal sanction.

The title of the play refers to a dog painted by Janet. Her husband had dogmatic view on all subjects. His criticism of the picture was intended to show his progressive
and broad-minded ideas. He thought the dog too grave and the painting, therefore, defective. After the wife had left "the little dog laughed." Either the husband had not looked at the painting before closely enough to see what he now saw or being thoroughly imperceptive saw what was not there. The truth is that he lacked eyes and was unable to view a picture correctly.

8. "Lunch Hour" by John Mortimer is a one-act play in prose with only three characters, a girl, a man and a manageress. They meet at lunch hour. The man describes the girl as "the one oasis in the desert of my days and nights." He is apparently tired of a dull and monotonous social life, "among the bright red hang-it-yourself wall paper and the Scandinavian lamp-shades." He is forty years old and the girl twenty-two. The man had arranged for a quiet meeting by telling a cock-and-bull story to the manageress for ensuring privacy to enjoy love. The girl herself began to talk as if the invented tale was actually true, asking and answering questions in accordance with it. This went on till lunch hour came to an end. The man observed desolately when they left: "We never took off our overcoats!" The situation which involved many lies to support it, did not, however, lead to the fulfilment of the purpose designed. The-

19. Ibid., p.29
20. Ibid., p.29
21. Ibid., p.32
remark about the bright-red wall paper and the Scandinavian lamp shades is central to the reality as the man experienced it: all glitter outside and hollow within. This would be an apt label to describe life in our time. One might ask, why should the girl take up the thread of an invented tale, was she mesmerized or did she use the story as a device to spend the time? Apparently, she did not want an intrigue. However, carefully planned, the meeting led to nothing but frustration for the man. It might be treated as a fable for life in general; waiting, hoping and telling lies but with no satisfaction at the end. There is pessimism in the attitude. One wonders whether this is a correct interpretation of what happens to most people under rigour of a routine-bound life with very little leisure to relax.

9. "Another Way Out"\textsuperscript{22} by Lawrence Langner. A young man and a young woman live together though not married. People regard them as man and wife, some whisper against them because of the violation of the moral code. The pair are used to each other and need mutual society. Yet they did not think that marriage would be a solution. They were looking for "another way out" but finally social pressure robbed them of choice and they decided to get married. The

\textsuperscript{22} Lawrence Langner's "Another Way Out", Thirty Famous One-Act Plays, (The Modern Library, 1943).
situation is comical because the idealism is unproductive of any kind of form in which it could be re-embodied. The prodigal at last returns home, finding its regulations to be the best after a brief taste of lawless freedom.

10. Eric Bradwell's "Zero Hour"\textsuperscript{23} refers to the experience of an unmarried woman Sorel on her thirtieth birthday. For her it is the zero hour, to seize "the dregs that were offered to me, before it was too late"\textsuperscript{24}. The dregs in the context mean what she calls a companionate marriage, to live with a man without any obligation on either side, so that the one or the other could depart without excuse or explanation. Sorel explains her position to her friend Catherine, a married woman with a family. She is rather Victorian in her attitude and advises her to look before she leaps. Sorel was packing up to go away the same night and was not willing to accept advice or warning. Another friend (Isobel) who came earlier and had left some time before returned to look for a cigarette case. She got it back and heard the story of adventure on which Sorel was about to launch. It happened that Isobel herself was also the same man's mistress, and had wondered what made him plan a hurried journey to Scotland. She now understood the cause but she


\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., p.31.
would not stand in her friend's way. Sorel could go ahead with her blessings, she said. This forgiveness and this indication of the man's grasshopper instinct made her drop him and her great adventure at the same time. After thirty a woman cannot pick and choose in the marriage market. She grows elderly and narrow-minded. Sorel's idea was to retain freedom and enjoy at the same time a fulfilment of her emotional and physical needs. She changed her mind when she had to change her ideas about the worth of the man who was to be her path finder. If the author believed in a companionate marriage as an alternative to the conventional union he would not have placed a hurdle in Sorel's path. But, apparently, he does not think the remedy sufficiently reliable. Good-hearted generous men turn out to be no better than samplers of women with whom no self respecting old maid will agree to form a relationship. The deflation of her adventurous spirit is somewhat comical and the servant maid's offer of a cup of tea as a conclusion to the unconventional life she had planned comes with an effect of relief to her but to the audience this must seem comical.

11. "The Heroic Mould" by W. Templeton Law. This is a simple play about a girl's strategy in winning a husband and making him work in a tobacconist shop, owned by her father.

The girl throws a ball of paper from the man's room into the manager's who is annoyed and dismisses him on the spot as a result. And the two then leave the office to get married and settle down at the shop which was to provide their livelihood. The heroic mould belongs to the reversal of the capitalist society and the supremacy of labour as in Russia. Some of the characters regard such a regime as almost a utopia. But what is apparently an implied criticism is that his utopia seems at the same time to encourage, or at least to forgive indolence and inefficiency. Either the picture painted of Soviet economy is deliberately satirical or the aspiration for such a society is treated ironically in the play. For the play, evidently, is not opposed to capitalism for discovering a cure of poverty and injustice. Whatever is said on this subject reveals a muddle-headed approach and seems on the whole to represent not a world of increasing efficiency and production but of indolent day-dreaming, almost an equivalent of the land of lotus-eaters.

12. "The Silver Key" by Juanita Hayes. The play opens on the eve of a marriage, the mother of the bride Mrs. Clayton is worried about the younger daughter who would have to face loneliness as a result. She is, in fact, in love with her sister.

bridegroom elect. Miss Elliott, a friend of the family, discovers her secret and plays the good angel to her. Felicity rushes out of the house and goes to the sea-shore several miles away intending suicide. Miss Elliott sends after her a young man who was attached to her but was not loved by her. On the sea-shore the girl is surprised to see the young man; the circumstance saved her from the step she had planned. The waves, strangely enough, wash ashore a silver key. The young man gave it to her with the words that she would be able to have him whenever she desired. Coming back home at a late hour at night she meets Miss Elliott who advises her to announce her engagement. The girl does not know what she did to help her. But she came to know some details about Miss Elliott which the latter told her by way of warning. Miss Elliott had loved Felicity's father and throughout her life identified herself with his interests. This was often a painful experience, surrounded as he was by his wife, children and she found her life both barren and futile. She warned Felicity that she could easily be doomed to the same fate unless she took care. Felicity heeded the advice and was no doubt benefited by the wisdom of her senior.

The play is interesting from the point of view of plot construction, and the idea of the silver key presents
a kind of symbol which is both understood and relished. The only trouble about the plot is that it is not given to human beings to assume the role of Providence and play it successfully. Hence, the denouement, however, satisfactory leaves the impression of being artificially contrived.

13. "Master Wayfarer" a happening of long ago by J.E. Harold Terry. This play in prose is interspersed with songs. The scene takes place mainly at a wayside hostelry one hundred and fifty years ago on the road to York. A man has been thrown off by a maid being involved in love with a villain, apparently because he carries a lot of gold about and is smartly dressed. The wayfarer, one of the characters arrives, the disappointed lover confides to him his melancholy tale and is rewarded by an account of the wayfarer's own life which contained tragic passages. The wayfarer seemed to him to be the father of the maid, and the hostelry, he realized, was started with the money his wife stole from him when she eloped some years ago. The wayfarer did not confirm the story but assured the man that he would be able to remove from the girl's life the villain who had outrivalled him in her affection. The wayfarer, who earned his income by punch-and-judy shows, readily consented to give a performance at the girl's

request. He asked the maid to dance along with him but his own steps often went wrong, for he was all the time engaged in watching the maid's face and seeing there the resemblance to his wife's. The villain mocked at him and tossed a golden coin towards him by way of showing off. The wayfarer examined it and said that the coin was not genuine, adding that the police had already information about him and was on his track. The villain was frightened; the maid also saw that the coin was a forged one. There was no trouble in pushing the villain through the window. The wayfarer stealthily left the lovers together, his tune could be heard fading away in the distance while the maid regretted that she had no chance to thank her benefactor. The role the wayfarer played was that of providence itself, and as thanks are not claimed by providence so also he did not ask for them. The cause is known to us but not to the girl. He had done a father's duty in helping his daughter to be happy. This fact suppressed from the girl's knowledge contributes an element of delicacy to the plot, making it as decorous as one of the most decorous of centuries could wish it to be.

28Oliphant Down's "The Maker of Dreams", One-Act Plays of To-day, First Series (George G. Harrap & Co. Ltd., 1961)
14. "Between the Soup and the Savoury" by Gertrude Jennings is a domestic comedy whose action takes place between the first and the last course of a dinner. The dishes are served from the kitchen and the bridegroom-elect is having dinner with the family but his tone is sullen, his behaviour distant. All the food served by Ada, the parlour-maid, was found to have various defects. A story told by Emily, the kitchen-maid, to her fellow servant during the dinner referred to an anagram and a golden locket, the loss of which was the subject of a heated discussion at the dining table upstairs. It came out that Emily had the anagram in her possession which in her words she had "borrowed" to make up a story that one 'Arold a carpenter loved her. This was purely imagination. Maria, the cook, asked her to replace the anagram and promised to take her to her mother next week. Emily said that she had no chance of being loved, even her mother seemed to have no affection for her. She needed, therefore, a secondary life in the realm of fancy for her existence. This is comedy but Emily's case makes it a near tragedy. We can see from this that it is difficult to have a chemically pure comedy without losing touch with reality. The play is written in cockney dialect, evidently because the class seen here cannot be otherwise painted with due realism.

15. "Mother's Day" by J. B. Priestly. The play has a brief stage direction indicating that the time of the action is the present. Perhaps what follows is a recurrent situation and, therefore, time may well be left out of account or described vaguely as "the present". The mother of a family works hard, the children all grown up go out and come in as they please, throwing things about and expecting her to put them in order, to provide them with their meals and to iron their clothes, etc. The situation got on the woman's nerves. A neighbour advised exchange of personality with her. She was assertive and had a commanding disposition. The result was that the mother asked her children to attend to themselves and resorted to smoking, which surprised everyone, and even proposed having meals outside. This change bewildered the children for whom she had drudged all her life, without so much as receiving "a thank you" for all that she did. This policy worked well but she wanted her friend to come often and encourage her to sustain the role. The situation is comical so far as the transformation is concerned, but at the same time it strikes a serious note. Mothers are often treated with scant courtesy and are exploited heartlessly by the children. There should be a way of dispensing justice to a mother and we are led to see that the remedy lies with

the victim herself. She must relax when necessary and let things take their course. From such a new situation, readjustment will follow and what will emerge is a normal life.

16. "The Twelve Pound Look"[^1] by James M. Barrie is a play in prose and the plot is a little out of the common. A man finds that Kate, appointed as his typist, was his ex-wife; the cause of her desertion, surprisingly enough, is explained as his very considerable success in life. He is now "Sir Harry" married to a second wife who seems to be quite happy with him. The aversion to prosperity is an aversion to smugness which Kate refers to in a phrase she uses, – a phrase which provides the play's title. What the play makes us see is, that success produces changes in a man's character, not all of which are a credit to him and that those nearest to him may be repelled by some of its manifestations. It is a wise and sobering thought that behind the glitter of prosperity there may be a kind of decline for which even success itself is no compensation. The reappearance of Kate, the former wife, at the moment Harry is knighted, gives rise to a little self-searching which may serve

effectively to cure the complacency in which he had indulged. For he had supposed that Kate had run away with a man although he saw no one with whom such an adventure could be undertaken. The discovery of the true cause is a blow to his own sense of proud superiority. But he tried to gain more weight in his second wife's estimation by promising her a rope of pearls and declaring at the same time that it was a bagatelle to him, a trifle which made little or no drain on his resources.

17. "Fumed Oak" by Noel Coward is marked by a dialogue of great strength and by an admirable contrast of character and situation, tending to a comical finale. A husband is oppressed for fifteen years of married life and has a daughter under sixteen who also is no comfort.


33. See also J. C. Trewin's comment on the dialogue of Noel Coward: "To many playgoers he must remain always the enfant terrible of the nineteen-twenties, the writer whose clipped dialogue started a fashion, who set the younger generation 'talking like typewriters', as Mrs. Patrick Campbell put it, and whose quick, brittle, tap-tap-tapping wit sounded the note of an uneasy decade." J. C. Trewin's "Tap-Tap", Dramatists of To-day (Staples Press, 1953), p.151.
He is torn in pieces every night for going to the pictures or coming home late for some other reason. Finally, he buys a ticket to go overseas and tells his wife that he will not see her again as long as he lives. "It's a dream come true." The family will not starve, he gives them £50. The mother and the daughter could both work for their future needs. To his daughter his advice is fatherly and perhaps a little ironical. He suggests that she should have her adenoids out spending thus the first money she will earn. Evidently, her snoring added to the other discomforts which made life miserable for him. The title seems to imply a kind of new growth to which the husband could look forward, now that he was leaving home.

18. "The Browning Version" by Terence Rattigan is concerned with a teacher, his wife and his student and a colleague. The teacher has to leave school and a boy gives him on the occasion Browning's Version of Euripides as a token of affection and esteem. That he enjoyed any regard from his students is a fact the wife maliciously denied. The

34. "Fumed Oak", p.514.

colleague sees the injustice of her attitude and tells his friend that between him and his wife there existed an improper relationship. The play has two different strains complicating action, and their presence may be interpreted as that of a sub-plot. As the brevity of the form did not allow due attention to be paid to the two situations, they appear as parts of a disturbing tension which was ultimately resolved. Finally, the teacher, maligned by his wife and treated unkindly by the school authorities, stands before us as an attractive scholarly man with an adequate capacity for human response. The wife sees his strength and realizes that he is not a man to be trifled with.

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19. "Night Watches" by Allan Monkhouse. The plot is about two soldiers who quarrel and are reconciled in the hospital wards. One was said to be deaf and dumb and yet continued making a noise, disturbing the other's rest. The mystery was, that the dumb could speak in sleep. This led to the suspicion that he was shamming or pretending. His critic and fellow soldier, helped him to hear after an experiment made on his ear. The two then danced noisily and showed how

obviously they enjoyed each other's society. The hospital orderly and the nurse thought the situation incapable of a rational explanation. But the nurse had a motherly nature and wanted her boys to be happy. The orderly wanted to be included in the same class with access to her affection but he had never been wounded in war and hence this was out of the question. He had to sip his tea alone while the nurse refused to mother him. The hospital ward for a soldier may be uncomfortable but he bears no ill-will to a fellow soldier in spite of his failings and is ready to forgive him.

This is, therefore, a picture of how friendships spring in the battle field and are sustained by a sense of common suffering. The variety in the hospital ward, however, unpleasant on occasions, manifesting itself, through the crudities of its simple inmates is, nevertheless, entertaining, and the author has brought this out in the quality of the dialogue, changing its tempo, to introduce new elements of feeling and jealousy.

20. "The Three Wayfarers" by Thomas Hardy. The story of Thomas Hardy's "The Three Strangers" is here presented by the author in a dramatic form. The original tale has a

richer humour and greater suspense. An escaped prisoner condemned to be hung for stealing a sheep sits by the side of his appointed executioner under the roof of a shepherd celebrating a child's christening ceremony. Police enquiry is set on foot but the prisoner is never captured. His courage and present wit win him universal admiration and the police gets no help from the people around in rearresting him. In the original story the police are baffled because the neighbours are not willing to co-operate. Here some people openly support the prisoner and prevent recapture. This is hardly an improvement and the tale suffers as a result of its conversion into the dramatic form.

21. "The Old Bull" by Bernard Gilbert. On the death of a farmer, the house-keeper and farm-foreman are worried. They know that the eldest son, who inherits in case of intestacy, is unfair and tyrannical. The bull was the pride of the farm but was at the time very ill. The younger son comes to enquire after it and to suggest what should be done for its welfare. The elder comes immediately after, orders his brother to work for a living, threatens dismissal to the servants and wants the bull to be taken to a fair, though ill.

He made it clear that he was the master of the farm and his father's sole heir. An uncle now arrives and tells him that a will was in his possession, in terms of which the divisions made in favour of the two sons are, that, the smaller of the two farms which belonged to their late father should be combined with the bull while the larger one should stand alone. The elder brother chooses after considerable mental calculation the smaller farm and signs the document. The bull, however, dies and he finds himself, as a result, less well provided for than the younger brother. His disappointment is welcome to the audience. The threatened dismissal cannot take place because the will provides for a compensation of £100 to each of the old farm-hands in case of dismissal. Misfortune then coming out of his own free choice, satisfies the standard of poetic justice. This, however, is not realism. The two farm-hands speak dialect and represent the values the elder son despised, but to these values he has, however, to acknowledge his final defeat.

22. "The Dye-hard"\(^{39}\) by Harold Brighouse chooses a title for the play, involving a deliberate ambiguity; it perhaps implies also the need of a new coinage. Tom is a yarn dyer; hence the first half of the title. But he has fixed ideas about how the job should be done, hence he is a dye-hard, a conservative

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who will not give up his principles at any cost. He has walked out of the firm where he was employed because the proprietor wanted him to introduce machinery to replace the manual process. He was opposed to the idea because he thought that the quality would suffer if modern ideas were introduced. This period of unemployment lasted for several days and he observed austerity in his food habits so that he might live within his means. This he does in spite of the protest of his wife Susan and of the fact that she could easily carry on without any particular hardship, even without her husband's income. A neighbouring dyer Chadwick offers him ten pounds a week as wages and free choice to practise conservative modes of dyeing. In fact, Chadwick has seen from experiment that machinery does not do the work as well as the manual process. He insists that this is private information which Tom cannot pass on to his former employer without betraying him. Tom tells his wife that the increase in wages will mean that he will be able to buy a car and that they will belong to the motoring class. Yet he himself does not accept the offer. He hesitates and, meanwhile, Walter, his former employer, arrives unexpectedly and tells him that the cricket team for which he had played last year would suffer a sure defeat because he would not be
able to play, not being in his employment any longer. This greatly disturbs Tom. He cannot endure the thought that the team will not be able to maintain its standards. Chadwick gives him permission to play on behalf of Walter in spite of his being his employee. Walter now informs him that he has abandoned the idea of a machine. He has seen from experience that the machine does not reach the standard of the manual process and so he has accepted Tom's position as correct. Tom is happy at this and immediately decides to rejoin the old firm, rejecting on the spot the more remunerative offer. His wife must not think of a car, she must iron his trousers adding a special grease so that he may play cricket with obvious smartness and wipe off from memory the interval of disagreement which made him keep away from the dye-works.

The play has attractive dialogue. Its conclusion is pleasant and shows the Englishman's fondness for sports as a ruling consideration in his life. Tom's reconciliation with his employer was made possible in the first instance by his loyalty to the team he had played for. The fact that his opinion about the relative superiority of the manual process was upheld, gave him sufficient grounds for accepting the old firm as the place of his work but this does not fully explain the pleasure with which he dismissed from his mind the prospect of material advancement. What the play seems
somewhat didactively to suggest is, that loyalty and interest in sports are higher values than the idea of merely getting on in life.

23. "The Price of Coal" by Harold Brighouse. The scene is laid in Lanchashire, close to the coal fields and the local dialect is used in the speeches. Mary Bradshaw makes tea for her cousin Jack, a collier and she gets his breakfast packet ready so that he could eat in the mine. Jack thinks that Mary is taking too much trouble. He could have done everything himself or his mother could have helped. Mary pointed out that the latter was ill and should not, therefore, be disturbed. She said she had been doing this job for so long that she scarcely looked upon it as a trouble. Jack had asked her for her hand the previous night and wanted an answer. She had already told him that she would ponder over the matter for a whole day before she could make her mind known. Impatient Jack said: "Yo' couldn't give me so much as an ' int now? Nobbut a lick an ' a promise like?" A miner often dies by accident and should he die the same day he would carry away with him the thought of her consent as his last consolation.

41. Ibid., p. 61.
Mary was adamant and said that he must go, so as to reach the mine punctually and catch the first cage that went down. Soon after he had gone off his mother Ellen came down and said that she had had a very bad dream. She had the same dream many years ago when her husband was killed in a mine accident. Mary was alarmed but was not allowed to go out to make enquiries. The old lady said, what would people say if she went? Was she going to pose for a photographer to show her pretty face? In case of accident in the mines a bell rang to announce this. Now a bell began to ring furiously, and it was clear that a disaster had taken place; Mary was mad with misery; if Jack had delayed as he proposed to do he would have been saved. A neighbour gave the details. Her own son and husband had escaped. They did not go down by the first cage which was smashed. Ellen and Polly (a neighbour) began to talk as if the boy was dead. Their thoughts ran on the preliminaries for the burial. They spoke without emotion, such accidents happened every day. They were not heartless but had become resigned to fate. Mary thought them callous but they were, in fact, kind and thoughtful. They had locked the front door to prevent Mary from going out. The scene in the mine would be too terrible for one so young and inexperienced. Ellen said merely the death of her son would take away from her the
last man who could stand by her. Unsentimental as the statement was, it nevertheless, voiced the tragedy of her heart. Her self-control was not lost even under the greatest stress. Things however, ended in a much better way than they had expected. Jack came in with his arm in a sling and immediately talked about the date of their marriage. Mary did not hesitate to tell him that she loved him.

The dialect is a functional element in the drama. The Lancashire dialect aids in achieving local colour. We learn about the price paid for coal, the price is of course the blood and toil and the sudden death of so many workers. Our industrial civilization exacts a high price for the amenities it supplies. The play until the middle seems to be developing as a tragedy. It is almost near the end that there is a happy reversal of the dreadful expectation. We do not see the working out of the drama. If it is a symbol of death and calamity how could the anticipated danger be averted? Does a dream of this kind ever produce a different result? The primitive feeling about a dream of ill-omen is utilized to create a foreboding of dark happenings. This is a weakness, for an essentially tragic situation and atmosphere cannot be turned into comedy without damage being done to the value of the work as a whole. The introduction of the dream and its later partial fulfilment are not satisfactory elements in the play. For they point in a direction contrary to that
the plot takes. Hence they seem to be a weakness which the
author courted without a clear purpose.

24. "We Got Rhythm" \(^{42}\) by Nora Ratcliff is an extravaganza
in prose. The characters evidently hold rehearsals for the play
with the author supervising. The eve of a general election
causes a stir. In the course of the play-rehearsal members of
four parties are seen all promising an earthly heaven to the
electorate in return for support. They leave after a while
and the author remarks that the scene in which they appear
has his approval. But only politics or the mining world would
not be enough. He wants "the whole screaming farce to the
bitter, peevish end !" \(^{43}\) Thus the rehearsal starts again and
the girls repeat in verse the expectation of a holiday from
"Friday tomorrow" extending to Easter. What happens to working
men is described by the author in words of dark pessimism:
"There are twenty-four hours in a day. You're chained to your
galley benches for eight of them. You're chained to your
bellies for three or four more. You're let out for a run, and
you crawl to a celluloid dramshop and tie yourselves up there,
chained to simpering shadows and canned emotionalism for another
three hours. What there is left - you sleep, and then crawl back
to your benches again !" \(^{44}\) The rhythm to which the play refers

\(^{42}\) Nora Ratcliff's "We Got Rhythm", Twenty-four One-Act Plays
(Everyman's Library, London, J.M.Dent & Sons Ltd.).

\(^{43}\) Ibid., p.331.

\(^{44}\) Ibid., p.330.
is a mode of recreation, and is as much the author's work as of the worker's with some portion of vitality still unspent. The play is an extravaganza and is further qualified in the subtitle as socio-illogical. The idea is, obviously, that when there is no definite pattern, the author's liberty may be called an extravagance, and where life does not follow the cast-iron mould as it never does, it becomes illogical, also under that label, a picture of society. That various contradictions are balanced in life and that delicate poise is sometimes maintained by an author is the fact sought to be rendered.

25. The comedies sometimes have themes which are purely imaginary. The fun and laughter are enjoyed over a situation which perhaps has only a basis in our imagination. To this class will belong Kathleen Davey's "Unnatural Scene" which represents Miss Brown as principal of St. Mary's Secretarial College for gentlewomen. She is an extremely relentless task-mistress, and drives her subordinates to nervous tension by her exacting demands, which leave these unfortunate women often without leisure or the opportunity for relaxation. This play is said to be written in response to a demand for an all-women-cast. It has seven characters and the dialogue captures

with ease the moments of tension and holds the attention of the audience. The title of the play well suggests its content. We are entertained by a view of an organisation which avowedly does not exist, and in this respect affords parallel to Tennyson's "The Princess".

The idea, nevertheless, which we thus form is not that English society has reached a stage of perfection and has become free from faults and blemishes which provide an easy target for criticism. There must be and are many eccentricities, many departures from the norm which are capable of becoming the subject of critical laughter. Yet we do not see such objects being introduced in the longer plays of Shaw and Galsworthy, however, social and other criticism appear as important element. The explanation for the meagre dependence on contemporary material in the one-act plays is that their short compass rules cut much of the complications of social life and what is offered is usually a comparatively abstract picture. To this the group of Irish Plays is an exception.

There may be another reason to which we may refer. Frustrations and sufferings which the world situation has created seem to underlie much of the experience of the common-man and they have been introduced in many avant-garde plays allusively, suggesting psychological disorders
and spiritual affliction. A sense of life's meaninglessness
is ousting the purely comic attitude which does not give
us anything more than a brief entertainment. The examples of
comedy which follow do not seem to be in accord with the
ordinary facts of life. Yet they have their appeal and their
power to entertain, based as they are upon situations and
character which occasionally gain a certain degree of liveliness.

The play has only three characters. A night watchman, Augustus
and a policeman. The night watchman is discovered in his shanty,
smoking a short pipe. The policeman comes in and tries to
crack a few jokes to which he does not respond. He is,
apparently, a little impervious to humour, and somewhat staid
in character with fixed notions. Augustus now comes in shivering
with cold. The watchman makes him sit near the fire, offers
him tea and the young man listens to his views like: "Cigs.
is vice. Pipes isn't." He remarks: "You're as bad as my old
dad was." Augustus has returned from the States and is
interested to hear that the watchman's son is also there. He
went ten years ago and the watchman thinks that he must be
doing well. He wrote only once to the girl he loved, apparently

46. Harold Chapin's "Augustus in Search of A Father", One-Act
Plays of To-day, Sixth Series (George G. Harrap & Co. Ltd.,
1959).
47. Ibid., p. 63.
48. Ibid., p. 62.
she still loves him and is unmarried. Augustus tried to persuade him that there is just a possibility that his son might be a failure in America. The watchman would not accept this view even as a bare possibility. The young man tells him about his American experiences, giving him accounts of the places he had visited and the work he had done. The policeman comes in again and becomes suspicious of the young man and starts a series of questions to which the answers he gives do not tally with the answers he had given to the watchman. The latter points this out and he winks at him to keep quiet. The policeman tells him: "You're rather like a gentleman I'm looking for. Suppose you come along o'me and have a nice warm and a nap at the station."

He attempted to run away. A pursuit follows and he is captured at the end. Augustus wants to tell the watchman about his boy, about himself.

"AUGUSTUS (almost pleadingly). Is ... is you wife as sure he's got on? Wouldn't his mother be pleased --

WATCHMAN. She's dead.

AUGUSTUS. Dead. I thought mothers waited till their boys came back. Oh, well, good night.

WATCHMAN. Good night. Be off! Good luck!

AUGUSTUS (under his voice). Dad."

49. Ibid., p.73.
50. Ibid., p.75.
The search for the father ends tragically. The welcome and the affectionate relationship between the watchman and his prodigal son indicates an awareness which is not conscious, but a case of blood calling to blood. The watchman even tries to give him shelter. But the ideas which he held about his son's successful career in America must have collapsed, when Augustus called him 'dad' – as he was being led away by the policeman. The play is hardly a comedy. It should be better described as tragedy. The young man's failure and the old man's rosy picture of his son's success are both brought face to face, as it were, in the final moment of defeat and despair, as the policeman lays hands on him and prepares to take him away. In this account more is meant than the mere story, more than a failure from which recovery is possible. The idea seems to be to indicate the gap between hope and frustration, which every boy must experience, some more disastrously than others.

27. "The Master of the House"\(^{51}\) by Stanley Houghton. This play seems to be linked up to the play "The Dear Departed"\(^{52}\) by the same author. In the one there is death which is only seeming, in the other, death is real enough:

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and yet possessing a power that belongs to life itself through some process of hallucination not unnatural in the given circumstances. The son of the family comes home and turns out his step-mother because at his father's death he becomes owner of the property. But as he rummages among the belongings of the dead man, the latter seems to watch him with a strange power and the son leaves the house noisily shutting the door behind, with the dead man as master of the house, for the night at least.

The behaviour of the young man to the step-mother was both cruel and high-handed but he was actuated by a desire to enjoy complete possession because years back his father had turned him out of the house. The legal possession came to him but the dead man made him feel that the gift was not actually deserved by him. In fact, the lawyer came to draft a new will only to discover him already dead. The situation is uneasy, yet the sole cause for this is a superstition to which only a childish imagination can yield. In mature person such behaviour is irrational.

28. "The Vixen and the Grapes"\textsuperscript{53} by Marjorie R. Watson. The scene is a women's prison in South America. The murder of a man, Duncan Corby, led to the arrest of Santita, a servant-maid. She was found near the dead man with a blood-stained

\textsuperscript{53} Marjorie R. Watson's "The Vixen and the Grapes, Eight More One-Act Plays for Women, Selected by Elizabeth Everard (George G. Harrap & Co.Ltd., 1951).
knife in her hand. Police enquiry, however, exonerated her. Sister Maria learnt from Mrs. Corby that she herself had killed her husband because he had killed her dog. The husband was a Don Juan; his affairs with women were a standing scandal among those who knew him. Harriet (Mrs. Corby) decided to spend the rest of her life in the prison as a lay sister, because she found that much good work awaited to be done among the prisoners. This might be interpreted as an act of penance. Her friend Janet told her that should she change her mind she could come to England by only letting her know of her desire for the normal life. Janet's role is not central to the play. Harriet comments on the grapes being sour with reference to her friend's limitation. She herself will not follow her friend's example for she had found her vocation in social work.

Like the six other plays in the same volume it has an all-women cast. Elizabeth Everard who contributes a preface to the volume *Eight More One-Act Plays for Women* speaks of the standard seen in these plays as "no mean one." There is no reason to think that the plays achieve a special merit by leaving out men characters. The social scene is always enlivened
by a mixed company. The exclusion of men from the play cannot by itself constitute an element of excellence. Such a specialized cast may have interest for some audience. To judge of its value as a play we must try to ascertain what advantage is gained by restriction to an all-women cast. Of such advantage there is no evidence. The interest may be due to something not often done; and, therefore, admirable when done at all.

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29. "Tell it not in Gath" by Joe Corrie. The scene opens at a Rectory. The Rev. Arthur Welsey cannot pacify his wife who comes to him with many complaints. Being married to a churchman is a source of deep affliction for her. But the husband asks her to leave him for the moment because there is a meeting to be held. Several people attend it and the discussion centres on the problem of maintaining moral standards and preventing the miners from gambling. The hollowness of the principles preached appears as soon as the clergyman's wife interrupts the proceedings with the announcement that one of the members present and an enthusiastic upholder of moral standards, had won twenty thousand pounds in a gamble. All the criticism of such activity is forgotten and he rushed out promising to contribute handsomely to a church building. He wanted to meet

his wife, leaving the other members to envy him for his good luck. Soon the Rector's wife came there again to correct the news. She said it was she who had won the money, observing with much relief that the drudgery of their life must now end. She wept and what her husband said we must 'tell it not in Gath'. For surely his enthusiasm for the good cause did not prevent him from enjoying his luck. Personal greed is an unsettling factor. If there is a chance for its explosion, neither sacred nor secular things will be able to keep it under control. That human nature is so debased is a fact often effectively concealed under the drapery of social hypocrisy. This is blown off when such a happy accident occurs with an over-powering impact upon latent desires and ambitions.

30. "The Age of Leisure" by Neil Grant is a criticism of the rapid mechanization steadily eliminating the need of human labour. There seems to be little room for employment. Some of the characters are prepared to face starvation and death, provided there is prospect of work. Independently several people decide to go to Lapland because industrially backward, the country still needed human labour. At this

stage there is an announcement that Lapland also had introduced the age of leisure in its economy. Those who were hopeful are now despondent. The human world, apparently, has no provision for the use of human labour. This is all presented clearly but perhaps a little too pessimistically. What had happened at the early stages of industrialization need not happen again because of the further advances planned. Perhaps leisure combined with the means of livelihood may after all be a desirable goal for mankind but never one of these in absence of the other. In the play the assurance of livelihood without work seems a very bleak future. For the belief is that as food sustains the body, adequate work provides a channel for energy and, thereby, sustains the spirit.

The age of leisure, as foreseen in the play, has not yet come in reality. Philosophers and scientists have seen the possibility of its arrival but the occasion should not be one of dismay and fearful anticipation. For the scope of adventure will not be exhausted by such a leap forward in the method of production.

31. "There is no Return" by Eric Bradwell, a New Zealander, is a drama concerned with the period 1933.

This is an account of war, its sufferings and disillusionments.

and the unwillingness to pay the price due to the young soldiers for the great sacrifice they have made. A mother idealizes her son, supposed to have died. She is thankful that he did not live as a cripple. But fifteen years after the battle the young man returns, blind and suffering from amnesia. Something in the smell of the flowers drew him on to the old place but he is asked by his brother rudely not to come again and the father, too, repeated the same orders. Only the mother recognized something in the voice that stirred old memories and she thought of her son. The poor man, left unrecognized to live as a tramp for the rest of his life.

The war was responsible for heroic acts. The country rejoiced in the heroism but as has often been complained of by writers and thinkers, was reluctant to accept heroes. For they came back with socialistic ideas which shook the foundations of the old society. Men valued their comfort and security more than the ideas of the returned soldier. They found it easier to honour and admire the brave men from a distance than to reabsorb them into the society to which they themselves belong, lest it should collapse under the pressure of the new. There is no advantage in putting new wine into an old bottle. The ex-soldier is ordered off the premises by his father and brother,
the mother remained isolated in a futile dream. The natural inference is not that the accident is caused by amnesia but that it is the result of a subtle inhumanity, making the hearts cold.

32. "The Dear Departing"\(^{57}\) by Leonid Andreyev does not appear to have been written for stage production. The reason for this is that there are too many characters. They will require even more than a stage of our time to accommodate. In addition, there is a precipice where a man hangs almost on the edge of destruction, while crowds watch and wait for the excitement of the final moment. Mothers with children, clergyman, the police and tourists of all nationalities are among the crowd. They are painted with a satirical purpose but the most persistent note is concerned with the heartlessness of that large and mixed crowd who were worried not about the safety of the man hanging dangerously from the precipice but rather about the fact that he did not fall down soon enough to satisfy their appetite for horror. At the end the man gets down without harm and the cause of his perilous adventure is known to be a mode of attracting people to the site so as to ensure increased profits for a local hotel.

The drama by itself has no special technical significance. The theme seems original as a mode of castigating human nature.

The following quotation from the play will bring out the relevance of our comment:

**Bloodthirsty Lady.** "When you've been looking upwards for a long time you are bound to feel faint. And haven't you any smelling salts? No? Dear me, how thoughtless of you! How are we to bring you round again after he's dropped? And no ether, I suppose? Well, of course! If you're like that, what can you... isn't there anybody here to look after you?"

33. "The Little Man" by John Galsworthy. The play is in three scenes. It opens on the platform of an Austrian railway station, shifts into a second class compartment and finally is staged on the arrival platform of another station. There is a crowd of passengers waiting for the train, among them the Little Man. He is half English and half American by extraction on his father's side and half German and half Dutch on his mother's. This detail is relevant, for there is an attempt in the play to give the peculiarities of speech and manner of various nationals. The American traveller talks a good deal and gets other people to join in conversation with him. He is always 'guessing' in the true American manner and there is,

58. Ibid., pp. 206-207.

evidently a tendency in him to exaggerate and speak with a view to publicity. He shortly declares his faith in brotherhood of man and the inherent feeling and desire for heroism. The busy waiter is asked to supply eggs and he fails to bring them in time to the American. He threatens to kill him if he makes more delay and says with savage humour there will be another waiter in heaven! The Little Man's orders are, however, quickly, supplied. He calls the man head-waiter and is taken to task for doing so. The American thinks that the lower classes should be kept in their place. This is not a democratic view and the attitude well shows the gulf between profession and practice. The train arrives and all hurry out except a woman with her baby and her bundles. The American looks back but does not help. The Little Man does. He takes the baby in his arms and boards the train; it, however, moves off before the mother gets in. The Little Man dangles the baby in his arms and tries to comfort it and lets it suck his finger. He is pleased with the baby. The various passengers in the compartment find the scene quite agreeable but they soon notice that the baby has spots on its body. The American thinks that it is measles but the spots are black and the German shouts terrified that it is typhus! The American
comments that it is quite an indisposition and immediately all hurry off on various excuses. The English woman looks back with some tenderness but she is dragged away by her husband. In the last scene the Little Man is seen alone on the platform with the baby. The American admires his humanity. In his eyes he is a hero but the police is after the Little Man. The baby's mother wired to the station master. The orders are to arrest the little Man. The Little Man cannot explain himself, not knowing enough German. The police officer will not touch him for fear of infection. The subordinates will not listen to him because he is not the direct official superior. The officer complains that by holding the baby in his arms he is trying to escape arrest. But the fact is that the Little Man would not desert the baby. The mother now arrives and when she is accused of taking an infected child on the railway, she proves that the black spots are not illness but some dried mess. The child's legs were perfectly white. The American hails the Little Man as an angel. The mother kisses his feet. The police are pacified. There is apparently, no case against the Little Man. Finally, the American takes his photograph.

The play is full of irony and it shows how pompous sentiments are accompanied by actions of a mean and selfish kind.
The great idea always gets our lip sympathy. In actual life and action a narrow egoism is the standard to which people conform. In this comparison of races the German comes out the worst with his doctrine of "push and pull."

34. "Wurzel-Flummery" by A. A. Milne. Fifty thousand pounds are offered by a millionaire to a man who would be rechristened as Wurzel-Flummery. The name is revolting enough to scare even the most unscrupulous hunter after fortune but one Crashaw swallowed the bait, and the girl he loved, Viola, agreed to the change of surname. The comedy lies in the oscillation between aversion and the seductive power of money, the latter finally asserting its superior strength. Money wins in the end. Oscar Wilde's "The Importance of Being Earnest" exploits a similar theme, but the motive there for a change of name is the desire of love and marriage and not money; the name, again, possesses an appeal for the intending brides, which may perhaps be allowed to be partly genuine. Here, however, the fable is fantastic; the adoption of the proposed name seems satirical, the purpose being to criticise the abject depths to which one can descend for the love of money.

35. "Five Birds in a Cage" by Gertrude Jennings.

The play attempts a satirical view of characters belonging


mainly to two orders, the aristocratic and the working class. On account of the failure of electricity an elevator in London hung suspended for nearly two hours. There are five people including the liftman and they naturally talk to one another in this emergency. Susan (the Duchess of Wiltshire) and Leonard, (Lord Porth) are engaged in conversation. The former is rude to the young lord and gets him to do up her shoelace and orders him about with a sense of her unquestioned right to do so. Yet she lets him know that he is, too inefficient, even worthless to be her husband adding that Bert, a workman is much cleverer by comparison. He is more sure footed and has greater courage. He even gets down the lift to seek help and succeeds in obtaining it. He has been made a foreman on a comfortable salary and expects to get married. The Duchess is ready to flirt with him. She has evidently, a superficial layer of egalitarian feeling under which is concealed her superiority and her class consciousness. Bert pays no attention to her advances and is anxious to please Nelly, a milliner's assistant. She has to carry a new dress to a rich and fashionable woman who wants to wear it the same evening at a party. Nelly knows her to be difficult to please and delay in the delivery of the new garment may mean the loss of her job. They all try to comfort her and assure her that the accident in the
lift will be a sufficient excuse. But she is not convinced because she knows that her story will not be believed. Bert gets friendly with her. They had met before in the same lift without speaking to each other. He now suggested that they might walk out together and get engaged. The Duchess does not approve of this. For this is to lose a man whom she had believed to be a victim of her charm. The long confinement to the lift became depressing and there were moments of actual panic. For it was feared that the lift might be rolling down or some escaped gas might suffocate them. Most of the five people were frightened. The Duchess and the young lord were frightened more than any one else. Even some kind of parting speeches were delivered in the apprehension of impending death. At the end, however, they escaped the terrors of the fate they had imagined. The Duchess had worried about her delayed dinner, Nelly because she feared to lose her job. At last the former asked her, who was it she was taking the dress to? The girl said, it was the Duchess of Wiltshire. Susan thereupon asked Nelly angrily why did she come out with the dress without a greater margin of time on her hand? Soon, however, her manner was changed to effusiveness and she said she would adopt both Nelly and Bert and let them live with her.

The play gives us some insight into "upper class" manners and shows that although the aristocrat may condescend to the lower orders, the gulf between them is so wide and real
that no genuine sympathy can possibly exist. After the Second World War the situation seems to have changed and society seems to have moved on to amorphousness so that the class divisions have lost all their old strength and exclusiveness. The Duchess's speech has a salty aristocratic flavour, the young lord is colourless and is too ready to submit rather than assert his will. Bert has more character and certainly knows his mind. Nelly has a mental vacuity, common to women of her class and a persistent worry about her job. Horace, the liftman, is so bound by law that he will not depart an iota from it even to save life or to give relief in an emergency.

36. Harold Chapin's "It's the Poor that 'elps the Poor" is a cockney drama and the scene is laid in the Camden Town. A child dies of starvation, neighbours assemble to observe the occasion and they even practise extravagance to provide entertainment on the occasion. The satire comes out in the eagerness to spend money while a little of this could have saved the child, which died because there was no food to support life. Mrs. Harris produces a bottle of special scotch. Mrs. Herberts expresses gratitude at this lavish show of neighbourly feeling and she says this as the mother of the child who dies. Mrs. Harris's reply "with some pride" is "That's

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62. Harold Chapin's "It's the Poor that 'Elps the Poor", One-Act Plays of To-day, Second Series (George G. Harrap & Co.Ltd., 1959).
nothing, dearie. We'd 'a' done the same for anyone.  

The poor helping the poor thus seems no more than a myth. What people want is mirth and they are unstinted in their expenditure on this head. They spend less as has often been said, to save a life than to celebrate a death.

(5)

The group of plays we shall now consider will illustrate many divergent traits including even a resort to the supernatural, or at least the extraordinary. As these devices are intended merely to amuse or please they are more correctly described under the title we have chosen rather than under any other, implying preoccupation with any serious question.

37. We may consider Clifford Bax's "Silly Willy", A Marionette Play (1917). Silly Willy is a soldier with a "game leg" and given to singing popular songs. Lady Silverlocks is ill from indulgence in a large quantity of chocolates and suspects that she may be dying. Her maid Mary Ann is assisted by Silly Willy in the management of the laundry work. The

63. Ibid., p.45.

doctor's attendance is urgent and waggly, a dog is sent to fetch Dr. Bedsyde Manners. He comes and tells the patient that she is going to die but that he can cure her if she consented to give her dog to him as his fee. At first unwilling the lady parts with the poor animal, and was cured. Afterwards she shammed illness so as to get back the dog. It was stolen by Silly Willy and was offered to her for sale. Confusion arose when lady Silverlocks and the doctor both claimed the dog. Mary Ann the maid, proposed the solution, - let the doctor marry her and both will possess the dog. Silverlocks was in the doctor's embrace in a second and after drinking the medicine they began to dance wildly and the dog also joined them because it also had drunk the same medicine.

In this play the hard crust of reality is peeled off from the human skin, as it were, to discover the childhood life underneath as a mode of giving pleasure, and strengthening the link with that time of life, which is never entirely broken.

38. "The Boatswain's Mate" by W. W. Jacobs makes proposal of marriage to Mrs. Waters, landlady at "The Beehive". She is pretty, about thirty years of age, and the man is over fifty. Mrs. Waters refuses him day after day. Chancing to meet a retired soldier, he gives him written directions to pretend to be a burglar trying to rob the lady's house. The

idea is that she would marry him when he saved her from the threatened danger. A window is specially kept open; the ex-soldier enters by it, but is soon faced by the landlady, equipped with a gun. She learns the whole story from him and as Benn was prowling in the garden watching her, she fired a blank cartridge and then told Benn that the burglar was killed and that a grave should be made quickly for the disposal of the body. The retired soldier who is, however, alive and well, pays tribute to Mrs. Waters' ankles and so completely wins her heart, then he announces to his friend in the garden that he is not dead but is leaving for the night to return the next day as landlord of the inn! When he said this with his arm round her waist the lady said nothing, evidently, signifying acceptance. The retired soldier was tall and goodlooking and in all things easily outtrivalled Benn. The latter left the place with much less buoyancy of spirit than when he had come. Although a trifle, the play has been well-contrived. It is an adaptation of W.W. Jacobs's story of the same title. The play is based upon the simple psychology that a woman's love cannot be won unless good looks aid the wooer and a natural gallantry ready to discover beauty and charm in the woman.

39. "The Stepmother" by Arnold Bennett. The play is described as a farce. There is no serious problem of any kind.

introduced. A novelist Mrs. Cora Prout is upset by some criticism in a journal. Enquiry did not reveal the author of the attack. A doctor in a downstairs flat is a candidate for her hand. She had instructed her secretary to say "No" if he should call and he called two hours earlier than the appointed time. The novelist's secretary is in love with her step-son who has been turned out of the house. The secretary thought that the doctor's intervention might make matters easier for her. She delivered the message but changed the 'No' to 'Yes'. Soon after the step-son comes in and declares himself as author of the injudicious criticism but he explains that he has now come in as a reporter from a journal. The novelist meets the doctor who comes with a cheerful look to greet her. The secretary's conversion of the message from 'No' to 'Yes' accounts for this evident joy in the doctor. The novelist showed herself to be only too eager to authorize the change in her message. As expression of her pleasure she settled five hundred pounds annually on her son and ordered the pair to get married. The plot hinges upon the interest of two couples to get married as fast as they could. Such a situation is not normally favourable to serious drama. The intention is to amuse by a series of topsy-turvy reversals of the expected. All that happens is a reversal of the expected event and in this reversal is found the comic element, producing laughter.
40. A. A. Milne's "The Man In The Bowler Hat" is a farce rather than a comedy but it represents an expectation for adventure which goes unfulfilled in most lives. John and Mary are ordinary people in their early forties or late thirties. They reflect in the midst of their domestic conversation, on the uneventfulness of their lives and even the impossibility of adventure of any kind. This discontent with monotony of existence is not exceptional in a well-organised community, in this age of increasing mechanization. A man unexpectedly enters their parlour in a bowler hat and overcoat and takes his seat in a corner of the room. Next a man and a woman enter. Apparently, they are the hero and the heroine, and are very much in love with each other. The girl tells him that he must not tell it to her father. There is speculation by Mary and John about 'it'. Does it mean Income-tax collection or the Rajah's Ruby? A little later the electricity fails; there are noise all around and when the light comes again the hero is found gagged. Mary and John think of helping but the villain enters and they want to know where the Rajah's Ruby is. The hero refuses to answer upon which the villain asks for a pin to torture him. Mary supplies

67. A. A. Milne's "The Man in the Bowler Hat" One-Act Plays of To-day, Fourth Series (George G. Harrap & Co.Ltd., 1960)
it and the torture proceeds. The hero agrees to give information about the Rajah's Ruby. It is in Charing Cross station in a hat-box. The key for it is in another station also in a hat-box. The key for that is in a third station in another box and so on through twenty major tube stations of London. But what causes agony is that the key is lost and, therefore, also the prospect of the jewel's recovery.

At the beginning the hero presses two revolvers into the hands of Mary and John. Shots are fired outside the room. A sinister looking man steals into the room and out through the window. He does this twice. The man in the bowler hat with the cigar in the mouth removes it to speak a few words. "Yes.... That's all right .... Just a bit ragged still .... We'll take it again at eleven tomorrow .... Second Act, please."68 (And so the rehearsal goes on).

Milne in choosing such a plot with an emphasis on the farcical element seems to imply that in modern life adventures are not drawing-room experiences. One has to go out and seek them but there is an easy substitute in the shape of projection into other lives momentarily and sharing the experience of such an excitement. A drama is the likeliest mode for the creation of a sense of adventure. The living room

68. Ibid., p.73
in the flat occupied by the couple is transformed into a stage for the rehearsal of a sensational melodrama. Even then previous permission is necessary from the owner of the flat to stage the show. The illusion, that we are witnessing an actual outrage is neither intended nor produced. One understands from the start it is a play which is being rehearsed. John and Mary in their comments seem also to think along the same lines. The business of the play is, of course, amusement - to make people laugh and enjoy themselves. This momentary conjunction between the real and the fanciful is a little strange but we might well ask, why is not the melodrama acted out fully, instead of giving us one scene from life and another from the play? What purpose does this mix-up serve? The answer seems to be that the writer is merely trying to make an experiment with a new form. We have had inset plays. The tradition is at least as old as the reign of Queen Elizabeth. But the play seems to be first of its kind to blur out the edges of reality, as it were, by the intrusion of fantasy and giving at least a momentary feeling that the much-desired adventure instead of coming in a trickle came in, so to speak, in a flood to astonish and overpower.

41. "Collect your Hand Baggage" by John Mortimer. The characters here are eleven in number and the scene is a

big waiting-room at a London Air Port. The meeting of the characters is casual. Two couples come regularly to the airport and have coffee there. Crispin, a middle-aged bohemian also keeps them company. He left his wife for a slight difference in taste. Now he was staying as a paying guest with the wife of an ex-Indian civilian. The previous night he talked with her daughter Paddy and he believed that she had promised him to join a flight to Paris. Without any money of his own he was afraid of such a thoughtless commitment. The girl, however, turned up at the airport and showed him a ticket she had bought. Crispin urged by gallantry and also by the desire of an enjoyable holiday in Paris borrowed from his friends and even sold his overcoat to raise supplies. But when he had equipped himself with a ticket a young man arrived with baggage. She was clearly waiting for his arrival. As for Crispin's idea of accompanying her she had no knowledge. For, when the subject was discussed his voice was lost in the noise made by the radio. This was her explanation and she went off with her young friend. The bohemian was disappointed but was still without hope of going to Paris in spite of the set-back. He asked his wife on the telephone to join him for the trip. But she refused
being busy attending to guests at her little restaurant. When he rang off the loudspeaker was calling upon passengers for Paris to collect their baggages.

The play does not give us much by way of character or situation. It seems largely a comment upon the confusions of our life and the pain and suffering arising therefrom. At the beginning Paddy seemed to be both impulsive and foolish. At the end the middle-aged man appeared in this light. The tables were thus turned. The last straw for him was to discover that he had not even a cigarette to console him in his affliction.