

Yeats William Butler

**The Collected Works in Verse
and Prose of William Butler
Yeats. Volume 4 of 8....**



William Yeats
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and Prose of William Butler
Yeats. Volume 4 of 8. The Hour-
glass. Cathleen ni Houlihan.
The Golden Helmet. The
Irish Dramatic Movement

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in Verse and Prose of
William Butler Yeats, Vol.
4 (of 8) / The Hour-glass.
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THE HOUR-GLASS: A MORALITY

PERSONS IN THE PLAY

A Wise Man

A Fool

Some Pupils

An Angel

The Wise Man's Wife and two Children

THE HOUR-GLASS: A MORALITY

A large room with a door at the back and another at the side, or else a curtained place where persons can enter by parting the curtains. A desk and a chair at one side. An hour-glass on a bracket or stand near the door. A creepy stool near it. Some benches. A WISE MAN sitting at his desk.

WISE MAN

[Turning over the pages of a book.]

Where is that passage I am to explain to my pupils to-day? Here it is, and the book says that it was written by a beggar on the walls of Babylon: 'There are two living countries, the one visible and the one invisible; and when it is winter with us it is summer in that country, and when the November winds are up among us it is lambing-time there.' I wish that my pupils had asked me to explain any other passage. [*The FOOL comes in and stands at the door holding out his hat. He has a pair of shears in the other hand.*] It sounds to me like foolishness; and yet that cannot be, for the writer of this book, where I have found so much knowledge, would not have set it by itself on this page, and surrounded it

with so many images and so many deep colours and so much fine gilding, if it had been foolishness.

FOOL

Give me a penny.

WISE MAN [*turns to another page*]

Here he has written: ‘The learned in old times forgot the visible country.’ That I understand, but I have taught my learners better.

FOOL

Won’t you give me a penny?

WISE MAN

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

FOOL

Such a great wise teacher as you are will not refuse a penny

to a fool.

WISE MAN

What do you know about wisdom?

FOOL

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

WISE MAN

What is it you have seen?

FOOL

When I went by Kilcluan where the bells used to be ringing at the break of every day, I could hear nothing but the people snoring in their houses. When I went by Tubbervanach, where the young men used to be climbing the hill to the blessed well, they were sitting at the crossroads playing cards. When I went by Carrigoras, where the friars used to be fasting and serving the poor, I saw them drinking wine and obeying their wives. And when I asked what misfortune had brought all these changes, they said it was no misfortune, but it was the wisdom they had learned

from your teaching.

WISE MAN

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

FOOL

That is foolish advice for a wise man to give.

WISE MAN

Why, Fool?

FOOL

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

WISE MAN

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

pennies.

FOOL

Give me a penny and I will bring you luck. Bresal the Fisherman lets me sleep among the nets in his loft in the winter-time because he says I bring him luck; and in the summer-time the wild creatures let me sleep near their nests and their holes. It is lucky even to look at me or to touch me, but it is much more lucky to give me a penny. [*Holds out his hand.*] If I wasn't lucky, I'd starve.

WISE MAN

What have you got the shears for?

FOOL

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

WISE MAN

Whom would I drive away?

FOOL

I won't tell you.

WISE MAN

Not if I give you a penny?

FOOL

No.

WISE MAN

Not if I give you two pennies?

FOOL

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

WISE MAN

Three pennies?

FOOL

Four, and I will tell you!

WISE MAN

Very well, four. But I will not call you Teig the Fool any longer.

FOOL

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

WISE MAN

Why do they do that?

FOOL

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

WISE MAN

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

FOOL

I have seen plenty of angels.

WISE MAN

Do you bring luck to the angels too?

FOOL

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

WISE MAN

When do you see them?

FOOL

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

[He points upward.]

WISE MAN

And what happens then?

FOOL

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

WISE MAN

Is it long since you have seen them, Teig the Fool?

FOOL

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

WISE MAN

Well, there are your four pennies. You, a fool, say ‘Glory be to God,’ but before I came the wise men said it.

FOOL

Four pennies! That means a great deal of luck. Great teacher, I have brought you plenty of luck!

[He goes out shaking the bag.]

WISE MAN

Though they call him Teig the Fool, he is not more foolish than everybody used to be, with their dreams and their preachings and their three worlds; but I have overthrown their three worlds with the seven sciences. With Philosophy that was made from the lonely star, I have taught them to forget Theology; with Architecture, I have hidden the ramparts of their cloudy heaven; with Music, the fierce planets' daughter whose hair is always on fire, and with Grammar that is the moon's daughter, I have shut their ears to the imaginary harpings and speech of the angels; and I have made formations of battle with Arithmetic that have put the hosts of heaven to the rout. But, Rhetoric and Dialectic, that have been born out of the light star and out of the amorous star, you have been my spearman and my catapult! Oh! my swift horsemen! Oh! my keen darting arguments, it is because of you that I have overthrown the hosts of foolishness! [*An ANGEL, in a dress the colour of embers, and carrying a blossoming apple-bough in her hand and a gilded halo about her head, stands upon the threshold.*] Before I came, men's minds were stuffed with folly about a heaven where birds sang the hours, and about angels that came and stood upon men's thresholds. But I have locked the visions into heaven and turned the key upon them. Well, I must consider this passage about the two countries. My mother used to say something of the kind. She would say that when our

bodies sleep our souls awake, and that whatever withers here ripens yonder, and that harvests are snatched from us that they may feed invisible people. But the meaning of the book may be different, for only fools and women have thoughts like that; their thoughts were never written upon the walls of Babylon. I must ring the bell for my pupils. [*He sees the ANGEL.*] What are you? Who are you? I think I saw some that were like you in my dreams when I was a child – that bright thing, that dress that is the colour of embers! But I have done with dreams, I have done with dreams.

ANGEL

I am the Angel of the Most High God.

WISE MAN

Why have you come to me?

ANGEL

I have brought you a message.

WISE MAN

What message have you got for me?

ANGEL

You will die within the hour. You will die when the last grains have fallen in this glass.

[She turns the hour-glass.]

WISE MAN

My time to die has not come. I have my pupils. I have a young wife and children that I cannot leave. Why must I die?

ANGEL

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

WISE MAN

Where will death bring me to?

ANGEL

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

WISE MAN

But I have also denied the existence of Hell!

ANGEL

Hell is the place of those who deny.

WISE MAN [*kneels*]

I have, indeed, denied everything, and have taught others to deny. I have believed in nothing but what my senses told me. But, oh! beautiful Angel, forgive me, forgive me!

ANGEL

You should have asked forgiveness long ago.

WISE MAN

Had I seen your face as I see it now, oh! beautiful angel, I would have believed, I would have asked forgiveness. Maybe you do not know how easy it is to doubt. Storm, death, the grass rotting, many sicknesses, those are the messengers that came to me. Oh! why are you silent? You carry the pardon of the Most High; give it to me! I would kiss your hands if I were not afraid – no, no, the hem of your dress!

ANGEL

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

WISE MAN

You cannot understand. You live in a country that we can only dream about. Maybe it is as hard for you to understand why we disbelieve as it is for us to believe. Oh! what have I said! You

know everything! Give me time to undo what I have done. Give me a year – a month – a day – an hour! Give me to this hour's end, that I may undo what I have done!

ANGEL

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

WISE MAN

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

ANGEL

[At the door and pointing at the hour-glass.]

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

WISE MAN

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

[He stands at the desk with a fixed look in his eyes. The voices of THE PUPILS are heard singing these words:

I was going the road one day —
O the brown and the yellow beer —
And I met with a man that was no right man:
O my dear, O my dear!

Enter PUPILS and the FOOL

FOOL

Leave me alone. Leave me alone. Who is that pulling at my

bag? King's son, do not pull at my bag.

A YOUNG MAN

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

FOOL

Give me pennies! Give me some pennies!

A YOUNG MAN

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

FOOL

I want to buy bacon in the shops, and nuts in the market, and strong drink for the time when the sun is weak, and snares to catch rabbits and the squirrels that steal the nuts, and hares, and a great pot to cook them in.

A YOUNG MAN

Why don't your friends tell you where buried treasures are?
Why don't they make you dream about treasures? If one dreams
three times there is always treasure.

FOOL [*holding out his hat*]

Give me pennies! Give me pennies!

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

A YOUNG MAN

Master, will you have Teig the Fool for a scholar?

ANOTHER YOUNG MAN

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

WISE MAN

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

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

WISE MAN

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

ALL THE YOUNG MEN

No one, Master! No one!

WISE MAN

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

A YOUNG MAN

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

WISE MAN

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

A YOUNG MAN

No, no, Master!

WISE MAN

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

A YOUNG MAN [*to his Neighbour*]

He wants somebody to dispute with.

HIS NEIGHBOUR

I knew that from the beginning.

A YOUNG MAN

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

WISE MAN

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

A YOUNG MAN

Master, till you came, no teacher in this land was able to get rid of foolishness and ignorance. But every one has listened to you, every one has learned the truth. You have had your last disputation.

ANOTHER

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

WISE MAN

**[Comes from his desk and stands
among them in the middle of the room.]**

Pupils, dear friends, I have deceived you all this time. It was I myself who was ignorant. There is a God. There is a Heaven. There is fire that passes, and there is fire that lasts for ever.

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

A YOUNG MAN [to Another]

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

WISE MAN [*in a low, solemn voice*]

Just now, before you came in, someone came to the door, and when I looked up I saw an angel standing there.

A YOUNG MAN

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

WISE MAN

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

A YOUNG MAN

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

ANOTHER YOUNG MAN

You see how well we remember your teaching.

WISE MAN

Out, out from my sight! I want someone with belief. I must find that grain the Angel spoke of before I die. I tell you I must find it, and you answer me with arguments. Out with you, out of my sight!

[The Young Men laugh.]

A YOUNG MAN

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

WISE MAN

Out, out! This is no time for laughter! Out with you, though you are a king's son!

[They begin to hurry out.]

A YOUNG MAN

Come, come; he wants us to find someone who will dispute with him.*[All go out.]*

WISE MAN

[Alone; he goes to the door at the side.]

I will call my wife. She will believe; women always believe. *[He opens the door and calls.]* Bridget! Bridget! *[BRIDGET comes in wearing her apron, her sleeves turned up from her floury arms.]* Bridget, tell me the truth; do not say what you think will please me. Do you sometimes say your prayers?

BRIDGET

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

WISE MAN

But do you not believe in God?

BRIDGET

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

WISE MAN

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

BRIDGET [*considering*]

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

WISE MAN

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

BRIDGET

You want somebody to get up an argument with.

WISE MAN

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

BRIDGET

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

WISE MAN

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

BRIDGET

**[Wiping her arms in her apron
and pulling down her sleeves.]**

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

WISE MAN [*kneels down*]

'*Confiteor Deo Omnipotenti beatæ Mariæ.*' I have forgotten it all. It is thirty years since I have said a prayer. I must pray in the common tongue, like a clown begging in the market, like Teig the Fool! [*He prays.*] Help me, Father, Son, and Spirit!

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

FOOL

Give me something; give me a penny to buy bacon in the

shops, and nuts in the market, and strong drink for the time when the sun grows weak.

BRIDGET

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

WISE MAN

I am lost! I am lost!

BRIDGET

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

WISE MAN

Out of this, woman, out of this, I say! [*BRIDGET goes through the kitchen door.*] Will nobody find a way to help me! But she spoke of my children. I had forgotten them. They will

believe. It is only those who have reason that doubt; the young are full of faith. Bridget, Bridget, send my children to me.

BRIDGET [*inside*]

Your father wants you; run to him now.

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

WISE MAN

Children, what do you believe? Is there a Heaven? Is there a Hell? Is there a Purgatory?

FIRST CHILD

We haven't forgotten, father.

THE OTHER CHILD

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

FIRST CHILD

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

WISE MAN

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

FOOL

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

WISE MAN

What are you doing that for?

FOOL

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

WISE MAN

You have heard everything! That is why you want to find out what hour it is! You are waiting to see them coming through the door to carry me away. [*FOOL goes on blowing.*] Out through the door with you! I will have no one here when they come. [*He seizes the FOOL by the shoulders, and begins to force him out through the door, then suddenly changes his mind.*] No, I have something to ask you. [*He drags him back into the room.*] Is there a Heaven? Is there a Hell? Is there a Purgatory?

FOOL

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

WISE MAN

Tell me; tell me!

FOOL

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

WISE MAN

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

FOOL [*looking wise*]

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

WISE MAN

[Goes towards the hour-glass as if to uncover it.]

No, no, I have not the courage. [*He kneels.*] Have pity upon me, Fool, and tell me!

FOOL

Ah! Now, that is different. I am not afraid of you now. But I must come nearer to you; somebody in there might hear what the Angel said.

WISE MAN

Oh, what did the Angel tell you?

FOOL

Once I was alone on the hills, and an angel came by and he said, 'Teig the Fool, do not forget the Three Fires; the Fire that punishes, the Fire that purifies, and the Fire wherein the soul rejoices for ever!'

WISE MAN

He believes! I am saved! The sand has run out... [FOOL *helps him to his chair.*] I am going from the country of the seven wandering stars, and I am going to the country of the fixed stars! I understand it all now. One sinks in on God; we do not see the truth; God sees the truth in us. Ring the bell. They are coming. Tell them, Fool, that when the life and the mind are broken the truth comes through them like peas through a broken peascod. Pray, Fool, that they may be given a sign and carry their souls alive out of the dying world. Your prayers are better than mine.

[FOOL *bows his head.* WISE MAN'S head sinks on his arm on the books. PUPILS are heard singing as before, but

now they come right on to the stage before they cease their song.

A YOUNG MAN

Look at the Fool turned bell-ringer!

ANOTHER

What have you called us in for, Teig? What are you going to tell us?

ANOTHER

No wonder he has had dreams! See, he is fast asleep now. [*Goes over and touches him.*] Oh, he is dead!

FOOL

Do not stir! He asked for a sign that you might be saved. [*All are silent for a moment.*].. Look what has come from his mouth.. a little winged thing.. a little shining thing... It is gone to the door. [*The ANGEL appears in the doorway, stretches out her hands and closes them again.*] The Angel has taken it in her hands... She will open her hands in the Garden of Paradise.[*They all kneel.*

CATHLEEN NI HOULIHAN

PERSONS IN THE PLAY

Peter Gillane

Michael Gillane, *his Son, going to be married*

Patrick Gillane, *a lad of twelve, Michael's Brother*

Bridget Gillane, *Peter's Wife*

Delia Cahel, *engaged to Michael*

The Poor Old Woman

Neighbours

CATHLEEN NI HOULIHAN

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

PETER

What is that sound I hear?

PATRICK

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

PETER

It might be a hurling.

PATRICK

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

cheering is.

BRIDGET

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

PETER [*shifts his chair to table*]

Those are grand clothes, indeed.

BRIDGET

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

PETER

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

PATRICK [*who is still at the window*]

There's an old woman coming down the road. I don't know is

it here she is coming?

BRIDGET

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

PATRICK

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

BRIDGET

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

PETER

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

Trouble enough I had making it.

[PATRICK opens the door and MICHAEL comes in.]

BRIDGET

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

MICHAEL

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

BRIDGET

Did he say anything?

MICHAEL

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

PETER

Have you got the fortune, Michael?

MICHAEL

Here it is.

[MICHAEL puts bag on table and goes over and leans against chimney-jamb. BRIDGET, who has been all this time examining the clothes, pulling the seams and trying the lining of the pockets, etc., puts the clothes on the dresser.]

PETER

[Getting up and taking the bag in his hand and turning out the money.]

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

in at the end.

BRIDGET

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

PETER

Indeed, I wish I had had the luck to get a hundred pounds, or twenty pounds itself, with the wife I married.

BRIDGET

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

PETER

That is true, indeed.

[He pats her arm.]

BRIDGET

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

PETER

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

MICHAEL

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

BRIDGET

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

PETER

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

MICHAEL [*coming over towards the table*]

Well, you would like a nice comely girl to be beside you, and to go walking with you. The fortune only lasts for a while, but the woman will be there always.

PATRICK [*turning round from the window*]

They are cheering again down in the town. Maybe they are landing horses from Enniscrone. They do be cheering when the horses take the water well.

MICHAEL

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

PATRICK

**[Opens the door to go out, but stops
for a moment on the threshold.]**

Will Delia remember, do you think, to bring the greyhound pup she promised me when she would be coming to the house?

MICHAEL

She will surely.

[PATRICK goes out, leaving the door open.]

PETER

It will be Patrick's turn next to be looking for a fortune, but

he won't find it so easy to get it and he with no place of his own.

BRIDGET

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

PETER

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

BRIDGET

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

MICHAEL

They're not done cheering yet.

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

BRIDGET

Do you see anything?

MICHAEL

I see an old woman coming up the path.

BRIDGET

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

MICHAEL

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

BRIDGET

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

PETER

I may as well put the money out of sight. There is no use leaving it out for every stranger to look at.

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

MICHAEL

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

BRIDGET

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

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

OLD WOMAN

God save all here!

PETER

God save you kindly!

OLD WOMAN

You have good shelter here.

PETER

You are welcome to whatever shelter we have.

BRIDGET

Sit down there by the fire and welcome.

OLD WOMAN [*warming her hands*]

There is a hard wind outside.

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

PETER

Have you travelled far to-day?

OLD WOMAN

I have travelled far, very far; there are few have travelled so far as myself, and there's many a one that doesn't make me welcome. There was one that had strong sons I thought were friends of mine, but they were shearing their sheep, and they wouldn't listen to me.

PETER

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

OLD WOMAN

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

BRIDGET

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

OLD WOMAN

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

BRIDGET

What was it put you wandering?

OLD WOMAN

Too many strangers in the house.

BRIDGET

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

OLD WOMAN

I have had trouble indeed.

BRIDGET

What was it put the trouble on you?

OLD WOMAN

My land that was taken from me.

PETER

Was it much land they took from you?

OLD WOMAN

My four beautiful green fields.

PETER [*aside to* BRIDGET]

Do you think could she be the widow Casey that was put out of her holding at Kilglass a while ago?

BRIDGET

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

PETER [*to OLD WOMAN*]

Did you hear a noise of cheering, and you coming up the hill?

OLD WOMAN

I thought I heard the noise I used to hear when my friends came to visit me.

[She begins singing half to herself.

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

MICHAEL [*coming from the door*]

What is that you are singing, ma'am?

OLD WOMAN

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

[She goes on singing, much louder.]

I am come to cry with you, woman,
My hair is unwound and unbound;
I remember him ploughing his field,
Turning up the red side of the ground,

And building his barn on the hill
With the good mortared stone;
O! we'd have pulled down the gallows
Had it happened in Enniscrone!

MICHAEL

What was it brought him to his death?

OLD WOMAN

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

PETER [*aside to BRIDGET*]

Her trouble has put her wits astray.

MICHAEL

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

OLD WOMAN

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

MICHAEL

Were they neighbours of your own, ma'am?

OLD WOMAN

Come here beside me and I'll tell you about them. [MICHAEL *sits down beside her at the hearth.*] There was a red man of the O'Donnells from the north, and a man of the O'Sullivans from the south, and there was one Brian that lost his life at Clontarf

by the sea, and there were a great many in the west, some that died hundreds of years ago, and there are some that will die to-morrow.

MICHAEL

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

OLD WOMAN

Come nearer, nearer to me.

BRIDGET

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

PETER

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

BRIDGET

The poor thing, we should treat her well.

PETER

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

BRIDGET

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

PETER

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

BRIDGET

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

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

BRIDGET [*to the OLD WOMAN*]

Will you have a drink of milk, ma'am?

OLD WOMAN

It is not food or drink that I want.

PETER [*offering the shilling*]

Here is something for you.

OLD WOMAN

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

PETER

What is it you would be asking for?

OLD WOMAN

If anyone would give me help he must give me himself, he

must give me all.

[PETER *goes over to the table staring at the shilling in his hand in a bewildered way, and stands whispering to* BRIDGET.

MICHAEL

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

OLD WOMAN

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

MICHAEL

Are you lonely going the roads, ma'am?

OLD WOMAN

I have my thoughts and I have my hopes.

MICHAEL

What hopes have you to hold to?

OLD WOMAN

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

MICHAEL

What way will you do that, ma'am?

OLD WOMAN

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

MICHAEL

I will go with you.

BRIDGET

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

OLD WOMAN

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

PETER [*to BRIDGET*]

Who is she, do you think, at all?

BRIDGET

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

OLD WOMAN

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

PETER

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

OLD WOMAN

[Who is standing in the doorway.]

They are wondering that there were songs made for me; there have been many songs made for me. I heard one on the wind this morning.

[*Sings.*] Do not make a great keening
When the graves have been dug to-morrow.
Do not call the white-scarfed riders
To the burying that shall be to-morrow.
Do not spread food to call strangers
To the wakes that shall be to-morrow;
Do not give money for prayers
For the dead that shall die to-morrow.

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

MICHAEL

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

PETER

Come over to me, Michael.

MICHAEL

Hush, father, listen to her.

OLD WOMAN

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

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

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

BRIDGET [*to* PETER]

Look at him, Peter; he has the look of a man that has got the touch. [*Raising her voice.*] Look here, Michael, at the wedding clothes. Such grand clothes as these are! You have a right to fit them on now, it would be a pity to-morrow if they did not fit. The boys would be laughing at you. Take them, Michael, and go

into the room and fit them on.

[She puts them on his arm.]

MICHAEL

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

BRIDGET

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

MICHAEL

I had forgotten that.

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

PETER

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

[Neighbours come crowding in, PATRICK and DELIA

with them.

PATRICK

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

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

DELIA

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

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

PATRICK

The boys are all hurrying down the hill-sides to join the French.

DELIA

Michael won't be going to join the French.

BRIDGET [to PETER]

Tell him not to go, Peter.

PETER

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

BRIDGET

Try and coax him over to the fire.

DELIA

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

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

OLD WOMAN'S *voice outside*

They shall be speaking for ever,

The people shall hear them for ever.

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

PETER

[*To* **PATRICK**, *laying a hand on his arm.*]

Did you see an old woman going down the path?

PATRICK

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

THE GOLDEN HELMET

PERSONS IN THE PLAY

Cuchulain

Leagerie

Conal

Emer, *Cuchulain's wife*

Leagerie's Wife

Conal's Wife

Laeg, *Cuchulain's chariot-driver*

Red Man

Horseboys and Scullions

Three Black Men

THE GOLDEN HELMET

A house made of logs. There are two windows at the back and a door which cuts off one of the corners of the room. Through the door one can see rocks, which make the ground outside the door higher than it is within, and the sea. Through the windows one can see nothing but the sea. There are three great chairs at the opposite side to the door, with a table before them. There are cups and a flagon of ale on the table.

At the Abbey Theatre the house is orange red, and the chairs, tables and flagons black, with a slight purple tinge which is not clearly distinguishable from the black. The rocks are black, with a few green touches. The sea is green and luminous, and all the characters, except the RED MAN and the Black Men are dressed in various tints of green, one or two with touches of purple which looks nearly black. The Black Men are in dark purple and the RED MAN is altogether dressed in red. He is very tall and his height is increased by horns on the Golden Helmet. The Helmet has in reality more dark green than gold about it. The Black Men have cats' heads painted on their black cloth caps. The effect is intentionally violent and startling.

CONAL

Not a sail, not a wave, and if the sea were not purring a little

like a cat, not a sound. There is no danger yet. I can see a long way for the moonlight is on the sea.

[A horn sounds.]

LEAGERIE

Ah, there is something.

CONAL

It must be from the land, and it is from the sea that danger comes. We need not be afraid of anything that comes from the land. *[Looking out of door.]* I cannot see anybody, the rocks and the trees hide a great part of the pathway upon that side.

LEAGERIE *[sitting at table]*

It sounded like Cuchulain's horn, but that's not possible.

CONAL

Yes, that's impossible. He will never come home from Scotland. He has all he wants there. Luck in all he does. Victory and wealth and happiness flowing in on him, while here at home

all goes to rack, and a man's good name drifts away between night and morning.

LEAGERIE

I wish he would come home for all that, and put quiet and respect for those that are more than she is into that young wife of his. Only this very night your wife and my wife had to forbid her to go into the dining-hall before them. She is young, and she is Cuchulain's wife, and so she must spread her tail like a peacock.

CONAL [*at door*]

I can see the horn-blower now, a young man wrapped in a cloak.

LEAGERIE

Do not let him come in. Tell him to go elsewhere for shelter. This is no place to seek shelter in.

CONAL

That is right. I will tell him to go away, for nobody must know the disgrace that is to fall upon Ireland this night.

LEAGERIE

Nobody of living men but us two must ever know that.

CONAL [*outside door*]

Go away, go away!

[A YOUNG MAN covered by a long cloak is standing upon the rocks outside door.]

YOUNG MAN

I am a traveller, and I am looking for sleep and food.

CONAL

A law has been made that nobody is to come into this house to-night.

YOUNG MAN

Who made that law?

CONAL

We two made it, and who has so good a right? for we have to guard this house and to keep it from robbery, and from burning and from enchantment.

YOUNG MAN

Then I will unmake the law. Out of my way!

[He struggles with CONAL and shoves past into the house.]

CONAL

I thought no living man but Leagerie could have stood against me; and Leagerie himself could not have shoved past me. What is more, no living man could if I were not taken by surprise. How could I expect to find so great a strength?

LEAGERIE

Go out of this: there is another house a little further along the shore; our wives are there with their servants, and they will give you food and drink.

YOUNG MAN

It is in this house I will have food and drink.

LEAGERIE [*drawing his sword*]

Go out of this, or I will make you.

[The YOUNG MAN seizes LEAGERIE'S arm, and thrusting it up, passes him, and puts his shield over the chair where there is an empty place.]

YOUNG MAN [*at table*]

It is here I will spend the night, but I won't tell you why till I have drunk. I am thirsty. What, the flagon full and the cups empty and Leagerie and Conal there! Why, what's in the wind that Leagerie and Conal cannot drink?

LEAGERIE

It is Cuchulain.

CONAL

Better go away to Scotland again, or if you stay here ask no one what has happened or what is going to happen.

CUCHULAIN

What more is there that can happen so strange as that I should come home after years and that you should bid me begone?

CONAL

I tell you that this is no fit house to welcome you, for it is a disgraced house.

CUCHULAIN

What is it you are hinting at? You were sitting there with ale beside you and the door open, and quarrelsome thoughts. You are waiting for something or someone. It is for some messenger who is to bring you to some spoil, or to some adventure that you will keep for yourselves.

LEAGERIE

Better tell him, for he has such luck that it may be his luck will amend ours.

CONAL

Yes, I had better tell him, for even now at this very door we saw what luck he had. He had the slope of the ground to help him. Is the sea quiet?

LEAGERIE [*looks out of window*]

There is nothing stirring.

CONAL

Cuchulain, a little after you went out of this country we were sitting here drinking. We were merry. It was late, close on to midnight, when a strange-looking man with red hair and a great sword in his hand came in through that door. He asked for ale and we gave it to him, for we were tired of drinking with one another. He became merry, and for every joke we made he made a better, and presently we all three got up and danced, and then

we sang, and then he said he would show us a new game. He said he would stoop down and that one of us was to cut off his head, and afterwards one of us, or whoever had a mind for the game, was to stoop down and have his head whipped off. 'You take off my head,' said he, 'and then I take off his head, and that will be a bargain and a debt between us. A head for a head, that is the game,' said he. We laughed at him and told him he was drunk, for how could he whip off a head when his own had been whipped off? Then he began abusing us and calling us names, so I ran at him and cut his head off, and the head went on laughing where it lay, and presently he caught it up in his hands and ran out and plunged into the sea.

CUCHULAIN [*laughs*]

I have imagined as good, when I had as much ale, and believed it too.

LEAGERIE [*at table*]

I tell you, Cuchulain, you never did. You never imagined a story like this.

CONAL

Why must you be always putting yourself up against Leagerie and myself? and what is more, it was no imagination at all. We said to ourselves that all came out of the flagon, and we laughed, and we said we will tell nobody about it. We made an oath to tell nobody. But twelve months after when we were sitting by this table, the flagon between us —

LEAGERIE

But full up to the brim —

CONAL

The thought of that story had put us from our drinking —

LEAGERIE

We were telling it over to one another —

CONAL

Suddenly that man came in with his head on his shoulders

again, and the big sword in his hand. He asked for payment of his debt, and because neither I nor Leagerie would let him cut off our heads he began abusing us and making little of us, and saying that we were a disgrace, and that all Ireland was disgraced because of us. We had not a word to say.

LEAGERIE

If you had been here you would have been as silent as we were.

CONAL

At last he said he would come again in twelve months and give us one more chance to keep our word and pay our debt. After that he went down into the sea again. Will he tell the whole world of the disgrace that has come upon us, do you think?

CUCHULAIN

Whether he does or does not, we will stand there in the door with our swords out and drive him down to the sea again.

CONAL

What is the use of fighting with a man whose head laughs

when it has been cut off?

LEAGERIE

We might run away, but he would follow us everywhere.

CONAL

He is coming; the sea is beginning to splash and rumble as it did before he came the last time.

CUCHULAIN

Let us shut the door and put our backs against it.

LEAGERIE

It is too late. Look, there he is at the door. He is standing on the threshold.

[A MAN dressed in red, with a great sword and red ragged hair, and having a Golden Helmet on his head, is standing on the threshold.]

CUCHULAIN

Go back into the sea, old red head! If you will take off heads, take off the head of the sea turtle of Muirthemne, or of the pig of Connaught that has a moon in his belly, or of that old juggler Manannan, son of the sea, or of the red man of the Boyne, or of the King of the Cats, for they are of your own sort, and it may be they understand your ways. Go, I say, for when a man's head is off it does not grow again. What are you standing there for? Go down, I say. If I cannot harm you with the sword I will put you down into the sea with my hands. Do you laugh at me, old red head? Go down before I lay my hands upon you.

RED MAN

So you also believe I was in earnest when I asked for a man's head? It was but a drinker's joke, an old juggling feat, to pass the time. I am the best of all drinkers and tipsy companions, the kindest there is among the Shape-changers of the world. Look, I have brought this Golden Helmet as a gift. It is for you or for Leagerie or for Conal, for the best man, and the bravest fighting-man amongst you, and you yourselves shall choose the man. Leagerie is brave, and Conal is brave. They risk their lives in battle, but they were not brave enough for my jokes and my

juggling. [*He lays the Golden Helmet on the ground.*] Have I been too grim a joker? Well, I am forgiven now, for there is the Helmet, and let the strongest take it.

[He goes out.]

CONAL [*taking Helmet*]

It is my right. I am a year older than Leagerie, and I have fought in more battles.

LEAGERIE [*strutting about stage, sings*]

Leagerie of the Battle
Has put to the sword
The cat-headed men
And carried away
Their hidden gold.

[He snatches Helmet at the last word.]

CONAL

Give it back to me, I say. What was the treasure but withered leaves when you got to your own door?

CUCHULAIN

[*Taking the Helmet from LEAGERIE.*]

Give it to me, I say.

CONAL

You are too young, Cuchulain. What deeds have you to be set beside our deeds?

CUCHULAIN

I have not taken it for myself. It will belong to us all equally. [*He goes to table and begins filling Helmet with ale.*] We will pass it round and drink out of it turn about and no one will be able to claim that it belongs to him more than another. I drink to your wife, Conal, and to your wife, Leagerie, and I drink to Emer my own wife. [*Shouting and blowing of horns in the distance.*] What is that noise?

CONAL

It is the horseboys and the huntboys and the scullions quarrelling. I know the sound, for I have heard it often of late. It is a good thing that you are home, Cuchulain, for it is your own horseboy and chariot-driver, Laeg, that is the worst of all, and now you will keep him quiet. They take down the great hunting-horns when they cannot drown one another's voices by shouting. There – there – do you hear them now? [*Shouting so as to be heard above the noise.*] I drink to your good health, Cuchulain, and to your young wife, though it were well if she did not quarrel with my wife.

Many men, among whom is LAEG, chariot-driver of CUCHULAIN, come in with great horns of many fantastic shapes

LAEG

I am Cuchulain's chariot-driver, and I say that my master is the best.

ANOTHER

He is not, but Leagerie is.

ANOTHER

No, but Conal is.

LAEG

Make them listen to me, Cuchulain.

ANOTHER

No, but listen to me.

LAEG

When I said Cuchulain should have the Helmet, they blew the horns.

ANOTHER

Conal has it. The best man has it.

CUCHULAIN

Silence, all of you. What is all this uproar, Laeg, and who began it?

[The Scullions and the Horseboys point at LAEG and cry, 'He began it.' They keep up an all but continual murmur through what follows.]

LAEG

A man with a red beard came where we were sitting, and as he passed me he cried out that they were taking a golden helmet or some such thing from you and denying you the championship of Ireland. I stood up on that and I cried out that you were the best of the men of Ireland. But the others cried for Leagerie or Conal, and because I have a big voice they got down the horns to drown my voice, and as neither I nor they would keep silent we have come here to settle it. I demand that the Helmet be taken from Conal and be given to you.

[The Horseboys and the Scullions shout, 'No, no; give it to Leagerie,']

'The best man has it,' etc.

CUCHULAIN

It has not been given to Conal or to anyone. I have made it into a drinking-cup that it may belong to all. I drank and then Conal drank. Give it to Leagerie, Conal, that he may drink. That will make them see that it belongs to all of us.

A SCULLION OR HORSEBOY

Cuchulain is right.

ANOTHER

Cuchulain is right, and I am tired blowing on the big horn.

LAEG

Cuchulain, you drank first.

ANOTHER

He gives it to Leagerie now, but he has taken the honour of it

for himself. Did you hear him say he drank the first? He claimed to be the best by drinking first.

ANOTHER

Did Cuchulain drink the first?

LAEG [*triumphantly*]

You drank the first, Cuchulain.

CONAL

Did you claim to be better than us by drinking first?

[LEAGERIE and CONAL draw their swords.]

CUCHULAIN

Is it that old dried herring, that old red juggler who has made us quarrel for his own comfort? [*The Horseboys and the Scullions murmur excitedly.*] He gave the Helmet to set us by the ears, and because we would not quarrel over it, he goes to Laeg and tells him that I am wronged. Who knows where he is now, or who he is stirring up to make mischief between us? Go back to your work

and do not stir from it whatever noise comes to you or whatever shape shows itself.

A SCULLION

Cuchulain is right. I am tired blowing on the big horn.

CUCHULAIN

Go in silence.

[The Scullions and Horseboys turn towards the door, but stand still on hearing the voice of LEAGERIE'S WIFE outside the door.]

LEAGERIE'S WIFE

My man is the best. I will go in the first. I will go in the first.

EMER

My man is the best, and I will go in first.

CONAL'S WIFE

No, for my man is the best, and it is I that should go first.

[LEAGERIE'S WIFE and CONAL'S WIFE struggle in the doorway.]

LEAGERIE'S WIFE *sings*

My man is the best.
What other has fought
The cat-headed men
That mew in the sea
And carried away
Their long-hidden gold?
They struck with their claws
And bit with their teeth,
But Leagerie my husband
Put all to the sword.

CONAL'S WIFE

**[Putting her hand over the other's
mouth and getting in front of her.]**

My husband has fought
With strong men in armour.
Had he a quarrel
With cats, it is certain
He'd war with none
But the stout and heavy
With good claws on them.
What glory in warring
With hollow shadows
That helplessly mew?

EMER

[Thrusting herself between them and forcing both of them back with her hands.]

I am Emer, wife of Cuchulain, and no one shall go in front of me, or sing in front of me, or praise any that I have not a mind to hear praised.

[CUCHULAIN puts his spear across the door.]

CUCHULAIN

All of our three wives shall come in together, and by three doors equal in height and in breadth and in honour. Break down the bottoms of the windows.

[While CONAL and LEAGERIE are breaking down the bottoms of the windows each of their wives goes to the window where her husband is.]

While the windows are being broken down EMER sings

My man is the best.
And Conal's wife
And the wife of Leagerie
Know that they lie
When they praise their own
Out of envy of me.
My man is the best,
First for his own sake,
Being the bravest
And handsomest man
And the most beloved
By the women of Ireland
That envy me,
And then for his wife's sake
Because I'm the youngest
And handsomest queen.

*[When the windows have been made into doors,
CUCHULAIN takes his spear from the door where EMER
is, and all three come in at the same moment.]*

EMER

I am come to praise you and to put courage into you,
Cuchulain, as a wife should, that they may not take the
championship of the men of Ireland from you.

LEAGERIE'S WIFE

You lie, Emer, for it is Cuchulain and Conal who are taking the championship from my husband.

CONAL'S WIFE

Cuchulain has taken it.

CUCHULAIN

Townland against townland, barony against barony, kingdom against kingdom, province against province, and if there be but two door-posts to a door the one fighting against the other. [*He takes up the Helmet which LEAGERIE had laid down upon the table when he went to break out the bottom of the window.*] This Helmet will bring no more wars into Ireland. [*He throws it into the sea.*]

LEAGERIE'S WIFE

You have done that to rob my husband.

CONAL'S WIFE

You could not keep it for yourself, and so you threw it away that nobody else might have it.

CONAL

You should not have done that, Cuchulain.

LEAGERIE

You have done us a great wrong.

EMER

Who is for Cuchulain?

CUCHULAIN

Let no one stir.

EMER

Who is for Cuchulain, I say?

[She draws her dagger from her belt and sings the same words as before, flourishing it about. While she has been singing, CONAL'S WIFE and LEAGERIE'S WIFE have drawn their daggers and run at her to kill her, but CUCHULAIN has forced them back. CONAL and LEAGERIE have drawn their swords to strike CUCHULAIN.]

CONAL'S WIFE

[*While EMER is still singing.*]

Silence her voice, silence her voice, blow the horns, make a noise!

[The Scullions and Horseboys blow their horns or fight among themselves. There is a deafening noise and a confused fight. Suddenly three black hands holding extinguishers come through the window and extinguish the torches. It is now pitch dark but for a very faint light outside the house which merely shows that there are moving forms, but not who or what they

are, and in the darkness one can hear low terrified voices.

FIRST VOICE

Did you see them putting out the torches?

ANOTHER VOICE

They came up out of the sea, three black men.

ANOTHER VOICE

They have heads of cats upon them.

ANOTHER VOICE

They came up mewling out of the sea.

ANOTHER VOICE

How dark it is! one of them has put his hand over the moon.

[A light gradually comes into the windows as if shining from the sea. The RED MAN is seen standing in the midst of the house.]

RED MAN

I demand the debt that is owing. I demand that some man shall stoop down that I may cut his head off as my head was cut off. If my debt is not paid, no peace shall come to Ireland, and Ireland shall lie weak before her enemies. But if my debt is paid there shall be peace.

CUCHULAIN

The quarrels of Ireland shall end. What is one man's life? I will pay the debt with my own head. [EMER *wails.*] Do not cry out, Emer, for if I were not myself, if I were not Cuchulain, one of those that God has made reckless, the women of Ireland had not loved me, and you had not held your head so high. [*He stoops, bending his head. Three Black Men come to the door. Two hold torches, and one stooping between them holds up the Golden Helmet. The RED MAN gives one of the Black Men his sword and takes the Helmet.*] What do you wait for, old man? Come, raise up your sword!

RED MAN

I will not harm you, Cuchulain. I am the guardian of this land,

and age after age I come up out of the sea to try the men of Ireland. I give you the championship because you are without fear, and you shall win many battles with laughing lips and endure wounding and betrayal without bitterness of heart; and when men gaze upon you, their hearts shall grow greater and their minds clear; until the day come when I darken your mind, that there may be an end to the story, and a song on the harp-string.

THE IRISH DRAMATIC MOVEMENT

The Irish dramatic movement began in May, 1899, with the performance of certain plays by English actors who were brought to Dublin for the purpose; and in the spring of the following year and in the autumn of the year after that, performances of like plays were given by like actors at the Gaiety Theatre, Dublin. In the third year I started Samhain to defend the work, and on re-reading it and reading it for the first time throughout, have found it best to reprint my part of it unchanged. A number has been published about once a year till very lately, and the whole series of notes are a history of a movement which is important because of the principles it is rooted in whatever be its fruits, and these principles are better told of in words that rose out of the need, than were I to explain all again and with order and ceremony now that the old enmities and friendships are ruffled by new ones that have other things to be done and said.

March, 1908.

SAMHAIN: 1901

When Lady Gregory, Mr. Edward Martyn, and myself planned the Irish Literary Theatre, we decided that it should be carried on in the form we had projected for three years. We thought that three years would show whether the country desired to take up the project, and make it a part of the national life, and that we, at any rate, could return to our proper work, in which we did not include theatrical management, at the end of that time. A little later, Mr. George Moore¹ joined us; and, looking back now upon our work, I doubt if it could have been done at all without his knowledge of the stage; and certainly if the performances of this present year bring our adventure to a successful close, a chief part of the credit will be his. Many, however, have helped us in various degrees, for in Ireland just now one has only to discover an idea that seems of service to the country for friends and helpers to start up on every hand. While we needed guarantors we had them in plenty, and though Mr. Edward Martyn's public spirit made it unnecessary to call upon them, we thank them none the less.

Whether the Irish Literary Theatre has a successor made on its own model or not, we can claim that a dramatic movement which will not die has been started. When we began our work,

¹ Both Mr. Moore and Mr. Martyn dropped out of the movement after the third performance at the Irish Literary Theatre in 1901. – W.B.Y.

we tried in vain to get a play in Gaelic. We could not even get a condensed version of the dialogue of Oisín and Patrick. We wrote to Gaelic enthusiasts in vain, for their imagination had not yet turned towards the stage, and now there are excellent Gaelic plays by Dr. Douglas Hyde, by Father O'Leary, by Father Dineen, and by Mr. MacGinlay; and the Gaelic League has had a competition for a one-act play in Gaelic, with what results I do not know. There have been successful performances of plays in Gaelic at Dublin and at Macroom, and at Letterkenny, and I think at other places; and Mr. Fay has got together an excellent little company which plays both in Gaelic and English. I may say, for I am perhaps writing an epitaph, and epitaphs should be written in a genial spirit, that we have turned a great deal of Irish imagination towards the stage. We could not have done this if our movement had not opened a way of expression for an impulse that was in the people themselves. The truth is that the Irish people are at that precise stage of their history when imagination, shaped by many stirring events, desires dramatic expression. One has only to listen to a recitation of Raftery's *Argument with Death* at some country Feis to understand this. When Death makes a good point, or Raftery a good point, the audience applaud delightedly, and applaud, not as a London audience would, some verbal dexterity, some piece of smartness, but the movements of a simple and fundamental comedy. One sees it too in the reciters themselves, whose acting is at times all but perfect in its vivid simplicity. I heard a little Claddagh girl tell a folk-story at Galway

Feis with a restraint and a delightful energy that could hardly have been bettered by the most careful training.

The organization of this movement is of immediate importance. Some of our friends propose that somebody begin at once to get a small stock company together, and that he invite, let us say, Mr. Benson, to find us certain well-trained actors, Irish if possible, but well trained of a certainty, who will train our actors, and take the more difficult parts at the beginning. These friends contend that it is necessary to import our experts at the beginning, for our company must be able to compete with travelling English companies, but that a few years will be enough to make many competent Irish actors. The Corporation of Dublin should be asked, they say, to give a small annual sum of money, such as they give to the Academy of Music; and the Corporations of Cork and Limerick and Waterford, and other provincial towns, to give small endowments in the shape of a hall and attendants and lighting for a week or two out of every year; and the Technical Board to give a small annual sum of money to a school of acting which would teach fencing and declamation, and gesture and the like. The stock company would perform in Dublin perhaps three weeks in spring, and three weeks in autumn, and go on tour the rest of the time through Ireland, and through the English towns where there is a large Irish population. It would perform plays in Irish and English, and also, it is proposed, the masterpieces of the world, making a point of performing Spanish and Scandinavian, and French, and

perhaps Greek masterpieces rather more than Shakespeare, for Shakespeare one sees, not well done indeed, but not unendurably ill done in the Theatre of Commerce. It would do its best to give Ireland a hardy and shapely national character by opening the doors to the four winds of the world, instead of leaving the door that is towards the east wind open alone. Certainly, the national character, which is so essentially different from the English that Spanish and French influences may well be most healthy, is at present like one of those miserable thorn bushes by the sea that are all twisted to one side by some prevailing wind.

It is contended that there is no reason why the company should not be as successful as similar companies in Germany and Scandinavia, and that it would be even of commercial advantage to Dublin by making it a pleasanter place to live in, besides doing incalculable good to the whole intellect of the country. One, at any rate, of those who press the project on us has much practical knowledge of the stage and of theatrical management, and knows what is possible and what is not possible.

Others among our friends, and among these are some who have had more than their share of the hard work which has built up the intellectual movement in Ireland, argue that a theatre of this kind would require too much money to be free, that it could not touch on politics, the most vital passion and vital interest of the country, as they say, and that the attitude of continual compromise between conviction and interest, which it would necessitate, would become demoralising to everybody

concerned, especially at moments of political excitement. They tell us that the war between an Irish Ireland and an English Ireland is about to become much fiercer, to divide families and friends it may be, and that the organisations that will lead in the war must be able to say everything the people are thinking. They would have Irishmen give their plays to a company like Mr. Fay's, when they are within its power, and if not, to Mr. Benson or to any other travelling company which will play them in Ireland without committees, where everybody compromises a little. In this way, they contend, we would soon build up an Irish theatre from the ground, escaping to some extent the conventions of the ordinary theatre, and English voices which give a foreign air to one's words. And though we might have to wait some years, we would get even the masterpieces of the world in good time. Let us, they think, be poor enough to whistle at the thief who would take away some of our thoughts, and after Mr. Fay has taken his company, as he plans, through the villages and the country towns, he will get the little endowment that is necessary, or if he does not some other will.

I do not know what Lady Gregory or Mr. Moore think of these projects. I am not going to say what I think. I have spent much of my time and more of my thought these last ten years on Irish organisation, and now that the Irish Literary Theatre has completed the plan I had in my head ten years ago, I want to go down again to primary ideas. I want to put old stories into verse, and if I put them into dramatic verse it will matter less to me

henceforward who plays them than what they play, and how they play. I hope to get our heroic age into verse, and to solve some problems of the speaking of verse to musical notes.

There is only one question which is raised by the two projects I have described on which I will give an opinion. It is of the first importance that those among us who want to write for the stage study the dramatic masterpieces of the world. If they can get them on the stage so much the better, but study them they must if Irish drama is to mean anything to Irish intellect. At the present moment, Shakespeare being the only great dramatist known to Irish writers has made them cast their work too much on the English model. Miss Milligan's *Red Hugh*, which was successfully acted in Dublin the other day, had no business to be in two scenes; and Father O'Leary's *Tadg Saor*, despite its most vivid and picturesque, though far too rambling dialogue, shows in its half dozen changes of scene the influence of the same English convention which arose when there was no scene painting, and is often a difficulty where there is, and is always an absurdity in a farce of thirty minutes, breaking up the emotion and sending one's thoughts here and there. Mr. MacGinlay's *Elis agus an bhean deirce* has not this defect, and though I had not Irish enough to follow it when I saw it played, and excellently played, by Mr. Fay's company, I could see from the continual laughter of the audience that it held them with an unbroken emotion. The best Gaelic play after Dr. Hyde's is, I think, Father Dineen's *Creideamh agus gorta*, and though it changes the scene

a little oftener than is desirable under modern conditions, it does not remind me of an English model. It reminds me of Calderon by its treatment of a religious subject, and by something in Father Dineen's sympathy with the people that is like his. But I think if Father Dineen had studied that great Catholic dramatist he would not have failed, as he has done once or twice, to remember some necessary detail of a situation. In the first scene he makes a servant ask his fellow-servants about things he must have known as well as they; and he loses a dramatic moment in his third scene by forgetting that Seagan Gorm has a pocket-full of money which he would certainly, being the man he was, have offered to the woman he was urging into temptation. The play towards the end changes from prose to verse, and the reverence and simplicity of the verse makes one think of a mediæval miracle play. The subject has been so much a part of Irish life that it was bound to be used by an Irish dramatist, though certainly I shall always prefer plays which attack a more eternal devil than the proselytiser. He has been defeated, and the arts are at their best when they are busy with battles that can never be won. It is possible, however, that we may have to deal with passing issues until we have re-created the imaginative tradition of Ireland, and filled the popular imagination again with saints and heroes. These short plays (though they would be better if their writers knew the masters of their craft) are very dramatic as they are, but there is no chance of our writers of Gaelic, or our writers of English, doing good plays of any length if they do not study

the masters. If Irish dramatists had studied the romantic plays of Ibsen, the one great master the modern stage has produced, they would not have sent the Irish Literary Theatre imitations of Boucicault, who had no relation to literature, and Father O'Leary would have put his gift for dialogue, a gift certainly greater than, let us say, Mr. Jones' or Mr. Grundy's, to better use than the writing of that long rambling dramatisation of the *Tain bo Cuailgne*, in which I hear in the midst of the exuberant Gaelic dialogue the worn-out conventions of English poetic drama. The moment we leave even a little the folk-tradition of the peasant, as we must in drama, if we do not know the best that has been said and written in the world, we do not even know ourselves. It is no great labour to know the best dramatic literature, for there is very little of it. We Irish must know it all, for we have, I think, far greater need of the severe discipline of French and Scandinavian drama than of Shakespeare's luxuriance.

If the *Diarmuid and Grania* and the *Casadh an t-Sugain* are not well constructed, it is not because Mr. Moore and Dr. Hyde and myself do not understand the importance of construction, and Mr. Martyn has shown by the triumphant construction of *The Heather Field* how much thought he has given to the matter; but for the most part our Irish plays read as if they were made without a plan, without a 'scenario,' as it is called. European drama began so, but the European drama had centuries for its growth, while our art must grow to perfection in a generation or two if it is not to be smothered before it is well above the earth by what is

merely commercial in the art of England.

Let us learn construction from the masters, and dialogue from ourselves. A relation of mine has just written me a letter, in which he says: 'It is natural to an Irishman to write plays, he has an inborn love of dialogue and sound about him, of a dialogue as lively, gallant, and passionate as in the times of great Eliza. In these days an Englishman's dialogue is that of an amateur, that is to say, it is never spontaneous. I mean in *real life*. Compare it with an Irishman's, above all a poor Irishman's, reckless abandonment and naturalness, or compare it with the only fragment that has come down to us of Shakespeare's own conversation.' (He is remembering a passage in, I think, Ben Jonson's *Underwoods*.) 'Petty commerce and puritanism have brought to the front the wrong type of Englishman; the lively, joyous, yet tenacious man has transferred himself to Ireland. We have him and we will keep him unless the combined nonsense of ... and ... and ... succeed in suffocating him.'

In Dublin the other day I saw a poster advertising a play by a Miss ... under the patronage of certain titled people. I had little hope of finding any reality in it, but I sat out two acts. Its dialogue was above the average, though the characters were the old rattle-traps of the stage, the wild Irish girl, and the Irish servant, and the bowing Frenchman, and the situations had all been squeezed dry generations ago. One saw everywhere the shadowy mind of a woman of the Irish upper classes as they have become to-day, but under it all there was a kind of life, though it was but the life of a

string and a wire. I do not know who Miss ... is, but I know that she is young, for I saw her portrait in a weekly paper, and I think that she is clever enough to make her work of some importance. If she goes on doing bad work she will make money, perhaps a great deal of money, but she will do a little harm to her country. If, on the other hand, she gets into an original relation with life, she will, perhaps, make no money, and she will certainly have her class against her.

The Irish upper classes put everything into a money measure. When anyone among them begins to write or paint they ask him 'How much money have you made?' 'Will it pay?' Or they say, 'If you do this or that you will make more money.' The poor Irish clerk or shopboy,² who writes verses or articles in his brief leisure, writes for the glory of God and of his country; and because his motive is high, there is not one vulgar thought in the countless little ballad books that have been written from Callinan's day to this. They are often clumsily written for they are in English, and if you have not read a great deal, it is difficult to write well in a language which has been long separated, from the 'folk-speech'; but they have not a thought a proud and simple man would not have written. The writers were poor men, but they left that money measure to the Irish upper classes. All Irish writers have to choose whether they will write as the upper

² That mood has gone, with Fenianism and its wild hopes. The National movement has been commercialized in the last few years. How much real ideality is but hidden for a time one cannot say. — W.B.Y., *March*, 1908.

classes have done, not to express but to exploit this country; or join the intellectual movement which has raised the cry that was heard in Russia in the seventies, the cry 'to the people.'

Moses was little good to his people until he had killed an Egyptian; and for the most part a writer or public man of the upper classes is useless to this country till he has done something that separates him from his class. We wish to grow peaceful crops, but we must dig our furrows with the sword.

Our plays this year will be produced by Mr. Benson at the Gaiety Theatre on October the 21st, and on some of the succeeding days. They are Dr. Douglas Hyde's *Casadh an t-Sugain*, which is founded on a well known Irish story of a wandering poet; and *Diarmuid and Grania*, a play in three acts and in prose by Mr. George Moore and myself, which is founded on the most famous of all Irish stories, the story of the lovers whose beds were the cromlechs. The first act of *Diarmuid and Grania*

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