

# CHAINS DRAMATIZA

BY Randolph Bartlett, in Los Angeles Graphic.

After all that has been said by men of noble life as to the secret of all right conduct being only 'Duty, duty, duty,' is man to be told now that duty is the primal curse from which we must redeem ourselves before we can advance another step along the road which, as we imagine—having forgotten the repudiations made by our fathers—duty and duty alone has brought us thus far? But why not? God was one of the most sacred of our conceptions; and He had to be denied. Then Reason became the infallible Pope, only to be deposed in turn. Is Duty more sacred than God or Reason?"

Thus, in his introduction to "The Quintessence of Ibsenism" did George Bernard Shaw arraign duty, generally considered by orthodox social thinkers to be the only stable foundation upon which relations of men and women can be based. The corollary is, how far should the individual be influenced by his duty to society when it conflicts with his obvious duty to himself? The latest of the dramas to enshrine individual freedom as the highest motive actuating man, is Elizabeth Baker's "Chains," a graphic picture of scenes in the lives of the clerk class of London, wherein a young man makes a vain effort to break away from the awful monotony of his existence. The play makes no pretense of dramatic verisimilitude; the innate characters of these people, neither dull enough nor revolutionary enough for high tragedy, preclude such a possibility. The story has its high lights through the awakening of the aspirations of two persons who have had their visions of freedom. All the others wear their chains willingly except the one who makes the losing fight, and these manacles are of many kinds. Some have been weighted with them so long that they have made of them a sort of religion; for others they are gilded with romance; still others lack the mental perspective to realize that there is another life outside of the circumscribed radius to which the chains confine them.

Charles Wilson is an ordinary clerk. His employment may be in a bank, a mercantile establishment, a brokerage office, or anywhere that men are employed in the keeping of accounts and similar capacities. There is a vast amount of this routine work in the business of the world. Someone must attend to the innumerable details of the operations of the men of creative mind who guide large enterprises. Not all can be creative in the commercial world. Wilson is one of the privates in the army of clerks, and he has married a girl whose sister is a clerk, and whose friends are clerks. It is a veritable community of accountants, in which the summit of human achievement is the faithful performance of these mechanical duties so persistently and continuously that eventually the chief clerk dies or is promoted, and the devoted one steps into the exalted position thus vacated. Wilson chafes at the dead level of it all, but seems to have no aspiration. Such a thing as open rebellion does not occur to him. He finds his only relief in the companionship of his devoted young wife, and in pottering around in a postage stamp of a garden, in which nothing can be induced to grow, but where his latent instinct toward creativeness can find some thing like elbow room. Clearly he is in the mood for rebellion, if the inspiration should come.

It does come. The Wilsons eke out the husband's meager salary by taking in a boarder—another clerk named Tennant. He takes Wilson aside and confides to him in all the solemnity of a man who is about to be hanged, that he has decided to give up his position and go to Australia. He has nothing in sight out there, but is going to take the risk. He simply cannot stand it any longer. At first, Wilson is not awakened, and while the idea interests him, much as if his friend were

going on a polar expedition, taking up aviation, or embarking in other such hazardous enterprises, his own conscience does not immediately receive the flip that would make him say, "Why shouldn't I, too?" Wilson's wife, Lily, is frankly amazed, and regards Tennant's determination as absolutely foolish. The idea of giving up what you know you have, and what you can have indefinitely, with the ever present possibility of an ultimate chief clerkship, is preposterous to her.

Lily's sister, Maggie Massey, is the first person to appreciate Tennant's adventurous proceeding. She has felt the chains of the shop dragging upon her, and is looking forward to escape from them in a month or two by the matrimony route, having made an excellent match. She is surprised in admitting to her sister what she not even realized herself, that she is not particularly fond of her fiancé, and suddenly she becomes irritated at the idea. Maggie's admiration for Tennant's course arouses in Wilson the realization that it may not be such an idiotic proceeding after all. His own discontent is intensified that their rent is to be raised, and by his wife's suggestion that they take in two boarders instead of one. "The day we rent the bathroom, Lily—I'm off to the colonies!" he says in a jesting spirit, and then he begins to think of it seriously. The presence of a bathroom in a clerk's house sounds queerly to American readers, who are informed by the voracious writers of humorous travel articles that even the big houses in England have only one or, at most, two of these institutions, but as this is an English play it is entitled to respect in matters of detail such as this.

The more Charley thinks of the possibility of doing himself, what Tennant is going to do, the more dissatisfied he becomes with his condition. Maggie sympathizes with him, almost going so far as to persuade him to take the chance.

MAGGIE: I can never understand why a man gets married. He has so many chances to see the world and do things—and then he goes and marries and settles down and is a family man before he's twenty-four.

WILSON: It's a habit.

MAGGIE: If I were a man I wouldn't stay in England another week. I wouldn't be a quill driver all my life—  
(Wilson walks restlessly up and down the room.)

—If I were a man.

WILSON: Men can't do everything.

MAGGIE: Don't you think it's fine of Mr. Tennant to throw up everything and take the risk?

WILSON: I'd do the same if—

(Lily's voice is heard from the adjoining room.)

MAGGIE: I wonder what Lily would say if you did.

WILSON: (Stops dead and looks at Maggie) If I did? What are you talking about?

MAGGIE: Why shouldn't you?

WILSON: Why shouldn't I? Aren't there a thousand reasons?

MAGGIE: There's Lily, certainly, but

WILSON: She wouldn't understand. She'd think I was deserting her. . . . But that's not all. I might manage her—I don't know—but you see, I've got a berth I can stay in all my life. It's like throwing up a dead cert. And then—

MAGGIE: It would be a splash.

WILSON: Yes, and think of all your people. What'd they say? They'd say I was running away from Lily—of course, it would seem like it. . . . It's impossible. I might never get anything to do—and then—

Thus it trails off, lack of determination, through his will power having been sapped by the routine and force of the ideas of all his relatives and friends preventing him from deciding to make the break, but also from buckling down determinedly to the life that confronts him if he

stays. At this point he receives another shock. He learns that the customary increase in salary which is regarded as the annual reward of the possessor of all the clerical virtues, is not forthcoming. The news is brought by a fellow employe, a veteran in the army of clerks, in whom Wilson sees a picture of what he will become if he remains in the rut. At last, the desire reaches the active stage, and instead of regarding the revolt as impossible, Wilson considers it as a contingency to be considered. He suggests it to the affectionate Lily with disastrous results. She blames it to Tennant, she wails that her husband is tired of her, she will work hard and economize, and take another lodger. She cannot conceive of her husband wanting to do such a thing if he still loves her. So he packs her off to bed, with soothing assurances that he didn't mean a word of it, but when he is alone he unfolds a map of Australia and studies it far into the night.

Sunday, at the home of the parents of Maggie and Lily. The spirit of unrest is everywhere, excepting in the calm bosoms of the thoroughly satisfied elder Masseys. Maggie feels it, and begins to have doubts as to her future happiness as the wife of Walter Foster, a sort of prince among clerks, in spite of the fact that it will mean emancipation from the shop, a fine home, and a servant. Her mother is puzzled at this, but is still more bewildered to learn that Wilson has suggested that he might go to Australia. Maggie hints that office work is monotonous, to which the mother replies, characteristically:

Of course, it is. So is all work. Do you expect work to be pleasant? Does anybody ever like work? The idea is absurd. Anyone would think work was to be pleasant. You don't come into the world to have pleasure. We've got to do our duty and the more cheerfully we can do it, the better for ourselves and everybody else.

There is the clash in a nutshell, the crux of the drama. Which is the voice to which a man should give ear—the one which tells him to do the thing which everyone expects him to do, which will interfere least with the conventions and rules of society, which will cause the least ripple on the placid tide—or should he fight for his right to do the thing that will satisfy the clamor of his own soul? Is joy in work only for an indefinite, future elysium?

And only the Master shall praise us, and only the Master shall blame; And no one shall work for money, and no one shall work for fame, But each for the joy of the working, and each, in his separate star, Shall draw the Thing as he sees it for the God of Things as They are!

There is a regular family row at the Masseys when Wilson admits that he has had this desire to go to Australia, or elsewhere, to try to escape from his chains. Maggie alone can understand his point of view. The others simply argue in a circle. Wilson is a fool to sacrifice what he knows what he can get for mere speculation, and as for a married man thinking of going away, even though he makes it clear that he has a little money saved up upon which Lily can live until he can send for her, it is nothing short of desertion, and he is the next thing to a scoundrel to think of it at all. At last he turns upon his tormentors:

"For heaven's sake, can't you listen fair? My wife needn't go to her father for protection from me! I'm not a scoundrel just because I've got an idea, am I? (A pause—nobody answers) But I'll tell you what, marriage shouldn't tie a man up as if he was a slave. I don't want to desert Lily—she's my wife and I'm proud of it—but because I'm married, am I never to strike out in anything? People like us are just cowards. We seize on the first soft job—and there we stick, like whipped dogs. We're afraid to ask for anything, afraid to ask for a rise even—we wait till it comes,

And when the boss says he won't give you one—do we up and say, "Then I'll go somewhere where I can get more." Not a bit of it. What's the good of sticking here all our lives? Why shouldn't somebody risk something sometimes? We're all so jolly frightened—we've got no spunk—that's where the others get the hold over us—we slog on day after day and when they cut out wages down we take it as meek as Moses. We're not men, we're machines. Next week, I've got my choice—either to take less money to keep my job or to chuck it and try something else. You say—everybody says—keep the job. I expect I shall—I'm a coward like all of you—but what I want to know is, why can't a man have a fit of restlessness and all that, without being thought a villain?"

The play closes with the day of Tennant's departure. Wilson outwardly has become reconciled to his fate, notwithstanding the fact that Lily encouraged him to go in these inspiring words: "If you want to go, I'll never stand in your way." Wilson successfully resists this bit of heroic urging, but Maggie has openly joined the revolutionists and broken her engagement with the highly superior clerk, Foster. She realized, finally that in marrying him she would just be exchanging one form of cage for another, and her common sense perceives the fallacy that a married woman is free. She does not look upon the shop with any more affection than before, but she realizes that at least she can escape from it if driven to desperation, while the idea of ever running from the solid Foster is preposterous.

While everyone has regarded Wilson as recovered from his fever, he has been making plans quietly for breaking away secretly, for his courage has been sapped so completely that he cannot entertain the idea of the scene which would follow an open announcement of his decision. He takes Tennant and Maggie into his confidence. He will leave as usual, for the office, but will take a train for Plymouth and join Tennant on the boat, leaving a letter to Lily to receive after he has sailed, explaining all. He is about to go, and naturally he is looking glum over the serious situation. Lily notices this and to cheer him up whispers a little secret in his ear, and inadvertently, almost, upsets all his plans. He could ignore the criticisms of his friends, the wrath of his wife's family, her own tears, but the responsibility of prescriptive paternity is the deciding factor. He dons his conventional clerk's attire and goes to the office, while Lily sings a hymn which is quite a favorite with her family:

And it will surprise you what the Lord has done,  
Count your blessings, count them one by one,  
Count your blessings, see what God has done,  
Count your blessings, count them one by one.

The chains are triple riveted again, Wilson resumes his life sentence as a clerk; in time he may even become as solid as the jilted Foster and perhaps, one day, call his son a fool for contemplating any other course, and say, "Why I went through that myself once—nearly rushed off to the colonies because I didn't get an increase of salary—but I didn't do it—and here I am."

## HOMEOPATHIC DOSES.

The testimony brought out at the trial of Col. Roosevelt's case in Marquette, Mich., reminds a Kansas story teller of this incident: Once there was a college professor who had been a total abstainer all his life. He became run down in health and had no appetite and his family physician recommended that he take a little beer before each meal. In a week he reported to the doctor:

"That beer has done me no good, and I have taken it regularly before meals each day."

"Uh huh," said the doctor, "how much did you take at a time?"

"Why, doctor," said the professor, "I took a teaspoonful before each meal—in a glass of water."—Boston Herald.