

THE MODERN DRAMA SERIES

EDITED BY EDWIN BJÖRKMAN

THE GODS OF THE MOUNTAIN : THE GOLDEN DOOM : KING
ARGIMĒNĒS AND THE UNKNOWN WARRIOR : THE GLITTERING
GATE : THE LOST SILK HAT : BY LORD DUNSANY

FIVE PLAYS

GODS OF THE MOUNTAIN THE GOLDEN DOOM KING
ARGIMĒNĒS AND THE UNKNOWN WARRIOR THE GLITTERING
GATE THE LOST SILK HAT

BY

LORD DUNSANY

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INTRODUCTION

Observation and imagination are the basic principles of all poetry. It is impossible to conceive a poetical work from which one of them is wholly absent. Observation without imagination makes for obviousness; imagination without observation turns into nonsense. What marks the world's greatest poetry is perhaps the presence in almost equal proportion of both these principles. But as a rule we find one of them predominating, and from this one-sided emphasis the poetry of the period derives its character as realistic or idealistic.

The poetry of the middle nineteenth century made a fetish of observation. It came as near excluding imagination as it could without ceasing entirely to be poetry. That such exaggeration should sooner or later result in a sharp reaction was natural. The change began during the eighties and gathered full headway in the early nineties. Imagination, so long scorned, came into its rights once more, and it is rapidly becoming the dominant note in the literary production of our own day.

The new movement has been called "neo-romantic" and "symbolistic." Both these names apply, but neither of them exhausts the contents or meaning of the movement which received its first impetus from Ibsen and which later found its typical embodiment in Maeterlinck. From this movement came much of the inspiration that produced the poetical re-birth of Ireland out of which has sprung the man whom I have now the pleasure of introducing to American readers: a man with imagination as elfish as moonlight mist.

Edward John Moreton Drax Plunkett, Lord Dunsany, is the eighteenth member of his family to bear the title which gives him a place in the Irish peerage. He was born in 1878 and received his education at Eton and Sandhurst. In 1899 he succeeded his father to the title and the family estate in Meath, Ireland. During the South African war he served at the front with the Coldstream Guards. He is passionately fond of outdoor life and often spends the whole day in the saddle before sitting down at his desk to write late at night.

His work proves, however, that he is as fond of spiritual as of physical exercise, and that he is an inveterate traveller in those mysterious regions of the partly known or wholly unknown where the imagination alone can guide us. His first literary heroes were the brothers Grimm and Andersen. Then the Greek world of Olympians was revealed to him, making a lasting impression on his mind. But it was the Bible that gave him the limpid style which makes his most fantastic tales as real as government reports—or rather much more so. "For years no style seemed to me natural but that of the Bible," he said not long ago, "and I feared that I would never become a writer when I saw that other people did not use it."

For something like ten years he has been a pretty frequent and increasingly valued contributor to English and Anglo-Irish periodicals. He has previously published five volumes: "The Gods of Pegana," 1905; "Time and the Gods," 1906; "The Sword of Welleran," 1908; "A Dreamer's Tales," 1910; and "The Book of Wonder," 1912. All are collections of prose pieces that defy accepted classifications. They are fairy tales and short stories and essays and prose poems at the same time.

The reader has only to take a brief glance at one of those works to make the astounding discovery that he is being introduced to worlds of which he has never heard before. Even the "Arabian Nights" have a clearly identifiable background of popular legend and myth. Nothing of the kind is to be found in the writings of Lord Dunsany. He may be said to have created a new mythology wholly his own. He is not only the master but the maker of the countries to which he takes us on such fascinating jaunts. His commonest name for them is the Edge of the World, but sometimes he speaks of them as the Lands of

Wonder. This latter name is doubly significant, for the whole movement of which he forms such a striking manifestation has been defined as a "renascence of wonder."

The names of places and persons appearing in the stories of Lord Dunsany are worth a study in themselves. There are hundreds of them, giving evidence of an inexhaustible imagination; and each one of them is as aptly suggestive as if generations of men had been at work shaping them. To hear of Sardathion, the city built by the Gods of Old, is to see its domes of marble rising sky-high in the sunset-lighted air. To hear of Slith and Sippy and Slorg, the three thieves who went to the Edge of the World in quest of the Golden Box, is to feel as if one were dealing with historical characters like Aaron Burr or Chinese Gordon. And as we learn more about them, these fanciful creatures of Lord Dunsany's brain assume still more familiar characteristics, as if they had been studied in some Irish village or English street. It is this fact that reveals one of the main secrets of Lord Dunsany's appeal: that behind all his exuberant imagination lies a solid basis of observation, enabling him to endow the most impossible adventures with a homely and convincing air.

The five plays contained in the present volume have all been produced on the stage. "The Golden Doom" and "The Gods of the Mountain" have been staged most successfully at the Haymarket Theatre, London. "King Argimēnēs" and "The Glittering Gate" have been given by the Irish Players, and "The Lost Silk Hat" has been put on by Iden Payne at Manchester. In America, the first three have been in the repertoire of Stuart Walker's Portmanteau Theatre, and "The Glittering Gate" has been given by the Neighborhood Players.

After seeing "The Gods of the Mountain," Frank Harris wrote: "It was one of the nights of my life; the only play, I said to myself, which meant anything to me in twenty years or more." Without sharing the opinion of Mr. Harris about the dramatic output of the last twenty years, I share fully his enthusiasm in regard to the play that caused his remark. The note struck in it is so distinctly new as to make one gasp as under a sharp shock. But the surprise turns quickly into pleasure such as only the originality of genius can confer.

It is hard to define just what makes these plays what they are. But certain qualities are tangible. Their deep and rich symbolism is one. It is the kind of symbolism for which the advances of modern psychology had prepared us—the kind that is inseparable from life itself as we are only just beginning to understand it. Another quality is their capacity for suggesting at once the intimate unity and appalling vastness of life. In "The Golden Doom" the fate of an empire and a little boy's desire for a new plaything become linked as facts of equal importance in the web of fate. In "The Gods of the Mountain" we meet with an atmosphere of fatality comparable only to that found in the Greek dramas. The crime of *hybris*, which to the Greeks was the "unforgivable sin," is here made as real to us as it was to them.

But these remarks of mine about the inner significance of the plays should not tempt anybody into thinking them deficient in that element of formal perfection without which they could not be classed as works of art. They are, indeed, "things of beauty," and their beauty inheres in their design as well as in their style. Through all of them the greatest possible economy of means has been observed, so that not a word, not a tone, not a gesture is wasted in obtaining the effect aimed at. The dialogue of Maeterlinck is suggested, but not more than suggested. The words spoken by the characters of Maeterlinck are often so vague as to be practically meaningless. The characters of Lord Dunsany speak as simply as those of Maeterlinck, but always sharply to the point; there can be no mistaking of what they mean, and that meaning serves always to carry the action of the play forward. And each play of Lord Dunsany's is an exciting adventure, conveying to the reader an exhilarating sense of motion without ever descending to old-fashioned stage tricks for the production of that sense. This means that they combine to an extraordinary degree the qualities which make separately for theatrical or literary success.

Edwin Björkman.

CHRONOLOGICAL LIST OF PLAYS BY LORD DUNSANY

The Glittering Gate, 1909
King Argimēnēs and the Unknown Warrior, 1911
The Gods of the Mountain, 1911
The Golden Doom, 1912
The Lost Silk Hat, 1913
The Tents of the Arabs, 1915
A Night at an Inn, 1916
The Queen's Enemies, 1916
The Laughter of the Gods, 1917

THE GODS OF THE MOUNTAIN PERSONS

Agmar }
Slag }
Ulf }
Oogno } *Beggar*
 } s
Thahn }
Mlan }
A Thief }

Oorand }
er }
Illanaun } *Citizens*
Akmos }

The Dromedary
Men
Citizens, etc.
The Others

Scene: The East

THE GODS OF THE MOUNTAIN

THE FIRST ACT

Outside a city wall. Three beggars are seated upon the ground.

OOGNO

These days are bad for beggary.

THAHN

They are bad.

ULF (*an older beggar but not gray*)

Some evil has befallen the rich ones of this city. They take no joy any longer in benevolence, but are become sour and miserly at heart. Alas for them! I sometimes sigh for them when I think of this.

OOGNO

Alas for them! A miserly heart must be a sore affliction.

THAHN

A sore affliction indeed, and bad for our calling.

OOGNO (*reflectively*)

They have been thus for many months. What thing has befallen them?

THAHN

Some evil thing.

ULF

There has been a comet come near to the earth of late and the earth has been parched and sultry so that the gods are drowsy and all those things that are divine in man, such as benevolence, drunkenness, extravagance, and song, have faded and died and have not been replenished by the gods.

OOGNO

It has indeed been sultry.

THAHN

I have seen the comet o' nights.

ULF

The gods are drowsy.

OOGNO

If they awake not soon and make this city worthy again of our order I for one shall forsake the calling and buy a shop and sit at ease in the shade and barter for gain.

THAHN

You will keep a shop?

[Enter Agmar and Slag. Agmar, though poorly dressed, is tall, imperious, and older than Ulf. Slag follows behind him.]

AGMAR

Is this a beggar who speaks?

OOGNO

Yes, master, a poor beggar.

AGMAR

How long has the calling of beggary existed?

OOGNO

Since the building of the first city, master.

AGMAR

And when has a beggar ever followed a trade? When has he ever haggled and bartered and sat in a shop?

OOGNO

Why, he has never done so.

AGMAR

Are you he that shall be first to forsake the calling?

OOGNO

Times are bad for the calling here.

THAHN

They are bad.

AGMAR

So you would forsake the calling?

OOGNO

The city is unworthy of our calling. The gods are drowsy and all that is divine in man is dead. (*To third beggar*) Are not the gods drowsy?

ULF

They are drowsy in their mountains away at Marma. The seven green idols are drowsy. Who is this that rebukes us?

THAHN

Are you some great merchant, master? Perhaps you will help a poor man that is starving.

SLAG

My master a merchant! No, no. He is no merchant. My master is no merchant.

OOGNO

I perceive that he is some lord in disguise. The gods have woken and have sent him to save us.

SLAG

No, no. You do not know my master. You do not know him.

THAHN

Is he the Soldan's self that has come to rebuke us?

AGMAR

I am a beggar, and an old beggar.

SLAG (*with great pride*)

There is none like my master. No traveller has met with cunning like to his, not even those that come from Æthiopia.

ULF

We make you welcome to our town, upon which an evil has fallen, the days being bad for beggary.

AGMAR

Let none who has known the mystery of roads or has felt the wind arising new in the morning, or who has called forth out of the souls of men divine benevolence, ever speak any more of any trade or of the miserable gains of shops and the trading men.

OOGNO

I but spoke hastily, the times being bad.

AGMAR

I will put right the times.

SLAG

There is nothing that my master cannot do.

AGMAR (*to Slag*)

Be silent and attend to me. I do not know this city. I have travelled from far, having somewhat exhausted the city of Ackara.

SLAG

My master was three times knocked down and injured by carriages there, once he was killed and seven times beaten and robbed, and every time he was generously compensated. He had nine diseases, many of them mortal—

AGMAR

Be silent, Slag.—Have you any thieves among the calling here?

ULF

We have a few that we call thieves here, master, but they would scarcely seem thieves to you. They are not good thieves.

AGMAR

I shall need the best thief you have.

[Enter two citizens richly clad, Illanaun and Oorander.]

ILLANAUN

Therefore we will send galleons to Ardaspes.

OORANDER

Right to Ardaspes through the silver gates.

[Agmar transfers the thick handle of his long staff to his left armpit, he droops on to it and it supports his weight; he is upright no longer. His right arm hangs limp and useless. He hobbles up to the citizens imploring alms.]

ILLANAUN

I am sorry. I cannot help you. There have been too many beggars here and we must decline alms for the good of the town.

AGMAR *(sitting down and weeping)*

I have come from far.

[Illanaun presently returns and gives Agmar a coin. Exit Illanaun. Agmar, erect again, walks back to the others.]

AGMAR

We shall need fine raiment; let the thief start at once. Let it rather be green raiment.

BEGGAR

I will go and fetch the thief. (*Exit*)

ULF

We will dress ourselves as lords and impose upon the city.

OOGNO

Yes, yes; we will say we are ambassadors from a far land.

ULF

And there will be good eating.

SLAG (*in an undertone to Ulf*)

But you do not know my master. Now that you have suggested that we shall go as lords, he will make a better suggestion. He will suggest that we should go as kings.

ULF

Beggars as kings!

SLAG

Ay. You do not know my master.

ULF (*to Agmar*)

What do you bid us do?

AGMAR

You shall first come by the fine raiment in the manner I have mentioned.

ULF

And what then, master?

AGMAR

Why, then we shall go as gods.

BEGGARS

As gods!

AGMAR

As gods. Know you the land through which I have lately come in my wanderings? Marma, where the gods are carved from green stone in the mountains. They sit all seven of them against the hills. They sit there motionless and travellers worship them.

ULF

Yes, yes, we know those gods. They are much revered here, but they are drowsy and send us nothing beautiful.

AGMAR

They are of green jade. They sit cross-legged with their right elbows resting on their left hands, the right forefinger pointing upward. We will come into the city disguised, from the direction of Marma, and will claim to be these gods. We must be seven as they are. And when we sit we must sit cross-legged as they do, with the right hand uplifted.

ULF

This is a bad city in which to fall into the hands of oppressors, for the judges lack amiability here as the merchants lack benevolence, ever since the gods forgot them.

AGMAR

In our ancient calling a man may sit at one street corner for fifty years doing the one thing, and yet a day may come when it is well for him to rise up and do another thing while the timorous man starves.

ULF

Also it were well not to anger the gods.

AGMAR

Is not all life a beggary to the gods? Do they not see all men always begging of them and asking alms with incense, and bells, and subtle devices?

OOGNO

Yes, all men indeed are beggars before the gods.

AGMAR

Does not the mighty Soldan often sit by the agate altar in his royal temple as we sit at a street corner or by a palace gate?

ULF

It is even so.

AGMAR

Then will the gods be glad when we follow the holy calling with new devices and with subtlety, as they are glad when the priests sing a new song.

ULF

Yet I have a fear.

[Enter two men talking.]

AGMAR *(to Slag)*

Go you into the city before us and let there be a prophecy there which saith that the gods who are carven from green rock in the mountain shall one day arise in Marma and come here in the guise of men.

SLAG

Yes, master. Shall I make the prophecy myself? Or shall it be found in some old document?

AGMAR

Let someone have seen it once in some rare document. Let it be spoken of in the market place.

SLAG

It shall be spoken of, master.

[Slag lingers. Enter Thief and Thahn.]

OOGNO

This is our thief.

AGMAR (*encouragingly*)

Ah, he is a quick thief.

THIEF

I could only procure you three green raiments, master. The city is not now well supplied with them; moreover, it is a very suspicious city and without shame for the baseness of its suspicions.

SLAG (*to a beggar*)

This is not thieving.

THIEF

I could do no more, master. I have not practised thieving all my life.

AGMAR

You have got something: it may serve our purpose. How long have you been thieving?

THIEF

I stole first when I was ten.

SLAG (*in horror*)

When he was ten!

AGMAR

We must tear them up and divide them amongst the seven. (*To Thahn*) Bring me another beggar.

SLAG

When my master was ten he had already to slip by night out of two cities.

OOGNO (*admiringly*)

Out of two cities?

SLAG (*nodding his head*)

In his native city they do not now know what became of the golden cup that stood in the Lunar Temple.

AGMAR

Yes, into seven pieces.

ULF

We will each wear a piece of it over our rags.

OOGNO

Yes, yes, we shall look fine.

AGMAR

That is not the way that we shall disguise ourselves.

OOGNO

Not cover our rags?

AGMAR

No, no. The first who looked closely would say, "These are only beggars. They have disguised themselves."

ULF

What shall we do?

AGMAR

Each of the seven shall wear a piece of the green raiment underneath his rags. And peradventure here and there a little shall show through; and men shall say, "These seven have disguised themselves as beggars. But we know not what they be."

SLAG

Hear my wise master.

OOGNO (*in admiration*)

He is a beggar.

ULF

He is an *old* beggar.

CURTAIN

THE SECOND ACT

The Metropolitan Hall of the city of Kongros. Citizens, etc.

Enter the seven beggars with green silk under their rags.

OORANDER

Who are you and whence come you?

AGMAR

Who may say what we are or whence we come?

OORANDER

What are these beggars and why do they come here?

AGMAR

Who said to you that we were beggars?

OORANDER

Why do these men come here?

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