

CHAPTER-II

THE LITTLE DREAM, DEFEAT,

AND

THE SUN

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(I)

John Galsworthy's first one-act play, The Little Dream, is, with the exception of A Bit O'Love, the only play, where the social problems of the day are replaced by a full play of the rich imagination of a poet and a dreamer. It was put at the Gaiety Theatre, Manchester, by Miss Horniman in 1911. It is a poetic rendering of an innocent mountain-girl's aspiration for love and fuller life. In her search for happiness, Seelchen, "the little soul", acquires experience and knowledge and realizes the contrast between the peace of mountain side and the lure of cities. The present century has witnessed the desertion of rural England and overcrowding of the cities. John Galsworthy has dramatized this phenomenon in the form of an idyll. It shows the conflict between the values of city life and those of country life in the mind of an innocent mountain-girl. So The Little Dream presents the dream world containing the adventures of a soul in search of life and happiness.

Seelchen, an eighteen year old daughter of a peasant living in a remote mountain, is hungry for thrill. The three great peaks, namely, the Wine Horn, the Cow Horn and the inaccessible Great Horn are visible through the window of her

hut. Seelchen falls in love with Lamond, a climber from the city, who stays for one night at the Mountain inn. She asks him, "Is it very nice in towns, in the world where you come from ?" (The Little Dream, from The Plays of John Galsworthy, p.205). Then there is a little dream, in which she is torn between Lamond, the young climber from the great city and Felsman, the chief guide of the valley. In fact, she is attracted towards the life represented by them. Seelchen yields first to one and then to another of her suitors. She gets tired of the town and even the dull mountains fail to attract her. She aspires for something which shall include them both and will offer still more; something that will have continuity and yet change and universality too. Firstly, she listens to the offer of the mountain peak of the Wine Horn and then to that of the Cow Horn. But the sweetest voice comes from the Great Horn, which says, "Both thou shalt love, little soul ! Thou shalt lie on the hills with silence; and dance in the cities with knowledge. Both shall possess thee ! " (The Little Dream, p. 208). The trance of Seelchen comes to an end, when she wakes in the ever-touched freshness of the mountain dawn.

This one-act play with six short scenes exploits the location of Devon. Galsworthy used the Austrian setting for many of his works like The Little Dream and The Little Man. Generally Galsworthy maintains the realistic attitude rather than the romantic, in his plays as well as one-act plays. But

The Little Dream is free from all rationalism. It is an idyll filled with a soul's yearning. Harry Shaw, in his Dictionary of Literary Terms defines an Idyll as "a composition in prose or verse describing pastoral scenes and events or any simple, appealing and charming incident. It's an idealized story of happy innocence."²⁷ The Little Dream, with its dream-like and visionary atmosphere, is a significant illustration of this definition.

Galsworthy has presented the longings and aspirations of this innocent mountain girl in a symbolic manner. Leon Schalit observes in John Galsworthy : a Survey, that Villa Rubein, his early novel, ends with a symbolic question : "Can we never have enough ?" and this is one of the leading ideas in The Little Dream. Each major character is a symbol, an idea. Seelchen, swaying here and there in her "little dream" is the incorporation of human longings. Felsman, the mountaineer, is the symbol of the harmony between the nature and the mountains. Lamond, the vivid adventurer, represents empty joys of the cities. In the second scene, there are seven additional symbolic characters (three mountains and four flowers) in the dream. In the third scene also there are many figures in the dream, such as Moth Children, Goat Boys etc. This symbolism in theme and characters, does demand a verse one-act play. In a letter to Frank Lucas written on Oct. 10, 1912, Galsworthy wrote : "The deeper symbolism of The Little Dream is so personal to me, so intimate, that I rather despair of making it clear in prose."²⁸ Even the stage-directions

enhance the poetic atmosphere. In the second scene the flowers lough happily to favour the Cow Horn, one of the symbolic characters. In the fourth scene a faint wailing of wind is heard when Seelchen says that the air will be there "to freeze me." (The L.D., p.213). The one-act play ends after Seelchen's dream and then "through the open door, the first flush of dawn shows in the sky. There is a sound of goat-bells passing." (The L.D., p. 216).

The Little Dream, certainly, stands as a class by itself. Because it is largely in verse, and in spirit it is almost a poem presented on the stage. Some of the verses are accompanied by music and dance. It is a long poem of 3000 words dipped in the atmosphere of the full moon. Galsworthy, independently, published his collections of poems three times, i.e. in 1913, 1926 and 1934. The poetic touch is found in some other plays. A Bit O'Love (1915), most personal of Galsworthy's plays, also has the background of Devonshire village. The mood of The Little Dream lingered into the next full-length play The Pigeon (1911). Similarly, there is an inter-traffic between The Little Dream and two other works written at this time in different genres. They are - (1) Moods, Songs and Doggerels, a collection of poems published in 1912, and (2) The Inn of Tranquillity, a collection of sketches, stories and essays, also published in 1912. Even a novel, The Dark Flower (1913) contains three episodes, namely Spring, Summer and Autumn. An account given by Margaret Morris in My Galsworthy Story shows that his interest in the young



dancer began to develop during this period. His first letter to her was written on 9-2-1911. In fact, Galsworthy asked her to play the role of Drowning in The Little Dream.²⁹ A play written earlier, Joy (1907), was also an idyll in a garden endangered by the shadow of a non-idyllic world outside. But it was not received well by the people who had labelled Galsworthy "a realist".

Even The Little Dream was not successful on the stage. It includes, in addition to the major characters, various voices and apparitions. Hence it was difficult to make its symbolism comprehensible on the stage. However, Galsworthy seemed to be satisfied. He wrote on 17-5-1911, "The Little Dream, though I think only understood by one in ten, impressed people and was a great success in its way."³⁰ Galsworthy may be a bit unaware of another potentiality of this one-act play. It can be a good Radio-play or a Television play. Margaret Morris rightly stated in 1967, "I think it is really an impossibility for the theatre, though I believe it might make a very good film."³¹ This solitary experiment in poetry, by Galsworthy, failed to fetch much success. But it is an important landmark in the career of a dramatist, who is known as a "grim" person. Mottram, in his biography of John Galsworthy, writes, "certainly no one else could have brought about the actual production on the commercial stage of what is either a dramatic poem, or a poetic miniature drama."³²

(II)

John Galsworthy's novels and plays did not deal with the theme of war. It was only in the shorter pieces that Galsworthy wrote directly about the war. Defeat and The Sun are his one-act plays which have the background of the First World War.

Defeat was written in October, 1916 and it was produced at the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith on 14th March, 1920. Galsworthy's experiences of Boer War and First World War might have led him to reflect on war as the root cause of social evils. This one-act play presents a touching scene in the First World War depicting the depth of national pride in men and women. An English officer visits a street girl without being aware that she is a German, therefore, doubly despised and outcast from society. He realizes from her talk that she has become homesick as well as cynic. She is disgusted with war and all people on either side who are waging the war. She says, "I despise my people too; even more, because they began this war.----- I despise all the peoples. Why haf they made the world so miserable." (Defeat, in Six Short Plays, p.103). The officer is sympathetic to her, when he knows that she is an outcast. He tries to persuade her about human kindness and unselfishness. Suddenly the shouting of the newspaper boy is heard. Britain's victory is announced. The excited

officer lays down two notes and rushes off. In spite of all the cynicism and disgust of her own nation, the girl tears the notes, though she has got only one shilling with her. Outside the passing soldiers are singing "Rule Britannia". The cheering for her country's disasters upsets her and with all her might she begins to sing: "Die wacht am Rhein."

There are only two characters in this "tiny drama". The German girl is very honest. At first she does not reveal her identity. But having seen the officer's sympathy she says, "I am not Russian at all - I am German." (Defeat, p. 101). She is Galsworthy's spokesman on the theme of the war. That is why she despises her people too; even more, because they began this war. The bitter experiences of the war have made the German girl a cynic. She says, "I believe in nothing, not even my country." (p.107). Through her dialogues Galsworthy ironically points out that the people of every nation think that if they win, the world will be better. There is a touch of satire as well as pathos in her question to the officer, "You think the war is fought for the future; you are giving your lives for a better world, aren't you?" (p.105). The young officer, on the other hand, is a typical military man. He simply says, "We do our job-- that's all." (p.100). But he is influenced by the pathos in her life and he admits, "You upset me." (p.106).

The theme of Defeat is less dramatic and it presents much discussion about the effects of war. But the tense moment

is presented at the end with the help of dramatic irony - Galsworthy's regular weapon. The contrast at the end is very touching. The German girl sings with all her might : "Die Wacht am Rhein". And outside men pass, singing : "Rule, Britannia ! " Similarly, like Justice, this one-act play also presents many wordless episodes, which exhibit Galsworthy's effective use of stage-directions and a keen sense of situation.

In a letter, written in 1932, Galsworthy had described the War as "insensolly". Defeat shows how people suffer from the excessive ardours of patriotism. The forlorn German girl throws away her degradingly earned money to sing. "Die Wacht am Rhein" in the moment of her country's defeat. Galsworthy has properly noted the drama hidden in this situation.

Another short play, The Sun depicts the cruel effect of war on the relationship between a soldier and his beloved. The Sun was written in 1919 and it was performed, for the first time, at the Liverpool Playhouse in 1922.

The soldier in this one-act play returns from the front, after a long absence of three years. He is very much eager to marry Daisy, his girl. But he happens to find that she has fallen in love with another man, who is ready to fight with the soldier for Daisy. But the soldier says, "No more fightin", no more drillin', no more sleepin' rough". (The Sun in Six Short Plays, pp. 117-118). The soldier, just out of the war, is too happy to brood over his misfortunes. He thinks the world is before him

as the sun is shining; hence he would not hurt any body. He is charmed by the very idea that he is able to breathe the fresh air in the atmosphere when "the bright sun shines; the quiet river flows; the cuckoo is calling." (The Sun, p.113). The soldier forgives Daisy. He looks on the Sun and with a laugh he goes away.

There are only three characters in this one-act play : Daisy, the girl, Jack, the soldier and Jim, the Man, who jeers at the soldier, when he says, "One man's luck is another's poison." (p.113). The soldier's misery is not found on the surface. It is hidden in the irony of the situation in which the (gilted) lover, aware of the cause of his misfortune, does not mention it plainly. He deludes himself simply with the appreciation of the shining sun and the singing cuckoo. However, he mentions the war twice, as a sorrowful event. He refers to his war experiences and tells Jim, "I don't want to see a girl cry, this day of all, with the sun shinin'....."(p.119). He would not fight with his rival, when he challenges him. This pathetic picture shows the horrors of war in the lives of nameless and numberless human beings. Even the girl is not to be blamed much. The soldier's arrival was rather unexpected for her. That is why she said, "I never thought he'd come back from the fightin'."(p.114).

Thus, The Sun, points out a pathetic situation in the life of a soldier, after the war has ceased. One is reminded of A.A. Milne's one-act play, The Boy Comes Home, in which Philip, a young boy coming from the war, wants to burn his uniform and sell his revolver and spend the rest of his life in the British Museum and be happy.