

CHAPTER-III

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(I)

The literary career of John Galsworthy shows a successful handling of various genres. His nephew, Rudolf Sauter, notes in Galsworthy The Man, that one day, when they were riding together on Dartmoor, he asked his uncle why it was that he sometimes chose the novel and sometimes the stage as a means of expression. Galsworthy told him that a theme would occur to him already dressed either as a story or a play - seldom as both.³³ There are only two occasions when an idea is simultaneously expressed in both the forms. 'The Stoic', a tale from Five Tales was dramatized as Old English. Secondly, a one-act play The First and the Last was an effective dramatization of the story of the same name from Five Tales. These dramatizations were made in spite of his conviction that the same material cannot be successfully used in different genres. In the two instances mentioned above he could not for some time decide in which form to work it out; and ended by expressing it in both. But it must be noted that in no circumstances did he convert a play into a story or a story into a play.

The one-act play, The First and the Last was written in June 1917 and its first performance took place in London in 1919. The story was written before 1917, but it was published in Five Tales in 1927. The First and the Last has a typical Galsworthy touch of a problem play. Like The Silver Box, a full-length play presented in 1906, this one-act play also presents the dominance of poverty and helplessness. It deals with a thrilling situation which presents a deep attachment between a reckless man and an unfortunate street woman and at the same time the struggle of worldly Keith Darrant on the verge of becoming a judge, to save his erring but lovable brother, who is that reckless man. Keith Darrant, a successful barrister is suddenly confronted by his brother who suddenly lurks in the shadow of his study in the evening. Keith asks his brother, "what is it, man? Have you committed a murder that you stand there like a fish?" To his great shock Larry answers in a whisper, "Yes, Keith." ^{The} (First and the Last in Six Short Plays, p.12). The circumstances of the murder reveal love between Larry and Wanda, an unfortunate Polish girl of twenty, who was driven to a bad life because of circumstances, till she met Larry. She finds in Larry a noble lover. She has the lost dog's love for him. But, Patrick Walenn, a mongrel, responsible for her indecent life, again comes to shatter her peaceful union with Larry and he becomes the victim. For Keith, this is a matter of prestige, as he is awaiting judgeship. He tries hard with every ingenuity to conceal the crime and gets Larry and Wanda away. Meanwhile, the policemen arrest a vagabond

trying to rob the dead body. He is charged with murder and Keith advises his brother to leave the country. But good natured Larry is disturbed and he says, "The poorest little wretch on God's earth - locked up - for me ! A little wild animal, locked up. There he goes, up and down - in his cage....." ^{The} (First and the Last, p.35). That innocent vagabond is given the verdict of death. But Larry resolves to save him. Larry and Wanda, the fallen woman for whom Larry killed the man, commit suicide. Larry leaves behind, a letter of confession of murder. But Keith, an ambitious lawyer and the King's counsel, burns the letter for family prestige. He obliterates every trace of connection with Larry and leaves the bodies to be discovered. Thus, in spite of the sacrifice of Larry and Wanda, the vagabond is destined to die.

The title of this one-act play has a reference to the line from the Holy Writ : "So the last shall be first and the first last." Galsworthy's presentation of Keith, Larry and Wanda, is very effective. He says about his characters, "It might be said of Shaw's plays that he creates characters who express feelings which they have not got. It might be said of mine, that I create characters who have feelings which they cannot express."³⁴ This is true as far as the three characters in this one-act play are concerned. Wanda, a woman without shelter reveals goodness of her mind. In the plays like The Pigeon and Exiled, Galsworthy presents such outcasts. Like Megans in The Pigeon, Wanda is a victim of poverty, and therefore she is insecure in the society. But she

has earnest and genuine love for Larry. She would die rather than part company with him. Like Larry she also has sympathy for the vagabond who was arrested because he was found near the dead body and had stolen a ring. Wanda says, "Perhaps he was hungry. I have been hungry. You do things then that you would not." (p.38) Larry, the major character, like Anthony and Roberts in The Silver Box, comes out of the fray with his head bloody, but unbowed. He commits a murder and comes to his brother for advice. But once he knows about the arrest of the vagabond, he follows his own inclinations. His evil action goes on pinching him as the similar action does the young law student in Dostoevsky's novel Crime and Punishment. He says to his brother, "I must see how it goes with that poor devil." (p.33) He is restless for the period of two months during which the trial goes on in the court. The verdict is out and Larry makes up his mind to end his life. He hates this world - Keith's world. Keith, belonging to the practical world presents a sharp contrast to Larry. He thinks of himself and his family. Larry rightly says to him, "By God, you are a stony devil !" (p.18) Keith finds himself in a dilemma, after Larry and Wanda commit suicide. He cannot let the world realize that he has known the whole affair for the two months. He exclaims, "My name....my whole fortune !" (p.43) and escapes through the awkward situation.

The First and the Last, thus, reveals Galsworthy's keen sense of situation. Like The Little Man it has been divided into three scenes. But Galsworthy's first one-act play The Little Dream

has six scenes. Except these three one-act plays, 'no other one-act play has been divided into scenes. Another remarkable aspect of the structure of The First and the Last is that, it is the only one-act play of Galsworthy, which takes liberty with the time. There is a gap of two months between the second and the third scene. A close study of Galsworthy's style shows that he occasionally creates drama without resorting to any language. Some of his most powerful scenes are wordless. Like Defeat, this one-act play also has many 'dumb scenes'. The agonies of Keith in the last scene are presented merely through the gestures indicated in the stage directions. The curtain falls after the detailed stage directions have given the spectators the idea of the horror of the situation. The effective use of the stage directions is found in Galsworthy's plays like The Silver Box and Justice. Like the one-act play, Defeat, in The First and the Last also, the newspaper boy has been used for an important announcement.

The First and the Last was successful on the stage. Rudolf Sauter writes, "Meggie Albanesi's acting had virtually reduced the whole audience to tears."³⁵ The one-act play has an element of a thriller and Galsworthy never surpassed its poignancy. The spectators receive a shock in the second scene when Keith is talking with Wanda in her room. There is a knock on the door. A policeman comes to warn that the outer door is open. With Justice and The First and the Last, the whole climate

of the theatre was changing. The road was being paved for Look Back In Anger and The Caretaker. Of course, like a typical Galsworthy play The First and the Last succeeds in communicating the idea that society is the villain. It brightens Galsworthy's image as a steady enemy of all oppressions.

(II)

Three one-act plays of Galsworthy, namely, The Little Man, Hall Marked and Punch and Go have a strain of satire. The Little Man was written before the outbreak of the First World War. It was written in November 1913, but it was performed first in Birmingham in 1915. It was also presented in New York at Maxine Elliott's Theatre in 1917 as a curtain raiser to G.K. Chesterton's play Magic. Before the First World War, Galsworthy and his wife Ada travelled widely in America, Egypt, Canada, Russia, British Columbia and Austria. Galsworthy might have come across the nature of officialdom, different types of persons and the general human nature in these travels. The Little Man deals with the theme of egotism in individual lives, by presenting various sketches of the humanity. Galsworthy ridicules egoism and hollow idealism and stresses the importance of fellowship and understanding in life. The situation arises out of an incident in a journey by train in which persons of different nationalities are involved just accidentally.

The first scene takes place at a railway-platform restaurant of an Austrian railway station. A small group consisting of persons of different nationalities is waiting for the train and harassing the waiter by giving various quick orders. The American talks of brotherhood, equality and individual freedom and beats the drum of his country. He praises Leo Tolstoi as a grand man, but the German dismisses Tolstoi as a sentimentalist and hails Nietzsche as the true philosopher. The Englishman and his wife do not respond to the discussion. They remain aloof by hiding themselves behind the newspapers. The Dutch youth simply laughs. A lonely woman of low station is sitting with her baby and two large bundles. There is the Little Man of uncertain nationality, who simply observes the travellers and occasionally participates in the discussion. It is announced that the train is arriving at the other platform. All persons rush in excitement to catch the train. The woman of lower class is unable to run with her baby and two large bundles. She calls for help and only the Little Man rushes back, picks up the baby and a bundle and asks the woman to follow him with the other bundle. But she fails to catch the train and is separated from the baby. The second scene shows a second class corridor compartment in a moving train occupied by the same group of travellers. The Little Man somehow huddles himself inside the same compartment, with the baby. All the passengers, led by the American, loudly appreciate the generosity of the Little Man.

The baby wails, the Little Man rocks it and a peal of laughter goes on from the compartment. But the humanity of the travellers is evaporated as soon as they see one black spot on the head of the baby. The German suspects typhus and one by one the passengers go to the corridor under some pretext, as they want to avoid the company of the Little Man and the baby. Even the American praises the Little Man once again and disappears saying, "Guess I'm wanted in the dining-car." (The Little Man in Six Short Plays, p.65). The Little Man alone nurses the baby, unable to understand the sudden change in the behaviour of his fellow-travellers. The third scene presents the Little Man with the baby at a station. As he answers 'no' when asked if it is his child, he is arrested. He cannot make himself understood, as he speaks English only. The official shows him a telegram with instructions to "Rest gentleman mit black baby." (The Little Man, p.70). The American interferes and says that the Little Man is an angel and the baby has typhus fever. The official asks the Little Man to give up the child at once, but he refuses. But the baby's mother arrives by the next train. She is mad with joy to see her baby safe in the hands of the Little Man. Now the official wants to arrest her at once for taking about a child with typhus. But it is soon revealed that the baby has no typhus and its legs are "as white as a banana". All the passengers are ashamed of their behaviour. The American exploits the opportunity by delivering a speech, full of sentiment, admiration and idealism. All including the official and police-

men show their reverence. The mother of the baby kisses his hand with gratitude. The American snaps the group.

Galsworthy has exhibited the national characteristics of the English, the American, the German and the Dutch with a lot of fun. He has employed various ways for characterization. The Dutch youth, for instance, simply laughs now and again at everything. He neither speaks nor does anything. Perhaps it is his typical expression of egotism. It is remarkable that Galsworthy does not follow the convention of giving proper names to his characters. He has the purpose of abstracting and making the theme more general. Galsworthy has followed this practice in Defeat and to some extent in The Sun and Hall Marked. The English persons in this one-act play speak hardly any dialogues. They watch everything from a distance. The Englishman's egoism is typical. He would not allow his wife to show sympathy for the baby. The German man shows his approval of the Little Man in his stiff, formal way. His realism presents a contrast to the superficial idealism of the American. He is proud of Nietzsche and reads Don Quixote, but he is unwilling to make room for the Little Man, who struggles in the compartment with the baby in his arms. It is the German man, who declares without caring to know the truth - that the baby has typhus. The American is the most amusing figure. He attempts to be sociable at all costs. He reveals superficiality as well as immaturity. He is a talkative

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person, who praises the Little Man as a "saint" who "only wants a halo....."(p.74). He admires the Little Man's heroism and goodness. But he himself has none of these qualities. So there is a lot of irony in the American's behaviour. He defines the hero as "a person that'll help another at the expense of himself."(p.53) But he himself shows only verbal sympathy to the needy woman. Some sensitive reviewers have found Galsworthy guilty of presenting the somewhat fanciful American. But Helen Cohen rightly points out, "The dramatist has been equally disrespectful in his handling of Germans, Dutch and English."³⁶ The Little Man is the good, kindhearted, unknown citizen of the world. He is a good Samaritan and hence he does not represent any particular nationality. As against the egoistic vanities and selfish fear exhibited by others, he reveals noble behaviour. Thus a meeting of heterogeneous company takes place on a railway platform.

The one-act play The Little Man is a satire on human nature in general and the European travellers in particular. Besides it satirizes officialdom also. Apparently it seems that Galsworthy makes fun of all the nationalities represented - the aggressively voluble American, the reserved English persons at the opposite pole, the stiff German, the officious Austrians, the Dutch youth who does nothing but laughs. But the satire is not directed against certain familiar national characteristics. It does not bite deep enough, because Galsworthy's aim seems to

be the creation of laughter. No other one-act play of John Galsworthy is humorously conceived throughout. Two other one-act plays - Hall Marked and Punch and Go - also contain some element of humour. But The Little Man is predominantly humorous. Galsworthy has created humour by making fun of national characteristics. The Englishman asks to his wife in an Oxford voice - "Sugar?". The Englishwoman replies in a Cambridge voice, "One." In the third scene the American pleads for the Little Man before the officials in the following way :

American : The little man has a heart of gold. (He points to his heart, and takes out a gold coin).

Official : (Thinking he is about to be bribed)

Aber, das ist zu viel !

(But that is too much !) (p.68)

Another similar ironical situation is found when the German says to the Little Man in the first scene, "You see, you will not get your beer", because the Little Man had addressed the waiter honourably as "Herr Ober", which means, "Mr Head Waiter". But as he speaks the waiter returns, bringing the Little Man's beer. (p.49) Later on, the woman requests for help, while all persons are running to catch the train. The American listens to her and says, "What is that ? Help ?" (p.56). But he continues to run.

The structure of The Little Man may present some difficulties in staging this one-act play. The first scene has the background of the departure platform of an Austrian Railway Station. The second scene takes place in the second class compartment of a corridor carriage in motion. The third scene has the background of an arrival platform. Interior of a train is a difficulty. But the staging needs to be suggestive rather than realistic. Then a brisk presentation of this one-act play may be effective. Like this one-act play, Galsworthy shows his fondness of the Austrian setting in other one-act play, The Little Dream and full-length plays like Villa Rubein and The Dark Flower. The language of this one-act play has been made lively by the use of broken English and the American idioms. In the third scene there are many dialogues spoken in German. Galsworthy himself says about the dialogues, "From start to finish clear dialogue is hand-made like good lace, clear, of fine texture."³⁷ Dialogues in The Little Man show Galsworthy's keen sense of situation and hence even the dialogues in German do not hamper the enjoyment of this one-act play.

One more aspect of this one-act play needs to be discussed. It is just possible that one may think that The Little Man has a close reference to the First World War. But it must be remembered that this "Farcical Morality" was written in November 1913. It is true that it was presented on the stage

in 1915. Meanwhile, the two years of war with Germany had added a grim ironical twist. The easy optimism of the American tourist and the German's disbelief in the nobler aspects of human nature, began to be interpreted in a new light. Galsworthy's two one-act plays, Defeat and The Sun deal with the problems arising out of the war. But The Little Man does not claim to establish such kind of relationship with the War. It merely states the favourite moral of Galsworthy - the difference between verbal and practical humanity. The Little Man points out the need of practising the Christian values so much talked about in the company of fellow travellers. His role is similar to that of Miss Beech in Joy, a full-length play. Both of them advocate the importance of understanding and fellowship. The sub-title of this one-act play is "farcial morality". It has, no doubt, a message to convey. Galsworthy has made his spectators think about the values of institutions commonly accepted without question. But he has done it in a farcical way because the incidents are treated lightly and the characters never become too real.

Hall Marked, a satiric trifle, was written by Galsworthy in 1913. It was presented at the Liverpool Playhouse in 1922. It is an amusing account of middle-class conservatism about marriage. This one-act play satirizes the deep-rooted English prejudice against love without marriage. The middle-class families in Galsworthy's days were orthodox and they acknowledged.

Marriage as a union of the man and the woman. But pre-marital relationship was condemned. Sometimes such condemnation is based on misunderstanding and it causes a lot of trouble. Galsworthy uses a funny incident in a village for this one-act play.

Some important persons (the Squire, the Rector and their better halves) of a village society happen to come at the residence of one Mrs Challenger, a woman newly arrived in the village. They are impressed by her heroic rescuing of a dog from drowning in a dirty pond while fighting with another dog. When the curtain goes up it is seen that the lady is busy in her bathroom dressing the wounded dog, while the others, full of gratitude, wait for her. The Squire remarks, "She ought to have the Victoria Cross for goin' in that pond." (Hall Marked, in Six Short Plays, p.82). They gather that her husband, Mr Challenger, is a gentleman and he is, like her, fond of dumb animals. Lady Ella suggests her husband, the Squire, that they ought to invite the couple to dinner. But suddenly, Maud, the Rector's wife, notices that there is no wedding ring in her finger. The whole party is confused. Because the people see masculine evidence in the house, in the things like braces and strops. They suspect their marriage and forget the good qualities of her character. She becomes the object of ridicule and insult. The Squire says, "Must think of the village." (Hall Marked, p.88). A feeling of discomfort gradually seizes the group and the members of the

group cannot tolerate the idea that the lady should be living with a man without, as they suppose, being married to him. They start taking her leave quite abruptly, forgetting her good action. Their hypocrisy stands dramatically exposed when Mrs Challenger's maid brings the wedding ring, forgotten in the bath room.

Galsworthy satirizes the middle-class attitude towards marriage. The society would not take the persons as they are. This is their conservatism. Only Lady Ella, the Squire's wife reveals good nature by saying, "Well I'm not going to be ungrateful !"(p.89) Later on, she remarks, "It's horrible not having the courage to take people as they are."(p.91) Galsworthy has used a very minor incident to expose the orthodoxy about marriage in this one-act play. It deals with a single, concentrated situation. In the satirical one-act plays of Galsworthy the number of characters is comparatively large. We find it, in addition to this one-act play, in The Little Man and Punch and Go. In Hall Marked there are eight characters and two dogs. For the first time Galsworthy introduces animals on the stage. In the personal life, Galsworthy and Ada, were very much fond of dogs, Like The Little Man, Defeat and The Sun, in this one-act play also. Galsworthy uses the device of not giving names to the main characters. This adds to the mystery of the one-act play. For a long time, we do not know the name of the lady mentioned as "Herself" in the stage-directions. We come to know

her name - Mrs Challenger - very late when the Squire inquires with Jarvis. Her character may be compared to that of the Little Man. Her innocent question, "What is the matter with them?" (p.93) reminds one of the similar situation in The Little Man, in which the fellow travellers leave their compartment to the surprise of the Little Man, as they wrongly think that the baby with the Little Man has typhus fever.

The one-act play Hall Marked reveals many good aspects of Galsworthy's dramatic art. The selection of the subject itself is quite significant and it shows how a one-act play can be written out of a trifle situation. The rapid and hasty stage directions at the beginning make this one-act play attractive right from the start. The wordless actions in The First and the Last are slow, but the same are rapid in this one-act play. The beginning of Hall Marked assumes that much drama has taken place already and the audience is brought almost near the climax. After The Little Man this is another one-act play which is conceived humourously. Even the stage directions at the end of the one-act play indicating a hand slipping in at the casement window, softly laying a pair of braces on the windowsill, create humour. Galsworthy was a steady enemy of all sorts of oppressions. This is very well revealed in The First and the Last. But the social injustice in the world of the middle-class village society is revealed very dramatically in Hall Marked.

Generally, Galsworthy's one-act plays deal with a specific problem in a man's life as in The First and the Last, or they satirize national characteristics in general and human nature in particular as in The Little Man, or they ridicule social conventions as in Hall Marked. But the last one-act play of Galsworthy, Punch and Go, written in 1920 and presented in London in 1924, dealt with altogether different theme. It is a satire on the blind commercialism of modern stage production which results in the vulgarization of art, the narrow outlook of the professional theatrical companies, their lack of artistic sense and their concern for cheap public tastes. Only those plays are to be staged that attract the public. Such tendency leads to the propagation of cheap, deceptive entertainment. Instead of a good drama, the people as well as the producers tend to prefer cheap and ugly entertainment. Punch and Go is a little comedy in which amid the comic amusement, one sees Galsworthy's condemnation of the vulgar "boss" as well as his sympathy for the disappointed artist.

Mr. Vane, a producer takes much pains to stage a piece called "Orpheus with His Lute". In the presence of Mr. Frust, the owner of the theatre, the rehearsal begins. The theme depicts the conflict between a Professor and his wife and this theme generalizes the tragedy of civilization. The Professor is busy in writing a dry article on Beauty. He states in the article that the Orpheus legend symbolizes to this day the call of Beauty.

His much younger attractive wife yearns for more beauty and reality in her life. She asks, "Why don't we live, instead of writing of it ? (She points out into the moonlight) What do we get out of life ? Money, fame, fashion, talk, learning ? Yes. And what good are they ? I want to live !" (Punch and Go in Six Short Plays, p.136). She goes out into the moonlight and the Professor falls asleep in his chair and dreams. In the dream he sees that a faun lies behind a rock in the moonlight. The figure of a Greek youth (Orpheus) comes, playing on the lute. The trunk of the apple-tree is transformed into a girl's body with bare arms and legs and the face of the Professor's wife. As if hypnotized, the nymph sways slowly towards the youth, till their lips touch. The Professor wakes and utters a frightened cry. His wife tells him that it was no dream. The Professor thinks that she has become somewhat hysterical. He continues with the article regardless of her sobbing. He cannot understand her, even though he is cultured and modern. Here, the one-act play returns to reality. The owner of the theatre, Mr. Frust, pretends to be moved by the playlet. But he says, "Well, I liked that little pocket piece fine. But I'm blamed if I know what it's all about." (Punch and Go, p.140). When it is explained to him that this is a little allegory of the tragedy of civilization, he congratulates all the actors, but instantly tells Mr. Vane, the producer, to abandon the play because he would not take liberties with the public. Mr. Vane is frustrated at the last moment because of the high-handedness of his boss. But Mr. Frust says, "Give the public what it wants, and what the

public wants is punch and go. They've got no use for Beauty, Allegory, all that high-brow racket." (p.141). He orders to rehearse Pop Goes the Weasel which will go well with Louisa Loses - plays which have 'pep' in them and can offer the public cheap entertainment.

The Punch and Go has some delightful sketches of theatre personalities at rehearsal during which the action takes place. The hustle and bustle of the producer, the stage manager, the electrician, the property man and the call boy indicate Galsworthy's keen concern for staging the drama in the theatres. The portrayal of Frust is very satirical. He sees the performance of Orpheus with his Lute and praises the actors and the setting. But it is very casual, because immediately he asks Mr. Foreson, the stage manager, "Got a match ? (p.139) Mr. Frust only knows that he must get profit, no matter if it costs the expulsion of art from the stage. He echoes the spirit of the Nation of Shopkeepers. Thus Punch and Go is a witty little satire which ridicules the lack of finer feeling and artistic sense in the commercial theatre producers. Mr. Frust has less regard for the actors. That is why when Vane tells him the names of the persons who would act in "Orpheus with his Lute" he comments promptly, "Names don't draw." (p.129). Occasionally the satirical element gives way to the plain humour. Foreson, the stage manager firstly asks Herbert, the call boy, to sit in the chair, so that the Electrician should mark the situation. But once it is done, Foreson orders Herbert, "Call the boss, and tell

beginners to stand by, sharp, now ! " (p.127) Another example of humour is found when the wife of the Professor tells him that she is going out and the Professor asks her to mind the dew, and thereupon she retorts, "The Christian virtues and the dew." (p.133).

The structure of The Punch and Go indicates how Galsworthy adopts a suitable style for the one-act play. There is a play within this one-act play. For the first time Galsworthy has employed this technique. The same stage is used for the rehearsal as well as the one-act play. Galsworthy has neatly fitted the rehearsal scene into the one-act play. Wayne Philip, the editor of Modern One Act Plays remarks, "The prosaic order for the final curtain is a model piece of rounding off."³⁸ Because the end of the rehearsal scene coincides with the end of the one-act play. The stage directions, though lengthy occasionally, reveal Galsworthy's knowledge of the performance of the play. Like The Little Dream, in this one-act play there is a dream-scene with a poetic background. Except these two one-act plays, in no other one-act play of Galsworthy this poetic touch is seen. This dream-scene and the rehearsal scene make the staging of punch and Go a bit difficult. All the effects need expert timing. But this little piece offers ample fun even in reading. It may be very successful as a radio-play or a television play.

Thus, the one-act play, Punch and Go, reveals Galsworthy's high regard for the art of the theatre and his strong condemnation of the mean money-seekers. He points out the sordid fact that the new men of this financial and manufacturing world treat the art of drama as a commercial enterprise. Galsworthy suggests that such persons vulgarize the arts. The theatre-art here stands symbolically for all arts. By writing this little comedy Galsworthy has expressed his concern for arts in the present days. In the words of Mottram, "The piece may possibly be Galsworthy's own protest against the crippling commercial direction and circumstances of the London theatrical world."³⁹