

VICE TRIUMPHANT

SIR,— Sensation dramas should mirror Society as it is, not as it ought to be. But in its existing phase Virtue is invariably triumphant in the long run — I may say the very long run — and Vice is introduced simply that it may be utterly and irrevocably overwhelmed in the last act. Is this true to nature? I, for one, have spent a long and laborious life in the exercise of the strictest virtue, and I have never triumphed. Now in my old age I intend to go in for a course of hideous and blood-curdling wickedness, and, as a first step of my career of infamy, I publish a Sensation Drama in support of my views.

Yours,

AN AGED CURATE.

SIR ROCKHEART THE REVENGEFUL;

OR

A LIFE ON THE OCEAN WAVE

SCENE.— *Drawing-room in SIR ROCKHEART'S castle. Enter the crew of H.M.S. Matilda Jane. They clear the room of all the furniture for a hornpipe.*

OLD BOB BACKSTAY.— My dear eyes! I am bosun's mate of the Matilda Jane. SIR ROCKHEART has invited us all to dinner in the servant's hall!

ALL.— He has. Hurrah!

OLD B. B.— Three cheers for the noble SIR ROCKHEART! Here's may prosperity be his mainstay, and may blessings be showered -

Enter SIR ROCKHEART.

SIR R.— Confound it, what are you rabble doing in my drawing-room? Bear off to the servant's hall, ye varlets, or by the Lord Harry I'll make mincemeat of every mother's son of ye!

OLD B. B.— Ay, ay, yer honour!

(They all go out disconcerted.)

SIR R. (*moodily*).— I am SIR ROCKHEART the Revengeful, and I war against society. I have no particular reason for being revengeful, for no one has ever injured me, so I attribute it to an inherent taste for depravity of all kinds. This morning I boiled my aunt; this afternoon I chopped up my prattling babe.

Enter THE LADY CLARIBEL.

THE LADY C.— Father, I love ULRIC the Unimpeachable. Consent to our union.

(She prays.)

SIR R.— He is a worthy young man with an undeniable rent-roll, and perfectly unobjectionable in every respect. I know, dear CLARIBEL, that he loves you devotedly, and I am perfectly certain that bliss unutterable would characterise your wedded life. But

he dies to-morrow!

LADY C.— Oh, father!

SIR R.— What!!! Dare to dictate!

(He siezes her by the feet, and is about to dash her brains out upon the wall, when who should come in but OLD BOB BACKSTAY?)

OLD B. B.— What do I see? A lubberly old three-decker bearing down upon an unarmed punt! Dash my old eyes, that ain't fair! Sheer off, yer ugly old swab, or abaft my funnel if I don't make you see more stars than were ever dreamt of in your philosophy.

SHAKESPEARE, ahem!

SIR R. *(bitterly)*.— And this, *this* is a British seaman's return for my princely hospitality!

OLD B. B. *(touched)*.— No, no, SIR ROCKHEART, don't say that. I've eaten of your beer and drunk of your cheese, I know; and if so be as ever you're in want of a dinner, you may reckon on OLD BOB BACKSTAY'S sharing his last halfpenny with your honour; but the lubber who would stand by and see an innocent and convulsively beautiful young gal slaughtered in cold blood by a weak and defenceless old man without expostulooralating is a wretch whom "twere gross flattery to term a coward!"

(Unmanned, but he recollects himself and his authority.) TOBIN, ahem!

SIR R.— You are right, worthy fellow, quite right. But I mean to kill her notwithstanding.

OLD B. B.— Then speak to the man at my wheel, if I don't summon the whole ship's crew, who will help me to secure your darned old carcass, "you bugroo-eating, pea-soup-swilling son of a sea-cook!" MARRYAT, ahem!

(He whistles. Enter six hundred and forty men of the Matilda Jane, each with a pistol in each hand, which they point at SIR ROCKHEART.)

ALL.— Surrender!

SIR R.— No!

ALL.— Then die!

(They all snap their pistols, which flash in the pan.)

ALL.— Perdition! Our twelve hundred and eighty pistols have been tampered with.

SIR R.— Ha! Ha! Ha! And learn, ye minions, that next time ye come to carouse in a British baronet's servants' hall, ye had best not hang up your pistols in the family umbrella-stand!

ALL.— Foiled!

SIR R.— Ye may say that. *(Takes a revolver from his pocket, and shoots them all.)* Now who shall stay me?

(Enter ULRIC the Unimpeachable.)

ULRIC.— I will!

SIR R.— Not so!

ULRIC.— Yes! I love CLARIBEL devotedly, and cannot consent to stand calmly by while you are dashing her brains out.

SIR R.— This to me in my own freehold? (*Aside.*) I have a reversionary interest in all his property, and, if I kill him, twelve thousand acres of the richest pasture land, all the castles on the Rhine, the vineyards of Ay and Epernay, most of Africa, the Isle of Wight, the Summer Palace at Pekin, the Island of Ceylon, and the British Museum will all be mine! Shall I hesitate? No!

(Desperate combat, in which ULRIC is killed.)

SIR R.— So fare all in whose property SIR ROCKHEART THE REVENGEFUL has an interest in reversion or remainder! By-the-bye, the property is entailed on myself and the children of my late wife. (*Sheds a tear.*) My late wife is dead (*sighs*), and (*recovering himself*) if I kill CLARIBEL I shall be (*triumphantly*) Tenant-in-Tail-after-Possibility-of-Issue-Extinct!

(Kills CLARIBEL and takes possession of all the property. His new tenantry enter and do him homage. Eventually, after a long and happy life, he dies at a good old age, surrounded by hosts of faithful and attached dependents.)