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MULCASTER MARKET

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Three Plays for Young Players

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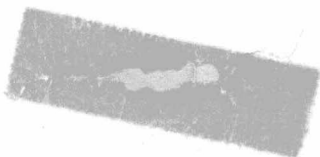
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CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
MULCASTER MARKET	13
THE PEDLAR'S DREAM	29
THE STOLEN BOY	55

PREFACE

These plays have been written especially for the entertainment of young people between the ages of 10 and 15, as readers, as actors or as spectators. I have tried to avoid the difficulties of adult plays and the condescension only too common in children's plays. No situations are introduced which are beyond the acting powers of young people. But the young like acting adult parts, and adult emotions of simple kinds have been represented. I have tried to make the situations concrete, factual and dramatic, and to portray a wide range of characters.

Most people nowadays have a certain degree of sophistication unsuitable to the intention of these plays. The modern atmosphere has therefore been avoided by setting the plays in the past. Hence the "period" flavour of the language, which may distress some adult readers, but which young players may not find unattractive. There is no use of archaism for its own sake, merely the adoption of a kind of speech which should be easy to learn and to present in a formalised and expressive way. No particular dialect has been suggested and none is necessary, but any regional dialect, provided it is not too obviously urban, would not be out of place. Moreover, there is scope for playing in costume, so that the wardrobe department will take an active share in production.

Settings, costume, speech and gesture should alike be simple, bold, suggestive rather than representational—in short what is most truly theatrical will on the stage be most effective. Stage-directions are given sparingly for the most part, because invention and ingenuity on the part of the producer and his assistants are the life blood of

dramatic activity. In two of the plays songs are included and melodies suggested. If the songs or melodies are unacceptable to actors or producer, let others be adapted or made up. The producer must take any liberties with the text which he thinks warranted, according to the capacities of his players and his scenic resources, provided he does his best to interpret the dramatic intention of the plays. For instance, in the first play I have characterised one of the rogues by giving him a slight stammer. With some young players it may be thought desirable to omit this.

Finally, although these plays are written for amateurs, they will be best enjoyed if undertaken with professional seriousness. A successful production depends on the careful co-ordination of a mass of details. There is no one in a dramatic production, however humble his function, who cannot ruin the performance by some small fault. The educational significance of this truth is self-evident. These are apprentice plays, brief and unassuming, but their presentation will involve most of the problems encountered in much more ambitious productions.

MULCASTER MARKET

A Play in Four Acts based on an Indian Story

CHARACTERS

Blockhead }
Barebones } *three rogues*
Longlegs }
A Labourer





A BEGGAR'S LIFE



The mas-ter steals the maid-en's heart, The Cuck-oo steals the



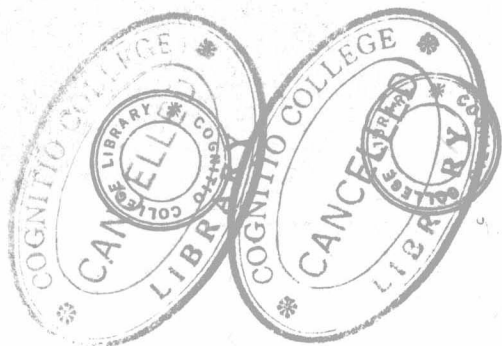
rob-in's nest. Come forth, come forth ye rob-bers all, A

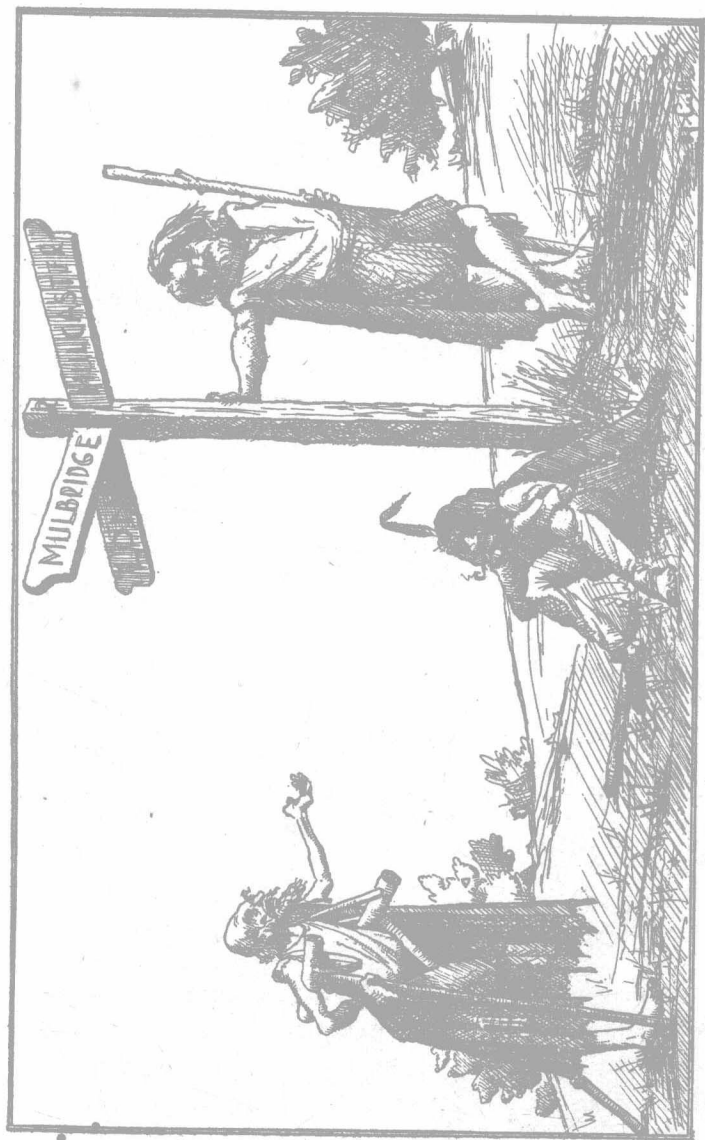


beg-gar's life is all the best. A beg-gar's life, a



beg-gar's life, A beg-gar's life is all the best.





MULCASTER MARKET

ACT 1

[A crossroads. A signpost in the centre of the stage points to MULCASTER, MULBRIDGE, and LONDON. The signpost stands in a hole in the centre of a mound; it can be replaced by a tree for Acts 2, 3 and 4. This scenery can be dispensed with, if necessary.]

Enter from opposite sides BAREBONES, a beggar with a black patch over one eye, and BLOCKHEAD, a tall, foolish beggar. He has an educated voice in spite of his stammer. BAREBONES puts his bundle down and sits with his back to the signpost, takes out a clay pipe and lights it. BLOCKHEAD is singing a song. As the song finishes, he sits down beside BAREBONES.]

BLOCKHEAD :

The master steals the maiden's heart,
The cuckoo steals the robin's nest.

Come forth come forth, ye robbers all,
A beggar's life is all the best.

A beggar's life, a beggar's life,
A beggar's life is all the best !

I will sit down beside thee, Brother Barebones, so that I may get a whiff of thy p-pipe, for I have no tobacco of my own, and tobacco is hard to come by.

BAREBONES : Sit down and welcome, Brother Blockhead, so long as you sing no more of your foolish song.

BLOCKHEAD : I ask p-pardon for my ill singing, but in truth I think it is n-not such a foolish s-song.

BAREBONES : You are a beggar yourself, Brother Blockhead, so how can you sing that a beggar's life is all the best?

BLOCKHEAD : It is like your tobacco—not very good, but there is no better to be had. Let me s-sit a little nearer, that I may s-smell it more strongly. Ah!

BAREBONES : Tell me, Blockhead, were you always a devotee of the vagabond's trade? In other words, were you always a beggar?

BLOCKHEAD : No. I have f-followed many trades. I c-come of a very good family—a very old family. My mother was a Windfall.

BAREBONES : My mother was a thief, the best of her trade, between Newcastle and Portsmouth. She taught me no trade, but thieving, and an ill trade it is.

BLOCKHEAD : Tis not such a bad trade, Brother Barebones. We wander where we will, we w-work for no man, we listen to the birds in summer and watch the b-buttercups in the water meadows.

BAREBONES : We can eat neither b-birds nor b-buttercups. We need food like other men, and just now my stomach is in urgent need of sustenance—in other words, I am hungry. Have you anything to eat, brother?

BLOCKHEAD : No. But I have two legs to carry me to Mulcaster Market, and a voice to sing me a song on the way. (*He sings.*)

A beggar's life, a beggar's life,

A beggar's life—

BAREBONES : Pray you, do not sing. Your two legs, though they be as lean as a scarecrow's, may be strong; but your voice is like the rusty hinges of a barnyard door. 'Twill scare the birds from the tree-

tops and turn the buttercups blue. Moreover, you are a foolish man, and your idle talk stops me thinking.

BLOCKHEAD: You may be w-wiser than I, Brother Barebones, but you have had no more to eat this seven days than I have. W-what are you thinking of?

BAREBONES: Food, brother. Food and drink. What else is there to think of?

BLOCKHEAD: Money, brother. Rich farmers that might be coming this way from Mulcaster Market, with their bellies full of beer and their b-bags full of silver.

BAREBONES: Never a penny will they give you and me. For nowadays they are all as mean and miserly as a skeleton in Mulcaster graveyard. And it is in the graveyard that all beggars will soon be lying, if they have no more to eat than I have had this year. What could I not give for a dish of fat ham and three fried eggs and a quart of ale at the King's Head by Mulcaster gaol!

BLOCKHEAD: What hast thou to give, Brother Barebones, but the black patch over thine eye and thy little tobacco-pipe? But t-talk not to me of M-mulcaster gaol, for I spent fourteen days there once, and it is a place I like the outside of better than the inside.

BAREBONES: I tell you what, Brother. If I had the chance of robbing a fat farmer of two fat hens and a string of pork sausages, I would spend a month in Mulcaster gaol and live on dry bread and rusty water. But here comes another of our trade.

Enter LONGLEGS, a skinny old beggar with only one leg and a pair of crutches. He hobbles in excitedly.

LONGLEGS: News, brothers! I have news. If your ears be as hungry as your bellies, stop your idle tongues and listen to me.