

THE
INSECT PLAY

(‘And so *ad infinitum*’)

*An Entomological Review
in three acts, a Prologue and
an Epilogue*

by

THE BROTHERS ČAPEK

Translated from the Czech by Paul Selver and adapted for
the English Stage by Nigel Playfair and
Clifford Bax

So, Naturalists observe, a flea
Has smaller fleas that on him prey;
And these have smaller still to bite 'em,
And so proceed *ad infinitum*.

DEAN SWIFT

'And so *ad infinitum*' was first produced at the Regent Theatre, on 5 May 1923.

SCENES

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DRAMATIS PERSONAE

(In the order of their appearance)

A TRAMP
A LEPIDOPTERIST
CLYTIE }
OTTO } *Butterflies*
FELIX }
IRIS }
VICTOR }
A CHRYSALIS
MR. BEETLE
MRS. BEETLE
ANOTHER BEETLE
ICHNEUMON FLY
HIS DAUGHTER
MR. CRICKET
MRS. CRICKET
A PARASITE
OTHER CREEPERS AND CRAWLERS
THE BLIND TIMEKEEPER }
THE CHIEF ENGINEER }
THE SECOND ENGINEER }
AN INVENTOR } *Ants*
A MESSENGER }
A SIGNAL OFFICER }
A JOURNALIST }
A PHILANTHROPIST }
THE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF OF THE YELLOWS, &C. }
FIRST }
SECOND } *Moths*
THIRD }
FIRST SNAIL
SECOND SNAIL
A WOODCUTTER
A WOMAN
SCHOOL CHILDREN

PROLOGUE

THE TRAMP is discovered, stretched out in sleep; a bottle at his side. BUTTERFLIES flutter across the scene.

Enter a LEPIDOPTERIST with a net

LEPIDOPTERIST. There they go, there they go! Fine specimens! *Apatura Iris*—*Apatura Clythia*—light-blue butterflies and the Painted Lady. Wait a minute—I'll get you! That's just it—they won't wait, the silly creatures. Off again. . . Hullo—somebody here. They're settling on him. Now! Carefully. Slowly. Tiptoe! One, two, three!

[*A butterfly settles on the tip of the TRAMP's nose. The LEPIDOPTERIST makes a dab with his net*]

TRAMP. 'Ullo! What yer doin'? Ketchin' butterflies?

LEPIDOPTERIST. Don't move! Careful now! They're settling again. Funny creatures—they'll settle on mud, on any sort of garbage, and now they're settling on you.

TRAMP. Let 'em go. They're 'appy.

LEPIDOPTERIST. Idiot! I've lost them, confound you! There they go, there they go!

TRAMP. It's a shime—it is, reely.

[*The LEPIDOPTERIST rushes out, R. The TRAMP stretches his arms, takes a pull at the emptied bottle, yawns, staggers to his feet and drops down again*]

[*Speaking to the audience*] All right—all right! Don't you worry. I 'aven't 'urt myself! I know what you think—you think I'm screwed—some of you! Rotten observation—low visibility—that's what you're suffering from. You didn't catch me staggering, did you? I fell like a

tree—like a hero! I was rehearsing, that's what I was doing—the fall of man! The fall of man! There's a picture for yer! Ah, you little flowers—you didn't think I was drunk, did you? You've too much respect for me! I'm a man, that's what I am—a lord of creation! A great thing to be, I tell yer! 'Now then, pass along there, my man!' That's what they say to me. It's wonderful! 'Clear up that rubbish heap, my man, and I'll give you a tanner, my man.' It's a fine thing to be a man. [*He succeeds in getting his balance.*]

Enter the LEPIDOPTERIST, R.

LEPIDOPTERIST. Two,—splendid Nymphalidae!

TRAMP. No offence, mister, but why'jer catch them when they're all so 'appy playing?

LEPIDOPTERIST. Playing, you call it. I'm afraid you haven't the scientific mind, my friend. It's the overture to the natural system by which Nature keeps up the balance of the population—that's what you call 'playing'. The male pursues the female; the female allures, avoids—selects—the eternal round of sex!

TRAMP. What will you do with them when you catch them?

LEPIDOPTERIST. What shall I do? Well, each insect must be identified, recorded and assigned a place in my collection. The butterfly must be carefully killed, and then carefully pinned, and properly dried, and care must be taken that the powder is not rubbed off. And it must be protected against dust and draught. A little cyanide of potassium.

TRAMP. And what's it all for?

LEPIDOPTERIST. Love of nature—if you loved nature as much as I did, my man—Careful—didn't I tell you—

they're off again. Never mind, I'll get you, see if I don't. [*Exit*]

TRAMP. 'E's clever, that there bloke. And as for me, P'raps I am screwed; but if I *am*, 'oo cares? That ain't the only reason why I see Everythink double, everythink in pairs. Them little birds up there . . . I see yer plain! 'Tweet-weety-weet . . . Lord! 'ow they bill and coo, As yer might say. Them butterflies again, What sport they 'ave—'ow prettily they woo! Love's what they want. Some day they'll get it, p'raps: Everythink does—or mostways everythink . . . (S'pose *you'd* a girl who loved all kinds of chaps—Wouldn't *you* damn yerself, and take to drink?) Well, 'ere's the world, and though I'm down and out, It's worth while learnin' what it's all about.

ACT I
THE BUTTERFLIES

A hill. Many flowers and bright-coloured cushions. In the c. a small table or bar, with high seats and coloured glass containing cold drinks and straws.

TRAMP. I say—I say! It's a bit of all right. What price the 'Eath now? Paradise—that's what it is—Paradise! And don't it smell nice! Odi Colone, not 'alf.

[CLYTIE runs in laughing, followed by OTTO]

OTTO. I love you, Clytie. [Exeunt]

TRAMP. Butterflies! That's what they are. Butterflies, playin'. I'd like to stay 'ere and watch 'em if I wasn't so—Never mind; they can kick me out if they like. I'll lie down 'ere, comfortable.—'Pon my soul, I will. [*He takes and arranges the cushions*] [*Sleepily*] All right—that's what it is; all right.

Enter FELIX—a poet butterfly

FELIX. [*Ecstatically*] Iris! Iris! Where are you, Iris? If only I could find a rhyme for you!

All I desire is
Beautiful Iris . . .

No, that's wretched commonplace.

The star to whom my thoughts aspire is
Iris, Iris, radiant Iris.

That's no better. I know! She will reject my passion and I shall then produce an exquisite lament. For instance,—

If only thou wert ill, hard-hearted Iris!

Then I could melt thee with my kind inquiries . . .

[*Laughter behind*]

ACT I THE BUTTERFLIES

Listen! Iris! [*He stands at the side, burying his face in his hands.*]

[IRIS enters, followed by VICTOR]

IRIS. All alone, Felix? And so picturesquely mournful?

FELIX. You, Iris? I didn't think—

IRIS. Why aren't you over there? So many pretty little flappers—

FELIX. You know very well, Iris—they don't interest me.

IRIS. Poor little fellow—why not?

VICTOR [*a lady-killer*]. You mean, they don't interest you yet!

FELIX. They interest me no longer.

IRIS. Do you hear that, Victor? That's a nice thing to say to my face. Come here, you rude little man. Sit down close to me . . . No,—close. You don't call that close, do you? Tell me, my precious, don't women really interest you any longer?

FELIX. No—I'm weary of them.

IRIS. [*With a sigh*] Oh, you men—you're such cynics. You have your fun—as much fun as you can get—and then you say [*imitating*] 'I'm weary of them.' It's a terrible thing to be a woman.

VICTOR. Why?

IRIS. *We* never grow tired of love. Have you had a terrible past, Felix? When did you first fall in love?

FELIX. I don't know. I forget. It was so long ago. I was a schoolboy.

VICTOR. Ah, you were still a caterpillar. Gobbling up all the leaves.

IRIS. A little kitty kitty kitty caterpillar. Was she dark and beautiful?

FELIX. As beautiful——

IRIS. As what?

FELIX. As beautiful as you,

IRIS. And did she love you?

FELIX. I don't know. I never spoke to her.

IRIS. Good heavens! What did you do to her then?

FELIX. I looked at her from afar.

VICTOR. Sitting on a green leaf?

FELIX. And wrote poems, letters—my first novel.

VICTOR. It's appalling the number of leaves a caterpillar uses up.

IRIS. Don't be nasty, Victor. Look, his eyes are full of tears.

VICTOR. Tears? Poor little cry-baby.

FELIX. They're not, they're not!

IRIS. Let me see—look into my eyes quickly.

VICTOR. One, two, three, four—Ah! I knew he couldn't hold out any longer.

IRIS. What's the colour of *my* eyes, Felix dear?

FELIX. Blue—like Heaven.

IRIS. Yours are brown—golden-brown. I don't care for blue eyes, they're so cold. Poor Clytie has green eyes, hasn't she? Do you like Clytie's eyes, Felix?

FELIX. Clytie's? I don't know. Yes—she has beautiful eyes.

IRIS. Oh, but her legs are dreadfully thick! You're such bad judges of women, you poets.

VICTOR. Have you read the last poem that Felix published? It came out in the Spring Anthology.

IRIS. Read it me, quickly.

FELIX. No, no, I won't let you read it to her. It's bad—it's old—I've passed that stage long ago.

VICTOR. It's called 'The Eternal Life'.

FELIX. You're not to read it—really!

VICTOR. [*Reads*]

There's nothing true. The earth and sky
Were false when first created;
And you and I will surely lie
When love is consummated.

IRIS. That's witty, isn't it, Victor? How did you think of it? What's consummated, Felix?

VICTOR. From the Latin 'consummare'. It means that Love has—ahem—achieved its aim.

IRIS. What aim?

VICTOR. Well—the usual one.

IRIS. Oh, how shocking, Felix. I'm afraid of you. Is Latin always so immoral?

FELIX. Don't, Iris. It's such a bad poem.

IRIS. Why, bad?

FELIX. There's no real passion in it.

IRIS. Victor, you will find my fan in the garden.

VICTOR. Oh, don't let *me* disturb you, [*Exit*]

IRIS. Quick, Felix—tell me the truth. You can tell me everything.

FELIX. Iris, Iris—how can you bear him? That fop, that silk-hatted satyr!

IRIS. Victor?

FELIX. How foully he thinks of love, of you, of everything.

IRIS. Poor Victor—he's so soothing. No, Felix, talk about poetry. I'm fond of poetry . . .

'Were false when first created'
Felix, you're frightfully clever . . .

'When love is consummated'

Tell me, Felix, poets are dreadfully, hideously, passionate, aren't they?

FELIX. Oh, Iris, I've grown out of what's in that poem a long time.

IRIS. If only that Latin word wasn't so coarse. I can stand anything, anything, but it mustn't have a horrid name. Felix, you must be tender and delicate with women. If I were to let you kiss me, you wouldn't give me a horrid name, would you?

FELIX. Iris, I wouldn't dare to kiss you.

IRIS. Be brave, little boy. Faint heart never won—Tell me, whom did you write that poem to? To Clytie?

FELIX. No, no, no.

IRIS. To whom, then?

FELIX. To nobody, upon my honour, to nobody; or rather, to all the women in the world.

IRIS. Good gracious! All the women in the—— Felix,

you're a terrible rake. But you *must* let me know one thing—who's your [*whispering*] ladybird now?

FELIX. You won't tell any one—you really won't?

IRIS. No.

FELIX. I haven't got one.

IRIS. What?

FELIX. Not yet—I swear it. [*Very simply.*]

IRIS. Oh what a naughty fib! How many women have you told the tale to? I see through you, Felix. You're a dangerous man.

FELIX. Iris, dear, don't laugh at me. I've had awful experiences—in my imagination. Terrible disappointments. Love-affairs without number—but only in my dreams. Dreams are the poet's life. I know all women, and I've not known one—I swear it, Iris.

IRIS. Then why do you say you are tired of women?

FELIX. Oh, Iris, every one disparages the thing that he loves best.

IRIS. Do you mean dark women? You love Clytie—the cat.

FELIX. No—dreams, eternal dreams.

IRIS. You have such passionate eyes, Felix. You're awfully clever. What are you thinking about now?

FELIX. About you. Woman is a riddle.

IRIS. Guess it then. But not too roughly, please.

FELIX. I cannot see into the depths of your eyes.

IRIS. [*Crossly*] Oh, then look somewhere else.

FELIX. Iris, I——

here. How are you, Felix? Iris, you've been teasing him—he's blushing.

Enter OTTO

OTTO. Got you now, Clytie—Oh, I beg your pardon. How do you do, Iris? How are you, my boy?

[FELIX sits down, sighing]

IRIS. You're out of breath, Clytie.

CLYTIE. Otto has been chasing me.

OTTO. She flew away, so I *had* to follow her.

Enter VICTOR

VICTOR. Quite a little party.

CLYTIE. [*Drinking*] Oh, I'm so thirsty.

IRIS. Take care of yourself, dearest. Victor, see how thin she's become again. You're looking terrible—you really are.

CLYTIE. Thank you, darling. You will be a mother to me, won't you?

VICTOR. Were you at the Garden Party yesterday?

CLYTIE. Yesterday? Pooh—that's ancient history.

VICTOR. Marvellous weather.

IRIS. [*To CLYTIE*] Just a moment, dearest. What have you been doing? Your bodice is torn.

CLYTIE. Thank you, darling—Felix! You look so sad. What's the matter with you, my precious?

FELIX. I'm thinking.

CLYTIE. Thinking? What do you keep thinking about?

FELIX. Men's minds were given them to use.

CLYTIE. And women's?

FELIX. To misuse.

IRIS. Oh, isn't that good, Felix!

CLYTIE. The nasty little fellow hates me.

VICTOR. Be careful, Clytie—that's the first step towards love.

OTTO. Eh, what's that?

IRIS. Felix and love? The idea! Why, he wrote something about women—wait . . .

FELIX. Iris, how can you! Don't!

IRIS. There's nothing true. The earth and sky
Were false when first created;
And you and I will surely lie
When love is consummated.

CLYTIE. Will surely what?

IRIS. 'Surely lie', dearest.

VICTOR. Felix, you scoundrel—how many women have you lied to?

OTTO. 'And you and I will surely lie'—I see! Of course! ha, ha—very good.

IRIS. 'When love is consummated.'

CLYTIE. Wait—Otto's going to laugh again.

[*He does so*]

IRIS. Felix is awfully clever. None of you could find a rhyme for 'Iris'.

CLYTIE. On, couldn't we!

Some times Iris,
A wicked liar is.

FELIX. Oh, stop it, stop it!

OTTO. Ha, ha! That's splendid. Iris—liar is.

IRIS. Darling, you have such strange ideas about poetry.
But you'll never guess what a beautiful rhyme Felix
made to my name. Guess.

VICTOR. Give it up.

CLYTIE. You must tell us.

IRIS. [*Triumphantly*] 'Fire is!'

VICTOR. What?

IRIS. 'I shall have flown where the fire is!'

OTTO. Ha, ha, ha! 'Fire is'—that's jolly clever.

IRIS. Oh, you're horrid. You've no sense of art or poetry,
or anything. I've no patience with you.

VICTOR. The rhymes of our little friend Felix
Are sweet as the honey a bee licks.

IRIS. Splendid, Victor. You're frightfully witty.

CLYTIE. Heavens, Victor's managed to produce a
rhyme.

OTTO. 'Felix—bee licks'—that's good, damn good.

VICTOR. Poetry—what is it but lying and fooling?

IRIS. Oh no, it stirs the feelings. I'm fearfully fond of it.

OTTO. Ha! Blotto!

CLYTIE. Who's blotto?

OTTO. Rhymes with Otto. Good—eh, what?

IRIS. You're terribly clever, Otto.

OTTO. Lovely star!

IRIS. Where? What do you mean?

OTTO. That's the beginning of a poem.

CLYTIE. [*Yawning*] Oh, do stop talking this literary stuff.
I'm fed up with it.

VICTOR. [*Aside to IRIS*] Not so much as I'm fed up with
her!

IRIS. *Are you? Are you really, Victor? I feel like kissing
you. Catch me—catch me if you can.*

[*She runs off, and VICTOR after her*]

CLYTIE. What a fright! What a figure!—Felix!

FELIX. Yes?

CLYTIE. How ever could you fall in love with her?

FELIX. With whom?

CLYTIE. With that dowdy thing!

FELIX. Whom do you mean?

CLYTIE. Iris, of course.

FELIX. I? What can you be thinking of? That was over—
long ago.

CLYTIE. I understand. Iris is so awfully ignorant—and
such thick ankles. Oh, Felix, at your age we have so
many illusions about women.

FELIX. I haven't, Clytie. I passed that stage when I was
a boy.

CLYTIE. No, Felix, you don't know women. Sit here
beside me—no, closer. You've no idea what they're like
—their minds, their souls, their bodies. You're so young.

FELIX. Oh, if I were! I've had so much experience.

CLYTIE. You *must* be young—it's the fashion. To be young, a butterfly, and a poet—Is there anything more beautiful in the world?

FELIX. It is not beautiful; it is an agony. The fate of the young is to suffer, and a poet to suffer a hundredfold.

CLYTIE. It's the fate of a poet to be terribly happy. Ah, Felix, you remind me of my first love.

FELIX. Who was he?

CLYTIE. Nobody—I forget. None of my lovers was the first. Ah, that Victor! I *hate* men. Let's be friends, Felix—like two girls together.

FELIX. Like two girls?

CLYTIE. Love's nothing to you. Love's so common I want something special, something pure, something new.

FELIX. A poem.

CLYTIE. [*Doubtfully*] Yes, that'll do—You see how much I like you.

FELIX. Listen!

She came in the blue Spring weather,
Gay as a foxglove is;
And our two hearts rhymed together,
And our lips were one in a kiss.

CLYTIE. What's that?

FELIX. A poem—the beginning.

CLYTIE. And how does it go on?

FELIX. I'll bring you the end in a minute. But I outgrow my work so quickly than when I reach' the end I may have to alter the beginning.

CLYTIE. [*In disgust*] Bah! [*To OTTO*] Now then, can't you leave your moustache alone?

OTTO. Love me, Clytie.

CLYTIE. Visitors are requested not to touch.

OTTO. Love me, Clytie.

CLYTIE. Otto, you're so irresistibly handsome.

OTTO. I love *you* madly.

CLYTIE. I know—I know. Say 'ninety-nine'.

OTTO. Ninety-nine.

CLYTIE. Say it again.

OTTO. Ninety-nine.

CLYTIE. How it rumbles in your chest—like thunder. Otto, you're fearfully strong, aren't you?

OTTO. Cly-Cly-Cly——

CLYTIE. What's the matter now?

OTTO. Love me, Clytie.

CLYTIE. Oh, don't be tiresome.

OTTO. Love me, love me now!

CLYTIE. [*Flying off*] Wait, wait, wait—don't be impatient.

OTTO. [*After her*] Love me, Clytie! [*Exeunt*]

TRAMP. There now—that poor male insect! Well, I'm blest——

Goin' 'alf balmy for them flighty things! . . .

As fer that kind of female—why, she's jest

A man-trap 'idden be'ind two silky wings.

[CLYTIE *flying in from the other side, and powdering herself at the mirror*]

CLYTIE. Whew! Just managed to get away from him, only just!

TRAMP. Ho! 'Igh Society, what? Powder yer nose, Strip to yer waist—and let the *rest* show through! Put it blunt-like—Lord Alf and Lady Rose Be'ave exactly like them insect's do.

CLYTIE. Are you a butterfly?
[TRAMP throws his cap at her as if to catch her]
Aren't you a butterfly?

TRAMP. I'm a man.

CLYTIE. What's that? Is it alive?

TRAMP. Well, in a manner o' speakin', lady.

CLYTIE. [Flying up to him] Can it love?

TRAMP. Oh yus. Reg'lar butterfly.

CLYTIE. How thrilling you are! Why do you have black down on your face? And—oh, it pricks!

TRAMP. Down! That's scrub. 'Aven't shaved for a fortnight, I 'aven't.

CLYTIE. There's a fragrance in the air about you.

TRAMP. Stale baccy—that's what it is.

CLYTIE. So delicious—so new!

TRAMP. [Throwing cap again] Shoo, yer 'ussy!

CLYTIE. [Flying away] Chase me, chase me!

TRAMP. Oh, you baggage, you.

CLYTIE. [Approaching] Let me come near you. You are so unusual.

TRAMP. I've met the likes of you afore, I 'ave. [Catches her hand] I've 'eld 'er 'ands like this, and told 'er if she'd

smile at me I'd let 'er go—and then I let 'er go. Better for me and better for 'er, if I'd killed 'er straight off. [Lets her go] 'Ere, sling yer 'ook. I don't want yer.

CLYTIE. [Flying away to mirror] How strange you are!

TRAMP. Oh, yer strumpet, you, yer painted 'arlot!

CLYTIE. [To him again] Say it again, say it again, so strange, so coarse—I—

TRAMP. Garn—yer white-faced 'arridan! Isn't that enough for yer?

CLYTIE. I love you, I love you!

TRAMP. Go—get a move on. I 'ate the sight of yer.

CLYTIE. Oh, you wretch! [She returns to the mirror.]

IRIS. [Running, out of breath] Something to drink—quick!

CLYTIE. Where have you been?

IRIS. On the hill-tops—it was so hot.

CLYTIE. Where did you leave Victor?

IRIS. Victor? Who's Victor?

CLYTIE. Why, you went off with him.

IRIS. Oh yes, of course—but that was only fun. I remember now. Something awfully funny happened. It'll make you scream. He kept running after me . . . ha, ha, ha.

CLYTIE. Why did you leave him?

IRIS. I'm telling you. He kept running after me, and suddenly—ha, ha, ha. A bird flew along and ate him up!

CLYTIE. You don't say!

IRIS. As true as I'm standing here. I thought I should

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have died. [*She bursts into laughter and buries her head in the cushions.*]

CLYTIE. What is the matter with you?

IRIS. Oh, those men!

CLYTIE. Do you mean Victor?

IRIS. No—Otto. Victor was eaten by a bird. Just fancy—immediately after, up came your Otto. Oh, the look in his eyes—all on fire—and then—ha, ha, ha!

CLYTIE. What then?

IRIS. He came after me. 'Love me, Iris,' he said, 'love me, love me.'

CLYTIE. Well, did you?

IRIS. Ha, ha! Guess again. 'Love me, Iris, love me!'

FELIX. [*Flying in with a pen in his hand*] Here it is, Clytie, listen!

She came in the light Spring weather,
Gay as a jonquil is——

[*Iris laughs hysterically*]

What's the matter?

IRIS. What a vulgar fellow! I could have strangled him.

CLYTIE. Otto?

FELIX. Listen, Clytie——
And our two hearts rhymed together
And our lips were one in a kiss.
She said, 'How strange to discover
The lessons a kiss can teach!
You have turned a child to a lover
As a peach-flower turns to a peach.'

IRIS. Is my hair horribly untidy?

ACT I

THE BUTTERFLIES

CLYTIE. Horribly. Let me, darling—Beast!

IRIS. You're angry, aren't you? [*Imitating*] Otto loves wonderfully.

Enter OTTO

OTTO. I love you, Iris

IRIS. Catch me if you can. [*Exit*]

OTTO. I love *you*, Clytie.

CLYTIE. Follow me, follow me. [*Exeunt*]

FELIX. Wait, wait!

TRAMP. Fool!

FELIX. Who's that? Somebody, anyway. I'll read *you* the end.

I answered 'But each new-comer
Is only supreme for an hour . . .'

TRAMP. [*Striking at him with his cap*] Shoo!

FELIX. [*Flying about*]

I answered 'But each new-comer
Is only supreme for an hour.
The fruit may fall with the summer
But Spring will renew the flower.'

ALL THE BUTTERFLIES *enter fluttering*

TRAMP. Butterflies! Nice *birds* them butterflies!

CURTAIN

ACT II
CREEPERS AND CRAWLERS

SCENE: *A sandy hillock—Various holes, etc.*

BEETLES *are quarrelling over a CHRYSALIS, which is seized first by one then the other*

CHRYSALIS. The whole world is bursting into blossom.
I am being born.

TRAMP. [*Raising his head—he is lying half asleep*] How much?

CHRYSALIS. The Great Adventure begins.

TRAMP. Right oh! [*Settles down again.*]

MR. BEETLE. [*Behind the scenes*] What yer getting at? [*Pause*]

MRS. BEETLE. [*Behind the scenes*] Me?

MR. BEETLE. Yes, you—you lump of rubbish.

MRS. BEETLE. Silly swine.

MR. BEETLE. Fathead.

MRS. BEETLE. Fathead yourself—mind where you're going.

They enter, rolling a huge ball of dirt

MR. BEETLE. It's all right, isn't it?

MRS. BEETLE. I'm all of a tremble.

MR. BEETLE. Our capital—that's what it is—our lovely capital—careful—careful.

MRS. BEETLE. Can't be too careful with our capital—our little pile.

ACT II CREEPERS AND CRAWLERS

MR. BEETLE. How we've saved and scraped and toiled and moiled to come by it.

MRS. BEETLE. Night and morning, toiled and moiled and saved and scraped.

MR. BEETLE. And we've seen it grow and grow, haven't we, bit by bit—our little ball of blessedness.

MRS. BEETLE. Our very own it is.

MR. BEETLE. Our very own.

MRS. BEETLE. Our life's work.

MR. BEETLE. Smell it, old woman—pinch it—feel the weight of it. Ours—ours.

MRS. BEETLE. A godsend.

MR. BEETLE. A blessing—straight from Heaven—capital—capital.

CHRYSALIS. Eternal night is breaking:
The universe is waking:
One minute, just one minute
And I—I—shall be in it.

MRS. BEETLE. Husband.

MR. BEETLE. What is it, old woman?

MRS. BEETLE. Ha, ha, ha!

MR. BEETLE. Ha, ha, ha! Wife!

MRS. BEETLE. What is it, old man?

MR. BEETLE. Ha, ha! It's fine to own something—property—the dream of your life, the fruit of your labours.

MRS. BEETLE. Ha, ha, ha!

MR. BEETLE. I'm off my head with joy—I'm going balmy.

MRS. BEETLE. Why?

MR. BEETLE. With worry. Now we've got our little pile that we've so looked forward to, we've got to work and work and work to make another one.

MRS. BEETLE. Why another one?

MR. BEETLE. Silly—so that we can have two, of course,

MRS. BEETLE. Two? Quite right—quite right—two.

MR. BEETLE. Just fancy—two—at least two, say three. Every one who's made his pile has to make another.

MRS. BEETLE. So that he can have two?

MR. BEETLE. Yes, or three.

MRS. BEETLE. Husband.

MR. BEETLE. Well, what is it?

MRS. BEETLE. I'm scared—S'posin' some one was to steal it from us.

MR. BEETLE. What?

MRS. BEETLE. Our capital—our little pile—our all in all.

MR. BEETLE. Our pi-ile—My gawd—don't frighten me.

MRS. BEETLE. We oughtn't to roll it about with us till we've made another one, dearie, did we?

MR. BEETLE. I'll tell you what—we'll invest it—In—vest it—store it up—bury it. That's what we'll do—nice and deep—nice and deep.

MRS. BEETLE. I hope nobody finds it.

MR. BEETLE. Eh, what's that? Finds it—No, of course they won't. Our little bit of capital.

MRS. BEETLE. Our nest-egg—Oh, bless me—I hope no one does—our little all.

MR. BEETLE. Wait—stay here and watch it—Watch it careful—don't let your eyes off it, not for a minute—Capital—Capital.

MRS. BEETLE. Where yer off to?

MR. BEETLE. To look for a hole—a little hole—a deep hole—deep and narrer to bury it in—out of harm's way—Careful—Careful. [Exit

MRS. BEETLE. Husband—husband, come back—wait a bit—I've found one—such a nice hole—Husband! He's gone! If I could only look into it—No, I mustn't leave yer. But only a peep—Here, stay here good and quiet, darling. Hubby'll be back soon—in half a jiff, half a jiff—So long, keep good—half a ji—

Enters the lair of the ICHNEUMON FLY

CHRYSA LIS. Oh, to be born—to be born—into the great new world.

Enter a STRANGE BEETLE

STRANGE BEETLE. They've gone—now's my chance. [Rolls pile away.]

TRAMP. 'Ere, mind where yer going to.

STRANGE BEETLE. Mind yer feet.

TRAMP. What's that yer rolling?

STRANGE BEETLE. Ha, ha! That's my capital—my little pile, my all.

TRAMP. Bit niffy, ain't it?

STRANGE BEETLE. Eh?

TRAMP. It smells.

STRANGE BEETLE. Capital don't smell—Off you go, my precious—This way, my little all, my nest-egg, my capital. [Exit

MRS. BEETLE. Oh dear, oh dear. That's somebody's house, that is—We can't put you there, my jewel. Oh, where's it gone to? Where's it gone to? My little pile—where's it gone to?

TRAMP. Why, not 'arf a minute—

MRS. BEETLE. [*Rushing at him*] Thief—thief—What 'ave you done with my pile?

TRAMP. I'm telling yer.

MRS. BEETLE. Here, give it back—yer wretch.

TRAMP. Just this minute a gentleman rolled it away over there.

MRS. BEETLE. What gentleman? Who?

TRAMP. A pot-bellied fellow, a fat, round chap.

MRS. BEETLE. My husband?

TRAMP. A feller with an ugly mug and crooked feet.

MRS. BEETLE. That's my husband.

TRAMP. His capital he said it was.

MRS. BEETLE. That's him—he must have found a hole—Husband—My precious—Darling! Where is the blasted fool?

TRAMP. That's where he rolled it to.

MRS. BEETLE. Coo-eh! Couldn't he have called me? Husband, my precious! I'll learn yer—Our capital—our all—our little pile. [*Exit*

TRAMP. Them butterflies was gay
And foolish, yer might say:
But these 'ere beetles—lumme,
They *do* work, anyway!

So, 'ere's to wish 'em luck—
Though gatherin' balls of muck
Is jest about as rummy
As anythink I've struck.

CHRYSALIS. O universe, prepare! O space, expand!
The mightiest of all happenings is at hand.

TRAMP. What's that?

CHRYSALIS. I'm being born.

TRAMP. That's good—and what are you going to be?

CHRYSALIS. I don't know—I don't know—Something great.

TRAMP. Ah, ha!

CHRYSALIS. I'll do something extraordinary—I'm being born.

TRAMP. What *you* want's life, my son.

CHRYSALIS. When half a minute's gone,
Something immense, unbounded,
Will happen here.

TRAMP. Go on!

CHRYSALIS. I shall do something great!

TRAMP. What?

CHRYSALIS. When I change my state,
The world will be astounded!

TRAMP. Well—'urry up. I'll wait.

Enter ICHNEUMON FLY, *dragging the corpse of a*
CRICKET *to its lair*

ICHNEUMON FLY. Look, larva, daddy's bringing you something nice.

Enters his lair

CHRYsalis. [*Shouting*]
The torment of my birth
Is tearing the whole earth.
She groans to set me free——

TRAMP. Then get a move on. See?

ICHNEUMON FLY. [*Returning*] No, no, daughter, you must eat. You mustn't come out—it wouldn't do at all. Daddy'll soon be back and he'll bring you something nice. What would you like, piggywiggy?

Enter LARVA

LARVA. Daddy, I'm bored here.

ICHNEUMON FLY. Ha, ha! That's a nice thing to say. Give daddy a kiss—Daddy'll bring you something tasty. Would you like a follow of cricket? Ha, ha—not a bad idea.

LARVA. I'd like—I don't know what I'd like.

ICHNEUMON FLY. She doesn't know what she'd like, bless her little heart. I'll find something you'll like—Ta-ta! Daddy must go to work now—Daddy must go a hunting and fetch something for his popsy-wopsy. Ta-ta! Go back now, poppet, and wait for your din-din. Ta-ta! [*Exit* LARVA

ICHNEUMON FLY. [*To Tramp*] Who are you?

TRAMP. I?

ICHNEUMON FLY. Are you edible?

TRAMP. Yes, I don't think.

ICHNEUMON FLY. [*Sniffing*] No—not fresh enough—Who are you?

TRAMP. Oh, any sort of skunk, I am.

ICHNEUMON FLY. [*Bowing*] Pleased to meet you. Any family?

TRAMP. Not as I am aware of.

ICHNEUMON FLY. Did you see her?

TRAMP. 'Er? Who?

ICHNEUMON FLY. My Larva. Charming, eh? Smart child—And how she grows, and what a twist she's got. Children are a great joy, aren't they?

TRAMP. I've 'eard 'em well spoken of.

ICHNEUMON FLY. Well, of course they are, you take it from me—One who knows. When you have them, at least you know what you're working for. That's life, that is. Children want to grow, to eat, to laugh, to dance, to play, don't they? Am I right?

TRAMP. Children want a lot.

ICHNEUMON FLY. Would you believe it, I take her two or three crickets every day. Do you think she eats them all up? No—Only the titbits—A splendid child, eh?

TRAMP. I should say so.

ICHNEUMON FLY. I'm proud of her—real proud. Takes after me—just like her daddy, eh? Ha, ha! And here I stand gossiping, when I ought to be at work. Oh, the fuss and the running about—Up early, home late, but as long as you're doing it for some one worth doing it for, what does it matter? Am I right?

TRAMP. I suppose you are.

ICHNEUMON FLY. A pity you aren't edible, isn't it? It is, really. I must take her something, you know, mustn't I? You see that yourself, don't you? [*Fingering* CHRYsalis.]

CHRYsalis. I proclaim the re-birth of the world.

ICHNEUMON FLY. Ah! You aren't ripe yet—Pity.

CHRYSALIS. I shall inspire—I shall create.

ICHNEUMON FLY. It's a great responsibility to bring up children—A great worry, isn't it? Feeding the poor little mites, paying for their education and putting them out into the world. That's no trifle, I can tell you. Well, I must be off now—Au revoir—Pleased to have met you—Ta-ta, my chicken—Be good! *[Exit]*

TRAMP. This 'as me fairly beat. That fly destroys
The cricket jest to feed 'is girls and boys;
But that pore 'armless cricket found life sweet,
Same as 'e docs—No! Nature 'as me beat!

LARVA. *[Crawling out of hole]* Daddy! Daddy!

TRAMP. So you're the Larva. Let's have a look at you,

LARVA. How ugly you are!

TRAMP. Am I? Why?

LARVA. I don't know—Oh, how bored I am! I want—I want——

TRAMP. What yer want?

LARVA. I don't know. Yes I do—To tear up something—
Something alive—that wriggles.

TRAMP. 'Erc, what's come over yer?

LARVA. Ugly—ugly—ugly! *[Crawls away.]*

TRAMP. Where's Mr. Manners?—Blowed if I'd feed a
daughter

Like 'er. Perliteness—that's what *I'd* 'ave taught 'er.

Enter MR. BEETLE

MR. BEETLE. *[Calling]* Come along, old girl. I've found a hole. Where are you? Where's my pile? Where's my wife?

TRAMP. Your wife? Do you mean that old harridan?
That greasy fat bundle of rags?

MR. BEETLE. That's her—Where's my pile?

TRAMP. That old tub in petticoats?

MR. BEETLE. That's her—that's her—She had my pile—
What's she done with my pile?

TRAMP. Why, your beauty went to look for you.

MR. BEETLE. Did she? Where's my pile?

TRAMP. That great ball of muck?

MR. BEETLE. Yes, yes. My nest-egg—my savings—my
capital. Where's my beautiful pile? I left my wife with it.

TRAMP. Some gentleman rolled it away over there. Your
wife wasn't here at the time.

MR. BEETLE. Where was she? Where is she?

TRAMP. She went after him. She thought it was you. She
kept shoutin' for yer.

MR. BEETLE. I'm not asking about her. Where's my pile,
I say?

TRAMP. Gentleman rolled it away.

MR. BEETLE. Rolled it away? My pile? Gawd in 'eaven!
Catch him. Catch him. Thief! Murder! All my little lot.
All I've saved. They've killed me, they've done me in.
Who cares about my wife? It's my pile they've taken.
Help—stop thief! Murder!

TRAMP. Ha, ha, ha!

Crikee! 'E don't want pleasure
But jest to pile up treasure;
And when the old sly copper—
Death—comes and nabs 'im proper,

'E'll still be like a nigger
Sweatin' to make it bigger,
Still 'eavin' and still puffin' . . .
And what's he gained? Why, nuffin'!

MR. CRICKET. [*Off stage*] Look out, darling—take care you don't stumble. Here we are—here we are. Oopsi-daisy! This is where we live—this is our new little home. Careful—You haven't hurt yourself, have you?

Enter MR. and MRS. CRICKET

MRS. CRICKET. No, Cricket, don't be absurd.

MR. CRICKET. But darling, you must be careful—When you're expecting—and now open the peephole—look—How do you like it?

MRS. CRICKET. Oh, darling, how tired I am!

MR. CRICKET. Sit down, darling, sit down. My popsy must take great care of herself.

MRS. CRICKET. What a long way—And all the move! Oh, men never know half the trouble moving is.

MR. CRICKET. Oh darling, come, come—Look, darling, look.

MRS. CRICKET. Now don't get cross, you horrid man,

MR. CRICKET. I won't say another word, really I won't. Fancy, Mrs. Cricket won't take care of herself, and in her state too—What do you think of her?

MRS. CRICKET. You naughty man—how can you joke about it?

MR. CRICKET. But darling, I'm so happy. Just fancy, all the little crickets, the noise, the chirping—[*Imitates the noise and laughs.*]

MRS. CRICKET. You—you silly boy—wants to be a great big Daddy, eh?

MR. CRICKET. And don't you want to be a Mummy too?—my Popsy?

MRS. CRICKET. Yes'm does! Is this our new home?

MR. CRICKET. Our little nest. Commodious little villa residence.

MRS. CRICKET. Will it be dry? Who built it?

MR. CRICKET. Why, goodness me, another Cricket lived here years ago.

MRS. CRICKET. Fancy, and has he moved?

MR. CRICKET. Ha, ha—Yes, he's moved. Don't you know where to? Guess.

MRS. CRICKET. I don't know—What a long time you take saying anything—Do tell me, Cricket, quickly.

MR. CRICKET. Well, yesterday a bird got him—Snap, snip, snap. So we're moving into his house. By Jove, what a slice of luck!

MRS. CRICKET. Gobbled him up alive? How horrible!

MR. CRICKET. Eh? A godsend for us. I did laugh. Tralala, etc. We'll put up a plate. [*Puts up plate with 'Mr. Cricket, musician'*] Where shall we put it? More to the right? Higher?

MRS. CRICKET. And you saw him eaten?

MR. CRICKET. I'm telling you—like that—snap, snip!

MRS. CRICKET. Horrible! Cricket, I have such a queer feeling.

MR. CRICKET. Good heavens—Perhaps it's—no, it couldn't be, not yet!

MRS. CRICKET. Oh dear, I'm so frightened.

MR. CRICKET. Nothing to be frightened of, dear—
Every lady——

MRS. CRICKET. It's all very well for you to talk—
Cricket, will you always love me?

MR. CRICKET. Of course, darling—Dear me, don't cry—
come, love.

MRS. CRICKET. Show me how he swallowed him—Snip,
snap.

MR. CRICKET. Snip, snap,

MRS. CRICKET. Oh, how funny! [*Has hysterics.*]

MR. CRICKET. Well, well. There's nothing to cry about.
[*Sits beside her*] We'll furnish this place beautifully. And
as soon as we can run to it, we'll put up some——

MRS. CRICKET. Curtains?

MR. CRICKET. Curtains, of course! How clever of you to
think of it. Give me a kiss.

MRS. CRICKET. Never mind that now—Don't be silly.

MR. CRICKET. Of course I'm silly. Guess what I've
brought?

MRS. CRICKET. Curtains!

MR. CRICKET. No, something smaller—Where did
I——?

MRS. CRICKET. Quick, quick, let me see.

[MR. CRICKET *takes out a rattle*
Oh, how sweet, Cricket! Give it to me.

MR. CRICKET. [*Sings*]
When Dr. Stork had brought their child,
Their teeny-weeny laddy,
All day about the cradle smiled
His mumsy and his daddy:
And 'Cricket, cricket, cricket,
You pretty little thing'—
Is now the song that all day long
They sing, sing, sing.

MRS. CRICKET. Lend it me, darling—Oh, daddy—I'm
so pleased. Rattle it.

MR. CRICKET. Darling.

MRS. CRICKET. [*Singing*] Cricket, cricket, cricket!

MR. CRICKET. Now I must run round a little—let people
know I am here.

MRS. CRICKET. [*Singing*]
And 'Cricket, cricket, cricket,
You pretty little thing . . .'

MR. CRICKET. I must get some introductions, fix up
orders, have a look round. Give me the rattle, I'll use it
on my way.

MRS. CRICKET. And what about me? I want it.

MR. CRICKET. Very well, darling.

MRS. CRICKET. You won't leave me long——

MR. CRICKET. Rattle for me if you want me. And I
expect a neighbour will be coming along. Have a chat
with him, about the children, and all that, you know.

MRS. CRICKET. You bad boy.

MR. CRICKET. Now, darling, be careful. Won't be long,
my pet. [*Runs off*]

MRS. CRICKET. [*Rattles*] Hush-a-bye—cricket—on the tree top! Cricket! I feel frightened.

TRAMP. Don't you be frightened, mum. You'll 'ave an easier time than most ladies, by the look of yer.

MRS. CRICKET. Who's there, a beetle?—You don't bite?

TRAMP. No.

MRS. CRICKET. And how are the children?

TRAMP. Ah—now you're askin'! Rum, 'ow
Yer question 'urts me, some'ow;
For, beg your pardon, Madam—
Fact is, I've never 'ad 'em.

MRS. CRICKET. Oh, dear, haven't you any children?
That's a pity. [*Shakes rattle*] Cricket! Cricket! And why did you never marry, beetle?

TRAMP. Well, some's too selfish, maybe,
To want a wife and baby . . .
Oh, 'strewth, what do I care now?—
She wouldn't 'ave me! There now.

MRS. CRICKET. Yes! Yes! You men *are* troublesome.
[*Rattles*] Cricket! Cricket! Cricket!

CHRYSALIS. In me, in me, in me,
The future strives to be!

TRAMP. Oh, buck up!

CHRYSALIS. I will accomplish such deeds.

Enter MRS. BEETLE

MRS. BEETLE. Isn't my husband here? Oh, the stupid man. Where is our pile?

MRS. CRICKET. Your pile? Can we play with it? Do let me see it.

MRS. BEETLE. It's nothing to play with, it's our future, our nest-egg, our capital. My husband, the clumsy creature, has gone off with it.

MRS. CRICKET. Oh dear, I hope he hasn't run away from you.

MRS. BEETLE. And where is yours?

MRS. CRICKET. He's away on business. Cricket! Cricket!

MRS. BEETLE. Fancy him leaving you all alone like that poor thing, and you—[*Whispers*—aren't you?

MRS. CRICKET. Oh dear!

MRS. BEETLE. So young, too. And aren't you making a pile?

MRS. CRICKET. What for?

MRS. BEETLE. A pile—for you and him and your family.
That's for your future—for your whole life.

MRS. CRICKET. Oh no, all I want is to have my own little home, my nest, a little house of my very own. And curtains, and children, and my Cricket. That's all.

MRS. BEETLE. How can you live without a pile?

MRS. CRICKET. What should I do with it?

MRS. BEETLE. Roll it about with you everywhere.
There's nothing like a pile for holding a man.

MRS. CRICKET. Oh no, a little house.

MRS. BEETLE. A pile, I tell you.

MRS. CRICKET. A little house.

MRS. BEETLE. Pretty little innocence! I'd like to stay with you, but I must be going.

MRS. CRICKET. And I wanted to hear all about your children.

MRS. BEETLE. I don't want to bother over no children.
My pile, that's all I want, my pile! *[Exit]*

MRS. CRICKET. Oh, what an old frump! I don't wonder
her husband's run away from her. *[Sings a snatch of the
song]* I've such a queer feeling. Snip! Snap! That's
what he did to him—Snip!

ICHNEUMON FLY *enters*

ICHNEUMON FLY. Ha, ha! *[He murders MRS. CRICKET
and drags her to his lair.]*

TRAMP. Oh, murder!

ICHNEUMON FLY. Daughter, daughter! Chicken! *[Sing-
ing]* 'Open your mouth and shut your eyes and see what
some one'll send you.'

TRAMP. 'E's killed 'er, and I stood like a bloomin' log!
Didn't utter a sound she didn't and nobody ran to 'elp
her!

Enter PARASITE

PARASITE. Bravo! Comrade, just what I was thinking.

TRAMP. To die—like that—so young, so 'elpless.

PARASITE. Just what I was thinking. I was looking on all
the time. I wouldn't do a thing like that, you know. I
wouldn't really. Every one wants to live, don't they?

TRAMP. Who are you?

PARASITE. I, oh nothing much, I'm a poor man, an
orphan. They call me a parasite.

TRAMP. How can any one dare to kill like that!

PARASITE. That's just what I say. Do you think he needs
it? Do you think he's hungry like me? Not a bit of it.
He kills to add to his larder, what's three-quarters full

already. He collects things, he does, hangs 'em up to
dry, smokes 'em, pickles 'em. It's a scandal, that's what
it is, a scandal. One's got a store while another's starv-
ing. Why should he have a dagger, and me only my
bare fists to fight with, and all over chilblains too—
aren't I right?

TRAMP. I should say so.

PARASITE. There's no equality, that's what I say. One a
law for the rich—another for the poor! And if I was to
kill anything, I couldn't eat it—not satisfactorily, I
can't chew properly, my jaw's too weak. Is that right?

TRAMP. I don't 'old with killin', no'ow.

PARASITE. My very words. Comrade, or at least,
hoarding shouldn't be allowed. Eat your fill and 'ave
done with it. Down with larders! Storing things is
robbin' those who haven't nowhere to store. Eat your
fill and have done with it and then there'd be enough
for all, wouldn't there?

TRAMP. *I dunno—*

PARASITE. Well, I'm tellin' yer, aren't I? Down with—

ICHNEUMON FLY. *[Re-entering]* Eat it up baby, eat it up.
Choose what you like. Have you got a nice daddy? Eh?

PARASITE. Good afternoon, my lord.

ICHNEUMON FLY. How d'ye do? Edible? *[Sniffing.]*

PARASITE. Oh no, you're joking, guv'nor, why me?

ICHNEUMON FLY. Get out, you filthy creature. What d'ye
want here, clear off.

PARASITE. I'm movin', your worship; no offence,
captain. *[Cowers.]*

ICHNEUMON FLY. [*To TRAMP*] Well, did you see that neat piece of work, eh? It's not every one who could do that. Ah, my boy, that's what you want—brains, expert knowledge, enterprise, imagination, initiative—and love of work, let me tell you.

PARASITE. That's what I say.

ICHNEUMON FLY. My good man, if you want to keep alive, you've got to fight your way. There's your future, there's your family. And then you know there must be a certain amount of ambition. A strong personality is bound to assert itself.

PARASITE. That's what I say, sir.

ICHNEUMON FLY. Of course, of course. Make your way in the world. Use the talent that's in you, that's what I call a useful life.

PARASITE. Absolutely, your grace 'its it every time.

ICHNEUMON FLY. Hold your tongue, you filthy creature. I'm not talking to you.

PARASITE. No, of course you weren't, my lord, beg your pardon, I'm sure.

ICHNEUMON FLY. And how it cheers you up when you do your duty like that. 'Do the job that's nearest, though it's dull at whiles.' When you feel that, you feel that you are not living in vain. 'Life is *real*, life is earnest, life is not an empty dream,' Well, good afternoon, sir, I must be off again! 'The daily round, the common task!' So long! [*Exit*]

PARASITE. The old murderer. Believe me, it was all I could do not to fly at his throat! Yes, sir, I'll work too if need be, but why should I work when somebody else has more than he can consume? I've got initiative—

but I keep it here. [*Pats stomach*] I'm 'ungry, that's what I am, 'ungry, that's a pretty state of things, isn't it?

TRAMP. Anything for a piece of meat.

PARASITE. That's what I say. Anything for a piece of meat, and the poor man's got nothing. It's against nature. Every one should have enough to eat, eh? Down with work!

TRAMP. [*Shaking rattle*] Poor creature, poor creature!

PARASITE. That's it. Every one's got a right to live.
[*Rattle and chirping in reply*]

MR. CRICKET. [*Enters, rattling*] Here I am, my pet, here I am, my darling. Where are you, my precious? Guess what hubby's brought you.

ICHNEUMON FLY. [*Behind him*] Aha!

TRAMP. Look out—look out!

PARASITE. Don't interfere, mate—don't get mixed up in it. What must be, must be.

MR. CRICKET. Mummy!

ICHNEUMON FLY. [*Kills him*] Larva, look what your kind daddy's bringing you now.

TRAMP. Oh, Gawd in Heaven—'ow can you stand by and see it?

PARASITE. Just what I say. That's the third cricket he's had already, and me nothing. And that's what we poor working men are asked to put up with.

ICHNEUMON FLY. [*Re-entering*] No, no, kiddy, I've no time. Daddy must go back to work. Eat, eat, eat. Quiet now, I'll be back in an hour. [*Exit*]

PARASITE. It's more than I can stand—dirty old profiteer! What injustice! I'll show 'im, that I will. Just you wait! [*Trembling*] 'E's not coming back, is 'e? Keep cave! I must just 'ave a look.

TRAMP. Thank 'eaven! These 'eathen insect's may be vile,
But man—man's diff'rent. Folks like me an' you
Work 'ard, real 'ard, and makes our little pile . . .
Blast! I'm all mixed. *That's* what them beetles do.

It's what I say—*man* 'as ideals and dreams
And fam'ily love. 'Is purpose—put it plain—
Is keepin' up the race . . . , 'Ullo, though—seems
I've got them crickets fairly on the brain.

Bold—that's what man is; resolute, yer might s'y.
If 'e wants more, 'e does 'is neighbour in . . .
O 'Ell! That makes 'im like this murd'rous fly . . .
But, there you are, 'oo can think straight on gin?

CHRYSALIS. I feel something great—something great.

TRAMP. What jer call great?

CHRYSALIS. To be born, to live!

TRAMP. All right, little chrysalis—I won't desert yer.

PARASITE. [*Rolling out of the FLY's lair, and hiccoughing*]
Ha, ha, ha! Hup—that—ha, ha, hup—the old miser—
hup—kept a larder—hup—for that white-faced daught-
er of his. Hup—ha, ha. I feel quite—hup—I think I'm
going to bust—damn the hiccoughs! It's not every one
who'd eat as much as that—hup. I'm not a common
man, eh, mate?

TRAMP. And 'ow about the Larva?

PARASITE. Oh, I've gobbled her up too, hup. For what
we 'ave received may the—hup.

TRAMP. Gah! Bleedin' Bolshie!

ACT III THE ANTS

TRAMP. It's like this 'ere . . . What's wrong about
Them insect's, if yer think it out,
Is, they've no feller-feelin'. Each
Jest for 'isself is what *they* preach.

CHRYSALIS. Listen to me, listen to me—
The whole world will soon be free!

TRAMP. Thinks 'e's the world, 'e does . . . My 'at!
These insect's all b'aves like that—
Ridic'lous creatures! Jest can't see
'Ow small they looks to you and me . . .
They make me tired. . . . I'd give my clay
(Gospel, I would) to get away.
Man! These 'ere insect's never dream
Of workin' to some general scheme.

CHRYSALIS. The crowning hour approaches. Lo
The universe begins to glow!

TRAMP. [*Jumping up*]
Gorblimey, if I 'aven't struck
The truth! Now, there's a bit o' luck.
Insect's won't work together. Man
Will. 'E can form a general plan.
There's something great in 'im what fights
And perishes for the nation's rights.

[*Sits down*]

CHRYSALIS. My wings are coming. See, they spread
Beyond the vast suns overhead!

TRAMP. I've 'it it! That's what makes men great—
Givin' their lives up for the State! . . .
Man's not 'alf noble—put it straight!

'Ere, what's that bitin' me? Blimey, there's another of 'em—S'truth, I've sat on an Ant heap—'undreds and thousands—that's what they are playing at—'undreds and thousands!

[In the meantime the Curtain rises and displays the Ant Heap. In the centre sits a BLIND ANT who counts continuously: ANTS with sacks, beans, shovels, etc., run across in time to his counting]

BLIND ANT. One, two, three, four—one, two, three, four.

TRAMP. What's that? What yer counting for, old boy?

BLIND ANT. One, two, three, four—

TRAMP. What's this 'ere? A warehouse or a factory, isn't it? Hi, what's it for?

BLIND ANT. One, two, three, four—

TRAMP. What's this factory for, I'm asking—why's this blind feller countin'? Ah, he's giving them the time. They all move in time as he counts, one, two, three, four. Like machines—Bah, it makes my head swim,

BLIND ANT. One, two, three, four—

Enter CHIEF ENGINEER

CHIEF ENGINEER. Quicker, quicker, one, two three, four—

BLIND ANT. *[More quickly]* One, two, three, four—one, two, three, four.

[They all move more quickly]

TRAMP. What's that? I'm asking yer, sir, what's this 'ere factory?

CHIEF ENGINEER. What's your business?

TRAMP. Business?

CHIEF ENGINEER. From which of the Ants?

TRAMP. I'm a human man, that's what I am. Ants indeed!

CHIEF ENGINEER. This is an Ant realm. What do you want here?

TRAMP. 'Avin' a look.

CHIEF ENGINEER. Do you want work?

TRAMP. Shouldn't mind.

SECOND ENGINEER *rushes in*

2ND ENGINEER. A discovery! A discovery!

CHIEF ENGINEER. What is it?

2ND ENGINEER. A new method of speeding up. Don't count one, two, three, four—count *blank*, two, three, four—blind fellow, hullo!

BLIND ANT. One, two, three, four—

2ND ENGINEER. Wrong: Blank, two, three, four.

BLIND ANT. Blank, two, three, four. Blank, two, three, four—*[ALL move more quickly.]*

TRAMP. Not so fast—Makes me feel giddy.

2ND ENGINEER. Who are you?

TRAMP. Stranger in these parts!

2ND ENGINEER. Where from?

CHIEF ENGINEER. From the humans—Where's the Human Ant Heap?

TRAMP. What?

CHIEF ENGINEER. Where's the Human Ant Heap?

AND SO AD INFINITUM

TRAMP. Oh, over there, and over there. Everywhere.

2ND ENGINEER. Ha, ha! Everywhere! Fool!

CHIEF ENGINEER. Are there any humans?

TRAMP. Yes. They're called the lords of creation, that's what they're called.

2ND ENGINEER. Ha, ha! Lords of creation!

CHIEF ENGINEER. We are the lords of creation.

2ND ENGINEER. Ha, ha! Masters of the world!

CHIEF ENGINEER. We're the masters of the world.

2ND ENGINEER. The Ant Realm!

CHIEF ENGINEER. The largest Ant State!

2ND ENGINEER. A World Power!

CHIEF ENGINEER. The largest Democracy!

TRAMP. What's that?

CHIEF ENGINEER. The world must obey us!

2ND ENGINEER. All have to work—all for *Her*.

CHIEF ENGINEER. As *She* orders.

TRAMP. Who's *Her*?

CHIEF ENGINEER. The whole of the State. The Nation!

TRAMP. Why, that's just the same as us! M.P.s we 'ave and Boro' Councillors, that's democracy—'Ave yer got Boro' Councillors?

CHIEF ENGINEER. No, we have the whole.

TRAMP. And who speaks for the whole?

2ND ENGINEER. Ha, ha! He knows nothing.

ACT III

THE ANTS

CHIEF ENGINEER. The one who orders. She who only issues commands.

2ND ENGINEER. She abides in the law—she is nowhere else.

TRAMP. And who gives you your orders?

CHIEF ENGINEER. Reason.

2ND ENGINEER. Law.

CHIEF ENGINEER. The interests of the State.

2ND ENGINEER. That's it—that's it——

TRAMP. I like that—all for the whole, and the whole for all.

CHIEF ENGINEER. For its majesty.

2ND ENGINEER. And against its enemies.

TRAMP. What's that? Against whom?

CHIEF ENGINEER. Against all.

2ND ENGINEER. We are surrounded by enemies.

CHIEF ENGINEER. We defeated the Black Ants——

2ND ENGINEER. And starved out the Brown——

CHIEF ENGINEER. And subjugated the Greys, and only the Yellows are left; we must starve out the Yellows——

2ND ENGINEER. We must starve them all out.

TRAMP. Why?

CHIEF ENGINEER. In the interests of the whole.

2ND ENGINEER. The interests of the whole are the highest.

CHIEF ENGINEER. Interests of race——

2ND ENGINEER. Industrial interests——

CHIEF ENGINEER. Colonial interests——

2ND ENGINEER. World interests——

CHIEF ENGINEER. Interests of the world.

2ND ENGINEER. Yes, yes, that's it.

CHIEF ENGINEER. All interests are the whole's.

2ND ENGINEER. Nobody may have interests but the whole.

CHIEF ENGINEER. Interests preserve the whole.

2ND ENGINEER. And wars nourish it.

TRAMP. Ah, you've warlike Ants.

2ND ENGINEER. He knows nothing.

CHIEF ENGINEER. Our Ants are the most peaceful Ants.

2ND ENGINEER. A nation of peace.

CHIEF ENGINEER. A labour State.

2ND ENGINEER. They only wish for world power——

CHIEF ENGINEER. Because they wish for world peace——

2ND ENGINEER. In the interest of their peaceable output——

CHIEF ENGINEER. And in the interests of progress.

2ND ENGINEER. In the interest of their interests, when we rule over the world.

CHIEF ENGINEER. We shall conquer time, we wish to reign over time.

TRAMP. Over what?

CHIEF ENGINEER. Time. Time is greater than space.

2ND ENGINEER. Time has never been mastered.

CHIEF ENGINEER. The master of Time will be master of all!

TRAMP. Slowly, for the love of Mike, slowly, let me think——

CHIEF ENGINEER. Speed is the master of Time.

2ND ENGINEER. The taming of time——

CHIEF ENGINEER. He who commands speed will rule over time.

2ND ENGINEER. Blank, two, three, four—blank, two, three, four——

BLIND ANT. [*More quickly*] Blank, two, three, four—blank, two——

CHIEF ENGINEER. We must quicken the speed.

2ND ENGINEER. The speed of output.

CHIEF ENGINEER. The Peace of Life——

2ND ENGINEER. Every movement must be quickened.

CHIEF ENGINEER. Shortened——

2ND ENGINEER. Calculated——

CHIEF ENGINEER. To a second——

2ND ENGINEER. To the *n*th of a second——

CHIEF ENGINEER. So as to save time——

2ND ENGINEER. So as to increase the output——

CHIEF ENGINEER. Work had been too slow—labour must be carried out unsparingly——

2ND ENGINEER. Ruthlessly——

AND SO AD INFINITUM

TRAMP. And what's the hurry, anyway?

CHIEF ENGINEER. The interests of the whole.

2ND ENGINEER. It is a question of output—question of power.

CHIEF ENGINEER. Peaceful competition.

2ND ENGINEER. We are fighting the battle of peace.

BLIND ANT. Blank, two, three, four——

[AN OFFICIAL *approaches the TWO ENGINEERS and makes a report*]

TRAMP. Blank, two, three, four! Yer *must* go quicker.

Why,

If I was countin', 'stead o' you, I'd make them vermin fly.

Quicker, quicker, quicker! We men are jest like you——

We're all for speed. I tell yer, we're countin' quicker, too;

And if we rush to ruin, we'll 'ave ourselves to thank——

So wake up, ole blind feller. On with yer countin'! Blank——

BLIND ANT. Two, three, four——

CHIEF ENGINEER. Faster—faster——

[AN ANT *collapses with his load and moans*]

2ND ENGINEER. Tut, tut! What's that? Get up.

ANOTHER ANT. [*Next to him, bending over*] Dead!

CHIEF ENGINEER. One, two—carry him away, quick.

2ND ENGINEER. He died honourably in the cause of speed.

ACT III

THE ANTS

CHIEF ENGINEER. How are you lifting him? Too slowly, you're wasting time. Drop him. Now head and feet together. Blank, two, three—wrong, drop him again. Head and feet—blank, two, three, four—take him away—blank, two, blank, two, blank——

2ND ENGINEER. Two, three, four—quicker.

TRAMP. Anyhow, he died quick enough——

CHIEF ENGINEER. Work, work, he who possesses more, must work more.

2ND ENGINEER. He requires more——

CHIEF ENGINEER. He has more to defend——

2ND ENGINEER. And more to gain.

CHIEF ENGINEER. We are a nation of peace—peace means work.

2ND ENGINEER. And work, strength.

CHIEF ENGINEER. And strength, war.

2ND ENGINEER. Yes, yes.

Enter INVENTOR, groping

INVENTOR. Out of my way—step aside.

2ND ENGINEER. Our inventor——

INVENTOR. Take care, take care. Don't touch my head. It is glass, it is brittle. It is greater than I am; keep out of the way, or it will burst, smash, bang. Step aside.

2ND ENGINEER. How goes it?

INVENTOR. It hurts me, it's going to burst. It may knock against the walls—bang! I can't get my hands round it. I can scarcely carry it. Look out, do you hear? Whew, whew!

CHIEF ENGINEER. What's in it?

INVENTOR. A machine—a new machine in my head. Oh, oh, a huge machine. Out of the way, out of the way, I'm carrying a machine.

CHIEF ENGINEER. What sort of a machine?

INVENTOR. A war machine. A vast machine, a huge one. The swiftest, most effective crusher of lives. The forefront of progress, the acme of science. Whew, whew, do you hear it? Ten thousand, a hundred thousand dead! Whew, whew, it keeps on working. Two hundred thousand dead—whew, whew, whew, whew!

CHIEF ENGINEER. [*To TRAMP*] A genius, eh?

INVENTOR. Oh, oh, what pain, my head's splitting—out of the way, out of the way, don't knock against me—whew, whew, whew! [*Exit*]

CHIEF ENGINEER. A vast intellect. The greatest of Scientists.

2ND ENGINEER. Nothing serves the State so much as Science.

CHIEF ENGINEER. Great is Science, and it will prevail—there will be war.

TRAMP. Why war?

CHIEF ENGINEER. Because we shall have a new war machine.

2ND ENGINEER. Because we still need a bit of the world.

CHIEF ENGINEER. A bit of the world from the Birch tree to the Pine tree.

2ND ENGINEER. The road between the two blades of grass—

CHIEF ENGINEER. The only open road to the South—

2ND ENGINEER. A question of prestige.

CHIEF ENGINEER. And trade.

2ND ENGINEER. The rights of nationality.

CHIEF ENGINEER. We or the Yellows—

2ND ENGINEER. Never was war more honourable or urgent—

CHIEF ENGINEER. Than the war we must fight.

2ND ENGINEER. We are prepared.

CHIEF ENGINEER. We have only to find a *casus belli*.

BLIND ANT. Blank, two, three, four— [*A gong*]

CHIEF ENGINEER. What's that?

VOICE. [*Outside*] A messenger! A messenger!

Enter MESSENGER

MESSENGER. I beg to announce myself. From the G.H.Q. Southern Army.

CHIEF ENGINEER. Good.

MESSENGER. In accordance with our instructions, we crossed the frontier of the Yellows—

CHIEF ENGINEER. What then?

MESSENGER. The Yellows captured me and took me to their Commander-in-Chief—

CHIEF ENGINEER. And—?

MESSENGER. Here is his letter—

CHIEF ENGINEER. Show it me. "The Government of the Yellow Ants calls upon the Ant Realm within three

months to withdraw their Army lying between the Birch tree and the Pine tree between the two blades of grass.'

2ND ENGINEER. Listen to him.

CHIEF ENGINEER. 'This territory comprises the historical, vital, industrial, general, and military interests of our State, so that it rightly belongs to us.'

2ND ENGINEER. An insult, an insult, we shall not tolerate it!

CHIEF ENGINEER. 'Meanwhile we are giving orders to our Army to mobilize.' War, war, at last!

2ND ENGINEER. At last a war is forced upon us.

CHIEF ENGINEER. To arms!

ANOTHER MESSENGER *runs on*

2ND MESSENGER. The Yellows are marching across our frontier——

CHIEF ENGINEER. To arms! To arms!

2ND MESSENGER. Mobilization—to arms!

BOTH MESSENGERS. To arms! To arms!

[Alarm sirens—from all sides the ANTS scramble into the ANT HEAP]

BLIND ANT. Blank, two, three, four—blank, two, three, four——

[Increasing din within]

TRAMP. It does yer good to see 'em pass,
 Prepared to shed their blood——
 And jest for 'alf a yard o' mud,
 Between two blades o' grass.
 It does yer good to see 'em all
 So 'andsome and so spry.
 They're not afraid to up and die——

They've 'eard the Nation's call.
 It makes yer think o' them ole scenes,
 With star-shells over 'ead,
 The night we left a thousan' dead——

And keptured two latrines.
 Now, fellers, dig yerselves right in,
 And stay there till yer bust.
 Them Yellers wants your yard o' dust,
 And don't you let 'em win!

CHRYSALIS. They call, they shout, they beat their drums.
 The world wakes. The great moment comes!

[Beating of drums—ANTS transform themselves into SOLDIERS. CHIEF ENGINEER becomes COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF]

TRAMP. Now, that's what trainin' does. You're smart lads. Put it there!
 Crumbs! If you're half the ant I takes yer for, I swear
 You'll cop that bit o' land afore the Yellers cop it——
 But 'ere's the brass 'ats comin'. I guess I'd better 'op it.

CHIEF ENGINEER. Soldiers! We find ourselves compelled to call you to the colours. A wicket enemy has treacherously attacked us, for the purpose of outwitting our peaceable preparations. At this great hour I have been appointed Dictator.

2ND ENGINEER. Three cheers for the Dictator—Shout boys, or——

SOLDIERS. Hip, hip, hooray!

CHIEF ENGINEER. *[Saluting]* Thank you! You have responded to the gravity of the moment. Soldiers, we are fighting for life and liberty.

2ND ENGINEER. And for the greatness of our State.

CHIEF ENGINEER. And for the greatness of our State.
We shall wage war for the interest of civilization and our military honour. Soldiers, I am with you to the last drop of my blood.

2ND ENGINEER. Long live our beloved Commander-in-Chief!

SOLDIERS. Long live our Commander-in-Chief!

CHIEF ENGINEER. I know my soldiers. They will fight until the final victory. Long live our gallant men. Hurrah!

SOLDIERS. Hurrah! Hurrah!

CHIEF ENGINEER. [*To* 2ND ENGINEER] The First and Second Divisions will attack frontally. The Fourth will envelop the Pine Wood, and break into the Ant Heap of the Yellows. Women and children to be slaughtered—Third Division in reserve—no quarter!

[SECOND ENGINEER *salutes*]

May God assist us in this. Soldiers, 'shun! Right turn—quick march!

[*Drums*]

One, two! War forced upon us—one, two, one, two! In the name of Justice! No quarter! For your hearths and homes! One, two, one, two! We are only defending ourselves. War on the world. For a Greater Home Country. One, two—a ruthless enemy. Will of the Nation! To battle—strike hard. Historical claims. Brilliant spirit of the Army. One, two, one, two!

[*Fresh TROOPS march past*]

Good luck, soldiers, I shall be behind you—Well done the Fifth! The conquerors of the Pine Trees. A mighty epoch, to victory—conquer the world, magnificent

daring—one, two! Well done, Seventh! Beat them, soldiers, the Yellows are cowards. Hack your way through, burn, destroy, heroes!

Enter MESSENGER

MESSENGER. The Yellows have invaded the stretch of country between the roots of the Pine Tree and the Stone——

CHIEF ENGINEER. Entirely according to plan. Faster, soldiers, one, two. War forced on us for honour and glory, needs of the State, no conception of Justice; soldiers, show your bravery, victory is ours, greatest moment in history. Quick march, quick march, quick march!

[*Big bang in the distance*]

The battle is beginning. Up with the reserves.

[*Looks through the telescope*]

BLIND ANT. Blank, two, three, four—blank——

[*Increasing din*]

CHRYsalis. Wild voices of the world, be dumb!
Your woes are at an end. I come!

CHIEF ENGINEER. Reserves, stand to! [*To* 2ND ENGINEER] Issue a report.

2ND ENGINEER. [*In a loud voice*] The battle has begun at last, under favourable weather conditions. Our heroic men are fighting in magnificent spirits.

CHIEF ENGINEER. Right turn, quick march!—one, two, one, two—faster boys!

Enter MESSENGER

MESSENGER. Our right wing is retreating. The Fifth Regiment is completely destroyed.

AND SO AD INFINITUM

CHIEF ENGINEER. According to plan. Sixth Regiment, replace them.

TRAMP. Ho, yuss! . . . There was other reports that began
'The Regiment was butchered—accordin' to plan!'
And after 'is battle, 'e'll go round and scan
The corpses, all 'eaped up—'accordin' to plan'.

Enter STRETCHER-BEARERS with wounded

A WOUNDED MAN. The Fifth Regiment, our regiment—we're all destroyed. Stop! Stop!
[*Telegraph instrument clatters*]

SIGNAL OFFICER. [*Reading dispatch*] 'Fifth Regiment destroyed. We await orders.'

CHIEF ENGINEER. Sixth, take its place. [*To 2ND ENGINEER*] Issue a report.

2ND ENGINEER. The battle is developing successfully. The Fifth Regiment especially distinguished itself, heroically repelling all attacks, whereupon it was relieved by the Sixth.

CHIEF ENGINEER. Bravo! I will decorate you with the Steel Cross.

2ND ENGINEER. Thank you. I am only doing my duty.

JOURNALIST. [*Approaching with note-book*] I am a journalist; shall we announce a victory?

CHIEF ENGINEER. Yes. Successful operations. Thanks to our plans prepared years ago. The admirable spirit of our forces—irresistible advance—the enemy demoralized.

JOURNALIST. We—we—we——

ACT III

THE ANTS

CHIEF ENGINEER. Eh?

JOURNALIST. We will print everything.

CHIEF ENGINEER. Good. We rely upon the co-operation of the Press. Don't forget the admirable spirit.

JOURNALIST. The Press is performing its d-duty!

[*Exit*]

Enter PHILANTHROPIST with collecting-box

PHILANTHROPIST. Help the wounded! All for the wounded! Gifts for the wounded. Give to the wounded. Help for the cripples.

CHIEF ENGINEER. Second Division, attack—it must break through whatever the sacrifice.

PHILANTHROPIST. For our heroes—help your brothers—help for the wounded.

TRAMP. War for the wounded! Coppers for their wounds.

PHILANTHROPIST. Help for the wounded—give to the cripples.

TRAMP. [*He tears off a button and puts it in the collecting-box*]
All for the wounded! My last button for the war!

ANOTHER WOUNDED MAN. Oh! Put me out of my misery, do!

PHILANTHROPIST. Aid the wounded.
[*Telegraph instrument again*]

SIGNAL OFFICER. The right wing of the Yellows is retreating.

CHIEF ENGINEER. Pursue them. Finish them off. Don't bother about prisoners.

2ND ENGINEER. The enemy retiring in confusion. Our

regiments in defiance of death, dogging his footsteps with splendid daring.

CHIEF ENGINEER. Fourth Levy!

SIGNAL OFFICER. The Fourth Regiment has invested the Pine Tree and has made a rear attack on the Ant Heap of the Yellows—the garrison is slaughtered.

CHIEF ENGINEER. Raze it to the ground—finish off the civilians.

SIGNAL OFFICER. The enemy is overwhelmed—they have evacuated a foot of the furze bush.

CHIEF ENGINEER. Victory is ours. [*Falls on knees and removes his helmet*] Great god of the Ants, thou hast granted victory to thy servants. I appoint thee honorary Colonel. [*Jumps up*] Third Division, forward, all reserves forward—no prisoners. Forward! [*Again on his knees*] Righteous god of strength, thou knowest that our holy cause—[*Jumps up*] After them—after them—attack them—hunt them down—slaughter everybody. The empire of the world is settled. [*Kneels*] God of the Ants, in this significant hour—[*Prays silently.*]

TRAMP. [*Bending over him softly*] Empire of the World! You miserable Ant you, you call this bit of clay and grass the world? This dirty little patch of soil? If I was to trample down all this 'ere Ant 'eap of yours and you with it, d'yer think these 'ere trees above yer would notice it? Not they!

CHIEF ENGINEER. Who are you?

TRAMP. Only a voice. Though yesterday p'r'aps I was a soldier on another ant heap. What yer think of yerself, conqueror of the world? Feel big enough? Don't that 'eap of corpses seem too small—for your glory, yer miserable image?

CHIEF ENGINEER. [*Rising*] I disregard you entirely—I proclaim myself Emperor!

SIGNAL OFFICER. The Second Division is asking for reinforcements. Our troops seem exhausted.

CHIEF ENGINEER. They must hold out. Shoot down defaulters.

SIGNAL OFFICER. The Third Division has been thrown into confusion.

AN ANT. [*Escapes across stage*] We're running away!

CHIEF ENGINEER. Mobilize the nation!

A SHOUT. No! No! Back, back!

PIERCING CRY. Save yourselves!

CHIEF ENGINEER. Send the unfit to the front—every one must go!

SOLDIER. They're beating us, run.

TWO SOLDIERS. They've surrounded us—escape!

A SOLDIER. To the West. Escape to the West!

SOLDIERS. They've surrounded us from the West—run to the East!

CHIEF ENGINEER. Back! To your places—to the front. Face to West.

CROWD. [*From R.*] Escape—they're hunting us down. To the East.

CROWD. [*From L.*] To the West, out of the way, they're here!

[*The two streams begin to fight*]

CHIEF ENGINEER. [*Shouting at them*] Back, cowards! You cattle—I am your Emperor.

A SOLDIER. Lie down. [*Runs him through*] Escape!

2ND ENGINEER. [*Runs in wounded*] They've taken the city. Put out the lights.

THE YELLOWS. [*Penetrating from both sides*] Hurrah! Hurrah! The Ant Heap is ours!
[*Lights go out: confusion*]

2ND ENGINEER. Fight! Fight! Ah!

YELLOW LEADER. Into the passages after them—spare nobody, slaughter all the men.

SHOUTS OF SLAUGHTERMEN. Ah! Ah!

BLIND ANT. Blank, two—blank, two—blank, two.

YELLOW LEADER. After them—murder—murder them all.

[*The din becomes more remote*]

BLIND ANT. Blank, two—blank, two—blank, two—

YELLOW LEADER. Light!

[*Lights are lit—the foreground is empty—corpses piled everywhere*]

Excellent, Yellows. All are slaughtered.

TRAMP. Chuck it, General!

YELLOW LEADER. The victory of the Yellows. The victory of justice and progress. Ours is the path between the two blades of grass. The world belongs to us Yellows. I proclaim myself Ruler of the Universe.

CHRYSALIS. I—I—I—

YELLOW LEADER. [*On his knees*] Most righteous god of the Ants—thou knowest that we fight only for justice, our victory, our national honour, our commercial interests.

TRAMP. [*Rushes out, kicks him over, and grinds him into pieces with his boot*] Bah! Yer insect, yer insect!

EPILOGUE

DEATH AND LIFE

SCENE: *Interior of the forest. Pitch-black night. The TRAMP sleeping in the foreground.*

TRAMP. [*Speaking in his sleep*] Chuck it, General! [*Wakes*] Been nappin', 'ave I? Crumbs, I feel cold. I'm sick—shiverin' all over . . . Where am I? Can't see me 'ands, it's so bloomin' dark . . . 'Oo's that speakin'? . . . [*Shouting*] 'Ullo! 'oo's talkin'? . . . Nothin'—no one anywhere. Gawd! I'm skeered. Where's the sky got to? There ain't no sky! Can't be dead, can I? Feel sick enough. For 'eaven's sake, a bit of light—just a glimmer!

A VOICE. Wait, wait. The light is coming.

TRAMP. I can 'ear voices—everywherc, voices! 'Ark!

VOICE OF ANT-SOLDIER. I'm wounded . . . I'm thirsty.

VOICE OF ANT-COMMANDER. Army of Occupation, advance!

VOICE OF MR. BEETLE. My pile! Where's my little pile?

VOICE OF A BUTTERFLY. Iris! Iris!

TRAMP. Give us a bit of light! I'm skeered!

VOICE OF CRICKET. Another cricket lived here a long time ago. Careful, mumsy, careful!

VOICE OF ICHNEUMON FLY. Aha! Got them!

VOICE OF ANT-SOLDIER. Water, water!

VOICE OF ANT-COMMANDER. And see that you take no prisoners.

VOICE OF A BUTTERFLY. Iris! Iris!

VOICE OF MR. BEETLE. My pile! Where's my lovely pile?

TRAMP. What's 'ere? A flint! If only I could strike a spark from it, jest one, one little spark o' light!

[He strikes it upon another stone. Sparks burst forth. The forest is lit up]

Thank 'eaven, 'ere's light!

VOICES. Escape! escape!

CHRYSALIS. Who is that calling me? I come. I come!

[MUSIC]

My wings begin to sever:

My outer sheath is torn . . .

VOICES OF MOTHS. *[Rapidly coming near and nearer]*

Into it, into it, into it! Wing your flight

Into the ecstasy, into the heart of the light!

CHRYSALIS. I shall have life for ever;

I shall at last be born!

[MOTHS in a bevy fly into the midst of the light. They whirl round]

MOTHS. Into it, into it, into it! Wing your flight

Into the ecstasy, into the heart of the light!

TRAMP. What are you? Moths? What yer want? Is it life?

FIRST MOTH. *[Separating from the others]* Ah . . . ! *[Stands still]*

We are struck from the dark

And again we expire.

Each is a spark

Of an infinite fire. . . .

[She falls dead]

CHORUS. And to flash from the forge for a moment, and perish, is all our desire.

TRAMP. Why's she dead? She didn't want to die.

SECOND MOTH. *[Separating, etc.]* Ah . . . ! *[Stands still]*

We are drops on the crest

Of a fountain that leaps—

[she falls dead]

THIRD MOTH. *[Separating]*

We dance without rest

And return to the deeps,—

CHORUS. For life is eternal, and rises from death where you think that it sleeps.

THIRD MOTH. Life is eternal. It cannot fail.

All hail to life—

[Falls dead]

MOTHS. All hail, all hail!

TRAMP. Life and death—seems they're both good if we know how to treat 'em. I'm a battered old moth, I am, but I'll dance with yer! All hail to life!

MOTHS. All hail, all hail!

[MOTH after MOTH falls dead]

TRAMP. Butterflies, beetles, moths, and men—why can't we all live 'appy together? The world's big enough, and life could be 'appy for everythink—if we 'ad a bit o' sense.

MOTHS. All hail, all hail!

CHRYSALIS. *[Shrieking]* Out of my way! Behold!

[She rends her husk and leaps forth as a MOTH]

TRAMP. What? You, Chrysalis? Reely born?

AND SO AD INFINITUM

CHRYSALIS-MOTH. [*Whirling*] Ah! [*Stands still*]

O light! O love! O ecstasy
Of being! Life has entered *me*!

A FEW LAST MOTHS. Eternal life—all hail to thee!

[*They fall dead*]

CHRYSALIS-MOTH.

Hearken, O heaven! O earth, give ear!
I will proclaim a mystery here.
I will solve all things. I will tell
The whole world's meaning. Hearken well. . . .

[*She falls dead*]

TRAMP. [*Kneeling by the dead CHRYSALIS*] Dead. She's dead too. Pore Chrysalis—and you 'ad sich 'opes. What was yer going to say? I wonder! They don't seem skeered o' death, these little mites don't. Life's a rapture to them, and death's a rapture. It's queer. Pore little mites—all done for. . . . 'Ere—what's this? My turn, is it? Get off my chest, damn yer! I won't die. 'Aven't I jest learned 'ow to live and let live? Gawd, I feel sick. I can't be dyin'? It can't 'ave come to me? . . . Chuck it—yer stranglin' me. I know 'oo it is—you're Death. Yer want to count me out—I know. Take that!

Enter TWO SNAILS

FIRST SNAIL. Thtop—Thome one's makin' a noith.

SECOND SNAIL. Come back, come back.

TRAMP. That's for you, rattlebones! You felt that, eh? 'Ere, get yer knee off my chest—I only want to live. I won't give yer my life, yer old skull and crossbones yer—Ow! it's 'is foot on my head.

[*Falls*]

FIRST SNAIL. I thay, thnail.

EPILOGUE

DEATH AND LIFE

SECOND SNAIL. What?

FIRST SNAIL. 'E'th thtruggling with death.

SECOND SNAIL. We'll have a look, eh?

TRAMP. Let me live—what will it matter to you? Only this once—till tomorrow. Let me breathe—stop, don't strangle me—I don't want to die—I 'aven't enjoyed life yet—not 'alf—

[*Falls*]

FIRST SNAIL. What fun, eh?

SECOND SNAIL. I thay, thnail!

FIRST SNAIL. What?

SECOND SNAIL. He'th done for.

TRAMP. You strangle a man when 'e's down, do you, coward? Stop, let me tell you—all I want's another moment—let me live—go away—I've more to tell you—I've learned how to live.

FIRST SNAIL. Well, it'th all up with him.

SECOND SNAIL. Oh dear, oh dear! What a mithfortune! How we shall mith him, my dear.

FIRST SNAIL. What are you talkin' about? It's nothing to do with uth.

SECOND SNAIL. That's what people thay when thomebody dies.

FIRST SNAIL. Oh yeth. Well, we won't futh about it.

SECOND SNAIL. No! No! Ith the way of the world.

[*Dawn—BIRDS awaken*]

Enter WOODCUTTER

AND SO AD INFINITUM

WOODCUTTER. [*Singing*]

'As I went down to Shrewsbury Town
I came by luck . . .'

[*He sees the TRAMP'S corpse*] Hallo—what's this?
Boozed, is he? Here—wake up, mate. My word! he's
dead. Poor old chap. . . . Well, anyway, he'll have no
more trouble.

Enter a WOMAN, carrying a new-born baby

WOMAN. Morning, Peter Wood. Why, whatever's the
matter?

[*Church bells*]

WOODCUTTER. He's dead.

WOMAN. Dead? Who is it?

WOODCUTTER. Only a tramp by the look of him.

WOMAN. It gives me a turn. It's bad luck, you know.
Here am I taking my sister's baby to be baptized, and—
ugh!

WOODCUTTER. One's born and another dies. No great
matter, missus.

WOMAN. It means bad luck.

WOODCUTTER. What's death? There's always people
enough. [*Chucking the baby under the chin*] Gi-gi-gi-gigg,
baby! Wait till you're grown up!

WOMAN. I hope he'll be better off than we are, that's all.
These taxes!

WOODCUTTER. Plenty of work—that's what he'll need.

[*Voices of SCHOOL CHILDREN approaching*]

WOMAN. Here come the girls on their way to school.
Quick, Peter Wood—cover up that! They mustn't see
it, poor dears.

EPILOGUE

DEATH AND LIFE

*Enter some SCHOOL CHILDREN. They file across the
stage singing:*

'As I went down to Shrewsbury Town,
I came by luck on a silver crown:
And what shall I buy with that, said I,
What shall I buy in Shrewsbury Town?

As I went down to Shrewsbury Town,
I saw my love in a dimity gown:
And all so gay I gave it away,
I gave it away—my silver crown.'

[*During the song one little girl gives a flower to the baby.
This, after the singers have left the stage, the WOMAN
takes and lays on the body of the TRAMP*]

CURTAIN