

**THE LAW OF THE LAND,  
OR, LONDON IN  
THE LAST CENTURY: A  
DRAMA IN THREE ACTS**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649311224

The Law of the Land, Or, London in the Last Century: A Drama in Three Acts by W. H. Wills

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.  
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

[www.triestepublishing.com](http://www.triestepublishing.com)

**W. H. WILLS**

**THE LAW OF THE LAND,  
OR, LONDON IN  
THE LAST CENTURY: A  
DRAMA IN THREE ACTS**



0

THE LAW OF THE LAND,

OR,

LONDON IN THE LAST CENTURY;

**A Drama,**

IN THREE ACTS.

(FOUNDED ON FACT).

---

BY W. H. WILLS,

*Member of the Dramatic Authors' Society.*

---

FIRST PERFORMED AT THE ROYAL SURREY THEATRE,  
*August 21st, 1837.*

CORRECTLY PRINTED FROM THE PROMPT BOOK, WITH ENTRANCES,  
EXITS, ETC. CORRECTLY MARKED.

---

---

LONDON: †

PUBLISHED BY W. KENNETH, DRAMATIC REPOSITORY,  
BOW STREET, COVENT GARDEN; G. BERGER, 19, HOLYWELL  
STREET, STRAND.

*To be had of all Booksellers, and in the Theatre on the nights of Performance.*

---

1837.

HARVARD COLLEGE LIBRARY  
FROM  
THE BEQUEST OF  
EVERY JANSEN WENDELL  
1918

---

Lewis and Co. Printers, 15, Fifth Street, Saco.

TO

T. P. COOKE, Esq.

---

MY DEAR SIR:

To you I owe the kindness of having introduced a former Drama of mine upon the stage; to you, therefore, I have the pleasure of inscribing my latest effort;—a poor, though sincerely paid, compliment.

The subject of this piece—that of the life and unhappy end of a celebrated Doctor of Laws—was suggested to me by the proprietor of the Surrey Theatre; and I hesitated for some time ere I attempted to work upon it,—first, because I felt that my limited dramatic experience was not equal to the task; and secondly, because I feared that when finished it would do me little credit on the score of moral taste. The vanity inseparable from authorship, however, overcame the first difficulty, and the other I conquered by referring to the many precedents furnished me by former Dramatists, many of whose plays are founded upon similar events; and which are seldom performed without exercising a powerful and salutary influence over the minds of the audience.

That good *moral* effects are to be wrought upon the mind by stage performances, no one can be better aware of than yourself, who have ever been successful in producing them. The mixture of thoughtlessness, high honor, good heartedness, and patriotism, which forms the characters you have arrived at such eminence in personating, renders their actions and sentiments

so far removed from those of the stilted hero, as to make them excellent and practicable examples; because, from their extreme naturalness, as you pourtray them, their best traits are easy of imitation; and there can be little doubt that many an effectual lesson of prudence, constancy, and discipline, has been learnt from your performances, and from the acting of others equally eminent in the different walks of the Drama. Hence, I have spared no research in endeavouring to form a correct estimate of the character of the unfortunate individual who is the subject of this play, that I might endeavour to make his unbounded charity and benevolence worthy of imitation, and show how easily the best natures may be entrapped into crime, unless solidly imbued with honesty, prudence, and sound principle. If in any one instance, a good effect is produced by witnessing the "Law of the Land" I shall be sufficiently consoled for the censures I may be open to for want of *taste*.

Such censure I have already received. Long before the piece was produced an article appeared in the COURT JOURNAL headed "Dr. Dodd done for the Drama;" which, under the garb of facetiousness, put forth as many mis-statements, and as much injustice, as it is natural to suppose any writer would be guilty of who pretends to give an account of a production he had never seen. I am informed that the "correspondent" is a dramatic author, from whom such an article did not come with the best grace; for, besides having brought similar subjects on the stage himself, he ought not to have gratuitously come forward—being a dramatist of established reputation—to throw difficulties across the path of a young and struggling aspirant, who will doubtless deserve, and have to feel, the wholesome strictures of *fair* criticism, during his probation for public favour. From my answer to the article alluded to, (handsomely inserted by the Editors of the Court Journal,) I make the following extract, to show my reasons for originating a Drama upon events that might be thought to have occurred at a time hardly remote enough from the present to be acted on the stage.



“The pitch of intellectual refinement to which this age has arrived is too superlative to tolerate the heated extravagancies of fancy, or the glowing vagaries of imagination. Every work acted or printed, or both, must, at least, be founded on *fact*. Novels are no longer unblushingly published as attenuated falsehoods in five volumes, but must owe their origin to “certain extraordinary events in a certain family high in the rolls of nobility,” or end their career where it begins—in unread paid-for paragraphs and undisturbed booksellers’ shelves. No murder, matricide, parricide, fratricide, infanticide, or suicide, dare be admitted into modern romance, that has not been sworn upon affidavit in the olden time. Five-act plays *must* be historical, and melo-dramas undoubtedly authentic.

Deeply impressed with these opinions, I undertook the task proposed to me by my patron of the Surrey. Sophocles, I cogitated, “improved”—to use a conventicle phrase—upon the crimes of *Œdipus*; Euripides on the misfortunes of *Prometheus*; and Lillo reformed the tender consciences of till-robbing apprentices by the example of *George Barnwell*; why, then, should I hesitate to feed the moral taste of a refined public by “doing *Doctor Dodd* for the drama?”

I fear, my dear sir, that not only you but the public will charge me with presumption for bringing forward during the action of the plot some of the great literary characters who flourished in “the Last Century;” but it has been my aim to introduce them so unobtrusively, as not to evince any attempt at delineating their wit and genius by the dialogue allotted to them.

I must not forget to thank you for having introduced me to *Mr. Davidge*—a gentleman whose friendship I highly esteem.

Believe me to be

My Dear Sir,

Your’s sincerely,

The Author.



## PROLOGUE

BY MRS. CORNWELL BARON WILSON.

*Spoken by Mrs. R. Honner, in the dress of a Counsel.*

My lads and ladies—met to form the jury :—  
I'm specially instructed to conjure ye,  
To hear me for my client ;—I beseech  
Five minutes patience for my "maiden" speech.

We are a trembling author in this cause,  
Who draw our present *action* from the laws.  
"The laws!" methinks, some learned brother says,  
"Wouldst turn the book of statutes into plays?  
Blackstone, to *fire* our sympathies invoke,  
Melt us with *Burns*, and warm our hearts with *Coke*?  
Why next to play the penal code you'll strive,  
Or turn the well-known 'six acts' into 'five.'"—(crosses)

Wait, learned brother, e'er you so decide,  
And hear our author on the other side.  
By way of something new with interest rife,  
He chose to take his scene from *actual* life ;  
A deeper lesson hoping thus to teach,  
Than any Fiction's airy grasp could reach.  
To build the fabric that his story rears,  
From the crushed ruins left of former years—  
To tread with daring step on hallowed ground,  
Record the past, yet no survivor wound—  
Has been no easy task. Our cause we trust,  
Ladies, to you, who're ever more than just.  
Give us a *locus standi* in your smiles,  
Favour from you each anxious fear beguiles ;  
And should your lords not think the verdict right,  
We'll move for a new trial every night.