

**IF; A PLAY
IN FOUR ACTS**

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If; a play in four acts by Lord Dunsany

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LORD DUNSANY

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A PLAY IN FOUR ACTS

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FOREWORD

To praise a new play of Dunsany's is, to my mind, like commending a sunset as a satisfactory event, or expressing a favorable opinion of the beauty of flowers. Which emphasizes the remarkable fact that this author has no lukewarm admirers, or temperate cavilers. Readers of both his prose and plays divide themselves into antithetical groups: those who read with cool, abstract, analytical consciousness, and those who so lose themselves in "eternal and ancient lands" that they forget language, style, the author himself, and only when the tale is past, the play ended, do they become again aware of the world and its lesser affairs, remember and appreciate the conceiver of these words and phrases, and become conscious of some faint protest from the wholly confused, self-controlled critics who, like Miss Cubbidge's school-friend feel that "it is not Proper for you to be there."

Hence any foreword such as this can be only a very personal thing. If I were as frank

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as critics are supposed to be, or brief as book-reviewers ought to, or direct as a head-liner, I might sum it all up in a single sentence: I am tremendously fond of Dunsany and his work, and I am sorry for you if you're not!

The law of compensation is ever operative and those who find no thrill, no emotion of utter delight in these tales and plays, must surely draw from some other source of life's pleasure, real surfeit, of which we, his devotees, are ignorant. I have read "The Exiles' Club" probably forty times, in crowded hotel lobbies, in green and steamy jungles, in an upper berth swinging through an arc of ninety degrees, and I look forward to the forty-first reading with the certain knowledge of complete absorption. I know that the four words "I am the last" in "Charon," and the other four, "It was new then" in "The Song of the Blackbird" will seem as fresh at the next as at the first reading. There is very probably some definite reason for such unreasoning obsession as this, but I can neither name nor phrase it. Whether Dunsany pictures little god Jabim sorrowing on a kitchen midden, or pirates sailing in a wheeled brig through the Sahara, or the men of Daleswood scrawling their love of home in a