

**WHAT THE PUBLIC
WANTS; A PLAY IN
FOUR ACTS. [1909]**

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What the Public Wants; A Play in Four Acts. [1909] by Arnold Bennett

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ARNOLD BENNETT

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BY ARNOLD BENNETT

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CUPID AND COMMONSENSE
WHAT THE PUBLIC WANTS

GEORGE H. DORAN COMPANY
NEW YORK

WHAT THE PUBLIC WANTS

A PLAY IN FOUR ACTS

BY

ARNOLD BENNETT

Author of "The Old Wives' Tale,"

"How to Live on Twenty-four Hours a Day," etc.

GEORGE H. DORAN COMPANY
PUBLISHERS NEW YORK

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CHARACTERS

SIR CHARLES WORGAN, Newspaper Proprietor }
FRANCIS WORGAN, Wanderer } Brothers.
JOHN WORGAN, Provincial Doctor }
SAUL KENDRICK, Manager of Worgans, Ltd.
HOLT ST. JOHN, Theatrical Manager.
SAMUEL CLELAND, his Stage Manager.
SIMON MACQUOID, Dramatic Critic.
JAMES BRINDLEY, Earthenware Manufacturer.
EDWARD BRINDLEY, his SON.
PAGE-BOY.

EMILY VERNON, Widow.
MRS. CLELAND (Henrietta Blackwood).
ANNIE WORGAN, Wife of John Worgan.
MRS. WORGAN, Mother of the Worgans.
MRS. DOWNES.
SERVANT at John Worgan's.

TIME :—To-day.

WHAT THE PUBLIC WANTS

ACT I

NOTES ON CHARACTERS IN THIS ACT

Sir Charles Worgan.—Brusque. Accustomed to power. With rare flashes of humour, and of charm. Well dressed, but not too carefully. Strong frame. Decided gestures. Age 40.

Francis Worgan.—A traveller, a philosopher, and something of a dilettante; rather afraid of coming to grips with life. Very well dressed, but with a touch of the unusual—for example, a quite fashionable collar with a soft necktie tied in a rather obtrusive bow. Talks quietly. Always punctiliously polite. Age 41.

Saul Kendrick.—Gross, stoutish, sporting. Dressed correctly, but without taste. Loud. His cigar is several sizes too large. His gestures are vulgar. Not gentlemanly, though by fits and starts he seems to remember that he is a gentleman. Age 50.

Emily Vernon.—Beautiful; but conscious that her youth is passing. Charming. Her moods change rapidly. She is dressed with distinguished taste, but not expensively. Her face is sad when she isn't alert. She has been through sorrow and through hard times. Age 29.

Simon Macquoid.—The only thing to note is that he is angry throughout his scene. Age 45.

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Private office of Sir Charles Worgan. Doors R., L., and back centre. Utmost possible richness of office furniture. Grand central desk, with dictaphone and telephone. Side tables, full of papers, correspondence, etc. Large date-calendar prominent. A red disk showing on wall at back. General air of orderliness and great activity. Sir Charles Worgan and Kendrick are opposite each other at central desk, with two piles of assorted magazines and journals on the desk. Kendrick is smoking a large cigar. Time, afternoon, November.

Kendrick. Now then, there's this confounded *Sabbath Chimes!* [*picking up a periodical from the pile to his left hand*].

Sir C. Well, what's it doing?

Kendrick [*referring to a list of figures*]. Eighteen thousand.

Sir C. It's dropping, then.

Kendrick. Dropping? I should say it was! But it never was any real good. We bought it for a song and—

Sir C. [*interrupting him sharply*]. That's no reason! We bought the *Evening Courier* when its shares were at sixpence, and now it's earning a thousand pounds a week.

Kendrick. Yes, but the *Courier* isn't religious. You wouldn't call a halfpenny evening paper exactly religious, would you?

Sir C. What's that got to do with it? Do you mean to say there isn't a religious public?

Kendrick. I've never met it [*flicking ash off his cigar*].

Sir C. [*very slightly nettled*]. Now look here, Kendrick, we don't want to waste time in facetiousness. We still have quite twenty papers to go through [*fingering pile*].

Kendrick [*very slightly more deferential*]. I'm not joking, Sir Charles. What I say is—there are two things that are absolutely U.P. in this country; one is limericks, and the other is religion.

Sir C. That be damned! No one ever expected limericks to last; but let me tell you there's a lot of money in religion yet. [*Kendrick shrugs his shoulders.*] Let's have a squint at *Chimes* [*he turns the pages over*]. Hm! No! It isn't crisp enough. I ask you—does it look snappy? . . . [*reading from it in a startled tone*]. "Problems of the Day: Are we growing less spiritual?" [*Angry.*] Great heavens! Whose idiotic notion was that?

Kendrick. Haliburton's.

Sir C. Well, that really is a bit too thick! You know, seriously, you ought to keep an eye on things better than that.

Kendrick [*hurt*]. I've been giving all my time to the sporting department. Think of the trouble

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I've had with the *Billiard Ball* alone, to say nothing of putting the *Racecourse* on its legs. I can't attend to everything, Sir Charles.

Sir C. [*still fuming*]. "Are we growing less spiritual?" As if anybody cared a tuppenny curse whether we are growing less spiritual or not! No wonder the thing's dropping! What does the Reverend Mr. Haliburton get?

Kendrick. Fifty pounds a month.

Sir C. Does he imagine he's going to earn fifty pounds a month, *here*, by asking the British public if it's growing less spiritual? Sack the fool. Where did you pick him up?

Kendrick. Religious Tract Society. Fished him out myself.

Sir C. Well, you'd better return him with thanks.

Kendrick. That's all very fine. Where shall we find some one to take his place? It isn't the first starving curate that comes along who will be able to run Haliburton's department. He's a worker.

Sir C. What's the good of his being a worker if he's never got the hang of our style? [*Holding out periodical.*] Look at it!

Kendrick. I'm not defending him. I'm only saying that to find ideas for *Sabbath Chimes*, *The Sunday Comrade*, *The Pleasant Sunday Afternoon Record*, *Sunday Tales*, *The Sunday School Teacher's Friend*, and *Golden Words*, is none so