



*(Introduction)*

## **“UP or Down”**

Single act play by:

**Varvara de Vesselitsky**

### **PREFACE**

IMPRESSIONS OF A FELLOW WORKER,

One of the remarkable things about Miss de Vesselitsky was that she had a masterly grasp of the origins and philosophical bearings of the work in which she was the leader, and yet never by any chance referred to them in the fortnightly discussions at committee. Anyone familiar with what she wrote—and alas! would that she had written ten times as much~ would have expected her to be continually pointing out the general considerations which arose on the cases or some other aspect of the fortnight's work.

She never did. We always felt that one of our great privileges in belonging to her committee was that we could study, in an example of rare excellence, a mentality different from our own.

The great masters of creative thought and art proceed, we are told, through three stages, first the observation of facts and individuals, then the drawing of general inferences, then the reconstruction of these generalities in concrete individual guise. That is art. It was quite easy not to realise what was happening. When she would go on repeating "Such a nice boy, such a dear boy. Such a nice looking boy: he came and cried," with the seeming artlessness of a child, we other simpler Anglo-Saxons were quite deceived. We admired the tender solicitude, and maternal devotion, but missed the dramatist and philosopher.

'Up or Down' came as a revelation and enlightened us. Miss de V. once wrote a little book called "The Homeworker and her Outlook."

This is the poor mother's outlook—'poor' in Miss de V.'s searchingly sociological sense of left behind by the age she lives in, beaten by circumstances she can neither see through, nor rise above.

Clever, vivid and amusing as they are, all the persona in "Up or Down" are merely part of that environment which so terribly baffles the poor mother.

The play must be read. We are not going to analyse it in detail even if we were competent!

Fortunately Miss de V. has left us the second stage in the process, as well as the third, for Up and Down contains the theories of her paper "Poverty in the making and unmaking" clothed in flesh and blood, Mrs. Downout is a "case" in which 99 out of 100 people would most certainly give relief in money, and in which most modern Boards of Guardians would have given an allowance "pending the sons and daughter finding work." Miss de V. shows in a masterly way that the money would go mostly to the moneylender and the balance on brandy, that the young people would see less than ever any necessity to find work, or to regard work as anything but the rendering of casual unskilled temporary service of a very menial order, as a means of picking up a few shillings. They would still fail to draw any very marked distinction between "work" and borrowing or stealing, the only problem of which they were aware being the immediate finding of cash to meet an immediate need without the slightest reference to the future. In the world of to-day Miss de V. shows that this attitude cannot fail to be disastrous, while the converse, reasonable planning for the future—barring serious illness or exceptional misfortune—ordinarily and easily brings progressive prosperity. We find this is a world as kind and beneficent to the Mrs. Uphills as it is mysteriously cruel to the Mrs. Downouts. That is why the dénouement, Mrs. Downout's suicide by the help of the gas oven, has such a dramatic truth. At a time when lavish public assistance is poured out as from a tap, to commit suicide because one is temporarily "bad off" strikes one and all as ridiculous. In Miss de V.'s hands it teaches a great truth. Mrs. Downout is killed by her own goodness, just as Bennie, true son of his mother, gets himself locked up for stealing—too late!—to help her. Actually Mrs. Downout has food in the house and

her rent paid up to date. She has nothing to worry about except a moneylender who has not even attempted to take proceedings at the moment she kills herself! Her simple thought is that as she borrowed the money she must pay it, and if she can't she must die! She accepts that situation just as she accepts her own exploitation by her idle sons, and just as she utterly fails to understand that the young lady from the C.O.S., equally with the parson, have no purpose except to help her. If Mrs. Downout's words are not more convincing than those of Timothy, Swithin, James and Aunt Ann in the "Forsyte Saga" they are not less convincing—the analysis of a human social situation and its reconstruction in living concrete form far surpasses anything in that famous book. In one aspect "Up or Down" is an advocacy of her work for the Apprenticeship and Skilled Employment Association blunt and plain enough for him who runs to read, in another it is a cutting from Dostoevsky. ' The play has been thoughtlessly called an attack upon the C.O.S. because in it the C.O.S. visitor makes a mistake and the causes the methods of that Society to appear in an absurd light. The point is to show how the activities of the various agencies, including the Church and the Police, may strike an honest but unintelligent woman like Mrs. Downout, and the point is exceedingly well made.

Otherwise the whole play is a subtle and wonderful piece of pure C.O.S. propaganda,

What we were familiar with were:

(1) the infinite fund of loving patience ever at the disposal of the "children" as she accurately described the saucy young people, very grown up in their own estimation, who emerge from our elementary schools:

(2) The immovable determination, masked by a gentle sweetness almost uncanny to us tougher folk, that the best and not the second best should be done for every single one that came into her hands, How readily she would abrogate, laughing, her own rules, to do more kindness to an erring child, how ruthlessly she would bring to book an employer trying to escape his liability towards an apprentice, learner or "hand." Tyranny was a thing so hateful to her that it would hardly stand thinking about, yet she was a beloved despot to her committee and the circle of devotee friends who worked for her, That curious contradiction abiding ' in one tender heart is, we imagine, the great paradox of the Russian people, and the secret behind much Russian history.

Her main interests were unrelenting services to the children, and musings on the deep mysteries of human and social life, but she had a real and extensive program of practical proposals, These she has set out in "Poverty in the making and unmaking." Some of these she was actually endeavouring to translate into reality by means of the series of conferences of employers upon which she had made such a successful beginning.

In publishing this play we do not only desire to testify to our affection for the authoress, and to perpetuate this fragment of her genius. We believe that she knew much about our social ills, and what is rarer, knew of certain steps forward which could wisely and successfully be taken. ..

We want to get London to take them.

“UP OR DOWN?”

A PLAY IN ONE ACT

Varvara de Vesselitsky

WITH A FOREWORD

BY THE

Rev. J. C. PRINGLE.

ONE SHILLING,

Published by the Stepney Skilled Employment  
Committee, Toynbee Hall, 28 Commercial  
Street, London, 5.

## DRAMATIS PERSONAE

Mrs. Downout .....

Lizzie----- her Daughter

BENNIE ----- her Son

Mrs. UPHILL ----- a Neighbour

Jim ----- her Son

Mr. Rich -----a Publican

Mr. Best -----a Friendly Parson

COS. Visitor (very young)

Mrs. Dreadnought-----the Dreaded Moneylender

The Police Inspector

A Doctor

## UP OR DOWN. A PLAY IN ONE ACT.

**Scene:** The kitchen in a poor tenement. Signs of poverty.

Mrs. . Downout, none too tidy and with her hair in crimping pins, counts out a few pennies, mumbling to herself. Searches for more and counts them out again,

**Mrs, Downout:** T'aint enough yet. . Goes to the cupboard, takes out a bottle and has a drink,

Knocking at door, (Calls out frightened.) Wait, wait, You ain't 'arf in a 'urry ter-day, you ain't. (Another knock.) Ul pay yer to the last penny 'f you gives me time. I always means to pay yer. But when the door opens it is Mrs, Uphill who enters, fat and comfortable looking, Oh, it's only you

**Mrs. Uphill:** It's only me—just come to pass the time like. Anythink wrong here?

**Mrs, Downout:** I'm that queer—and that frightened—when f thinks that yere moneylender's comin'... I kind 'er fee] my insides turning insides out... But I ain't one ° ter complain, .

**Mrs, Uphill:** Ain't cher? Well, any'ow you ain't looking very ' grand to-day. .

**Mrs. Downovut:** It's worry, Mra, Uphill. Worry'd kill a cat, leastways me. Sometimes I feels I can't stand it no longer. (Sits down.) . . .

**Mrs. Uphill:** There, there, pore thing! That's ow my own mother used ter carry on. I bin through a bit of trouble m'self.

**Mrs. Downout:** Your looks don't pity you. (Turns to cupboard.)

**Mrs. Uphill:** Yes, things is easier now, Yer see my Jimmie~ ae 'e's doin' awful well. And my Kate—she brings 'ome . more of a Saturday than 'er poor dear dead daddy ever done in 'is lifetime. Then look at my Georgie—four quid a ; ~ week, if it's a copper. .And e's sech a good boy--says 'e owes it all to 'is mammy, 'e do, And it's always, ' Mother, 'ere's a bob ter spend on yerself.'? (Laughs.) Fancy me doin' sech a thing !

**Mrs. Downout (sourly) :** Yes, some people know 'ow to get 'eaps off of their children. I never get nothink off of none of mine—leastways not off of my boys—Il ain't sayin' nothink "bout Lizz.

**Mrs. Uphill:** You didn't oughter.

..

**Mrs, Downout:** Some 'as all the luck—and they keeps it all ter

theirselves, they do.

**Mrs, Uphill** (clears her throat): It's just bout this 'ere thing I was comin' ter speak to you. My son Jimmie is that taken up 'bout your Lizzie.. 'E can't stand seeing 'er and that feller Rich together. Makes 'im sick, pore boy, it do—'e's bin off 'is feed for two days now.

**Mrs, Downout:** Well, and why the 'ell shouldn't my Lizz keep company with old Rich? 'Taint as if she was proper engaged to yer Jim.

Lizzie Downout enters.

**Mrs. Uphill:** 'Ome so early, Lizzie? Lizzie sinks dejectedly into a chair.

**Lizzie:** They put me off again! ss Mrs,

**Downout (groans):** There! Didn't I tell yer? My

children, they're never no 'elp to me, no—not one of them an' me what's 'ad seven, to say nothing of four misses. Now I did 'ope somethink from my Lizzie, and she's turning out same as the rest of 'em.

**Lizzie:** Mother, t'aint my fault!

**Mrs. Downout (scornfully):** My fault, I reckon.

**Lizzie:** Trade's bad, and unskilled 'ands always gets put off. You see, I never 'ad no chance to learn the trade proper.

**Mrs, Downout:** Didn't I tell yer? Always my fault. Oh : Gawd! I'm sick and tired of it all. I wish I was dead.

**Mrs. Uhill:** My girl, she started same as yours done to learn the bookbindin' and now she's earning such lovely money! -

**Lizzie (interrupting):** Yes, but Mum took me away after three weeks 'cause the money

wasn't enough. I bin in and out of work ever since

**Mrs, Uphill:** That was a shame! Such a grand job my Katie 'as now, and all through Toynbee 'All. Yes, and my

boys, too—them ladies, they worried that there telephone

of theirs, and rang up every firm in London, I do believe,

for my Georgie—upholstering' 'e asked for, and upholster 'e shall 'ave; them's their words. My! it make my back ache just setting' there and watching them at it.

**Mrs Downout:** Well, J never 'ad no use for '°em, no'how. What d'yer think they wanted ter do to my bov? Ave 'im 'prenticed 1 I wouldn't sign no pipers—-not if you was 'ter kill me }

**Mrs, Uphill:** Well, you should 'ave 'eard'them going on over the telephone about my Billie and 'is drorings—with me as knows 'im setting there, ready to split with laughin' —me what only thinked 'bout the piper and the pencils 'e was wastin' !

**Mrs. Downovut:** Ough! 'Ow you do carry on! Them lidies is for them as likes 'em. Good Lord, the questions they asks me, and the cheek of 'em giving me advice—me, the mother of seven, and what's buried three of them. Fancy wanting my girl to work for seven shillings! 'T'woudn'tkeep her in boot leather. So I places 'er myself where she gets twelve.

Mrs, Downout is cursorily sweeping while this conversation is going on, and here pushes dust under the mat.

**Lizzie:** And I bin in and out ever since.

**Mrs. Uphill:** (takes Ligsie aside}: Lizz, my girl, what's this © 'bout yer keepin' comp'ny with a publican?

**Lizzie:** Oh, Mrs. Uphill, don't!

Maras. Uphill: And I, what thought you loved my Jimmy. 'E's that cut up about yer, 'e's bin off 'is feed fer two days! ...

Knocking at door. Screeches on part of Mrs. Downout.

**Mrs. Downout:** Tell 'er I'm out, and mind yer stick to it!

Goes into the scullery.

**Lizzie:** I don't know what to do. If only I could get Mother clear of debt!

**Mrs. Uphill:** You can't! It's 'er way ter be in trouble. .

More knocking on the door,

**Lizzie:** That woman'll be the death of Mother.  
Poor Mum ain't got the nerves of a cat,

Man's voice through the door: Are you there,  
Missy? It's only me.

With a sigh of relief Lizzie throws open the door,

-

**Mr. Rich (the Publican):** Excuse me looking in,  
(He keeps on his hat, but pushes it back on his  
head in deference to Lizzie.) But I come on very  
particular business (looks meaningfully at Mrs,  
Uphill, who remains seated), most particular  
private business, (Mrs, Uphill takes the hint and  
flounces out by scullery door.)

**Mr. Rich:** It's this—look 'ere. Money-is of  
infinitesimal importance to me compared  
(suddenly becomes coy) ~. compared to you,  
Lizzie. She's gone!

Now for it !!

**Lizzie:** I know you're very kind... .

**Rich;** Granted. But what I want to say is this

(Moving nearer to her}. Give me a chance to be kind to you. . Do you get my meaning?

**Lizzie (frightened):** I'm afraid I can't quite get you.

**Mr. Rich:** Then let's set down, and I'll make myself plain. (Finds chairs for them both to sit down on.) You know my wife what died a year ago?—a fine woman, she was! You remember all them wreaths people sent to the funeral?

There was no money spared on her funeral, there wasn't!

**Lizzie :** I remember.

Mr. Rich: Well, she went and died, and left me a widower.

I ain't quite cut out for a widower—or is it a celibate you call it? (Moves his chair a little nearer, Lizzie hers a little further.)

**Lizzie:** I don't know. -

**Mr. Rich:** And what I sez to myself is this—why should I be a celibate? Ain't I got as good a home to hoffer a woman

as ever she'd need? And aren't there thousands of women what needs it?

**Lizzie:** There is!

**Mr. Rich:** An easy life she'd have, and an 'appy one, I tell you. (Again moves his chair.) Well, Missy, what do you think of it?

He is divided between coyness and admiration of his own wit.

**Lizz:** Think of what, Mr. Rich? ' .

**Mr. Rich:** Marrying me? What do you suppose I'm talking about?

**Lizz:** I'm sure you're most kind, but. ... (Gets up and walks away.)

**Mr. Rich:** Now stop fooling, and let's get down to business. I - know all about them debts of your Mother, and I'm prepared—yes, prepared to corroborate them! You get my meaning?

**Lizzie:** I know if somethink ain't done soon, Mother'll lose 'er reason, She's that worried—I don't know what'll become of her!

Mr Rich: Just so!

(Jingles the coins in his trouser pockets.)

And, as previously stated, money's no hobjec' to me,

(Rises and takes a step towards her.)

And that's not all.

(Very confidentially.)

I like you, Lizz! (He now moves rapidly, towards her, but she still evades him.) And so I thought

I'd take time by the forefront, as you call it, and arrange to get married at once--get the Parson-

**Parson:** (peeps in): May I come in? I knocked twice, but got no answer. . . He comes in, At sight of his clerical dress Lizzie gives a wild shriek and runs into the next room.

**Parson:** I'm so sorry

.

Mr. Rich (touching his hat): Good day, Sir.

**Mrs. Uphill** (emerging from inner room): Sorry, sir, but the pore girl is that frightened, she thinks ye'r wantin' ter marry 'er this minute.

**Parson ;** marry her?

**Mrs. Uphill:** Yes, what d'yer call it? Perforate the ceremony.

**Parson:** Oh, dear! I wish it were something of that kind I'd come about !

**Mrs. Uphill** (shocked): What d'yer mean, Sir?

**"Parson (sighs):** I have a far more unpleasant duty to perform. Can I see Mrs. Downout?

**Mrs. Uphill:** I couldn't say. Not if she's as scared of you as what Lizz is! But I'll go and see. (She goes to see, but at the door she turns.) To tell you the truth my friend 'ere, she don't 'old with clergies no more'n she do with Toynbee 'All.  
(Exit into scullery door.)

**Mr. Rich:** (confidentially to parson): By the way, Gov'ner, perhaps you can "lighten me. What's this 'ere Toynbee 'All I hear folks jawing about?

**Parson:** Ah, that is a question. But nothing to worry about, I~ can assure you. I mean it isn't a pub.

**Mr. Rich:** You mean it ain't got licensed premises? I thought as much. But what exactly is Toynbee?

**Parson:** Oh, Toynbee was a young professor at Oxford. That's where I'm from.

**Mr. Rich:** I get you: the place that runs our boat races. A sporting club, you might call it?

**Parson:** Well, not exactly.

**Mr. Rich:** I see, you don't know more about it than what I do. Sorry to have troubled you, I say, Gov'nor, I'm a busy man and must be going now. (Very confidentially.) I'll leave it to you as a parson to put in a good word for me,

(Taps him confidentially on the chest.) Mrs, Downout comes in, followed by Mrs, Uphill.

**Mr. Rich (to Mrs. Downout):** Tell the Missy I'll keep the vacancy open until to-morrow, Good-bye, everybody. Be good if you can, and if you can't be careful! Ta-ta!

Goes out,

**Parson:** I fear, Mrs. Downout, I very much fear. .  
. (hesitates and clears his throat) you must keep  
stricter watch over your son Benjamin...  
otherwise, I fear... I very much fear.. he will soon  
be in trouble.

**Mrs, Downout:** And is that all you comes to say  
to me? Me. , what thought you'd come ter 'elp!. -

**Parson:** I do want to help you.

**Mrs Downout:** And so you starts throwing  
stones at my pore ( son....? some words missing  
here)

**Mrs. Uphill:** Please, sir, if you'll just kindly step  
across the landing to my place and tell me all  
about it, maybe I can explain it to 'er kind of  
more lifelike—no disrespect meant to you, sir.  
an Mrs. Uphill and the Parson go out together. .  
a Mrs. Downout again counts her pennies and  
tries to take another drink, but finds the bottle  
empty. Knocking again.

**Mrs, Downout:** It's 'er fer sure this time. Wait,

wait, and I'll ; pay yer. I always told you I'd pay it. . : She cautiously opens the door.

**C.O.S. Visitor (at the door):** Is Mrs, Crabjaw at home?

**Mrs. Downout:** She don't live 'ere.

**Cos Visitor :** I wonder if I've made a mistake?  
Oh, I see, it's Mrs. - Downout.

Enters, and Mrs. Downout carefully bolts the door. .

**Mrs. Downout:** And what might you be wanting?

**Cos Visitor (rather nervously):** I only . . . I just came to ask you & few more questions, .. « .  
**Mrs. Downout:** Good lord! More ladies come to 'vestigate me?

**Cos Visitor :** First of all, could you let me see—I think it was—your marriage lines? ;

**Mrs, Downout:** Good lord! What's a young thing like you got ter do with marriage lines?

**Cos Visitor (resolutely):** Where are they ?

**Mrs. Downour (her arms akimbo):** D'ye mean ter insult me?

**Cos Visitor:** Oh, please, don't take it like that. . . . I only meant to help you. Now do sit down... (sits down herself) and tell me; What exactly is your husband doing?

**Mrs. Downout (sits down):** I'm sure I can't tell you.

**Cos Visitor :** Try to think. ‘

**Mrs. Downout:** Good lord! D'you take me for one of them spiritists? And 'im as always liked to keep 'isself to 'isself !

**Cos Visitor:** I don't quite understand. ... Where is he working? .

**Mrs, Downout** (points upwards, then, as doubts creep into her ; mind}: 'Old on! If 'e's got to work it'll be down there. —\_ (Points downwards.)

**Cos Visitor** : Do you mean he's a miner?

**Mrs, Downout:** See 'ere, young woman—'e's bin dead for the e last ten years | .

**Cos Visitor {consulting her notebook)** : You have a husband who calls himself a general labourer, and a son? '

**Mrs. Downout:** Three of 'em, all out of work.

**Cos Visitor:** Three? How is that? & must have their names and ages. {Gets ready to write, again consults her notes.)

**Mrs, Downout:** Them little ones ain't 'arf cheeky.

**Visitor** : You have a daughter in a lunatic asylum, and another who's just had a baby.

**Mrs. Downout:** Lord 'ave mercy on us! Is the woman raving mad?

**Cos Visitor:** But I assure you that's what your husband said when he called at our office.

**Mrs. Downout:** My young man what's bin dead ten years, called at your office !!

**Visitor: (losing patience):** But, of course, Mrs. Downout, and you really must try to be more reasonable !

**Mrs. Downout (jumps up and walks away):** I got it... A mad woman run loose. I must 'umour 'er, as the saying is. (Comes back to C.O.S. Visitor, suavely): All right, darling, 'ave it your own way, and thank yer kindly for yer visit, and now I'll be biddin' you good evenin'.

By gestures dismisses her visitor.

**Cos Visitor:** I haven't finished yet... .

**Mrs. Downout:** Good lord! what more can yer want? An 'usband what's bin dead ten years callin' at yer orfice, a daughter in a lunatic asylum, and one what's 'aving a biby? (Pause.) Mrs Sounds like Mrs, Crabjaw down in Paradise Court !

**Visitor (suddenly discovers her mistake):** Oh, I'm so sorry... it is Mrs, Crabjaw. ... You see, I got my notes mixed.

**Mrs. Downout snorts,** Now, we're all right. You have three sons all out of work and one daughter, Can you tell me why they're all out of work?

**Mrs. Downout:** You don't think I'm agoin' ter tell all my troubles ter a young thing like you! .

**Cos Visitor:** But I only want to help you. There's your son Ben, jamin, aged sixteen, what's he doing?

**Mrs. Downout:** Out on strike pr'aps.

**Cos Visitor :** What strike?

**Mrs. Downout:** Out I ain't particular as to what strike, Just a... a general strike

**Cos Visitor:** But that was over six months ago.

**Mrs. Downout (heaves a deep sigh):** I wish to Gawd this was over. (Moves away.)

**Cos Visitor:** Don't go away, Mrs. Downout, I won't trouble you about Benjamin. Now let me see—there is Richard, aged eighteen, an .

**Mrs. Downout:** Oh, you mean Dick? Well, 'e ain't one what's ever cared much 'bout work. .

**Cos Visitor :** Where is he now?

**Mrs. Downout:** Dunno

**Cos Visitor (amazed):** You don't know? But I want the names and addresses of all the firms he has worked for.

**Mrs. Downout:** 'Ere! What d'yer tike me for?  
Spying on my own boy !

Cos Visitor (gives up Dick and starts afresh with one of the others) ; Well, you have a son, Robert, aged twenty. He ought to be a help to you. Where was he last working?

**Mrs, Downout:** Well, to tell yer the truth, I never troubled much 'bout 'im. I just takes the money when 'e 'as it, and asks no questions. A good boy my Bobby is, that's 'im (showing photo). 'e never done nothink 'e didn't oughter—not if ye was to kill 'im!

**Cos Visitor:** Then he ought to get on.

**Mrs. Downout:** Get on! 'E ain't done more'n three days' work all last month, and mind... 'e ain't one to shirk it if 'e 'as it.

Knocking on the door. She carefully unbolts and peeps through the door. Cos Visitor (Glances at her watch): Oh dear! I'll be late for Committee, and your case was to be brought up.

**Mrs. Downout:** What d'yer mean by bringin' up my case?\_ Do you take me for a bloomin' corpse? She is very indignant. While Visitor is trying to pacify her

enter Mrs. Uphill and the Parson,

**Mrs. Uphill (to the Parson):** Now, I understand all abaht it. Parson: Do you? Well, perhaps you're very quick. My own impression is we've done nothing but talk about your boys and Skilled Employment—Toynbee Hall you call it. But I fear we're disturbing?

**Mrs, Downout:** You is! Nowadays one can't call one's 'ome one's own no more. (Goes into scullery.)

**Cos Visitor (recognising the Parson):** Oh, how d'you do, Mr. Best? {Shakes hands with him.) Are you coming to our Committee meeting ?

**Mr. Best:** I'm afraid... .

**Cos Visitor:** Oh, do! I've got a car just round the corner, I'll give you a lift.

**Mrs Uphill:**. (barring the way to the door as Cos Visitor and Mr. Best try to go): Perhaps the lady could explain better'n what I can 'bout this 'ere Skilled Employment.

**Cos Visitor (gladly):** Oh, yes! I know all about Skilled Employment, {t's only this work that is new to me.

**Mrs, Uphill:** Tell this gentleman what they're driving after. 'E don't seem ter understand.

**Cos Visitor :** Oh, but I don't know how to, You see, what they say is: it's so difficult to help poor people. Everything you do seems to bit back at them. And so the idea is to make it possible for the poor to do something themselves—to rise up out of their poverty, as it were—but Pm afraid I'm not putting it as I should.

**Mrs, Uphill:** Oh, go on... tell 'im 'ow my boys bin uplifted. Yes, and my girl too. You go a'ead and tell 'im. It's the first step in life what counts—the first job, if you get my meaning.

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Cos Visitor and Mr. Best politely try to interrupt and to slip past Mrs. Uphill, but she holds the fort, and goes on untroubled.

I don't 'old with too much of this 'ere patchin' up and rescue work, I'm fer giving 'elp just when 'elp is of use in the neck of time as the saying is. (Here she pauses a moment for breath.)

**Cos Visitor:** I'm sure, Mrs. Uphill, you explain much better than I do, but I really must be going.

**Mrs. Downout (cautiously peeping in):** Thank Gawd for some. fink! (She comes in followed by Lizzie; but when her visitors go out and before Lissie has time ta close the door, the Moneylender dashes in.)

**Moneylender:** A-hal I see you've got company! Well, the more the merrier. Out with that money you owes me!

**Mrs. Downout (whimpering):** I paid it back to you twice over.

**Moneylender** : Now look 'ere, t'ain't no use goin' on like that, out that money... must come—or,...

Advances menacingly.

**Mrs, Downout:** All I ever 'ad off of you was twenty-three and sixpence, and I've paid you back over two pounds.

**Moneylender:** That ain't got nothing to do with it. All you're speakin' of was only hinterest. Now the principal's got to be paid back. And because of the weeks you ain't paid no interest what you owes me ter-day is thirty-nine and sixpence.

**Mrs. Downout** : Good lord !

**Moneylender:** I see by yer fice you ain't got it. Out with the hinterest then! Come now, that's easy. Penny in the shilling on two pounds is

three shillings and fourpence. Have you got the money, or shall I call in the police?

**Mrs Downout:** I got a few coppers,

Counts them out again and lays them on the table.

**Moneylender:** (snatching up the pennies); I see, two-and-three- pence short. Then that makes it that next week you owes me the hinterest on two pounds—~two-and-fourpence-halfpenny,

**Mrs, Downout :** Good lord! a . fissile plucks up courage and advances towards Moneylender,

**Lizzie:** Mrs. Dreadnought, Mother's paid you back over two pounds already, and all she ever 'ad off of you was twenty. three and sixpence.

**Moneylender:** You shut up! You hinterfering little minx !

**Lizzie (stands her ground):** I ain't agoing to let 'er pay you no more. .

**MoneyLender:** You little worm... you wait and see what'll 'appen to you... you... forward piece, you dressed'j up doll, you blinkin' pisty ficed toad ! .

**Mrs. Downout (terrified):** Oh, Lizzie! For 'eavens' sake don't oe make 'er angry! What with 'er shoutin' an' 'er 'ollering so as all the neighbours can 'ear—and me what 'as always kept mesself so quiet and respectable like... . I'll die co of shame! Oh, 'eavens! Oh.... oh!

(Shrieks é as her youngest son, Bennie, dashes in, followed by a policeman who chases him round the Moneylender, round the table, all round the room, and finally catches him and holds him out by the scruff of the neck. The pennies have just been knocked out of the Moneylender's hand.) .

**Policeman:** Here, Ma, look at your offspring! Ain't you ashamed ?

**Mrs, Downout, Mrs. UpnHill, Lizzie,  
Moneylender:** What's 'e done?

**Policeman :** Been caught in the hact of stealing, 'e 'as—look at him, Ma, see how you brought him up!

**Moneylender :** See 'ow you let 'im down !

**Bennie:** Let me go! I tells you. ... What's a boy like me ter do? I never 'ad no chance in life!

**Mrs. Uphill:** You 'ad the same chance as what my boys 'ad, ' and one of them is just about ter become a manager,

**Lizzie:** A manager? Oh, d'you mean my Jimmie? .

**Mrs. Uphill:** Yes, you little vixen! Keepin' company with a publican—that's what you've thrown away! Well, with a brother of yours what's goin' to jail, maybe it's all turned out for the best.

While this is being said, Mrs. Downout on her knees mutely implores policeman to let go of boy. -

**Policeman (to Mrs. Downout):** Sorry, Ma, but the law must be . obeyed. He pulls Bennie towards the door, but Moneylender bars the way.

**Moneylender :** Mr. Policeman, would yer mind arrestin' this 'ere woman fer me?

**Policeman:** Not to-day, Ma'am, (Tries to pass.)

**Moneylender:** I just thought t'would save yer the trouble of calling' again.

**Policemman :** What for d'you want 'er arrested?

**Moneylender :** She won't give me back the money what's owin' me, She's a thief! Now will you arrest 'er?

**Policeman (to Moneylender) :** Sorry, Ma, that's not my job. You will have to take legal proceedings.

Mrs. Downout gives a cry of dismay. :

**Moneylender** : What's them?

**Policeman** : Going to law and spending a lot of money.

**Moneylender**: But why in 'ell should I do that?

**Policeman**: Sorry, Ma, that's the law of the land.

**Moneylender (rolls up her sleeves and gets her arms into training)**: Them's the best !

**Policeman**: Sorry, Madam, but if you try anything of that sort, you'll soon be doing time yourself .

**Moneylender** : Oh, you beauty! You ain't 'arf funny!

**(To Mrs. Downout)**: You and I'llt 'ave this out privately .. . if you get my meaning.

Mrs. Downout does get her meaning and grows more and more alarmed. Moneylender struts out

with great dignity, and Policeman makes a final attempt to lead away Bennie,

**Bennie** : So long, Mum, cheerio!

**(To policeman}**; Ow! Don't pull at me like that. I ain't said a blooming word to you !

Policeman drags boy away.

**Mrs. Downout:** Oh. ... I can't stand no more of this...

**Mrs. Uphill:** Then set down, pore dear, There, let me pick up them pennies for you. A penny saved is a penny wasted ——no, that don't sound quite right...

**Mrs. Downout:** This ain't the moment to be funny,

**Mrs, Upniiy (hurt):** T ain't funny—leastways I can't 'elp looking funny pickin' up yer coppers.

(As she ts stout and rheumatic this stooping down is really a labour of love, Picks up all the

pennies and puts them into Mrs. Downout's hand). And now I must go 'ome and get a bit of supper for ny children comin' 'ome from work.

{Starts to go out, °

**Mrs. Downout** : So long ! Lizzie: Right oh! . . .

Mrs, Uphill goes out.

**Mrs. Downout:** too must be gettin' our bit of tea, Tain't -much what we got. Good "eavens! The fire's out? I'll 'ave to light the gas stove. a, . As She climbs on to a chair and starts putting pennies ' into the gas meter, Again there is knocking on the , door.

**Mrs, Downour:** Don't let 'er in

**Lizzie:** It's all right, Mum, it's only the lidy.

**Cos Visitor:** I came because I thought I ought to let you know at once,

**Mrs. Downout** (from her perch): Eh?

**Cos Visitor** : The Committee decided they could do nothing for you.

**Mrs. Downout:** And is that all you come disturbin' us ter say?

**Visitor:** No. I also wanted to explain that it wasn't the marriage lines, it was the rent book they told me to look at. You see, I've only been at this work a few days.

**Mrs. Downout:** She calls it work !

Cos Vistor quickly goes out again. Mrs. Downout continues putting pennies into the gas meter.

**Lizzie** : Mother, what for are you puttin' all them pennies in?

**Mrs. Downout:** I've bin tellin' ye all day. I can't stand no more of it! (Afore knocking.) There she is again! I'm too fate, too late! (Runs into the

next room.) - Lizzie (opens the door in fear, then with a cry of joy): Jimmie! (Rushes towards him.)

**Jimmie:** Mother told me you was in trouble, so I thought I'd come over at once. Lizzie (remembers her troubles and walks away from him): Oh, jimmie ! you mustn't 'ave nothink more to do with me!

**Jimmie :** Nonsense, Lizz! Where'd I be myself if no one'd helped a me I was no different from Ben, when I was a boy, a ' bit wilder, if any.

**Lizzie:** No, no, jim. You always bin different; there's never bin no one like you . . . there never could be!

**Jimmie:** Well, I don't mind telling you—once I very nearly went to the dogs.

**Lizzie :** Oh, Jimmie

**Jimmie:** Yes, I'd 'ave been where he is, if people hadn't looked . after me. Them ladies at

Toynbee Hall made me see things different . . .  
and... once, when I was in a . scrape .. .

**Lizzie (interrupting)** : You couldn't be! .

**Jimmie** : Anyhow I'm going to stand by you and  
Bennie. And I've got good news for you, Lizzie .  
. . d'you mind if - . we're engaged?

**Lizzie:** Oh, Jimmie ! My jim} I can't! I've got to  
'elp ~ Mother

This reminds her of her Mother and going to the  
scullery door she calls out: It's all right, Mum, it's  
only my Jim !

**Jimmie** (who has been undoing a small parcel):  
I've got a ring for you

**Lizzie weeping)** : Oh, Jimmie( I can't bear to  
say not .

**Lizzie:** Poor Mum, poor Mummie!

(To Mrs, Dreadnought) f 'Twas you what done it—you, and your threats, and all the the worry of it!

**Moneylender** : 'Twas 'er own ways what did 'er in; she never i 'ad no sense,

Bennie (runs in joyfully): Some bloke that Mr. Best! 'E bailed me out! (Sees the Moneylender.)

What, yau still 'ere? a ; .

**Moneylender** : What you doin' 'ere yerself, you blooming jail bird?

**Bennie**: I 'ain't done no 'arm. I was only trying to raise a , quid or two to help Mother pay them debts of 'ers,

**Lizzie**: Oh, Bennie, Mum's killed 'erself, and its 'er what done it!

**Moneylender** : They don't 'arf rub it in, they don't.

(Goes out.) a . . I'll be off,

Jimmié brings back doctor and shows him way to - scullery.

**Bennie (catching hold of Jimmie):** What's 'appened to Mum?

**Jimmié:** I'm afraid she's dead. .

**Bennie:** Dead! And I stole to save 'er !

He goes into the scullery and Lizzie comes out weeping.

She sinks into a chair, and Jimmié bends over her.

***CURTAIN.***