



## 2. A Phœnix too Frequent

" to whom conferr'd a peacock's undecent,  
a squirrel's harsh, a phœnix too frequent "

*Characters in order of appearance :*

The Funeral Procession of VIRILIUS, *late civil servant of Ephesus*

DOTO, *maid to Dynamene* ... Yvonne Mitchley

DYNAMENE, *widow of Virilius* ... Goolmohr Dhalla

TEGEUS, afterwards CHROMIS, *a soldier* ... Duncan Logan

*The scene is set in the tomb of Virilius. Night.*

The play produced by J. A. Mitchley

Costumes by Laws

Lighting by Harry Edwards

### THE PLAY

The PHŒNIX is one of Fry's first essays in comedy and also his first play to be seen in London—at the Mercury Theatre in 1946. In the present producer's opinion it remains his most amusing piece but at the same time it is an early statement of the same theme as that of A SLEEP OF PRISONERS. The style of the verse is much more florid than that of the later play and is more typical of the author as most people think of him. The story on which the play is based is a very old one which has been used by many dramatists—among others Charles Dibdin, who made it into an operetta called THE EPHESIAN MATRON. This is the second production of the PHŒNIX by the Moot House Players—two of the cast are playing the same parts as they did in 1956.

### THE COMPANY AND THE PRODUCTIONS

THE MOOT HOUSE PLAYERS form the drama section of the Mark Hall and Netteswell Community Association in the new town of Harlow. The present 'double bill' is the second production by the company designed for touring and also as an introduction to 'open' staging as distinct from the 'proscenium' variety. The company's first touring production. THE LADY'S NOT FOR BURNING, was 'on the road' from September, 1958, to the end of August, 1959, during which time 22 performances were given, 17 in this country and 5 in Germany. The success of this experiment has prompted the present programme which has been arranged so that it can be presented as a whole evening's entertainment of both plays or the plays can be given as individual items followed by discussion. A SLEEP OF PRISONERS can also be performed in church buildings of all kinds which gives even more possibilities of venue.

The present productions are arranged with the audience on three sides of the acting area in order that some indication of the church setting of the SLEEP OF PRISONERS can be given when the performance is taking place in an ordinary hall ; that is to say, the actors are not completely surrounded by the audience as is usual in 'theatre-in-the-round.' Nevertheless, this arrangement also throws all the stress on the actor and his living presence, which is the essence of the 'theatre-in-the-round' technique and which we feel is so important in these days of mechanised entertainment.

We shall be glad to receive enquiries for free dates for the 'double bill' or for individual plays and we hope to have the programme available throughout the 1959/60 season.

Please address all enquiries to :—

Mrs. P. M. Hopkins, 12 Tanys Dell, Harlow, Essex.

# THE MOOT HOUSE PLAYERS

*present*

## TWO PLAYS by CHRISTOPHER FRY

### 1. A Sleep Of Prisoners

*Characters in order of appearance :*

PRIVATE DAVID KING	...	...	Duncan Logan
PRIVATE PETER ABLE	...	...	John Truman
CORPORAL JOE ADAMS	...	...	Gordon Hewlett
PRIVATE TIM MEADOWS	...	...	Jack Mitchley

*The scene is set inside a church which has  
been turned into a prison camp. Night*

The play produced by Yvonne E. Mitchley

Setting by Gordon Hewlett : Lighting by Harry Edwards

*When both plays are being given as one complete programme the  
SLEEP OF PRISONERS will be followed by a fifteen minute interval*

### THE AUTHOR AND HIS PLAY

It has been said with much truth that all Mr. Fry's plays are religious in theme whatever their surface appearance may be. Throughout his work he has been at pains to attempt to show that man's progress is the growth of vision : the increased perception of what makes for life and death. This concept is at the heart even of his comedies, since, as he says himself, "comedy is an essential part of men's understanding." A SLEEP OF PRISONERS is an attempt on his part to make a more simple statement of this theme, though in a complicated design where each of four men is seen through the sleeping thoughts of others, and each, in his own dream, speaks as at heart he is, not as he believes himself to be.

The men are four soldiers recently taken prisoner and locked up in a church in enemy territory. One man, David King, loses his temper and half strangles his friend, Peter Able ; the struggle is broken up by the Corporal, Joe Adams, and the fourth member of the quartet, an older man named Tim Meadows, and they all retire to bed. Up to this point, except for the heightened language of the poet, the play has been naturalistic in approach but now it moves into the 'super-real' as each man in turn 'dreams out' his reactions to the attempted murder with his comrades as the figures of his dream. First, Tim Meadows sees the struggle in terms of the Cain and Abel story ; then David King, previously the Cain figure, sees himself as King David and Peter Able as Absalom during the period when Absalom turned against his father and was killed in the ensuing battle through the efforts of Joab ; the third dream is that of Peter Able, who imagines himself Isaac to David King's Abraham in the poignant story of the sacrifice which has attracted dramatists through the ages. Lastly comes Corporal Adams' dream, which, although beginning as a personal one, changes later to a state of thought entered into by all the sleeping men, as though, sharing their prison life, they shared, for a few moments of the night, their sleeping life also. This general situation is seen by the group reflected in the story of Shadrac, Meshac and Abednego and their passage through the fiery furnace. Although the immediate surroundings of the church suggest these Biblical backgrounds to the dreamers, the stories are played out in modern terms and idiom and in verse which is supple and vigorous. Poetry is the language in which man explores his own amazement and the prisoners find in their dreams the courage to trust in the power of good as something "stronger than anger, wiser than strategy, enough to subdue cities and men, if we believe it with the long courage of truth."

We can only hope that our audiences will derive as much interest and excitement from the play as the cast have in the course of preparing it for them.

A SLEEP OF PRISONERS was first presented in April, 1951 at the University Church, Oxford, and later at St. Thomas' Church, Regent Street, London, as part of the Festival of Britain programme.