

THE
BIRD OF PARADISE.

A farce.

Adapted from the French,

BY
ALFRED THOMPSON.

AUTHOR OF
COLUMBUS, ON THE CARDS, &c., &c.

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89, STRAND, LONDON.

THE BIRD OF PARADISE.

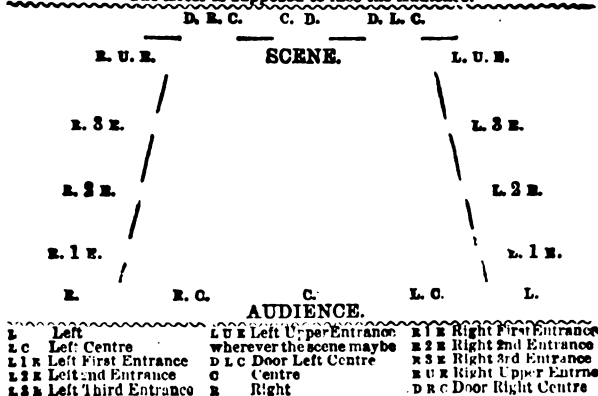
First performed at the Gaiety Theatre, London, (under the management of Mr. Hollingshead,) June 26, 1869.

CHARACTERS.

SHERAPNEL, a Naturalist **Mr. T. Bolton.**
HANNIBAL ATCHISON, Violoncellist **Mr. J. Robins.**

EXPLANATIONS OF THE STAGE DIRECTIONS.

The Actor is supposed to face the Audience.



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THE BIRD OF PARADISE.

SCENE.—*A bedroom. At back a bed with curtains—R. C., a door on to staircase. Fire-place R.—L., a cupboard door, small table C. Between bed and cupboard a practical window—curtains drawn. Between fire-place and door a washstand with bed-candle and matches on it—two candles on chimney-piece. Room nicely furnished. On curtain rising the stage is empty—lights down. A bell is heard ringing. The door opens, and SHRAPNEL enters in evening dress, with Inverness cape on, wrapper and Gibus. He knocks against the wash-stand, table, &c., and pulls up in the middle of the room.*

SHRAP. Confound it! this is too bad! (*calls*) Bloomsbury! Bi-Bloomsbury Bill. That boy's gone again—I'll give up that boy and turn him on the streets again. (*runs up against washstand and finds matches*) Why doesn't he put the matches where I told him? I might have gone on ringing till quarter day if I hadn't had my key with me. Bloomsbury! that boy's behaviour seems slightly wanting in respect; this comes of trying to make a peacock out of a London sparrow. (*clock chimes the half-hour*) Half-past six in the morning, and I not in bed yet. Awful debauchery for a Professor of Natural History in the Islington Athenæum. (*he takes off his things, places the table near fire-place, in taking out his handkerchief, &c., drops a photograph*) Ah, the photograph of my niece, Louisa Bella—I've done my best all the evening playing whist at Mrs. Beshamell's. to make Louisa Bella known—all in vain—poor dear, no one passed a compliment on her. They passed her without the compliment; and yet the dear child is only six and thirty, and she doesn't look her age, certainly, by at least three months. She doesn't seem to go off—I don't mean in looks, I mean in the marriage market. And yet she is so clever. She can stuff birds better than Leadbeater, especially when it's duck and onions. Wonderful talent, but the men don't see it. (*taking change out of his pocket*) By the powers, the evening has not been so badly spent after all. Let me see, I had fifteen shillings and my keys, when I left home, (*counts*) twenty-two, besides the ninety-nine shillings owing me by the foreign-

looking young stranger, which makes a total of five pounds six shillings, clear profit. By the way, what was the foreign-looking party's name? I know we exchanged cards. (*taking out card*) Ah, here's his pasteboard—Hannibal Atchison, Mus. Doc—Mus. Doc? What's that mean? Mus. Domesticus, Common Mouse. Never mind, he was awfully unlucky, was Hannibal. (*to the public*) Beg pardon; but if you are still there in another two hours, you'll be very good if you'll wake me, as I have an appointment at nine. Thank you. (*he goes to bed, puts out his candle on chair, and turns to the wall—silence—a knock is heard gently at the door, at last the door opens, HANNIBAL puts his head in.*)

HANNIBAL *entering on tiptoe, with a violoncello under his arm.*

HANNI. Not come home yet! Ah, if I'd had his luck, I should have stayed longer at Mrs. Beshamell's. Perhaps I'd better wait for him. (*he sits down near the cupboard with his violoncello by his side*) Mr. Shrapnell, still out! Dreadful dissipation; but he was winning, while I—what would my family say if they knew I had lost the sum of ninety-nine shillings at cards, four pounds nineteen shillings, and all on tick. Not that I've got any family, nor any means of paying up, if it comes to that. Ah! I left that fatal room of Mrs. Beshamell's a sadder, a much sadder man; but when I got home I couldn't sleep, so I gave my arm to Henry James—Henry James is my violoncello, called after my godfather, who left me the instrument with his blessing—and out I went. The fresh air has revived my throbbing temples, so I thought I might as well look up my creditor, and here I am; but as I can't practice on his feelings I may as well take it out of Henry James. (*he tunes his violoncello.*)

SHRAP. (*turning round*) Something must have happened to the warming pan.

(HANNIBAL *draws out a sharp note with his bow—*

SHRAPNEL *jumps out of bed, and comes down B.*

SHRAP. Somebody's left a baby on the door step.

HANNI. (*aside*) Shrapnel, by Jove!

(*he places his violoncello in corner.*

SHRAP. If you're a burglar, say so; and mention your terms without further bloodshed.

HANNI. (*timidly advancing*) Not at all; pray don't mention it. I dropped in just to see if there were any letters for me.

SHRAP. What do you mean, sir? They couldn't be letters of credit, sir. Who the deuce are you, sir?

HANNI. Hannibal Atchison! (*sneezing*)

SHRAP. Bless you! my foreign looking stranger of Mrs. Beshamell's. (*he draws the curtain and lets in the daylight*) Pray, forgive me for supposing for an instant you were a ruffian, but I was scarcely awake. So delighted to see you, ninety-nine shillings—I mean ninety-nine friends out of a hundred wouldn't have given me so much pleasure. Pray be seated estimable young man.

HANNI. Really, you are too kind—I do not know how to repay you—I mean to thank you. (SHRAPNEL forces HANNIBAL into chair which he has put in c. of stage.)

SHRAP. (*who fetches another chair and sits at HANNIBAL'S R.*) My dear Mr. Atchison! I shall positively never forgive myself for not recognising you sooner.

HANNI. Pray, do not let that annoy you. It makes no difference to me, I assure you.

SHRAP. Now that we are become acquainted—I may say on familiar terms,—will you let me know what fearful visitation caused those unearthly noises just now? I hope you are not a spiritualist.

HANNI. Not in the least, my dear sir; but under the impression that I was alone, and having brought Henry James with me —

SHRAP. (*rising and going to door*) A friend of yours, Hannibal! Why didn't you bring him in and introduce him?

HANNI. A friend? No; Henry James is my violoncello—a pet name, you know. The fact is, that instrument is my best friend—more than a friend—a brother! I never go out without him.

SHRAP. By Jingo! you must find him inconvenient in an omnibus.

HANNI. Henry James inconvenient? Never! I put him on my neighbour's knees and he is as quiet as a child. (*puts it on SHRAPNEL'S knees.*)

SHRAP. Precisely! Well, do you know, I rather like that instrument when it's in the hands of a virtuoso (*puts it on HANNIBAL'S knees*) like you, Mr. Atchison, (*both rise*) and I imagine our acquaintance is not to cease here.

HANNI. Certainly not, sir. My gratitude and your hospitality leads me to believe that a friendship founded on a double bas-is—a double bass is —

SHRAP. (*shaking his hand*) Very good, very good indeed. (*aside*) Idiot! However he has been losing all night.

HANNI. (*aside*) Double bass! He didn't understand. My very dear sir, let me beg you will continue the snooze as before. Pray go to bed again—lie down Pompey! lie down.

SHRAP. Well, if you won't think it rude after the dissipated night at Mrs. Beshamell's. (*he goes to bed.*)

HANNI. A reminder—well I suppose I must tell him. (*he sits sternly at the foot of the bed.*) Mr. Shrapnell, last night as you know —

SHRAP. I know what you are going to say. Now, I beg you, do not be in a hurry—there is no hurry indeed (*aside*) Let us appear magnanimous! I was quite grieved to see your bad luck.

HANNI. It was bad luck indeed.

SHRAP. Must have done violins to your feelings—violins. (*laughs.*)

HANNI. Very good, indeed—capital. I suppose I must laugh, as he's my creditor (*aside*)

SHRAP. But, joking apart —

HANNI. Why do you call me Jo-King?

SHRAP. No, no, joking apart—wasn't the evening delightful? Mrs. Beshamell puts her guests so much at their ease. You were at her carpet dance at the beginning of the evening, I think. I danced with the lovely Lady McToddy—so elegant—so romantic! Didn't you find the McToddy get into your head?

HANNI. Good again! What a wag you are in the morning!

SHRAP. (*modestly*) Ah, you should hear me after lunch! Do you go much into society, sir?

HANNI. Well, I don't care for balls much—my dancing days have not begun; but I adore concerts. I can take my Phil-harmonics (*laughs*) Only last night, now, I was at a concert given in Hyde Park Corner. That was a pleasure for me—I heard Mario.

SHRAP. Mario! What an artist, eh?

HANNI. You've seen Mario? What in—"Romeo and Juliet?"

SHRAP. Romeo and Juliet! no. In Spiers and Pond's. He was taking a mock-turtle. What a dove-like voice!

HANNI. The mock-turtle or Mario? (*roars at the joke and punches SHRAPNEL's ribs.*)

SHRAP. Decidedly this is past a joke. I shall get up. (*turns out and puts on his dressing-gown*) Suppose, my dear Hannibal, we return to the subject which brought you here.

HANNI. (*seized with remorse*) That brings a check to all my spirits.

SHRAP. I should prefer it much if it would bring a check to me—on the Bank of England.

HANNI. Listen, Shrapnell, (*melo-dramatically*) to a penitent's dying prayer. Cracknell, listen. (*on his knees*) The red blood flies to the roots of my hair as I avow it, but my quarter's allowance has all been spent, and I have ten weeks to wait for the next instalment—I cannot pay but I am penitent.

SHRAP. (*sternly*) Without a penny-tent you should say —

HANNI. This night of horror saw me lose my all. I even lost my head—take it!

SHRAP. Absurd! What should I do with your head? They wouldn't give me anything on it.

HANNI. Well, then, take my notes.

SHRAP. What notes—bank notes?

HANNI. Alas! no, music notes! I am professor of music to several learned societies, and one ladies' seminary, and my charges at the girls' school are one shilling an hour.

SHRAP. A reduction on taking a quantity?

HANNI. No, but sisters pay only half-a-crown the two; so that if you will kindly subscribe to my terms I will give you lessons on the violoncello. In ninety-nine lessons we shall be quits.

SHRAP. By the late lamented Jingo! but that's one way to pay old debts. Are you going to make a fool of me, may I ask?

HANNI. That cock won't fight. Very well—another proposition. Not only have I a reputation for my lessons but also for my compositions.

SHRAP. So I should think; compositions with your creditors you mean?

HANNI. (*bitterly*) Cruelly do you make me feel my position. Sir, my shay-doover is one of those harmonious melodies which only Schubert or Handel could have turned out of their marvellous brains. Yes, Handel might have turned—only Handel—(*reflecting romantically*.)

SHRAP. How long is that Handel going to turn?

HANNI. Could Handel have turned such an air?

SHRAP. Look here. Suppose we consider that Handel turned once for all—and drop it, will you?

HANNI. Certainly. This melody into which I have poured all the fire of my youth, all the mesmeric influence of an unfledged love —

SHRAP. Is called —

HANNI. The "Bird of Paradise." And you shall listen to this lovely air, and we will put it down like the lessons at so much an hour—after ninety-nine hours of "Bird of Paradise." I shall owe you nothing whatever —

SHRAP. Ninety-nine hours of "Bird of Paradise!" in the same day too, would be purgatory—I'd rather give you a receipt for the money.

HANNI. A receipt, sir. Do you take me for a swindler, sir? do you wish to insult me, sir? do you wish me to call you out, sir?

SHRAP. Fight with a man who beats time? He'd make an overture through my body in no time!

HANNI. Very well, it's understood then. I'll give you an advance of five shillings' worth. (*looks at clock*) It's now nine. At two o'clock you are free for to-day.

SHRAP. Oh, nonsense, impossible. I've got an appointment. Look here for to-day I can only take a shillings worth of "Bird of Paradise."

HANNI. Very well; every day will knock off a shilling. That won't last more than three months.

SHRAP. Confound the man with his instalments; one can't even get them discounted.

HANNI. (*taking his violoncello*) Our honour is still intact.

SHRAP. (*sitting near table*) There's no chance of getting rid of the bird, so I suppose I must swallow it.

HANNI. (*looking about on ground*) You don't happen to have got a music stand?

SHRAP. Not that I know of; the animals I stuff have never yet asked for such a thing.

HANNI. I'm going to begin. Don't put any restraint on yourself if you wish to applaud; I am accustomed to that kind of thing. First instalment! (*he plays a piece on the violoncello—imitation.*)

SHRAP. (*after the piece*) As an imitation of a windy night it is perfect; but at the next instalment you really must put a blanket over your instrument—there's a thorough draught comes off it!

HANNI. Tell me! gentle Shrapnel!—Do you not fancy you hear the Bird descending on golden wings from its home in Paradise. You can't imagine what success this little bird has brought me. Why, only last Tuesday, in a little drawing-room in Battersea Park, I played this before at least three thousand persons!

SHRAP. That sounds like cramming! (*rising*)

HANNI. (*rising*) Sir!

SHRAP. Cramming the room! Let me thank you—
To our next merry meeting.

HANNI. Stop a bit—you've got some more owing.

SHRAP. (*pointing to clock*) Not at all—your hour is over, look.

HANNI. Too true! How time passes with those we love! Then, sir, I am now in your debt to the amount only of ninety-eight shillings

SHRAP. Ninety-eight shillings, it is. Good day, Hannibal, good day; we shall meet again one of these days.

HANNI. One of these days? My blessed friend, we shall meet to-morrow. (*he goes to cupboard door.*)

SHRAP. Not that door. That's the way out. By the way, I've an idea. I suppose it's all the same to you where you let off your "Bird of Paradise."

HANNI. Why so?

SHRAP. Because it will soon be Christmas, and I might send my relations a few shillings' worth of "Bird of Paradise." I should economize in Christmas boxes. Well, we'll talk of that to-morrow, ta-ta.

HANNI. Only ninety-eight shillings my generous preserver. (*kisses his hand.*)

SHRAP. You needn't mind about being punctual.

HANNI. At five minutes past ten I shall re-appear.

(*exit R. C.*)

SHRAP. (*coming down*) To think this is the only time I ever won at whist in my life.

HANNI. (*putting his head in*) I humbly beg your pardon.

SHRAP. You again! What do you want? There are no letters for you.

HANNI. (*coming down, R.*) My dear sir, I told you a moment ago, that I should be with you at five minutes past ten, to-morrow.

SHRAP. Well, what then?

HANNI. I just remember that I have an appointment with my dentist, to be vaccinated, at that hour, so I think I had better give you a second helping of "Bird of Paradise" to-day.

SHRAP. You going to be vaccinated? Not on my account, I beg! It won't signify to me whether you are pitted or not. In fact, I shall be the most *pitied* of the two.

HANNI. (*seated*) Instalment number two.

SHRAP. (*out of patience*) The deuce take your instalments! I tell you what—you shall have your revenge for what you've lost.

HANNI. My revenge?

SHRAP. Exactly. (*aside*) I've got a pack of cards, and if

I can't arrange them so as to lose I'm a Dutchman. (*he takes pack of cards off chimney-piece, and places table c.*)

HANNI. I beg pardon, but I don't quite understand.

SHRAP. Now there's a good man—don't look over, and you shall know all in good time.

HANNI. Ha! I am in your way! I am a stumbling block in your path—I will retire.

SHRAP. Get out! (*HANNIBAL goes into cupboard—SHRAPNEL showing cards to public*) As I often have friends here for a quiet game of *ecarté*, I have substituted photographs of Louisa Bella for the queens. There's a Bella of diamonds, a Bella of spades—there's a pair of Bellas; but they've only blown up the flame of love once. Yes, once my Louisa Bella had an offer from her music master, it seems, and I am pledged to bring an action against him for breach of promise of marriage as soon as he comes in for any property. (*looking round*) Where's that "Bird of Paradise?" He can't have been so considerate as to have thrown himself out of the window! (*looks out.*) HANNIBAL, in cupboard, drums on the door) What's that? Volunteers! where are you?

HANNI. (*opening cupboard door*) Cuckoo!

SHRAP. How did you get in there?

HANNI. As a gentleman of the press of course. I did not wish to interfere with you.

SHRAP. I thought we said you were to have your revenge. (*HANNIBAL comes to table, c.*)

HANNI. Play at cards! I have sworn off ever since that hateful night—last night.

SHRAP. You refuse! We can't play at cricket on the hearth, or croquet in the coal-scuttle.

HANNI. What do you say to pitch and toss?

SHRAP. My dear sir, that's what Box and Cox have done before us.

HANNI. True, we'll play at cabs.

SHRAP. What's cabs?

HANNI. There don't be a grumbler. It's giving you a handsome chance. You don't know the game?

SHRAP. No, never did. How can you get cabs on tables as high up as this.

HANNI. I've seen cabs on hire.

SHRAP. Don't do that again. What's your little game?

HANNI. Look here, your window's just the thing. I'll explain the game—every cabman has a number?

SHRAP. It's his nature to.

HANNI. Not his good nature but his duty according to

Scotland-yard. Well, with the numbers on the cabs we'll play at odd or even.

SHRAP. I see.

HANNI. How many cabs up?

SHRAP. Are there any down—oh,—well fifteen we'll say.

HANNI. All right; fifteen cabs, at ten bob a cab.

SHRAP. Half sovs—all right.

HANNI. I take the evens, but don't let my advice influence you.

SHRAP. Dear, no. Let me see, you take the evens, then I'll have the odds. (*aside*) With a little bad luck I shall get rid of him and his debt altogether.

HANNI. Have you quite settled?

SHRAP. Quite; let us place ourselves at the gaming window. (*opens window*)

HANNI. (*sitting on window sill*) Look here. You write down the numbers. while I call the cabs.

SHRAP. Very well! Fire away. (*sits at table.*)

HANNI. (*looking into street*) 2008, 4030, 160, 6666. I say there's one with S.E.R. written on it.

SHRAP. S.E.R. Sir. That must be a knight cab, so it doesn't count.

HANNI. 46, 1042, 5120. That's a hansom with two horses in the shafts.

SHRAP. That's odd.

HANNI. No, it's even—1844.

SHRAP. (*rising*) Stop, that's quits.

HANNI. What's he mean by quits? Why, that's only nine. We are in for fifteen cabs. Go on 138, 6,022, 2,118, 12, 114, 84.

SHRAP. Come, I say, there are no unevens left in town to-day.

HANNI. How many cabs have passed?

SHRAP. Fifteen exactly. (*counting.*)

HANNI. Fifteen. Hie, cabby, stop, the game's up.

SHRAP. (*at window*) Oh! that's not fair. No wonder there are nothing but evens. It's Derby Day, and they've taken all the odds to the stand at Epsom. (*they both burst out laughing, and nearly fall out.*)

HANNI. (*recovering himself as they return down stage*) Mr. Shrapnel, I think that is enough in the way of puns. It's not very commy—so only the night before last I was at a dinner party, and I had an irresistible desire to make a pun. Well, if you'll believe me I went on to the landing and said it to the butler, and nobody was any the worse for it. Now I can return to that house without blushing. Sir, no more puns I beseech you.

SHRAP. Very well—how do we stand?—Fifteen cabs at ten shillings a cab—that makes—oh, come, I say this is infernal (*walking up and down distractedly*) You make a forcible entry into my abode—you wake me up with discordant noises—you victimise me with your infernal Bird of Paradise—you lead me into the seductive intricacies of the game of cabs—and now it is I who owe you money?

HANNI. Money! I won't touch your money. Do as I did—find another mode of payment.

SHRAP. (*in a rage*) Damn it, sir,—I've not been bitten by a violoncello. I can't pay you in Birds of Paradise (*reflecting*) Birds of —. Why not though—by the way, now I come to think of it—I'm not a musician, but I am a bird-stuffer. I'll make a Bird of Paradise of you and stuff you—stuff you—you hear that, sir. That's logic!

HANNI. Logic! Stuff and nonsense—get out!

SHRAP. This is too much. Here have you been gorging me with your indigestible melody, and I'm not to be allowed to retaliate with my stuffing. Come, come—no cowardice. Put yourself in a pleasing position, and let me get to work.

HANNI. Get to work! Bloodthirsty un-naturalist, I prefer submitting my fate to the cards, as you proposed a few minutes ago. (*takes up cards*) By the piper that played before Paganini! What do I see—Louisa Bella!

SHRAP. Louisa Bella! how do you know her name?

HANNI. Her name! why, she's my most promising pupil in the ladies' seminary, and I don't mind telling you — (*whispers.*)

SHRAP. Vile violoncelist! my niece is breaking her heart for you.

HANNI. His niece! your uncle.

SHRAP. Deceitful instrumentalist! (*rushes on him.*)

HANNI. I won't be stuffed.

SHRAP. Marry Louisa Bella, or I will bring an action for breach of promise and stuff you afterwards.

HANNI. Done with you! I'd rather be married, than kept prisoner in a glass case with a wire up my back and my feet in the moss.

SHRAP. (*to the public*) As if marriage wasn't very similar—there's my hand. The cab you called is waiting to be paid outside. My nephew, shall we be off to Louisa Bella?

HANNI. (*to public*) Certainly, but don't forget Henry James, and the "BIRD OF PARADISE."

CURTAIN.