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Family Plays

The Merry Pranks of Tyll

A Comedy for Children by

Daniel J. Fleischhacker

The Merry Pranks of Tyll

Comedy. Developed from folklore by Daniel Fleischhacker.

Cast: 2m., 4w., 5 either gender, 1 boy, 1 girl with doubling, or up to 19 (2m., 4w., 11 either gender, 1 boy, 1 girl). This engaging comedy is built on the adventures of the playful, lighthearted, lovable German rogue, Tyll Eulenspiegel, who exposed evil through laughter. Tyll eludes his parents and gains admittance to the king's palace by way of the kitchen. He wins the friendship of the cook, confounds the wise men, and charms the king and queen. Skillfully exposing all their pretensions through his pranks, he places the wise men in jeopardy. Fearful of Tyll's rising power, they lay a plot to dispose of him. But the wily Tyll escapes their clutches and lives to twit the king and queen into recognition of their own faults. *Two sets with proscenium interludes. Medieval costumes. Approximate running time: 60 minutes. Code: MJ7*

Family Plays

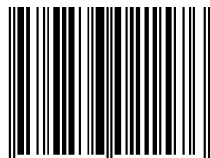
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PREFACE

The happy stories of Tyll Eulenspiegel's pranks are familiar reading to the children and adults of Europe and England. With the passing of years, the stories of his pranks eventually trickled to the United States. It is unfortunate that his followers in this country number so few, for there is a wonderful lesson in all of his roguery. This play then, is written with the hope that the light-hearted whimsy and the simple wisdom of Tyll Eulenspiegel, will gain new followers in the children of America.

Although most readers of Tyll's pranks suspect he must be a fictional character, this is not so. Tyll Eulenspiegel really lived, born in Kneitlingen in Brunswick at the end of the thirteenth or beginning of the fourteenth century, and died, probably of the Black Plague, in Möllen about 1350. His tombstone still stands in the cemetery at Möllen, carved with the figures of the owl and the mirror, the eternal symbols of Eulenspiegel's wisdom and truth.

The "author" of Eulenspiegel's pranks is said to be a Franciscan Friar, Thomas Murner, who first collected the tales of his pranks as early as 1493. This collection was a series of Low German jests, often rather boisterous. There followed many editions, and the tales were eventually translated into English, French, Dutch, Danish, Polish, Latin and Hebrew.

The original Tyll Eulenspiegel was a clumsy hero who worked his way across Europe, outwitting innkeepers and merchants. His character is later transformed into a self-appointed jester who exposed evil through laughter. Much later, Tyll Eulenspiegel becomes a symbol of the rising middle class, struggling against the tyranny of the nobility. But for children, he is a perfect symbol of the child world against the adult world.

He is by no means new to the drama. One of the first plays in which he appears is a rhymed Shrovetide play by the German playwright, Hans Sachs, and Ben Johnson in England, makes several references to Eulenspiegel in his masques.

In my play I have made no attempt to literally dramatize the pranks. They can best be enjoyed by reading them. I have, however, attempted to capture the *spirit* of Tyll Eulenspiegel and effect a transplanting to the stage. Several of the tales do form the basis for the comic action in the play. Since I have called this "a comedy for children," there is little doubt as to the purpose of this work. It was deliberately written to entertain—as only Tyll Eulenspiegel's humor can entertain.

—Daniel Fleischhacker
East Lansing, Michigan

THE MERRY PRANKS OF TYLL

CHARACTERS:

CLAS, Tyll's father.

SETKIN, Tyll's mother.

MRS. BIGAROUND, The King's cook.

TYLL EULENSPIEGEL, A boy of about nine or ten.

GRETCHEN, A kitchen girl.

SCHNABEL, The Prime Minister.

THE KING

THE QUEEN

THE OLD SAGE

THE ASTROLOGER

THE ALCHEMIST

THE MAGICIAN

FRAU GROUCH

SKINFLINT

WORMWOOD

BARNSMELL

} Four sick people

A LADY-IN-WAITING to the Queen.

TWO GUARDS

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES:

Act I, The scullery kitchen of the King's castle in Germany in 1300.

Act II, The kitchen, the next day.

Act III,

Scene 1, the kitchen late at night.

Scene 2, the throne room of the castle.

THE MERRY PRANKS OF TYLL

PROLOGUE, ACT I

(CLAS appears before the curtain.)

CLAS: Good afternoon, boys and girls. I want to tell you a little about our play before it begins. It takes place many years ago, as you can see by my costume. We are people from the Middle Ages, and our play takes us to Germany in the fourteenth century. But about our tale. I am Clas, the charcoal-burner. I've been searching all day for my son, Tyll. Tyll is a boy about your own age . . . a boy with a tremendous imagination *and* a pocketful of tricks! Today he left early in the morning, and hasn't come home yet!

(Enter SETKIN excitedly.)

SETKIN: Clas, have you found him?

CLAS: (*To the audience*) This is my wife, Setkin. (*To SETKIN*) I can't find a sign of him anywhere.

SETKIN: What could have happened to him?

CLAS: I don't know, but I can tell you what's *going* to happen to him when I get my hands on him. He'll never run away like this again.

SETKIN: Maybe he ran an errand for the priest up at the monastery. Did you ask there?

CLAS: I asked at the monastery, the blacksmith's, the baker, the cobbler, the—I don't think there's a house in Kneitlingen that I missed! Nobody's seen him.

SETKIN: The poor boy. He's probably starved by now. Oh, why does he do these things?

CLAS: That boy has had the mark of mischief on him ever since he was born.

SETKIN: (*Suddenly brightening*) Did you ask at the nobleman's castle? He sometimes goes there to earn money by running errands.

CLAS: Wait a minute! The castle. I just thought of it as you mentioned the nobleman's.

SETKIN: What castle?

CLAS: The King's castle! Don't you remember how he always talked of going to the King to be his jester?

SETKIN: Yes, I remember.

CLAS: I'll bet any money that Tyll has gone there, and I'm going after him.

SETKIN: I'm going, too.

CLAS: It's a very long journey, Setkin. All the way to Nuremberg.

SETKIN: I don't care. I want to find Tyll.

CLAS: Then bundle up and follow me. We can ask along the way if anyone has seen him. Come along.

(SETKIN exits and CLAS turns to the audience.)

Why don't you come along, too?

(HE exits, following SETKIN. The curtain opens on Act I.)

ACT I

(The scene is the scullery kitchen of the King's castle. It is a large room dominated by a big stone fireplace. In front of the fire is a heavy oak table and chairs.)

It is night, and the kitchen is dark except for the orange glow of the embers in the fireplace. MRS. BIGAROUND, the King's cook, is preparing to retire. She is a large woman, quick of temper, but equally quick to smile. At present she wears a huge nightgown and wears a night cap.

Carrying a lighted candle, she bolts the large doors leading to the outside of the castle, yawns and stretches, then moves to the fire. There, she gives one last stir to the embers, yawns again, and is about to move out of the room. Suddenly a figure of a boy is seen leaping down from one of the small, arched windows. He bounds nimbly to the table top, landing in front of MRS. BIGAROUND. The boy is TYLL EULENSPIEGEL, and is dressed in a bright green peasant costume.)

MRS. BIGAROUND: *(Startled)* Saints above! Who are you?

TYLL: *(Good-naturedly)* Who are you?

MRS. BIGAROUND: *(Regaining her composure)* I am Mrs. Big-around, and you'd better not try any of your tricks with me. How did you get in here?

TYLL: The same way the light and air get in . . . through the window. I scaled up the walls outside.

MRS. BIGAROUND: *(Holding her candle closer to him.)* Why, you're only a boy. What's your name?

TYLL: Tyll.

MRS. BIGAROUND: Tyll? Tyll what?

TYLL: *(Sitting cross-legged)* Tyll when.

MRS. BIGAROUND: Tyll when?

TYLL: *(Leaping to the floor)* Tyll what?

MRS. BIGAROUND: *(Losing patience)* Tyll what, tyllf when . . . I've had about enough of your nonsense.

TYLL: *(Laughing pleasantly)* Tyll Eulenspiegel.

MRS. BIGAROUND: Olenschlaffer?

TYLL: Eulenspiegel. Tyll Eulenspiegel.

MRS. BIGAROUND: What kind of name is that . . . Ulfenspaggel?

TYLL: *(Quickly)* Eulenspiegel, Eulenspiegel, Eulenspiegel!

MRS. BIGAROUND: *(Throwing up her hands in despair)* I heard you the first time. I can't say it without breaking my jaws.

TYLL: It's easy. Just say Oil. . . .

MRS. BIGAROUND: Oil. . .

TYLL: En. . .

MRS. BIGAROUND: En. . .

TYLL: Spiegel. Tyll Eulenspiegel!

MRS. BIGAROUND: Tyll Eulenspiegel! (*Surprised at herself*) I've said it.

TYLL: Of course.

MRS. BIGAROUND: (*Eyeing him more closely*) It's very late. Everyone's in bed. What do you want here?

TYLL: I've come to be the jester to the King.

MRS. BIGAROUND: (*Laughing*) You? Ha, ha. Jester to the King?

TYLL: I'm very funny. I've always been able to make people laugh. Sometimes even when I'm not trying.

MRS. BIGAROUND: You had better pack up your tricks and go back home. The King will have no time for the likes of you.

TYLL: But I *have* to see him.

MRS. BIGAROUND: You say you can make people laugh? All right, make me laugh.

TYLL: Right now?

MRS. BIGAROUND: Right now!
(*MRS. BIGAROUND sets down her candle, folds her arms, and assumes an expression that shows she has no intention of laughing, no matter what happens.*)

TYLL: All right, I'll try. Like this? (*He makes a face.*)
(*MRS. BIGAROUND remains unsmiling.*)
What about this? (*TYLL turns a handspring.*)
(*MRS. BIGAROUND still remains straight-faced.*)

MRS. BIGAROUND: I'm waiting.

TYLL: Here's a real trick! (*He backs up to get momentum, bumps against the edge of the hearth and sits flat on an ember of the fire. He leaps up with a yelp, and circles the table jumping wildly and holding the place where HE has been burned. MRS. BIGAROUND is convulsed with laughter.*)
You weren't supposed to laugh at that.

MRS. BIGAROUND: It's the funniest thing I've seen.

TYLL: (*Managing a smile*) You see, I told you I could make you laugh, even if I did have to burn the seat of my pants to do it.
(*The noise and laughter have awakened GRETCHEN, who enters the kitchen rubbing her eyes.*)

GRETCHEN: (*Yawning*) I heard you laughing, Mrs. Bigaround. Who's here?

TYLL: Me.

GRETCHEN: Who are you?

TYLL: Tyll Eulenspiegel. What's your name?

GRETCHEN: Gretchen. I'm the King's kitchen girl.

MRS. BIGAROUND: I knew you'd wake somebody with your clowning. Gretchen, you go right back to bed.

GRETCHEN: I can't sleep. My stomach is growling like a lion.

MRS. BIGAROUND: Well, all right. I'll get you both some food.
(*To TYLL*) How long has it been since you had supper?

TYLL: Supper? I haven't even had lunch.

MRS. BIGAROUND: You mean you've been traveling all day without any food?

TYLL: Yes. And it's very hard to be funny on an empty stomach.

MRS. BIGAROUND: (*Indicating the table*) You sit right there. I've got some cold meat left from supper. (*SHE exits to get the food.*)

GRETCHEN: Have you come a long way?

TYLL: All the way from Kneitlingen. I've come to be the King's jester.

GRETCHEN: Really? Do you really know how to make people laugh?

TYLL: Most of the time. Do you think the King will like me?

GRETCHEN: Oh, yes. If you really can make people laugh.

(*TYLL's eye catches the dinner gong hanging alongside the fireplace.*)

TYLL: What's that?

GRETCHEN: The dinner gong. We ring it when it's supper time.

(*MRS. BIGAROUND enters with a plate of food.*)

MRS. BIGAROUND: I brought some cheese and bread, too.

TYLL: Then it's supper time now!

(*HE snatches a large mixing spoon from the table, leaps to the gong and begins beating it.*)

MRS. BIGAROUND: What are you doing? Stop that, do you hear?

You'll wake the whole castle!

TYLL: (*Beating harder*) That's what I intend to do.

MRS. BIGAROUND: Give me that spoon!

(*SHE moves toward him, but TYLL leaps nimbly out of the way.*)

Scoundrel! Wait 'til the King hears of this! (*She begins to chase TYLL.*)

Rascal! Imp!

(*MRS. BIGAROUND is no match for the nimble EULENSPIEGEL. They chase about the kitchen and in the midst of the chase they bump into SCHNABEL, the Prime Minister, who enters excitedly. He is short and chubby, with a small moustache. He is dressed in a long red night gown and stocking cap.*)

Ooops, Mr. Schnabel!

SCHNABEL: (*Excited*) What's all the noise? Is there a fire?

TYLL: Yes.

SCHNABEL: Where?

TYLL: In the fireplace. (*HE rubs his seat.*) I know!

SCHNABEL: Who are you?

TYLL: Who are you?

MRS. BIGAROUND: He's a living devil, Mr. Prime Minister, I swear it. He's the one who sounded the dinner gong.

SCHNABEL: What do you mean by this?

TYLL: I just wanted people to know I was here.

SCHNABEL: Do you realize that it's the middle of the night? People are sleeping here.

TYLL: Who's asleep?

SCHNABEL: Me.

TYLL: How can you be asleep if you're standing here?

SCHNABEL: (*Angry*) Why you . . . (He lunges for TYLL, but TYLL evades him.)

TYLL: I don't want to see you . . . I want to see the King.

SCHNABEL: (*With exaggerated politeness*) Oh. You want to see the King. (*With a profound bow*) Whom shall I say is calling?

TYLL: (*Proudly*) Just tell him that Tyll Eulenspiegel has come to be his jester.

SCHNABEL: (*Exploding*) Are you crazy?

TYLL: No. I just told you I was Tyll.

SCHNABEL: (*Exasperated*) Ooh . . .!

MRS. BIGAROUND: He just goes on like this all the time, Mr. Schnabel.

SCHNABEL: I've had enough of your impudence. I'll teach you how to talk to your elders.

(SCHNABEL makes another lunge at TYLL. TYLL escapes him again.)

MRS. BIGAROUND: It's no use, Mr. Schnabel. He's like a greased pig.

TYLL: (*Running to escape SCHNABEL*) Wait! I didn't mean any harm.

SCHNABEL: Do you expect me to believe that?

(SCHNABEL is a little faster than MRS. BIGAROUND and he corners TYLL and catches him.)

Now I'll teach you a lesson you won't forget.

(He is about to begin beating TYLL when the KING and the QUEEN enter the kitchen. THE KING wears a night gown, elaborately trimmed in ermine cuffs and an ermine collar. He does not wear his crown, but has on a funny little night cap. THE QUEEN is arrayed in a pink night gown, but her sleeping headdress is magnificent. It rises to a point, then two long, filmy streamers cascade down from that point and fan out into a train. It is so long that it is necessary for a LADY-IN-WAITING to carry it. THE QUEEN's face is overly made-up with white powder and garish red circles of rouge at each cheek. The LADY-IN-WAITING carries a mirror and a box with rouge and powder.)

THE KING: What is the meaning of this?

SCHNABEL: Your Majesty. (He falls to one knee. MRS. BIGAROUND and GRETCHEN curtsy. During the lull, TYLL runs to the KING.)

TYLL: Oh, Sire, protect me.

THE QUEEN: It's a boy.

THE KING: Schnabel, you ought to be ashamed of yourself . . . beating a boy.

SCHNABEL: But Your Majesty, he's . . . he's . . . well, you'll see.

THE KING: (*To TYLL*) Poor boy, don't be afraid. No one will hurt you.

TYLL: Thank you, Sire.

THE QUEEN: What are you doing in the castle at this time of night?

TYLL: If you please, Your Majesty, I've come to be your jester.

THE QUEEN: You?

TYLL: Yes, Your Majesty.

THE KING: What's your name, boy?

TYLL: Tyll Eulenspiegel.

THE KING: Til what?

MRS. BIGAROUND: Don't let him start that, Your Majesty.

SCHNABEL: He'll only make a fool of you.

THE KING: We'll see. That's quite a mouthful for such a small boy.

TYLL: It's really very easy to say. Eulenspiegel.

(THE KING tries, but his tongue is tangled.)

THE KING: I'll just call you Master Merrymaker.

MRS. BIGAROUND: Master Noisemaker would be more like it.

THE KING: How old are you?

TYLL: Two hundred years old, Sire. Maybe three hundred. I'm not sure.

THE QUEEN: Three hundred years old?

THE KING: *(Laughing)* That's as old as Methuselah.

TYLL: Oh, I'm older than Methuselah, Sire, and twice as wise.

MRS. BIGAROUND: Braggart!

SCHNABEL: Now do you see why I was trying to teach him a lesson, Your Majesty? He's an impudent rascal.

THE QUEEN: Let him alone. He amuses me.

TYLL: I can prove that I'm wise. Ask me the hardest question you can think of.

THE KING: Well, let me see . . . *(Thinking)* Very well, what is the secret of life?

THE QUEEN: The secret of life is beauty.

(SHE beckons to her maid who gives her the mirror.)

TYLL: The secret of life, Sire, is laughter.

THE QUEEN: Laughter?

SCHNABEL: What kind of answer is that?

THE KING: How do you know, Tyll?

TYLL: I'll prove it. *(To MRS. BIGAROUND)* Could you live without ever laughing?

MRS. BIGAROUND: I don't know . . . I don't think so.

TYLL: *(To SCHNABEL)* Could you live without laughing?

SCHNABEL: Of course not. No one could live without laughing.

TYLL: *(Leaping to the table top)* Then laughter is the secret of life.

THE KING: *(Pleased)* Excellent!

TYLL: And I can tell riddles and do gymnastics, and make the funniest faces in all Christendom. *(HE makes a face for the KING)*

THE QUEEN: *(Tittering)* He's like a little monkey.

(SHE adjusts her hairdo.)

THE KING: Schnabel, call my wise men. I want them to test this boy.

SCHNABEL: But Your Majesty. . . .

THE KING: Call them. All of them. The Sage, the Astrologer, the Alchemist, and the Magician.

SCHNABEL: Very well, Your Majesty.

(HE bows and then exits.)

THE QUEEN: Tell me, boy, how did you get your strange name?

TYLL: (*Leaping down from the table*) Well, my saint's name is Tyllbert. That means "quick of movement."

MRS. BIGAROUND: He's *that* all right.

THE QUEEN: And the rest of your name?
(*TYLL steps forward and directs his speech partly to the audience and partly to the KING and QUEEN.*)

TYLL: Once I was an apprentice to a fortune teller at a big fair in Kneitlingen. When the master was gone, I took over his place. I told my customers that I could show them the biggest fool and the wisest man both at the same time.

THE KING: How did you do that?

TYLL: I let him look in a mirror.

MRS. BIGAROUND: A mirror?

TYLL: And in the mirror he saw himself.

THE KING: That's very wise.

TYLL: So my master named me Eulenspiegel. Eulen for owl, the wisest of all birds, and Spiegel for mirror. Eulenspiegel.

THE KING: The owl for wisdom, and the mirror for truth. My boy, I like you.
(*THE QUEEN quickly hands the mirror to her LADY-IN-WAITING. SCHNABEL enters.*)

SCHNABEL: The wise ones are coming, Your Majesty.
(*Offstage, the ASTROLOGER, the ALCHEMIST, the MAGICIAN, and the SAGE, are heard chanting. After a moment, they appear. Each is dressed in a long robe decorated with the symbols of his profession. All appear very strange and frightening.*)

VOICES: (*Chanting*) Porto, portas, portat,
Portamus, portis, portant.
Janua stamus, janua stabimus,
In janua stetimus. (*Ad lib*)

THE SAGE: (*Who is quite old*) Sire, what is the meaning of this?

THE KING: Sage, I want you to test this boy. (*He indicates TYLL*)
(*ALL look in unison at TYLL.*)

THE SAGE: (*Disdainfully*) A boy? But Your Majesty, we who contain all the world's knowledge, should not waste time testing a mere boy.

THE KING: He says he is the smartest boy in the world. I want each of you to ask him your hardest question.
(*The four approach TYLL and circle him, staring intently at him.*)

THE SAGE: Where did you study?

TYLL: Study?

MAGICIAN: Where did you go to school?

TYLL: I never went to school in my life. The world is my school.

THE SAGE: Your Majesty, he is obviously a fake.

THE KING: But you haven't tested him yet.

TYLL: Ask me a question. Anything except, "What is the secret of life?"

THE KING: He's already answered that one.

THE SAGE: Amazing!

(The four men withdraw, murmuring, and confer for a moment. Then

THE SAGE steps to TYLL.)

THE SAGE: Very well, tell me how many days have gone by since the birth of Adam?

TYLL: That's easy. Seven, sir.

THE SAGE: Seven days since the birth of Adam?

TYLL: Yes. Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday. When these are passed, they start all over again.

(THE KING laughs, and THE QUEEN titters.)

THE KING: Superb!

THE QUEEN: He is clever.

THE SAGE: But Your Majesty. . . .

THE KING: Enough, Sage, you've had your question. The Alchemist next.

TYLL: Remember, your hardest question.

THE ALCHEMIST: How many gallons of water are there in all of the oceans?

TYLL: *(Quickly)* Eight hundred and ninety seven billion, nine hundred and thirty million, six hundred thousand, seven hundred and thirty-six and three-fourths gallons!

THE ALCHEMIST: How can you prove this?

TYLL: Simple enough. Order all the rivers to stop running and the rains to stop falling, and measure out the gallons. You'll find I'm right.

THE ALCHEMIST: But that's impossible.

TYLL: Then how can you say my answer is wrong?

THE QUEEN: *(Giggling)* Wonderful!

THE KING: I told you he was wise.

THE ALCHEMIST: *(Angry)* Impudent brat! I could have answered that.

TYLL: Then why did you ask me?

(THE ALCHEMIST turns away exasperated.)

THE KING: The Magician next.

THE MAGICIAN: Devil, answer this one. Where is the center of the earth?

(TYLL sits cross-legged on the floor and ponders for a moment.)

SCHNABEL: There, you've caught him at last.

(TYLL leaps up, moves down right center, plants his feet firmly and points to the floor.)

TYLL: The center of the earth is right where I'm standing.

THE MAGICIAN: How do you know?

TYLL: If you don't believe me, take a long piece of string and measure all around the earth until you come back here. If I'm one inch off, you can have me horsewhipped.

THE MAGICIAN: Are you trying to make a fool of me?

TYLL: No, sir. (*To THE KING*) Besides, everyone knows that the center of the earth is the King's palace. Is there anyone here who would deny it?

(*He looks around but no one answers.*)

THE MAGICIAN: Your Majesty, he's mocking us.

THE KING: But he answered your question. The Astrologer next.

THE ASTROLOGER: Here is one you cannot answer. How far is it from earth (*He bends and touches the floor*) to Heaven? (*He stands and points at the roof.*)

TYLL: Oh, not so very far.

SCHNABEL: Do you call that an answer?

TYLL: If someone in Heaven called out to you, you could hear it right where you're standing.

THE ASTROLOGER: Prove it.

TYLL: If you doubt it, sir, then go up to Heaven and call to me. I'll hear it. If I don't, you can send me to the dungeon.

THE ASTROLOGER: Your Majesty. . . .

TYLL: Any more questions?

THE KING: No more questions. You've proved yourself to me.

THE QUEEN: And to me.

(*THE QUEEN gestures to the LADY-IN-WAITING, who brings the cosmetics and touches up the rouge spots on THE QUEEN's cheeks.*)

THE KING: It's very late. I shall order the servants to prepare the finest bed in the castle.

TYLL: But Your Majesty, I'd be happy to sleep on a bed of straw near the fire.

THE QUEEN: Nonsense.

THE KING: And in addition, starting tomorrow, you shall be my new Sage.

THE SAGE: (*Aghast*) But Your Majesty—

THE KING: You say you contain all the knowledge of the world, but a mere boy can answer your hardest questions. Begone, all of you!

(*THE ASTROLOGER, THE MAGICIAN, THE ALCHEMIST and THE SAGE begin the chant again.*)

And stop that infernal chanting!

(*The chanting stops. THE ASTROLOGER, THE MAGICIAN and THE ALCHEMIST exit. THE SAGE moves to the down right proscenium and remains deep in thought.*)

(*To SCHNABEL*) You had better get some sleep, Schnabel. We have a big day ahead of us tomorrow. The sick people will be here bright and early. Good night.

ALL: Good night, Your Majesty.

(*THE KING, QUEEN, and LADY-IN-WAITING exit. GRETCHEN, seated at the hearth, has dozed off.*)

TYLL: (*To MRS. BIGAROUND*) What sick people?

MRS. BIGAROUND: Once a year the King invites the sick of the