

The Palmy Days of Nance Oldfield eBook

The Palmy Days of Nance Oldfield

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THE PALMY DAYS OF NANCE OLDFIELD

CHAPTER I

FROM TAVERN TO THEATRE

"Out of question, you were born in a merry hour," says Don Pedro to the blithesome heroine of "Much Ado About Nothing."

"No, sure, my lord," answers Beatrice. "My mother cried; but then there was a star danced, and under that was I born."

Surely a star, possibly Venus, must have danced gaily on a certain night in the year of grace 1683, when the wife of Captain Oldfield, gentleman by birth and Royal Guardsman by profession, brought into the busy, unfeeling world of London a pretty mite of a girl. 'Twas a year of grace indeed, for the little stranger happened to be none other than Anne Oldfield, whose elegance of manner, charm of voice and action and



loveliness of face would in time make her the most delightful comedienne of her day. Perhaps she found no instant welcome, this diminutive maiden who came smiling into existence laden with a message from the sunshine; her father was richer in ancestry than guineas, and the arrival of another daughter may have seemed an honour hardly worth the bestowal.[A] But Thalia laughed, as well she might, and even the stern features of Melpomene relaxed a little in witnessing the birth of one who would prove almost as wondrous in tragedy, when she so minded, as she was fascinating in the gentler phases of her art.

[Footnote A: According to Edmund Bellchambers, Anne Oldfield “would have possessed a tolerable fortune, had not her father, a captain in the army, expended it at a very early period.”]

Yet the laughter of Thalia and the unbending of her sister Muse were hardly likely to make much impression in the Oldfield household, where money had more admirers than mythology, and so we are not surprised to learn that, with the death of the gallant captain, this “incomparable sweet girl,” who would ere long reconcile even a supercilious Frenchman to the English stage, had to seek her living as a seamstress. How she sewed a bodice or hemmed a petticoat we know not, nor do we care; it is far more interesting to be told that, though only in her early teens, the toiler with the needle found her greatest recreation in reading Beaumont and Fletcher’s plays. The modern young woman, be her station high or low, would take no pleasure

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in such a literary occupation, but in the days of Nance Oldfield to con the pages of Beaumont and Fletcher was considered a privilege rather than a duty. Then, again, the little seamstress had a soul above threads and thimbles; her heart was with the players, and we can imagine her running off some idle afternoon to peep slyly into Drury Lane Theatre, or perhaps walk over into Lincoln's Inn Fields, where the noble Betterton and his companions had formed a rival company. The performance over, she hurries to the Mitre Tavern, in St. James's Market, and here she is sure of a warm welcome, as is but natural, since the Mrs. Voss who rules the destinies of the hostelry is Anne's elder sister[A]. Here the girl loves to spend those rare moments of leisure, reading aloud the comedies of long ago and dreaming of the future; and here, too, it is that dashing Captain Farquhar listens in amazement as she recites the "Scornful Lady."

[Footnote A: According to one authority Mrs. Voss was Anne's aunt. We adhere, however, to Dr. Doran's account of the relationship.]

George Farquhar—how his name conjures up a vision of all that is brilliant, rakish, and bibulous in the expiring days of the seventeenth century! It is easy to picture him, as he stands near the congenial bar of the tavern, entranced by the liquid tones and marvellous expression of Nance's youthful voice. He has a whimsical, good-humoured face, perhaps showing the rubicund effects of steady drinking (as whose features did not in those halcyon times of merry nights and tired mornings?), and a general air of loving the world and its pleasures, despite a secret suspicion that a hard-hearted bailiff may be lying in wait around the corner. His flowing wig may seem a trifle old, the embroidery on his once resplendent vest look sadly tarnished, and the cloth of his skirted coat exhibit the unmistakable symptoms of age, but, for all that, Captain Farquhar stands forth an honourable, high-spirited gentleman. And gentleman George Farquhar is both by birth and bearing. Was he not the son of genteel parents living in the North of Ireland, and did he not receive a polite education at the University in Dublin? So polite, indeed, has his training been that he is already the author of that wonderful "Love and a Bottle," a comedy wherein he amusingly holds the mirror up to English vices, including his own. And, speaking of vices, he can now look back to those salad days when he wrote verses of unimpeachable morality, setting forth, among other sentiments, that—

"The pliant Soul of erring Youth
Is, like soft Wax, or moisten'd Clay,
Apt to receive all heav'nly Truth,
Or yield to Tyrant Ill the Sway.
Shun Evil in your early Years,
And Manhood may to Virtue rise;
But he who, in his Youth, appears
A Fool, in Age will ne'er be wise."



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Poor fellow! He never will be wise in the material sense; he will trip gracefully through life with more brains and bonhomie than worldly discretion, yet eclipsing many steadier companions by writing the “Recruiting Officer” and other sparkling plays, not forgetting “The Inconstant,” which will last even unto the end of the nineteenth century. At present—and ’tis the present rather than the past or future that most concerns the captain—he holds a commission in the army, which he is foolish enough to relinquish later on, and he has come to the very sensible conclusion that he is far more at home in the writing of comedies than the acting therein. For he has been on the stage, and precipitately retired therefrom after accidentally wounding a fellow performer[A]. In the course of two or three years Farquhar will make a desperate attempt to be mercenary by marrying a girl whom he supposes to be wealthy; he will find out his mistake, and then, like the thoroughbred that he is, will go on cherishing her as though she had brought him a ton of rent-rolls. When he is dead and gone, Chetwood, the veteran prompter of Drury Lane, will tell us, quaintly enough, how “it was affirm’d, by some of his near Acquaintance, his unfortunate Marriage shortened his Days; for his Wife (by whom he had two Daughters), through the Reputation of a great Fortune, trick’d him into Matrimony. This was chiefly the Fault of her Love, which was so violent that she was resolved to use all Arts to gain him. Tho’ some Husbands, in such a Case, would have proved *mere Husbands*, yet he was so much charm’d with her Love and Understanding, that he liv’d very happy with her. Therefore when I say an unfortunate Marriage, with other Circumstances, conducted to the shortening of his Days; I only mean that his Fortune, being too slender to support a Family, led him into a great many Cares and Inconveniences.”

[Footnote A: Farquhar was playing in “The Indian Emperor” being cast for Guyomar, a character whose pleasant duty it is to kill Vasquez, the Spanish general. This particular Guyomar forgot to change his sword for a theatre foil, and in the subsequent encounter gave Vasquez too realistic a punishment].

No one would have appreciated the unconscious humour of Chetwood’s assertion about “some husbands” more than Farquhar himself. One trembles to think, by the way what a “mere husband” must have been in the reigns of William or Anne.

In the meantime we are almost forgetting young Mistress Oldfield, who is still reading the “Scornful Lady,” and putting new life and grace into lines which nowadays seem a bit academic and musty. The captain has not forgotten her, however; on the contrary, he is so charmed with what he hears that he makes some flimsy excuse to get into that room behind the bar whence the silvery voice proceeds. There he first meets Nance, surrounded by what audience we know not, and is struck dumb at the lovely figure standing out in bashful relief, as it were, against a background of wine bottles and ale tankards. There is an awkward pause, no doubt, and if the girl of fifteen comes to a sudden stop in her recital, Farquhar is no less embarrassed on his part.



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The handsome, rosy face of a strapping tavern wench would not have startled him, but he was not gazing upon a bouncing serving maid or the hoydenish daughter of a prosperous innkeeper. He beheld a creature in all the gentle bloom of highbred beauty—tall, well-formed, and radiating a sort of natural elegance, with a fine-shaped, expressive face, to which great speaking eyes and a mouth half pensive, half smiling, lent an air of rare distinction. These were the eyes which in after years Anne would half close in a roguish way, as when, for instance, she meditated a brilliant stroke as Lady Betty Modish, and then, opening them defiantly, would make them glisten with the spirit of twinkling comedy. These were the eyes, too, which would shine forth such unutterable love when she played Cleopatra that one might well pardon the peccadilloes of poor Antony. But as yet there was no thought of drooping eyelids or amorous glances; all was natural, and nothing more so than the coyness of Nance upon seeing the author of “Love and a Bottle.”

Captain Farquhar had never before beheld this seamstress from King Street, Westminster, but she must have been familiar with the handsome figure of one who had drunk many a brimming glass at the Mitre Tavern. Thus, when he made bold to praise her elocution, she was not offended, and, although she ignored his request to continue the “Scornful Lady,” Anne proved sufficiently mistress of the interruption to astonish the intruder by her “discourse and sprightly wit.” That innate breeding, of which no amount of poverty could deprive her, came to the surface, to show that a woman of quality is none the worse for a surprise. Farquhar, bowing low with a grace that made his faded clothes seem the pink of fashion, poured forth a torrent of flowery compliments, which became all the stronger when he heard that the girl knew Beaumont and Fletcher nearly by heart. She must have blushed, looking prettier than ever, as the visitor went on; and how that young heart did leap as he predicted for her a glorious future on the stage! The stage! the *Ultima Thule* of all her hopes! The very idea of acting filled her head with a thousand bewildering fancies, and, as she told Chetwood in after years, “I longed to be at it, and only wanted a little decent intreaties.”

The decent intreaties were forthcoming. Nance’s mother, who evidently rejoiced in a prophetic spirit not given to all parents, strongly agreed with Farquhar’s opinion that the young lady should try a theatrical career, and the upshot of the whole episode was that Captain Vanbrugh took an interest in the newly-found jewel. This was a high honour. Vanbrugh had not yet made for himself a reputation as an architect by building Blenheim Castle for the Marlboroughs, nor had he changed his title of Captain for Sir John; but he was a great man, nevertheless, a successful dramatist and a boon companion of Christopher Rich, manager of Drury Lane. When the enthusiastic

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Farquhar sounded the praises of Anne Oldfield the future Sir John quickly repaired to the sign of the Mitre, with which, no doubt, he was already familiar, and met the young enchantress of that historic little room behind the bar. The arrival of this second and more distinguished captain was evidently the signal for a family council. We can see them all—Nance, glowing with excitement, her Brahmin-like, aristocratic beauty heightened by a dash of natural colour, quite different from the rouge she might use later; Mrs. Voss, sleepy, comfortable, and well pleased; and Mrs. Oldfield, full of importance and maternal solicitude. Vanbrugh, with his good-humoured smile and military bearing, talks in a fatherly way to the daughter, is deeply impressed with her many attractions, and is not sorry to learn that her ambition is all for comedy. He promises to use his good offices with Mr. Rich to have her enrolled as a member of the Drury Lane company, keeps his word, too—something for a gentleman to do in the year 1699—and soon has the satisfaction of seeing his new protegee hobnobbing with Mrs. Verbruggen, Wilks, Cibber, and other players of the house, while drawing fifteen shillings a week for the privilege.

To hobnob, receive a few shillings, and do next to nothing on the stage does not seem a glorious beginning for our heroine, but think of the inestimable luxury of brushing up against Colley Cibber. This remarkable man, who would be in turn actor, manager, playwright, and a pretty bad Poet Laureate before death would put an extinguisher on his prolific muses, had at first no exalted opinion of the newcomer's powers.

“In the year 1699,” he writes in that immortal biography of his,[A] “Mrs. Oldfield was first taken into the house, where she remain'd about a twelvemonth, almost a mute and unheeded, 'till Sir John Vanbrugh, who first recommended her, gave her the part of Alinda in the 'Pilgrim' revis'd. This gentle character happily became that want of confidence which is inseparable from young beginners, who, without it, seldom arrive to any excellence. Notwithstanding, I own I was then so far deceiv'd in my opinion of her, that I thought she had little more in her person that appeared necessary to the forming a good actress; for she set out with so extraordinary a diffidence, that it kept her too despondingly down to a formal, plain, (not to say)flat manner of speaking.”

[Footnote A: “An Apology for the Life of Mr. Colley Cibber.”]

How strange it seems, as we peer back behind the scenes of history, to think of a theatrical *debutante* rejoicing in an extraordinary diffidence. “Rather a cynical remark, isn't it?” the reader may ask. Well, perhaps it is, but these are piping times of advertising, when even genius has been known to employ a press agent.



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Nance Oldfield may have been almost mute for a twelvemonth, yet more than a few feminine novices, Anno Domino 1898, would never be content to remain silent; not only must they make a noise behind the footlights, but they feel it incumbent to be heard in the newspapers as well. Any dramatic editor could tell a weary tale of the importunities of a progressive young lady who wants to enlighten an aching public at least six times a week as to the number of her dresses, the colour of her hair, and the attention of her admirers. There is a blessed consolation in all this: the female with the trousseau, the champagned locks and the notoriety lasts no longer than the butterfly, and her place is soon taken by the girl who never bothers about the paragraphs, because she is sure to get them.

To return to the more congenial subject of Oldfield, it is strange that so shrewd a Thespian as Cibber (who seems to have been clever in all things but poetry) was so long in coming to a real appreciation of her genius. He is manly enough to confess that not even the silvery tone of that honeyed voice could, "till after some time incline my ear to any hope in her favour." "But public approbation," he tells us, "is the warm weather of a theatrical plant, which will soon bring it forward to whatever perfection nature has design'd it. However, Mrs. Oldfield (perhaps for want of fresh parts) seem'd to come but slowly forward 'till the year 1703." So slowly had she come forward indeed, that in 1702, Gildon, a now forgotten critic and dramatist, included her among the "meer Rubbish that ought to be swept off the stage with the Filth and Dust." [A] Time has avenged the actress for this slight; who, excepting the student of theatrical history, remembers Gildon?

[Footnote A: From the "Comparison Between the Two Stages."]

What is more to the purpose, Nance was able to avenge herself in the flesh, only a few months after these contemptuous lines had been penned. It happened at Bath, in the summer of 1703, and the story of her triumph, brief as it is, sounds quaint and pretty, as it comes down to us laden with a thousand suggestions of fashionable life in the reign of Queen Anne—a life made up of gossip and cards, drinking, gaming, patches and powder, fine clothes, full perriwigs and empty heads. What a picturesque lot of people there must have been at the great English spa that season, all anxious to get a glimpse of her plump majesty, who was staying there, and all willing enough to do anything except to test the waters or the baths from which the place first acquired fame. They were all there, the pretty maids and wrinkled matrons, the young rakes of twenty, ready for a frolic, and the old rakes of thirty too weary to do much more than go to the theatre and cry out, "Damme, this is a damn'd play." Then the children, who were always in the way, and the aged fathers of families who liked to swear at the dandified airs and newly imported French manners of their sons.

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And such sons as some of them were too—smart fellows, of whom the beau described in “The Careless Husband,” may be taken as an example: one “that’s just come to a small estate, and a great perriwig—he that sings himself among the women—he won’t speak to a gentleman when a lord’s in company. You always see him with a cane dangling at his button, his breast open, no gloves, one eye tuck’d under his hat, and a toothpick.”

What of the belles of the Bath? They seem to have been much after the fashion of their modern sisters, with their harmless little vanities, their love of expensive finery, and their pretty eyes ever watching for the main chance, or a chance man. Odsbodkins! but the world has changed very little, for even then we hear of dashing specimens of the New Woman, in the persons of ladies who affected men’s hats, feathers, coats, and perriwigs, to such an extent that our dear friend Addison will gently rebuke them during the reign of the *Spectator*. He doubts if this masculinity will “smite more effectually their male beholders,” for how would the sweet creatures themselves be affected “should they meet a man on horseback, in his breeches and jack-boots, and at the same time dressed up in a commode[A] and a night raille?”

[Footnote A: A cumbersome head-dress made of lace or muslin.]

How charming it would have been to watch the whole gay crew, just as Addison and Steele must have done, and to feel, like these two delightful philosophers, that you were a little above the surroundings. Poor Dick Steele may not always have been above those surroundings; we can fancy him taking things comfortably in some tipping-house, red-faced, happy, and winey, but even the most puritanical of us will forgive him. Read, by the way, what he says of the Spa’s morals[A]—“I found a sober, modest man was always looked upon by both sexes as a precise, unfashioned fellow of no life or spirit. It was ordinary for a man who had been drunk in good company, or.... to speak of it next day before women for whom he had the greatest respect. He was reprov’d, perhaps, with a blow of the fan, or an ‘Oh, fy!’ but the angry lady still preserved an apparent approbation in her countenance. He was called a strange, wicked fellow, a sad wretch; he shrugs his shoulders, swears, receives another blow, swears again he did not know he swore, and all was well. You might often see men game in the presence of women, and throw at once for more than they were worth, to recommend themselves as men of spirit. I found by long experience that the loosest principles and most abandoned behaviour carried all before them in pretensions to women of fortune.”

[Footnote A: *Spectator*, No. 154. Steele is writing as Simon Honeycomb.]



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Into this merry throng came Anne Oldfield during that never-to-be-forgotten summer—not, however, as an equal, but as an humble player of the troupe from Drury Lane. They had moved down from London, these happy-go-lucky Bohemians, as they were wont to do each season, among them being the ubiquitous Cibber, the gentlemanly Wilks, and that very talented vagabond, George Powell. Powell it was who liked his brandy not wisely but too well, and who made such passionate love on the stage that Sir John Vanbrugh used to wax nervous for the fate of the actresses. One great artiste was missing, however. Mrs. Verbruggen was ill in London, and that shining exponent of light comedy, who Cibber said was mistress of more variety of humour than he ever knew in any one actress, would never more tread those boards which were dearer to her than life.[A] Before she disappears for ever from these “Palmy Days” let us read a page or two about her from the graphic pictures in that famous “Apology for the Life of Mr. Colley Cibber”:

* * * * *

“As she was naturally a pleasant mimick, she had the skill to make that talent useful on the stage, a talent which may be surprising in a conversation, and yet be lost when brought to the theatre.... But where the elocution is round, distinct, voluble, and various, as Mrs. Montfort’s was, the mimick there is a great assistant to the actor.”

[Footnote A: A brief memoir of Mrs. Verbruggen and her first husband, handsome Will Mountford, will be found in “Echoes of the Playhouse.”]

* * * * *

Which reminds one that more than a baker’s dozen of modern comedians, so called, are nothing less than mimics. However, this is digressing, and so we continue:

“Nothing, tho’ ever so barren, if within the bounds of nature, could be flat in her hands. She gave many heightening touches to characters but coldly written, and often made an author vain of his work that in itself had but little merit. She was so fond of humour, in what low part soever to be found, that she would make no scruple of defacing her fair form to come heartily into it;[A] for when she was eminent in several desirable characters of wit and humour in higher life, she would be in as much fancy when descending into the antiquated Abigail of Fletcher (‘Scornful Lady’) as when triumphing in all the airs and vain graces of a fine lady, a merit that few actresses care for. In a play of D’Urfey’s, now forgotten, called the ‘Western Lass,’ which part she acted, she transformed her whole being, body, shape, voice, language, look, and features, into almost another animal, with a strong Devonshire dialect, a broad, laughing voice, a poking head, round shoulders, an unconceiving eye, and the most bediz’ning, dowdy dress that ever cover’d the untrain’d limbs of a Joan Trot. To have seen her here you would have thought it impossible the same creature could ever have been



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recover'd to what was as easy to her, the gay, the lively, and the desirable. Nor was her humour limited to her sex; for, while her shape permitted, she was a more adroit pretty fellow than is usually seen upon the stage. Her easy air, action, mien, and gesture quite chang'd, from the quof to the cock'd hat and cavalier in fashion. People were so fond of seeing her a man, that when the part of Bays in the 'Rehearsal' had for some time lain dormant, she was desired to take it up, which I have seen her act with all the true coxcomby spirit and humour that the sufficiency of the character required."

[Footnote A: Davies, in his "Life of Garrick," says of Peg Woffington that "in Mrs. Day, in the 'Committee,' she made no scruple to disguise her beautiful countenance by drawing on it the lines of deformity and the wrinkles of old age, and to put on the tawdry habilaments and vulgar manners of an old hypocritical city vixen."]

Let us cry peace to her manes and then wander back to Mistress Oldfield, whom we have a very ungallant way of leaving from time to time.

Well, Verbruggen having been taken out of the dramatic lists "most of her parts," as Colley chronicles, "were, of course, to be disposed of, yet so earnest was the female scramble for them, that only one of them fell to the share of Mrs. Oldfield, that of Leonora in 'Sir Courtly Nice'; a character of good plain sense, but not over elegantly written."

A "female scramble" it must have been with a vengeance, as any one who knows aught of theatrical ambition will easily understand. The only really distinguished actress of the Drury Lane coterie *hors de combat*, and a bevy of feminine vultures of no particular pretension, anxiously waiting to dispose of her histrionic remains! Think of it, ye managers who have to subdue the passions and limit the extravagant hopes of your players, and pity poor, unfortunate Mr. Rich. Do you wonder that Nance only contrived to get the plain-spoken Leonora? The wonder of it is that she obtained any role whatsoever.

Let Cibber continue the story, while he frankly confesses that even he could form a false estimate of a colleague:

* * * * *

"It was in this part Mrs. Oldfield surpris'd me into an opinion of her having all the innate powers of a good actress, though they were yet but in the bloom of what they promis'd. Before she had acted this part I had so cold an expectation from her abilities, that she could scarce prevail with me to rehearse with her the scenes she was chiefly concerned in with Sir Courtly, which I then acted. However, we ran them over with a mutual inadvertency of one another. I seem'd careless, as concluding that any assistance I



could give her would be to little or no purpose; and she mutter'd out her words in a sort of mighty manner at my low opinion of her. But when the play came to be acted, she had just occasion to triumph over the error of my judgment, by the (almost) amazement that her unexpected performance awak'd me to; so forward and sudden a step into nature I had never seen; and what made her performance more valuable was that I knew it all proceeded from her own understanding, untaught and unassisted by any one more experienced actor."

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In the original text, Cibber, in pursuance of that old-fashioned method of capitalising every third or fourth word without any particular rhyme or reason, has spelled occasion with a big O. Well he might, for it was, perhaps, the most important occasion in all the eventful life of Oldfield. She would win many a more popular triumph in days to come, but what were all of them compared to the honour of having compelled the writer to admit that he had blundered.

“Though this part of Leonora in itself was of so little value, that when she got more into esteem it was one of the several she gave away to inferior actresses; yet it was the first (as I have observed) that corrected my judgment of her, and confirmed me in a strong belief that she could not fail in very little time of being what she was afterwards allow’d to be, the foremost ornament of our Theatre.”

It takes but slight exercise of fancy to see inside the stuffy little theatre of Bath, on that memorable summer afternoon, when “Sir Courtly Nice”^[A] is produced, with Cibber in the foppish title-role and the fair unknown as Leonora, “Belguard’s sister, in love with Farewell.” Her fat, peaceful, and phlegmatic Majesty, Anne Stuart, is in the royal box, perhaps (although she is far from being a playgoer), and with her retinue may be seen her dearest of friends, Sarah Churchill, now Duchess of Marlborough, and the most brilliant political Amazon of her time. How appropriate, by-the-way, that they should be together at the comedy. The whole intimacy of the two, gentle Sovereign and fiery subject, is nothing more or less than a curious play, wherein Anne takes the role of Queen (unwillingly enough, poor thing, for she was born to be bourgeoisie) and the Duchess assumes the leading part. Unfortunate “Mrs. Morley”!^[B] You have a weary time of it, trying to act up to royalty when you would be so much happier as a middle-class housewife, and, perhaps, you have never been more bored than you are to-day in viewing “Sir Courtly Nice.” Nor can the performance be as delightful as it might otherwise prove to her of Marlborough; ’tis but a few months since her son, the Marquis of Blandford, had ended in small-pox a career which promised to carry on the greatness of his house.

[Footnote A: “Sir Courtly Nice; or, It Cannot be,” was from the pen of John Crown. In dedicating it to the Duke of Ormond, as can be seen in the original publication of the piece (“London, Printed by H.H. Jun. for R. Bently, in Russell street, Covent Garden, and Jos. Hindmarsh, at the Golden-Ball over against the Royal Exchange in Cornhill, MDCLXXXV”). The author says: “This comedy was Written by the Sacred Command of our late Most Excellent King, of ever blessed and beloved Memory (Charles II.). I had the great good fortune to please Him often at his Court in my Masque, on the Stage in Tragedies and Comedies, and so to advance myself in His good opinion; an Honour may render a wiser Man than I vain; for I believe he had more equals in extent of Dominion than of Understanding. The greatest pleasure he had from the Stage was in Comedy, and he often Commanded me to Write it, and lately gave me a Spanish Play

called 'No' Puedeser Or, It Cannot Be' out of which I took part o' the Name and design o' this."]



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[Footnote B: It is hardly necessary to remind the reader that in the private correspondence between Anne and the Duchess of Marlborough, the former signed herself “Mrs. Morley,” while her friend masqueraded as “Mrs. Freeman.”]

The comedy is about to begin as a common-looking person makes his appearance in the box. He is a dull, heavy fellow, who suggests nothing more strongly than a fondness for brown October ale and a good dinner into the bargain. Anne turns towards him with as affectionate a glance as she thinks it seeming to bestow in public. Is he not her husband, George of Denmark, and the father of all those children whom she never has succeeded in rearing to man’s, or woman’s, estate? He is a faithful consort, too, which is saying not a little in the days when Royal constancy, on the male side, is the rarest of jewels. George has vices, to be sure, but they belong to the stomach rather than the heart—that obese heart which, such as it is, the good Queen can call her own.

“Hath your Royal Highness ever seen this Cibber act?” asked the Duchess, by way of making conversation. She never stands on ceremony with soft-pated George, and does not wait to speak until she is spoken to.

“Cibber—Cibber—who be Cibber?” queries the Prince, a beery look in his eye, a foreign accent on his tongue.

“He’s the son of the sculptor, Caius Gabriel Cibber, your Highness.”

“I do not know—I do not know,” mutters George drowsily. Then he falls asleep in the box, and snores so deeply that Manager Rich, who has been in the front of the house, pokes his inquisitive face into the poorly-lighted auditorium, and quickly pokes it back again.

But hush! Wake up, Prince, and look at the stage. The play has begun, and some member of the company, we know not who, has recited the archaic prologue, which asks:

“What are the Charmes, by which these happy Isles
Hence gain’d Heaven’s brightest and eternal smiles?
What Nation upon Earth besides our own
But by a loss like ours had been undone?
Ten Ages scarce such Royal worths display
As England lost, and found in one strange Day.
One hour in sorrow and confusion hurld,
And yet the next the envy of the World.”

[Illustration: *Colley cibber*



In the character of “Sir Novelty Fashion, newly created Lord Foppington,” in Vanbrugh’s play of “The Relapse, or, Virtue in Danger.”

From the Painting by J. GRISONI, the property of the Garrick Club]

The King is dead! Long live the Queen! The prologue was written in honour of his most Catholic Majesty James II. and his consort, Marie Beatrice of Modena, but the opening lines are admirably adapted to flatter Anne, and so they are retained, even though what follows happens to be new.[A]

[Footnote A: The remainder of the original prologue, had it been recited, would have raised a storm.]



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But what care we for the prologue when the first scene is on and Violante and Leonora are confessing their respective love affairs, as women always do—on the stage. Leonora has a dragon of a brother who would compel her to marry that pink of empty propriety, Sir Courtly, but she rebels against the admirer selected for her, as all well-bred young women should in plays, and sets her heart upon another. In consequence there is trouble of the dear old romantic kind.

“I never stir out, but as they say the Devil does, with chains and torments,” Leonora tells Violante. “She that is my Hell at home is so abroad.”

“Vio. A New Woman?”

“*Leo.* No, an old Woman, or rather an old Devil; nay, worse than an old Devil, an old Maid.

“Vio. Oh, there’s no Fiend so Envious.

“*Leo.* Right; she will no more let young People sin, than the Devil will let ’em be sav’d, out of envy to their happiness.

“Vio. Who is she?”

“*Leo.* One of my own blood, an Aunt.

“Vio. I know her. She of thy blood? She has not a drop of it these twenty years; the Devil of envy sucked it all out, and let verjuice in the roome.”

These lines are decidedly unfeminine and coarse, as viewed from a nineteenth century standard, and there is nothing in them to recommend the two girls to the particular favour of the audience. Yet, in the case of Leonora, they are given with such rare spirit, and the speaker, with her almost sensuous charm and the melody of that marvellous voice, is so fascinating, that the house is suddenly caught in some entrancing spell. Oldfield has burst upon it in all the sudden glory of a newly unfolded flower, and murmurs of admiration and surprise are heard on every side. More than this, Queen Anne, whose thoughts may have been far away with the dead Duke of Gloucester, betrays a sudden interest in the performance, and thus sets the fashion for all those around her, excepting his most sleepy Royal Highness, the Prince of Denmark. He dozes on; twenty angels from heaven would not disturb him.

As the play proceeds, the curiosity centres around the new Leonora, so that even the scene where Sir Courtly is found making the most elaborate of toilets, with the assistance of a bevy of vocalists, does not exert the attraction to be found in the presence of Oldfield. The episode is all very funny, of course, and there is an appreciative titter when the fop defines the characteristics of a gentleman:



“Complaisance, fine hands, a mouth well furnished—

“*Servant*. With fine language?

“*Sir courtly*. Fine teeth, you sot; fine language belongs to pedants and poor fellows that live by their wits. Men of quality are above wit. 'Tis true, for our diversion, sometimes we write, but we ne'er regard wit. I write, but I never write any wit.

“*Servant*. How then, sir?

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“*Sir courtly*. I write like a gentleman, soft and easy.”

It is only a titter, however, that Cibber can produce this afternoon, or evening,[A] nor does the audience take the usual relish in that touch-and-go rubbish of a duet sung by a supposed Indian and his love, a duet in which the former declares:

“My other Females all Yellow, fair or Black,
To thy Charmes shall prostrate fall,
As every kind of elephant does
To the white Elephant Buitenacke.
And thou alone shall have from me
Jimminy, Gomminy, whee, whee, whee,
The Gomminy, Jimminy, whee.”

To which the lovely maiden answers:

“The great Jaw-waw that rules our Land,
And pearly Indian sea
Has not so absolute Command
As thou hast over me,
With a Jimminy, Gomminy, Gomminy,
Jimminy, Jimminy, Gomminy, whee.”

[Footnote A: Theatrical performances in this reign generally began at 5 p.m.]

When the play is over Nance can take a new part, that of a feminine conqueror. She has overshadowed Colley Cibber, who is more dazed than chagrined at the *denouement*, and she has proved more potent for the public amusement than all the beauties of “Jimminy, Gomminy,” with its elephants, its jaw-waw, and its pearly Indian Sea. As she sits in the green-room, smiling in girlish triumph while she looks around at the beaux and players who crowd about her, anxious to worship the rising star, her eloquent glance falls on George Farquhar. There is a tear in his eye, but a radiant expression about the face. What does the Oldfield’s success mean to the Captain? Perhaps Anne knows, as she throws him a tender recognition; perhaps she thinks of that song in “*Sir Courtly Nice*” which runs:

“Oh, be kind, my dear, be kind,
Whilst our Loves and we are Young;
We shall find, we shall find,
Time will change the face or mind,
Youth will not continue long.
Oh, be kind, my dear, be kind.”



CHAPTER II

AN ENTRE-ACTE

While Anne Oldfield is resting from her first triumph and preparing for another, let us glance for a moment at the theatrical conditions which surround her. Curious, perplexing conditions they are, marking as they do a transition between the brilliant but generally filthy period of the Restoration—a period in which some of the worst and some of the best of plays saw the light—and the time when the punctilio and artificial decency of the age will cast over the stage the cold light of formality and restraint. The nation is but slowly recovering from the licentiousness which characterised the merry reign of Charles II., that witty, sceptical sovereign, who never believed in the honesty of man nor the virtue of frail woman. The playwrights are recovering too, yet, if anything, more tardily than the people; for when a nasty cynicism, like that pervading the old comedies, is once boldly cultivated, many a long day must elapse ere it can be replaced by a cleaner, healthier spirit.



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Charles has surely had much to answer for at the bar of public opinion (a bar for which he evidently felt a profound contempt), and the evil influence which he and his Court exerted on the drama supplies one of the greatest blots on his moral 'scutcheon. Augustus William Schlegel, that foreigner who studied the literature of the English stage as few Britons have ever done, well pointed out that while the Puritans had brought Republican principles and religious zeal into public odium, this light-hearted monarch seemed expressly born to dispel all respect for the kingly dignity. "England was inundated with the foreign follies and vices in his train. The Court set the fashion of the most undisguised immorality, and this example was the more extensively contagious, as people imagined that they showed their zeal for the new order of things by an extravagant way of thinking and living. The fanaticism of the Republicans had been accompanied with true strictness of manners, and hence nothing appeared more convenient than to obtain the character of Royalists by the extravagant inclination for all lawful and unlawful pleasures.

"The age of Louis XIV. was nowhere imitated with greater depravity. The prevailing gallantry at the Court of France was not without reserve and tenderness of feeling; they sinned, if I may so speak, with some degree of dignity, and no man ventured to attack what was honourable, though his own actions might not exactly coincide with it. The English played a part which was altogether unnatural to them; they gave themselves heavily up to levity; they everywhere confounded the coarsest licentiousness with free mental vivacity, and did not perceive that the sort of grace which is still compatible with depravity, disappears with the last veil which it throws off."

As Schlegel goes on to say, we can easily imagine into what direction the tastes of the English people drifted under such auspices. "They possessed no real knowledge of the fine arts, and these were merely favoured like other foreign fashions and inventions of luxury. They neither felt a true want of poetry, nor had any relish for it; they merely wished to be entertained in a brilliant and light manner. The theatre, which in its former simplicity had attracted the spectators solely by the excellence of the dramatic works and the actors, was now furnished out with all the appendages with which we are at this day familiar; but what is gained in external decoration is lost in internal worth."

In other words, the theatrical life and literature of the Restoration was morally rotten to the core. How that rottenness has been giving way, during the childhood of Nance Oldfield, to what may be styled a comparative decency, need not be described here. Suffice it to explain that such a change is taking place, and let us accordingly sing, rejoice and give thanks for small mercies. Thalia has ceased to be a wanton; she is fast becoming quite a respectable young woman, and as to Melpomene—well, that severe Muse is actually waxing religious.



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Religious? Yes, verily, for will not all good Londoners read in the course of a year or two that there will be a performance of "Hamlet" at Drury Lane "towards the defraying the charge of repairing and fitting up the chapel in Russell Court," said performance to be given "with singing by Mr. Hughes, and entertainment of dancing by Monsieur Cherier, Miss Lambro his scholar, and Mr. Evans. Boxes, 5s.; pit, 3s.; gallery, 2s.; upper gallery, 1s."

Here was an ideal union of church and stage with a vengeance, the one being served by the other, and the whole thing done to the secular accompaniment of singing and dancing. For an instant the town was scandalised, but Defoe, that perturbed spirit for whom there was no such word as rest, saw the humour of the situation.

"Hard times, gentlemen, hard times these are indeed with the Church," he informs the promoters of this ecclesiastical benefit, "to send her to the playhouse to gather pew-money. For shame, gentlemen! go to the Church and pay your money there, and never let the playhouse have such a claim to its establishment as to say the Church is beholden to her.... Can our Church be in danger? How is it possible? The whole nation is solicitous and at work for her safety and prosperity. The Parliament address, the Queen consults, the Ministry execute, the Armies fight, and all for the Church; but at home we have other heroes that act for the Church. Peggy Hughes sings, Monsieur Ramandon plays, Miss Santlow dances, Monsieur Cherier teaches, and all for the Church. Here's heavenly doings! here's harmony!"

"In short," concludes the author of "Robinson Crusoe," "the observations on this most preposterous piece of Church work are so many, they cannot come into the compass of this paper; but if the money raised here be employed to re-edify this chapel, I would have it, as is very frequent, in like cases, written over the door in capital letters: 'This church was re-edified anno 1706, at the expense and by the charitable contribution of the enemies of the reformation of our morals, and to the eternal scandal and most just reproach of the Church of England and the Protestant religion. Witness our hands,

"Lucifer, Prince of Darkness, |
and | Churchwardens."[A]
Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, |

[Footnote A: *Review*, June 20, 1706.]

The "enemies of the reformation of our morals!" Defoe used the expression satirically, but how well it suited the minds of many pious persons, ranging all the way from bishops to humble laymen, who could see nothing in the theatre excepting the prospective flames of the infernal regions. Clergymen preached against the playhouse then, just as some of them have done since, and will continue so to do until the arrival of

the Millennium. Oftentimes the criticisms of these well-meaning gentlemen had more than a grain of truth to make them half justifiable. The stage

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was still far from pure, in spite of the improvement which was going on steadily enough, and there is no denying the fact that several of the worst plays of the Restoration could still claim admirers. Even “Sir Courtly Nice,” wherein occurs one of the most indecent passages ever penned, and one of the most suggestive of songs, was received without a murmur. Congreve was pardoned for his breaches of decorum, and Dryden was looked upon as quite proper enough for all purposes.

The *morale* of the players could hardly be called unimpeachable, at least in some instances, but the violations of social rules were not so open as they had been in the old days. Here and there a frail actress might depart from the stony path of virtue, or an actor give himself up to wine and the dodging of bailiffs, yet the attending scandals were not flaunted in the face of the public. In other words, there were Thespians of doubtful reputation then, just as there are now, and these black sheep helped materially to keep up against their white brethren that remarkable prejudice which has endured even unto the present decade.

As a class, the players had no social position of any kind, although the great ones of the earth, the men of rank, never hesitated to hobnob with them when, like Mrs. Gamp, they felt “so disposed.” Even in the enlightened reign of Queen Anne, there existed among many intelligent persons the vague idea that one who trod the boards was nothing more or less than a vagabond, and we are not surprised to learn, therefore, that in a royal proclamation of the period, “players and mountebanks” are mentioned in the same sentence, as though there was little difference between them.

Perhaps, the “artists” to whom the title of vagabond might be applied with a certain degree of justice were the strolling players, who seem to have been much after the fashion of others of their ilk, before and since. Good-natured, poverty-stricken barnstormers they doubtless were, living from-hand-to-mouth, and quite willing to go through the whole gamut of tragedy, from Shakespeare to Dryden, for the sake of a good supper. Here is a graphic picture of such a band of dramatic ne’er-do-wells, drawn by Dick Steele in the forty-eighth issue of the *Spectator*:

“We have now at this place [this is a letter of an imaginary correspondent to ‘Mr. Spectator’] a company of strollers, who are very far from offending in the impertinent splendor of the drama. They are so far from falling into these false gallantries, that the stage is here in his original situation of a cart. Alexander the Great was acted by a fellow in a paper cravat. The next day, the Earl of Essex seemd to have no distress but his poverty; and my Lord Foppington the same morning wanted any better means to show himself a fop than by wearing stockings of different colours.[A] In a word, though they have had a full barn for many days together, our itinerants are still so wretchedly poor, that without you can



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prevail to send us the furniture you forbid at the playhouse, the heroes appear only like sturdy beggars, and the heroines gypsies. We have had but one part which was performed and dressed with propriety, and that was Justice Clodpate. This was so well done, that it offended Mr. Justice Overdo, who, in the midst of our whole audience, was (like Quixote in the puppet show) so highly provoked, that he told them, if they would move compassion, it should be in their own persons and not in the characters of distressed princes and potentates. He told them, if they were so good at finding the way to people's hearts, they should do it at the end of bridges or church porches, in their proper vocation as beggars. This, the justice says, they must expect, since they could not be contented to act heathen warriors, and such fellows as Alexander, but must presume to make a mockery of one of the Quorum."

[Footnote A: It must be remembered that theatrical costumes, as we see them to-day, did not exist. The art of dressing correctly, according to the nature of the character and the period in which the play was supposed to occur, was practically unknown. Even in after years we hear of Spranger Barry playing Othello in a gold-laced scarlet suit, small cocked hat, and knee-breeches, with silk stockings. Think of it, ye sticklers for realism! Dr. Doran narrates how Garrick dressed Hamlet in a court suit of black coat, "waistcoat and knee-breeches, short wig with queue and bag, buckles in the shoes, ruffles at the wrists, and flowing ends of an ample cravat hanging over his chest." Barton Booth's costume for Cato was even more of an anachronism. "The Cato of Queen Anne's day wore a flowered gown and an ample wig."]

Poor strollers. There was a bit of stern philosophy in the advice of the justice, for they would probably have led a merrier and more luxurious life had they deserted the barns for the bridges and church-porches. Perhaps the same change would suit the wandering players who are to be found in these last years of the nineteenth century, travelling from one third-class hotel to another, and wondering whether they will ever make enough money to return home and sun themselves on the New York Rialto.

Humble as they were in the time of Queen Anne, her Government saw fit to subject the strollers to what might be called police regulation, and the Master of the Revels, who was a censor of plays and a supervisor-in-general of theatrical matters, had to issue an imposing order setting forth that whereas "several Companies of Strolling Actors pretend to have Licenses from Noblemen,[A] and presume under that pretence to avoid the Master of the Revels, his Correcting their Plays, Drolls, Farces, and Interludes: which being against Her Majesty's Intentions and Directions to the said Master: These are to signifie That such Licenses are not of any Force or authority. There are likewise several Mountebanks Acting upon Stages, and Mountbanks on Horseback, Persons that keep Poppets, and others that make Shew of Monsters, and strange Sights of Living Creatures, who presume to Travel without the said Master of the Revels' Licence," &c.

&c. The whole pronunciamento went to show that the despised strollers were not beneath the notice of a lynx-eyed Government.



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[Footnote A: A survival of the days when noblemen often had their own companies of actors, and were empowered to regulate the performances of these dramatic servants.]

It is curious that the functionary to whom was assigned the important critical duty of revising plays should also be obliged to concern himself with the doings of puppets and country "side shows." Yet before the law there was very little if any difference between a performance of "Hamlet" by the great Betterton, and an exhibition of the marital infelicities of Punch and Judy. Are matters so much better now that we can afford to laugh at the incongruity? Do not theatres devoted to the "legitimate" and dime museums, the homes of triple-pated men, human corkscrews and other intellectual freaks, come under the same police supervision, and rank one and all within the same classification as "places of amusement?" Nay, to go further and fare worse, do not some of these very freaks regard themselves as fellow-workers in the dramatic vineyard made so fertile through the toil of a Booth, a Mansfield or a Terry? The writer has himself heard the manipulator of a marionette troupe (whose wife, by-the-way, posed in a curio hall as a "Babylonian Princess") speak of Sir Henry Irving as "a brother professional."

This complacent individual had his prototype during the very period which we are considering. He was an artistic gentleman named Crawley, the happy manager of a puppet show which used to bring joy into the hearts of the merry people thronging the famous Bartholomew Fair. One fine day, as the manager was standing outside of his booth, he was put into a flutter of excitement by the approach of the mighty Betterton, in company with a country friend. The actor offered several shillings for himself and rustic as they were about to enter the show, but this was too much for Crawley. He saw the chance of his life, and took advantage of it. "No, no, sir," he said to "Old Thomas," with quite the patronising air of an equal, "we never take money of one another!" Betterton did not see the matter in the same light, and, indignantly throwing down the silver, stalked into the booth without so much as thanking the proprietor of the puppets.

What a Bedlam of a place Bartholomew must have been, with its noise, its gew-gaws, bad beer, cheap shows, and riotous visitors. Ned Ward, to whose descriptions modern readers are indebted, partly through the aid of John Ashton,[A] for many a glimpse of old-time London life, has left us a vivid picture of the fair as it appeared to him. The entrance to it, he says, was like unto a "Belfegor's concert," with its "rumbling of drums, mixed with the intolerable squalling of catcalls and penny trumpets." Nor could the sense of smell have been much better catered to than that of hearing, owing to the "singeing of pigs and burnt crackling of over-roasted pork." Once within the enclosure he saw all sorts of remarkable things, including the actors, "strutting round

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their balconies in their tinsey robes and golden leather buskins;” the rope-dancers, and the dirty eating-places, where “cooks stood dripping at their doors, like their roasted swine’s flesh.” Ward also looked on at several comedies, or “droles,” being enacted in the grounds, and, after coming to the conclusion that they were like “State fireworks,” and “never do anybody good but those that are concerned in the show,” he repaired to a dancing booth. Here he had the privilege of watching a woman “dance with glasses full of liquor upon the backs of her hands, to which she gave variety of motions, without spilling.”

[Footnote A: See Ashton’s “Social Life in the Reign of Queen Anne.”]

All this may have a curious interest, but it looks a trifle inconsistent, does it not, to lament the unjustness of connecting puppet entertainments and the like with the stage, and then deliberately devote space to the mysteries of Bartholomew Fair? It is more to the purpose to speak of the two theatres which claimed the attention of London playgoers in the year 1703—the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, and the house in Lincoln’s Inn Fields.

Of the two, Drury Lane was the more important in an historical sense, having been the house of the famous “King’s Company,” as the players of Charles II. were styled, and then of the combined forces formed in 1682 by the union of this organisation and the “Duke of York’s Company.” This was the house into which Nance Oldfield came as a modest *debutante*. It had been built from the designs of Wren, to replace the old theatre destroyed by fire in 1672.

Cibber has sketched for us the second Drury Lane’s interior, as it appeared in its original form, before the making of changes intended to enlarge the seating capacity. “It must be observed then, that the area or platform of the old stage projected about four feet forwarder (*sic*), in a semi-oval figure, parallel to the benches of the pit; and that the former lower doors of entrance for the actors were brought down between the two foremost (and then only) pilasters; in the place of which doors now the two stage boxes are fixt. That where the doors of entrance now are, there formerly stood two additional side-wings, in front to a full set of scenes, which had then almost a double effect in their loftiness and magnificence.

“By this original form, the usual station of the actors, in almost every scene, was advanc’d at least ten foot nearer to the audience than they now can be; because, not only from the stage’s being shorten’d in front, but likewise from the additional interposition of those stage boxes, the actors (in respect to the spectators that fill them) are kept so much more backward from the main audience than they us’d to be. But when the actors were in possession of that forwarder space to advance upon, the voice

was then more in the centre of the house, so that the most distant ear had scarce the least doubt or difficulty in hearing what fell

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from the weakest utterance. All objects were thus drawn nearer to the sense; every painted scene was stronger; every grand scene and dance more extended; every rich or fine-coloured habit had a more lively lustre. Nor was the minutest motion of a feature (properly changing from the passion or humour it suited) ever lost, as they frequently must be in the obscurity of too great a distance. And how valuable an advantage the facility of hearing distinctly is to every well-acted scene, every common spectator is a judge. A voice scarce raised above the tone of a whisper, either in tenderness, resignation, innocent distress, or jealousy suppress'd, often have as much concern with the heart as the most clamorous passions; and when on any of these occasions such affecting speeches are plainly heard, or lost, how wide is the difference from the great or little satisfaction received from them? To all this the master of a company may say, I now receive ten pounds more than could have been taken formerly in every full house. Not unlikely. But might not his house be oftener full if the auditors were oftener pleas'd? Might not every bad house, too, by a possibility of being made every day better, add as much to one side of his account as it could take from the other."

The latter portion of Colley's remarks will be echoed by our own audiences, which are so often doomed to see the most delicate of plays acted in barns of theatres where all the sensitive effects of dialogue and action are swallowed up in the immensity of stage and auditorium. There is nothing more dispiriting, indeed, both to performers and spectators, than the presentation of some comedy like the "School for Scandal" in a house far better suited to the picturesque demands of the "Black Crook" or the "County Circus."

The theatre in Drury Lane, as Oldfield knew it, had a not over-cheerful interior, the most noticeable features of which included the pit, provided with backless benches, and surrounded by what would now be called the Promenade. The latter, as Misson informs us,[A] was taken up for the most part by ladies of quality. In addition to these quarters and the boxes, there were two galleries reserved for the common herd, but into which, no doubt, impecunious beaux, down in the heels and at the mouth, would frequently stray.

[Footnote A: Henre Misson's "Memoirs and Observations in his Travels over England."]

The performances generally began at 5 o'clock, but that there were occasional lapses into unpunctuality, may be inferred from the following advertisement in the *Daily Courant* of October 5, 1703:

"Her Majesty's Servants of the Theatre Royal being return'd from the Bath, do intend, to-morrow, being Wednesday, the sixth of this instant October to act a Comedy call'd 'Love Makes a Man, or the Fop's Fortune.' [A] With singing and dancing. And whereas the audiences have been incommoded by the Plays usually beginning too late, the

Company of the said Theatre do therefore give notice that they will constantly begin at Five a Clock without fail, and continue the same Hour all the Winter."[B]



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[Footnote A: One of Cibber's earlier plays.]

[Footnote B: Quoted in "Social Life in the Reign of Queen Anne."]

To the *fin de siècle* playgoer the idea of beginning a performance at so strange an hour seems nothing short of startling, until it be remembered that people of quality were then wont to dine between three and four o'clock of the afternoon. How they spent the earlier portion of the day is not hard to relate. The men of fashion rose tardily, feeling none the better, as a rule, for a night at club or tavern, and then lounged about as best they could, visiting, sauntering in the Mall,[A] or otherwise trying to pass the time until dinner. This solid meal over they were ready for the theatre, where they occasionally arrived in a state of unpleasant exhilaration, damning the play, ogling the women and making themselves as obnoxious as possible to the unfortunates who cared more for the stage than the commonplace audience.

[Footnote A: "It seem'd to me as if the World was turn'd top-side turvy; for the ladies look'd like undaunted heroes, fit for government or battle, and the gentlemen like a parcel of fawning, flattering fops, that could bear cuckoldom with patience, make a jest of an affront, and swear themselves very faithful and humble servants to the petticoat; creeping and cringing in dishonor to themselves, to what was decreed by Heaven their inferiours; as if their education had been amongst monkeys, who (as it is said) in all cases give the preeminence to their females."—"The Mall as described by Ned Ward."]

And the women: what of them? They played cards, often for highly respectable(?) stakes, or went to the theatre when there was nothing better to do, and frittered away the greater number of the twenty-four hours in a mode that the fashionable woman of 1898 would consider positively scandalous. Sometimes the dear creatures went for a stroll in the Mall, there to meet the English coxcombs with French manners, or else they paid a few visits.

"Thus they take a sip of tea, then for a draught or two of scandal to digest it, next let it be ratafia, or any other favourite liquor, scandal must be the after draught to make it sit easy on their stomach, till the half hour's past, and they have disburthen'd themselves of their secrets, and take coach for some other place to collect new matter for defamation."[A]

[Footnote A: Thomas Brown.]

Drury Lane must have presented an animated but none the less disorderly scene any evening during the season when a popular play was to be given. Women in the boxes talking away for dear life, beaux walking about the house, chattering, ogling and laughing, or even sitting on the stage while the performance was in progress,[A] and the orange girls running around to sell their wares and, not infrequently, their own souls as well.



[Footnote A: Owing in great part to the efforts of Queen Anne, this wretched custom of allowing a few spectators to sit on the stage was practically abolished before the close of the reign.]



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“Now turn, and see where loaden with her freight,
A damsel stands, and orange-wench is hight;
See! how her charge hangs dangling by the rim,
See! how the balls blush o’er the basket-brim;
But little those she minds, the cunning belle
Has other fish to fry, and other fruit to sell;
See! how she whispers yonder youthful peer,
See! how he smiles and lends a greedy ear.
At length ’tis done, the note o’er orange wrapt
Has reach’d the box, and lays in lady’s lap.”

These lines by Nicholas Rowe form a graphic but unsavoury picture of the demoralisation to be found in an early eighteenth century audience. Affairs were much better than they used to be in the *laissez-faire* Restoration period, but, as may be imagined, there was still room for improvement. The rake, the cynic and the loosely-moraled women were still abroad in the land (have we quite done with them even yet?), and many a hard struggle would take place before the artificial restraint and decorum of the Georgian era would triumph over the mocking spirit of Charles Stuart and his professional idlers. In the meantime, as Shadwell relates, the rakes “live as much by their wits as ever; and to avoid the clinking dun of a boxkeeper, at the end of one act they sneak to the opposite side ’till the end of another; then call the boxkeeper saucy rascal, ridicule the poet, laugh at the actors, march to the opera, and sponge away the rest of the evening.” And he goes on to say that “the women of the town take their places in the pit with their wonted assurance. The middle gallery is fill’d with the middle part of the city, and your high exalted galleries are grac’d with handsome footmen, that wear their master’s linen.”[A]

[Footnote A: The footmen were sometimes sent, early in the afternoon, to keep places in the theatre until their masters or mistresses should arrive. They created so much disturbance, however, that a stop had to be put to the practice, and the servants were relegated to the upper gallery. To this they were given free admission.]

And now for a few pages about Drury Lane’s rival, the theatre within the walls of the old tennis court in Lincoln’s Inn Fields. It was the home of the company headed by the noble Betterton, the “English Roscius,” who had, in 1695, headed the revolt against the management of the other house. At that time the tide of popular success at Drury Lane had reached a rather low ebb, a painful circumstance due, no doubt, to the fickleness of a public that was beginning to tire of the favourite players and to betray a fondness for operatic and spectacular productions rather than the “legitimate.” Christopher Rich, the manager of the theatre, was, like many of his kind, more given to considering the weight of his purse than the scant supply of sentiment with which nature might originally have endowed him, and so he tried to do two characteristic things. The salaries of his faithful employes should be reduced



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and the older members of the company retired into the background as much as possible. Younger faces must occupy the centre of the stage; even Betterton, the greatest actor of his time, should be supplanted in some of his parts by the dissolute George Powell, and the genius of Mrs. Barry,[A] whom Dryden thought the greatest actress he had ever seen, was to give way to the less matured charms of the lovely Anne Bracegirdle.

[Footnote A: Mrs. Barry is said to have been a very elegant dresser; but, like most of her contemporaries, she was not a very correct one. Thus, in the “Unhappy Favourite,” she played Queen Elizabeth, and in the scene of the crowning she wore the coronation robes of James II.’s Queen; and Ewell says she gave the audience a strong idea of the first-named Queen.—DORAN’S “Annals of the Stage.”]

Cibber relates the story in a sympathetic vein. “Though the success of the ‘Prophetess’ and ‘King Arthur’ (two dramatic operas in which the patentees[A] had embark’d all their hopes) was in appearance very great, yet their whole receipts did not so far balance their expense as to keep them out of a large debt, which it was publicly known was about this time contracted.... Every branch of the theatrical trade had been sacrificed to the necessary fitting out those tall ships of burthen that were to bring home the Indies. Plays of course were neglected, actors held cheap, and slightly dress’d, while singers and dancers were better paid, and embroider’d. These measures, of course, created murmurings on one side, and ill-humour and contempt on the other.”

[Footnote A: Alexander Davenant, Charles Killigrew, and Rich.]

“When it became necessary therefore to lessen the charge, a resolution was taken to begin with the salaries of the actors; and what seem’d to make this resolution more necessary at this time was the loss of Nokes, Montfort and Leigh, who all dy’d about the same year. No wonder then, if when these great pillars were at once remov’d the building grew weaker and the audiences very much abated. Now in this distress, what more natural remedy could be found than to incite and encourage (tho’ with some hazard) the industry of the surviving actors? But the patentees, it seems, thought the surer way was to bring down their pay in proportion to the fall of their audiences. To make this project more feasible they propos’d to begin at the head of ’em, rightly judging that if the principals acquiesc’d, their inferiors would murmur in vain.

“To bring this about with a better grace, they, under pretence of bringing younger actors forward, order’d several of Betterton’s and Mrs. Barry’s chief parts to be given to young Powel and Mrs. Bracegirdle. In this they committed two palpable errors; for while the best actors are in health, and still on the stage, the public is always apt to be out of humour when those of a lower class pretend to stand in their places.”



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And with a bit more of this timely philosophy—to which, let it be hoped, he ever lived up to himself—Colley goes on to say that, “tho’ the giddy head of Powel accepted the parts of Betterton, Mrs. Bracegirdle had a different way of thinking, and desir’d to be excused from those of Mrs. Barry; her good sense was not to be misled by the insidious favour of the patentees; she knew the stage was wide enough for her success, without entering into any such rash and invidious competition with Mrs. Barry, and, therefore, wholly refus’d acting any part that properly belong’d to her.”

Then came the revolt, which the astute Betterton (“a cunning old fox” Gildon once dubbed him) seems to have managed with all the diplomacy of a Machiavelli. “Betterton upon this drew into his party most of the valuable actors, who, to secure their unity, enter’d with him into a sort of association to stand or fall together.” In the meantime he pushed the war into Africa, or, to change the simile, determined to lead his people out of the land of bondage, as exemplified by Drury Lane, and settle down in a new theatre. Nay, the “cunning old fox” even went so far as to secure an interview with his most august sovereign, William of Orange. What an audience it must have been, with William, stiff, uncomfortable, and unintentionally repellant, confronted by the greatest of living “Hamlets” and a group of other players made brilliant by the presence of the imperial but not too moral Mistress Barry, the lovely Bracegirdle, breathing the perfume of virtue, real or assumed, and the fascinating Verbruggen.[A] Perhaps the King found them an interesting lot, perhaps he merely regarded them with the same good-natured curiosity he might have exhibited for a pack of mountebanks, but in either case he was determined, with that sombre seriousness so typical of him, to do his duty in the premises. So he listened patiently to their complaints, and the result of it all was that by the advice of the Earl of Dorset, the Lord Chamberlain, a royal licence, allowing the revolters to act in a separate theatre, was duly issued. A subscription for the erection of the new house was immediately opened, people of quality paid in anywhere from twenty to forty guineas a piece, and the whole affair assumed permanent shape. Poor, tired, pre-occupied William had done what was expected of him, lifting his eyes for the nonce from the real world, as represented by the map of Europe, to gaze upon his subjects of the mimic boards.

[Footnote A: Mrs. Verbruggen and Joseph Williams seceded from the new company almost at once.]

“My having been a witness of this unnecessary rupture,” writes Cibber, “was of great use to me when, many years after, I came to be a menager myself. I laid it down as a settled maxim, that no company could flourish while the chief actors and the undertakers were at variance. I therefore made it a point while it was possible upon tolerable terms, to keep the valuable actors in humour with their station; and tho’ I was as jealous of their encroachments as any of my co-partners could be, I always guarded against the least warmth in any expostulations with them; not but at the same time they might see I was perhaps more determin’d in the question than those that gave a loose to their resentment, and when they were cool were as apt to recede.”



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Colley was shrewd enough in dealing with players, and, as any one who has ever had aught to do with them knows, the majority of Thespians must be treated with the greatest tact. They are sensitive and high-strung, yet often as unreasonable as children, and the man who can rule over them with ease should be snapped up by an appreciative government to conduct its most diplomatic of missions. With the theatrical stars of his own day Cibber seems to have been firm but prudent. "I do not remember," he tells us, "that ever I made a promise to any that I did not keep, and, therefore, was cautious how I made them." A fine sentiment, dear sir, eminently fit for a copy book, but we can well believe that your promises never erred on the side of extravagance.

It is a fascinating subject, this study of old-time stage life—fascinating, at least for the writer, who is tempted to run on garrulously, describing the doings of Betterton in the new theatre, and then wandering off to speak of the establishment of Italian opera in England. But the limits of the chapter are reached; let us bid good-bye to "Old Thomas," whose

"Setting sun still shoots a glimmering ray,
Like ancient Rome, majestic in decay,"

and hasten to worship the rising sun, in the person of Mistress Oldfield.

CHAPTER III

A BELLE OF METTLE

"For let me tell you, gentlemen, courage is the whole mystery of making love, and of more use than conduct is in war; for the bravest fellow in Europe may beat his brains out against the stubborn walls of a town—but

"Women born to be controll'd,
Stoop to the forward and the bold."

These lines, taken hap-hazard from Colley Cibber's "Careless Husband," contain the very spirit and essence of that old English comedy wherein the hero was nothing more than a handsome rake and the heroine—well, not a straitlaced Puritan or a prude. They breathe of the time when honesty and virtue went for naught upon the stage, and the greatest honours were awarded to the theatrical Prince Charming who proved more unscrupulous than his fellows. Yet, strange as it may seem, the "Careless Husband" is a vast improvement, in point of decency, on many of the plays that preceded it, and marks a turning point in the moral atmosphere of those that came after. "He who now reads it for the first time," says Doran, "may be surprised to hear that in this comedy a really serious and eminently successful attempt to reform the licentiousness of the drama was made by one who had been himself a great offender. Nevertheless the fact



remains. In *Lord Morelove* we have the first lover in English comedy, since licentiousness possessed it, who is at once a gentleman and an honest man. In *Lady Easy* we have what was hitherto unknown or laughed at—a virtuous married woman.” To go further, it may be added that the story points an unexceptionable moral, proving that the best thing for a husband to do in this world is to be true to the legitimate companion of his joys and sorrows.



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With all this in favour of the “Careless Husband,” it is a curious fact that the play, if presented in its original form, would not be tolerated by the audiences of to-day.[A] The dialogue is often coarse and suggestive, although for the most part full of sparkle and mother wit, while the plot smacks of intrigue, lying and adultery. But it is a fine work for all that; there is a delightful flavour about it, as of old wine, and we feel in reading each successive scene that we are uncorking a rare literary bottle of the vintage 1704. How much of the vintage of 1898 will stand, equally well, the uncorking process if applied in a century or two from now? How many plays in vogue at present will be read with pleasure at that distant period? Will they be the gruesome affairs of Ibsen, still tainted with their putrid air of unhealthy mentality, or the clever performances of Henry Arthur Jones; the dramas of Bronson Howard or the farcical skits of Mr. Hoyt?

[Footnote A: Were the “Careless Husband” adapted to suit the exacting requirements of nineteenth century modesty, its brilliancy would be gone.]

The “Careless Husband” has not been acted these many, many years, yet to all who treasure the historical memories of the stage it should be recalled with interest, for it was in this gay comedy that the ravishing Nance shone forth in all the silvery light of her resplendent genius. Read the pages of the old play in unsympathetic mood and they may look musty and worm-eaten, but imagine Oldfield as the sprightly Lady Betty Modish, the elegant Wilks as Sir Charles Easy, and Cibber[A] himself in the empty-headed role of Lord Foppington, and, presto! everything is changed. The yellow leaves are white and fresh, the words stand out clear and distinct, and it takes but a slight flight of fancy to hear the dingy auditorium of Drury Lane echoing and re-echoing with laughter. For 'twas at Drury Lane that the comedy first saw the light, in December 1704, and this was the cast:

LORD MORELOVE Mr. Powell.
LORD FOPPINGTON Mr. Cibber.
SIR CHARLES EASY Mr. Wilks.
LADY BETTY MODISE Mrs. Oldfield.
LADY EASY Mrs. Knight.
LADY GRAVEAIRS Mrs. Moore.
MRS. EDGING Mrs. Lucas.

[Footnote A: Wilks had a singular talent in representing the graces of nature; Cibber the deformity in the affectation of them.—STEELE.]

How the performance came about let Cibber explain. The “Apologist” has been speaking of Oldfield’s success in Leonora, and he goes on to say:

“Upon this unexpected sally, then, of the power and disposition of so unforeseen an actress, it was that I again took up the first two acts of the ‘Careless Husband,’ which I had written the summer before, and had thrown aside in despair of having justice done



to the character of Lady Betty Modish by any one woman then among us; Mrs. Verbruggen being now in a very declining state of health, and Mrs. Bracegirdle out of my reach and engag'd in another company: But, as I have said, Mrs. Oldfield having thrown out such new proffers of a genius, I was no longer at a loss for support; my doubts were dispell'd and I had now a new call to finish it."

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[Illustration: ROBERT WILKS *After the Painting by JOHN ELLYS, 1732*]

And finish the play Cibber did, casting Nance for the volatile Lady Betty and producing it under the most brilliant auspices. The whole assignment of characters was admirable, but the first Lady Betty, bursting upon the town in sudden glory, threw all her companions into the shade. Never had such a fine lady of comedy been seen, said the critics; never had an actress (who was not expected to be over-versed in the affairs of the “quality”) displayed such gentility, high-breeding and evidence of being—Heaven knew how—quite “to the manner born.” Never was woman so bubbling over with humour, said the people. As for Colley, he was delighted, of course, but believing that an honest confession is good for the soul, even for the soul of a Poet Laureate, he has left us the following graceful tribute to the important part played by the actress in making the “Careless Husband” a success:

“Whatever favourable reception this comedy has met with from the Publick, it would be unjust in me not to place a large share of it to the account of Mrs. Oldfield; not only from the uncommon excellence of her action, but even from her personal manner of conversing. There are many sentiments in the character of Lady Betty Modish that I may almost say were originally her own, or only dress’d with a little more care than when they negligently fell from her lively humour.”

Here we have a clue to that vivacity and *naivete* which distinguished Anne off the stage as well as on. Can it be that she, rather than Cibber, suggested this dashing bit of dialogue from the comedy:

* * * * *

“LADY BETTY. [*Meeting* LADY EASY.] Oh! my dear! I am overjoyed to see you! I am strangely happy to-day; I have just received my new scarf from London, and you are most critically come to give me your opinion of it.

“LADY EASY. O! your servant, madame, I am a very indifferent judge, you know: what, is it with sleeves?

“LADY BETTY. O! ’tis impossible to tell you what it is! ’Tis all extravagance both in mode and fancy, my dear; I believe there’s six thousand yards of edging in it—then such an enchanting slope from the elbow—something so new, so lively, so noble, so *coquet* and charming—but you shall see it, my dear.

“LADY EASY. Indeed I won’t, my dear; I am resolv’d to mortify you for being so wrongfully fond of a trifle.

“LADY BETTY. Nay, now, my dear, you are ill-natured.



“LADY EASY. Why truly, I am half angry to see a woman of your sense so warmly concerned in the care of her outside; for when we have taken our best pains about it, 'tis the beauty of the mind alone that gives us lasting value.

“LADY BETTY. Oh! my dear! my dear! you have been a married woman to a fine purpose indeed, that know so little of the taste of mankind. Take my word, a new fashion upon a fine woman is often a greater proof of her value than you are aware of.



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“LADY EASY. That I can’t comprehend; for you see, among the men, nothing’s more ridiculous than a new fashion. Those of the first sense are always the last that come into’ em.

“LADY BETTY. That is, because the only merit of a man is his sense; but doubtless the greatest value of a woman is her beauty; an homely woman at the head of a fashion, would not be allowed in it by the men, and consequently not followed by the women; so that to be successful in one’s fancy is an evident sign of one’s being admir’d, and I always take admiration for the best proof of beauty, as beauty certainly is the source of power, as power in all creatures is the height of happiness.

“LADY EASY. At this rate you would rather be thought beautiful than good.

“LADY BETTY. As I had rather command than obey. The wisest homely woman can’t make a man of sense of a fool, but the veryest fool of a beauty shall make an ass of a statesman; so that, in short, I can’t see a woman of spirit has any business in this world but to dress—and make the men like her.

“LADY EASY. Do you suppose this is a principle the men of sense will admire you for?

“LADY BETTY. I do suppose that when I suffer any man to like my person, he shan’t dare to find fault with my principle.

“LADY EASY. But men of sense are not so easilly humbled.

“LADY BETTY. The easiest of any. One has ten thousand times the trouble with a coxcomb....The men of sense, my dear, make the best fools in the world: their sincerity and good breeding throws them so entirely into one’s power, and gives one such an agreeable thirst of using them ill, to show that power—’tis impossible not to quench it.”

* * * * *

Compare this bristling dialogue with the inane stuff that too often passes for comedy nowadays, and one finds all the difference between real humour and flippancy. We stand at the threshold of the twentieth century, boastfully proclaiming that we do everything better than ever could our ancestors, yet where are the new comedies that might hold a candle to the “Careless Husband,” the “Inconstant,” or the “School for Scandal?” We may be presumptuous enough, nevertheless, to hold up that much-quoted candle, but the light from it will burn pale and dim when placed near the golden glow of the past. Would that we could purify some of the old-time pieces and thus preserve them for future generations of theatre-goers. Alas! that is impossible, for to cleanse them with a sort of moral soap and water would destroy nearly all their delightful glitter.



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The lines of Lady Betty must have fairly sizzled with the fire of comedy as they fell from the pretty lips of Oldfield. No wonder that Londoners thought the character bewitching; no wonder that Cibber wrote so enthusiastically of the actress in that wonderful Apology. "Had her birth plac'd her in a higher rank of life," he notes, perhaps forgetting that her very descent entitled the poor sewing-girl to a position which poverty denied her, "she had certainly appear'd in reality what in this play she only excellently acted, an agreeably gay woman of quality a little too conscious of her natural attractions. I have often seen her in private societies where women of the best rank might have borrow'd some part of her behaviour without the least diminution of their sense or dignity. And this very morning, when I am now writing at the Bath, November 11, 1738, the same words were said of her by a lady of condition, whose better judgment of her personal merit in that light has embolden'd me to repeat them."

The best of us have a wee bit of snobbishness buried deep in the inmost recesses of our souls, and Colley, who was neither the best nor the worst of humanity, had this quality well developed. To see that one has but to read the above quotation between the lines. He loved a lord as ardently as did the next man, and he attached to rank the same exaggerated importance which pervades, with all the unwelcome odour of sickening incense, the literature of his age. As Macklin so well said of him, Nature formed Cibber for a coxcomb, and it is quite probable that he took greater delight in being thought a leader of fashion than a writer of charming plays. Indeed, he was careful to cultivate the society of young noblemen, and this he was able to do by virtue of his theatrical successes, and, more helpful still, by a levity of character which stuck to him despite his great earnestness in many directions. Perhaps his frivolity and his love of pleasure, including the delights of the gaming table, may have been half assumed; perhaps he was only playing one of his many parts. He certainly succeeded in the role; he enlivened the dissipations of many a beau by his quaint conceits and flashes of humour, and went on his way rejoicing that he could be the boon companion of twenty idle lords.[A]

[Footnote A: Colley Cibber, one of the earliest of the dramatic autobiographers, is also one of the most amusing. He flourished in wig and embroidery, player, poet, and manager, during the Augustan age of Queen Anne, somewhat earlier and somewhat later. A most egregious fop, according to all accounts, he was, but a very pleasant one notwithstanding, as your fop of parts is apt to be. Pope gained but little in the warfare he waged with him, for this plain reason—that the great poet accuses his adversary of dullness, which was not by any means one of his sins, instead of selecting one of the numerous faults, such as pertness, petulance, and presumption, of which he was really guilty.—M.R. Mitford.]



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If he was surprised, therefore, that Oldfield could act the high-born woman of fashion, the “lady of condition,” who shall blame him? A tavern does not seem the proper school for deportment, and, though one has the bluest blood in Christendom, humble surroundings may keep it from flowing very freely. Still, Anne was naturally a thoroughbred; the girl had a personal distinction which was hers by right of inheritance, and what she lacked in elegance she was quick to acquire as she grew into womanhood.

It is a strange coincidence that the actress who in after years rejuvenated Lady Betty[A], and made her again a living, breathing creature, had at one period of her career been a tavern girl. Abington it was who seemed the very incarnation of aristocracy, and made the audience forget that, high as she stood upon the stage, she had once been almost in the gutter.

[Footnote A: Mrs. Abington, one of the most graceful and spirited actresses of the eighteenth century, was born in 1731, shortly after the death of Oldfield. She had the honour of being the original Lady Teazle, a part which she rehearsed under the direction of Sheridan, and she enjoyed the further distinction of being detested by Garrick. The latter said of her: “She is below the thought of any honest man or woman.”]

The same welcome anomaly is noticed now, when the actresses who play the women of the “hupper circles” with the greatest delicacy and keenness of touch are frequently the products of the lower or middle class. On the other hand, the *dame de societe* who trips lightly from the drawing-room to the stage, amid the blare of trumpets and the excitement of her friends, usually fails to make a mark. To be sure, several of them have made marks—very black ones.

Now let us turn the pages of the “Careless Husband,” as we scan them in Lowndes’s “British Theatre,” and see if we cannot extract some amusement therefrom. The scene opens in the lodgings of Sir Charles Easy, who, like many other dramatic personages of the eighteenth century, has a name that signifies his character. Easy, Sir Charles is in every sense of the word, particularly easy as to morals, for the possession of a lovely wife does not prevent him from prosecuting an amour with a woman of quality, Lady Graveairs, or having a vulgar intrigue with the maid of his own spouse. In fine, he is a right amiable gentleman, according to the curious standards of long ago; a very prince of good fellows, who in these days would pass for a cad.

We are hardly begun with the comedy before we are introduced to this paragon, who enters just after Lady Easy and the maid, Edging, have discovered fresh proofs of his flirtation with Lady Graveairs. Charles is inclined to be philosophical in a blase, tired way, and he says: “How like children do we judge of happiness! When I was stinted in my fortune almost everything was a pleasure to me, because most things then being out of my reach, I

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had always the pleasure of hoping for 'em; now fortune's in my hand she's as insipid as an old acquaintance. It's mighty silly, faith, just the same thing by my wife, too; I am told she's extremely handsome [as though the sad devil didn't know it], nay, and have heard a great many people say she is certainly the best woman in the world—why, I don't know but she may, yet I could never find that her person or good qualities gave me any concern. In my eye, the woman has no more charms than my mother"—and we may be sure that Sir Charles had never bothered himself much about the attractions of the last named lady.

Then the fair Edging comes to centre of stage and the following innocent dialogue ensues:

* * * * *

“EDGING. Hum—he takes no notice of me yet—I'll let him see I can take as little notice of him. [*She walks by him gravely, he turns her about and holds her; she struggles.*] Pray, sir!

“SIR CHARLES. A pretty pert air that—I'll humour it—what's the matter, child—are you not well? Kiss me, hussy.

“EDGING. No, the deuce fetch me if I do. [*Here was a model servant, of course.*]

“SIR CHARLES. Has anything put thee out of humour, love?

“EDGING. No, sir, 'tis not worthy my being out of humour at ... don't you suffer my lady to huff me every day as if I were her dog, or had no more concern with you—I declare I won't bear it and she shan't think to huff me. For aught I know I am as agreeable as she; and though she dares not take any notice of your baseness to her, you shan't think to use me so—”

* * * * *

But enough of this delectable conversation. The picture which it gives us is unpleasant and coarse; there is about it none of the glitter that can make vice so alluring. We will also skip an interview between Sir Charles and Lady Easy (who thinks it the part of diplomacy to hide her knowledge of her master's peccadilloes), and hurry on to the entrance of Lord Morelove, our hero. Morelove, who must have been admirably played by the fiery, impetuous Powell, is neither a libertine, nor, on the other hand, a prig; he is simply a gentlemanly and essentially human fellow who is consumed with an honest passion for Lady Betty Modish. Nay, he would be glad to marry the fine creature, but she has quarrelled with him and he is now telling Sir Charles all about it:



* * * * *

“So, disputing with her about the conduct of women, I took the liberty to tell her how far I thought she err’d in hers; she told me I was rude and that she would never believe any man could love a woman that thought her in the wrong in anything she had a mind to [Rather exacting, are you not, Lady Betty?], at least if he dared to tell her so. This provok’d me into her whole character, with as much spite and civil malice, as I have seen her bestow upon a woman of true beauty, when the men first toasted her:[A] so in the middle of my wisdom, she told me she desir’d to be alone, that I would take my odious proud heart along with me and trouble her no more. I bow’d very low, and as I left the room I vow’d I never wou’d, and that my proud heart should never be humbled by the outside of a fine woman. About an hour after, I whipp’d into my chaise for London, and have never seen her since.”



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[Footnote A: Many of the wits of the last age will assert that the word (toast), in its present sense, was known among them in their youth, and had its rise from an accident at the town of Bath, in the reign of Charles II. It happened that, on a public day, a celebrated beauty of those times was in the Cross Bath, and one of the crowd of her admirers took a glass of the water in which the fair one stood, and drank her health to the company. There was in the place a gay fellow half fuddled, who offered to jump in, and swore, though he liked not the liquor, he would have the toast. He was opposed in his resolution; yet this whim gave foundation to the present honour which is done to the lady we mention in our liquors, who has ever since been called a Toast.—The *Tatler*.]

* * * * *

What a quaint, circumspect and very ceremonious affair must that lovers' row have been. No swearing, no slang or loud talking, but everything deliberate and in the best of form. Lady Betty telling Morelove to go about his business, and that quickly, but doing so with a stately elegance worthy of the great Mrs. Barry; the suitor bowing low, with his white hand pressed against that "odious proud heart" which is gently breaking at the thought of departing. What a nice painting it would make for a Watteau fan.

Thus nearly all our characters have their entrances, Lady Betty is revealed to us through the medium of the lively dialogue quoted a few pages back, and then there is another stir. In comes Lord Foppington, otherwise Colley Cibber, in all the vapid glory of fine clothes, and a great periwig. A very prince of coxcombs, with his soft smile and conscious air of superiority—a mere bag of vanity, whose emptiness is partly hidden by gorgeous raiment, gold embroidery, rings, snuff-box, muff and what-not. With what genteel condescension does he greet Sir Charles; how gracefully nonchalant is he to my Lord Morelove. "My dear agreeable! *Que je t'embrasse! Pardi! Il y a cent ans que je ne t'ai veu.* My lord, I am your lordship's most obedient humble servant."

So Foppington takes his place in the comedy, and begins to play his brainless but important part. He, the disconsolate Morelove, and the brilliant Lady Betty all meet at dinner with Sir Charles and Lady Easy. Of course the hero makes an unsuccessful attempt to regain the good graces of his inamorata, and, of course, the coxcomb carries on a violent flirtation with her in the angry face of his rival. With the meal over, and everybody on the *qui vive*, this scene ensues:

* * * * *

Enter Foppington (who has been chatting to the ladies and who now seeks the post-dinner conversation of his host and Lord Morelove).

"FOPPINGTON. Nay, pr'ythee, Sir Charles, let's have a little of thee. We have been so chagrin without thee, that, stop my breath [what a bloodcurdling oath, so suggestive of

the awful curses of our own *jeunesse d'oree*], the ladies are gone, half asleep, to church for want of thy company.



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“SIR CHARLES. That’s hard indeed, while your lordship was among ’em. Is Lady Betty gone too?

“FOP. She was just upon the wing. But I caught her by the snuff-box, and she pretends to stay to see if I’ll give it her again or no.

“MORE. Death! ’tis that I gave her, and the only present she ever would receive from me. [*Aside to SIR CHARLES.*] Ask him how he came by it?

“SIR CHARLES. Pr’ythee don’t be uneasy. Did she give it to you, my lord?

“FOP. Faith, Charles, I can’t say she did or she did not, but we were playing the fool, and I took it—a *la*—pshah—I can’t tell thee in French, neither, but Horace touches it to a nicety—’twas *Pignas direptum male pertinaci*. [*Nota Bene*: Our modern comedians seldom quote Horace; their humour is not of the classic kind.]

“MORE. So! But I must bear it. If your lordship has a mind to the box, I’ll stand by you in the keeping of it.

“FOP. My lord, I’m passionately oblig’d to you, but I am afraid I cannot answer your hazarding so much of the lady’s favour.

“MORE. Not at all, my lord; ’tis possible I may not have the same regard to her frown that your lordship has. [Here’s a bit of human nature. Morelove stands in awe of that frown, but he doth valiantly protest, and that too much, that the displeasure of Lady Betty is no more to him than a dozen of ciphers.]

“FOP. That’s a bite, I am sure—he’d give a joint of his little finger to be as well with her as I am. [*Aside.*] But here she comes! Charles, stand by me. Must not a man be a vain coxcomb now, to think this creature follow’d one?

“SIR CHARLES. Nothing so plain, my lord.

“FOP. Flattering devil.”

Enter LADY BETTY.

“LADY BETTY. Pshah, my Lord Foppington! Pr’ythee don’t play the fool now, but give me my snuff-box. Sir Charles, help me to take it from him.

“SIR CHARLES. You know I hate trouble, madame.

“LADY BETTY. Pooh! you’ll make me stay still; prayers are half over now.

“FOP. If you’ll promise me not to go to church, I’ll give it you.



“LADY BETTY. I’ll promise nothing at all, for positively I will have it. [*Struggling with him.*]

“FOP. Then comparatively I won’t part with it, ha! ha!

[*Struggles with her.*]

“LADY BETTY. O you devil, you have kill’d my arm! Oh! Well—if you’ll let me have it, I’ll give you a better.

“MORE. [*Aside to SIR CHARLES.*] O Charles! that has a view of distant kindness in it.

“FOP. Nay, now I keep it superlatively. I find there’s a secret value in it.

“LADY BETTY. O dismal! upon my word, I am only ashamed to give it you. Do you think I wou’d offer such an odious fancy’d thing to anybody I had the least value for?

“SIR CHARLES. [*Aside to LORD MORELOVE.*] Now it comes a little nearer, methinks it does not seem to be any kindness at all.



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“FOP. Why, really, madame, upon second view, it has not extremely the mode of a lady’s utensil: are you sure it never held anything but snuff?”

“LADY BETTY. O! you monster!

“FOP. Nay, I only ask because it seems to me to have very much the air and fancy of Monsieur Smoakandfot’s tobacco-box.

“MORE. I can bear no more.

“SIR CHARLES. Why don’t then; I’ll step into the company and return to your relief immediately.

[*Exit.*

“MORE. [*To LADY BETTY.*] Come, madame, will your ladyship give me leave to end the difference? Since the slightness of the thing may let you bestow it without any mark of favour, shall I beg it of your ladyship?”

“LADY BETTY. O my lord, no body sooner. I beg you give it my lord.

[*Looking earnestly on LORD FOPPINGTON, who, smiling, gives it to LORD MORELOVE and then bows gravely to her.*]

“MORE. Only to have the honour of restoring it to your lordship; and if there be any other trifle of mine your lordship has a fancy to, tho’ it were a mistress, I don’t know any person in the world who has so good a claim to my resignation.”

* * * * *

In the hands of Powell, Cibber, and Oldfield this scene must have had all the sparkle of champagne; but let us hope, speaking of wine, that the prince of paragons, Morelove, was perfectly sober. Or shall we say comparatively sober?—for when bibulous George had just a dash of spirits within him (and that was nearly always) there came a roseate hue to his acting which rather added to its romantic colour. Sometimes this colour was laid on too garishly, as the supply of fire-water happened to be larger,[A] and Sir John Vanbrugh has himself left it on record that Powell, as Worthy, came well nigh spoiling the original production of the “Relapse.” “I own,” writes Sir John, “the first night this thing was acted, some indecencies had like to have happened; but it was not my fault. The fine gentleman of the play, drinking his mistress’s health in Nantes brandy, from six in the morning to the time he waddled up upon the stage in the evening, had toasted himself up to such a pitch of vigour, I confess I once gave up Amanda for gone; and am since, with all due respect to Mrs. Rogers, very sorry she escaped; for I am confident a certain lady (let no one take it to herself that is handsome) who highly blames the play, for the barrenness of the conclusion, would then have allowed it a very natural close.” It



should be added that the Mrs. Rogers herein mentioned as playing Amanda was a capable tragic actress whose ambition it was to enact none but virtuous women. Her own virtue—but we are dipping into scandal.[B]

[Footnote A: To the folly of intoxication he added the horrors of debt, and was so hunted by the sheriffs' officers that he usually walked the streets with a sword (sheathed) in his hand; and if he saw any of them at a distance, he would roar out, "Get on the other side of the way, you dog!" The bailiff, who knew his old customer, would obligingly answer, "We do not want you *now*, Master Powell." EDMUND BELLCHAMBERS.]



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[Footnote B: Her fondness for virtue on the stage she began to think might persuade the world that it had made an impression on her private life; and the appearance of it actually went so far that, in an epilogue to an obscure play, the profits of which were given to her, and wherein she acted a part of impregnable chastity, she bespoke the favour of the ladies by a protestation that in honour of their goodness and virtue she would dedicate her unblemished life to their example. Part of this vestal vow, I remember, was contained in the following verse:—

“Study to live the character I play.”

But alas! how weak are the strongest works of art when Nature besieges it.—CIBBER.]

As for the “Careless Husband,” the more one reads from it the more cause is there to regret the utter hopelessness of reviving a play so honeycombed by inuendo. How delightfully, for instance, would some of the badinage between Morelove and the spirited Lady Betty have been treated in the earlier days of the Daly Company, with John Drew and Miss Rehan as the lovers. We can picture the two, as they would have given the following lines, the one gentlemanly and effective, the other imperious, liquid-voiced, and radiant of humour:

* * * * *

“MORELOVE. Do you know, madame, I have just found out, that upon your account I have made myself one of the most ridiculous puppies upon the face of the earth—I have upon my faith! Nay, and so extravagantly such—ha! ha! ha!—that it’s at last become a jest even to myself; and I can’t help laughing at it for the soul of me; ha! ha! ha!

“LADY BETTY. [*Aside.*] I want to cure him of that laugh now. My lord, since you are so generous, I’ll tell you another secret. Do you know, too, that I still find (spite of all your great wisdom, and my contemptible qualities, as you are pleased now and then to call them), do you know, I say, that I see under all this, you still love me with the same helpless passion; and can your vast foresight imagine I won’t use you accordingly, for these extraordinary airs you are pleased to give yourself.’ [Talk of the independence of the ‘New Woman.’ Who could have been more self-assertive than this eighteenth century belle?]

“MORE. O by all means, madame, ’tis as you should, and I expect it whenever it is in your power. [*Aside*] Confusion!

“LADY BETTY. My lord, you have talked to me this half-hour without confessing pain. [*Pauses and affects to gape.*] Only remember it.

“MORE. Hell and tortures!

“LADY BETTY. What did you say, my lord?



“MORE. Fire and furies!

“LADY BETTY. Ha! ha! he’s disorder’d. Now I am easy. My Lord Foppington, have you a mind to your revenge at piquet?

“FOP. I have always a mind to an opportunity of entertaining your ladyship, madame.

[LADY BETTY *coquets with* LORD FOPPINGTON.]



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“MORE. O Charles, the insolence of this woman might furnish out a thousand devils.

“SIR CHARLES. And your temper is enough to furnish a thousand such women. Come away—I have business for you upon the terrace.

“MORE. Let me but speak one word to her.

“SIR CHARLES. Not a syllable; the tongue’s a weapon you always have the worst at. For I see you have no guard, and she carries a devilish edge.

“LADY BETTY. My lord, don’t let anything I’ve said frighten you away; for if you have the least inclination to stay and rail, you know the old conditions; ’tis but your asking me pardon next day, and you may give your passion any liberty you think fit.

“MORE. Daggers and death! [What a picturesque, old-fashioned oath, is it not?
“Daggers and death!” Writers of English melodramas, please take notice.]

“SIR CHARLES. Is the man distracted?

“MORE. Let me speak to her now, or I shall burst.[A]

“SIR CHARLES. Upon condition you’ll speak no more of her to me, my lord, do as you please.

“MORE. Pr’ythee pardon me—I know not what to do.

“SIR CHARLES. Come along, I’ll set you to work, I warrant you. Nay, nay, none of your parting ogles—will you go?

“MORE. Yes, and I hope for ever.

[Exit SIR CHARLES *pulling away* LORD MORELOVE.]

[Footnote A: Here is the way in which several of our refined farcical writers would have given it:

MORELOVE. Let me speak to her now, or I shall burst.

SIR CHARLES. Upon condition that you’ll not burst here, in the parlour, do as you please.]

* * * * *

There is about this and many other scenes the fragrance of an old perfume, as of lavender. We take up the book after years of neglect, and the odour, which is not that of sanctity, is still perceptible—a potent reminder of the past. And Lady Betty Modish?



She must be—well-nigh on to two hundred years old (a thousand florid pardons, sweet madame, for bringing in your age), but she is as blooming, saucy, and interesting as ever.

What becomes of Betty in the comedy, the reader may ask. She goes on her triumphant way, the same cruel enchantress, until the last act, when she is quite ready to fall into the arms of Lord Morelove. Sir Charles Easy, touched by the constancy and devotion of his wife, announces that he will mend his wilful habits, and Lord Foppington, who flattered himself that Lady Betty was madly in love with him, accepts his dismissal with great good humour. Then we have a song setting forth how:

“Sabina with an angel’s face
By Love ordain’d for joy,
Seems of the Siren’s cruel race,
To charm and then destroy.

“With all the arts of look and dress,
She fans the fatal fire;
Through pride, mistaken oft for grace,
She bids the swains expire.



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“The god of Love, enraged to see
The nymph defy his flame,
Pronounced his merciless decree
Against the haughty dame:

“Let age with double speed o’ertake her,
Let love the room of pride supply;
And when the lovers all forsake her,
A spotless virgin let her die.”

Next, with the sound of this horrible warning ringing in our ears, Sir Charles steps forward to give the tag: “If then [turning to Lady Easy] the unkindly thought of what I have been hereafter shou’d intrude upon thy growing quiet, let this reflection teach thee to be easy:

“Thy wrong, when greatest, most thy virtue prov’d;
And from that virtue found, I blus’d and truly lov’d.”

So ends the comedy in a blaze of morality. We almost see Sir Charles fitting on a pair of newly-made wings, as he prepares to float away to some better planet; but let him go, by all means. We shall remain here and watch that fair sinner, Oldfield.

CHAPTER IV

MANAGERIAL WICKEDNESS

Of all the vested rights that mankind is heir to none is more sacred than the right of an actor to abuse his manager. It is among the blessed privileges which help to make life cheerful and sunny, for, when all is said, what would be the joy of existence if we might not criticise those whom Providence has placed above us. Even a king may be abused, behind his royal back, and so an humble manager shall not escape.

There was a manager of Oldfield’s day who surely did not escape, and that was Christopher Rich, Esquire, one of the patentees of Drury Lane Theatre, and sole director, as a rule, in the affairs of that Thespian temple. Thespian temple, indeed! What cared Mr. Rich for Thespis or for art? He looked upon actors as a lot of cattle whose sole mission in life was to make him rich in pocket as well as in name, and who might, after the performance of that pious act, betake themselves to the Evil Gentleman for aught he cared. Several modern managers have been equally appreciative, but it is a comfort to reflect that a portion of the fraternity are vast improvements on crusty Christopher, who was described by a contemporary as “an old snarling lawyer, master and sovereign; a waspish, ignorant pettifogger in law and poetry; one who understands



poetry no more than algebra; he wou'd sooner have the Grace of God than do everybody justice."[A]

[Footnote A: Gildon's "Comparison Between the Two Stages."]

This was the measly director in whose company Nance figured for a time, and for whom she must have had a profound if discreetly-concealed contempt. Cibber, who seems to have keenly gauged the man, has left us an account of how Rich[A] treated his actors. "He would laugh with them over a bottle and bite them in their bargains. He kept them poor, that they might not be able to rebel; and sometimes merry, that they might not think of it."



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How graphic is this picture, with its vision of sly, crafty Christopher, as he denies the players their well-earned wages and then hurries them off to a neighbouring tavern, there to get them hilarious on cheap wine and grudgingly to pay the reckoning. "All their articles of agreement," continues Colley, "had a clause in them that he was sure to creep out at, viz., their respective sallaries were to be paid in such manner and proportion as others of the same company were paid; which in effect made them all, when he pleas'd, but limited sharers of loss, and himself sole proprietor of profits; and this loss or profit they only had such verbal accounts of as he thought proper to give them. 'Tis true, he would sometimes advance them money (but not more than he knew at most could be due to them) upon their bonds; upon which, whenever they were mutinous, he would threaten to sue them. This was the net we danc'd in for several years. But no wonder we were dupes," whimsically adds Colley, "while our master was a lawyer."

[Footnote A: Christopher Rich was the father of John Rich, a manager who excelled in pantomime, and who appreciated the "legitimate" as little as did his father.]

And a very commonplace, foxy and inartistic lawyer he was, too, with his fondness for money bags and his willingness to oblige the town with anything it wanted. To his narrow mind there was no great difference between a lot of rope-dancers and a company of players, or, if there should be, the advantage was quite in favour of the former. We see the same commercial spirit to-day, when the average manager rents his house for one week to an Irving or a Mansfield, and perhaps turns it over, the following Monday night, to the tender mercies of performing dogs and cats. 'Tis all grist that comes to his mill, and what cares he whether that grist represent "Macbeth" or canine drama?

Cibber was not above looking at the practical side of things, but he had no patience, nevertheless, with the Philistianism of Rich, who had that fatal fondness for "paying extraordinary prices to singers, dancers, and other exotick performers, which were as constantly deducted out of the sinking sallaries of his actors." [A]

[Footnote A: Operatic singers and dancers, mostly recruited from the Continent, were fast becoming fashionable, and, as their appearance on the scene interfered with the profits of the actors, it may be imagined that the latter held the strangers in much contempt.]

For it seems that Master Rich had not bought his share of the Drury Lane patent to elevate the stage, but rather to get a fortune therefrom. "And to say truth, his sense of everything to be shown there was much upon a level with the taste of the multitude, whose opinion and whose money weigh'd with him full as much as that of the best judges. [Colley was evidently thinking of himself as one of these judges.] His point was

to please the majority who could more easily comprehend anything they saw than the daintiest things that could be said to them.”



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Nay, Christopher actually went so far that he once sought the services of an elephant to add to the strength of his company, thus anticipating the realism of our own time, when a few cows, a horse or two, a lot of chickens and some real straw will cover a multitude of sins in the construction of a play.[A] Yet, sad to relate, the elephant was never allowed to lend weight to the drama, as “from the jealousy which so formidable a rival had rais’d in his dancers, and by his bricklayer’s assuring him that if the walls were to be open’d wide enough for its entrance it might endanger the fall of the house [the old theatre in Dorset Garden, which Rich wished to use] he gave up his project, and with it so hopeful a prospect of making the receipts of the stage run higher than all the wit and force of the best writers had ever yet rais’d them to.”

[Footnote A: Apropos to the appearance of elephants on the stage, a capital anecdote is told by Colman in his “Random Records.” Johnstone, a machinist employed at Drury Lane during the latter portion of the eighteenth century, was celebrated for his superior taste and skill in the construction of flying chariots, triumphal cars, palanquins, banners, wooden children to be tossed over battlements, and straw heroes and heroines to be hurled down a precipice; he was further famous for wickerwork lions, pasteboard swans, and all sham birds and beasts appertaining to a theatrical menagerie. He wished on a certain occasion to spy the nakedness of the enemy’s camp, and therefore contrived to insinuate himself, with a friend, into the two-shilling gallery, to witness the night rehearsal of a pantomime at Covent Garden Theatre. Among the attractions of this Christmas foolery a real elephant was introduced, and in due time the unweildly brute came clumping down the stage, making a prodigious figure in a procession. The friend who sat close to Johnstone jogged his elbow, whispering, “This is a bitter bad job for Drury. Why, the elephant’s *alive!*—he’ll carry all before him, and beat you hollow. What d’ye think on’t, eh?” “Think on’t,” said Johnstone, in a tone of the utmost contempt, “I should be very sorry if I couldn’t make a much better elephant than that at any time!”]

Yet it was under the auspices of such a man that Oldfield made several of her most brilliant successes, not forgetting the memorable appearance as Lady Betty. And all the while, no doubt, Mr. Rich was thinking how much more sensible an attraction would be an elephant or a tight-rope walker. But Nance, who had now a firm friend in Cibber, went merrily on her way, creating new characters in comedy and astonishing even her most enthusiastic admirers by the imposing air she could frequently give to a tragic part. In none of them, grave or gay, was she more charming than as Sylvia, the heroine of Farquhar’s “Recruiting Officer,” a play in which she graced man’s clothes. Sylvia is a delightful creature who masquerades as a dashing youth, and thereby has the



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privilege of watching her lover, Captain Plume. Of course the deception is discovered, and all ends happily in the orthodox fashion [the only bit of orthodoxy about the performance, by-the-way]. The girl is allowed to marry the Captain and settles down, we may suppose, to the pleasures of domesticity and woman's gowns. The comedy was admirably acted throughout, Wilks, Cibber, and that prince of mimics, Dick Estcourt, being in the cast, and the seal of popular approval was quickly put upon the production. At present such a seal should bring hundreds, perhaps thousands, of dollars into the pockets of the author, but it is possible that a few paltry pounds represented the profits of Farquhar.[A]

[Footnote A: The "Recruiting Officer" first saw the light in April 1706.]

In the meantime the spirit of discontent was abroad among the members of the Drury Lane company. Well it might be when the manager of the house, as Cibber points out, "had no conception himself of theatrical merit either in authors or actors, yet his judgment was govern'd by a saving rule in both. He look'd into his receipts for the value of a play, and from common fame he judg'd of his actors. But by whatever rule he was govern'd, while he had prudently reserv'd to himself a power of not paying them more than their merit could get, he could not be much deceived by their being over or undervalued. In a word, he had with great skill inverted the constitution of the stage, and quite changed the channel of profits arising from it; formerly (when there was but one company) the proprietors punctually paid the actors their appointed sallaries, and took to themselves only the clear profits: But our wiser proprietor took first out of every day's receipts two shillings in the pound to himself; and left their sallaries to be paid only as the less or greater deficiencies of acting (according to his own accounts) would permit. What seem'd most extraordinary in these measures was, that at the same time he had persuaded us to be contented with our condition, upon his assuring us that as fast as money would come in we should all be paid our arrears."

Lawyer Rich lived too soon. How useful would he have been in these latter days, when irresponsible managers infest the profession and turn an honest penny by trading on the credulity and unbusinesslike qualities of many a deluded player. The average manager pays his debts and is quite as stable and upright in his dealings as one could desire, but what can be said of the man who take companies "on the road," after making all sorts of glowing promises, and finally elopes with the money-box, leaving his actors stranded in a strange city. Incidents of this kind, which to the victims have more of tragedy than any play in their *repertoire*, occur almost every day during the theatrical season, but nothing is done to prevent the ever-increasing scandal. The erstwhile proprietor of the company returns by Pullman car to New York, complains loudly about "poor business," a "sunken fortune," &c., and then prepares to take out another combination. As for his dupes, who are probably half-starving in some third class western town, they may walk home on the railroad ties.



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Yes, Mr. Rich was evidently intended for a wider sphere and a more progressive age than those he had to adorn. But despite all his financial talents some of the best players in Drury Lane were ready to desert from that house the moment the chance came.

[Illustration: WILLIAM CONGREVE

By Sir GODFREY KNELLER, 1709]

The chance did come, in the season of 1706-7, when Mrs. Oldfield, Wilks, Mrs. Rogers, and several others, went over to the handsome new theatre in the Haymarket, and were joined there later by Cibber. This imposing house was opened in the spring of 1705 by Congreve and Vanbrugh, and to it had gone Betterton and his associates at Lincoln's Inn Fields. But noble old Roscius, who had so long cast his welcome spell upon London theatre-goers, was getting old and feeble, and so were several of the other members; the spell was well-nigh broken, and not even a trial of that "new-fangled" style of entertainment, Italian opera,[A] could make the management a success.

[Footnote A: How Italian opera was despised by certain critics of Queen Anne's reign has already been shown in "Echoes of the Playhouse." In his "Essay on the Operas after the Italian Manners," Dennis writes (1706): "If that is truly the most Gothic, which is the most oppos'd to Antick, nothing can be more Gothick than an Opera, since nothing can be more oppos'd to the ancient Tragedy, than the modern Tragedy in Musick, because the one is reasonable, the other ridiculous; the one is artful, the other absurd; the one beneficial, the other pernicious; in short, the one natural and the other monstrous."]

Now enters upon the scene the redoubtable Owen Swiney, who plays a short but brilliant part in the theatrical world, and next, with all his money gone, enters upon a twenty years' exile on the Continent. Then he will come home, to be made Keeper of the King's Mews, and presently our Colley will immortalise him in one of those pen-portraits which make so many of the Poet Laureate's friends or foes stand out clear and distinct against the background of the "Apology." Here is the picture, fresh and beaming as ever:

* * * * *

"If I should farther say, that this person has been well known in almost every metropolis in Europe; that few private men, with so little reproach, run through more various turns of fortune; that, on the wrongside of three-score,[A] he has yet the open spirit of a hale young fellow of five and twenty; that though he still chuses to speak what he thinks to his best friends with an undisguised freedom, he is, notwithstanding, acceptable to many persons of the first rank and condition; that any one of them (provided he likes them) may now send him, for their service, to Constantinople at half a day's warning; that Time has not yet been able to make a visible change in any part of him but the



colour of his hair, from a fierce coal-black to that of a milder milk-white: When I have taken this liberty with him, methinks it cannot be taking a much greater if I at once should tell you that this person was Mr. Owen Swiney.”



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[Footnote A: Swiney, or MacSwiney, died in 1754, after making Peg Woffington his legatee]

* * * * *

Swiney was an ardent Irishman who had, for some mysterious reason, formed a friendship with Rich, and his advice and energy often stood the manager of Drury Lane in good stead. When, in the summer of 1706, Vanbrugh proposed that Swiney should lease the Haymarket, Sir John being anxious to relinquish management, just as Congreve had done some time before, cunning Christopher gave his consent, curiously enough, to what was nothing more or less than the setting up of a rival company of actors. In the first place, he probably looked upon his players as an encumbrance, since he was in the vein for operatic entertainments just then, and, furthermore, he pictured himself as a future monopolist controlling the destinies of two houses. For he never dreamed, did this haggling, pettifogging lawyer, that Swiney would swerve from the old time allegiance to him, and he felt so secure on this point that he privately encouraged the desertion of his own forces. He made one exception, however, by stipulating that Cibber should remain at Drury Lane. Colley was too experienced, too versatile a man to be lost with impunity; he could do everything in a theatre, from acting to writing good plays and bad poetry, and while the wily Rich chiefly depended upon his singers and dancers, he said "it would be necessary to keep some one tolerable actor with him, that might enable him to set those machines a going."

It so happened that Cibber was one of the men that Swiney needed most, and, while the new manager of the Haymarket apparently acquiesced in the exception insisted on by Rich, it was not long before he showed his hand. It was a better hand than that of his whilom associate, who had been foolish enough to think that he held the trump card in the game. The card in question was a little matter of two hundred pounds owing from Swiney to Rich, and the latter fondly believed that this loan would bind the debtor to him as with hooks of steel. But we do not love men the more because they chance to be our creditors; sometimes, indeed, we love them the less for it, and so these two hundred pounds did not prevent the Celt from breaking over the traces of the Englishman. Let Cibber continue the story:

* * * * *

"The first word I heard of this transaction was by a letter from Swiney, inviting me to make one in the Hay-Market Company. whom he hop'd I could not but now think the stronger party. But I confess I was not a little alarm'd at this revolution. For I considered that I knew of no visible fund to support these actors but their own industry; that all his recruits from Drury Lane would want new cloathing; and that the warmest industry would be always labouring up hill under so necessary an expence, so bad a situation, and so inconvenient a theatre," &c.



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In fine, Master Colley resolved that it would be the course of wisdom to stay at Drury Lane, where he seems to have enjoyed to an unusual degree the confidence of the very manager whom afterwards he did not hesitate to abuse. So when Cibber came up to London from Gloucestershire, where he had been spending his vacation, he returned to the fold of his old master.

* * * * *

“But I found our company so thinn’d that it was almost impracticable to bring any one tolerable play upon the stage. When I ask’d him where were his actors, and in what manner he intended to proceed? he reply’d, *Don’t you trouble yourself, come along, and I’ll shew you.*”

“He then led me about all the by-places in the house, and shew’d me fifty little backdoors, dark closets, and narrow passages in alterations and contrivances of which kind he had busied his head most part of the vacation; for he was scarce ever without some notable joyner or a bricklayer extraordinary, in pay, for twenty years. And there are so many odd obscure places about a theatre, that his genius in nook-building was never out of employment, nor could the most vain-headed author be more deaf to an interruption in reciting his works, than our wise master was while entertaining me with the improvements he had made in his invisible architecture; all which, without thinking any one part of it necessary, tho’ I seem’d to approve, I could not help now and then breaking in upon his delight with the impertinent question of—*But, Master, where are your actors?*”

* * * * *

This exhibition of a spirit so commonplace and inartistic proved too much for Cibber. Perhaps he might have pardoned it had there been no salary owing him, for your greatest apostle of the drama will sometimes do a good deal of winking at glaring inconsistencies when a money *quid pro quo* looms up in the distance. Here was a case, however, where the *quid pro quo* loomed not at all, and the author of the “Careless Husband” became correspondingly disgusted. I told him (Rich) I came to serve him at a time when many of his best actors had deserted him; that he might now have the refusal of me; but I could not afford to carry the compliment so far as to lessen my income by it; that I therefore expected either my casual pay to be advanced, or the payment of my former salary made certain for as many days as we had acted the year before. No, he was not willing to alter his former method; but I might chuse whatever parts I had a mind to act of theirs who had left him.

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“When I found him, as I thought, so insensible, or impregnable, I look’d gravely in his face, and told him—He knew upon what terms I was willing to serve him, and took my leave.”

* * * * *

Shortly after the interview Cibber joined the Haymarket company, and one result of his defection was an open quarrel between Rich and Swiney.

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This season of 1706-7 was a memorable one for Oldfield. She then played for the first time with the chaste Anne Bracegirdle,[A] whom she quickly cast into the shade. So apparent, indeed, was the shadow that the elder of the two retired from the stage in the course of a few months, in the very prime of her beauty. It was a pathetic incident, and yet the cloud had its silver lining. How often are we called upon to pity players who linger before the footlights long after they should have made their exits; instead of departing at the right moment, leaving behind them charming memories, they die by inches in full view of the audience.

[Footnote A: "Mrs. Bracegirdle was perhaps a woman of a cold constitution," says Genest.]

[Illustration: MRS. ANNE BRACEGIRDLE]

Perhaps poverty keeps them at work, but, be that as it may, the public gives a sigh of relief when the few remaining sparks of genius are at last snuffed out. When one of them is taken from us, and we read of the death in the morning paper, we murmur, "Poor old Jones! Well, it's certainly time he shuffled off." Then we drink our coffee placidly, turn to some other news, and never think of him again. Many a once-beloved actor gets this cruel epitaph.

There was nothing superannuated about Bracegirdle when she made her exit, for the actress still displayed that comeliness which had, until recently, held the attention of London. "She was of a lovely height," says Tony Aston, "with dark brown hair and eyebrows, black, sparkling eyes, and a fresh, blushy complexion; and, whenever she exerted herself, had an involuntary flushing in her breast, neck, and face, having continually a cheerful aspect, and a fine set of even white teeth; never making an exit, but that she left the audience in an imitation of her pleasant countenance." When Aston wrote Mrs. Bracegirdle was still living. "She has been off the stage these 26 years or more, but was alive July 20, 1747, for I saw her in the Strand, London, then—with the remains of charming Bracegirdle." Poor old Diana! Time brought her at least one revenge; she had outlived Nance Oldfield these many years.[A]

[Footnote A: Bracegirdle died in September 1748.]

"Bracey," as Cibber loved to call her, had just left the boards when George Farquhar's lively comedy, "The Beaux' Stratagem," was produced at the Haymarket. Perhaps she saw the performance from the audience side of the house, and was generous enough to admire the sparkle of Oldfield as Mrs. Sullen; and perhaps, as she was a very charitable body, Mistress Bracegirdle went to pay a last visit to the brilliant author of the play. For poor, worn-out Farquhar was dying, nor could the laughter with which the theatre re-echoed bring much merriment into that poverty-stricken home which he was so soon to leave for a world where there would be neither guineas nor debts.



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The ill man was game to the last, and his sense of humour never deserted him. When Oldfield was rehearsing Mrs. Sullen (a woman who separates from one husband only to have another, Archer, in prospect) she told Wilks that “she thought the author had dealt too freely with Mrs. Sullen, in giving her to Archer, without such a proper divorce as would be a security to her honor.” Wilks, who was to play Archer, spoke of this criticism to Farquhar in the course of a visit to the dying playwright. “Tell her,” gaily replied the latter, “that for her peace of mind’s sake, I’ll get a real divorce, marry her myself, and give her my bond she shall be a real widow in less than a fortnight.” Poor fellow! He was faithful to Mistress Farquhar unto the end, but who shall say that he had forgotten the old days which began so fairly at the Mitre Tavern?

[Illustration: MRS. BRACEGIRDLE

As the Sultanness]

Soon there will be another theatrical revolution by which the rival companies of the Haymarket and Drury Lane will be united under one management at the latter house, while Owen Swiney will be left free to devote his attention to Italian opera. This union comes about through the efforts of Colonel Brett[A], a very *debonnaire* gentleman from Gloucestershire, whom Cibber, his warmest admirer, trots out for our inspection in the perennial “Apology.” It appears that Sir Thomas Skipwith, who has a share in the Drury Lane Patent, becomes so disgusted with the antics of Rich and his refusal to make any accounting of the profits of the house, that he presents Brett with his interest.[B] To the Colonel the gift is a congenial one; he has passed many a pleasant hour behind the scenes at Drury Lane, and doubtless thinks that in doing so he writes himself down a very knowing dog.

[Footnote A: Colonel Brett was the father of Anne Brett, who became a very dear friend of George I.]

[Footnote B: Sir Thomas afterwards asserted that he only gave his share to Brett strictly “in trust.”]

Probably he is, for Cibber says that though he spent some time at the Temple, “he so little followed the Law there that his neglect of it made the Law (like some of his fair and frail admirers) very often follow him.” As he had an uncommon share of social wit and a handsome person, with a sanguine bloom in his complexion, no wonder they persuaded him that he might have a better chance of fortune by throwing such accomplishments into the gayer world than by shutting them up in a study.

* * * * *

“The first view that fires the head of a young gentleman of this modish ambition just broke lose from business is to cut a figure (as they call it)in a side box at the play, from



whence their next step is to the Green Room behind the scenes, sometimes their *non ultra*. Hither at last, then, in this hopeful quest of his fortune, came this gentleman-errant, not doubting but the fickle dame, while he was thus qualified to receive her, might be tempted to fall into his lap. And though possibly the charms of our theatrical nymphs might have their share in drawing him thither, yet in my observation the most visible cause of his first coming was a more sincere passion he had conceived, for a fair full-bottom'd perriwig which I then wore in my first play of the 'Fool in Fashion' in the year 1695."



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This love affair would suggest what Mr. Gilbert calls:

“A Passion a la Plato
For a bashful young potato.”

were we not to remember that in Anne’s time handsome full-bottomed periwigs were regarded with an enthusiasm far too fervid to be called Platonic. Actors made it a point to have this indispensable headgear as elaborate as possible, and it is even related that Barton Booth and Wilks actually paid forty guineas each “on the exorbitant thatching of their heads.”

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But let loquacious Colley have his say: “For it is to be noted that the *Beaux* of those days were of a quite different cast from the modern stamp, and had more of the stateliness of the peacock in their mein than (which now seems to be their highest emulation) the pert air of a lap-wing. Now, whatever contempt philosophers may have for a fine perrwig, my friend, who was not to despise the world, but to live in it, knew very well that so material an article of dress upon the head of a man of sense if it became him, could never fail of drawing to him a more partial regard and benevolence than could possibly be hoped for in an ill-made one.”

* * * * *

Brett expresses such an admiration for this particular full-bottomed periwig that Cibber is highly flattered, and the two are soon laughing themselves into the best of terms. Nay, they spend the night roistering over a bottle or two of wine, and dear, vain Colley, like many who come after him, falls into the belief that he is a bold, fast man. With an air of conscious rakishness that is charmingly ridiculous, he writes: “If it were possible the relation of the happy indiscretions which passed between us that night could give the tenth part of the pleasure I then received from them, I could still repeat them with delight.”

Instead of pausing, however, to relate those happy indiscretions, Cibber prattles on in his colloquial way, telling us that through the goodly offices of Sir Thomas Skipwith, Brett was introduced to the divorced wife of the Earl of Macclesfield, “a lady who had enough in her power to disencumber him of the world and make him every way easy for life.”[A]

[Footnote A: One story of the day made this woman the mother of Richard Savage.]

“While he was in pursuit of this affair [colley adds the Apologist] which no time was to be lost in (for the Lady was to be in town for but three weeks) I one day found him idling



behind the scenes before the play was begun. Upon sight of him I took the usual freedom he allow'd me, to rate him roundly for the madness of not improving every moment in his power in what was of such consequence to him. [Oh, fie, thou worldly old Colley.] Why are you not (said I) where you know you only should be? If your design should once get wind in the town, the ill-will of your enemies or the sincerity of the Lady's friends may soon blow up your hopes, which in your circumstances of life cannot be long supported by the bare appearance of a gentleman."



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And now Cibber announces that he expects to shock us, although the story he goes on to disclose is not in any sense improper. Could it be that according to his eighteenth century reverence for precedence the crime lay in the rough and tumble way in which, as he ventures to show, an humble player treated the future husband of a dethroned Countess. Here, at least, is the awful tale:

* * * * *

“After twenty excuses to clear himself of the neglect I had so warmly charged him with, he concluded them with telling me he had been out all the morning upon business and that his linnen was too much soil’d to be seen in company. Oh, ho! said I, is that all? Come along with me, we will soon get over that dainty difficulty. Upon which I haul’d him by the sleeve into my shifting-room, he either staring, laughing, or hanging back all the way. There, when I had lock’d him in, I began to strip off my upper cloaths, and bade him do the same; still he either did not or would not seem to understand me, and continuing his laugh, cry’d, What! is the puppy mad? No, No, only positive, said I; for look you, in short, the play is ready to begin, and the parts that you and I are to act to-day are not of equal consequence; mine of young Reveller (in ‘Greenwich Park’[A]) is but a rake; but whatever you may be, you are not to appear so; therefore take my shirt and give me yours; for depend upon’t, stay here you shall not, and so go about your business.

[Footnote A: A play written by Mountford.]

“To conclude, we fairly chang’d linnen, nor could his mother’s have wrap’d him up more fortunately; for in about ten days he marry’d the Lady.”

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The gallant Colonel not only married the ex-Countess but became so flirtatious with at least one other woman that he suggested to Cibber the most *risque* scene in the “Careless Husband.” This, then, was the model gentleman to whom Skipwith made over a share in the Drury Lane patent, and through whose efforts the rival companies were united in 1708. Swiney, according to the orders of the Lord Chamberlain, was to conduct the Haymarket for operatic performances, and the players were all to act at the older house.

For a time life at the theatre went as merrily as a marriage bell. The public, of both high and low degree, crowded Drury Lane, and every one was happy excepting sour-faced Rich, who saw with disgust that the plausible, insinuating Brett was fast overshadowing him in the management. How wily Christopher schemed and schemed, and how the gay Colonel was finally compelled to relinquish his portion of the patent altogether, are

details that need not be set forth here. It will suffice to say, that as a result of all this intriguing, affairs at Drury Lane assumed an almost chaotic character. Nor was it long before Owen Swiney entered into treaty with Wilks, Dogget, Mrs. Oldfield and Cibber, who were to come over to the Haymarket as the heads of a new company.



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In this episode the sunny spirit of Nance was brought prettily into the foreground. "When Mrs. Oldfield was nominated as a joint sharer in our new agreement to be made with Swiney [again is the quotation from Cibber], Dogget, who had no objection to her merit, insisted that our affairs could never be upon a secure foundation if there was more than one sex admitted to the management of them." Beastly, unchivalrous, narrow-minded Dogget. Were you alive to-day, how the New Woman would champ with rage. "He therefore hop'd that if we offer'd Mrs. Oldfield a *Carte Blanche* instead of a share, she would not think herself slighted." And Oldfield, with the affability which sat so well upon her, did not think herself in the least slighted. She "receiv'd it rather as a favour than a disobligation. Her demands therefore were two hundred pounds a year certain, and a benefit clear of all charges, which were readily sign'd to."

In the meantime Drury Lane is closed by order of the Lord Chamberlain,[A] on the ground that in seeking to take from the actors one-third of their benefit receipts the management have proceeded illegally. Soon the new forces of Swiney take possession of the Haymarket, and for a short time London has but one playhouse. Mayhap Mr. Rich is chagrined, or perhaps he is not ill-pleased, and in any case he extracts great comfort from a manifesto published in his behalf by the treasurer of Drury Lane, sweet-named Zachary Baggs. In this formidable document, which seeks to prove that the seceders are a lot of ingrates, Oldfield is held up to the public as a sad example of depravity. Her account with Master Rich is thus itemised:

&nb

sp;

L s. d.

To Mrs. Oldfield, at 4 l. a week salary, which for 14 weeks and one day; she leaving off acting presently after her benefit (viz.) on the 17th of March last, 1708, though the benefit was intended for her whole nine months acting, and she refused to assist others in their benefits; her salary for these 14 weeks and one day came to, and she was paid 56 13 4

In January she required, and was paid ten guineas, to wear on the stage in some plays, during the whole season, a mantua petticoat that was given her for the stage and though she left off three months before she should, yet she hath not returned any part of the ten guineas 10 15 0

And she had for wearing in some plays a suit of boys cloaths on the stage; paid 2 10 9

By a benefit play; paid 62 7 8

[Footnote A: June 1709.]



But what cares laughing Nance for Master Baggs' spiteful paragraph about the mantua petticoat. Mantua petticoat, forsooth! she has more artistic things to think about than that, and so pray do not plague her, gentle reader, with so commonplace an incident. Let her act on serenely until that glorious night in April 1713, when, back at Drury Lane, under the triumvirate of Cibber, Wilks and Dogget, she helps to make sedate Addison's equally sedate "Cato" a triumphant success.



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CHAPTER V

A DEAD HERO

“The soul, secur’d in her existence, smiles
At the drawn dagger, and defies its point.
The stars shall fade away, the sun himself
Grow dim with age, and nature sink in years;
But thou shalt flourish in immortal youth,
Unhurt amidst the war of elements,
The wrecks of matter, and the crush of worlds.”

So doth noble Cato philosophise when, in Addison’s stately tragedy, he gazes on his sword and plans to admit the Grim Visitor whom the most of us wish to keep without our threshold until the last fatal moment. How those lines used to thrill the classic hearts of our ancestors; how Barton Booth, who

“shook the stage, and made the people stare,”

could put into this mild plea for suicide a fervour that caused Drury Lane to ring with applause. What mattered it if the actor, as Pope related, wore a long wig and flowered gown? Cato was none the less himself for that, nor did Booth’s elegance of delivery seem unwelcome because his clothes pictured the dandified spirit of the eighteenth century.

“Cato!” The play is forgotten now, but there was magic in its name in the palmy days of its author, gentle, kindly Joseph Addison. So potent was that magic, such vivid impression did the fate of the grand old Roman make on more than one mind, when thus retold in lofty verse, that the tragedy was cited as a justification of self-destruction.

“What Cato did, and Addison approved
Cannot be wrong.”

These lines, written on a scrap of paper by Eustace Budgell, were found shortly after the death of that odd genius. From being an honoured contributor to the *Spectator*, Budgell descended to the depths of infamy, poverty, and despair, and so one day he threw himself out of a boat under London Bridge, and the waters of the Thames closed over him for ever. He owed his early prosperity to Addison, his cousin, and by way of gratitude he sought to throw upon his benefactor’s memory the odium of this moist and melancholy exit from the world.

Their lies no odium, nevertheless, where Addison is concerned. His own life may have been clouded towards the last by the mists of disappointment, but to us admiring moderns he is all sunshine. Not the fiery sunshine of summer, but the genial, dignified



light of an autumn afternoon when nature seems in most reflective mood. For there was nothing impetuous or ardent in the composition of this good-humoured philosopher; and while he railed so well at the petty sins and vanities of the England in which he dwelt, the satire had naught of venom, malice, or uncharitableness.

Nowadays Addison and the *Spectator* go rolling down to fame together, an indivisible reminder—the very essence indeed—of the virtues, peccadilloes, greatness and meanness of early eighteenth century life. We may forget that Joe was quite a politician in his prime, we are even loth to recall that there was ever such a play as “Cato,” but so long as the English language has power to charm, the dear old volumes of the *Spectator* will stand out as a delightful landmark of that literature which forms the heritage of American and Briton alike.

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How fondly do we turn the pages of the well-read essays, with their pictures of good Sir Roger de Coverley, Will Honeycomb, and the rest of that happy crew. And over what portrait do we linger more lovingly than that of the *Spectator* himself, wherein there is many a stroke of the pen that brings Addison in view. When he tells us, for instance: “I threw away my rattle before I was two months old, and would not make use of my coral until they had taken away the bells from it,” the writer is indulging in a pretty bit of humour at the expense of his own sedate youth.

* * * * *

“I have passed my latter years,” the philosopher goes on to say, “in this city (London), where I am frequently seen in most public places, though there are not above half a dozen of my select friends that know me.... There is no place of general resort wherein I do not often make my appearance: sometimes I am seen thrusting my head into a round of politicians at Will’s,[A] and listening with great attention to the narratives that are made in those little circular audiences; sometimes I smoke a pipe at Child’s,[B] and while I seem attentive to nothing but the postman, overhear the conversation of every table in the room. I appear on Sunday nights at St. James’ coffee house, and sometimes join the little committee of politics in the inner room, as one who comes there to hear and improve. My face is likewise very well known at the Grecian, the Cocoa Tree, and in the theatres both of Drury Lane and the Haymarket. I have been taken for a merchant upon the Exchange for above these ten years, and sometimes pass for a Jew in the assembly of stockbrokers at Jonathan’s. In short, wherever I see a cluster of people, I always mix with them, though I never open my lips but in my own club.”

[Footnote A: Will’s and Child’s were popular coffee-houses, as were also the Grecian, St. James’, and the Cocoa Tree.]

[Footnote B: See footnote on page 97.]

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It is easy to fancy Addison, shy but ever observant, mingling with the people who thronged the coffee-houses and there settled the affairs of the nation, discussed their neighbours, and sipped their coffee or stronger drink, as the case might be. He must have laughed in his sleeve many a time as he heard the know-it-alls predicting that the British nation was on the brink of perdition or announcing, in the most confidential of manners, the secret policies of his Christian Majesty, Louis XIV. of France. Probably Joe agreed with Steele, who, in speaking of a certain coffee-house, observed that in it men differed rather in the time of day wherein they made a figure, than in any real greatness above one another.

[Illustration: JOSEPH ADDISON By SIR GODFREY KNELLER]



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"I, who am at the coffee-house at six in the morning," Dick writes on,[A] "know that my friend Beaver the haberdasher has a levee of more undissembled friends and admirers than most of the courtiers or generals of Great Britain. Every man about him has, perhaps, a newspaper in his hand; but none can pretend to guess what step will be taken in any one court of Europe, till Mr. Beaver has thrown down his pipe, and declares what measures the allies must enter into upon this new posture of affairs. Our coffee-house is near one of the inns of court, and Beaver has the audience and admiration of his neighbours from six till within a quarter of eight, at which time he is interrupted by the students of the house; some of whom are ready dressed for Westminster at eight in a morning, with faces as busy as if they were retained in every cause there; and others come in their night gowns to saunter away their time, as if they never designed to go thither.

[Footnote A: *Spectator*, No. 49.]

"I do not know that I meet in any of my walks, objects which move both my spleen and laughter so effectually as those young fellows at the Grecian, Squire's, Searle's, and all other coffee-houses adjacent to the law, who rise early for no other purpose but to publish their laziness. One would think these young virtuosos take a gay cap and slippers, with a scarf and party-coloured gown, to be ensigns of dignity; for the vain things approach each other with an air which shews they regard one another for their vestments. I have observed that the superiority among these proceeds from an opinion of gallantry and fashion. The gentleman in the strawberry sash, who presides so much over the rest, has, it seems, subscribed to every opera this last winter, and is supposed to receive favours from one of the actresses."[A]

[Footnote A: Come, says my Friend, let us step into this Coffee House here; as you are a Stranger in the Town, it will afford you some Diversion. Accordingly in we went, where a parcel of Muddling Muckworms were as busy as so many Rats in an old Cheese Loft; some Going, some Coming, some Scribbling, some Talking, some Drinking, some Smoaking, others Jangling: and the whole Room stinking of Tobacco, like a Dutch Scoot or a Boatswain's Cabbin. The Walls being hung with Gilt Frames, as a Farriers shop with Horse shoes; which contain'd abundance of Rarities viz. Nectar and Ambrosia, May Dew, Golden Elixirs, Popular Pills, Liquid Snuff, Beautifying Waters, Dentifrisis Drops, Lozenges, all as infallible as the Pope,

Where every one above the rest
Deservedly has gain'd the Name of Best

(as the famous Saffold has it).—WARD.]



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As the day lengthens the scene changes. The gentleman with the strawberry sash and uncertain morals and his servile subjects disappear, giving place “to men who have business or good sense in their faces, and come to the coffee-house either to transact affairs or enjoy conversation. The persons to whose behaviour and discourse I have most regard, are such as are between these two sorts of men; such as have not spirits too active to be happy and well pleased in a private condition, not complexions too warm to make them neglect the duties and relations of life. Of this sort of men consist the worthier part of mankind; of these are all good fathers, generous brothers, sincere friends, and faithful subjects. Their entertainments are derived rather from reason than imagination; which is the cause that there is no impatience or instability in their speech or action. You see in their countenances they are at home, and in quiet possession of the present instant as it passes, without desiring to quicken it by gratifying any passion or prosecuting any new design. These are the men formed for society, and those little communities which we express by the word neighbourhood.”

Thus moved the panorama of the coffee-house. Perhaps nothing contributed more importantly to the gossip of the latter than did the mention of quiet Addison himself after the night in April, 1713, which witnessed the triumph of “Cato.” The essayist had always possessed, like many other literary men, a secret longing to be the author of a prosperous tragedy, and in his earlier days made bold to submit a play to the inspection of Dryden. The poet read it with polite interest, and, on returning the manuscript to the author, expressed therefor his profound esteem, with many apologetic *et ceteras*, and only regretted that, in his humble opinion, the piece, if placed upon the stage, “would not meet with its deserved success.” In other words, Dryden saw that Addison was sadly wanting in dramatic instinct, but was too forbearing to say this in plain, set terms. As for the young man, he must have felt much after the fashion of the aspiring writer who receives an article back from an unappreciative magazine with a printed slip warning him that “the rejection of manuscript does not imply lack of merit,” &c. &c., the whole thing being intended as a moral cushion to break the suddenly descending spirits of the sender.

Years later the great man was favoured with another cushion of this sort by no less a person than his friend Alexander Pope, whose august criticism he asked in behalf of “Cato.” The major part of the play—all of it, in fact, excepting the last act—had been written when Addison first began to fall under the passionate influence of French tragedy, with its tiresome regularity of form and attempted imitation of the classic drama. [A] And a powerful influence it was in the days of good Queen Anne, so powerful, verily, that it almost emasculated the art of play-writing, and for a time well nigh bereft the stage of originality of thought or freedom of expression. Form, form, that was the cry still ringing in the ears of the author when he put the finishing touches to a production which was to be famous for the nonce, and then go down in the dark waters of oblivion with the wreck of many like it.



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[Footnote A: Just as the school of Racine and Boileau set its face against the extravagances of the romantic coteries, so Addison and his English followers, adopting the principles of the French classicists, applied them to the reformation of the English theatre. Hence arose a great revival of respect for the political doctrines of Aristotle, regard for the unities of time and place, attention to the proprieties of sentiment and diction—in a word, for all those characteristics of style afterwards summed up in the phrase “correctness.”—W.J. COURTHOPE’S “Addison.”]

“When Mr. Addison,” related Pope, “had finished his ‘Cato,’ he brought it to me, desired to have my sincere opinion of it, and left it with me for three or four days. I gave him my opinion of it sincerely, which was, ‘that I thought he had better not act it, and that he would get reputation enough by only printing it.’ This I said as thinking the lines well written, but the piece was not theatrical enough. Some time after Mr. Addison said ‘that his own opinion was the same with mine, but that some particular friends of his, whom he could not disoblige, insisted on its being acted,’”

These particular friends who were not to be disobligeed seem to have been shining lights of the Whig party. It was feared that the Tories were conspiring to reinstate the male line of Stuart the moment Queen Anne should take herself to another world, and the friends of the Hanoverian succession grew sorely anxious. They were filled with delight, therefore, on hearing that Addison had, peacefully slumbering in his desk, a drama which, as Maynwaring explained, was written not for the love scenes, “but to support the old Roman and English public spirit.”[A] Here was a chance to inspire the people with a passion for liberty; the story of Cato, served up in all the elegance of French style, should point a moral against the claims of the Pretender, and pure politics might thus be taught from the rostrum of a theatre!

[Footnote A: Those who *affected* to think liberty in danger, and had *affected* likewise to think that a stage play might preserve it.—DR. JOHNSON.]

So it came about that one fine day the company at Drury Lane began the rehearsal of “Cato,” under circumstances, however, which hardly pointed to a successful production. There appears to have been some difficulty in the assignment of parts, and it is easy to imagine that at first the players exercised their prerogative of growling—a prerogative not calculated to dispel the doubts fast assailing Addison as to the outcome of the performance. Nance Oldfield made no fuss at playing Marcia, Cato’s daughter, for she was ever disposed to be tractable; but when it came to casting the noble Roman himself the trouble began. The story runs that the part was first offered to Cibber, and that he sensibly refused it. Colley might make a delightful fop, but the playing of dandies could hardly lead one up very gracefully to the handling of Cato.



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Next came the suggestion that John Mills[A] should try the character, but fortunately he displayed no more enthusiasm for it than did Cibber. Cato was too old a person for him to act, he said, and so declined to have anything to do with the elderly hero. Afterwards he was cast for the less important role of Sempronius, which proved in every way a better disposition of affairs, for Mills was a plodder rather than a genius. He belonged to the order of actors to whom, in the present day, we apply the charitable word of painstaking, an adjective which shows very plainly the nature of the man, while it likewise allows the critic to escape the charge of unkindness. We all know the painstaking player, and always cheerfully acknowledge his virtues, but who shall blame us if, after giving him the benefit of his earnestness, we yawn and creep out into the lobby while he holds the stage?

[Footnote A: Mills was considered one of the most useful actors that ever served in a theatre, but, though invested by the patronage of Wilks with many parts of the highest order, he had no pretensions to quit the secondary line in which he ought to have been placed.—BELLCHAMBERS.]

That Mills sometimes inspired this feeling of boredom may be imagined from the way in which his performance of Macbeth was once received. To those who remembered how magnificently Betterton had played the part, the chill formalism of the new aspirant must have seemed presumptuous, and one night the contrast proved too much for a country gentleman possessed of more honesty than politeness. After watching the progress of the tragedy with growing indignation his feelings became unbearable at a certain point in the fourth act, where George Powell came on as Lennox. "For God's sake, George," shouted the squire, "give us a speech and let me go home!"[A]

[Footnote A: "I recollect," says Bellchambers, "an incident of the same sort occurring at Bristol, where a very indifferent actor declaimed so long and to such little purpose that an honest farmer, who sat in the pit, started up with evident signs of disgust, and waving his hand, to motion the speaker off, cried out, 'Tak 'un away, tak 'un away, and let's have another.'"]

Thus every one must have given a sigh of relief when industrious John objected to the age of Cato; every one, at least, excepting Wilks, who had taken this actor under his theatrical wing and sought to elevate him above one far greater than either of them—Barton Booth. The fact was that Wilks hid within his breast the troublesome, green-eyed monster of jealousy; he feared the rising genius of Booth, and, now that he was part manager of Drury Lane, probably took pains to keep the rival as much as possible in the background. Unfortunately for this plan of annihilation the screen provided in the commonplace person of Mills proved entirely too flimsy to hide the coming man. Barton Booth was in many ways an ideal actor, in that he was blessed with the poetic imagination and scholarship to understand his roles and the tragic power to play them. He had, furthermore, a voice of marvellous resonance, an aristocratic bearing and a

handsome face and figure which were sure to attract attention, whether he appeared upon the stage or amid the more genial confines of the Bedford coffee-house.



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It was to Booth, therefore, that Cato was finally assigned, the other masculine parts being handed over to Cibber, Mills, Wilks, Powell, Ryan, Bowman, and Keen. The latter was a popular actor of majestic mould who used to play the King in "Hamlet" (a role too often left to the mercies of third-rate mouthers) in a fashion which would have justified the loyal and historic gentleman who preferred that character to all others in the play. As already mentioned, Marcia was to be acted by Oldfield, and to Mistress Porter, who usually revelled in the delineation of high and mighty passions, was given gentle, tearful Lucia, daughter to Lucius (Keen).

The rehearsals now went on apace, but evidently without much show of enthusiasm. Addison assisted, probably dispirited and nervous but outwardly unruffled, for he always presented a well-starched front to the watching-world. Honest Dick Steele looked on, and in that frank, ingenuous way he told his friends, with perhaps a suspicious flush on his winsome face and a swimming gleam in his eyes, that he was preparing to pack the theatre on the opening night in the interests of worried Joe. Poor, good-hearted Dick! Then there was Parson Swift, who sat behind the scenes with mild interest on his face and a sneer in that ugly, gnarled heart of his. "We stood on the stage," he writes to Stella, "and it was foolish enough to see the actors prompting every moment, and the poet directing them, and the drab that acts Cato's daughter (Mrs. Oldfield) out in the midst of a passionate part, and then calling out 'What's next?'"

Lastly came the great Mr. Pope, with that poor, deformed body and brilliant mind. He was not content merely to be a "looker on in Vienna," or in Utica; he pottered around unceasingly, hobnobbed with Oldfield (who now began to take the liveliest interest in the play), and suggested several alterations in the text. Once Nance ventured to criticise a speech of Portius; the amiable Addison, unlike the fashion of some other amiable authors, heard her objections with approval, and soon Mr. Pope was again called into consultation. There was more hobnobbing, a change of diction, and the rehearsals continued. Then, to cap the climax of poetic condescension, little Alexander honoured "Cato" with a flowing prologue wherein he set forth, archaically enough, that

"To wake the soul by tender strokes of art,
To raise the genius, and to mend the heart,
To make mankind in conscious virtue bold,
Live o'er each scene, and be what they behold:
For this the tragic Muse first trod the stage,
Commanding tears to stream through every age;
Tyrants no more their savage nature kept,
And foes to virtue wonder'd how they wept."

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At last came the eventful evening of April 13, when “Cato” saw the light. The theatre was packed, just as Steele promised that it should be, yet the audience would have been large had Dick never existed. There were no press agents to “boom” matters, but as it became known that the Whigs stood sponsors for the tragedy there was a corresponding desire to be in either at its triumph or its death. The result has passed into history. The characters were, for the most part, finely acted, and the play was admired for its lofty sentiments and elegance of expression, while the Tories, *mirabile dictu*, vied with their enemies in enthusiastic tokens of approval. The Whigs went to the theatre expecting to appropriate all of Mr. Addison’s illusions to the sacred cause of liberty, and what must have been their horror on finding that the Tories, refusing to be discomfited by any of those illusions, applauded as violently as did the friends of Hanover?

Pope has left us a description of this first night, in a letter to Sir William Trumbull. “Cato,” he writes, “was not so much the wonder of Rome in his days, as he is of Britain in ours; and though all the foolish industry possible has been used to make it thought a party play, yet what the author once said of another may the most properly in the world be applied to him on this occasion:

“Envy itself is dumb, in wonder lost,
And factions strive who shall applaud him most.”[A]

[Footnote A: From Addison’s poem of “The Campaign,” wherein the author sings of the greatness of Marlborough.]

“The numerous and violent claps of the Whig party on the one side of the theatre, were echoed by the Tories on the other; while the author sweated behind the scenes with concern to find their applause proceeding more from the hand than the head. This was the case too of the prologue writer, who was clapped into a staunch Whig at almost every two lines. I believe you have heard that after all the applause of the opposite faction, my lord Bolingbroke sent for Booth, who played Cato, into the box between one of the acts, and presented him with fifty guineas, in acknowledgement (as he expressed it) for defending the cause of liberty so well against a Perpetual Dictator.[A] The Whigs are unwilling to be distanced this way, and therefore design a present to the same Cato very speedily; in the meantime they are getting ready as good a sentence as the former on their side: so betwixt them it is probable that Cato (as Dr. Garth expressed it) may have something to live upon after he dies.”

[Footnote A: It is suggested by Macaulay that Lord Bolingbroke hinted at “the attempt which Marlborough had made to convert the Captain-Generalship into a patent office, to be held by himself for life.” The anecdote of Pope gives us an amusing example of the stealing of Whig thunder by the clever Tories.]



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So important a role did politics play in this first performance of "Cato" that to many in the house the merits of the actors must have passed unrecognised. And yet those merits were striking. Who could have made a lovelier Marcia than did Nance; and how thoroughly she must have justified the passion of that most virtuous of princes, the sententious Juba. The character was not worthy of her genius, but that did not prevent this true artist from giving to it all manner of dignity and beauty. Who could help pitying her lover when Marcia first repelled his amorous advances:

"I should be griev'd, young Prince, to think my presence
Unbent your thoughts, and slacken'd 'em to arms,
While, warm with slaughter, our victorious foe
Threatens aloud, and calls you to the field."

And when Marcia, having sent away the youth, explained:

"His air, his voice, his looks, and honest soul
Speak all so movingly in his behalf,
I dare not trust myself to hear him talk,"

the apology came with such delicious grace and plaintiveness that the house forgot her coldness in sorrow for her woes.

And Barton Booth? His superb acting of Cato raised him to such an airy pinnacle of fame that he soon became one of the managers of Drury Lane. The other players were evidently all more or less effective, barring Cibber, whose Syphax (the Numidian warrior who seeks the downfall of Cato), must have made the judicious grieve. Indeed we can easily believe that he used so many grotesque motions and spoke his lines with such a cracked voice as to win only ridicule and "a loud laugh of contempt."

Lord Bolingbroke's gift of fifty guineas had a disturbing effect not only on the Whigs but on Manager Dogget as well. That worthy feared the success of "Cato" would cause Booth to claim a share in the direction of Drury Lane, as he did, of course, in a very short time. In the hopes of shutting off all pretensions to this honour by a paltry expedient Dogget thought that Cibber, Wilks and himself, as joint managers, could relieve themselves of every obligation by duplicating the generosity of the Tory statesman.

"He insinuated to us (for he was a staunch Whig)" relates Colley, "that this present of fifty guineas was a sort of Tory triumph which they had no pretence to; and that for his part he could not bear that so redoubted a champion for liberty as Cato should be bought off to the cause of a contrary party. He therefore, in the seeming zeal of his heart, proposed that the managers themselves should make the same present to Booth which had been made him from the boxes the day before. This, he said, would recommend the equality and liberal spirit of our management to the town, and might be



a means to secure Booth more firmly in our interest, it never having been known that the skill of the best actor had received so round a reward or gratuity in one day before.

“Wilks, who wanted nothing but abilities to be reduc’d to tell him that it was my opinion that Booth would never be made easy by anything we could do for him, ’till he had a share in the profits and management; and that, as he did not want friends to assist him, whatever his merit might be before, every one would think since his acting of Cato, he had now enough to back his pretensions to it.”



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In the end Cibber's objections were overruled, "and the same night Booth had the fifty guineas, which he receiv'd with a thankfulness that made Wilks and Dogget perfectly easy, insomuch that they seem'd for some time to triumph in their conduct, and often endeavour'd to laugh my jealousy out of countenance. But in the following winter the game happened to take a different turn; and then, if it had been a laughing matter," says Colley, "I had as strong an occasion to smile at their former security." [A]

[Footnote A: After Booth was admitted into the management Dogget retired in disgust from Drury Lane, and brought suit against his former associates. He was decreed the sum of L600 for his share in the patent, with allowances for interest. "I desir'd," wrote Cibber, "we might all enter into an immediate treaty with Booth, upon the terms of his admission. Dogget still sullenly reply'd, that he had no occasion to enter into any treaty. Wilks then, to soften him, propos'd that, if I liked it, Dogget might undertake it himself. I agreed. No! he would not be concern'd in it. I then offer'd the same trust to Wilks, if Dogget approv'd of it. Wilks said he was not good at making of bargains, but if I was willing, he would rather leave it to me. Dogget at this rose up and said, we might both do as we pleas'd, but that nothing but the law should make him part with his property—and so went out of the room."]

"So much for one result of 'Cato's' first performance. The play had a run of thirty-five nights and as cunning as Dogget, was so charm'd with the proposal that he long'd that moment to make Booth the present with his own hands; and though he knew he had no right to do it without my consent, had no patience to ask it; upon which I turned to Dogget with a cold smile [what a freezing, polar expression Cibber could put on when he desired] and told him, that if Booth could be purchas'd at so cheap a rate, it would be one of the best proofs of his economy we had ever been beholden to: I therefore desired we might have a little patience; that our doing it too hastily might be only making sure of an occasion to throw the fifty guineas away; for if we should be obliged to do better for him, we could never expect that Booth would think himself bound in honour to refund them."

From this little conversation we see that art is not always the one beacon light of the player or the manager. Cibber argued with his natural shrewdness, but Wilks would not be convinced, and began, "with his usual freedom of speech," to treat the suggestion "as a pitiful evasion of their intended generosity."



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“But Dogget, who was not so wide of my meaning, clapping his hand upon mine, said, with an air of security, O! don't trouble yourself! there must be two words to that bargain; let me alone to manage that matter. Wilks, upon this dark discourse, grew uneasy, as if there were some secret between us that he was to be left out of. Therefore, to avoid the shock of his intemperance, I was the town crowded to the theatre. Even the good Queen, who must have been more or less bored at the fuss bestowed upon it, actually suggested that Mr. Addison should dedicate the tragedy to her Royal self. To inscribe a work to a sovereign means little or nothing in these days of republicanism, real or assumed, but Anne's request came as a great compliment. It was a compliment, however, which had to be dispensed with, for Addison had already proposed to dedicate 'Cato' to the Duchess of Marlborough, and he harboured no wish to mortify the aggressive Sarah (now out of favour with the Queen) by acting upon the hint of her one-time friend and mistress. So the author diplomatically ignored both horns of the dilemma, or, in other words, determined to consecrate his tragedy neither to Queen nor Duchess.”

When June was well nigh ended the Drury Lane players transplanted “Cato” to the scholarly environment of Oxford, where, as friend Cibber tells us, “a great deal of that false, flashy wit and forc'd humour,” which had been the delight of London, was rated at “its bare intrinsick value.” The play was admirably suited to the temper of a university audience, and its success proved so great, its sentiment so uplifted, that Dr. Sandridge, Dean of Carlisle, wrote to Barton Booth expressing his wish that “all discourses from the pulpit were as instructive and edifying, as pathetic and affecting,” as those provided by Mr. Addison.

The “Apology” gives us an interesting account of the favour accorded to “Cato,” above all other modern plays, by the dwellers in thoughtful Oxford.

“The only distinguished merit allow'd to any modern writer was to the author of 'Cato,' which play being the flower of a plant raised in that learned garden (for there Mr. Addison had his education), what favour may we not suppose was due to him from an audience of brethren, who from that local relation to him might naturally have a warmer pleasure in their benevolence to his fame? But not to give more weight to this imaginary circumstance than it may bear, the fact was, that on our first day of acting it, our house was in a manner invested, and entrance demanded by twelve a clock at noon, and before one it was not wide enough for many who came too late for places. The same crowds continued for three days together (an uncommon curiosity in that place) and the death of Cato triumphed over the injuries of Caesar everywhere. To conclude, our reception at Oxford, whatever our merit might be, exceeded our expectation.”



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The ladies and gentlemen of Drury Lane posted away from Oxford in a blaze of glory. They had actually behaved themselves, these despised mummers, and their contribution towards the repairing of a church was almost sufficient to bring them within the pale of holiness. "At our taking leave," writes Colley, jubilantly, "we had the thanks of the vice-Chancellor for the decency and order observ'd by our whole society, an honour which had not always been paid upon the same occasions; for at the act in King William's time I remember some pranks of a different nature had been complain'd of. Our receipts had not only enabled us (as I have observ'd) to double the pay of every actor, but to afford out of them towards the repair of St. Mary's Church the contribution of fifty pounds. Besides which, each of the three managers had to his respective share, clear of all charges, one hundred and fifty more for his one and twenty days' labour, which being added to his thirteen hundred and fifty shared in the winter preceding, amounted in the whole to fifteen hundred, the greatest sum ever known to have been shared in one year to that time. And to the honour of our auditors here and elsewhere be it spoken, all this was rais'd without the aid of those barbarous entertainments with which, some few years after (upon the re-establishment of two contending companies) we were forc'd to disgrace the stage to support it"

The success of "Cato" proved as brilliant in a literary as in a dramatic sense. The play was translated into several languages, not forgetting the Latin, and even Voltaire was pleased, in after years, to come down from his critical throne and honour Mr. Addison's verses with his praise.[A] "The first English writer," he said, "who composed a regular tragedy and infused a spirit of elegance through every part of it was the illustrious Mr. Addison." Poor Shakespeare!

[Footnote A: One sees in Voltaire (who observed that "Hamlet" "appears the work of a drunken savage") the old-fashioned tendency to belittle Shakespeare. This tendency has one of its most amusing reflections in a criticism by Hume, who said of the great poet that "a reasonable propriety of thought he cannot for any time uphold."]

Smile as we may over that frigid elegance, it seemed none the less impressive in the days of auld lang syne, and even yet we hear echoes of the play in a round of familiar quotations.

"The woman who deliberates is lost;"

And

"'Tis not in mortals to command success,
But we'll do more, Sempronius, we'll deserve it;"

And

"Curse on his virtues, they've undone his country."



still fall lightly on our ear. But the tragedy is forgotten, and why seek to resurrect those once-beloved characters? Cato, Marcia, Juba, and the rest—figures of classic marble rather than of flesh and blood—have all gone to that bourne whence no stage travellers return. They lie buried 'mid all the pomp of mouldering books, and there let them peacefully decay.



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CHAPTER VI

IN TRAGIC PATHS

The average comedian will whisper, if you are fortunate enough to get him in confidential mood, that he was really designed by nature to tread the stately walks of tragedy; that had not cruel fate intervened he would now be enthralling the town with his Hamlet, Macbeth, or Othello, and that even yet he has not lost all hope of adorning the kingdom of Melpomene. But he is not to be believed, in at least ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, and while we listen politely to his story of blasted ambition our hearts are exceeding thankful that the chance he looked for never came.

Nance Oldfield brilliantly reversed this order of things. Although she shone in comedy with the brighter light, she could play serious roles with majesty and power, and feel, or pretend to feel, a trifle bored in so doing. "I hate to have a page dragging my train about," she used to cry, with a pout of the pretty mouth; "why don't they give Porter those parts? She can put on a better tragedy face than I can." Yet whatever might be the undoubted capabilities of Porter for assuming the tragic mask, audience and manager sometimes insisted that Nance should banish all the sunlight and becloud her features with the sorrows of a high-strung heroine.

One of these heroines was Andromache, the title personage of "The Distressed Mother," an adaptation by Ambrose Philips of Racine's "Andromaque." This play seems heavy enough if we bother to read it now, but it had a thousand charms for theatre-goers in the days when Mr. Philips frequented Button's coffee-house and there hung up a cane which he threatened to use upon the body of the great Mr. Pope.[A] Addison, whom tradition credits with writing the entertaining epilogue, took all manner of interest in the tragedy, and the *Spectator* treated it to an advance notice which we degenerate might term an unblushing "boom."

[Footnote A: Pope had ventured to sneer at Philips' "Pastorals."]

"The players, who know I am very much their friend," says the *Spectator*[A] "take all opportunities to express a gratitude to me for being so. They could not have a better occasion of obliging me, than one which they lately took hold of. They desired my friend Will Honeycomb to bring me the reading of a new tragedy; it is called 'The Distressed Mother.' I must confess, though some days are passed since I enjoyed that entertainment, the passions of the several characters dwell strongly upon my imagination; and I congratulate the age, that they are at last to see truth and human life represented in the incidents which concern heroes and heroines. The style of the play is such as becomes those of the first education, and the sentiments worthy those of the highest figure. It was a most exquisite pleasure to me, to observe real tears drop from the eyes of those who had long made it their profession to dissemble affliction; and the

player, who read, frequently threw down the book, until he had given vent to the humanity which rose in him at some irresistible touches of the imagined sorrow.”

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[Footnote A: *Spectator*, No. 290, February 1, 1711-12. This essay has been credited to Steele.]

This picture of woe would hardly suit the theories of those hard-hearted players who believe that the true artist is never “carried away,” or affected by the pathos of his part. Surely, the scene is ridiculous rather than imposing, and one is tempted to suggest, albeit with bated breath, that the *Spectator* was indulging in a bit of good-natured exaggeration. Exaggeration did we say? The modern newspaper writer, who is always glad, when off duty, to call things by their plain names, would brand the notice of the “Distressed Mother” as a bare-faced puff. And who could quarrel with his scepticism? Actors are not in the habit of weeping over the reading of a play; they have little time for such briny luxury.

Yet in this very number of the *Spectator* we have George Powell, who was cast for Orestes in Mr. Philips’ tragedy, writing that the grief which he is required to portray will seem almost real enough to choke his utterance. Here is what the hypocrite says:

“Mr. SPECTATOR,—I am appointed to act a part in the new tragedy called ‘The Distressed Mother.’ It is the celebrated grief of Orestes which I am to personate; but I shall not act it as I ought, for I shall feel it too intimately to be able to utter it. I was last night repeating a paragraph to myself, which I took to be an expression of rage, and in the middle of the sentence there was a stroke of self-pity which quite unmanned me. Be pleased, Sir, to print this letter, that when I am oppressed in this manner at such an interval, a certain part of the audience may not think I am out; and I hope with this allowance, to do it with satisfaction.—I am, Sir, your most humble servant, GEORGE POWELL.”

Poor dashing, dissipated, brandy-bibbing George! Perhaps you had as keen an eye to the value of advertising as have certain players who never heard your name.[A]

[Footnote A: The original cast of the “Distressed Mother” included Booth (Pyrrhus), Powell (Orestes), Mills (Pylades), Mrs. Oldfield (Andromache), and Mrs. Porter (Hermione).]

The production of the “Distressed Mother” (March, 1712), was accompanied by an exciting popular demonstration which must for the nonce have made Powell quite forget those lines which gave him such exquisite sorrow. It all came from the jealousy of Mrs. Rogers, she of more virtue on the stage than off, and who always cherished, with the assistance of kind friends, a very sincere belief that her powers far exceeded those of Oldfield.[A]



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[Footnote A: The rivalry between Rogers and Oldfield once reached such a pass that Wilks sought to end it, and stop the complaints of the former's admirers, by a severe expedient. "Mr. Wilks," says Victor, "soon reduced this clamor to demonstration, by an experiment of Mrs. Oldfield and Mrs. Rogers playing the same part, that of Lady Lurewell in the 'Trip to the Jubilee;' but though obstinacy seldom meets conviction, yet from this equitable trial the tumults in the house were soon quelled (by public authority) greatly to the honour of Mr. Wilks. I am, from my own knowledge thoroughly convinced that Mr. Wilks had no other regard for Mrs. Oldfield but what arose from the excellency of her performances. Mrs. Roger's conduct might be censured by some for the earnestness of her passion towards Mr. Wilks, but in the polite world the fair sex has always been privileged from scandal."]

So when Nance was cast for the distraught Andromache there was trouble. Rogers demanded the part, and on being refused set about to make things as unpleasant as possible for her detested rival. Friends of the disappointed actress packed Drury Lane when the "Distressed Mother" was performed, and the appearance of Oldfield was made the signal for a riot. Royal messengers and guards were sent to put an end to the disorder, but the play had to be stopped for that night.

Colley, who had ever an eye to the pounds, shillings and pence, was disgusted at what he chose to call an exhibition of low malevolence. "We have been forced," he says, "to dismiss an audience of a hundred and fifty pounds, from a disturbance spirited up by obscure people, who never gave any better reason for it, than that it was their fancy to support the idle complaint of one rival actress against another, in their several pretentious to the chief part in a new tragedy. But as this tumult seem'd only to be the Wantonness of *English Liberty*, I shall not presume to lay any further censure upon it."

Finally the combined charms of Oldfield and the "Distressed Mother" triumphed, and young beaux who had helped to swell the riot were glad to come back meekly to Drury Lane and extol the attractions of Andromache. In the play itself Nance must have been all that the troublous part suggested, but it was when she tripped on gaily and gave the humorous epilogue that the house found her most delightful. She, who could reign so imperially in tragedy, had glided back to her better-loved kingdom of comedy, and what cared her captivated hearers if this self-same epilogue made an inharmonious ending to a serious play. It was quite enough that Andromache, with all her sufferings dispelled, should say melodiously:

"I hope you'll own, that with becoming art,
I've play'd my game, and topp'd the widow's part.
My spouse, poor man, could not live out the play,
But dy'd commodiously on wedding-day,[A]
While I his relict, made at one bold fling,
Myself a princess, and young Sty a King.
You, ladies, who protract a lover's pain,



And hear your servants sigh whole years in vain;
Which of you all would not on marriage venture,
Might she so soon upon her jointure enter?"



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[Footnote A: This is a coy reference to Pyrrhus, who was murdered while his marriage to Hector's widow was being celebrated with royal pomp. As he fell, it will be remembered, the King placed his crown upon the head of Andromache.]

An epilogue leading off with these lines was hardly an appropriate ending to a tragedy, yet are we fastidious enough in these days to sneer at the anomaly? We have banished prologue and afterpiece as something old-fashioned and inartistic, but never turn one solitary eyelash when Hamlet follows up his death by rushing before the curtain and grinning his thanks. Desdemonas who come forward, after the smothering scene, to receive flowers, and Romeos and Juliets who rise from the tomb that they may bow and smirk before an audience—while we have such as these among us, let us not cast stones at the early playgoer.

Addison has left, in the *Spectator*, a delightful story of dear old Sir Roger de Coverley's experience with the "Distressed Mother." Sir Roger, it appears, confessed that he had not seen a play for twenty years, and was very anxious to know "who this distressed mother was; and upon hearing that she was Hector's widow, he told me that her husband was a brave man, and that when he was a schoolboy he had read his life at the end of the dictionary." [A] So the old gentleman, accompanied by the *Spectator*, Captain Sentry, and a retinue of servants, set out in state for Drury Lane, and on arriving there went into the pit.

[Footnote A: *Spectator*, No. 335.]

"As soon as the house was full, and the candles lighted, my old friend stood up, and looked about him with that pleasure which a mind seasoned with humanity naturally feels in itself, at the sight of a multitude of people who seem pleased with one another, and partake of the same common entertainment. I could not but fancy to myself, as the old man stood up in the middle of the pit, that he made a very proper centre to a tragic audience. Upon the entering of Pyrrhus, the knight told me, that he did not believe the king of France himself had a better strut. I was indeed very attentive to my old friend's remarks, because I looked upon them as a piece of natural criticism, and was well pleased to hear him, at the conclusion of almost every scene, telling me that he could not imagine how the play would end. One while he appeared much concerned for Andromache; and a little while after for Hermione; and was extremely puzzled to think what would become of Pyrrhus.

"When Sir Roger saw Andromache's obstinate refusal to her lovers importunities, he whispered me in the ear, that he was sure she would never have him; to which he added, with a more than ordinary vehemence, 'You can't imagine, sir, what it is to have to do with a widow.' Upon Pyrrhus's threatening afterwards to leave her, the knight shook his head, and muttered to himself, 'Ay, do if you can.' This part dwelt so much upon my friend's imagination, that at



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the close of the third act, as I was thinking of something else, he whispered me in my ear, 'These widows, sir, are the most perverse creatures in the world. But pray,' says he, 'you that are a critic, is the play according to your dramatic rules, as you call them? Should your people in tragedy always talk to be understood? Why, there is not a single sentence in this play that I do not know the meaning of.'

"The fourth act very luckily began before I had time to give the old gentleman an answer. 'Well,' says the knight, sitting down with great satisfaction, 'I suppose we are now to see Hector's ghost,' He then renewed his attention, and, from time to time, fell a praising the widow. He made, indeed, a little mistake as to one of her pages, whom at his first entering he took for Astyanax; but quickly set himself right in that particular, though, at the same time he owned he should have been very glad to have seen the little boy, who, says he, must needs be a very fine child by the account that is given of him. Upon Hermione's going off with a menace to Pyrrhus, the audience gave a loud clap, to which Sir Roger added, 'On my word, a notable young baggage!'"

We can imagine Sir Roger going, a year later, to see Mrs. Oldfield carry all before her as Jane Shore in Nicholas Rowe's play of that name. The author had once been an ardent admirer of the glacierlike but lovely Bracegirdle, at whose haughty shrine he long worshipped in the hopes that the ice of her reserve might some day melt; and the wits of the coffee-house were wont to say, not without a grain of truth, that when the poet wrote dramas to fit Bracegirdle as the heroine, the lovers therein always pleaded his own passion[A]. Now that the charmer had left the stage, Rowe was forced to entrust the title character of Jane Shore to Nance, who vowed, no doubt, she was thoroughly bored at having to walk once again through a vale of tears. But she made another triumph (the author himself coached her in the part), and helped to give the production all manner of success.

[Footnote A: As Cibber says, Mrs. Bracegirdle "inspired the best authors to write for her, and two of them [Rowe and Congreve] when they gave her a lover in a play, seem'd palpably to plead their own passions, and make their private court to her in fictitious characters."]

It is a curious fact that the writing of the tragedy was indirectly due to political disappointment. Rowe had set himself assiduously to the study of Spanish with the idea of securing from Lord Halifax a diplomatic position, and his reward for this energy was so intangible that he soon gave up hopes of foreign travel and turned his attention to the tribulations of Jane. In other words, the noble Halifax merely expressed his satisfaction that Mr. Rowe could now read "Don Quixote" in the original.

Thus Nance played on, sometimes in comedy, and again in tragedy, when, despite her customary objections, the pages had to drag her train about. It was a train that swept all before it.



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The speaking of trains and pages suggests the fact that in old times the heroes and heroines of tragedy always wore, either in peculiarity of dress or pomp of surroundings, the badge of greatness. Nowadays a few bars of romantic music, to usher these characters on the stage, will suffice. But things were different then; our ancestors insisted that the aforesaid *dramatis personae* should be labelled, frilled and furbelowed.

Addison has an interesting essay on the subject.[A]

[Footnote A: *Spectator*, No. 42.]

“But among all our tragic artifices,” he says, “I am the most offended at those which are made use of to inspire us with magnificent ideas of the persons that speak. The ordinary method of making an hero, is to clap a huge plume of feathers upon his head which rises so very high, that there is often a greater length from his chin to the top of his head than to the sole of his foot. One would believe that we thought a great man and a tall man the same thing. This very much embarrasses the actor, who is forced to hold his neck extremely stiff and steady all the while he speaks; and notwithstanding any anxieties which he pretends for his mistress, his country, or his friends, one may see by his action, that his greatest care and concern is to keep the plume of feathers from falling off his head. For my own part, when I see a man uttering his complaints under such a mountain of feathers, I am apt to look upon him rather as an unfortunate lunatic, than a distressed hero.

“As these superfluous ornaments upon the head make a great man, a princess generally receives her grandeur from those additional encumbrances that fall into her tail; I mean the broad sweeping train that follows her in all her motions, and finds constant employment for a boy who stands behind her to open and spread it to advantage. I do not know how others are affected at this sight, but I must confess my eyes are wholly taken up with the page’s part; and, as for the queen, I am not so attentive to any thing she speaks, as to the right adjusting of her train, lest it should chance to trip up her heels, or incommode her, as she walks to and fro upon the stage. It is, in my opinion, a very odd spectacle to see a queen venting her passion in a disordered motion, and a little boy taking care all the while that they do not ruffle the tail of her gown. The parts that the two persons act on the stage at the same time are very different. The princess is afraid lest she should incur the displeasure of the king her father, or lose the hero, her lover, whilst her attendant is only concerned lest she should entangle her feet in her petticoat.”



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In a succeeding paragraph the reader finds that a cherished nineteenth-century custom—the representing of a vast army by the employment of half-a-dozen ill-fed, unpainted supers—has at least the sanction of age: “Another mechanical method of making great men, and adding dignity to kings and queens, is to accompany them with halberds and battle-axes. Two or three shifters of scenes, with the two candle-snuffers, make up a complete body of guards upon the English stage; and by the addition of a few porters dressed in red coats, can represent above a dozen legions. I have sometimes seen a couple of armies drawn up together upon the stage, when the poet has been disposed to do honour to his generals. It is impossible for the reader’s imagination to multiply twenty men into such prodigious multitudes, or to fancy that two or three hundred thousand soldiers are fighting in a room of forty or fifty yards in compass. Incidents of such a nature should be told, not represented.”

Addison remarks that “the tailor and painter often contribute to the success of a tragedy more than the poet,” a trite saying which holds good now, and he ends his essay with the belief that “a good poet will give the reader a more lively idea of an army or a battle in a description, than if he actually saw them drawn up in squadrons and battalions, or engaged in the confusion of a fight. Our minds should be open to great conceptions, and inflamed with glorious sentiments by what the actor speaks, more than by what he appears. Can all the trappings or equipage of a king or hero give Brutus half the pomp and majesty which he receives from a few lines in Shakespeare?” Which is all very true, yet “the tailor and painter” will continue popular, no doubt, until the crack of doom.

The month of December 1714 saw the reopening of the theatre in Lincoln’s Inn Fields, under letters patent originally granted by Charles II. to Christopher Rich, and restored by his broken-English Majesty George I. The renewal created a dangerous rival to Drury Lane, but it is not probable that the king worried over having planted such a thorn in the sides of Messrs. Steele, Booth, Wilks, and Cibber[A]. He remembered, he told Mr. Craggs, “when he had been in England before, in King Charles his time, there had been two theatres in London; and as the patent seemed to be a lawful grant, he saw no reason why two playhouses might not be continued.”

[Footnote A: On the death of Queen Anne the old licence or patent of Drury Lane lapsed, and when the new one was issued Steele was named therein as a partner.] Several useful players left Drury Lane to go over into Lincoln’s Inn Fields,[A] chief among them being Mrs. Rogers, who felt greatly relieved in transferring her affectations of virtue to a house where she would no longer be overshadowed by the genius of Oldfield. As for Nance, she was faithful to the old theatre, and continued to be the fairest though perhaps the frailest of its pillars, notwithstanding the personal



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charms of Mrs. Horton. The latter was a strolling player recently admitted to the sacred precincts of Drury. She had been in the habit of “ranting tragedy in barns and country towns, and playing Cupid in a booth, at suburban fairs. The attention of managers was directed towards her; and Booth, after seeing her act in Southwark, engaged her for Drury Lane, where her presence was more agreeable to the public than particularly pleasant to dear Mrs. Oldfield.”[B]

[Footnote A: 'Tis true, they none of them had more than a negative merit, in being only able to do us more harm by their leaving us without notice, than they could do us good by remaining with us: For though the best of them could not support a play, the worst of them by their absence could maim it; as the loss of the least pin in a watch may obstruct its motion.—CIBBER.]

[Footnote B: Dr. Doran’s “Annals of the Stage.”]

So wagged the mimic world with Nance as its most attractive figure. Sometimes she laughed her way through a play; and again she committed suicide for the edification of the audience, as when she appeared in “Busiris.” This was a windy tragedy by Dr. Young (he of the “Night Thoughts”), wherein Wilks, as Memnon, also had to kill himself. The performance was, naturally enough, far from cheerful, and no particular inspiration could have been obtained from the presence of Busiris himself, that semi-savage Egyptian king to whom Ovid referred:

“’Tis said that Egypt for nine years was dry;
Nor Nile did floods, nor heaven did rain supply.
A foreigner at length informed the King
That slaughtered guests would kindly moisture bring.
The King replied, ‘On thee the lot shall fall;
Be thou, my guest, the sacrifice for all.’”

Certainly a most ungenial host.

There were times when Oldfield could even arouse enthusiasm amid the dullest and most unappealing surroundings. This she did, for instance, in the stupid “Sophonisba” of James Thomson, who could write delightful poetry about nature without being able to carry any of that nature into the art of play-making. It was in this artificial tragedy that the famous line occurred: “Oh Sophonisba! Sophonisba, o!” which was afterwards parodied by “Oh! Jemmy Thomson! Jemmy Thomson, oh!” and it was in the same ill-fated compilation that Cibber had the distinction of being hissed off the stage. The latter, unlike Oldfield, had a sneaking fondness for tragedy, and when “Sophonisba” was first read in the green room he appropriated to his own use the dignified character of Scipio. His egotism and foolishness had their full reward. For two nights successively,



as Davies tells us, "Cibber was as much exploded as any bad actor could be. Williams, by desire of Wilks, made himself master of the part; but he, marching slowly, in great military distinction, from the upper part of the stage, and wearing the same dress as Cibber, was mistaken for him, and met with repeated hisses, joined to the music of cat-calls [notice, ye theatre-goers of 1898, that the cat-call is not the invention of the modern gallery god]; but, as soon as the audience were undeceived, they converted their groans and hisses to loud and long continued applause." Three years later, in 1733, Cibber retired from the stage.



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With Mrs. Oldfield the picture was far different. She could not make of Thomson's tragedy a success, yet she played Sophonisba (one of the last parts in which she was ever seen) with a grandeur of effect that well earned the undying gratitude of the author. [A] In after years her old admirers were wont to thrill with pleasure as they recalled the passionate intensity she gave to that much-quoted line,

“Not one base word of Carthage, for thy soul,”

as she stood glaring at the astonished Massinissa.

[Footnote A: Mrs. Oldfield, in the character of Sophonisba, has excelled what, even in the fondness of an author, I could either wish or imagine. The grace, dignity, and happy variety of her action have been universally applauded, and are truly admirable.— Thomson.]

Among those who saw Sophonisba was Chetwood, whose “General History of the Stage” gives us many a charming glimpse of dead and gone actors. Dead and gone? Nay, rather let it be said that they still live in the ever fresh and graphic pages of contemporary critics, and thus refute the gentle pessimism of Mr. Henley when he asks so gracefully:

“Where are the passions they essayed,
And where the tears they made to flow?
Where the wild humours they portrayed
For laughing worlds to see and know?
Othello's wrath and Juliet's woe?
Sir Peter's whims and Timon's gall?
And Millamant and Romeo?
Into the night go one and all.”

“I was too young,” says Chetwood, “to view her first dawn on the stage, but yet had the infinite satisfaction of her meridian lustre, a glow of charms not to be beheld but with a trembling eye! which held her influence till set in night.”

Of Nance's tendency to escape tragic plays the same writer tells us: “When ‘Mithridates’ was revived, it was with much difficulty she was prevail'd upon to take the part; but she perform'd it to the utmost length of perfection, and, after that, she seem'd much better reconcil'd to tragedy. What a majestic dignity in Cleopatra! and, indeed, in every part that required it: Such a finish'd figure on the stage, was never yet seen. In ‘Calista, the Fair Penitent,’ she was inimitable, in the third act, with Horatio, when she tears the letter with



“To atoms, thus!
Thus let me tear the vile detested falsehood,
The wicked lying evidence of shame!”

“Her excellent clear voice of passion, with manner and action suiting, us’d to make me shrink with awe, and seem’d to put her monitor Horatio into a mousehole. I almost gave him up for a troublesome puppy; and though Mr. Booth play’d the part of Lothario, I could hardly lug him up to the importance of triumphing over such a finish’d piece of perfection, that seemed to be too much dignified to lose her virtue.”

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Perhaps the reader may think that this chapter, like several others, is (as the theatre-goer said of “Hamlet”) too “deuced full of quotation.” Yet what can give a better picture of old stage life than these quaint and often eloquent records of the past? Pray be lenient, therefore, thou kindly critic, if the most faded books of the theatrical library are taken down from the dusty shelf, and a few of the neglected pages are printed once again. As these very books seem all the better in their dingy bindings, so do the old ideas, the odd conceits, the stories that charmed dead generations, take on a keener zest when clothed in the formal language of other days.

If we want to get that formal language in all its glory, let us bring from the library a copy of some early eighteenth-century tragedy. Shall we close our eyes and choose one at random? Well, what have we? The “Tamerlane” of our friend Nicholas Rowe, in which is set forth the story of the generous Emperor of Tartary, the “very glass and fashion of all conquerors.” The play is prefaced by a fulsome “Epistle Dedicatory,” addressed to the sacred person of the “Right Honourable William, Lord Marquis of Harrington,” and showing, almost pathetically, how frequently the literary workers of Queen Anne’s “golden age” were wont to beg the influence of some powerful patron. The dedication seems absolutely grovelling when viewed from the present standards, but Mr. Rowe and his friends saw therein nothing more remarkable than respectful homage to one of the world’s great men. The republic of letters was then an empty name.[A]

[Footnote A: “Tamerlane” was brought out in 1702, with Betterton in the title role.]

The author of “Tamerlane” fears that in thus calling attention to the play he may appear guilty of “impertinence and interruptions,” and, he adds, “I am sure it is a reason why I ought to beg your Lordship’s pardon, for troubling you with this tragedy; not but that poetry has always been, and will still be the entertainment of all wise men, that have any delicacy in their knowledge.” Then, after wasting a little necessary flattery on the noble marquis, he starts off into an unblushing eulogy of King William III., whose clemency was mirrored, supposedly, by the hero of the tragedy. “Some people [who do me a very great honour in it] have fancy’d, that in the person of Tamerlane, I have alluded to the greatest character of the present age. I don’t know whether I ought not to apprehend a great deal of danger from avowing a design like that: It may be a task indeed worthy of the greatest genius, which this or any other time has produc’d; but therefore I ought not to stand the shock of a parallel lest it should be seen, to my disadvantage, how far the *Hero has transcended the poet’s thoughts*”—and so on, *ad nauseam*.

To turn the leaves of the play, after wading through the slime of the “Epistle,” is to find amusing proof of the high-flown and at times bombastic expression which elicited such admiration from audiences of the old *regime*. (Do not laugh at it, reader; you tolerate an equal amount of absurdity in modern melodrama). The very first lines are charmingly suggestive of the starched and stately past. “Hail to the sun!” says the Prince of Tanais:

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“Hail to the sun! from whose returning light
The cheerful soldier’s arms new lustre take
To deck the pomp of battle.”

Playwrights of Rowe’s cult loved to hail the sun. Just why the orb of day had to be saluted with such frequency no one seemed able to determine, but the honour was continually bestowed, to the great edification of the groundlings. When Young wrote “Busiris,” he paid so much attention to old Sol that Fielding burlesqued the learned doctor’s weakness through the medium of “Tom Thumb,” and wrote that “the author of ‘Busiris’ is extremely anxious to prevent the sun’s blushing at any indecent object; and, therefore, on all such occasions, he addresses himself to the sun, and desires him to keep out of the way.”

After the Prince of Tanais’s homage to the sun we hear something fulsome about the virtues of King William, alias Tamerlane:

“No lust of rule, the common vice of Kings,
No furious zeal, inspir’d by hot-brain’d priests,
Ill hid beneath religion’s specious name,
E’er drew his temp’rate courage to the field:
But to redress an injur’d people’s wrongs,
To save the weak one from the strong oppressor,
Is all his end of war. And when he draws
The sword to punish, like relenting Heav’n,
He seems unwilling to deface his kind.”

A few lines later and we find one of the characters drawing a parallel between Tamerlane, otherwise William, and Divinity:

“Ere the mid-hour of night, from tent to tent,
Unweary’d, thro’ the num’rous host he past,
Viewing with careful eyes each several quarters;
Whilst from his looks, as from Divinity,
The soldiers took presage, and cry’d, Lead on,
Great Alha, and our emperor, lead on,
To victory, and everlasting fame.”

How changeth the spirit of each age! Imagine Bronson Howard or Augustus Thomas writing a play wherein the President of the United States was brought into such irreverent contact with the Deity.[A]

[Footnote A: Yet it cannot be easily forgotten that a certain clergyman, preaching, several years ago, at the funeral of a rich man’s son, compared the poor boy to Christ.



And this very ecclesiastic probably looks upon the stage as a monument of sacrilegiousness.]

But we need not follow the platitudes of Tamerlane and his companions, nor weep at the sententious wickedness of Bajazet, that ungrateful sovereign typifying Louis Quatorze, King of France, Prince of Gentlemen, and Right Royal Hater of His Protestant Majesty William of Orange. Heaven rest their souls! and with that pious prayer we may bid them farewell, as

“Into the night go one and all.”

CHAPTER VII

NANCE AT HOME



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“Home?” An actress at home? Does it not seem strange to apply the dear old English noun, so redolent of peace, and quiet, and privacy, to the feverish life of a mummer? We go, night after night, to see our favourite players shining 'mid the fierce glare of the footlights, watch them approvingly as they pass from role to role, and finally begin to believe, like the egotists we are, that they have no existence apart from the one we are pleased to applaud. What fools some of us must be to think there is never a time when the paint and powder, the tinsel and eternal artifice of the stage—yea, even our own condescending admiration—pall on the jaded spirits of the poor player.

“How sparkingly is Miss Smith acting Lady Teazle to-night!” we say, elegantly pressing our hands together in token of august favour. We are entranced, and it follows, therefore, that the actress must be entranced likewise. Mayhap Miss Smith does not share the same ecstasy; perhaps, as she stands behind the screen in Joseph Surface’s rooms, Sir Peter’s wife is wishing that the comedy were ended and she were comfortably ensconced in her cosy little lodgings round the corner. She pictures that crackling wood fire, and her old terrier basking in the gentle heat, and the tea-urn hissing near by (or is it a cold bottle of beer in the portable refrigerator?) and in the background sweet good Mr. Smith, who does nothing but spend his lady’s salary. In that temple of domesticity there are no thoughts of rouge, or paint-pots, or of Richard Brinsley Sheridan—it is merely home. Dost thou always hurry back to so attractive a one, thou patronising theatre-goer?

Our Nance had a home to which she was glad enough to hurry back, like the aforesaid Miss Smith, after the play was over at Drury Lane. There was no husband there to await her, but a very devoted knight in the person of Mr. Arthur Maynwaring, who, though he gave not his name nor the ceremony of bell, book, and candle to the union, played the part of spouse to the fair charmer. The town looked with good-natured tolerance on the moral code, or the want thereof, of the frail one, just as other towns, in later days, have looked with equal benevolence upon the peccadillos of some petted favourite. The times were not of the straightlaced order and no one expected from an actress wonders of chastity or conventionality. Are we ourselves exacting where the Thespian is concerned?

[Illustration: ANNE OLDFIELD

By JONATHAN RICHARDSON]

Fashion'd alike by Nature and by Art
To please, engage, and interest ev'ry heart.
In public life, by all who saw, approv'd;
In private life, by all who knew her, lov'd.

“Even her amours,” says Chetwood in treating of Mistress Oldfield, “seemed to lose that glare which appears round the persons of the failing fair; neither was it ever known that



she troubled the repose of any lady's lawful claim; and was far more constant than millions in the conjugal noose." Being thus acquitted of predatory designs upon the peace of English wives, and having the further virtue of constancy, a host of Londoners, men and women, high and low alike, gazed with charitable eyes upon Nance's private life. And she, dear girl, sinned on joyously.

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Mr. Maynwaring, who helped Oldfield to break the spirit of one commandment, was a brilliant figure in the reign of Queen Anne, albeit, like other brilliant figures of that period, he has passed into the darkness of oblivion. A clever dabbler in literature, an honest politician—a politician with scruples was as rare in those days as he is now—and a man of honour who could drink as much as his friends, the volatile Arthur was, perhaps, best known as the most attractive talker of the famous Kit-Cat Club. The Kit-Cat Club! What a wealth of anecdote doth its name conjure up to the student of the past! 'Twas in this famous organisation that noblemen and wits met on common ground, drank many a toast to the House of Hanover or to some reigning belle of London town, and exercised a patronising censorship over the world of letters. They were “the patriots that saved Briton,” says Horace Walpole, in referring to their anti-Jacobitism, and yet the most of them are forgotten.

If tradition is to be believed (and what siren is more comfortable to hearken unto than tradition?) these self-same patriots took their name of “Kit-Cats” from prosaic mutton pies. 'Twould be horrible to think on this gastronomic derivation of the title were we not to remember, quite fortunately, that geese saved classic Rome. Why, therefore, should not the preservers of perfidious Albion suggest the aroma of a lamb pasty?

It seems that the Club had its first headquarters in Shire Lane, near Temple Bar, at the establishment of Christopher Cat, a pastrycook who helped to enliven the inner man by delicious meat pies dubbed “Kit-Cats.” Hence the name of that notable coterie of Whigs which included Addison and Dick Steele, Congreve and His Grace of Devonshire.[A]

[Footnote A: Our modern celebrated clubs are founded upon eating and drinking, which are points wherein most men agree, and in which the learned and illiterate, the dull and the airy, the philosopher and the buffoon, can all of them bear a part. The Kit-Cat itself is said to have taken its original from a mutton pie. The Beef-Steak and October clubs are neither of them averse to eating and drinking, if we may form a judgment of them from their respective titles.—ADDISON in the *Spectator*.]

Maynwaring came of good English stock, and in early life showed the results of his relationship to the aristocratic house of Cholmondeley by supporting the lost cause of James II. So fervent an admirer was he of that apology for royalty that he took up the pen, if not the sword, in his behalf, and steeped the mightier weapon with satirical ink when he wrote a pamphlet entitled “The King of Hearts.” Rumour paid to the young author an unintentional compliment by insisting that the brochure came from the great Mr. Dryden, but that genius denied the soft impeachment while gracefully praising the unknown writer.



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This pursuit of Jacobitism was varied by the study of law—a study “sometimes relieved with a temporary application to music and poetry”—and when the disconsolate Arthur had lost his father, and thereby gained 800 pounds a year, he drowned his sorrows by an almost exclusive devotion to “society and pleasantry.” We are told[A] that on the ratification of the Peace of Ryswick he went to Paris, where he was exceedingly well received in consequence of the numerous introductory letters which had been furnished him from various quarters. He there contracted an intimacy with Boileau,—

“Whose rash envy would allow
No strain that shamed his country’s creaking lyre,
That whetstone of the teeth, monotony in wire.”

[Footnote A: “Memoirs of the Celebrated Persons comprising the Kit-Cat Club.”]

“The French poet invited Maynwaring to his country seat, where he behaved to him in a very hospitable manner, and frequently conversed with him respecting the merits of our English poets, of whom, however, he affected to know but little, and for whom he pretended to care still less. Monsieur de la Fontaine was also at times one of their company, and always spoke in very respectful terms of the poetry of the sister nation. Boileau’s pretending to be ignorant of Dryden ‘argued himself unknown’; but, perhaps, another reason may be assigned why the French writers found it convenient to know as little as possible of their English contemporary, who in many of his admirable prefaces and dedications has taken some trouble to explain the frivolity of the French poets, their tiresome *petit maitre-ship*, and all the finessing and trick with which they endeavour to make amends to their readers for positive deficiency of genius.”

After playing the *dilettante* in France, Maynwaring returned home, and in time became a staunch Whig, a Government official, and, later on, a Member of Parliament. The cause of the Pretender knew him no more, and in future this brilliant gentleman would be one of the greatest friends of that stupid Hanoverian family which waited drowsily, across the sea, for the death of Anne.

But what counted all the glamour of public life compared to the possession of Nance Oldfield and an honoured seat at the festive board of the Kit-Cat Club? Love and conviviality, youth and wit, carried the day, and through the influence of these seductive companions handsome Arthur failed to achieve greatness as a statesman. But when it came to waging political warfare against sour Swift, or to assisting Dick Steele with the “Tatler,” or—better still—toasting some fair one at the Club,[A] this *bon viveur* was in his finest mood.

[Footnote A: The (Kit-Cat) club originated in the hospitality of Jacob Tonson, the bookseller, who, once a week, was host at the house in Shire Lane to a gathering of writers. In an occasional poem on the Kit-Cat club, attributed to Sir Richard Blackmore, Jacob is read backwards into Bocaj, and we are told:



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“One Night in Seven at this convenient seat
Indulgent Bocaj did the Muses treat;
Their Drink was gen’rous Wine and Kit-Cat’s Pyes their Meat.
Hence did th’ Assembly’s Title first arise,
And Kit-Cat Wits spring first from Kit-Cat’s Pyes.”

About the year 1700 this gathering of wits produced a club in which the great Whig chiefs were associated with foremost Whig writers, Tonson being secretary. It was as much literary as political, and its “toasting glasses,” each inscribed with lines to a reigning beauty, caused Arbuthnot to derive its value from “its pell mell pack of toasts.”

Of old Cats and young Kits.

Tonson built a room for the Club at Barn Elms to which each member gave his portrait by Sir Godfrey Kneller, who was himself a member. The pictures were on a new-sized canvas adopted to the height of the walls, whence the name “Kit-Cat” came to be applied generally to three-quarter length portraits.—HENRY MORLEY’S Notes on the *Spectator*.]

It is to be supposed that at some time or other the health of Mistress Oldfield was drunk by the Kit-Cats, whose custom of honouring womankind in this bibulous way may have given rise to Pope’s plaintive query:

“Say why are beauties prais’d and honoured most,
The wise man’s passion, and the vain man’s toast?
Why deck’d with all that land and sea afford,
Why Angels call’d, and angel-like adored?”

And if the actress was thus deified or spiritualised, who drained his glass more fervently than did Arthur Maynwaring? For whatever may have been the faults of this dashing Whig, he had the courage of his sins, and took up his abode with Anne in the full light of day, as though a marriage ceremony were a bagatelle not worth the recollecting. The world was forgiving, to be sure, nor is it probable that either one of this easily-mated pair suffered any loss of public esteem by the union. Dukes—nay, even Duchesses—were glad to meet Nance, and Royalty allowed her to bask in the sunshine of its gracious approval. “She was to be seen on the terrace at Windsor, walking with the consorts of dukes, and with countesses, and wives of English barons, and the whole gay group might be heard calling one another by their Christian names.”

No wonder that the women of fashion, none of them saints, loved Oldfield and winked at the elasticity of her moral ethics. The dear creature was so bright in conversation, so full of *espièglerie*, and, still more important, she looked so charming in her succession of handsome toilettes, that she could be ever sure of a cordial welcome. “Flavia,” as Steele calls her, “is ever well-dressed, and always the genteelest woman you meet, but



the make of her mind very much contributes to the ornament of her body. She has the greatest simplicity of manners of any of her sex. This makes everything look native about her, and her clothes are so exactly



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fitted, that they appear, as it were, part of her person. Every one that sees her knows her to be of quality; but her distinction is owing to her manner, and not to her habit. Her beauty is full of attraction, but not of allurements. There is such a composure in her looks, and propriety in her dress, that you would think it impossible she should change the garb you one day see her in, for anything so becoming until you next day see her in another. There is no mystery in this, but that however she is apparelled, she is herself the same: for there is so immediate a relation between our thoughts and gestures that a woman must think well to look well."

* * * * *

Here, verily, was an actress who could set the town wild by the beauty and exquisite taste of her costumes, and who was conscientious enough, nevertheless, to keep the millinery phase of her art modestly in the background. You, ladies, who depend for theatrical success upon the elegance of your gowns, and fondly believe that fairness of face and liness of figure will atone for a thousand dramatic sins, take pattern by the industry of Oldfield. It will be a much better pattern than those over which you are accustomed to worry your pretty heads. The enterprising dressmakers who go to the play to get inspiration for new clothes may cease to worship you, but think of the other sort of inspiration which you will give to lovers of the drama! Then shall there be no more announcements to the effect that, "Miss Lighthouse will act Lady Macbeth in ten Parisian gowns made by Worth," or that when she treats us to the death of Marguerite Gautier (the aforesaid Mlle. Gautier dying, as everybody knows, in actual poverty) "Miss Lighthouse will wear diamonds representing one hundred thousand dollars."

There is not much to say about the domesticity of Nance and Arthur Maynwaring. How could there be? The lady kept house for her lord and master with grace and modesty (if it seems not paradoxical to mention modesty in this alliance), and it is safe to believe that more than one member of the Kit-Cat Club often tasted a bit of beef and pudding, and sipped a glass of port, at the table of the happy pair. Congreve, the particular friend and *protege* of the host, must have dined more than once with brilliant Nance, regaling his plump being with the joy of food and drink, and wondering, perhaps, how any one could prefer the hostess to his particular *chere-amie*, Anne Bracegirdle. And Oldfield, of what did she think as she gazed into the rounded face of Mr. Congreve, or listened to the merry wit of her devoted liege? Did the ghost of poor, dead Farquhar ever arise before her, the reminder of a day when love was younger and passion stronger? Let us ask no impertinent questions.



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What with acting, and supping, and an easy conscience, Mistress Oldfield gaily trod the primrose path of dalliance, and Cupid hovered near, albeit there was no law to chain him to the scene. But one day he took to his wings and flew away, after witnessing the untimely death (November 1712) of Mr. Maynwaring. The latter made his exit with the assistance of three physicians, and Nance was near to smooth the departure.[A] Then came the funeral, and after that Mrs. Mayn—Mrs. Oldfield dried her lovely eyes (did she not have enough weeping to do when she played in tragedy?), and began once more to think upon the joys of existence.

[Footnote A: He died at St. Albans, November 13, 1712, of a consumption, and was attended in his last illness by Doctors Garth, Radcliffe and Blackmore. In his will he appointed Mrs. Oldfield, the celebrated actress, his executrix, with whom he had lived for several years, and by whom he had a son, named Arthur Maynwaring. His estate was equally divided between this child, its mother and his sister.—“Memoirs of the Celebrated Persons Comprising the Kit-Kat Club.”]

When General Churchill, a nephew of the great Duke of Marlborough, suggested to the disconsolate widow-by-brevet that she should share his home, the proposal was accepted, and the actress entered for a second time into a free-and-easy compact, and for a second time remained faithful thereto until her new admirer went the way of Mr. Maynwaring. It was even rumoured—scandalous gossip!—that the two were married; and one day the Princess of Wales, afterwards Queen Caroline, asked the “incomparable sweet girl,” who was attending a royal levee, whether such were indeed the case. “So it is said, may it please your Royal Highness,” diplomatically replied Nance, “but we have not owned it yet.”

To Churchill our unsteady heroine presented one son, and it was through the marriage of the latter that the swift-running blood of Oldfield now courses through the veins of the first Earl of Cadogan’s descendants.[A] This son and the one who bore the name of Maynwaring were the only two children credited, or discredited, to the actress, but there appears to have been a mysterious daughter, a Miss Dye Bertie, who became, as Mrs. Delany tells us, “the pink of fashion in the *beau monde*, and married a nobleman.” It would not be wise, however, to peer too closely into the dim vista of the past. The picture might prove unpleasant.

[Footnote A: Her son, Colonel Churchill, once, unconsciously, saved Sir Robert Walpole from assassination, through the latter riding home from the House in the Colonel’s chariot instead of alone in his own. Unstable Churchill married a natural daughter of Sir Robert, and their daughter Mary married, in 1777, Charles Sloane, first Earl of Cadogan.... When Churchill and his wife were travelling in France, a Frenchman, knowing he was connected with poets or players, asked him if he was Churchill the famous poet. “I am not,” said Mrs. Oldfield’s son. “Ma foi!” rejoined the polite Frenchman, “so much the worse for you.”—DR. DORAN.]



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Surely we may have charity for Oldfield, when she dispensed the same virtue to those around her. Towards none did she show it more sweetly than to that disreputable fraud and alleged man of genius, Richard Savage. In his own feverish day Dick Savage cut a literary swath more wide than enviable, but when he is viewed from the unsympathetic light of the present he seems merely a clever vagabond. Yet Dr. Johnson, who could be so stern towards some of his contemporaries, condescended to love the aforesaid vagabond, in a ponderous, elephantine way, and deified him by writing the life of the ingrate, or an apology therefor. Savage had, once upon a time, led the youthful Johnson more than a few feet away from the path of rectitude, but the philosopher forgave, without forgetting, the wiles of the tempter, and treated him with a generosity by no means deserved. In the years of his prosperity—and the remembrance did him credit—Johnson could never forget that Savage and himself had been poor together, and had often wandered through London with hardly a penny to show between them.

* * * * *

“It is melancholy to reflect,” says Boswell, “that Johnson and Savage were sometimes in such extreme indigence that they could not pay for a lodging; so that they have wandered together whole nights in the streets. Yet in these almost incredible scenes of distress, we may suppose that Savage mentioned many of the anecdotes with which Johnson afterwards enriched the life of this unhappy companion, and those of other poets.

“He told Sir Joshua Reynolds, that one night in particular, when Savage and he walked round St. James’s Square for want of a lodging, they were not at all depressed by their situation; but in high spirits and brimful of patriotism, traversed the square for several hours, inveighed against the Minister, and resolved they would *stand by their country*.”

* * * * *

The claim of Savage that he was the illegitimate son of the Countess of Macclesfield—a claim which he was always asserting to the point of coarseness—seems to have been the stock-in-trade of this vagabond’s life. There never was proof that the relationship which he thus flaunted really existed; for, although the conduct of the Countess[A] was unpardonable, the poet could never show that he had been the mysterious infant which had this lady for its mother and Lord Rivers for an unnatural father. The child disappeared, and nothing more was ever known of its existence.

[Footnote A: Anne Mason, wife of Charles Gerrard, first Earl of Macclesfield, was divorced from that nobleman by an Act of Parliament. Another earl, Richard Savage, Lord Rivers, was the co-respondent. This was the same Countess of Macclesfield who subsequently married Cibber’s friend, Colonel Brett.]



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But Savage discovered, or affected to discover, that he was the missing one, and from that moment made the Countess miserable by his importunities for recognition and money, more particularly for the latter. "It was to no purpose," records Dr. Johnson, "that he frequently solicited her to admit him to see her; she avoided him with the most vigilant precaution, and ordered him to be excluded from her house, by whomsoever he might be introduced, and what reason soever he might give for entering it." And the Doctor, who had an abiding and very misplaced confidence in the fellow, adds plaintively: "Savage was at the same time so touched with the discovery of his real mother that it was his frequent practice to walk in the dark evenings for several hours before her door in hopes of seeing her as she might come by accident to the window, or cross her apartment with a candle in her hand."

"Touched with the discovery," forsooth! 'Twas a species of blackmail cloaked in the guise of filial sentiment.

This talented blackguard was wont to pray for alms from Mistress Oldfield; and that dear charitable creature (are not most actresses dear, charitable creatures?) would often waste her practical sympathy upon him. She despised the man, but, with that generosity so characteristic of her craft, was ever ready to relieve his necessities.[A] Well, well, how the glitter from a few guineas can envelop the fragile doner in a golden light, and throw over her faults the soft glow of forgiveness.

[Footnote A: In this (Johnson's) "Life of Savage" 'tis related that Mrs. Oldfield was very fond of Mr. Savage's conversation, and allowed him an annuity during her life of L50. These facts are equally ill-grounded; there was no foundation for them. That Savage's misfortunes pleaded for pity, and had the desired effect on Mrs. Oldfield's compassion, is certain; but she so much disliked the man, and disapproved his conduct, that she never admitted him to her conversation, nor suffered him to enter her house. She indeed often relieved him with such donations as spoke her generous disposition. But this was on the solicitation of friends, who frequently set his calamities before her in the most piteous light; and, from a principle of humanity, she became not a little instrumental in saving his life.—CIBBER'S "Lives of the Poets."]

Savage himself once turned player, and no one must have been more amused thereat than the Oldfield. It happened during the summer of 1723, when the poet, who was in his customary state of (theatrical) destitution, determined to replenish his shabby purse by bringing out a tragedy. While this play, "The Tragedy of Sir Thomas Overbury,"[A] was in rehearsal at Drury Lane, Colley Cibber kept the author in clothes, and the Laureate's son Theophilus, then a very young man, studied the part of Somerset. The principal actors were not in London just then, it being the off season, when the younger players strutted across



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the classic boards of the house, and Savage determined himself to enact Sir Thomas. He did so with melancholy results; even Johnson admits the failure of so presumptuous a leap before the footlights, "for neither his voice, look, nor gesture were such as were expected on the stage; and he was so much ashamed of having been reduced to appear as a player, that he always blotted out his name from the list when a copy of his tragedy was to be shown to his friends." [B]

[Footnote A: Savage, with his usual bad taste, published this tragedy as the work of "Richard Savage, son of the late Earl Rivers."]

[Footnote B: In the publication of his performance he was more successful, for the rays of genius that glimmered in it, that glimmered through all the mists which poverty and Cibber had been able to spread over it, procured him the notice and esteem of many persons eminent for their rank, their virtue, and their wit. Of this play, acted, printed, and dedicated, the accumulated profits arose to an hundred pounds, which he thought at that time a very large sum, having been never master of so much before. In the "Dedication," for which he received ten guineas, there is nothing remarkable. The preface contains a very liberal encomium on the blooming excellence of Mr. Theophilus Cibber, which Mr. Savage could not in the latter part of his life see his friends about to read without snatching the play out of their hands.—DR. JOHNSON.]

What a sublime hypocrite our Richard was, to be sure. That he felt so keenly the disgrace (?) of "having been reduced to appear as a player" was, no doubt, a sentiment intended for the exclusive ear of the great lexicographer, whose prejudice against the stage and its followers was strong to the point of absurdity. Despite the qualms of the poet over exposing his sacred self to the gaze of an audience he had no sensitiveness in receiving the money of an actress, and he was willing enough to have her aid in another direction.

That aid was cheerfully given once upon a time when Savage came dangerously near the scaffold. This prince of scamps and wanderer among the beery precincts of pot-houses happened to stroll one night, accompanied by two choice spirits (and himself full of spirits) into a disreputable coffee-house near Charing Cross. The three men rudely pushed their way into a parlour where some other roisterers were drinking; the intrusion was naturally resented, and as each and every one of the party chanced to be better filled with wine than with politeness, a brawl was the consequence. Swords were drawn and Savage killed a Mr. Sinclair, after which drunken act he cut the head of a barmaid who tried to hold him. Then more swearing, shrieking and sword-thrusting, a cry for soldiers, a flight from the coffee-house, and an almost instant arrest. A pretty picture, was it not?

When Savage was put on trial for his life, he pleaded that the killing of Sinclair was done in self-defence, and his acquittal would probably have followed but for the shrewdness of the prosecution. This prosecution was conducted by Francis Page, whose severity Pope immortalised in the lines:



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“Slander or poison dread from Delia’s rage
Hard-words or hanging—if your judge be Page.”

Page surely understood human nature, or that portion of it appertaining to the average jurymen, and he disposed of Mr. Savage’s defence by one well-directed blow when he said to the good men and true: “Gentlemen of the jury, you are to consider that Mr. Savage is a very great man, a much greater man than you or I, gentlemen of the jury; that he wears very fine clothes, much finer clothes than you or I, gentlemen of the jury; that he has abundance of money in his pocket, much more money than you or I, gentlemen of the jury; but, gentlemen of the jury, is it not a very hard case, gentlemen of the jury, that Mr. Savage should therefore kill you, or me, gentlemen of the jury.”

Whereupon the defendant began to make a speech in his own behalf, but his flow of eloquence was quenched by the judge, and the jury soon found Savage as well as Gregory, one of his companions in the drunken broil, to be guilty of murder. Many influences were now brought to bear on Queen Caroline, consort of George II., to secure a pardon for the rascal, but that good lady was for a time obdurate. She had heard a few choice stories anent the man, and among them, one which Dr. Johnson glosses over in this way: “Mr. Savage, when he had discovered his birth, had an incessant desire to speak to his mother, who always avoided him in public, and refused him admission into her house. One evening walking, as it was his custom, in the street that she inhabited, he saw the door of her house by accident open, he entered it, and, finding no person in the passage to hinder him, went upstairs to salute her. She discovered him before he entered her chamber, alarmed the family with the most distressful outcries, and when she had by her screams gathered them about her, ordered them to drive out of the house that villain who had forced himself in upon her and endeavoured to murder her. Savage, who had attempted with the most submissive tenderness to soften her rage, hearing her utter so detestable an accusation, thought it prudent to retire.”

Thus the Queen refused to interfere until the Countess of Hertford pleaded the cause of the imprisoned poet. In the meantime Mistress Oldfield interceded with the mighty Robert Walpole, and the result of all this wire-pulling was that Savage received the king’s pardon,[A] being thus left free to continue the persecution of his alleged mother, to beg from friends and strangers alike, and to follow a mode of life which scandalised even his kindly biographer. And when Oldfield, the latchets of whose shoes he was not worthy to tie, played her last part and passed away from the earthly stage, Richard wore mourning for her, as for a mother, “but did not celebrate her in elegies;[B] because he knew that too great profusion of praise would only have revived those faults which his natural equity did not allow him to think less because they were committed by one who favoured him; but of which, though his virtue would not endeavour to palliate them, his gratitude would not suffer him to prolong the memory or diffuse the censure.”

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[Footnote A: March 1728. It is cheerful to know that Mr. Gregory also escaped hanging. It was contended during the trial, and afterwards, that the testimony against both these defendants was more damning than the facts warranted.]

[Footnote B: Nevertheless Savage did write a poem in Oldfield's honour, although he did not sign his virtuous name thereto. The verses are quoted by Chetwood. *Vide* Chapter XI.]

Poor, crusty Samuel! what rot you could write now and then, and how you did hate players and their craft. But may not the bewildered reader ask how the aphorisms of the doctor and the disreputable affairs of Savage concern that home life of Nance to which the chapter is presumably consecrated? In answer the writer can only cry "Peccavi," and, having done so, will sin boldly again by giving one more anecdote. The story concerns Savage, but Steele is the hero of it, and as winsome Dick is always welcome, we may take leave of the other Dick in a pleasant way.

Savage was once desired by Sir Richard (says Johnson), with an air of the utmost importance, to come very early to his house the next morning. Mr. Savage came as he had promised, found the chariot at the door, and Sir Richard waiting for him and ready to go out. What was intended, and whither they were to go, Savage could not conjecture, and was not willing to inquire; but immediately seated himself with Sir Richard. The coachman was ordered to drive, and they hurried with the utmost expedition to Hyde Park Corner, where they stopped at a petty tavern and retired to a private room. Sir Richard then informed him that he intended to publish a pamphlet, and that he had desired him to come thither that he might write for him. He soon sat down to the work. Sir Richard dictated, and Savage wrote, till the dinner that had been ordered was put upon the table. Savage was surprised at the meanness of the entertainment, and after some hesitation ventured to ask for wine, which Sir Richard, not without reluctance, ordered to be brought. They then finished their dinner, and proceeded in their pamphlet, which they concluded in the afternoon.

Mr. Savage then imagined his task over, and expected that Sir Richard would call for the reckoning and return home; but his expectations deceived him, for Sir Richard told him that he was without money, and that the pamphlet must be sold before the dinner could be paid for; and Savage was therefore obliged to go and offer their new production to sale for two guineas, which with some difficulty he obtained. Sir Richard then returned home, having retired that day only to avoid his creditors, and composed the pamphlet only to discharge his reckoning.



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Savage also told Johnson another merry tale of careless Dick. "Sir Richard Steele having one day invited to his house a great number of persons of the first quality, they were surprised at the number of liveries which surrounded the table; and after dinner, when wine and mirth had set them free from the observation of a rigid ceremony, one of them inquired of Sir Richard how such an expensive train of domestics could be consistent with his fortune. Sir Richard very frankly confessed that they were fellows of whom he would very willingly be rid. And being then asked why he did not discharge them, declared that they were bailiffs, who had introduced themselves with an execution, and whom, since he could not send them away, he had thought it convenient to embellish with liveries, that they might do him credit while they stayed. His friends were diverted with the expedient, and by paying the debt discharged their attendants, having obliged Sir Richard to promise that they should never again find him graced with a retinue of the same kind."

These little pleasantries are echoes of the halcyon days when Steele thought Savage a very fine fellow, made him an allowance and even proposed to become the poet's father-in-law. But the recipient of all this favour was caddish enough to ridicule his patron, a kind friend mentioned the fact to Sir Richard, and the knight shut his doors on the ingrate. Let us, likewise, give the fellow his *conge*.

CHAPTER VIII

THE MIMIC WORLD

We have seen that Oldfield affected to despise tragedy, and was wont to suggest Mistress Porter as a lady better suited than herself to the purposes of train-bearing. And as the present chapter will be devoted to a few of Nance's contemporaries let us linger, if only for an instant, over the imposing memory of one whom cynical Horace Walpole thought even finer than Garrick in certain scenes of passion. This "ornament to human nature," as a biographer warmly called the Porter, played her first childish part in a Lord Mayor's pageant during the reign of James II., appearing as the Genius of Britain, and incidentally falling under the august notice of another genius of Britain, the great Mr. Betterton. That worthy man regarded the little girl with prophetic eyes, saw in her a wealth of undeveloped talent, and was soon instructing the chit in the mysteries of dramatic art. Sometimes the actress-in-miniature revolted, poor mite ("she should have been in the nursery, the minx," says some practical reader) and then noble Thomas would give vent to an awful threat. She must speak and act as she was directed, or else—horrible thought—the child should be thrown into the basket of an orange-girl and buried under one of the vine leaves which hid the luscious fruit! And with that punishment hanging over her, the novice went on learning and originating, until one day London woke up to find a new tragedienne within its boundaries.



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[Illustration: Mr. Mills, Mrs. Porter, Mr. Cibber.]

'Twas a tragedienne, be it added, who possessed no wonderful charm of person. She was pleasing in figure and bearing, but her voice was naturally harsh, her features did not shine forth loveliness, and when the scene wherein she walked called neither for vehemence of feeling, nor melting tenderness, her elocution became a monotonous cadence.[A] Yet in moments of dramatic excitement, or in places where the deep note of pathos had to be sounded, Porter played with a distinction that either thrilled the spectator or reduced him to the verge of tears. She threw cadence and monotony to the four winds of heaven, or rather to the four corners of the stage, and spoke with the earnestness of one inspired.

[Footnote A: Mrs. Porter was tall, fair, well-shaped, and easy and dignified in action. But she was not handsome, and her voice had a small degree of tremor. Moreover, she imitated, or, rather, faultily exceeded, Mrs. Barry in the habit of prolonging and toning her pronunciation, sometimes to a degree verging upon a chant; but whether it was that the public ear was at that period accustomed to a demi-chant, or that she threw off the defect in the heat of passion, it is certain that her general judgment and genius, in the highest bursts of tragedy, inspired enthusiasm in all around her, and that she was thought to be alike mistress of the terrible and the tender.—THOMAS CAMPBELL.]

As Queen Catherine Mrs. Porter was all mournful grace and dignity, as Lady Macbeth she breathed of battle, murder and sudden death, and in the role of Belvidera she showed yet another phase of her incomparable art. "I remember Mrs. Porter, to whom nature had been so niggard in voice and face, so great in many parts, as Lady Macbeth, Alicia in 'Jane Shore,' Hermione in the 'Distressed Mother,' and many parts of the kind, that her great action, eloquence of look and gesture, moved astonishment; and yet I have heard her declare she left the action to the possession of the sentiments in the part she performed." Thus wrote Chetwood, whose good fortune it was to see Oldfield, and Porter, and a host of other famous players, not forgetting, in later days, the wonderful Garrick himself.

Unlike several of her ilk, Mistress Porter could play the heroine off the stage as well as on. She lived at Heywoodhill, near Hendon, and used to wend her way homeward every night, at the conclusion of the play, in a one-horse chaise. The roads were dangerous, and highwaymen lurked in the neighbourhood, but the actress put her faith in Providence—and a brace of pistols which she always carried. The pistols came very nicely to her rescue one evening when a robber waylaid the chaise and put to the traveller the conventional question as to whether she most valued her money or her life. Nothing daunted by the impertinence of this ethical query, Mrs. Porter pointed one of the weapons at the intruder, and he, so goes



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the story, gracefully surrendered, for the reason that he was himself without firearms. The man made the best of the situation, however, by assuring the occupant of the vehicle that he was “no common thief,” and had been driven to his present course by the wants of a starving family. He told her, at the same time, where he lived, and urged his distresses with such earnestness, that she spared him all the money in her purse, which was about ten guineas.[A]

[Footnote A: Bellchambers’ “Memoirs.” This episode happened in the summer of 1731.]

Thereupon the highwayman departed, and Mrs. Porter whipped up her horse. In her excitement she must have used the lash too freely, for the animal started to run, the chaise was overturned, and the actress dislocated her thigh bone. When she had in part recovered from the accident, the victim made up a purse of sixty pounds, subscribed among her friends, and sent it to the poverty-stricken family of the desperado. How Nance would have laughed at the story had she been at the theatre to hear it told. But there was no more merriment for this daughter of smiles; she was lying cold and still amid the stony grandeur of Westminster Abbey.

Poor Porter outlived Oldfield for more than thirty years and, having also outlived an annuity settled upon herself, spent her declining days in what polite writers call straightened circumstances. One of the closing scenes of her career shows us a meeting between this veteran of the stage and Dr. Johnson, who could allow his kindness of heart and sense of generosity to overcome his hatred of things theatrical. It is easy to imagine the whole interview: the shrunken face of the Porter beaming all over with an appreciation of the honour paid her, and the Doctor full of benevolence and patronising courtesy, even to the extent of drinking cheap tea without a grumble. After the philosopher takes his leave he will likewise take with him a vivid memory of the beldam’s many wrinkles—so many, indeed, that “a picture of old age in the abstract might have been taken from her countenance.”[A]

[Footnote A: Dr. Johnson was pleased to avow that “Mrs. Porter in the vehemence of rage, and Mrs. Clive in the sprightliness of humour, he had never seen equalled.”]

Of a different calibre was Lacy Ryan, an ill-trained genius who could shine pretty well in both tragedy and comedy and from whom, according to Foote,

“... succeeding Richards took the cue,
And hence his style, if not the colour, drew.”[A]

[Footnote A: Justice has scarcely been done to Ryan’s merit. Garrick, on going with Woodward to see his Richard with a view of being amused, owned that he was astonished at the genius and power he saw struggling to make itself felt through the



burden of ill-training, uncouth gestures, and an ungraceful and slovenly figure. He was generous enough to own that all the merit there was in his own playing of Richard he had drawn from studying this less fortunate player.—PERCY FITZGERALD.]



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Like Mrs. Porter, Ryan was a youthful disciple of Betterton, and was brought to the notice of Roscius in a curious fashion. One day, when Lacy had just begun, as a boy of sixteen or seventeen, to court the dramatic muses, he was cast for the role of Seyton, the old officer who attends on Macbeth, and was, no doubt, charmed with the assignment. To wait upon Macbeth, in however humble a capacity, was in itself no mean honour, and when the aforesaid Macbeth would be Betterton himself, the importance of the task was re-doubled.

That afternoon Ryan came on the stage in all the glory of a full-bottomed wig (imagine playing Shakespeare these days with full-bottomed wigs) and a smiling young face, being very much pleased with himself and the world in general. To Betterton, who had expected to see in Seyton a henchman of mature years, and who up to this moment had been unconscious of Lacy's existence, the appearance of the boy came as a shock. Had the witches of the tragedy been turned into beautiful children he could not have been more surprised. However, he gave the new Seyton an encouraging look, and the stripling played the part in a way to earn the approbation of the great actor. After the performance was over, Betterton scolded old Downes, the prompter, for "sending a child to him instead of a man advanced in years."

This anecdote seems to show that the art of "make-up" had not reached perfection in those times, for a few well-put strokes of the pencil should have destroyed the juvenile aspect of Seyton. It must not be supposed, nevertheless, that the decoration of the face was unknown, and an entry in Pepys' delightful diary proves that "make-up" of a certain kind flourished at the Restoration. "To the King's house," says Pepys, "and there going in met with Knipp, and she took us up into the tireing-rooms;[A] and to the women's shift, where Nell (Gwyne) was dressing herself, and was all unready, and is very pretty, prettier than I thought. (Imagine the gloating eyes of the old hypocrite.) And into the scene-room, and there sat down, and she gave us fruit: and here I read the questions to Knipp, while she answered me, through all her part of 'Flora's Figarys,' which was acted to-day. But, Lord! to see how they were both painted, would make a man mad, and did make me loath them: and what base company of men comes among them; and how loudly they talk! And how poor the men are in clothes, and yet what a show they make on the stage by candle-light, is very observable. But to see how Nell cursed, for having so few people in the pit, was strange," *et cetera*. [B]

[Footnote A: Mrs. Knipp was an actress belonging to the King's Company and Mr. Pepys had for her a timid admiration.]

[Footnote B: In his notes to Cibber's "Apology," Lowe suggests the plausible theory that young actors playing "juveniles" did not use any "make-up" or paint, but went on the stage with their natural complexion. He instances this paragraph from Cibber: "The first thing that enters into the head of a young actor is that of being a heroe: In this ambition I was soon snubb'd by the insufficiency of my voice; to which might be added an uniform'd meagre person (tho' then not ill-made) with a dismal pale complexion."]



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To leave the merry days of Charles II, and wander back to those of Queen Anne, it may be said that Ryan made his first success as the Marcus in the original production of "Cato." It was a success rather added to than otherwise by an adventure of which this actor was the unfortunate victim. "In the run of that celebrated tragedy," writes Chetwood, "he was accidentally brought into a fray with some of our Tritons on the Thames; and, in the scuffle, a blow on the nose was given him by one of these water-bullies, who neither regard men or manners. I remember, the same night, as he was brought on the bier, after his suppos'd death in the fourth act of 'Cato,' the blood, from the real wound in the face, gush'd out with violence; that hurt had no other effect than just turning his nose a little, tho' not to deformity; yet some people imagine it gave a very small alteration to the tone of his voice, tho' nothing disagreeable." And a very good advertisement it was, no doubt.

In later years another much-discussed accident befell Mr. Ryan. As he was going home from the theatre one night, the actor was attacked by a footpad, and received in his face two bullets which broke a portion of his jaw. "By the help of a lamp [again is the quotation from Chetwood] the robber knew Mr. Ryan, as I have been inform'd, begg'd his pardon for his mistake, and ran off. Of this hurt, too, he recover'd, after a long illness, and play'd with success, as before, without any seeming alteration of voice or face. His Royal Highness, upon this accident (was it the Prince of Wales, afterwards George II?) sent him a handsome present; and others, of the nobility, copy'd the laudable example of the second illustrious person in the three kingdoms."

This was Lacy Ryan, who in his time played many different parts, among them Iago, Hamlet, Macduff, Captain Plume, and Orestes. He was not in any sense of the word a great actor, but he well adorned the station of theatrical life in which it had pleased heaven to place him, and strutted his lengthy hour upon the stage with much satisfaction to his companions and the public. Even when Ryan had to kill a bully in self-defence (it was a fellow named Kelly, who loved to haunt the coffee-houses, pick quarrels with peaceable citizens, and then half murder them), the world looked on approvingly, and averred that the player had acted with his usual conscientiousness.

Another contemporary of Nance was Benjamin Johnson,[A] who achieved curiously enough some of his greatest successes in the plays of his namesake, the other Ben Jonson. He began life as a scene painter, but afterwards turned his attention to the front, rather than the back, of the stage—or, as he would humorously explain, "left the saint's occupation to take that of a sinner." Johnson seems to have been a man of the world, and he saw a good deal of life, even though he never passed through the rough-and-tumble adventures of Lacy Ryan. When he was born (1665) Betterton dominated the boards; when he died (1742) Garrick had become the talk of London; and it is probable that in his latter years Ben could tell many a story of interesting experiences.



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[Footnote A: Ben Johnson excelled greatly in all his namesake's comedies, then frequently acted. He was of all comedians the chastest and closest observer of nature. Johnson never seemed to know that he was before an audience; he drew his character as the poet designed it.—DAVIES.]

There was one story, at least, that this actor used to relate with much unction after a visit which he once paid to Dublin. The hero of the affair was an Irishman, named Baker, who relieved the monotony of his work as a master pavior by acting Sir John Falstaff and other parts. When he was in the streets, overseeing the labours of his men, this pavior-artist usually rehearsed one of his characters, muttering the lines, gesticulating, and almost forgetting that he was without the sacred walls of a theatre. The workmen soon got accustomed to these out-of-door performances, and everything proceeded with the utmost smoothness, until one exciting day when Baker chanced to be alone with two new paviers. These recruits (countrymen from Cheshire) were much alarmed at a sudden change in the demeanour of their master, whose eyes began to roll and lips to move under the pressure of some strange emotion. Baker was merely rehearsing Falstaff; but the two men made up their little minds that he had lost his head, and they felt quite sure that their employer was a dangerous lunatic, when he gave them a piercing glance, and cried:

“Soft! who are you? Sir Walter Blunt: there’s honour for you! here’s no vanity! I am as hot as molten lead, and as heavy too. God keep lead out of me!”

“Wauns! I’se blunt enough to take care of you, I’se warrant you,” shouted one of the workmen, who had now recovered what he presumed to be his wits, and thereupon he and his companion laid violent hands on Baker. A crowd soon gathered, and despite the indignant cries of the master-pavior, who declared he was never more sane, this son of Thespis was tied hand and foot, and carried home in triumph with a howling mob for attendants. That ended Mr. Baker’s rehearsal for the nonce; and it is to be presumed that, when next he essayed the lusty Sir John, he made sure of an appreciative audience.

It is a seductive occupation to delve into the lives of these bygone players, and there is always temptation to tarry long and lovingly amid such chequered careers. But, like poor Joe, of Dickens, we must keep moving on, and so leave Johnson and Baker for another actor who waits to strut across the stage of these “Palmy Days.” Thomas Elrington is the new-comer; the same Elrington who sought to outshine the tragic Barton Booth, without possessing either the genius or the scholarship of that noble son of Melpomene. As a boy, Thomas was apprenticed by an impecunious father to an upholsterer in Covent Garden, but he cared more for the theatre than for his trade, and was, no doubt, regarded by his employer as a future candidate for the gallows.

* * * * *

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“I remember when he was an apprentice,” relates Chetwood, “we play’d in several private plays; when we were preparing to act ‘Sophonisba, or Hannibal’s Overthrow,’ after I had wrote out my part of Massiva I carried him the book of the play to study the part of King Masinissa. I found him finishing a velvet cushion, and gave him the book: but alas! before he could secrete it, his master (a hot, voluble Frenchman), came in upon us, and the book was thrust under the velvet of the cushion. His master, as usual, rated him for not working, with a ‘Morbleu! why a you not vark, Tom?’ and stood over him so long that I saw, with some mortification, the book irrecoverably stitch’d up in the cushion never to be retriev’d till the cushion is worn to pieces. Poor Tom cast many a desponding look upon me when he was finishing the fate of the play, while every stitch went to both our hearts.

“His master observing our looks, turn’d to me, and with words that broke their necks over each other for haste, abused both of us. The most intelligible of his great number of words were Jack Pudenges, and the like expressions of contempt. But our play was gone for ever.

“Another time,” continues the biographer, “we were so bold to attempt Shakespeare’s ‘Hamlet,’ where our ‘prentice Tom had the part of the Ghost, father to young Hamlet. His armour was composed of pasteboard, neatly painted. The Frenchman had intelligence of what we were about, and to our great surprise and mortification, made one of our audience. The Ghost in its first appearance is dumb to Horatio. While these scenes past, the Frenchman only muttered between his teeth, and we were in hopes his passion would subside; but when our Ghost began his first speech to Hamlet, ‘Mark me,’ he replied, ‘Begar, me vil marke you presently!’ and, without saying any more, beat our poor Ghost off the stage through the street, while every stroke on the pasteboard armour grieved the auditors (because they did not pay for their seats), insomuch that three or four ran after the Ghost, and brought him back in triumph, with the avenging Frenchman at his heels, who would not be appeas’d till our Ghost promised him never to commit the offence of acting again. A promise made, like many others, never to be kept.”

* * * * *

Elrington ultimately became a favourite player with Dublin audiences, and then contested with Booth in the latter’s own ground of London. He never equalled the classic Barton, yet made a success in tragedy, and was once asked (1728-9) to join the forces of Drury Lane for a term of years. He told the managers that he could not think of permanently leaving Ireland, where he was so well rewarded for his services, and added, “There is not a gentleman’s house there to which I am not a welcome visitor,” which shows that an actor can be a snob, like the worst of us.

When Elrington died, two years after the taking off of Oldfield, his epitaph was written in these flattering lines:—



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“Thou best of actors here interr’d,
No more thy charming voice is heard,
This grave thy corse contains:
Thy better part, which us’d to move
Our admiration, and our Love,
Has fled its sad remains.

“Tho’ there’s no monumental brass,
Thy sacred relicks to encase,
Thou wondrous man of art!
A lover of the muse divine,
O! Elrington, shall be thy shrine,
And carve thee in his heart.”

One of Elrington’s friends and artistic associates happened to be John Evans, a player possessed of talent, fatness, and indolence. As adventures seem to be in order in this chapter, let us recall two which occurred to this gentleman at a time when he was in high favour with the Irish. The first episode, making a warlike prologue to the second, had for its scene a tavern in the good city of Cork, where Evans had been invited to sup by some officers stationed in the neighbourhood. Jack responded gladly to the hospitable suggestion; the gathering proved a great success, the wine was circulated generously, and many toasts were offered. When the actor was called upon for a sentiment, he proposed the health of his gracious sovereign, Anne, whereat all in the company were pleased with the exception of one disloyal redcoat. Whether the latter had within him the contrariness which cometh with too liberal dalliance with the flowing bowl, or whether he chanced to be a Jacobite, further deponent sayeth not, but it is at least certain that the officer was not pleased at the honour paid to the Queen whose uniform he was willing to wear. So Mr. Malcontent leaves the room, and then sends up word to poor, inoffensive Jack, that he will be delighted to see that worthy below stairs; whereupon Jack quietly steals away and finds his would-be antagonist lurking behind a half-opened door. The soldier makes a lunge with his sword at the player, who succeeds in disarming the coward, and there the matter apparently stops.

But the end was not yet. When Evans went to Dublin, he found that his late challenger was circulating a lie, which made it appear that the comedian had in some wise affronted the whole British Army. No sooner did Jack put his face upon the stage than a great clamour arose, and it was decreed by the bullies among the audience (of whom there are ever a few in every house), that no play should be presented until the culprit had publicly begged pardon for a sin which he never committed. The play was “The Rival Queens,” the part assigned to Evans that of Alexander, but ’twas some time before this Alexander could be induced to crave the forgiveness of the excitable Dublinites. Finally he yielded to expediency, and, coming forward to the centre of the stage, expressed his contrition. At this, a puppy in the pit cried out “Kneel, you rascal!” and Evans, now

thoroughly exasperated, tartly answered: “No, you rascal! I’ll kneel to none but God, and my Queen.” Then the performance began.[A]



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[Footnote A: “As there were many worthy gentlemen of the army who knew the whole affair, the new rais’d clamour ceas’d, and the play went through without any molestation, and, by degrees, things return’d to their proper channel By this we may see, it is some danger for an actor to be in the right.”—CHETWOOD.]

How Chetwood bubbles over with a stream of ever-flowing anecdote. Much that he gives us in his “General History of the Stage” is only gossip, yet what is there more fascinating than tittle-tattle about players? The gossip of the drawing-room is merely inane, or else scandalous; but shift the scene to the theatre, and a story no longer bores; it is consecrated by the sacrament of interest. Is any apology necessary, therefore, if the quotation marks be again brought into requisition. This time the anecdote is of Thomas Griffith, an excellent comedian, and a harmless poet.

“After his commencing actor, he contracted a friendship with Mr. Wilks; which chain remained unbroke till the death of that excellent comedian. Tho’ Mr. Griffith was very young, Mr. Wilks took him with him to London (from Dublin), and had him entered for that season at a small salary. The ‘Indian Emperor’ being ordered on a sudden to be played, the part of Pizarro, a Spaniard, was wanting, which Mr. Griffith procured, with some difficulty. Mr. Betterton being a little indisposed, would not venture out to rehearsal, for fear of increasing his indisposition, to the disappointment of the audience, who had not seen our young stripling rehearse. But, when he came ready, at the entrance, his ears were pierced with a voice not familiar to him. He cast his eyes upon the stage, where he beheld the diminutive Pizarro, with a truncheon as long as himself (his own words.)

“He steps up to Downs, the prompter, and cry’d, ‘Zounds, Downs, what sucking scaramouch have you sent on there?’ ‘Sir,’ replied Downs, ‘He’s good enough for a Spaniard; the part is small.’ Betterton return’d, ‘If he had made his eyebrows his whiskers, and each whisker a line, the part would have been two lines too much for such a monkey in buskins.’

“Poor Griffith stood on the stage, near the door, and heard every syllable of the short dialogue, and by his fears knew who was meant by it; but, happy for him, he had no more to speak that scene. When the first act was over (by the advice of Downs) he went to make his excuse with—‘Indeed, Sir, I had not taken the part, but there was only I alone out of the play.’ ‘I! I!’ reply’d Betterton, with a smile, ‘Thou art but the tittle of an I.’ Griffith seeing him in no ill humour told him, ‘Indians ought to be the best figures on the stage, as nature had made them.’ ‘Very like,’ reply’d Betterton, ‘but it would be a double death to an Indian cobbler to be conquer’d by such a weazle of a Spaniard as thou art. And, after this night, let me never see a truncheon in thy hand again, unless to stir the fire.’ ... He took his advice, laid aside the buskin, and stuck to the sock, in which he made a figure equal to most of his contemporaries.



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“Our genius flutters with the plumes of youth,
But observation wings to steady truth.”

No one can resist telling another story, this time of fat Charles Hulet, whose abilities were only equalled by his corpulence. Having been apprenticed to a bookseller, he straightway proceeded to take a violent interest in the drama, and would often while away the evenings by spouting Shakespeare and other authors. In lieu of a company to support him young Hulet would designate each chair in the kitchen to represent one of the characters in the play he was reciting. “One night, as he was repeating the part of Alexander, with his wooden representative of Clytus (an old elbow-chair), and coming to the speech where the old General is to be kill’d, this young mock Alexander snatch’d a poker instead of a javelin, and threw it with such strength against poor Clytus, that the chair was kill’d upon the spot, and lay mangled on the floor. The death of Clytus made a monstrous noise, which disturbed the master in the parlour, who called out to know the reason; and was answered by the cook below, ‘Nothing, sir, but that Alexander has kill’d Clytus.’”

* * * * *

In latter days Hulet took great pride in the sonorous tones of his voice, and loved nothing more dearly than to steal up behind a man and startle the unsuspecting one by giving a very loud “Hem.” It was a “Hem,” however, which helped to make the actor’s winding-sheet, for one fine day he repeated the trick, burst a blood-vessel, and died within twenty-four hours.

Heaven bless all these merry vagabonds! We may not always wish to follow in their footsteps, but we like to keep near them and pry into their careless, happy lives. When the Bohemians enter a pot-house we are too virtuous, presumably, to go in likewise, but we stand without, to get a tempting whiff of hot negus and a snatch of some genial jest or tuneful song. Then, if our players stray, perchance, into the gloomy precincts of a pawn-shop, are we not quite prepared to steal up to the window and discover what tribute is being paid to mine uncle? And so, speaking of pot-houses, and negus, and pawn-shops, let us end our extracts from the invaluable Chetwood with this unconventional reminiscence of another player, Mr. John Thurmond. It was a custom at that time for persons of the first rank and distinction to give their birthday suits to the most favoured actors. I think Mr. Thurmond was honoured by General Ingolsby with his. But his finances being at the last tide of ebb, the rich suit was put in buckle (a cant word for forty in the hundred interest). One night, notice was given that the General would be present with the Government at the play, and all the performers on the stage were preparing to dress out in the suits presented. The spouse of Johnny (as he was commonly called) try’d all her arts to persuade Mr. Holdfast, the pawnbroker (as it fell out, his real name) to let go the cloaths for that



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evening, to be returned when the play was over. But all arguments were fruitless; nothing but the Ready, or a pledge of full equal value. Such people would have despised a Demosthenes, or a Cicero, with all their rhetorical flourishes, if their oratorian gowns had been in pledge. Well! what must be done? The whole family in confusion and all at their wits-end; disgrace, with her glaring eyes and extended mouth, ready to devour. Fatal appearance!

* * * * *

“At last Winny, the wife (that is, Winnifrede), put on a compos’d countenance (but, alas! with a troubled heart); stepp’d to a neighbouring tavern, and bespoke a very hot negus, to comfort Johnny in the great part he was to perform that night, begging to have the silver tankard with the lid, because, as she said, ‘a covering, and the vehicle silver, would retain heat longer than any other metal,’ The request was comply’d with, the negus carry’d to the playhouse piping hot, popp’d into a vile earthen mug—the tankard *l’argent* travelled *incog.* under her apron (like the Persian ladies veil’d), popp’d into the pawnbroker’s hands, in exchange for the suit—put on and play’d its part, with the rest of the wardrobe; when its duty was over, carried back to remain in its old depository; the tankard return’d the right road; and, when the tide flowed with its lunar influence, the stranded suit was wafted into safe harbour again, after paying a little for ‘dry docking,’ which was all the damage received.”

* * * * *

And Mr. Chetwood adds:

“Thus woman’s wit (tho’ some account it evil)
With artful wiles can overreach the Devil.”

Among such as these, good, bad and indifferent, moral and otherwise, did Mistress Oldfield pass what hours she consecrated to the theatre. In the early years, when merely a poor, struggling postulant before the altar of fame, the girl must have been more or less intimate with her dramatic associates, but as time went on and Nance blazed into a star of the first magnitude, the old feeling of fellowship may have become weakened. Not that the actress was in any sense snobbish; rather let it be said that the circumstances of her celebrity proved quite enough, in the course of human affairs, to separate her from the other players. Indeed, one of her biographers relates that Oldfield always went in state to Drury Lane, accompanied by two footmen, and that she seldom spoke to any one of the actors.[A]

[Footnote A: She always went to the house (*i.e.*, the theatre) in the same dress she had worn at dinner in her visits to the houses of great people; for she was much caressed on



account of her general merit, and her connection with Mr. Churchill. She used to go to the playhouse in a chair, attended by two footmen; she seldom spoke to any one of the actors, and was allowed a sum of money to buy her own clothes.—“General Biographical Dictionary.”]



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Nance may have made her entry into the green-room amid royal auspices, but who can for a second believe that “she seldom spoke to any one of the actors”? There was in her composition too much of sunshine to warrant any such belief, and then we know that behind the scenes she was ever affable and friendly. If she did not brook familiarity which comes of contempt, and if she moved about among her companions with dignity, then so much the better.

Of Nance’s sweetness of temper and sterling common-sense, Cibber has left us an attractive memory. It seems that when the Drury Lane management determined to revive “The Provoked Wife” of Sir John Vanbrugh (January 1726), Colley suggested that Wilks should take a rest during the run of the piece, and allow Barton Booth to play the lover, Constant. The idea did not meet with Wilks’ approval; “down dropt his brow, and fur’d were his features”; and the green-room became the scene of a violent spat between Cibber and himself, with Mrs. Oldfield and other members of the company as excited listeners. Finally the author of the “Apology” said: “Are you not every day complaining of your being over-labour’d? And now, upon the first offering to ease you, you fly into a passion, and pretend to make that a greater grievance than t’other: But, Sir, if your being in or out of the play is a hardship, you shall impose it upon yourself: The part is in your hand, and to us it is a matter of indifference now whether you take it or leave it.”

[Illustration: SIR JOHN VANBRUGH By Sir GODFREY KNELLER]

Upon this Mr. Wilks “threw down the part upon the table, crossed his arms, and sate knocking his heel upon the floor, as seeming to threaten most when he said least.” Hereupon Booth generously yielded up the much disputed Constant to his rival with the remark that “for his part, he saw no such great matter in acting every day; for he believed it the wholsomest exercise in the world; it kept the spirits in motion, and always gave him a good stomach”—and the elegant Barton, be it remembered, was a great eater.

* * * * *

“Here,” says Cibber, “I observed Mrs. Oldfield began to titter behind her fan. But Wilks being more intent upon what Booth had said, reply’d, every one could best feel for himself, but he did not pretend to the strength of a pack-horse; therefore if Mrs. Oldfield would chuse anybody else to play with her, he should be very glad to be excus’d. This throwing the negative upon Mrs. Oldfield was, indeed, a sure way to save himself; which I could not help taking notice of, by saying it was making but an ill compliment to the company to suppose there was but one man in it fit to play an ordinary part with her.



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“Here Mrs. Oldfield got up, and turning me half round to come forward, said with her usual frankness, ‘Pooh! you are all a parcel of fools, to make such a rout about nothing!’ Rightly judging that the person most out of humour would not be more displeased at her calling us all by the same name. As she knew, too, the best way of ending the debate would be to help the weak, she said, she hop’d Mr. Wilks would not so far mind what had past as to refuse his acting the part with her; for tho’ it might not be so good as he had been us’d to, yet she believed those who had bespoke the play would expect to have it done to the best advantage, and it would make but an odd story abroad if it were known there had been any difficulty in that point among ourselves. To conclude, Wilks had the part.”

Verily, Oldfield was a gentlewoman.

CHAPTER IX

“GRIEF A LA MODE”

“UNDERTAKER [*To his men*]. Well, come you that are to be mourners in this house, put on your sad looks, and walk by me that I may sort you. Ha, you! a little more upon the dismal; [*forming their countenances*] this fellow has a good mortal look—place him near the corpse: that wainscot face must be o’ top of the stairs; that fellow’s almost in a fright (that looks as if he were full of some strange misery) at the entrance to the hall. So—but I’ll fix you all myself. Let’s have no laughing now on any provocation. [*Makes faces.*] Look yonder, that hale, well-looking puppy! You ungrateful scoundrel, did not I pity you, take you out of a great man’s service, and shew you the pleasure of receiving wages? Did not I give you ten, then fifteen, now twenty shillings a week, to be sorrowful? and the more I give you, I think, the gladder you are.

“*Enter a BOY.*

“BOY. Sir, the grave-digger of St. Timothy’s in the Fields would speak with you.

“UNDERTAKER. Let him come in.

“*Enter GRAVE-DIGGER.*

“GRAVE-DIGGER. I carried home to your house the shroud the gentleman was buried in last night; I could not get his ring off very easilly, therefore I brought you the finger and all; and, sir, the sexton gives his service to you, and desires to know whether you’d have any bodies removed or not: if not, he’ll let them be in their graves a week longer.

“UNDERTAKER. Give him my service; I can’t tell readilly: but our friend, Dr. Passeport, with the powder, has promised me six or seven funerals this week.”

* * * * *

These extracts are not from the manuscript of a modern farce-comedy,[A] but belong to Steele's play of "The Funeral, or Grief a la Mode." If they have about them all the air of *fin-de-siecle* wit, so much the more eloquently do they testify to the freshness of Dick's satire. Freshness, satire, and death! Surely the three ingredients seem unmixable; yet when poured into the crucible of Steele's genius they resulted in a crystal that sparkled delightfully amid the lights of a theatre—a crystal which might still shed brilliancy if some enterprising manager would exhibit it to a jaded public.



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[Footnote A: In “A Milk White Flag,” a good specimen of “up-to-date” farce, Mr. Hoyt dallies entertainingly and discreetly with the blithesome topics of undertakers, corpses, and widows.]

In “The Funeral” the author impaled, with many a merciless slash of the pen, the hypocrisy and vulgar flummery that characterised the whole gruesome ceremony of conducting to its earthly resting-place the body of a well-to-do sinner. For the average Englishman loved a funeral and all its ghastly accompaniments as passionately as though he had Irish blood in his veins, and often insisted upon investing the burial of his friends with the mockery, rather than the sincerity, of woe.

Grief thus became a pleasure, and it was a pleasure, be it added, which was not taken too sadly. (Pardon the paradox.) The spirits of the deceased's many admirers had to be raised, and the enlivening process was set in motion by means of numerous libations, not of tea, but of lusty wine. When the wife of mine host of the “Crown and Sceptre” left this world of cooking and drinking, the women who crowded to the good lady's funeral had to drown their sorrows in a tun of red port,[A] and it is evident that at the burial of men the grief of the mourners required an equal amount of quenching. Indeed, the most absurd expenditures and preparations were made for what should be the simplest of ceremonies, and the result oftentimes proved garish in the extreme. As an example of the display in this direction, John Ashton quotes from the *Daily Courant* a report of the obsequies of Sir William Pritchard, sometime Lord Mayor of London. After a vast deal of pomp wasted in St. Albans and other places upon the unappreciative and inanimate Pritchard, the remains reached the country seat of the deceased, in the county of Buckingham. “Where, after the body had been set out, with all ceremony befitting his degree, for near two hours, 'twas carried to the church adjacent in this order, viz., 2 conductors with long staves, 6 men in long cloaks two and two, the standard, 18 men in cloaks as before, servants to the deceas'd two and two, divines, the minister of the parish and the preacher, the helm and crest, sword and target, gauntlets and spurs, born by an officer of Arms, both in their rich coats of Her Majesty's Arms enbroider'd; the body, between 6 persons of the Arms of Christ's Hospital, St. Bartholomew's, Merchant Taylors Company, City of London, empaled coat and single coat; the chief mourner and his four assistants, followed by the relations of the defunct, &c.”[B] In this aggregation of grandeur the mere bagatelle in the shape of a corpse seems almost completely overshadowed, and it is thus comforting to reflect that the latter finally had interment in a “handsome large vault, in the isle on the north side of the church, betwixt 7 and 8 of the clock that evening.” The dear departed, or grief for his memory, frequently played but too small a role in all these trappings of despondency,



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and the insignificance of the deceased might only be likened to the secondary position of a man at his own wedding. It was all fuss and mortuary feathers, mourning rings and mulled wine in the one case, just as in the other it is entirely a show of bride and blushes, flounces and femininity. [Footnote A: In writing of the customs connected with old-time English funerals, Misson says: "The relations and chief mourners are in a chamber apart, with their more intimate friends; and the rest of the guests are dispersed in several rooms about the house. When they are ready to set out, they nail up the coffin, and a servant presents the company with sprigs of rosemary: Every one takes a sprig and carries it in his hand till the body is put into the grave, at which time they all throw their sprigs in after it. Before they set out, and after they return, it is usual to present the guests with something to drink, either red or white wine, boil'd with sugar and cinnamon, or some such liquor. Butler, the keeper of a tavern, told me there was a tun of red port drank at his wife's burial, besides mull'd white wine. Note, no men ever go to women's burials, nor the women to the men's; so that there were none but women at the drinking of Butler's wine. Such women in England will hold it out with the men, when they have a bottle before them, as well as upon t'other occasion, and tattle infinitely better than they."]

[Footnote B: The will of Benjamin Dod, a Roman Catholic citizen of London (died 1714) runs in part as follows: "I desire four and twenty persons to be at my burial ... to every of which four and twenty persons ... I give a pair of white gloves, a ring of ten shillings value, a bottle of wine at my funeral, and half a crown to be spent at their return that night; to drink my soul's health, then on her Journey for Purification in order to Eternal Rest. I appoint the room, where my corpse shall lie, to be hung with black, and four and twenty wax candles to be burning; on my coffin to be affixed a cross and this inscription, *Jesus Hominum Salvator*. I also appoint my corpse to be carried in a herse drawn with six white horses, with white feathers, and followed by six coaches, with six horses to each coach, to carry the four and twenty persons.... Item, I give to forty of my particular acquaintance, not at my funeral, to every one of them a gold ring of ten shillings value.... As for mourning, I leave that to my executors hereafter nam'd; and I do not desire them to give any to whom I shall leave a legacy.... I will have no Presbyterian, Moderate Low Churchmen, or Occasional Conformists, to be at or have anything to do with my funeral. I die in the Faith of the True Catholic Church. I desire to have a tomb stone over me, with a Latin inscription, and a lamp, or six wax candles, to burn seven days and nights thereon."—*Vide* ASHTON.]

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Was it any wonder that when Dick Steele, aetat twenty-six, an officer of Fusiliers, and a merry vagabond, wanted to redeem his reputation by writing a rollicking comedy, his thoughts turned to the satirising of the British undertaker? For the young man must prove to the town that he was not the hypocrite several of his kind friends had dubbed him. The fact was, that he had been virtuous enough to write a pious work entitled, “The Christian Hero,” which he afterwards published, but as he had not grown sufficiently master of himself to live up to its golden precepts (nay, rather did he continue to spend his evenings in the taverns), the author came in for many a taunt and sneer. Why did he not practice what he preached? was the sarcastic query of his intimates.

Yet there was no thought of cant in what the soldier had done. His design in issuing the “Christian Hero” was, as he explained in after years, “principally to fix upon his own mind a strong impression of virtue and religion, in opposition to a stronger propensity towards unwarrantable pleasures.” This secret admiration was too weak; he therefore printed the book with his name, in hopes that a standing testimony against himself, and the eyes of the world (that is to say, of his acquaintances) upon him in a new light, would make him ashamed of understanding and seeming to feel what was virtuous, and living so contrary to life.

But the man was weak where the author was willing, and thus gay Richard went on “living so contrary a life” with true Celtic perversity, and made of himself anything but a Christian Hero. Rather was he a jolly Pagan, with a passion for his wine and his coffee-house, and a kindly, merry word even for those who twitted him upon his inconsistency. It was plain, therefore, that he must be some other sort of hero, and so he evolved the brilliant satire of “The Funeral,” to “enliven his character, and repel the sarcasms of those who abused him for his declarations relative to religion.”

[Illustration: SIR RICHARD STEELE

By Sir GODFREY KNELLER]

In the twinkling of an eye Steele became the spoiled darling of the day. The comedy, which was produced at Drury Lane in 1702, was the talk of the enthusiastic town, and the playwright arose from his beer-mugs, his wine-flagons, and his contemplation of ideal Christianity, to find himself famous. He had opened a new vein of satire, and a vein moreover which upheld virtue and laughed to scorn hypocrisy and vice. That was a moral which the dramatists of his epoch seldom taught.[A] And so the people crowded to the theatre, applauded the sentiment of the play, guffawed at the keen wit of the dialogue, and swore that this young rascal Steele was the prince of bright fellows. Then they went home—and revelled, as before, in the funerals of their friends.

[Footnote A: The “Funeral” is the merriest and most perfect of Steele’s comedies. The characters are strongly marked, the wit genial, and not indecent. Steele was among the

first who set about reforming the licentiousness of the old comedy. His satire in the "Funeral" is not against virtue, but vice and silliness.—DR. DORAN.]



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What of this remarkable comedy? Its story turned upon the marriage of the elderly Lord Brumpton to a designing young minx who estranges the nobleman from his son, Lord Hardy, the gentlemanly, poverty-stricken leading man of the piece. When Brumpton has a cataleptic fit, and is apparently dead as a doornail, the spouse confides his body to the undertaker with feelings of serene pleasure. But let the lines of the play, or a portion thereof, unfold the situation.

The scene is at Lord Brumpton's house; the nobleman has just been pronounced defunct, and Sable, the undertaker, has arrived. The latter, who is being bantered by two of the characters, Mr. Campley and Cabinet, is evidently a bit of a philosopher, albeit an uncanny one, for he says:

* * * * *

"There are very few in the whole world that live to themselves, but sacrifice their bosom-bliss to enjoy a vain show and appearance of prosperity in the eyes of others; and there is often nothing more inwardly distressed than a young bride in her glittering retinue, or deeply joyful than a young widow in her weeds and black train; of both which the lady of this house may be an instance, for she has been the one, and is, I'll be sworn, the other.

"CABINET. You talk, Mr. Sable, most learnedly.

"SABLE. I have the deepest learning, sir, experience; remember your widow cousin, that married last month.

"CABINET. Ay, but how you'd you imagine she was in all that grief an hypocrite! Could all those shrieks, those swoonings, that rising falling bosom, be constrained? You're uncharitable, Sable, to believe it. What colour, what reason had you for it?

"SABLE. First, Sir, her carriage in her concerns with me, for I never yet could meet with a sorrowful relict but was herself enough to make a hard bargain with me. Yet I must confess they have frequent interruptions of grief and sorrow when they read my bill; but as for her, nothing she resolv'd, that look'd bright or joyous, should after her love's death approach her. All her servants that were not coal-black must turn out; a fair complexion made her eyes and heart ake, she'd none but downright jet, and to exceed all example, she hir'd my mourning furniture by the year, and in case of my mortality, ty'd my son to the same article; so in six weeks time ran away with a young fellow."

* * * * *

And so on (with a cynicism of which, of course, no modern "funeral director" would be guilty—out loud), until the undertaker's men come on the scene.

* * * * *



“Where in the name of goodness have you all been?” asks SABLE. “Have you brought the sawdust and tar for embalming? Have you the hangings and the sixpenny nails, and my lord’s coat of arms?”

“SERVANT. Yes, sir, and had come sooner, but I went to the herald’s for a coat for Alderman Gathergrease that died last night—he has promised to invent one against tomorrow.”



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“SABLE. Ah! pox take some of our cits, the first thing after their death is to take care of their birth—let him bear a pair of stockings, he is the first of his family that ever wore one.... And you, Mr. Blockhead, I warrant you have not call'd at Mr. Pestle's the apothecary: will that fellow never pay me? I stand bound for all the poison in that starving murderer's shop: he serves me just as Dr. Quibus did, who promised to write a treatise against water-gruel, a healthy slop that has done me more injury than all the Faculty: look you now, you are all upon the sneer, let me have none but downright stupid countenances. I've a good mind to turn you all off, and take people out of the playhouse; but hang them, they are as ignorant of their parts as you are of yours.... Ye stupid rogues, whom I have picked out of the rubbish of mankind, and fed for your eminent worthlessness, attend, and know that I speak you this moment stiff and immutable to all sense of noise, mirth or laughter. [*Makes mouths at them as they pass by him to bring them to a constant countenance.*] So, they are pretty well—pretty well.”

[*Exit.*

* * * * *

When the stage is clear Lord Brumpton and his servant Trusty enter. The former has wakened from his cataleptic trance, as the faithful Trusty watched beside him, and is horrified to learn of Lady Brumpton's lack of grief. But hush; he will conceal himself, for here comes my lady, accompanied by her woman and confidant, Mistress Tattleaid.

* * * * *

“*Enter WIDOW and TATTLEAID, meeting and running to each other.*

“WIDOW. Oh, Tattleaid, his and our hour has come!

“TAT. I always said by his church yard cough, you'd bury him, and still you were impatient.

“WIDOW. Nay, thou hast ever been my comfort, my confident, my friend, and my servant; and now I'll reward thy pains; for tho' I scorn the whole sex of fellows I'll give them hopes for thy sake; every smile, every frown, every gesture, humour, caprice and whimsy of mine shall be gold to thee, girl; thou shalt feel all the sweets and wealth of being a fine rich widow's woman. Oh! how my head runs my first year out, and jumps to all the joys of widowhood! If thirteen months hence a friend should haul one to a play one has a mind to see,[A] what pleasure t'will be when my Lady Brumpton's footman called (who kept a place for that very purpose) to make a sudden insurrection of fine wigs in the pit and side-boxes. Then, with a pretty sorrow in one's face, and a willing blush for being stared at, one ventures to look round, and bow to one of one's own quality. Thus [*very directly*] to a snug pretending fellow of no fortune. Thus [*as scarce seeing him*] to one that writes lampoons. Thus [*fearfully*] to one who really loves. Thus



[*looking down*] to one woman-acquaintance, from box to box, thus [*with looks differently familiar*], and when one has done one's part, observe the actors do theirs, but with my mind fixed not on those I look at, but those that look at me. Then the serenades—the lovers! [A query—if the theatres were patronised only by those who looked solely at the stage, what would be the size of the audiences?]



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[Footnote A: A well-regulated widow kept herself at home for six weeks after the death of her husband, and denied herself the theatre and other public amusements for a twelvemonth.]

“TAT. Oh, madam, you make my heart bound within me: I'll warrant you, madam, I'll manage them all; and indeed, madam, the men are really very silly creatures, 'tis no such hard matter—they rulers! they governors! I warrant you indeed.

“WIDOW. Ay, Tattleaid, they imagine themselves mighty things, but government founded on force only, is a brutal power—we rule them by their affections, which blinds them into belief that they rule us, or at least are in the government with us. But in this nation our power is absolute; thus, thus, we sway—[*playing her fan*]. A fan is both the standard and the flag of England. I laugh to see men go on our errands, strut in great offices, live in cares, hazards and scandals, to come home and be fools to us in brags of their dispatches, negotiations, and their wisdoms—as my good dear deceas'd use to entertain me; which I, to relieve myself from, would lisp some silly request, pat him on the face. He shakes his head at my pretty folly, calls me simpleton; gives me a jewel, then goes to bed so wise, so satisfied, and so deceived.”

* * * * *

This pleasant conversation Lord Brumpton overhears, as he does also the inmost secrets of his lawyer, Puzzle. The latter gentleman, who has studied hard to cheat his good-natured employer, and succeeded, is a daringly drawn satire on the pettifogging attorney of the period.[A] Note the following words of wisdom, *apropos* to the drawing of wills, which Mr. Puzzle addresses to his nephew.

[Footnote A: Of the attorney of Queen Anne's day Ward wrote: “He's an Amphibious Monster, that partakes of two Natures, and those contrary; He's a great Lover both of Peace and Enmity; and has no sooner set People together by the Ears, but is Soliciting the Law to make an end of the Difference. His Learning is commonly as little as his Honesty; and his Conscience much larger than his Green Bag. Catch him in what Company soever, you will always hear him stating of Cases, or telling what notice my Lord Chancellor took of him, when he beg'd leave to supply the deficiency of his Counsel. He always talks with as great assurance as if he understood what he only pretends to know: And always wears a Band, and in that lies his Gravity and Wisdom. He concerns himself with no Justice but the Justice of a Cause: and for making an unconscionable Bill he outdoes a Taylor.”]

“PUZZLE. As for legacies, they are good or not, as I please; for let me tell you, a man must take pen, ink and paper, sit down by an old fellow, and pretend to take directions, but a true lawyer never makes any man's will but his own; and as the priest of old among us got near the dying man, and gave all to the Church, so now the lawyer gives all to the law.



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“CLERK. Ay, sir, but priests then cheated the nation by doing their offices in an unknown language.

“PUZZLE. True, but ours is a way much surer; for we cheat in no language at all, but loll in our own coaches, eloquent in gibberish, and learned in jingle. Pull out the parchment [*referring to the will of LORD BRUMPTON*], there's the deed; I made it as long as I could. Well, I hope to see the day when the indenture shall be the exact measure of the land that passes by it; for 'tis a discouragement to the gown, that every ignorant rogue of an heir should in a word or two understand his father's meaning, and hold ten acres of land by half-an-acre of parchment. Nay, I hope to see the time when that there is indeed some progress made in, shall be wholly affected; and by the improvement of the noble art of tautology, every Inn in Holborn an Inn of Court. Let others think of logic, rhetoric, and I know not what impertinence, but mind thou tautology. What's the first excellence in a lawyer? Tautology. What's the second? Tautology. What's the third? Tautology; as an old pleader said of action.”

* * * * *

Who shall say that the tautological sentiments of Mr. Puzzle are not still inculcated? Nay, the whole play furnishes a capital instance of the truism that the world changes but little, and, furthermore, that the mould of nigh two centuries cannot spoil the wit of sparkling Steele. Ah, Dick! Dick! you may have been a sorry dog, with your toasts and your taverns, yet 'tis a thousand pities that a few dramatists of to-day cannot drink inspiration from the same cups.

To continue our cheerful journey with this unusual “Funeral,” we soon find ourselves introduced to Lord Hardy, the unjustly discarded son of Brumpton. Hardy is a high-spirited, honest man of quality, a trifle out at elbows just now, owing to the stoppage of financial supplies from the paternal mansion. His straits are oft severe, and it is fortunate that he has in Trim a faithful servant who knows so well how to keep the duns at bay. “Why, friend, says I [Trim is describing to Hardy his method of dealing with his lordship's creditors], how often must I tell you my lord is not stirring. His lordship has not slept well, you must come some other time; your lordship will send for him when you are at leisure to look upon money affairs; or if they are so saucy, so impertinent as to press a man of your quality for their own, there are canes, there's Bridewel, there's the stocks for your ordinary tradesmen; but to an haughty, thriving Covent Garden mercer, silk or laceman, your lordship gives your most humble service to him, hopes his wife is well; you have letters to write, or you would see him yourself, but you desire he would be with you punctually on such a day, that is to say, the day after you are gone out of town, Which shows very plainly that Trim could have earned large wages had he lived in the nineteenth century. These ‘Palmy Days’ are not long enough, however, to permit the introduction of all the characters, nor the outlining of the entire story, with its brisk love-interest. But this bit of dialogue, which occurs after Sable has discovered the much-alive Lord Brumpton, is too good to be ignored:



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“SABLE. Why, my lord, you can’t in conscience put me off so; I must do according to my orders, cut you up, and embalm you, except you’ll come down a little deeper than you talk of; you don’t consider the charges I have been at already.

“LORD BRUMPTON. Charges! for what?

“SABLE. First, twenty guineas to my lady’s woman for notice of your death (a fee I’ve before now known the widow herself go halves in), but no matter for that—in the next place, ten pounds for watching you all your long fit of sickness last winter—

“LORD BRUMPTON. Watching me? Why I had none but my own servants by turns!

“SABLE. I mean attending to give notice of your death. I had all your long fit of sickness, last winter, at half a crown a day, a fellow waiting at your gate to bring me intelligence, but you unfortunately recovered, and I lost all my obliging pains for your service.

“LORD BRUMPTON. Ha! ha! ha! Sable, thou’rt a very impudent fellow. Half a crown a day to attend my decease, and dost thou reckon it to me?”

“SABLE.... I have a book at home, which I call my doomsday-book, where I have every man of quality’s age and distemper in town, and know when you should drop. Nay, my lord, if you had reflected upon your mortality half so much as poor I have for you, you would not desire to return to life thus—in short, I cannot keep this a secret, under the whole money I am to have for burying you.”

* * * * *

Of course Lady Brumpton is discomfited and disgraced at the end of the play, and, of course, Lord Brumpton is reconciled to his son—for Steele took care that virtue should be rewarded and the moral code otherwise preserved. As to her ladyship, who has proved a very entertaining sort of villain, we shall take leave of her in one of the best scenes of the comedy:

“WIDOW. [*Reading the names of the visitors who have called to leave their condolences*] Mrs. Frances and Mrs. Winnifred Glebe, who are they?”

“TATTLEAID. They are the country great fortunes, have been out of town this whole year; they are those whom your ladyship said upon being very well-born took upon them to be very ill-bred.”

“WIDOW. Did I say so? Really I think it was apt enough; now I remember them. Lady Wrinkle—oh, that smug old woman! there is no enduring her affectation of youth; but I plague her; I always ask whether her daughter in Wiltshire has a grandchild yet or not. Lady Worth—I can’t bear her company; [*aside*] she has so much of that virtue in her



heart which I have in mouth only. Mrs. After-day—Oh, that's she that was the great beauty, the mighty toast about town, that's just come out of the small-pox; she is horribly pitted they say; I long to see her, and plague her with my condolence.... But you are sure these other ladies suspect not in the least that I know of their coming?

“TAT. No, dear madam, they are to ask for me.



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“WIDOW. I hear a coach. [*Exit TATTLEAID.*] I have now an exquisite pleasure in the thought of surpassing my Lady Sly, who pretends to have out-grieved the whole town for her husband. They are certainly coming. Oh, no! here let me—thus let me sit and think. [*Widow on her couch; while she is raving, as to herself, TATTLEAID softly introduces the ladies.*] Wretched, disconsolate, as I am!... Alas! alas! Oh! oh! I swoon! I expire! [*Faints.*]

“SECOND LADY. Pray, Mrs. Tattleaid, bring something that is cordial to her. [*Exit TATTLEAID.*]

“THIRD LADY. Indeed, madam, you should have patience; his lordship was old. To die is but going before in a journey we must all take.

Enter TATTLEAID, loaded with bottles; THIRD LADY takes a bottle from her and drinks.

“FOURTH LADY. Lord, how my Lady Fleer drinks! I have heard, indeed, but never could believe it of her. [*Drinks also.*]

“FIRST LADY. [*Whispers.*] But, madam, don't you hear what the town says of the jilt, Flirt, the men liked so much in the Park? Hark ye—was seen with him in a hackney coach.

“SECOND LADY. Impudent flirt, to be found out!

“THIRD LADY. But I speak it only to you.

“FOURTH LADY. [*Whispers next woman.*] Nor I, but to no one.

“FIFTH LADY. [*Whispers the WIDOW.*] I can't believe it; nay, I always thought it, madam.

“WIDOW. Sure, 'tis impossible the demure, prim thing. Sure all the world is hypocrisy Well, I thank my stars, whatsoever sufferings I have, I have none in reputation. I wonder at the men; I could never think her handsome. She has really a good shape and complexion but no mein; and no woman has the use of her beauty without mein. Her charms are dumb, they want utterance. But whither does distraction lead me to talk of charms?

“FIRST LADY. Charms, a chit's, a girl's charms! Come, let us widows be true to ourselves, keep our countenances and our characters, and a fig for the maids.

“SECOND LADY. Ay, since they will set up for our knowledge, why should not we for their ignorance?



“THIRD LADY. But, madam, o’ Sunday morning at church, I curtsied to you and looked at a great fuss in a glaring light dress, next pew. That strong, masculine thing is a knight’s wife, pretends to all the tenderness in the world, and would fain put the unwieldy upon us for the soft, the languid. She has of a sudden left her dairy, and sets up for a fine town lady; calls her maid Cisly, her woman speaks to her by her surname of Mrs. Cherryfist, and her great foot-boy of nineteen, big enough for a trooper, is stripped into a laced coat, now Mr. Page forsooth.

“FOURTH LADY. Oh, I have seen her. Well, I heartily pity some people for their wealth; they might have been unknown else—you would die, madam, to see her and her equipage: I thought her horses were ashamed of their finery; they dragged on, as if they were all at plough, and a great bashful-look’d booby behind grasp’d the coach, as if he had never held one.



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“FIFTH LADY. Alas! some people think there is nothing but being fine to be genteel; but the high prance of the horses, and the brisk insolence of the servants in an equipage of quality are inimitable.

“FIRST LADY. Now you talk of an equipage, I envy this lady the beauty she will appear in a mourning coach, it will so become her complexion; I confess I myself mourned for two years for no other reason. Take up that hood there. Oh, that fair face with a veil!
[*They take up her hood.*]

“WIDOW. Fie, fie, ladies. But I have been told, indeed, black does become—

“SECOND LADY. Well, I’ll take the liberty to speak it, there is young Nutbrain has long had (I’ll be sworn) a passion for this lady; but I’ll tell you one thing I fear she’ll dislike, that is, he is younger than she is.

“THIRD LADY. No, that’s no exception; but I’ll tell you one, he is younger than his brother.

“WIDOW. Talk not of such affairs. Who could love such an unhappy relict as I am? But, dear madam, what grounds have you for that idle story?

“FOURTH LADY. Why he toasts you and trembles where you are spoke of. It must be a match.

“WIDOW. Nay, nay, you rally, you rally; but I know you mean it kindly.

“FIRST LADY. I swear we do.

[*TATTLEAID whispers the WIDOW.*]

“WIDOW. But I must beseech you, ladies, since you have been so compassionate as to visit and accompany my sorrow, to give me the only comfort I can now know, to see my friends cheerful, and to honour an entertainment Tattleaid has prepared within for you. If I can find strength enough I’ll attend you; but I wish you would excuse me, for I have no relish of food or joy, but will try to get a bit down in my own chamber.

“FIRST LADY. There is no pleasure without you.

“WIDOW. But, madam, I must beg of your ladyship not to be so importune to my fresh calamity as to mention Nutbrain any more. I am sure there is nothing in it. In love with me, quotha!”

[*WIDOW is led away. Exeunt LADIES.*]



Thus runs the comedy, trippingly as the tongue of a gay *raconteur*. Sometimes the scenes are exaggerated, sometimes the characters may be overdrawn, but the satire is true, and the wit is of the best. Take, for instance, the picture reproduced above. Are not its colours—albeit bold and merciless—tinged with the redeeming hue of naturalness? And of you, fair daughters of Eve (if any of you condescend to read these pages), let the author ask one impertinent little question: Is there not something in the conversation of Dick Steele's First Lady, or his Second Lady, or all the other Ladies, which suggests the charity and intellectuality that doth hedge in an afternoon tea?

CHAPTER X

THE BARTON BOOTHS

“Sweet are the charms of her I love,
More fragrant than the damask rose;
Soft as the down of turtle-dove,
Gentle as winds when zephyr blows;
Refreshing as descending rains,
On sun-burnt climes, and thirsty plains.”



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Thus rhapsodised the great Barton Booth, who could write harmless poetry when the cares of acting did not press too hard upon him. In this case the verses were addressed to the object of his passion, a lady who seems to have been, at first, a trifle parsimonious in her smiles; for, in another song intended for the same siren, the lover asks:

“Can then a look create a thought
Which time can ne'er remove?
Yes, foolish heart, again thou'rt caught,
Again thou bleed'st for Love.

“She sees the conquest of her eyes,
Nor heals the wounds she gave;
She smiles when'er my blushes rise,
And, sighing, shuns her Slave.

“Then, Swain, be bold! and still adore her
Still the flying fair pursue:
Love, and friendship, still implore her,
Pleading night and day for you.”

[Illustration: BARTON BOOTH]

Who was this “flying fair” that the swain pursued with such despairing fervour? Nance Oldfield? Nay, there was no romance there, for while Booth could make the most exquisite stage love to the actress, he never carried that love beyond the mimic world. Rather was it the lovely Mistress Santlow, that dancing bit of sunshine, who turned the heads of many an amorous spectator, and had enough of the temptress about her to lead a mighty warrior from the path of domestic constancy, and bring a Secretary of State almost to the verge of matrimony.[A] She seemed the apotheosis of grace, did this merry, moving Hester, and when she forsook the art she so delightfully adorned, and took to the “legitimate,” there were not a few among her admirers who regretted the change. “They mourned,” says Dr. Doran, “as if Terpsichore herself had been on earth to charm mankind, and had gone never to return. They remembered, longed for, and now longed in vain for that sight which used to set a whole audience half distraught with delight, when in the very ecstasy of her dance, Santlow contrived to loosen her clustering auburn hair, and letting it fall about such a neck and shoulders as Praxiteles could more readily imagine than imitate, danced on, the locks flying in the air, and half-a-dozen hearts at the end of every one of them.”

[Footnote A: The Duke of Marlborough and Secretary Craggs respectively.]

At the end of one of those locks was the throbbing heart of Barton Booth, which he had completely lost in watching the auburn hair and the poetic movements of the *coryphee*:



“But now the flying fingers strike the lyre,
The sprightly notes the nymph inspire.
She whirls around! she bounds! she springs!
As if Jove’s messenger had lent her wings.

“Such were her lovely limbs, so flushed her charming face
So round her neck! her eyes so fair!
So rose her swelling chest! so flow’d her amber hair!
While her swift feet outstript the wind,
And left the enamor’d God of Day behind.”



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Certes, Booth was in love when he wrote this eulogy.

But however sprightly and deftly did this charmer pirouette, she could not deny herself the luxury of appearing as a regular actress. Her first venture in this direction was as the Eunuch of “Valentinian,” wherein she donned boy’s attire, and was much more successful in masculine garb than have been not a few better artists. From this part to that of Dorcas Zeal in Shadwell’s play, “The Fair Quaker of Deal,”^[A] was but a step, and a step, be it said, which for the moment consoled the public for her desertion from the ballet. According to Cibber, Santlow was the happiest incident in the fortune of the play, and the Laureate tells us that she was “then in the full bloom of what beauty she might pretend to.”^[B] He adds that “before this she had only been admired as the most excellent dancer, which perhaps might not a little contribute to the favourable reception she now met with as an actress in this character which so happily suited her figure and capacity: the gentle softness of her voice, the composed innocence of her aspect, the modesty of her dress, the reserv’d decency of her gesture, and the simplicity of the sentiments that naturally fell from her, made her seem the amiable maid she represented. In a word, not the enthusiastick Maid of Orleans was more serviceable of old to the French army when the English had distressed them, than this fair Quaker was at the head of that dramattick attempt upon which the support of their weak society depended.”

[Footnote A: Produced at Drury Lane in February, 1710.]

[Footnote B: It might appear from this remark of Colley’s that the Santlow was not over handsome. Yet if a picture taken from life does not belie her the dancer was most fair to look upon.]

This “weak society” was the new company recruited by William Collier for Drury Lane Theatre, and wherein could be found, in addition to the light-limbed Hester, such players as her adoring swain, Barton Booth, Theophilus Keen, George Powell, Francis Leigh, Mrs. Bradshaw and Mrs. Knight. Colley was at that time (1710) in opposition to Drury, his interest lying with the Hay market management, and it is very evident that the success of the “Fair Quaker”—a success made in face of the counter attraction furnished by the long trial of Dr. Sacheverel—went sorely against the grain with him.^[A] The fact was that things at the Hay market were not flourishing, and the prosperity enjoyed by the Drury Lane comedy—and the Sacheverel show—seemed tantalising to bear.

[Footnote A: Shadwell evidently had Cibber in mind when he wrote in the preface to the “Fair Quaker of Deal”: “This play was written about three years since, and put into the hands of a famous comedian belonging to the Haymarket Playhouse, who took care to beat down the value of it so much as to offer the author to alter it fit to appear on the stage, on condition he might have half the profits of the third day; that is as much as to say, that it may pass for one of his, according to custom. The author not agreeing to



this reasonable proposal, it lay in his hands till the beginning of this winter, when Mr. Booth read it, and liked it, and persuaded the author that, with a little alteration, it would please the town.”]



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Even in after years Colley grew bitter in thinking of the "Fair Quaker," and could not help indulging in a dig at its expense when he came to write the "Apology." He likewise paid his satirical compliments to the new-fangled Italian opera which was given at the Haymarket during the season of 1709-10, on the days when the regular dramatic company did not appear. The opera had already proved a drawing attraction, but at the time here mentioned the popular interest in the performances had fallen off, and the dear and ever fickle public, of high and low degree, preferred either Drury Lane or the trial of Sacheverel to the artistic delights of music and the drama at the rival house. And so Cibber plaintively sighs.

"The truth is, that this kind of entertainment [opera] being so entirely sensual, it had no possibility of getting the better of our reason but by its novelty; and that novelty could never be supported but by an annual change of the best voices, which, like the finest flowers, bloom but for a season, and when that is over are only dead nosegays. From this natural cause we have seen within these two years even Farinelli singing to an audience of five and thirty pounds, and yet, if common fame may be credited, the same voice, so neglected in one country, has in another had charms sufficient to make that crown sit easy on the head of a Monarch, which the jealousy of politicians (who had their views in his keeping it) fear'd, without some such extraordinary amusement, his Satiety of Empire might tempt him a second time to resign." [A]

[Footnote A: The monarch alluded to was evidently Victor Amadeus, King of Sardinia. The tenor Farinelli (whose real name was Carlo Broschi) was born in the dukedom of Modena in 1705, and died 1782.]

That Cibber knew something of the wrangles which inevitably follow in the wake of an operatic troupe may be seen from the next paragraph:

"There is, too, in the very species of an Italian singer such an innate, fantastical pride and caprice, that the government of them (here at least) is almost impracticable. This distemper, as we were not sufficiently warn'd or apprized of, threw our musical affairs into perplexities we knew not easily how to get out of. There is scarce a sensible auditor in the Kingdom that has not since that time had occasion to laugh at the several instances of it. But what is still more ridiculous, these costly canary birds have sometimes infested the whole body of our dignified lovers of musick with the same childish animosities."

It was merely an illustration of the melancholy fact that the heavenly maid of music is too often attended by the handmaiden of discord. But to continue:



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“Ladies have been known,” says Colley, “to decline their visits upon account of their being of a different musical party. Caesar and Pompey made not a warmer division in the Roman Republick than those heroines, their country women, the Faustina and Cuzzoni, blew up in our commonwealth of academical musick by their implacable pretentions to superiority.[A] And while this greatness of soul is their unalterable virtue, it will never be practicable to make two capital singers of the same sex do as they should do in one opera at the same time! No, tho’ England were to double the sums it has already thrown after them. For even in their own country, where an extraordinary occasion has called a greater number of their best to sing together, the mischief they have made has been proportionable; an instance of which, if I am rightly informed, happen’d at Parma, where upon the celebration of the marriage of that Duke, a collection was made of the most eminent voices that expence or interest could purchase, to give as complete an opera as the whole vocal power of Italy could form.

[Footnote A: Francesca Cuzzoni and Faustina Bordoni Hasse, whose famous rivalry in 1726 and 1727 is here referred to, were singers of remarkable powers. Cuzzoni’s voice was a soprano, her rival’s a mezzo-soprana, and while the latter excelled in brilliant execution, the former was supreme in pathetic expression. Dr. Burney(“History of Music,” iv. 319) quotes from M. Quanta the statement that so keen was their supporter’s party spirit, that when one party began to applaude their favourite, the other party hissed!—R.W. LOWE, “Notes to the Apology.”]

“But when it came to the proof of this musical project, behold! what woful work they made of it! every performer would be a Caesar or Nothing; their several pretentions to preference were not to be limited within the laws of harmony; they would all choose their own songs, but not more to set off themselves than to oppose or deprive another of an occasion to shine. Yet any one would sing a bad song, provided nobody else had a good one, till at last they were thrown together like so many feather’d warriors, for a battle-royal in a cock-pit, where every one was oblig’d to kill another to save himself! What pity it was these froward misses and masters of musick had not been engag’d to entertain the court of some King of Moroccho, that could have known a good opera from a bad one! With how much ease would such a director have brought them to better order? But alas! as it has been said of greater things,

“Suis et ipsa Roma viribus ruit.’

“Imperial Rome fell by the too great strength of its own citizens! So fell this mighty opera, ruin’d by the too great excellency of its singers! For, upon the whole, it proved to be as barbarously bad as if Malice itself had composed it.”

It was a pity, no doubt, that the light of opera shone but dimly at the Haymarket, yet the ill wind which almost extinguished that light blew a blessing towards the nimble Santlow. For the dear creature prospered exceeding well as Dorcas Zeal; the heart of the public waxed warm toward the ex-dancer, and so did the cardiac organ of Barton

Booth. A few years later Booth married the charmer, and she, having become virtuous and prim, made the remainder of his life a bed of domestic roses.



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And now for the brief story of Booth's dignified career. Barton came of good English stock, and his father, with a true British desire to rule the destinies of his family, mapped out a clerical life for the boy. But the latter had no thought of the pulpit, and from the time that he acted in the "Andria" of Terence, at Westminster School, his hope was all for the stage. 'Tis very easy to applaud that hope now; perhaps his relations looked upon it as a temptation offered by the Evil One. When he reached the mature age of seventeen, and had orders to begin his university training, what does the youth do but run away from home, and, taking the theatrical bull by the horns, appear on the Dublin boards.

"He first apply'd to Mr. Betterton, then to Mr. Smith, two celebrated actors," says Chetwood, "but they decently refused him for fear of the resentment of his family. But this did not prevent his pursuing the point in view; therefore he resolv'd for Ireland, and safely arrived in June 1698. His first rudiments Mr. Ashbury[A] taught him, and his first appearance was in the part of Oroonoko, where he acquitted himself so well to a crowded audience, that Mr. Ashbury rewarded him with a present of five guineas, which was the more acceptable as his last shilling was reduced to brass (as he inform'd me). But an odd accident fell out upon this occasion. It being very warm weather, in his last scene of the play, as he waited to go on, he inadvertently wiped his face, that, when he enter'd, he had the appearance of a chimney-sweeper (his own words). At his entrance he was surprised at the variety of noises he heard in the audience (for he knew not what he had done), that a little confounded him, till he received an extraordinary clap of applause, which settled his mind. The play was desir'd for the next night of acting, when an actress fitted a crape to his face, with an opening proper for the mouth, and shap'd in form for the nose; but, in the first scene, one part of the crape slip'd off. 'And zounds!' said he (he was a little apt to swear), 'I look'd like a magpie. When I came off, they lamp-black'd me for the rest of the night, that I was flayed before it could be got off again.'"[B]

[Footnote A: Joseph Ashbury, Master of the Revels, in Ireland, actor, and manager of the theatre in Dublin.]

[Footnote B: Chetwood adds in a footnote: "The composition for blackening the face are ivory-black and pomatum, which is, with some pains, clean'd with fresh butter." "Oroonoko" was what we would now call a "black face" part.]

But Booth was too much in earnest to be daunted by anything so trifling as the misplacing of a mask. He studied hard, despite a youthful liking for the jolly joys of Bacchus, and soon made for himself an enviable position upon the Dublin stage. For the youth had all the qualities that went toward the formation of a fine actor; he possessed keen dramatic instinct, poetic sensibility, a beautiful voice, a handsome



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person, and, above all, a dogged ambition. In after years, when his health began to fail and the sweets of success had, perhaps, become a trifle cloying, the tragedian often went through a part in a perfunctory manner.[A] But those early days in Ireland marked the sunrise of his genius—a time no less noble, in its freshness and promise, than the later glory of the noontide—and there was in his performance nothing but youthful ardour and devotion.

[Footnote A: He (Booth) would play his best to a single man in the pit whom he recognised as a playgoer, and a judge of acting; but to an unappreciating audience he could exhibit an almost contemptuous disinclination to exert himself. On one occasion of this sort he was made painfully sensible of his mistake and a note was addressed to him from the stage-box, the purport of which was to know whether he was acting for his own diversion or in the service and for the entertainment of the public? On another occasion, with a thin house and a cold audience, he was languidly going through one of his usually grandest impersonations, namely, Pyrrhus. At his very dullest scene he started into the utmost brilliancy and effectiveness. His eye had just previously detected in the pit a gentleman, named Stanyan, the friend of Addison and Steele, and the correspondent of the Earl of Manchester. Stanyan was an accomplished man and a judicious critic. Booth played to him, with the utmost care and corresponding success. “No, no!” he exclaimed, as he passed behind the scenes, “I will not have it said at Button’s that Barton Booth is losing his powers!”—DR. DORAN.]

With that ardour, only whetted by his popularity in Dublin, Barton travelled to London (1701), and there offered respectful incense at the shrine of Betterton. ’Twas a shrine at which the public still worshipped; and when Roscius extended a helping hand to the kneeling postulant, and brought him before the patrons of Lincoln’s Inn Fields, the success of Booth seemed assured. The latter never forgot the generosity and kindly interest of his idol, and he spoke with all the sincerity of gratitude when he once said: “When I acted the Ghost with Betterton (as Hamlet), instead of my awing him, he terrified me. But divinity hung round that man.” Had he been of an egotistic mould Barton might have added, that his Ghost was considered hardly less effective than the Hamlet of the mighty Betterton.

For a decade, or longer, Booth went on this prosperous way, gaining in favour with the theatre-goers, and increasing his artistic resources. During this period he married the daughter of a baronet, and she lived for six years, but not long enough to witness his triumphs in the “Distressed Mother” and the classic “Cato.” As Chetwood well said, “Pyrrhus in the ‘Distressed Mother’ placed him in the seat of Tragedy, and Cato fixed him there.” We have already read something of the “Distressed Mother,” and of the production of Addison’s tragedy, and so there is no need to linger over the episodes which caused Booth to be acclaimed Betterton’s logical successor.



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We remember, likewise, that the original Cato was admitted to a share in the management of Drury Lane, as a result of the increased fame accruing from his impersonation of the grand old Roman. It was an incident, into which politics entered not a little; there were wires to pull, and Lord Bolingbroke had his hand in the theatrical pie. "To reward his merit," chronicles Chetwood, "he (Booth) was joined in the patent, tho' great interest was made against him by the other patentees, who, to prevent his soliciting his patrons at Court, then at Windsor, gave out plays every night, where Mr. Booth had a principal part. Notwithstanding this step, he had a chariot and six of a nobleman's waiting for him at the end of every play, that whipt him the twenty miles in three hours, and brought him back to the business of the theatre the next night."

"He told me," adds the writer, "not one nobleman in the Kingdom had so many sets of horses at command as he had at that time, having no less than eight; the first set carrying him to Hounslow from London, ten miles; and the next set, ready waiting with another chariot to carry him to Windsor." Evidently the inspired Barton, with all his high-flown talent, had an eye for the main chance. In this respect he resembled one greater than he—David Garrick.

Like Garrick, too, the enterprising Booth had his Peg Woffington, in the pretty person of Susan Mountford, a daughter of the great Mistress Verbruggen. He never placed a wedding-ring upon a finger of this young woman, but he gave her his protection after the death of the baronet's daughter, and continued to do so until the fragile creature ran off with a craven fellow named Minshull. This Minshull made away with over L3000, the sum of Susan's savings,[A] and the erring woman, alike false to her virtue and the destroyer of that virtue, ended her darkening days amid the clouds of insanity.

[Footnote A: In the year 1714, they (Booth and Susan) bought several tickets in the State Lottery, and agreed to share equally whatever fortune might ensue. Booth gained nothing; the lady won a prize of 5000 pounds, and kept it. His friends counselled him to claim half the sum, but he laughingly remarked that there had never been any but a verbal agreement on the matter; and since the result had been fortunate for his friend, she should enjoy it all.—Dr. DORAN.]

The picture is far prettier with Hester Santlow leaping into the affections of the actor, and finally marrying him according to the law of the land. She loved the great man tenderly, ministered to his wants with a wifely devotion which would hardly suit the "New Woman," and when he was wont to eat too much (for he had given up the flowing bowl[A] and must cultivate some other species of gluttony), the ex-dancer would have the dinner-table removed.

[Footnote A: Booth told Cibber that he "had been for sometime too frank a lover of the bottle; but having had the happiness to observe into what contempt and distress Powel had plung'd himself by the same vice, he was so struck with the terror of his example, that he fix'd a resolution (which from that time to the end of his days he strictly

observed) of utterly reforming it.” And Colley adds; “An uncommon act of philosophy in a young man!”]



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Strange, is it not, that the wife who could be so full of constancy, and all the other virtues, previously lived a notoriously loose existence? For it had been the fate of Santlow to stand continually in the glare of that fierce light which beats upon the stage, and never, perhaps, did she give the town more to talk about than by her celebrated *rencontre* with Captain Montague. The story affords a glimpse of the free-and-easy manners which sometimes prevailed in theatres, and will bear the telling, ere we bid farewell to its fair heroine.

“About the year 1717,” writes Cibber, “a young actress of a desirable person (Santlow), sitting in an upper box at the Opera, a military gentleman (Montague) thought this a proper opportunity to secure a little conversation with her, the particulars of which were probably no more worth repeating than it seems the *Damoiselle* then thought them worth listening to; for, notwithstanding the fine things he said to her, she rather chose to give the Musick the preference of her attention. This indifference was so offensive to his high heart, that he began to change the *Tender* into the *Terrible*, and, in short, proceeded at last to treat her in a style too grossly insulting for the meanest female ear to endure unresented. Upon which, being beaten too far out of her discretion, she turn’d hastily upon him with an angry look and a reply which seem’d to set his merit in so low a regard, that he thought himself oblig’d in honour to take his time to resent it.

“This was the full extent of her crime, which his glory delay’d no longer to punish than ’till the next time she was to appear upon the stage. There, in one of her best parts, wherein she drew a favourable regard and approbation from the audience, he, dispensing with the respect which some people think due to a polite assembly, began to interrupt her performance with such loud and various notes of mockery, as other young men of honour in the same place had sometimes made themselves undauntedly merry with. Thus, deaf to all murmurs or entreaties of those about him, he pursued his point, even to throwing near her such trash as no person can be suppos’d to carry about him unless to use on so particular an occasion.

“A gentlemen then behind the scenes,[A] being shock’d at his unmanly behaviour, was warm enough to say, that no man but a fool or a bully could be capable of insulting an audience or a woman in so monstrous a manner. The former valiant gentleman, to whose ear the words were soon brought by his spies, whom he had plac’d behind the scenes to observe how the action was taken there, came immediately from the pit in a heat, and demanded to know of the author of those words if he was the person that spoke them? to which he calmly reply’d, that though he had never seen him before, yet since he seem’d so earnest to be satisfy’d, he would do him the favour to own, that indeed the words were his, and that they would be the last words he should chuse to deny whoever they might fall upon.



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[Footnote A: Secretary Craggs.]

“To conclude, their dispute was ended the next morning in Hyde Park, where the determin’d combatant who first ask’d for satisfaction was obliged afterwards to ask his life too; whether he mended it or not, I have not yet heard; but his antagonist in a few years afterwards died in one of the principal posts of the Government.”

There were no more such scenes after Santlow became Mrs. Barton Booth. Everything was respectability, and the voice of the turtle-dove appears to have been heard in the home of the happy couple. Yea, the husband waxed ecstatic after several years of married bliss, once more tuned his lyre, and burst forth into verses, wherein he set forth, among other things:

“Happy the hour when first our souls were joined!
The social virtues and the cheerful mind
Have ever crowned our days, beguiled our pain;
Strangers to discord and her clamorous train,” &c.

The lines suggest placidity of existence, and placid, indeed, was the married life of Booth, barring his moments of ill-health. When his career is compared to that of certain other players, it stands out in rather pleasant relief, by virtue of its even tenor and prosperity. It was free from the vicissitudes which have waylaid the paths of equally great artists, and the current of his genius ran on without a ripple, save that of sickness. There was one direction, however, wherein Booth found variety and excitement, and that was in the wondrous diversity of parts which he assumed. In tragedy, his work took a wide range, going all the way from Laertes to Othello, while he sallied forth now and again into the field of comedy, and emerged therefrom with honour. He did not, to be sure, distinguish himself so brilliantly as a comedian as he did in tragic garb, yet he wooed Thalia in a genteel way which seldom failed to please. Nay, it is chronicled that he impersonated capon-lined Falstaff in a fashion that amused even phlegmatic Queen Anne. But the actor of long ago thought nothing of such catholicity in art. He often worked like a horse, that he might later play like a god.[A]

[Footnote A: To show the versatility of Booth it need only be mentioned that his parts (among many not herein named) included the Ghost, Laertes, Horatio and the Prince in “Hamlet,” Dick in “The Confederacy,” Captain Worthy in the “Fair Quaker of Deal,” Pyrrhus, Cato, Young Bevil in the “Conscious Lovers,” Tamerlane, Oronooko, Jaffier, Othello, King Lear, Hotspur, Wildair, Sir Charles Easy, Falstaff, Cassio, Macbeth, Banquo, Lennox, Henry VIII. and Cinna. Few living players can match such a repertoire.]



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Perhaps the most annoying disturbance which ever came into Booth's theatrical life, and not a great disturbance at that, was the jealousy which existed between Wilks and himself. Wilks was impetuous, bad tempered and crotchety, and it is possible that the envy was, originally, rather of his own making. But be that as it may, Booth suffered many a pang from the successes of the more dashing Wilks, and the latter never lost an opportunity of thwarting his associate. We remember how the commonplace Mills was pushed forward, with the idea of hiding the genius of Barton, and Cibber refers more than once to this short-sighted policy of Wilks. "And yet, again," he writes, "Booth himself, when he came to be a manager, would sometimes suffer his judgment to be blinded by his inclination to actors whom the town seem'd to have but an indifferent opinion of." And thereupon Colley asks "another of his old questions"—viz., "Have we never seen the same passions govern a Court! How many white staffs and great places do we find, in our histories, have been laid at the feet of a monarch, because they chose not to give way to a rival in power, or hold a second place in his favour? How many Whigs and Tories have changed their parties, when their good or bad pretensions have met with a check to their higher preferment?"

The fact is that there was never any artistic sympathy between the two distinguished actors. Booth could play comedy, and play it quite well, but his soul was all for tragedy. On the other hand, while Wilks knew how to tread the sombre paths of high drama (he even made a creditable Hamlet), the comedian looked with more regard upon his own peculiar vein of work, the impersonation of the graceful, the genteel, and the elegantly picturesque. In one way the latter proved more generous than his rival. "It might be imagin'd," runs on Cibber, "from the difference of their natural tempers, that Wilks should have been more blind to the excellencies of Booth than Booth was to those of Wilks; but it was not so. Wilks would sometimes commend Booth to me; but when Wilks excell'd the other was silent." [A]

[Footnote A: During Booth's inability to act ...Wilks was called upon to play two of his parts: Jaffier and Lord Hastings in "Jane Shore." Booth was, at times, in all other respects except his power to go on the stage, in good health, and went among the players for his amusement. His curiosity drew him to the playhouse on the nights when Wilks acted these characters, in which himself had appeared with uncommon lustre. All the world admired Wilks except his brother manager: amidst the repeated bursts of applause which he extorted, Booth alone continued silent.—DAVIES.]

But all these petty heartburnings and jealousies were buried in the grave of Wilks. That incomparable player, whose sprightliness seemed to defy the grim tyrant, and who could act the lithesome youth upon the stage even though he had to hobble to his hackney-coach when the piece was ended, made his last exit in the autumn of 1732. Booth followed on the same long journey in the May of 1733, after an illness during which the great patient was dosed with crude mercury, bled, plastered, blistered, and otherwise helped onward to his death. Verily, it is a wonder that the physicians of old did not extinguish the whole human race.



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The still attractive Santlow (or rather Mrs. Booth) survived the tragedian, and her sorrow may have been assuaged by the remembrance that she was left the sole heir of her husband. "I have considered my circumstances," wrote Booth in his will, "and finding upon a strict examination that all I am now possessed of does not amount to two-thirds of the fortune my wife brought me on the day of our marriage, together with the yearly additions and advantages since arising from her laborious employment on the stage during twelve years past, I thought myself bound by honesty, honour, and gratitude due to her constant affection, not to give away any part of the remainder of her fortune at my death"; and with that eloquent stroke of the pen the testator cut off with nothing a sister and a brother whom he had sufficiently helped during his lifetime.

Surely so noble an actor deserves an epitaph. Perhaps none could be more worthy than this estimate of the man, made by Aaron Hill: "He had learning to understand perfectly whatever it was his part to speak, and judgment to know how far it agreed or disagreed with his character. Hence arose a peculiar grace which was visible to every spectator, tho' few were at the pains of examining into the cause of their pleasure. He could soften, or slide over, with a kind of elegant negligence, the improprieties in a part he acted; while, on the contrary, he would dwell with energy upon the beauties, as if he exerted a latent spirit which had been kept back for such an occasion, that he might alarm, waken, and transport, to those places only, where the dignity of his own good sense could be supported with that of his author."

If some players of to-day will take a lesson by this description, the judicious Booth need not have lived in vain. His soul, like that of the late lamented John Brown, will go marching on.

CHAPTER XI

THE FADING OF A STAR

The life of Mistress Oldfield, like that of Barton Booth, was cast in pleasant places. Yet the lady had her little agitations, and found them, no doubt, rather an incentive to existence than otherwise. Take, for instance, the excitement surrounding the production, during the Drury Lane season of 1711-12, of Mrs. Centlivre's play, "The Perplexed Lovers." To the lovely Nance was entrusted the duty of speaking the epilogue thereto, wherein Prince Eugene (at that time on a visit to England) and the Duke of Marlborough were lauded in the true spirit of ancient flunkeyism. But the animosity which politics doth breed ran high, and the first night of the performance went by without the introduction of the eulogy. Some patriots objected to the sentiments which it contained, and the managers were cautious. As for Oldfield, she might have been cautious, too, and with reason, for she had received letters threatening her with dire pains and penalties if she spoke the offending words, but Anne stood ready to deliver them



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at whatsoever time the patentees might name. So when the second night of “The Perplexed Lovers” arrived, and a special licence from the Lord Chamberlain had been secured, the actress came valiantly forward and spoke the epilogue with success. Perhaps Eugene of Savoy thanked Mrs. Oldfield—let us hope that he did—and it is at least certain that after the withdrawal of the play his Highness sent Mrs. Centlivre an elaborate gold snuff-box.[A]

[Footnote A: Speaking of the beau’s outfit in the reign of Queen Anne, Ashton says: “His snuff-box, too, was an object of his solicitude, though, as the habit of taking snuff had but just come into vogue, there were no collections of them, and no beau had ever dreamed of criticizing a box, as did Lord Petersham, as, ‘a nice Summer box.’ ... Those of the middle classes were chiefly of silver, or tortoise-shell, or mother-of-pearl; sometimes of ‘aggat’ or with a ‘Moco Stone’ in the lid. A beau would sometimes either have a looking-glass, or the portrait of a lady inside the lid.”]

And who was the gratified Centlivre? A masculine looking female with a talent for play-writing, a tendency to appear in men’s parts, and last, but far from least, a nice little wen adorning her left eyelid. She possessed other characteristics too, but those herein mentioned are the only ones which stand out clearly after the lapse of nearly two centuries. This doughty woman had been married twice before she went to Windsor, where she once more entered into the matrimonial noose, or rather, again inveigled an unfortunate into that treacherous device. The visit to the seat of Royalty was signalled by her acting of Alexander the Great, but from the atmosphere of Kings and Queens she passed without a murmur to the humbler air of a kitchen. In other words, she married a Mr. Centlivre, chief cook to her well-fed Majesty Queen Anne; and the mean-livered Pope would refer to her, later on, as “the cook’s wife in Buckingham Court.” She might, indeed, be a cook’s wife, but she knew how to write with vivacity, and produced many an entertaining play. Among them were “A Bold Stroke for a Wife” and “The Wonder,” that comedy which Garrick would so relish in after years.

The nature of the aforesaid “Wonder” was explained in the satirical reflection of the secondary title, “A Woman Keeps a Secret!” And Mrs. Centlivre had this to say in her epilogue, upon the mooted question of feminine loquacity:

“Keep a secret, says a beau,
And sneers at some ill-natured wit below;
But faith, if we should tell but half we know,
There’s many a spruce young fellow in this place,
Wou’d never presume to show his face;
Women are not so weak, what e’er men prate;
How many tip-top beaux have had the fate,
T’ enjoy from mama’s secrets their estate!



Who, if her early folly had made known,
Had rid behind the coach that's now their own."

Mrs. Oldfield received fresh cause for nervousness, had she been of a timid temperament, when, some years later, during the season of 1717-18, Cibber's political play of "The Non-Juror" was brought out. The comedy was a blow aimed at the Jacobites and the Pretender, who had met with such disastrous treatment in the rebellion of 1715, and was a skilfully-wrought laudation of the Hanoverian dynasty.[A]



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[Footnote A: The piece was published and dedicated to George I., who acknowledged his sense of the honour by paying to Cibber the sum of two hundred guineas. That the good old prejudice against the stage was still in full force, despite the march of liberal ideas, is clearly shown in the author's address to the King: "Your comedians, Sir, are an unhappy society, whom some severe heads think wholly useless, and others, dangerous to the young and innocent. This comedy is, therefore, an attempt to remove that prejudice, and to show what honest and laudable uses may be made of the theatre, when its performances keep close to the true purposes of its institution." Cibber also referred to himself as "the lowest of your subjects from the theatre," and thus mirrored the servility of the golden Georgian era.]

"About this time," writes Cibber, telling of the play's presentation, "Jacobitism had lately exerted itself by the most unprovoked rebellion that our histories have handed down to us since the Norman Conquest; I therefore thought that to set the authors and principles of that desperate folly in a fair light, by allowing the mistaken consciences of some their best excuse, and by making the artful Pretenders to Conscience as ridiculous as they were ungratefully wicked, was a subject fit for the honest satire of comedy, and what might, if it succeeded, do honour to the stage by showing the valuable use of it. And considering what numbers at that time might come to it as prejudiced spectators, it may be allow'd that the undertaking was not less hazardous than laudable."

And hazardous the project certainly seemed; for, while the uprising in the interests of the Pretender had been ostensibly crushed, the spirit of "divine right" was as strong as ever; there were many worthy gentlemen who drank secret bumpers to the King—"over the water"—and the Hanoverian throne had as yet a precarious lodgment on English soil. It was expected, therefore, that these malcontents would have anything but an appetite for the theatrical feast set before them in the shape of the "Non-Juror," and would prove none the less disgusted because the play happened to be an adaptation of Moliere's "Tartuffe." As the latter comedy depicts a self-indulgent, crawling hypocrite of the worst type, and is an eloquent sermon against sham, it may be imagined that the Jacobites were not over enthusiastic when they learned that the moral of "Tartuffe" was to be applied to them.[A]

[Footnote A: Tartuffe, according to French tradition, is a caricature of the famous Pere la Chaise (Confessor to Louis Quatorze), who had a weakness for the pleasures of the table, including truffles (tartuffes). After Cibber's day, Moliere's play was again adapted into English, under the title of "The Hypocrite."]



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“Upon the hypocrisy of the French character,” explains Cibber (who probably looked upon France, Papacy, and the Pretender as a threefold combination of sin), “I engrafted a stronger wickedness, that of an English Popish priest lurking under the doctrine of our own Church to raise his fortune upon the ruin of a worthy gentleman, whom his dissembled sanctity had seduc’d into the treasonable cause of a Roman Catholick outlaw. How this design, in the play, was executed, I refer to the readers of it; it cannot be mended by any critical remarks I can make in its favour. Let it speak for itself.”

The “Non-juror” did speak for itself, too, and that in decided terms.[A] The production entailed the scorn of the disaffected, and made for Cibber some lasting enemies, but the friends of government were strong, Cibber was lauded for his loyalty, and the comedy achieved a triumph. The vivacity of Oldfield’s acting, as Maria, delighted all beholders, and it was further agreed that the performance was well given throughout. In the cast were Booth, Mills, Wilks, Cibber, Mrs. Porter, Mrs. Oldfield, and Walker. The Walker here mentioned was at that time a very young man, not over seventeen or eighteen years of age, and made his first hit in the “Non-juror.” When the “Beggars’ Opera” was subsequently brought out, the mighty Quin refused to play the highwayman, Macheath, and Walker willingly took the part and made therein the reputation of his life. But success turned his unsteady head. “He follow’d Bacchus too ardently, insomuch that his credit was often drown’d upon the stage, and, by degrees, almost render’d him useless.” Ungrammatical, but to the point, Mr. Chetwood.

[Footnote A: The success surpassed even expectation. It raised against Cibber a phalanx of implacable foes—foes who howled at everything of which he was afterwards the author; but it gained for him his advancement to the poet-laureateship, and an estimation which caused some people to place him, for usefulness to the cause of true religion, on an equality with the author of “The Whole Duty of Man.”—DR. DORAN.]

This Walker was a genius in a small fashion. He possessed an expressive face and manly figure, with a native buoyancy and humour which stood him in good stead in the character of Macheath, while he had the further gift of dominating a tragic scene with an assumption of tyrannic fire which must have been greatly admired by the theatre-goers of his time. He could not sing, to be sure, when he graced the “Beggars’ Opera,” but the audiences took the will for the deed, applauded his gaiety of action, and quickly pardoned his lyric short-comings. We are equally lenient nowadays to many a comic-opera comedian, so called. Chetwood tells us that Walker was the supposed author of two pieces, “The Quakers’ Opera,” and a tragedy styled “The Fate of Villainy.” The latter, it appears, “he brought to Ireland in the year 1744, and prevailed on the proprietors (of the Dublin theatre) to act it, under the title of ‘Love and Loyalty.’ The second night was given out for his benefit; but not being able to pay in half the charge of the common expences, the doors were order’d to be kept shut.”



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“But, I remember,” laconically adds Chetwood, “few people came to ask the reason. However, I fear this disappointment hasten’d his death; for he survived it but three days; dying in the 44th year of his age, a martyr to what often stole from him a good understanding.”

“He who delights in drinking out of season,
Takes wond’rous pains to drown his manly reason.”

Poor Walker! He is not the only actor who has perished from a mixture of wine and injured vanity.

To return to the success of the “Non-juror,” Cibber writes: “All the reason I had to think it no bad performance was, that it was acted eighteen days running, and that the party that were hurt by it (as I have been told) have not been the smallest number of my back friends ever since. But happy was it for this play that the very subject was its protection; a few smiles of silent contempt were the utmost disgrace that on the first day of its appearance it was thought safe to throw upon it; as the satire was chiefly employ’d on the enemies of the Government, they were not so hardy as to own themselves such by any higher disapprobation or resentment.”[A]

[Footnote A: The production of the “Non-juror” added Pope to the list of Cibber’s enemies, the great poet’s father having been a Non-juror.]

Yet Cibber’s enemies never failed to make things unpleasant for him if they could do so without running too great a risk. There was Nathaniel Mist, for instance, who published a Jacobite paper called *Mist’s Weekly Journal*. This vindictive gentleman, whose political heresies once brought him to the pillory and a prison, began a systematic attack upon the actor-manager, and kept up the warfare for fifteen years. Once, when Colley was ill of a fever, Mist made up his journalistic mind that his enemy must have the good taste to depart the pleasures of this life. So he inserted the following paragraph in his paper:

“Yesterday died Mr. Colley Cibber, late Comedian of the Theatre Royal, notorious for writing the ‘Non-juror.’”

The very day that this obituary appeared Cibber crawled out of the house, sick-faced but convalescent, and read the notice with keen interest. Whether he was amused thereat, or dubbed the joke a poor one, is a matter which he does not record, but he tells us that he “saw no use in being thought to be thoroughly dead before his time,” and “therefore had a mind to see whether the town cared to have him alive again.”

“So the play of the ‘Orphan’ being to be acted that day, I quietly stole myself into the part of the Chaplain, which I had not been seen in for many years before. The surprise of the audience at my unexpected appearance on the very day I had been dead in the



news, and the paleness of my looks, seem'd to make it a doubt whether I was not the ghost of my real self departed. But when I spoke, their wonder eas'd itself by an applause; which convinc'd me they were then satisfied that my friend Mist had told a fib of me. Now, if simply to have shown myself in broad life, and about my business, after he had notoriously reported me dead, can be called a reply, it was the only one which his paper while alive ever drew from me."



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The Jacobites could not interfere with the triumph of the “Non-juror,” but they were shrewd enough to bide their time. That time came, as they thought, in 1728, when there was unfolded at Drury Lane a comedy which became famous under the title of “The Provoked Husband.” The rough draft of the play was the work of Vanbrugh, now dead, but the dialogue and situations had been elaborated by Cibber. Here was a chance, therefore, to damn the latter writer, and accordingly the malcontents repaired to the theatre, hissed the performance roundly, and then went home with the comfortable reflection that they had gotten their revenge. Their revenge, however, was shortlived, for the general public liked the comedy, and soon flocked to its rescue.

“On the first day of ‘The Provok’d Husband,’” says the Poet Laureate, “ten years after the ‘Non-juror’ had appear’d, a powerful party, not having the fear of publick offence or private injury before their eyes, appeared most impetuously concerned for the demolition of it; in which they so far succeeded that for some time I gave it up for lost; and to follow their blows, in the publick papers of the next day it was attack’d and triumph’d over as a dead and damn’d piece: a swinging criticism was made upon it in general invective terms, for they disdain’d to trouble the world with particulars; their sentence, it seems, was proof enough of its deserving the fate it had met with. But this damn’d play was, notwithstanding, acted twenty-eight nights together, and left off at a receipt of upwards of a hundred and forty pounds; which happened to be more than in fifty years before could be then said of any one play whatsoever.”

The play was saved, and no one contributed more importantly to that result than did Mistress Oldfield. Her acting as the heroine, Lady Townley, was pronounced superb, and though she had now drifted into middle-age—was she not over forty?—Nance still seemed, on the stage at least, the incarnation of youth and grace. Is there not a certain English actress, now living (one, by-the-way, who plays Nance Oldfield and suggests her as well) who defies the inroads of time with equal carelessness.[A]

[Footnote A: In the wearing of her person she (Oldfield) was particularly fortunate; her figure was always improving to her thirty-sixth year, but her excellence in acting was never at a stand. And Lady Townley, one of her last new parts, was a proof that she was still able to do more, if more could have been done for her.—GENEST.]

Lady Townley is nothing more or less than a glorified, matured edition of Lady Betty Modish, and, therefore, a very charming woman. Charming, at least, on the boards of a theatre, if not upon the floor of a real drawing-room. For she has a love of pleasure which can hardly be called domestic, and her unfortunate husband, who would see more of her, is tempted to ask, in the very first scene of the play: “Why did I marry?” “While she admits no lover,”



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Lord Townley soliloquises [for my lady is at least virtuous] “she thinks it a greater merit still, in her chastity, not to care for her husband; and while she herself is solacing in one continual round of cards and good company, he, poor wretch, is left at large to take care of his own contentment. ’Tis time, indeed, some care were taken, and speedily there shall be. Yet let me not be rash. Perhaps this disappointment of my heart may make me too impatient; and some tempers, when reproach’d, grow more untractable.”

And when Lady Townley, all graces and ribbons and laces, enters on the scene my lord meekly asks:

* * * * *

“Going out so soon after dinner, madam?”

“Lady T. Lord, my Lord, what can I possibly do at home?”

“Lord T. What does my sister, Lady Grace, do at home?”

“Lady T. Why, that is to me amazing! Have you ever any pleasure at home?”

“Lord T. It might be in your power, madam, I confess, to make it a little more comfortable to me.

“Lady T. Comfortable! and so, my good lord, you would really have a woman of my rank and spirit, stay at home to comfort her husband! Lord! what notions of life some men have!

“Lord T. Don’t you think, madam, some ladies notions are full as extravagant?”

“Lady T. Yes, my lord, when tame doves live cooped within the pen of your precepts, I do think ’em prodigious indeed!

“Lord T. And when they fly wild about this town, madam, pray what must the world think of ’em then?

“Lady T. Oh! this world is not so ill bred as to quarrel with any woman for liking it.

“Lord T. Nor am I, madam, a husband so well bred as to bear my wife’s being so fond of it; in short, the life you lead, madam—

“Lady T. Is, to me, the pleasantest life in the world.



“Lord T. I should not dispute your taste, madam, if a woman had a right to please nobody but herself.

“Lady T. Why, whom would you have her please?

“Lord T. Sometimes her husband.

“Lady T. And don't you think a husband under the same obligation?

“Lord T. Certainly.

“Lady T. Why then we are agreed, my lord. For if I never go abroad till I am weary of being at home—which you know is the case—is it not equally reasonable, not to come home till one's a weary of being abroad?

“Lord T. If this be your rule of life, madam, 'tis time to ask you one serious question.

“Lady T. Don't let it be long acoming then, for I am in haste.

“Lord T. Madam, when I am serious, I expect a serious answer.

“Lady T. Before I know the question? [Here we can imagine Wilks, who played Lord Townley, waxing exceeding wroth at my lady.]

“Lord T. Pshah—have I power, madam, to make you serious by intreaty?

“Lady T. You have.

“Lord T. And you promise to answer me sincerely.



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“Lady T. Sincerely.

“Lord T. Now then recollect your thoughts, and tell me seriously why you married me?”

“Lady T. You insist upon truth, you say?”

“Lord T. I think I have a right to it.

“Lady T. Why then, my lord, to give you at once a proof of my obedience and sincerity—I think—I married—to take off that restraint that lay upon my pleasures, while I was a single woman.

“Lord T. How, madam, is any woman under less restraint after marriage than before it?”

“Lady T. O my lord! my lord! they are quite different creatures! Wives have infinite liberties in life that would be terrible in an unmarried woman to take.

“Lord T. Name one.

“Lady T. Fifty, if you please. To begin then, in the morning—a married women may have men at her toilet, invite them to dinner, appoint them a party in a stage box at the play; engross the conversation there, call 'em by their Christian names; talk louder than the players;—from thence jaunt into the city—take a frolicksome supper at an India house—perhaps, in her *gaiete de coeur*, toast a pretty fellow—then clatter again to this end of the town, break with the morning into an assembly, crowd to the hazard table, throw a familiar levant upon some sharp lurching man of quality, and if he demands his money, turn it off with a loud laugh, and cry—you'll owe it to him, to vex him! ha! ha!

“Lord T. [*Aside*]. Prodigious!”

It is related that so magnificently did Oldfield describe the pleasures of a woman of fashion that the audience echoed, with a different meaning, Lord Townley's comment, and showered her with plaudits. “Prodigious,” indeed, must have been her acting.

Nance was even more captivating, as the comedy progressed, and nowhere did she shine more brilliantly, it may be supposed, than in the following scene:

“Lady Townley. Well! look you, my lord; I can bear it no longer! Nothing still but about my faults, my faults! An agreeable subject truly!

“Lord T. Why, madam, if you won't hear of them, how can I ever hope to see you mend them?”

“Lady T. Why, I don't intend to mend them—I can't mend them—you know I have try'd to do it an hundred times, and—it hurts me so—I can't bear it!



“Lord T. And I, madam, can’t bear this daily licentious abuse of your time and character.

“Lady T. Abuse! astonishing! when the universe knows, I am never better company than when I am doing what I have a mind to! But to see this world! that men can never get over that silly spirit of contradiction—why, but last Thursday, now—there you wisely amended one of my faults, as you call them—you insisted upon my not going to the masquerade—and pray, what was the consequence? Was not I as cross as the Devil, all the night after? Was not I forc’d to get company at home? And was it not almost three o’clock in the morning before I was able to come to myself again? And then the fault is not mended neither—for next time I shall only have twice the inclination to go: so that all this mending and mending, you see, is but darning an old ruffle, to make it worse than it was before.



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“Lord T. Well, the manner of women’s living, of late, is insupportable, and one way or other—

“Lady T. It’s to be mended, I suppose! Why, so it may, but then, my dear lord, you must give one time—and when things are at worst, you know, they may mend themselves! Ha! ha!

“Lord T. Madam, I am not in a humour, now, to trifle.

“Lady T. Why, then, my lord, one word of fair argument—to talk with you, your own way now—you complain of my late hours, and I of your early ones—so far we are even, you’ll allow—but pray which gives us the best figure, in the eye of the polite world, my active, spirited three in the morning, or your dull, drowsy, eleven at night? Now, I think, one has the air of a woman of quality, and t’other of a plodding mechanic, that goes to bed betimes, that he may rise early, to open his shop—faugh!

“LORD T. Fy, fy, madam! is this your way of reasoning? ’Tis time to wake you then. ’Tis not your ill hours alone that disturb me, but as often the ill company that occasion those ill hours.

“LADY T. Sure I don’t understand you now, my lord; what ill company do I keep?

“LORD T. Why, at best, women that lose their money, and men that win it! or, perhaps, men that are voluntary bubbles at one game, in hopes a lady will give them fair play at another.[A] Then that unavoidable mixture with known rakes, conceal’d thieves, and sharpers in embroidery—or what, to me, is still more shocking, that herd of familiar chattering, crop-ear’d coxcombs, who are so often like monkeys, there would be no knowing them asunder, but that their tails hang from their head, and the monkey’s grows where it should do.

[Footnote A: Women gambled as passionately as did the men in the early part of the eighteenth century. Ashton quotes the following from the “Gaming Lady”: “She’s a profuse lady, tho’ of a miserly temper, whose covetous disposition is the very cause of her extravagancy; for the desire of success wheedles her ladyship to play, and the incident charges and disappointments that attend it make her as expensive to her husband as his coach and six horses. When an unfortunate night has happen’d to empty her cabinet, she has many shifts to replenish her pockets. Her jewels are carry’d privately into Lombard street, and fortune is to be tempted the next night with another sum, borrowed of my lady’s goldsmith at the extortion of a pawnbroker; and if that fails, then she sells off her wardrobe, to the great grief of her maids; stretches her credit amongst those she deals with, or makes her waiting woman dive into the bottom of her trunk, and lug out her green net purse full of old Jacobuses, in hopes to recover her losses by a turn of fortune, that she may conceal her bad luck from the knowledge of her husband.”]



“Lady T. And a husband must give eminent proof of his sense that thinks their powder puffs dangerous!

“Lord T. Their being fools, madam, is not always the husband’s security; or, if it were, fortune sometimes gives them advantages might make a thinking woman tremble.



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“Lady T. What do you mean?”

“Lord T. That women sometimes lose more than they are able to pay; and, if a creditor be a little pressing, the lady may be reduced to try if, instead of gold, the gentleman will accept of a trinket.

“Lady T. My lord, you grow scurrilous; you’ll make me hate you. I’ll have you to know I keep company with the politest people in town, and the assemblies I frequent are full of such.

“Lord T. So are the churches—now and then.

“Lady T. My friends frequent them, too, as well as the assemblies.

“Lord T. Yes; and would do it oftener if a groom of the chambers there were allowed to furnish cards to the company.

“Lady T. I see what you drive at all this while. You would lay an imputation on my fame to cover your own avarice! I might take any pleasures, I find, that were not expensive.

“Lord T. Have a care, madam; don’t let me think you only value your chastity to make me reproachable for not indulging you in everything else that’s vicious. I, madam, have a reputation, too, to guard that’s dear to me as yours. The follies of an ungoverned wife may make the wisest man uneasy; but ’tis his own fault if ever they make him contemptible.

“Lady T. My lord, you make a woman mad!

“Lord T. You’d make a man a fool.

“Lady T. If heaven has made you otherwise, that won’t be in my power.

“Lord T. Whatever may be in your inclination, madam, I’ll prevent you making me a beggar, at least.

“Lady T. A beggar! Croesus, I’m out of patience. I won’t come home till four to-morrow morning.

“Lord T. That may be, madam; but I’ll order the doors to be locked at twelve.

“Lady T. Then I won’t come home till to-morrow night.

“Lord T. Then, madam, you shall never come home again.” [*Exit Lord Townley.*]

* * * * *



In the end, of course, Lady Townley is converted to the pleasures of domesticity, and ends the comedy by saying:

“So visible the bliss, so plain the way,
How was it possible my sense could stray?
But now, a convert to this truth I come,
That married happiness is never found from home.”

Perhaps when Oldfield delivered these virtuous lines, she thought to herself that happiness, even of the unmarried kind, was never very far away from home. But she forgot sentiment when she came back to give the breezy epilogue:

“Methinks I hear some powder’d critics say
Damn it, this wife reform’d has spoil’d the play!
The coxcombs should have drawn her more in fashion,
Have gratify’d her softer inclination,
Have tipt her a gallant, and clinch’d the provocation.
But there our bard stops short: for ’twere uncivil
T’have made a modern belle all o’er a devil!
He hop’d in honor of the sex, the age
Would bear one mended woman—on the stage.”



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Continuing, after diverse moral reflections, Nance made this appeal to her hearers:

“You, you then, ladies, whose unquestion’d lives
Give you the foremost fame of happy wives,
Protect, for its attempt, this helpless play;
Nor leave it to the vulgar taste a prey;
Appear the frequent champion of its cause,
Direct the crowd, and give yourselves applause.”

“Zounds, madam,” cries a beau who is ogling a woman of quality in a stage box, “they say Anne Oldfield will never see forty-two again, but I’ll warrant you, madam, she looks not a day older than yourself.” And the woman of quality, who is over forty, bows at the compliment, as well she may. Bellchambers records that Lady Townley was universally regarded as Oldfield’s *ne plus ultra* in acting. “She slid so gracefully into the foibles, and displayed so humorously the excesses, of a fine woman too sensible of her charms, too confident in her strength, and led away by her pleasures, that no succeeding Lady Townley arrived at her many distinguished excellencies in the character.”[A] And the writer goes on to say that “by being a welcome and constant visitor to families of distinction, Mrs. Oldfield acquired a graceful carriage in representing women of high rank, and expressed their sentiments in a manner so easy, natural, and flowing, that they appeared to be of her own genuine utterance.” Pray, sir, what is there so remarkable about that? Had not Anne as gentle blood as that which coursed through the veins of many a lady of rank?

[Footnote A: The Lady Townleys of later years included Mrs. Spranger Barry and the imposing Mistress Yates.]

But the triumphs of the first Lady Townley were fast drawing to a close; the curtain would soon be rung down for ever upon that radiant face, with its angelic smile and dancing eyes, and the stage, whether Drury Lane or mother earth would see her no more. Ill health began to follow in her once careless path, and there were times when the duties of acting seemed almost unbearable. Yet she was a brave woman, and kept a merry front to the audience, although she was obliged, on occasions, to turn away from the house, that it might not see the tears of pain flowing down her cheek. Here was a combination of comedy and tragedy, with a vengeance!

Still Nance went on, delighting the town as of yore, and putting into her last original role, that of Sophonisba, a fire which breathed not of sickness nor failing powers. At last there came a day when she played her final part, and left Drury Lane only to be driven tenderly home to her death-bed. Think of the pathos of this last performance, this giving up of all that was most alluring in life, and let none of us poor moderns presume to analyse the heart-broken woman’s feelings as she said good-bye to the dear old theatre. Anne worshipped art, and the public, in turn, worshipped her; she had acted her many parts, laughed, cried, sinned, and waxed exceeding happy—and now she was



to be cast out into the darkness. Must she not have shivered when she entered her house in Lower Grosvenor Street for the last time? Poor lovable creature! There could be for her now neither lights, nor laughter, nor applause; all would be gloom and weariness to the end.



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During the weeks which followed, the invalid received the untiring attentions of Mistress Saunders, who once upon a time played bouncing chambermaids, but who had, for ten years past, acted as a feminine *valet de chambre* and general factotum for Mrs. Oldfield. And if ever she played well, 'twas in thus ministering to the dying wants of one who in health had been ever helpful and generous. Pope, who hated the great comedienne in his petty, spiteful way, has immortalised the intimacy of mistress and handmaiden in these lines:

“Odious! in woolen? 'twould a saint provoke!
Were the last words that poor Narcissa spoke.
'No, let a charming Chintz and Brussels lace
Wrap my cold limbs and shade my lifeless face;
One would not sure be frightful when one's dead,
And, Betty, give this cheek a little red.”[A]

[Footnote A: Pope's Moral Essays.]

These ante-mortem directions had no further reality than the imagination of the poet; but it is easy to believe that the woman who had set the fashions for the town these many years would have enough of the feminine instinct left, though Death waited without, to plan a becoming funeral garb. Woollen, forsooth! It was a beastly law which required that all the dead should be buried in that material, and Nance shuddered when she thought of it.[A]

[Footnote A: The dead were then buried in woolen, which was rendered compulsory by the Acts 30 Car. II. c. 3 and 36 ejusdem c. i. The first act was entitled “an Act for the lessening the importation of linnen from beyond the seas, and the encouragement of the woolen and paper manufactures of the kingdome.” It prescribed that the curate of every parish, shall keep a register to be provided at the charge of the parish, wherein to enter all burials and affidavits of persons being buried in woolen; the affidavit to be taken by any justice of the peace, mayor, or such like chief officer in the parish where the body was interred.... It imposed a fine of five pounds for every infringement, one half to go to the informer, and the other half to the poor of the parish. This Act was only repealed by 54 Geo. III. c. 108, or in the year 1815. The material used was flannel, and such interments are frequently mentioned in the literature of the time.—ASHTON.]

Soon there were no more thoughts of dress, no more plaintive shudders at the iniquity of the woollen act. The eyes whose kindly light had illumined the dull soul of many a playgoer, closed for ever on the 23rd of October, 1730, and the incomparable Oldfield was no more. Surely old Sol did not shine on London that day; surely he must have mourned behind the leaden English sky for one of his fairest daughters, that child of sunshine who brightened the world by her presence, and made her exit, as she did her entrance, with a smile.



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After the breath had left Anne's still lovely body, Mistress Saunders dressed her in a "Brussels lace head-dress, a Holland shift, with tucker and double ruffles of the same lace, and a pair of new kid gloves." It was, no doubt, the costume which the actress had commanded, and handsome she must have looked, as many an admirer took one last glimpse of the remains prior to the interment in Westminster Abbey. All that was mortal of Oldfield lay in state in the Jerusalem Chamber,[A] and then there followed an elaborate funeral, at which were present a host of great men, and the two sons of the deceased, Mr. Maynwaring and young Churchill. Were these sons less grieved when they found that their mother had left them the major part of her fortune?

[Footnote A: The solemn lying in state of an English actress in the Jerusalem Chamber, the sorrow of the public over their lost favourite, and the regret of friends in noble, or humble, but virtuous homes, where Mrs. Oldfield had been ever welcome, contrast strongly with the French sentiment towards French players. It has been already said, that as long as Clairon exercised the power, when she advanced to the footlights, to make the (then standing) pit recoil several feet, by the mere magic of her eyes, the pit, who enjoyed the terror as a luxury, flung crowns to her, and wept at the thought of losing her; but Clairon infirm was Clairon forgotten, and to a decaying actor or actress a French audience is the most merciless in the world. The brightest and best of them, as with us, died in the service of the public. Monfleury, Mondory, and Bricourt died of apoplexy, brought on by excess of zeal. Moliere, who fell in harness, was buried with less ceremony than some favourite dog. The charming Lecouvreur, that Oldfield of the French stage, whose beauty and intellect were the double charm which rendered theatrical France ecstatic, was hurriedly interred within a saw-pit. Bishops might be exceedingly interested in, and unepiscopally generous to living actresses of wit and beauty, but the prelates smote them with a "Maranatha!" and an "Avaunt ye!" when dead.—DR. DORAN.]

Later on Savage was inspired to write that famous poem of his, unsigned though it appeared, on the virtues of the departed:

"Oldfield's no more! and can the Muse forbear
O'er Oldfield's grave to shed a grateful tear?
Shall she, the Glory of the British Stage,
Pride of her sex, and wonder of the age;
Shall she, who, living, charm'd th' admiring throng,
Die undistinguish'd, and not claim a song?
No; feeble as it is, I'll boldly raise
My willing voice, to celebrate her praise,
And with her name immortalise my lays.
Had but my Muse her art to touch the soul,
Charm ev'ry sense, and ev'ry pow'r control,
I'd paint her as she was—the form divine,
Where ev'ry lovely grace united shine;

A mein majestic, as the wife of Jove;
An air as winning as the Queen of Love:



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In ev'ry feature rival charms should rise,
And Cupid hold his empire in her eyes.
A soul, with ev'ry elegance refin'd,
By nature, and the converse of mankind:
Wit, which could strike assuming folly dead;
And sense, which temper'd ev'ry thing she said;
Judgment, which ev'ry little fault could spy;
But candour, which would pass a thousand by:
Such finish'd breeding, so polite a taste,
Her fancy always for the fashion pass'd;
Whilst every social virtue fir'd her breast
To help the needy, succour the distrest;
A friend to all in misery she stood,
And her chief pride was plac'd in doing good.
But now, my Muse, the arduous task engage,
And shew the charming figure on the stage;
Describe her look, her action, voice and mein,
The gay coquette, soft maid, or haughty Queen.
So bright she shone, in ev'ry different part,
She gain'd despotic empire o'er the heart;
Knew how each various motion to control,
Sooth ev'ry passion, and subdue the soul:
As she, o'er gay, or sorrowful appears,
She claims our mirth, or triumphs in our tears.
When Cleopatra's form she chose to wear
We saw the monarch's mein, the beauty's air;
Charmed with the sight, her cause we all approve,
And, like her lover, give up all for love:
Anthony's fate, instead of Caesar's choose,
And wish for her we had a world to lose.
But now the gay delightful scene is o'er,
And that sweet form must glad our world no more;
Relentless death has stop'd the tuneful tongue,
And clos'd those eyes, for all, but death, too strong,
Blasted that face where ev'ry beauty bloom'd,
And to Eternal Rest the graceful Mover doom'd."

In writing which Savage almost justified his existence.



APPENDIX

THEATRICAL CLAPTRAP

(What Addison has to say about it in the "Spectator")

No. 44. FRIDAY, APRIL 20, 1711.

"Tu quid ego, et populus mecum desideret, audi."
HOR. ARS POET. ver. 153.

"Now hear what ev'ry auditor expects."
ROSCOMMON.

Among the several artifices which are put in practice by the poets to fill the minds of an audience with terror, the first place is due to thunder and lightning, which are often made use of at the descending of a god, or the rising of a ghost, at the vanishing of a devil, or at the death of a tyrant. I have known a bell introduced into several tragedies with good effect; and have seen the whole assembly in a very great alarm all the while it has been ringing. But there is nothing which delights and terrifies our English theatre so much as a ghost, especially when he appears in a bloody shirt. A spectre has very often saved a play, though he has done nothing but stalked across the stage, or rose through a cleft



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of it, and sunk again without speaking one word. There may be a proper season for these several terrors; and when they only come in as aids and assistances to the poet, they are not only to be excused, but to be applauded. Thus the sounding of the clock in "Venice Preserved" makes the hearts of the whole audience quake, and conveys a stronger terror to the mind than it is possible for words to do. The appearance of the ghost in "Hamlet" is a masterpiece in its kind, and wrought up with all the circumstances that can create either attention or horror. The mind of the reader is wonderfully prepared for his reception by the discourses that precede it. His dumb behaviour at his first entrance strikes the imagination very strongly; but every time he enters he is still more terrifying. Who can read the speech with which young Hamlet accosts him without trembling?

"Hor. Look, my Lord, it comes!

"Ham. Angels and ministers of grace defend us! Be thou a spirit of health, or goblin damn'd; Bring with thee airs from heav'n, or blasts from hell; Be thy events wicked or charitable; Thou com'st in such a questionable shape That I will speak to thee. I'll call thee Hamlet, King, Father, Royal Dane. Oh I answer me. Let me not burst in ignorance; but tell Why thy canoniz'd bones, hearsed in death, Have burst their cerements? Why the sepulchre, Wherein we saw thee quietly inurn'd, Hath op'd his ponderous and marble jaws To cast thee up again? What may this mean? That thou dead corse again in complete steel Revisit'st thus the glimpses of the moon, Making night hideous?"

I do not therefore find fault with the artifices above mentioned, when they are introduced with skill and accompanied by proportionable sentiments and expressions in the writings.

For the moving of pity our principal machine is the handkerchief; and indeed in our common tragedies we should not know very often that the persons are in distress by anything they say, if they did not from time to time apply their handkerchiefs to their eyes. Far be it from me to think of banishing this instrument of sorrow from the stage; I know a tragedy could not subsist without it: all that I would contend for is to keep it from being misapplied. In a word, I would have the actor's tongue sympathise with his eyes.

A disconsolate mother, with a child in her hand, has frequently drawn compassion from the audience, and has therefore gained a place in several tragedies. A modern writer, that observed how this had took in other plays, being resolved to double the distress, and melt his audience twice as much as those before him had done, brought a princess upon the stage with a little boy in one hand and a girl in the other. This too had a very good effect. A third poet being resolved to outwrite all his predecessors, a few years ago introduced three children with great success: and, as I am informed, a young



gentleman, who is fully determined to break the most obdurate hearts, has a tragedy by him where the first person that appears upon the stage is an afflicted widow in her mourning weeds, with half a dozen fatherless children attending her, like those that usually hang about the figure of Charity. Thus several incidents that are beautiful in a good writer become ridiculous by falling into the hands of a bad one.



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But among all our methods of moving pity or terror, there is none so absurd and barbarous, and which more exposes us to the contempt and ridicule of our neighbours, than that dreadful butchering of one another, which is very frequent upon the English stage. To delight in seeing men stabbed, poisoned, racked, or impaled is certainly the sign of a cruel temper; and as this is often practised before the British audience, several French critics, who think these are grateful spectacles to us, take occasion from them to represent us as a people who delight in blood. It is indeed very odd to see our stage strewed with carcasses in the last scenes of a tragedy; and to observe in the wardrobe of the playhouse several daggers, poniards, wheels, bowls for poison, and many other instruments of death. Murders and executions are always transacted behind the scenes in the French theatre, which in general is very agreeable to the manners of a polite and civilised people; but as there are no exceptions to this rule on the French stage, it leads them into absurdities almost as ridiculous as that which falls under our present censure. I remember in the famous play of *Corneille*, written upon the subject of the *Horatii* and *Curiatii*, the fierce young hero, who had overcome the *Curiatii* one after another (instead of being congratulated by his sister for his victory, being upbraided by her for having slain her lover), in the height of his passion and resentment kills her. If anything could extenuate so brutal an action, it would be the doing of it on a sudden, before the sentiments of nature, reason, or manhood could take place in him. However, to avoid public bloodshed, as soon as his passion is wrought to its height, he follows his sister the whole length of the stage, and forbears killing her till they are both withdrawn behind the scenes. I must confess, had he murdered her before the audience, the indecency might have been greater; but as it is, it appears very unnatural, and looks like killing in cold blood. To give my opinion upon this case, the fact ought not to have been represented, but to have been told if there was any occasion for it.

It may not be unacceptable to the reader to see how *Sophocles* has conducted a tragedy under the like delicate circumstance. *Orestes* was in the same condition with *Hamlet* in *Shakespeare*, his mother having murdered his father and taken possession of his kingdom in conspiracy with her adulterer. That young prince, therefore, being determined to revenge his father's death upon those who filled his throne, conveys himself by a beautiful stratagem into his mother's apartment, with a resolution to kill her. But because such a spectacle would have been too shocking to the audience, this dreadful resolution is executed behind the scenes. The mother is heard calling to her son for mercy, and the son answering her that she showed no mercy to his father; after which she shrieks out that she is wounded, and by what follows we find that she is



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slain. I do not remember that in any of our plays there are speeches made behind the scenes, though there are other instances of this nature to be met with in those of the ancients: and I believe my reader will agree with me that there is something infinitely more affecting in this dreadful dialogue between the mother and her son behind the scenes than could have been in anything transacted before the audience. Orestes immediately after meets the usurper at the entrance of his palace; and by a very happy thought of the poet avoids killing him before the audience, by telling him that he should live some time in his present bitterness of soul before he would despatch him, and by ordering him to retire into that part of the palace where he had slain his father, whose murder he would revenge in the very same place where it was committed. By this means the poet observes that decency, which Horace afterwards established as a rule, of forbearing to commit parricides or unnatural murders before the audience.

“Nec pueros coram populo Medea trucidet,”
ARS POET. ver. 185.

“Let not Medea draw her murd’ring knife,
And spill her children’s blood upon the stage.”
ROSCOMMON.

The French have therefore refined too much upon Horace’s rule, who never designed to banish all kinds of death from the stage; but only such as had too much horror in them, and which would have a better effect upon the audience when transacted behind the scenes. I would therefore recommend to my countrymen the practice of the ancient poets, who were very sparing of their public executions, and rather chose to perform them behind the scenes, if it could be done with as great an effect upon the audience. At the same time, I must observe, that though the devoted persons of the tragedy were seldom slain before the audience, which has generally something ridiculous in it, their bodies were often produced after their death, which has always in it something melancholy or terrifying; so that the killing on the stage does not seem to have been avoided only as an indecency, but also as an improbability.

“Nec pueros coram populo Medea trucidet:
Aut humana palam coquat exta nefarius Atreus;
Aut in avem Progne vertatur, Cadmus in anguem.
Quodcunque ostendis mihi sic, incredulus odi.”
HOR. ARS. POET. ver. 185.

“Medea must not draw her murd’ring knife,
Nor Atreus there his horrid feast prepare;
Cadmus and Progne’s metamorphoses
(She to a swallow turn’d, he to a snake);

And whatsoever contradicts my sense,
I hate to see, and never can believe.”
ROSCOMMON.



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I have now gone through the several dramatic inventions which are made use of by the ignorant poets to supply the place of tragedy, and by the skilful to improve it; some of which I could wish entirely rejected, and the rest to be used with caution. It would be an endless task to consider comedy in the same light, and to mention the innumerable shifts that small wits put in practice to raise a laugh. Bullock in a short coat, and Norris in a long one, seldom failed of this effect.[A] In ordinary comedies a broad and a narrow brimmed hat are different characters. Sometimes the wit of a scene lies in a shoulder-belt, and sometimes in a pair of whiskers. A lover running about the stage, with his head peeping out of a barrel, was thought a very good jest in King Charles the Second's time, and invented by one of the first wits of the age.[B] But because ridicule is not so delicate as compassion, and because the objects that make us laugh are infinitely more numerous than those that make us weep, there is a much greater latitude for comic than tragic artifices, and by consequence a much greater indulgence to be allowed them.

[Footnote A: Addison's comment about these two favourite comedians shows that then, as now, eccentricity in dress formed a popular species of stage humour.]

[Footnote B: Sir George Etherege, in his comedy of "The Comical Revenge, or Love in a Tub."]

COMIC EPILOGUES

(From the "Spectator")

No. 338. FRIDAY, MARCH 28, 1712.

"Nil fuit unquam
Sic dispar sibi."
HOR. SAT. III. 1-1-18.

"Made up of nought but inconsistencies."

I find the tragedy of the "Distressed Mother" is published to-day. The author of the prologue,[A] I suppose pleads an old excuse I have read somewhere, of "being dull with design;" and the gentleman who writ the epilogue[B] has, to my knowledge, so much of greater moment to value himself upon, that he will easily forgive me for publishing the exceptions made against gaiety at the end of serious entertainments in the following letter: I should be more unwilling to pardon him, than anybody, a practice which cannot have any ill consequence, but from the abilities of the person who is guilty of it.

[Footnote A: Steele.]

[Footnote B: Addison credited Budgell with the epilogue.]



“MR. SPECTATOR,—I had the happiness the other night of sitting very near you, and your worthy friend Sir Roger, at the acting of the new tragedy, which you have in a late paper or two so justly recommended. I was highly pleased with the advantageous situation fortune had given me in placing me so near two gentlemen, from one of which I was sure to hear such reflections on the several incidents of the play as pure nature suggested; and from the other, such as flowed from the exactest art and judgment; though I must confess that my curiosity led me so much to



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observe the knight's reflections that I was not so well at leisure to improve myself by yours. Nature, I found, played her part in the knight pretty well, till at the last concluding lines she entirely forsook him. You must know, Sir, that it is always my custom, when I have been well entertained at a new tragedy, to make my retreat before the facetious epilogue enters; not but that those pieces are often very well writ, but having paid down my half-crown, and made a fair purchase of as much of the pleasing melancholy as the poet's art can afford me, or my own nature admit of, I am willing to carry some of it home with me; and cannot endure to be at once tricked out of all, though by the wittiest dexterity in the world. However, I kept my seat the other night, in hopes of finding my own sentiments of this matter favoured by your friend's; when, to my great surprise, I found the knight, entering with equal pleasure into both parts, and as much satisfied with Mrs. Oldfield's gaiety, as he had been before with Andromache's greatness. Whether this were no more than an effect of the knight's peculiar humanity, pleased to find at last, that, after all the tragical doings, everything was safe and well, I do not know. But for my own part, I must confess I was so dissatisfied, that I was sorry the poet had saved Andromache, and could heartily have wished that he had left her stone-dead upon the stage. For you cannot imagine, Mr. Spectator, the mischief she was reserved to do me. I found my soul, during the action, gradually worked up to the highest pitch; and felt the exalted passion which all generous minds conceive at the sight of virtue in distress. The impression, believe me, Sir, was so strong upon me, that I am persuaded, if I had been let alone in it, I could at an extremity have ventured to defend yourself and Sir Roger against half a score of the fiercest Mohocks; but the ludicrous epilogue in the close extinguished all my ardour, and made me look upon all such noble achievements as downright silly and romantic. What the rest of the audience felt, I cannot so well tell. For myself I must declare, that at the end of the play I found my soul uniform, and all of a piece; but at the end of the epilogue, it was so jumbled together and divided between jest and earnest, that, if you will forgive me an extravagant fancy, I will here set it down. I could not but fancy, if my soul had at that moment quitted my body, and descended to the poetical shades in the posture it was then in, what a strange figure it would have made among them. They would not have known what to have made of my motley spectre, half comic and half tragic, all over resembling a ridiculous face, that, at the same time, laughs on one side, and cries on the other. The only defence, I think, I have ever heard made for this, as it seems to me the most unnatural tack of the comic tail to the tragic head, is this, that the minds of the audience must be refreshed, and gentlemen and ladies not sent away to their own



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homes with too dismal and melancholy thoughts about them: for who knows the consequence of this? We are much obliged indeed to poets for the great tenderness they express for the safety of our persons, and heartily thank them for it. But if that be all, pray, good Sir, assure them, that we are none of us like to come to any great harm; and that, let them do their best, we shall, in all probability, live out the length of our days, and frequent the theatres more than ever. What makes me more desirous to have some reformation of this matter is, because of an ill consequence or two attending it: for a great many of our church musicians being related to the theatre, they have, in imitation of these epilogues, introduced in their farewell voluntaries, a sort of music quite foreign to the design of church-services, to the great prejudice of well-disposed people. Those fingering gentlemen should be informed, that they ought to suit their airs to the place and business; and that the musician is obliged to keep to the text as much as the preacher. For want of this, I have found by experience a great deal of mischief. For when the preacher has often, with great piety, and art enough, handled his subject, and the judicious clerk has with the utmost diligence called out two staves proper to the discourse, and I have found in myself, and in the rest of the pew, good thoughts and dispositions, they have been all in a moment dissipated by a merry jig from the organ loft. One knows not what further ill effects the epilogues I have been speaking of may in time produce: but this I am credibly informed of, that Paul Lorrain[A] has resolved upon a very sudden reformation in his tragical dramas; and that, at the next monthly performance, he designs, instead of a penitential psalm, to dismiss his audience with an excellent new ballad of his own composing. Pray, Sir, do what you can to put a stop to these growing evils, and you will very much oblige your humble servant,

“PHYSIBULUS.”

[Footnote A: At that time ordinary of Newgate; and who, in his accounts of the convicts executed at Tyburn, generally represented them as true penitents, and dying very well.]

No. 341. TUESDAY, APRIL 1, 1712.

“—Revocate animos, maestumque timorem
Mittite—”
VIRG. AEN.I. 206.

“Resume your courage, and dismiss your care.”
DRYDEN.

Having, to oblige my correspondent Physibulus, printed his letter last Friday, in relation to the new epilogue, he cannot take it amiss, if I now publish another, which I have just received from a gentleman who does not agree with him in his sentiments upon that matter.



“Sir,—I am amazed to find an epilogue attacked in your last Friday’s paper, which has been so generally applauded by the town, and received such honours as were never before given to any in an English theatre.

“The audience would not permit Mrs. Oldfield to go off the stage the first night till she had repeated it twice; the second night the noise of *ancora* was as loud as before, and she was again obliged to speak it twice; the third night it was called for a second time; and, in short, contrary to all other epilogues, which are dropped after the third representation of the play, this has already been repeated nine times.



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“I must own I am the more surprised to find this censure, in opposition to the whole town, in a paper which has hitherto been famous for the candour of its criticisms.

“I can by no means allow your melancholy correspondent, that the new epilogue is unnatural, because it is gay. If I had a mind to be learned, I could tell him that the prologue and epilogue were real parts of the ancient tragedy; but every one knows, that on the British stage, they are distinct performances by themselves, pieces entirely detached from the play, and no way essential to it.

“The moment the play ends, Mrs. Oldfield is no more Andromache, but Mrs. Oldfield; and though the poet had left Andromache stone-dead upon the stage, as your ingenious correspondent phrases it, Mrs. Oldfield might still have spoke a merry epilogue. We have an instance of this in a tragedy where there is not only a death, but a martyrdom. [A] St. Catherine was there personated by Nell Gwyn; she lies stone-dead upon the stage, but, upon those gentlemen’s offering to remove her body, whose business it is to carry off the slain in our English tragedies, she breaks out into that abrupt beginning of what was a very ludicrous, but at the same time thought a very good epilogue:—

“Hold: are you mad? you damn’d confounded dog!
I am to rise and speak the epilogue.’

[Footnote A: “Tyrannic Love; or, the Royal Martyr.” By Dryden.]

“This diverting manner was always practised by Mr. Dryden, who, if he was not the best writer of tragedies in his time, was allowed by every one to have the happiest turn for a prologue or an epilogue. The epilogues to ‘Cleomenes,’ ‘Don Sebastian,’ the ‘Duke of Guise,’ ‘Aurengezebe,’ and ‘Love Triumphant,’ are all precedents of this nature.

“I might further justify this practice by that excellent epilogue which was spoken, a few years since, after the tragedy of ‘Phaedra and Hippolitus;’[A] with a great many others, in which the authors have endeavoured to make the audience merry. If they have not all succeeded so well as the writer of this, they have however shown that it was not for want of good will.

[Footnote A: By Edmund Neal.]

“I must further observe, that the gaiety of it may be still the more proper, as it is at the end of a French play; since every one knows that nation, who are generally esteemed to have as polite a taste as any in Europe, always close their tragic entertainments with what they call a *petite piece*, which is purposely designed to raise mirth, and send away the audience well pleased. The same person who has supported the chief character in the tragedy, very often plays the principal part in the *petite piece*; so that I have myself seen, at Paris, Orestes and Lubin acted the same night by the same man.



“Tragi-comedy, indeed, you have yourself, in a former speculation, found fault with very justly, because it breaks the tide of the passions, while they are yet flowing; but this is nothing at all to the present case, where they have already had their full course.



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“As the new epilogue is written conformably to the practice of our best poets, so it is not such an one, which, as the Duke of Buckingham says in his ‘Rehearsal,’ might serve for any other play; but wholly rises out of the occurrences of the piece it was composed for.

“The only reason your mournful correspondent gives against this facetious epilogue, as he calls it, is, that he has a mind to go home melancholy. I wish the gentleman may not be more grave than wise. For my own part, I must confess, I think it very sufficient to have the anguish of a fictitious piece remain upon me while it is representing; but I love to be sent home to bed in a good humour. If Physibulus is however resolved to be inconsolable, and not to have his tears dried up, he need only continue his old custom, and when he has had his half-crown’s worth of sorrow, slink out before the epilogue begins.

“It is pleasant enough to hear this tragical genius complaining of the great mischief Andromache had done him. What was that? Why, she made him laugh. The poor gentleman’s sufferings put me in mind of Harlequin’s case, who was tickled to death. He tells us soon after, through a small mistake of sorrow for rage, that during the whole action he was so very sorry, that he thinks he could have attacked half a score of the fiercest Mohawks in the excess of his grief. I cannot but look upon it as a happy accident, that a man who is so bloody-minded in his affliction, was diverted from this fit of outrageous melancholy. The valour of this gentleman in his distress brings to one’s memory the Knight of the Sorrowful Countenance, who lays about him at such an unmerciful rate in an old romance. I shall readily grant him that his soul, as he himself says, would have made a very ridiculous figure, had it quitted the body and descended to the poetical shades in such an encounter.

“As to his conceit of tacking a tragic head with a comic tail, in order to refresh the audience, it is such a piece of jargon, that I don’t know what to make of it.

“The elegant writer makes a very sudden transition from the playhouse to the church, and from thence to the gallows.

“As for what relates to the church, he is of opinion that these epilogues have given occasion to those merry jigs from the organ-loft, which have dissipated those good thoughts and dispositions he has found in himself, and the rest of the pew, upon the singing of two staves culled out by the judicious and diligent clerk.

“He fetches his next thought from Tyburn; and seems very apprehensive lest there should happen any innovations in the tragedies of his friend Paul Lorrain.

“In the mean time, Sir, this gloomy writer, who is so mightily scandalised at a gay epilogue after a serious play, speaking of the fate of those unhappy wretches who are condemned to suffer an ignominious death by the justice of our laws, endeavours to make the reader merry on so improper an occasion by those poor burlesque

expressions of tragical dramas and monthly performances.—I am, Sir, with great respect, your most obedient, most humble servant,



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“PHILOMEDES.”

ON DRAMATIC CRITICS

(Addison in the “Spectator”)

No. 592. FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 10, 1714.

“—Studium sine divite veni.”

HOR. ARS POET. 409.

“Art without a vein.”

ROSCOMMON.

I look upon the playhouse as a world within itself. They have lately furnished the middle region of it with a new set of meteors, in order to give the sublime to many modern tragedies. I was there last winter at the first rehearsal of the new thunder,[A] which is much more deep and sonorous than any hitherto made use of. They have a Salmonus behind the scenes who plays it off with great success. Their lightnings are made to flash more briskly than heretofore; their clouds are also better furbelowed, and more voluminous; not to mention a violent storm locked up in a great chest, that is designed for the “Tempest.” They are also provided with above a dozen showers of snow, which, as I am informed, are the plays of many unsuccessful poets artificially cut and shredded for that use. Mr. Rymer’s “Edgar” is to fall in snow, at the next acting of “King Lear,” in order to heighten, or rather to alleviate, the distress of that unfortunate prince; and to serve by way of decoration to a piece which that great critic has written against.

[Footnote A: Mr. Dennis’s new and approved method of making thunder. Dennis had contrived this thunder for the advantage of his tragedy of “Appius and Virginia”; the players highly approved of it, and it is the same that is used at the present day. Notwithstanding the effect of this thunder, however, the play was coldly received, and laid aside. Some nights after, Dennis being in the pit at the representation of “Macbeth,” and hearing the thunder made use of, arose from his seat in a violent passion, exclaiming with an oath, that that was his thunder. “See (said he) how these rascals use me: they will not let my play run, and yet they steal my thunder.”—“Notes on the Spectator.”]

I do not indeed wonder that the actors should be such professed enemies to those among our nation who are commonly known by the name of critics, since it is a rule among these gentlemen to fall upon a play, not because it is ill written, but because it takes. Several of them lay it down as a maxim, that whatever dramatic performance has a long run, must of necessity be good for nothing; as though the first precept in poetry were “not to please.” Whether this rule holds good or not, I shall leave to the



determination of those who are better judges than myself; if it does, I am sure it tends very much to the honour of those gentlemen who have established it; few of their pieces having been disgraced by a run of three days, and most of them being so exquisitely written, that the town would never give them more than one night's hearing.



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I have great esteem for a true critic, such as Aristotle and Longinus among the Greeks; Horace and Quintilian among the Romans; Boileau and Dacier among the French. But it is our misfortune, that some, who set up for professed critics among us, are so stupid, that they do not know how to put ten words together with elegance or common propriety; and withal so illiterate, that they have no taste of the learned languages, and therefore criticise upon old authors only at second hand. They judge of them by what others have written, and not by any notions they have of the authors themselves. The words unity, action, sentiment and diction, pronounced with an air of authority, give them a figure among unlearned readers, who are apt to believe they are very deep because they are unintelligible. The ancient critics are full of the praises of their contemporaries; they discover beauties which escaped the observation of the vulgar, and very often find out reasons for palliating and excusing such little slips and oversights as were committed in the writings of eminent authors. On the contrary, most of the smatterers in criticism, who appear among us, make it their business to vilify and depreciate every new production that gains applause, to descry imaginary blemishes, and to prove, by farfetched arguments, that what pass for beauties in any celebrated piece are faults and errors. In short, the writings of these critics, compared with those of the ancients, are like the works of the sophists compared with those of the old philosophers.

Envy and cavil are the natural fruits of laziness and ignorance; which was probably the reason that in the heathen mythology Momus is said to be the son of Nox and Somnus, of darkness and sleep. Idle men, who have not been at the pains to accomplish or distinguish themselves, are very apt to detract from others; as ignorant men are very subject to decry those beauties in a celebrated work which they have not eyes to discover. Many of our sons of Momus, who dignify themselves by the name of critics, are the genuine descendants of these two illustrious ancestors. They are often led into these numerous absurdities in which they daily instruct the people, by not considering that, first, there is sometimes a greater judgment shown in deviating from the rules of art than in adhering to them; and, secondly, that there is more beauty in the works of a great genius, who is ignorant of all the rules of art, than in the works of a little genius, who not only knows but scrupulously observes them.

First, we may often take notice of men who are perfectly acquainted with all the rules of good writing, and notwithstanding choose to depart from them on extraordinary occasions. I could give instances out of all the tragic writers of antiquity who have shown their judgment in this particular; and purposely receded from an established rule of the drama, when it has made way for a much higher beauty than the observation



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of such a rule would have been. Those who have surveyed the noblest pieces of architecture and statuary, both ancient and modern, know very well that there are frequent deviations from art in the works of the greatest masters, which have produced a much nobler effect than a more accurate and exact way of proceeding could have done. This often arises from what the Italians call the *gusto grande* in these arts, which is what we call the sublime in writing.

In the next place, our critics do not seem sensible that there is more beauty in the works of a great genius, who is ignorant of the rules of art, than in those of a little genius who knows and observes them. It is of those men of genius that Terrence speaks in opposition to the little artificial cavillers of his time:

“Quorum aemulari expotat negligentiam
Potius quam istorum obscuram diligentiam.”
AND. PROL. 20.

“Whose negligence he would rather imitate, than these men’s obscure diligence.”

A critic may have the same consolation in the ill success of his play as Dr. South tells us a physician has at the death of a patient, that he was killed *secundum artem*. Our inimitable Shakespeare is a stumbling-block to the whole tribe of these rigid critics. Who would not rather read one of his plays, where there is not a single rule of the stage observed, than any production of a modern critic where there is not one of them violated! [A] Shakespeare was indeed born with all the seeds of poetry, and may be compared to the stone in Pyrrhus’s ring, which, as Pliny tells us, had the figure of Apollo and the nine Muses in the veins of it, produced by the spontaneous hand of Nature without any help from art.

[Footnote A: With all his fondness for classic models, Addison breaks away from conventionality of form in this essay, and pays his tribute to the genius of Shakespeare. But critical Joe could never forget the bard’s so-called “faults” of construction.]

THEATRICAL PROPERTY

(Steele in “The Tatler,” No. 42)

It is now twelve of the clock at noon, and no mail come in; therefore I am not without hopes that the town will allow me the liberty which my brother news-writers take in giving them what may be for information in another kind, and indulge me in doing an act of friendship, by publishing the following account of goods and moveables.



This is to give notice, that a magnificent palace, with great variety of gardens, statues, and water works, may be bought cheap in Drury-lane; where there are likewise several castles, to be disposed of, very delightfully situated; as also groves, woods, forests, fountains, and country-seats, with very pleasant prospects on all sides of them; being the moveables of Christopher Rich, Esquire,[A] who is breaking up house-keeping, and has many curious pieces of furniture to dispose of, which may be seen between the hours of six and ten in the evening.



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[Footnote A: This essay was written (July, 1709) at the time that Drury Lane was closed, by order of the Lord Chamberlain.]

THE INVENTORY.

Spirits of right Nantz brandy, for lambent flames and apparitions.

Three bottles and a half of lightning.

One shower of snow in the whitest French paper.

Two showers of a browner sort.

A sea, consisting of a dozen large waves; the tenth bigger than ordinary, and a little damaged.

A dozen and a half of clouds, trimmed with black, and well conditioned.

A rainbow, a little faded.

A set of clouds after the French mode, streaked with lightning and furbelowed.

A new moon, something decayed.

A pint of the finest Spanish wash, being all that is left of two hogsheads sent over last winter.

A coach very finely gilt, and little used, with a pair of dragons, to be sold cheap.

A setting-sun, a pennyworth.

An imperial mantle, made for Cyrus the Great, and worn by Julius Caesar, Bajazet, King Harry the Eighth, and Signor Valentini.

A basket-hilted sword, very convenient to carry milk in.

Roxana's night-gown.

Othello's handkerchief.

The imperial robes of Xerxes, never worn but once.

A wild boar killed by Mrs. Tofts[A] and Dioclesian.

[Footnote A: A favourite singer of the day.]



A serpent to sting Cleopatra.

A mustard-bowl to make thunder with.

Another of a bigger sort, by Mr. D——'s[A] directions, little used.

[Footnote A: John Dennis, the critic.]

Six elbow-chairs, very expert in country dances, with six flower-pots for their partners.

The whiskers of a Turkish Pasha.

The complexion of a murderer in a band-box; consisting of a large piece of burnt cork, and a coal-black peruke.

A suit of clothes for a ghost, *viz.*, a bloody shirt, a doublet curiously pinked, and a coat with three great eyelet-holes upon the breast.

A bale of red Spanish wool.

Modern plots, commonly known by the name of trapdoors, ladders of ropes, vizard-masques, and tables with broad carpets over them.

Three oak-cudgels, with one of crab-tree; all bought for the use of Mr. Pinkethman.[A]

[Footnote A: The comedian.]

Materials for dancing; as masques, castanets, and a ladder of ten rounds.

Aurengezebe's scymitar, made by Will Brown in Piccadilly.

A plume of feathers, never used but by Oedipus and the Earl of Essex.

There are also swords, halberds, sheep-hooks, cardinals' hats, turbans, drums, gallipots, a gibbet, a cradle, a rack, a cart-wheel, an altar, an helmet, a back-piece, a breast-plate, a bell, a tub, and a jointed baby.

ACTORS AND AUDIENCE.



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(From Cibber's "Apology")

Among our many necessary reformatations, what not a little preserved to us the regard of our auditors was the decency of our clear stage, from whence we had now for many years shut out those idle gentlemen who seemed more delighted to be pretty objects themselves than capable of any pleasure from the play; who took their daily stands where they might best elbow the actor, and come in for their share of the auditor's attention. In many a laboured scene of the wannest humour and of the most affecting passion I have seen the best actors disconcerted, while these buzzing muscatos have been fluttering round their eyes and ears. How was it possible an actor, so embarrassed, should keep his impatience from entering into that different temper which his personated character might require him to be master of?

Future actors may perhaps wish I would set this grievance in a stronger light; and, to say the truth, where auditors are ill-bred, it cannot well be expected that actors should be polite. Let me therefore show how far an artist in any science is apt to be hurt by any sort of inattention to his performance.

While the famous Corelli,[A] at Rome, was playing some musical composition of his own to a select company in the private apartment of his patron-Cardinal, he observed, in the height of his harmony, his Eminence was engaging in a detached conversation, upon which he suddenly stopt short and gently laid down his instrument. The Cardinal, surprised at the unexpected cessation, asked him if a string was broke? To which Corelli, in an honest conscience of what was due to his musick, reply'd, "No, Sir, I was only afraid I interrupted business." His Eminence, who knew that a genius could never shew itself to advantage where it had not its regards, took this reproof in good part, and broke off his conversation to hear the whole concerto played over again.

[Footnote A: Arcangelo Corelli, the "father of modern instrumental music."]

Another story will let us see what effect a mistaken offence of this kind had upon the French theatre, which was told me by a gentleman of the long robe, then at Paris, and who was himself the innocent author of it. At the tragedy of "Zaire," while the celebrated Mademoiselle Gossin[A] was delivering a soliloquy, this gentleman was seized with a sudden fit of coughing, which gave the actress some surprise and interruption; and his fit increasing, she was forced to stand silent so long that it drew the eyes of the uneasy audience upon him, when a French gentleman, leaning forward to him, asked him, If this actress had given him any particular offence, that he took so publick an occasion to resent it? The English gentleman, in the utmost surprise, assured him, So far from it, that he was a particular admirer of her performance; that his malady was his real misfortune, and if he apprehended any return of it, he would rather quit his seat than disoblige either the actress or the audience.



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[Footnote A: Jeanne, Catherine Gossin, of the Comedie Francaise.]

This publick decency in their theatre I have myself seen carried so far that a gentleman in their second Loge, or middle-gallery, being observed to sit forward himself while a lady sate behind him, a loud number of voices called out to him from the pit, "*Place a la Dame! Place a la Dame!*" When the person so offending, either not apprehending the meaning of the clamour, or possibly being some John Trott who feared no man alive, the noise was continued for several minutes; nor were the actors, though ready on the stage, suffered to begin the play till this unbred person was laughed out of his seat, and had placed the lady before him.

Whether this politeness observed at plays may be owing to their clime, their complexion, or their government, is of no great consequence; but if it is to be acquired, methinks it is a pity our accomplished countrymen, who every year import so much of this nation's gawdy garniture, should not, in this long course of our commerce with them, have brought over a little of their theatrical good-breeding too.

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