APPENDIX I – GENTLEMAN JOHNNY AS DRAMATIST

GENTLEMAN JOHNNY as a dramatist deserves a separate chapter, for soldiers, though they have often played the chief part in tragedies, and sometimes in comedies, have rarely written for the stage. John Burgoyne wrote *The Maid o f the Oaks, The Lord o f the Manor, The Heiress,* and he translated and adapted Sedaine's *Richard Coeur de Lion.* In June, 1774, Lord Stanley, the nephew of Lady Charlotte and later on Lord Derby, celebrated his "nuptials" as they used to call a wedding in those days, with Lady Betty Hamilton, daughter of the Duke of Hamilton. On this "auspicious occasion" *a fête champêtre* (which one may translate lawn party, though it originally meant a picnic) was given at "The Oaks," a country seat near Epsom which has lent its name to a very celebrated race, dating from 1779, just as an even more celebrated race, first run in 1780, derived its name from the noble owner of "The Oaks."* It owed its origin to an after-dinner chat at "The Oaks" between Lord Derby and his friend Sir Charles Bunbury. A spin of a coin decided that the new stakes should be known as "The Derby" and not as "The Bunbury." And yet there are people who do not believe in Providence! Burgoyne, the wit and good-looking man about town was naturally made Master of the Ceremonies or "principal manager and conductor"; he greeted the assembled company and "conducted the nobility and other visitors through the house to the voluptuous scene on"—O dreadful anti-climax!—"the Back Lawn." Here there was an orangerie, a concealed band of music, swains in fancy dress playing nine pins, shepherdesses swinging, with shrieks of apprehension and tempestuous petticoats, in swings, archery, dancing, and nymphs kicking at a *tambour de basque* suspended from a tree. The branches .of the trees in the background bent under the weight of the Surrey yokels whose heads appeared among their leaves "as thick as codlings in a plentiful season." Then followed a supper "on the most costly dishes all hot and tempting," and on the top of that came minuets and country dances until three o'clock in the morning. This went on for five days; can you beat it in the records of Long Island? As a contemporary reporter remarked, "the greatest compliments are due to the skill and abilities of General Burgoyne on this occasion." It was, in fact, quite as splendid and as ludicrous an entertainment as the Mischianza with which Sir Billy was entertained just before he left Philadelphia.

Early in 1774 the greatest actor, not even excepting that fine mummer Sir Gorgeous Greasepaint, that England has ever produced, had put on what a contemporary critic called "a chaos of absurdities" called *Sethona* at Drury

*It is stated in Manning and Bray's History of Surrey that Burgoyne once owned "The Oaks," or "Lambert's Oaks" as it used to be called. This is not correct. In 1788 under a private Act of Parliament William Lambert an infant, sold the estate for £4,550 to Lord Derby. (I am indebted for this information to Sir Henry Lambert, K.C.M.G.)

Lane. David Garrick was looking about him for something to succeed this when Burgoyne approached him with a dramatic entertainment which he had written round the *fête champêtre,* and which he called *The Maid of the Oaks.* Garrick was delighted to make the acquaintance of so fashionable an author; he took his *Maid,* touched her up here and there, overhauled the dialogue, and staged it at Drury Lane. It ran for several nights and so, for those days, may be deemed a success. Horace Walpole who, as we have seen, never lost an opportunity of sneering at Burgoyne, ran it down. He writes, "12th November 1774. There is a new puppet-show at Drury Lane, as fine as scenes can make it, called 'The Maid of the Oaks' and as dull as the author could not help making it." Horace is wrong, there are some good things in the play; though, it must be admitted, the less said about the plot the better, but this applies to so many plays. Sir Harry Groveby is on the point of marrying Maria, the ward of Mr. Oldworth. Sir Harry has an uncle, "Old Groveby," briefly described as "an old crab"* who, like all stage uncles, does not approve of the match. But, again like most stage uncles, he meets Maria, not knowing who she is, and falls a victim to her charming disposition. (Cf. old Mr. Winkle and young Mrs. Winkle, née Arabella Allen.) Mr. Oldworth overcome by "Bells ringing, Music playing, huzzas at a distance, and a chorus of merry, merry villagers singing "Tis Maria's bridal day" ' breaks down completely, and discloses the fact that he is really not Maria's guardian, but her father. "O Sir," says Maria, not unnaturally, "explain this mystery." Mr. Oldworth does so. And it is a pretty lame, bald and impotent explanation. It appears that when Maria was born "the hour of your birth made me a widower, and you a splendid heiress. I trembled at the dangers of that situation, to be the object of flattery in the very cradle and made a prey to interest, is the common lot attending it." This unnatural parent, therefore, levanted—he did not want to be bothered with a baby—and concealed Maria's birth, "being abroad at the time the plan was easily executed." He reminds one very much of that mid-Victorian lover, the hero of that pathetic, yet cynical song so dear to one's grandparents, *In the Gloaming.* ("Gloaming" was that period of the day when the Victorians first gloamed at each other, and then exchanged "chaste salutes.") This selfish fellow after starting with

In the Gloaming,
O my Darling,
Think not bitterly of me—

and after a lot of specious flattery explains his faithlessness with the terribly cynical words:

It was best to leave you, Darling,
Best for you and—best for me.

*Or as one would say nowadays "grouch."

However, Maria's father did the best he could for her by announcing that she should inherit Oldsworth's Oaks, which so moved the old crab that *he* announced that if Maria, in the natural course of events, has a son, he shall inherit Gloomstock Hall. Which is all very like amateur theatricals. But there are two delightful characters in the play, Mr. Dupely and Lady Bab Lardoon. Mr. Dupely is very much a man of the world, and as for Lady Bab, "Oh she's a superior! a phoenix ! an epitome, or rather a caricature of what is called very fine life, and the first female gamester of the time." This does not impress that rascally rogue Mr. Dupely. He knows all about women. "Maria, Lady Bab, Pamela Andrews, Clarissa Harlowe, the girl that steals a heart in a country church, or she that picks your pocket in Covent Garden, are one and the same creature for all that—I am always too quick for them and make fools of them first, they are as transparent as glass," or as he would have said nowadays, easy fruit.

Lady Bab is much in advance of her day; she evidently possessed if not a latch-key, a large front door-key. She and her friends understand liberty as well as men. "We drop in at all hours, play at all parties, pay our own reckonings and in every circumstance (petticoats excepted) are true, lively, jolly fellows." She lived by her wits. "Jack Saunter of the Guards lost a hundred and thirty to me upon score at one time; I have not eat him half out yet—he will keep me best part of next Winter." Naturally she can not keep out of the papers (at the present day she would have had a press agent) "We hear a certain lady, not a hundred miles from Hanover Square, lost at one sitting, some nights ago, two thousand guineas." And then they dot the *i*'s. "Lady Bab Lardoon has tumbled down [*i.e.*, at gambling] three nights successively, a certain Colonel has done the same; and we hear that both parties keep house with sprained ankles." Upon which honest Mr. Oldworth comments "That last paragraph sounds a little enigmatical." She has a pleasant scene with Dupely the skilled lady-killer. Disguised as a shepherdess, Philly Nettletop of the Vale—everybody was in fancy dress at the *fête champêtre*—she unpins her nosegay and "with the air of the most perfect naivete," proffers it to Mr. Dupely. He accepts it and, while thanking her, remarks—the libertine!—that his wishes extended a little further. For a country maiden, or rustic lass, Philly for all her "Lack-a-dazy heart's" and bless me's" is somewhat cynical. She describes fine gentlemen as those who "take wives for fortunes and mistresses for show;* squander their money among tailors, barbers, cooks and fiddlers; pawn their honour to sharpers and their estates to Jews, and at last run to foreign countries to repair a pale face, a flimsy carease and an empty pocket." No wonder Dupely exclaims, "Hey-day! where

*John Gay was more to the point when he wrote the line: "A Miss for Pleasure, and a Wife for Breed."

has my Arcadian picked up this jumble?" The dreadful dog then struggles to kiss her, and urges her to "fly with him to the true region of pleasure in his chaise and four"; but of course her identity comes out, he is forgiven and Lady Bab accepts him, in the delightful. slang of the day, as her "Cavalier Servante and Cicisbeo."

When *The Maid* was produced at Drury Lane, Lady Bab was played by Frances Abington, the original Lady Teazle.[1] In the books on the eighteenth-century stage, there is no more charming portrait than that of Mrs. Abington. She was, for her looks and talent, the Marie Tempest of her day. Starting life as a cobbler's daughter, rising to be a flower-girl known as "Nosegay Fan," she ended by setting the fashion. She was the first to wear her own hair unpowdered, and knew the charm of a *négligée.*[2] She was very proud of her hands, and had a delightful little trick of "turning her wrist and seeming to stick a pin in the side of her waist." Altogether evidently a most enchanting little rogue.

Broad comic relief in *The Maid of the Oaks is* provided by an old retainer, Hurry, and the best that can be said for him is that he is not more tedious than many of Shakespeare's clowns. However, he throws an interesting light on Drink below Stairs in those days. He complains, "I have not touched a drop of liquor to-day—but two glasses of punch, a pint of hot negus to warm me, a bottle of cyder to cool me again, and a dram of cherry-bounce to keep all quiet." Does not this, barring the "cyder," make your mouth water?

The Lord of the Manor is another comedy____a musical comedy[3]—of artless subterfuge. It was produced anonymously and the *quidnuncs* put it down to Sheridan,—high praise indeed. When it was published with the author's name, Burgoyne wrote in the preface of Sheridan: "As an author he is above my encomium; as a friend it is my pride to think we are exactly upon a level": rather a compliment this as Sheridan was not so well-born as Burgoyne. He certainly was a real friend to the General, for he helped him when he was writing *The Heiress,* which explains why this is the best of Burgoyne's plays. Indeed they might not unfairly be described as "Sherry and water." The best characters in *The Lord of the Manor* are a French valet, a recruiting officer, Captain Trepan (probably the reason for the anonymity), and an old Mother Slapcabbage of a soldier's wife, Moll Flagon, a part played by a well-known comedian of the day with the very appropriate name, for a comedian, of Mr.

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[1] Horace Walpole who saw the first night of *The School far Scandal* May 8, 1777, wrote: "Mrs. Abington was equal to the first of her profession." Garrick did not like her. He called her "the worst of bad women."

[2] I understand, from what I have seen at the Cinema that the Vamp's motto is "Give me a *négligée* and twenty minutes."

[3]William Jackson known as "Jackson of Exeter" was responsible for the airs.

Suett. It contains what is I think the best verse that Burgoyne ever wrote in the song:

Encompassed in an angel's frame
An angel's virtues lay;
Too soon did Heaven assert the claim
And call its own away.
My Anna's worth, my Anna's charms
Must never more return !
What now shall fill these widowed arms?
Ah me! my Anna's urn !

Very artificial of course and very like a translation from Latin verse by some scholar. But it is a good effort for a soldier, certainly better than that of the widowed stockbroker in a poem by Doss Chiderdoss, that remarkable bard of the 'nineties. This gentleman, according to Doss, made up his mind to write some lines upon his loss. He set out the lady's portrait, with such stock-brokerish accompaniments as a decanter full of whisky and a syphon much less full of sodawater; the touching result was:

He gazed on the sad reminder
Of the form that had made him weep
Then swallowed a stiffish binder*
And suddenly fell asleep.

To return to Anna, there is poor comfort in an urn. This reminds me of a story told, I think, by Gronow of the Prince Regent and his friend Mr. R. B. Sheridan. The Regent being in speculative and meditative mood had been discussing what the delicate Victorians used to call *embonpoint.* The Regent suggested that mankind admired it owing to some faint recollection of having in early infancy derived nutriment from what Mr. Micawber termed "nature's fount." Sherry turned this down. He remarked coldly that he had been brought up on a pap-bottle and he had no inclination whatever to fondle pap-bottles. I can see George's fat sides shaking with laughter and hear him choking over his arrack-punch.

The French valet gives a good description of what he calls "the macaroni's knapsack." "It contains a fresh perfumed fillet for the hair, a pot of cold cream for the face, a calico under-waist coat compressed between two sachets *à l'odorat de Narcisse;* with a dressing of Maréchale powder, court plaister and *eau de luce. "* Captain Trepan, who reminds one rather of

*I hope it is not necessary for me to explain that a "binder" means a final drink.

Farquhar's Sergeant Kite, throws a lurid light on the recruiting methods of the day. He has a number of bills (what theatrical folk call "throwaways") showing the advantages of the army, which are posted up in the village. One represents "a London tailor with his boots upon the neck of the French King"; and another is an East Indian scene depicting "a nabob in triumph, throwing rough diamonds to the young fifers to play at marbles." He is, he asserts, a conscientious man "and never runs the same recruit through more than three regiments, and that only when we have been hard pressed for a review." Moll Flagon one may take as the typical soldier's wife of the day, an adept at marauding on a campaign, and always ready to marry the first soldier handy as soon as widowed. Her costume is "a Soldier's coat over her petticoat, she carries a Gin-bottle by her Side and a Short Pipe in her Mouth." Her sentiments are free and easy, not to say gay and fancy; she has a song:

Sing and quaff,
Dance and laugh,
A fig for care or sorrow;
Kiss and drink,
But never think.
'Tis all the same to-morrow.

One has no objection whatever to soldiers of all ranks kissing and drinking, but the advice "never think" should be carefully eschewed by all young officers who hope to rise in their profession. Think, but for heaven's sake, never say what you think.

It is interesting to note that in this play Burgoyne anticipates our old friend Mr. Jorrocks in a couplet in a hunting song:

The Chase of Old Britons was ever their care
Their sinews it brac'd, 'twas the image of war.

It will be remembered that Mr. Jorrocks said " 'Untin' is the sport of Kings, the image of war without its guilt, and only five and twenty per cent of its danger."

But Gentleman Johnny's chief claim to renown as a dramatist rests upon *The Heiress* which had an extraordinary success. Mrs. Inchbald says it "attracted vast sums of money from the East as well as the West part of the metropolis." By which she means that the citizens living East of Temple Bar as well as the fashionable world of St. James flocked to see it. That amazing man, Mr. Genest, who, although a parson, appears to have spent his whole time at the theater, writes in his *Some* (one ought to underline the *Some) Account of*

theEnglish Stage: "Drury Lane, 14th Jan. 1786 *The Heiress* by Gen. Burgoyne the best new comedy since *The School for Scandal.*[1] . . . It was acted thirty times in the course of the season." This, for those days, was a long run. *The Heiress* which was written at Lord Derby's seat, Knowsley, was dedicated to Lord Derby, and the celebrated Miss Farren (an honored and ancient name in the annals of the English stage) who played the leading female part, later on, on the death of the first Lady Derby, in whose honor *The Maid of the Oaks* had been written, married Lord Derby. So it was quite a family affair. Even "Horry" approved of it, saying it was "the genteelest comedy in the English language." He read it twice in one day and liked it better than anything he had ever seen since *The Provoked Husband.*[2] The plot consists of the usual complications and misunderstandings. In the last act somebody asks, "Why did you keep the secret from me?" Well, the real answer is, if he hadn't there would have been no play. Which reminds me of a story, very castaneous, of a band of Barnstormers. An actor, promoted to an important part, totally forgot his cue and rushed on several acts too soon. Dropping on one knee—probably the wrong one—he exclaimed "Please, Your Graice, we 'ave cut off the Dook of Buckingham's 'ead."

"Oh, you 'ave, 'ave you?" came the indignant reply; "then you've been and spoilt the 'ole of the bloomin' play."

The Heiress has a major and a minor hero, Lord Gayville and Mr. Clifford, and a major and a minor heroine, Lady Emily (the part Miss Farren played) and Miss Alton who turns out to be the heiress and sister to Clifford. The most entertaining character is Mr. Alscrip, a rascally old attorney. He is really a dreadful old man. The plot necessitates Miss Alton taking the post of lady companion to Miss Alscrip and the aged libertine tries to make love to her.

"But how to begin?" says he, "my usual way of attacking my daughter's maids will never do." So he tries a fresh gambit, addresses her as "Beauteous Stranger" and in less than three minutes "Kisses her fingers with rapture" exclaiming the while "Oh! the sweet little twiddle-diddles." No wonder Miss Alton considers him "a very strange old man."

The dialogue, here and there, is entertaining. Two minor characters, Mr. Blandish and his sister (not Serena), hangers-on of society, keep a lying-in list

[1] Arthur Murphy, the translator of Tacitus and biographer of Garrick, used exactly the same words of it.

[2] This appears to have been Walpole's criterion. Writing of Sheridan's *School for Scandal* he said, "I have seen Sheridan's new comedy and like it much better than any I have seen since *The Provoked Husband."* This, by the way, was by Colley Cibber.

and send kind inquiries "to be delivered at the doors before the first load of straw"* and, in the case of spinsters, inquiries as to the "Angora kittens and the last batch of Java sparrows." There is a description by Lord Gayville of the Sim Tappertit of the day, "one of those beings peculiar to this town who assume the name of gentleman, upon the sole credentials of a boot, a switch, and round hat—the *things* that escape from counters and writing-desks to disturb public places, insult foreigners and put modest women out of countenance." Mr. Brown in *Evelina* is very like this. Old Alscrip has one excellent speech: "What a change have I made to please my unpleasable daughter! Instead of my regular meal at Furnivall's Inn, here I am transported to Berkley Square, to fast at Alscrip House, till my fine company come from their morning ride two hours after dark. Nay, it's worse if I am carried among my great neighbours in Miss Alscrip's suite as she calls it. My Lady looks over me, my Lord walks over me, and sets me in a little tottering cane chair, at the cold corner of the table—though I have a mortgage upon the house and furniture, and arrears due of the whole interest. It's pleasant though to be well dressed. Lord! the tightness of my wig and stiffness of my cape give me the sense of the pillory—plaguey scanty about the hips, too, and the breast something of a merry-thought reversed." In one scene there is a curious parallel to Dickens. Lady Emily is instructing Miss Alscrip in demeanor, elocution and deportment.

"My dear Miss Alscrip, what are you doing? I must correct you as I love you. Sure you must have observed the drop of the underlip is exploded since Lady Simpermode broke a tooth. (*Sets her mouth affectedly.)* I am preparing the cast of the lips for the ensuing winter—thus—it is to be called the Paphian mimp.

"Miss Allscrip. (Imitating) I swear I think it pretty—I must try to get it.

"Lady Emily. Nothing so easy. It is done by one cabalistical word, like a metamorphosis in the fairy tales. You have only, when before your glass, to keep pronouncing to yourself Nimini-primini-the lips can not fail of taking their plie.

"Miss Alscrip. Nimini-primini, imini, mimini, oh! It's delightfully infantine! and so innocent, to be kissing one's own lips.

"Lady Emily. You have it to a charm."

I do not know if Charles Dickens had ever seen, or read, *The Heiress,* but this

*This may puzzle a modern generation. It is years since I have seen straw laid down in the West End streets. And yet babies continue to be born.

passage is very like that in *Little Dorrit,* "Papa, potatoes, poultry, prunes and prisms—all very good words for the lips."

In any case "nimini-primini" became a catch-word which lasted on well into the nineteenth century. I myself have recollections of it as being used, rather in derision, by aunts of mine who probably had seen revivals *of The Heiress* when they were young, and whom the word had struck as something quaint.

Although I love old plays, for I think you get from them a far more vivid notion of the life of the period than you do from the novels, I doubt if *The Heiress* would bear reviving. Just as it is doubtful if in one hundred years' time anybody will revive *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray,* or *The Importance of Being Earnest. The Heiress* was translated into many languages and ran through many editions. That with which I am acquainted is embellished by two plates, which are really very delightful. One represents Lord Gayville, with a very elegant leg, kneeling before Miss Alton (Clifford) whose waist is very high up, with Miss Alscrip, with towering ostrich-plumes upon her head, in the indignant background. The other shows a duel in Hyde Park, which appears to be a kind of Forest of Arden.

Burgoyne also translated from the French Sedaine's *Richard Couer de Lion* which is remembered for the song "O Richard! O mon Roi!" The part of Florestan was played by Mr. Caulfield, a name very familiar and dear to Handsome Jack. The librettos of operas, with the exception of those by the immortal "poet Bunn," are but dreary reading, so we will leave Lion Heart alone.

Burgoyne had, like most eighteenth-century dramatists, a great fondness for what one might (pedantically) call onomatopoeic names, that is to say names which suggest a person's nature and character. You will find, for example, in his comedies such names as Lady Cypher, Mrs. Squabble, Lord Flimzey, Lady Squander, Dolly, Dump, Lord Dangle,* Billy Vapid, Quicksilver Jack (a professional. deserter, "he was hanged at last in Berlin after having served six different princes in the same pair of shoes"), Lady Spite, Mrs. Scanty, Billy Skim, Secret Tom, Lady Newchapel (a Methodist) and so on. Sheridan and most eighteenth-century dramatists also invented names like these but the great master of this curious art of expressive nomenclature was a far more serious writer, John Bunyan. Witness his Pliable, Wordly Wiseman, Talkative of Prating Row, Pickthank, Lords Letchery, Love-Lust and Carnal Delight, Feeble-Mind, No-Good, Turn-about, By-ends of Fair-speech and Lady Feigning. The

*There is also a Dangle in Sheridan's *The Critic.*

habit still continues in Christmas Pantomimes where you may still meet such characters as Baron Blowhard and the Earl of Bodega.

As *The Heiress* was the best of Burgoyne's excursions into the drama, so was his plan for tinkering with *As You Like It* his worst. He tries to translate *As You*, as actors call it, into eighteenth-century phraseology. Thus, Rosalind is given a song of which one stanza is

"To be honest and fair is too much for our share
Impartially nature replies,
Ere that Phoenix I make, let me see for his sake
A man that's deserving the prize!"

There is a lilt about this which reminds one of the lyric written in honor of Mr. Pecksniff at Todger's:

"All hail to the vessel of Pecksniff the sire
With favouring breezes to fan
While Tritons flock round him and proudly admire
The architect, artist and man."

And oddly enough the hunting-song which in Burgoyne's version becomes:

"Ah! the dappled fool is stricken,
See him tremble—see him sicken,
All his worldly comrades flying,
See him bleeding, panting, dying.
From his eyelids wan and hollow
How the big tears follow—follow,
Down his face in piteous chace,
How they follow, follow, follow
Without stop, drop by drop,
How they follow drop by drop!"

bears, I think, a remarkable likeness to

"Can I view thee, panting, lying
On thy stomach, without sighing,
Can I unmoved see thee dying
On a log
Expiring frog!"

"The next verse is still more touching," said Mr. Leo Hunter, but I will not quote it, hoping that if you have forgotten it, you will refresh your memory by looking up the text.

Horace Walpole said, "Burgoyne's battles and speeches will be forgotten, but his delightful comedy of *The Heiress* still continues the delight of the stage and one of the most pleasing domestic compositions." I think he is wrong. No one, certainly, reads Burgoyne's speeches now, but who in the world ever does, in cold blood, read speeches? Nobody, except perhaps the orators who make them. And sometimes they read them when they deliver them, if they can't learn them by heart, as old Sam Rogers said of Lord Dudley, whom he did not like

"Ward has no heart, they say, but I deny it,
He has a heart____and gets his speeches by it."

But Saratoga will never be forgotten, for it was the beginning of the end of the War of Independence. But one should not blame Gentleman Johnny because his plays lie undisturbed on the top shelf. It is not the business of a general to write plays, any more than it is the business of a dramatist to fight battles. Mr. Shaw and Mr. Henry Arthur Jones, to mention only two names, have fought many battles ("My dear Wells") on paper, but I am sure that both would admit that they would cut but a poor figure at a General Headquarters.

Generals have certainly on occasion, like Burgoyne, written verse. A famous living general published many years ago a little volume of poetry. I rescued it from what was then called The Tuppenny Box where it was lying cheek by jowl with old sermons, old pamphlets on The Sewage Question, out of date school-books, and all the kind of cagmag which people so generously gave away during the war when they were asked to send books to our Tommies in the field. I took it home and read it. And when, the next day, with a vague idea that I had been cheated, I took it back to the second-hand bookseller and offered it to him for one penny, his face became distorted with a horrible sneer, and he laughed sardonically.

So I will not give the author's name.

