CHAPTER XIV – THE MAN

YOU can not spend five or six evenings a week for the best part of a year in the company of a man—or woman—without forming a pretty definite opinion about him, or her. Well, I have spent many evenings, not in Gentleman Johnny's company, but surrounded by all the books and material I could lay hold of about him and I have grown to like him tremendously, and even to respect him. I hope I have clearly indicated, or rather let him indicate himself, his weak points. He was pompous, he was a gambler, in morals a latitudinarian—his outspoken age would have used a blunter word—and, I have naturally left the worst for the last, he was a politician. He was both a tragic and a comic figure. As a soldier, though of unimpeached courage—even the Minden Man and the Grub Street guttersnipes whom he subsidized did not dare to impugn that—he was not a success in the field.

That sour, old, dyspeptic Carlyle grudgingly admits the "pretty way" in which he began at Valencia and says that he might have become "a kind of General." To this it might be retorted that at all events Lady Charlotte, and Susan too for that matter, each had with Gentleman Johnny a much happier life than Jenny had with her Thomas. John Burgoyne was not a great dramatist, nor was he a great general. He was a courteous and polished man about town; he loved his profession, and his soldiers loved him. He always gave his men the credit due to them, a little formality which some great generals of the past have neglected. He never called his soldiers "scum." There has never been in British military history a soldier so shockingly let down by the minister at home, because there has never been in military history a war, minister so casual, so incompetent, so mean, so contemptible, so cowardly* as "that man."

Regarding his morals it must be remembered that the eighteenth century was an immoral age, or perhaps one should say that it was a less hypocritical age than others have been. Burgoyne owned up to his weakness for womankind like a man, as we have seen in the extract from his will. With his Westminster

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*I have already mentioned-once or twice-his cowardice at Minden. He showed a similar lack of enterprise, to put it mildly, in the First Expedition to St. Malo in 1758. A wit of the day wrote of him:

"All pale and trembling on the Gallic shore
His Lordship gave the word, but could no more.
Too small the corps, too few the numbers were,
Of such a general to demand the care.
To some mean chief, some Major or a Brig.
He left his charge that night, nor cared a fig;
'Twixt life and scandal, honour and the grave,
Quickly deciding which was best to save,
Back to the ships he ploughed the swelling wave."

(The "Brig." was Brigadier-General Mostyn.)

fondness for Latin tags he must often have said of himself:

Video meliora, proboque,
Deteriora sequor.

A far worse charge than immorality can be brought against him and that is that he had, so it seems to me, no sense of humor though he was certainly witty; many lines in his plays can be brought as evidence for this. As to his pomposity, many men of his day, when they had pen in hand, took for their model the Great Cham of, Literature, Samuel Johnson, whose written style is not remarkable for its ease and elegance. Like all pompous people Burgoyne was apt to take himself too seriously. This is well brought out by a little anecdote told about him by Miss Fanny Burney, who was present with her brother in 1788 at the trial of Warren Hastings at which Burgoyne was, as it were, one of the stage-managers. She writes:

"When the Managers were all arranged, one from among them whom I knew not came up into the seats of the House of Commons and said 'Captain Burney,[1] I am very glad to see you.'

" 'How do you do, Sir,' answered James, 'here I am come to see the fine show.'

"Upon this the attacker turned short upon his heel and abruptly walked away. I inquired who he was:" 'General Burgoyne,' James told me.

" 'A Manager!' cried I, 'and one of the chargers! and you treat the business of the Hall[2] with such contempt to his face!'

"James laughed heartily at his own uncourtly address but would not repent, though he acknowledged he saw the offence his slight, and slighting speech, had given."

A less pompous man would, of course, have laughed it off.

Gentleman Johnny was in conversation not so witty as he is represented by Mr. Shaw in *The Devil's Disciple.* Still if any dramatist were to make any historical character talk in the way in which he probably really did talk when alive, why, the audience would walk out. Shakespeare makes Duncan when first

[1]Later Admiral Burney and a friend of Charles Lamb. The Admiral was the husband of that Whist-disciplinarian, Lamb's Sarah Battle. It will be remembered that Jem Burney and Burgoyne had gone out to North America in the same ship.

[2]*i.e.,* Westminster Hall.

he appears before Macbeth's Castle at Inverness exclaim:

> **"This castle has a pleasant seat; the air**
> **Nimbly and sweetly recommends itself**
> **Unto our gentle senses."**

There is a story told of an actor of the old school who had been promoted, in an emergency, from a very insignificant part to that of Duncan. He could not refrain from celebrating his advancement. He entertained his friends; his friends entertained him. They "set them up" again, and again, and again. And when the play began, though he may have forgotten his words, he remembered the gist of them. He made a magnificent entry, accompanied by hautboys and torches, looked round him, and with a kind of affable condescension pleasantly remarked to his astonished host, "Nice little place you've got here." And probably the real Duncan said something very much to this effect.

The best things about John Burgoyne were his courage, his courtesy, his kindness to, and consideration for, his men, who, as we have seen, had a real affection for him, and his John Bullish obstinacy. Though a politician his hands were clean: he certainly owed much to family connections, but in fashionable London of his day, who did not? He was essentially a gentleman, and, if he had lived longer, he would have made an admirable mentor for "Prinney," later George IV, many of whose intimates were of a raffishness that would have disgusted John Burgoyne.

It is evident that he was devoted to his wife Lady Charlotte, and she to him. Miss Caulfield also was obviously very fond of him.Perhaps some may ask why, as he was a widower, did he not marry his dearest Sue and, as the odd old-fashioned phrase has it, "make an honest woman of her"? I do not know, and in any case it is none of our business.

I like to think of Handsome Jack being driven post-haste in a post-chaise kissing Lady Charlotte's "sweet little Twiddle-diddles"* with, (probably) the lady's father shaking a gouty fist, tearing his wig, and zoundsing in the background—it would make a fine picture. I like to think of him riding gaily at the head of his own Regiment of Light Dragoons into Valencia d'Alcantara—the very name sounds like a gallop; I like to think of Gentleman Johnny putting on his very best uniform and, with an air of noble condescension, receiving his sword back from Horatio Gates; and I like to think of him offering to send "Our General," our delightful and Pickwickian General, a few delicacies (no *tea,* I hope) from England.

*To quote Mr. Alscrip (page 210)

On the other hand I do not like to think of poor Susan Caulfield all alone in the cold Abbey with the tears streaming down her pretty face at the loss of her old friend; still less do I like to think of her being deprived by the great nobleman, no doubt with the very best intentions in the world, of her children.

John Burgoyne died in 1792 but, like the soul of another J. B. he "goes marching on."

Before the Great War you could see him any day in Hyde Park near The Ladies Mile taking his ease and appraising "Fillies," in Pall Mall going into his Club, at Ascot (gamblin'), in Leicestershire (huntin'), And at first nights, especially at the Gaiety Theater, applauding Letty Lind's dancing and Florence St. John's singing. And after the show it was his pleasant habit to take a pretty chorus girl or two to supper at Romanos. The modern John Burgoyne, it is true, did not write for the stage, but he was a devoted admirer of it, especially when the *Corps de Ballet* was kicking its twinkling toes in the air. You will find him, magnificently flamboyant, in the pages of Ouida, where he sometimes so far forgot himself as to shoot grouse with a rifle. He sometimes, like his spiritual ancestor, even sat in Parliament, always ready, when told to do so by his leader, to "right about turn." He was with the Duke all through the Peninsula, riding to hounds between battles and flirting with senoritas. His "phlegm," as jealous, excitable, and gesticulating foreigners put it, had a great deal to do with the winning of Waterloo. Wherever he served his men were always ready to follow him hell-for-leather through hell. He has won V.C.'s innumerable. He gallantly blundered, with the most amazing whiskers, through that burlesque campaign, the Crimean War; he muddled through the Boer War; he helped to win the last war. And, as the years went by, though he may never have had the facile pen of Gentleman Johnny, he became more intelligent, and acquired, what is quite as important, a sense of humor.

In short, John Burgoyne with his gallantry, his philanderings, his gambling, his keen enjoyment of life, his tinge of pomposity, which has now nearly disappeared, is a very British type. And may it be long before the type is worn out.

On the other hand—God save us from Germains!

THE END