

Life And Letters Of John Gay (1685-1732) eBook

Life And Letters Of John Gay (1685-1732)

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Contents

Life And Letters Of John Gay (1685-1732) eBook.....	1
Contents.....	2
Table of Contents.....	7
Page 1.....	10
Page 2.....	11
Page 3.....	12
Page 4.....	14
Page 5.....	16
Page 6.....	18
Page 7.....	20
Page 8.....	21
Page 9.....	22
Page 10.....	24
Page 11.....	26
Page 12.....	28
Page 13.....	29
Page 14.....	30
Page 15.....	31
Page 16.....	33
Page 17.....	34
Page 18.....	35
Page 19.....	37
Page 20.....	38
Page 21.....	40
Page 22.....	41



[Page 23..... 43](#)

[Page 24..... 44](#)

[Page 25..... 45](#)

[Page 26..... 47](#)

[Page 27..... 49](#)

[Page 28..... 50](#)

[Page 29..... 51](#)

[Page 30..... 52](#)

[Page 31..... 54](#)

[Page 32..... 56](#)

[Page 33..... 58](#)

[Page 34..... 60](#)

[Page 35..... 62](#)

[Page 36..... 63](#)

[Page 37..... 65](#)

[Page 38..... 67](#)

[Page 39..... 68](#)

[Page 40..... 69](#)

[Page 41..... 71](#)

[Page 42..... 73](#)

[Page 43..... 75](#)

[Page 44..... 76](#)

[Page 45..... 77](#)

[Page 46..... 79](#)

[Page 47..... 81](#)

[Page 48..... 83](#)



[Page 49..... 85](#)

[Page 50..... 87](#)

[Page 51..... 89](#)

[Page 52..... 90](#)

[Page 53..... 92](#)

[Page 54..... 93](#)

[Page 55..... 94](#)

[Page 56..... 96](#)

[Page 57..... 98](#)

[Page 58..... 100](#)

[Page 59..... 102](#)

[Page 60..... 104](#)

[Page 61..... 106](#)

[Page 62..... 107](#)

[Page 63..... 108](#)

[Page 64..... 109](#)

[Page 65..... 110](#)

[Page 66..... 112](#)

[Page 67..... 114](#)

[Page 68..... 116](#)

[Page 69..... 118](#)

[Page 70..... 120](#)

[Page 71..... 121](#)

[Page 72..... 123](#)

[Page 73..... 125](#)

[Page 74..... 127](#)



[Page 75..... 128](#)

[Page 76..... 130](#)

[Page 77..... 132](#)

[Page 78..... 134](#)

[Page 79..... 136](#)

[Page 80..... 138](#)

[Page 81..... 140](#)

[Page 82..... 142](#)

[Page 83..... 144](#)

[Page 84..... 146](#)

[Page 85..... 148](#)

[Page 86..... 150](#)

[Page 87..... 152](#)

[Page 88..... 154](#)

[Page 89..... 156](#)

[Page 90..... 157](#)

[Page 91..... 158](#)

[Page 92..... 160](#)

[Page 93..... 162](#)

[Page 94..... 164](#)

[Page 95..... 166](#)

[Page 96..... 168](#)

[Page 97..... 170](#)

[Page 98..... 172](#)

[Page 99..... 174](#)

[Page 100..... 176](#)



Page 101.....179

Page 102.....182

Page 103.....184

Page 104.....187

Page 105.....189



Table of Contents

Section	Table of Contents	Page
Start of eBook		1
EARLY YEARS		1
CHAPTER II		4
GAY COMMENCES AUTHOR		4
CHAPTER III		11
CHAPTER IV		15
JOHN GAY TO DEAN SWIFT.		18
JOHN GAY TO DR. ARBUTHNOT.		19
CHAPTER V		22
JOHN GAY TO THE HON. MRS. HOWARD.		30
CHAPTER VI		32
JOHN GAY TO JACOB TONSON.		34
JOHN GAY TO DEAN SWIFT.		35
DEAN SWIFT TO JOHN GAY.		36
JOHN GAY TO DEAN SWIFT.		37
THE HON. MRS. HOWARD TO JOHN GAY.		37
JOHN GAY TO THE HON. MRS HOWARD.		38
THE HON. MRS. HOWARD TO JOHN GAY.		38
JOHN GAY TO THE HON. MRS. HOWARD.		39
THE HON. MRS. HOWARD TO JOHN GAY.		40
THE HON. MRS. HOWARD TO JOHN GAY.		41
CHAPTER VII		42
TO HER ROYAL HIGHNESS THE PRINCESS OF WALES.		42
JOHN GAY TO THE HON. MRS. HOWARD.		42
ALEXANDER POPE TO JOHN GAY.		45
DEAN SWIFT TO JOHN GAY.		46
THE HON. MRS. HOWARD TO JOHN GAY.		47
CHAPTER VIII		50
JOHN GAY TO DEAN SWIFT.		55
DEAN SWIFT TO JOHN GAY.		56



JOHN GAY TO DEAN SWIFT.	56
DEAN SWIFT TO JOHN GAY.	56
CHAPTER IX	58
JOHN GAY TO DEAN SWIFT.	59
JOHN GAY TO DEAN SWIFT.	59
JOHN GAY TO ALEXANDER POPE.	59
THE HON. MRS. HOWARD TO JOHN GAY.	60
JOHN GAY TO DEAN SWIFT.	60
CHAPTER X	67
CORRESPONDENCE	67
ALEXANDER POPE TO JOHN GAY.	67
JOHN GAY TO ALEXANDER POPE.	67
JOHN GAY TO DEAN SWIFT.	68
JOHN GAY TO THE HON. MRS. HOWARD.	70
JOHN GAY TO DEAN SWIFT.	72
CHAPTER XI	72
CORRESPONDENCE	72
JOHN GAY TO DEAN SWIFT.	73
JOHN GAY TO DEAN SWIFT.	73
JOHN GAY TO THE HON. MRS. HOWARD.	74
JOHN GAY TO DEAN SWIFT.	75
ALEXANDER POPE TO JOHN GAY.	75
JOHN GAY AND THE DUCHESS OF QUEENSBERRY TO THE HON. MRS. HOWARD.	76
JOHN GAY AND THE DUCHESS OF QUEENSBERRY TO THE HON. MRS. HOWARD.	77
ALEXANDER POPE TO JOHN GAY.	77
THE HON. MRS. HOWARD TO JOHN GAY.	77
DEAN SWIFT TO JOHN GAY.	78
JOHN GAY TO DEAN SWIFT.	78
DUCHESS OF QUEENSBERRY AND JOHN GAY TO THE HON. MRS. HOWARD.	78
CHAPTER XII	79
CORRESPONDENCE	79
JOHN GAY TO DEAN SWIFT.	79
JOHN GAY TO DEAN SWIFT.	80
DEAN SWIFT TO JOHN GAY.	80
THE COUNTESS OF SUFFOLK TO JOHN GAY.	80



JOHN GAY TO THE COUNTESS OF SUFFOLK.	81
JOHN GAY TO DEAN SWIFT.	82
THE COUNTESS OF SUFFOLK TO JOHN GAY.	82
DEAN SWIFT TO JOHN GAY.	83
JOHN GAY TO DEAN SWIFT.	83
CHAPTER XIII	84
DEATH	84
JOHN GAY TO DEAN SWIFT.	84
DEAN SWIFT TO JOHN GAY.	84
JOHN GAY TO DEAN SWIFT.	85
JOHN GAY TO DEAN SWIFT.	85
ALEXANDER POPE TO JOHN GAY.	86
JOHN GAY TO ALEXANDER POPE.	86
JOHN GAY TO DEAN SWIFT.	87
ALEXANDER POPE TO DEAN SWIFT.	87
APPENDIX	93
II. A CHRONOLOGICAL LIST OF THE CORRESPONDENCE OF JOHN GAY	93
I	93
SOURCES OF THE TUNES.	93
W.H. GRATTAN FLOOD.	96
II	96
UNDATED.	99
III	99
THE BEGGAR'S OPERA	100
CAST	100
PERIOD 1728	100
INDEX	100



Page 1

EARLY YEARS

The Gays were an old family, who settled in Devonshire when Gilbert le Gay, through his marriage with the daughter and heiress of Curtoyse, came into possession of the manor of Goldsworthy, in Parkham. This they held until 1630, when it passed out of their hands to the Coffins.[1] Subsequently they were associated with the parish of Frittelstock, near Great Torrington. In the Parish Registers of Barnstaple the name appears from time to time: in 1544 is recorded the death of Richard Gaye, and later of John Gaye, "gentill man," and Johans Gay. From other sources it is known that Richard Gay was Mayor of the town in 1533, and Anthony Gay in 1638.[2] The records of the family have not been preserved, but at some time early in the seventeenth century there was at Frittelstock one John Gay, whose second son, William, was the father of the poet.

William Gay resided at Barnstaple, and since he lived in a large house, called the Red Cross, at the corner of Joy Street, facing Holland Street, it is reasonable to assume that he was in easy circumstances. He married a daughter of Jonathan Hanmer, the leading Nonconformist divine of the town, and by her had five children. The first-born was a girl, who died in 1685; then came Katherine, born in 1676, who married Anthony Baller, whose son Joseph issued in 1820 the slim volume bearing the title of "Gay's Chair";[3] in 1778, Jonathan; and three years later, Joanna, who married John Fortescue—possibly a relation of William Fortescue, afterwards Master of the Rolls, who is still remembered as a friend of Pope. The youngest child was John, the subject of this memoir, stated by his earlier biographers to have been born in 1688, but now known, from an entry in the Barnstaple Parish Register, to have been baptised in the Old Church on September 16th, 1685.

Mrs. Gay died in 1694, her husband a year later; and the custody of the four surviving orphaned children devolved upon their uncles. William Gay's brothers were John and Richard, who resided at Frittelstock; James, Rector of Meeth; and Thomas, who lived at Barnstaple. Mrs. Gay's only brother was John Hanmer, who succeeded to his father's pastoral office among the Congregational or Independent Dissenters at Barnstaple. Jonathan, the elder son of William Gay, who inherited the family property, was intended for the Church, but "severe studies not well suiting his natural genius, he betook himself to military pursuits,"[4] and, probably about the time of his father's death, entered the army. Who took charge of the two girls is not known; but it is on record that John, after his father's death, and then in his tenth year, went to live at Barnstaple with his paternal uncle, Thomas Gay. It is interesting to note that in 1882, "among the pieces of timber carted away from the Barnstaple Parish Church [which was then undergoing restoration] has been found a portion of a pew, with the name 'John Gay,' and the date, 1695, cut upon it.... No other John Gay appears in the Parish Register." [5]



Page 2

Gay attended the Free Grammar School at Barnstaple, and among his schoolfellows there with whom he cemented an enduring friendship, were William Fortescue, to whom reference has been made above, and Aaron Hill.[6] William Raynor was the headmaster when Gay first went to the Grammar School, but soon he removed to Tiverton, and was succeeded by the Rev. Robert Luck. Luck subsequently claimed that Gay's dramatic instincts were developed by taking part in the amateur theatricals promoted by him, and when in April, 1736, he published a volume of verse, he wrote, in his dedication to the Duke of Queensberry.[7] Gay's patron and friend:—

“O Queensberry! could happy Gay
This offering to thee bring,
‘Tis he, my Lord’ (he'd smiling say),
‘Who taught your Gay to sing.’”

These lines suggest that an intimacy between Gay and Luck existed long after their relations as pupil and master had ceased, but it is doubtful if this was the case. It is certainly improbable that the lad saw much of the pedagogue when he returned to Barnstaple for a while as the guest of the Rev. John Hanmer, since Luck was a bitter opponent of the Dissenters and in open antagonism to John Hanmer.

How long Gay remained at the Grammar School is not known. There are, indeed, no records upon which to base a narrative of his early years. It is, however, generally accepted that, on leaving school, he was apprenticed to a silk-mercator in London. This was not so unaccountable a proceeding then as appears to-day, for we know from Gibbon's "Memoirs" that "our most respectable families have not disdained the counting-house, or even the shop;... and in England, as well as in the Italian commonwealths, heralds have been compelled to declare that gentility is not degraded by the exercise of trade": for example, the historian's great grandfather, son of a country gentleman, became a linen-draper in Leadenhall Street.

Gay had no taste for trade, and did not long remain in this employment. According to one authority, "he grew so fond of reading and study that he frequently neglected to exert himself in putting oft silks and velvets to the ladies";[8] while his nephew, the Rev. Joseph Bailer, says: "Young Gay, not being able to bear the confinement of a shop, soon felt a remarkable depression of spirits, and consequent decline of health; he was, therefore, obliged to quit that situation, and retire to Barnstaple, in the hope of receiving benefit from his native air."[9] No doubt the mercator was willing enough to cancel the indentures of an apprentice so unsatisfactory as Gay probably was. Anyhow, Gay returned to Barnstaple, and stayed awhile with his maternal uncle, the Rev. John Hanmer.



Page 3

It has been said that it was during this visit to Barnstaple that Gay began to write verses; and as most men who take to poetry began to dabble in ink in their youth, this statement may well be accepted. Only, so far no bibliographer has traced any of these early writings. Some poems, said to have been written by him in these days have been printed in the volume to which reference has already been made, "Gay's Chair: Poems never before printed, written by John Gay... With a Sketch of his Life from the MSS. of the Rev. Joseph Bailer, his nephew. Edited by Henry Lee ... 1820," but the authenticity of these cannot definitely be accepted. A chair, said to have been the property of Gay at Barnstaple, was sold early in the nineteenth century to Henry Lee, who sent it to be repaired. "On taking out the drawer in front, which was somewhat broken," so runs the story, "I found at the back part of the chair a concealed drawer, ingeniously fastened with a small wooden bolt;... it was full of manuscript papers, some of which appeared to have slipped over, as I found them stuck to the bottom or seat of the chair." [10] The poems in question are: "The Ladies' Petition to the Honorable the House of Commons," the longest and most ambitious of the pieces; "To Miss Jane Scott," "Prediction," "Comparisons," "Absence," "Fable," "Congratulation to a Newly-married Pair," "A Devonshire Hill," "Letter to a Young Lady," and "To My Chair." Of this small collection, Mr. John Underhill, who includes it in his admirable edition of Gay's poems in the "Muses' Library," writes: "The evidence in support of their authenticity is (1) the fact that they were found in a chair which was always spoken of by Gay's 'immediate descendants' as 'having been the property of the poet, and which, as his favourite easy chair, he highly valued'; and (2) that 'The Ladies' Petition' was printed nearly *verbatim* from a manuscript in the handwriting of the poet ... If really Gay's, they [the verses] may, we think, a great many of them, be safely regarded as the production of his youth, written, perhaps, during the somewhat extended visit to Devonshire which preceded his introduction to the literary world of Pope. The least doubtful piece, 'The Ladies' Petition' was probably 'thrown off' upon the occasion of his visit to Exeter in 1715."

If the verses are genuine, they have such biographical interest as is afforded by an allusion to a youthful love-affair. There are lines "To Miss Jane Scott":—

The Welsh girl is pretty,
The English girl fair,
The Irish deem'd witty,
The French *debonnaire*;

Though all may invite me,
I'd value them not;
The charms that delight me
I find in a *Scot*.

It is presumedly to the same young lady he was referring in the verses written probably shortly after he returned to London after his visit to Devonshire:—



Absence.

Augustus, frowning, gave command.
And Ovid left his native land;
From Julia, as an exile sent.
He long with barb'rous Goths was pent.



Page 4

So fortune frown'd on me, and I was driven
From friends, from home, from Jane, and
happy Devon! And Jane, sore grieved when from me torn away;— loved her sorrow,
though I wish'd her—*gay*.

That another girl there was may be gathered from the “Letter to a Young Lady,” who was not so devoted as Jane Scott, for the poet writes:

Begging you will not mock his sighing.
And keep him thus whole years a-dying!
“Whole years!”—Excuse my freely speaking.
Such tortures, why a month—a week in?
Caress, or kill him quite in one day,
Obliging thus your servant, *John gay*.

[Footnote 1: Risdon: *Survey of Devon* (1811), p. 243.]

[Footnote 2: Gribble: *Memorials of Devonshire*.]

[Footnote 3: *Gay's Chair*, p. 12.]

[Footnote 4: *Gay's Chair*, p. 13.]

[Footnote 5: *Notes and Queries*, N.S. VI, 488, December 16th, 1882, from the *North Devon Herald* of December 7th.]

[Footnote 6: Aaron Hill (1685-1750), dramatist and journalist.]

[Footnote 7: Charles Douglas, third Duke of Queensbury and second Duke of Dover (1698-1777), married Catherine, second daughter of Henry Hyde, Earl of Clarendon and Rochester.]

[Footnote 8: Ayre: *Pope*, pp. 11, 97.]

[Footnote 9: *Gay's Chair*, p. 13.]

[Footnote 10: *Gay's Chair*, p. 5.]

CHAPTER II

1706-1712



GAY COMMENCES AUTHOR

Gay's health was improved by his stay in his native town, and presently he returned to London, where, according to the family tradition, he "lived for some time as a private gentleman."^[1] Mr. Austin Dobson has pointed out that this is "a statement scarcely reconcilable with the opening in life his friends had found for him";^[2] but it may be urged against this view that Gay and his sisters had each a small patrimony.^[3] If it is assumed that he returned to the metropolis after he came of age in September, 1706, he may have been possessed of a sum of money, small, no doubt, but sufficient to provide him with the necessaries of life for some little time. When his brother, Jonathan, who had been promoted lieutenant at Cologne by Marlborough, under whom he served at Hochstadt and elsewhere, and captain by Queen Anne, committed suicide in 1709, after a quarrel with his colonel, John may have inherited some further share of the paternal estate.

When Gay was one-and-twenty, ginger was hot in his mouth. Wine, woman, and song appealed to him. It is not on record that he had any love-affair, save those indicated in the verses in "Gay's Chair"; but the indelicacy of many passages in his writings suggests that he was rather intimately acquainted with the bagnios of the town. No man whose sense of decency had not been denied could possibly have written the verses "To a Young Lady, with some Lamphreys," and this, even after making allowance for the freedom of the early eighteenth century. He certainly frequented the coffee-houses of Covent Garden and Pall Mall. Also, he roamed about the metropolis, and became learned in the highways and byways, north and south, and east and west—a knowledge which bore excellent fruit in "Trivia."

Page 5

But I, who ne'er was bless'd by Fortune's hand,
Nor brighten'd plough-shares in paternal land.
Long in the noisy town have been immured,
Respired its smoke, and all its cares endured.
Where news and politics divide mankind,
And schemes of state involve th' uneasy mind.[4]

Gay was then, as ever, a great eater. "As the French philosopher used to prove his existence by *cogito, ergo sum*," Congreve wrote to Pope long after, "the greatest proof of Gay's existence is *edit, ergo est*." [5] He ate in excess always, and not infrequently drank too much, and for exercise had no liking, though he was not averse from a ramble around London streets. As the years passed, he became fat, but found comfort in the fact that some of his intimates were yet more corpulent. To this, he made humorous reference in "Mr. Pope's Welcome from Greece":—

And wondering Maine so fat, with laughing eyes,
(Gay, Maine and Cheney,[6] boon companions dear,
Gay fat, Maine fatter, and Cheney huge of size).

Gay had a passion for finery. To this foible Pope, in the early days of his acquaintance with the young man, made reference in a letter to Swift, December 8th, 1713: "One Mr. Gay, an unhappy youth, who writes pastorals during the time of Divine Service, whose case is the more deplorable, as he hath miserably lavished away all that silver he should have reserved for his soul's health, in buttons and loops for his coat." Gay was not only well aware of this weakness, but he deplored it, though he could never contrive to overcome it. He made allusion to it in some lines known as the "Epigrammatical Petition," addressed to Lord Oxford,[7] in June, 1714, and also in the prologue to "The Shepherd's Week":—

I sold my sheep and lambkins too,
For silver loops and garments blue:
My boxen hautboy sweet of sound,
For lace that edged mine hat around;
For Lightfoot and my scrip I got
A gorgeous sword, and eke a knot.

Gay now renewed his acquaintance with his old schoolfellow, Aaron Hill, who, it is said, though on doubtful authority, employed him as an amanuensis when setting on foot the project of answering questions in a paper, styled the *British Apollo, or, Curious Amusements for the Ingenious*. [8] The first number of this publication appeared on March 13th, 1708, and it was issued on Wednesdays and Fridays until March 16th, 1711. Gay referred to it in his pamphlet, "The Present State of Wit," published in May 1711: "Upon a review of my letter, I find I have quite forgotten the *British Apollo*, which might possibly have happened from its having of late retreated out of this end of the



town into the country, where I am informed, however, that it still recommends itself by deciding wagers at cards and giving good advice to shopkeepers and their apprentices." Whether or no Gay ever contributed to the *British Apollo*, it seems likely that it was through the good offices of Hill that in May, 1708, Gay's poem, "Wine," was published by William Keble at the Black-Spread-eagle in Westminster Hall, who, about the same time, brought out a translation by Nahum Tate, the Poet Laureate, and Hill, of a portion of the thirteenth book of Ovid's "Metamorphoses."

Page 6

“Wine,” a subject on which Gay, even at the age of twenty-two, could write with some authority, secured a sufficient popularity to be paid the doubtful compliment of piracy in 1709, by Henry Hill, of Blackfriars, on whom presently the author neatly revenged himself in his verses, “On a Miscellany of Poems to Bernard Lintott,” by the following reference:—

While neat old Elzevir is reckon’d better
Than Pirate Hill’s brown sheets and scurvy letter.

This blank-verse poem, which may have been suggested by John Philips’ “Cider,” published in 1708, is written in the mock-heroic strain, and although it has no particular value, shows some sense of humorous exaggeration, of which Gay was presently to show himself a master.

Of happiness terrestrial, and the source
Whence human pleasures flow, sing, Heavenly Muse,
Of sparkling juices, of th’ enlivening grape,
Whose quick’ning taste adds vigour to the soul.
Whose sov’reign power revives decaying Nature,
And thaws the frozen blood of hoary age,
A kindly warmth diffusing—youthful fires
Gild his dim eyes, and paint with ruddy hue
His wrinkled visage, ghastly wan before—
Cordial restorative to mortal man,
With copious hand by bounteous gods bestow’d.

These are the opening lines. The concluding passage describing the tippling revellers leaving the tavern suggests, as has more than once been pointed out, the hand that afterwards wrote “Trivia.”

Thus we the winged hours in harmless mirth
And joys unsullied pass, till humid night
Has half her race perform’d; now all abroad
Is hush’d and silent, now the rumbling noise
Of coach or cart, or smoky link-boy’s call
Is heard—but universal Silence reigns:
When we in merry plight, airy and gay.
Surprised to find the hours so swiftly fly.
With hasty knock, or twang of pendent cord.
Alarm the drowsy youth from slumb’ring nod;
Startled he flies, and stumbles o’er the stairs
Erroneous, and with busy knuckles plies
His yet clung eyelids, and with stagg’ring reel
Enters confused, and muttering asks our wills;



When we with liberal hand the score discharge,
And homeward each his course with steady step
Unerring steers, of cares and coin bereft.

So far as is known, Gay preserved a profound silence for three years after his publication of "Wine," and then, on May 3rd, 1711, appeared from his pen, "The Present State of Wit, in a Letter to a Friend in the Country," sold at the reasonable price of three-pence. This attracted the attention of Swift. "Dr. Freind[9] ... pulled out a two-penny pamphlet just published, called 'The State of Wit', giving the characters of all the papers that have come out of late," he wrote in the "Journal to Stella," May 12: "The author seems to be a Whig, yet he speaks very highly of a paper called the *Examiner*,

Page 7

and says the supposed author of it is Dr. Swift. But, above all things, he praises the *Tatlers* and *Spectators*, and I believe Steele and Addison were privy to the printing of it. Thus is one treated by the impudent dogs." In this unambitious little sketch, as the author puts it, he gives "the histories and characters of all our periodical papers, whether monthly, weekly or diurnal," and it is, therefore, of value to the student of the early days of English journalism. He claimed to write without political bias: "I shall only promise that, as you know, I never cared one farthing either for Whig or Tory, so I shall consider our writers purely as they are such, without any respect to which party they belong." In "The Present State of Wit" most of the better-known periodical writers are introduced. Dr. William King is mentioned, not he who was the Archbishop of Dublin, nor he who was the Principal of St. Mary Hall, Oxford, but he of whom it was said that he "could write verses in a tavern three hours after he could not speak," who was the author of the "Art of Cookery" and the "Art of Love," and who in 1709 had fluttered the scientific doves by parodying the "Philosophical Transactions" in the *Useful Transactions in Philosophy and Other Sorts of Learning*, of which, however, only three numbers were issued. John Ozell was pilloried as the author of the *Monthly Amusement*, which was not, as the title suggests, a periodical, but was merely a title invented to summarise his frequent appearances in print. "It is generally some French novel or play, indifferently translated, it is more or less taken notice of, as the original piece is more or less agreeable." Defoe takes his place in the gallery as the editor and principal contributor to the weekly *Poor Review*, that is, the *Weekly Review* (which was published weekly from February 19th, 1704, until 1712) which, says Gay, "is quite exhausted and grown so very contemptible, that though he has provoked all his brothers of the quill round, none of them will enter into a controversy with him."

The periodical publications of the day are passed under review: the *Observer*, founded in 1702 by John Tutchin, and after his death five years later, conducted by George Ridpath, editor of the *Flying Post*, until 1712, when it had almost entirely ceased to please, and was finally extinguished by the Stamp Tax; the weekly *Examiner*, set up in August, 1710, in opposition to the Whig *Taller*, numbering among its contributors Dr. King, St. John, Prior, Atterbury, and Freind, and managed by Swift from No. 14 (October 26th, 1710); the *Whig Examiner*, the first issue of which appeared on September 14th, 1710, its five numbers being written by Addison; the *Medley*, another Whig paper, which ran from August, 1710, to August, 1711, and was edited by Arthur Mainwaring, with the assistance of Steele, Oldmixon, and Anthony Henley (a wit and a man of fortune, to



Page 8

whom Garth dedicated "The Dispensary," and who distinguished himself by describing Swift as "a beast for ever after the order of Melchisedec"). The *Tatter*, which appeared three times a week from April 12th, 1709, to January 2nd, 1711, was of course mentioned, and well-deserved tributes were paid to Steele and Addison. Of Addison he wrote with appreciation, but briefly: "This is that excellent friend to whom Mr. Steele owes so much, and who refuses to have his pen set before those pieces which the greatest pens in England would be proud to own. Indeed, they could hardly add to this gentleman's reputation, whose works in Latin and English poetry long since convinced the world that he was the greatest master in Europe of those two languages." Of Steele, Gay wrote at greater length: "To give you my own thoughts of this gentleman's writings, I shall, in the first place, observe that there is a noble difference between him and all the rest of our polite and gallant authors. The latter have endeavoured to please the age by falling in with them, and encourage them in their fashionable views and false notion of things. It would have been a jest, some time since, for a man to have asserted that anything witty could be said in praise of a married state, or that devotion and virtue were any way necessary to the character of a fine gentleman. Bickerstaff ventured to tell the town that they were a parcel of fops, fools and coquettes; but in such a manner as even pleased them, and made them more than half-inclined to believe that he spoke truth. Instead of complying with the false sentiments and vicious tastes of the age—either in morality, criticism, or good breeding—he has boldly assured them that they were altogether in the wrong; and commanded them, with an authority which perfectly well became him, to surrender themselves to his arguments for virtue and good sense. It is incredible to conceive the effect his writings have had on the town; how many thousand follies they have either quite banished, or given a very great check to! how much countenance they have added to virtue and religion! how many people they have rendered happy, by showing them it was their own fault if they were not so! and, lastly, how entirely they have convinced our young fops and young fellows of the value and advantages of learning! He has indeed rescued it out of the hands of pedants and fools, and discovered the true method of making it amicable and lovely to all mankind. In the dress he gives it, it is a welcome guest at tea-tables and assemblies, and is relished and caressed by the merchants on the 'Change. Accordingly there is not a lady at Court, nor a banker in Lombard Street who is not verily persuaded that Captain Steele is the greatest scholar and best casuist of any man in England. Lastly, his writings have set all our wits and men of letters on a new way of thinking, of which they had little or no notion before: and, although we cannot say that any of them have come up to the beauties of the original, I think we may venture to affirm, that every one of them writes and thinks much more justly than they did some time since."



Page 9

Gay's agreeable personality secured him many friends. Not later than the spring of 1711 he made the acquaintance of Henry Cromwell, whom he later described as "the honest hatless Cromwell with red breeches," by whom he was introduced to Pope, who was at this time a member of Addison's circle, and generally recognised as a rising man of letters. Pope evidently liked Gay, who was his senior by nearly three years, but was as a child in worldly wisdom. On July 15th, 1711, Pope wrote to Cromwell, "Pray give my service to all my friends, and to Mr. Gay in particular";[10] and again, nine days later, addressing the same correspondent, he said: "My humble services, too, to Mr. Gay, of whose paper ['The Present State of Wit'] I have made mention to [Erasmus] Lewis." [11] Gay, ever anxious to please those whom he liked and, perhaps, especially those who might be of use to him, when writing the verses, "On a Miscellany of Poems to Bernard Lintott" (which appeared in that publisher's *Miscellany* issued in May, 1712), eagerly took advantage to ingratiate himself with a number of people, in so far as he could do this by means of compliments. Gay tells the publisher that if he will only choose his authors from "the successful bards" praised by the author, then "praise with profit shall reward thy pains"; and—

So long shall live thy praise in books of fame,
And Tonson yield to Lintott's lofty name;

but, since an author should not praise one publisher at the expense of another, he has already had a kindly word for that more celebrated publisher, Jacob Tonson—"Jacob's mighty name." It may be mentioned in passing that Gay's "Poems on Several Occasions" bear the joint imprint of Lintott and Tonson. Gay waxed eloquent in these verses, when writing of the other contributors to the *Miscellany*, and bestowed praise upon his brother-poets in no measured quantity:—

Where Buckingham will condescend to give
That honour'd piece to distant times must live;
When noble Sheffield strikes the trembling strings,
The little loves rejoice and clap their wings.
Anacreon lives, they cry, th' harmonious swain }
Retunes the lyre, and tries his wonted strain, }
'Tis he,—our lost Anacreon lives again. }
But when th' illustrious poet soars above
The sportive revels of the god of love,
Like Maro's muse he takes a loftier flight,
And towers beyond the wond'ring Cupid's sight.

If thou wouldst have thy volume stand the test,
And of all others be reputed best,
Let Congreve teach the list'ning groves to mourn,
As when he wept o'er fair Pastora's urn.[12]



Let Prior's muse with soft'ning accents move,
Soft as the strain of constant Emma's love:
Or let his fancy choose some jovial theme.
As when he told Hans Carvel's jealous dream;
Prior th' admiring reader entertains,
With Chaucer's humour, and with Spenser's strains.[13]



Page 10

Waller in Granville lives; when Mira sings
 With Waller's hands he strikes the sounding strings.
 With sprightly turns his noble genius shines,
 And manly sense adorns his easy lines.

On Addison's sweet lays attention waits,
 And silence guards the place while he repeats;
 His muse alike on ev'ry subject charms,
 Whether she paints the god of love, or arms:
 In him pathetic Ovid sings again,
 And Homer's "Iliad" shines in his "Campaign."
 Whenever Garth shall raise his sprightly song,
 Sense flows in easy numbers from his tongue;
 Great Phoebus in his learned son we see,
 Alike in physic, as in poetry.

When Pope's harmonious muse with pleasure roves,
 Amidst the plains, the murm'ring streams and groves.
 Attentive Echo, pleased to hear his songs,
 Thro' the glad shade each warbling note prolongs;
 His various numbers charm our ravish'd ears, }
 His steady judgment far out-shoots his years, }
 And early in the youth the god appears. }

It was in reference to these complimentary lines (which Pope saw in manuscript) that, on December 21st, 1711, Pope wrote to Cromwell: "I will willingly return Mr. Gay my thanks for the favour of his poem, and in particular for his kind mention of me." [14] That letter is interesting also as being the last exchanged between Pope and his old friend; and it is instructive, as showing how the acquaintance between the poets was already ripening, that Pope turned to Gay in his distress at the defection of his earlier friend. "Our friend, Mr. Cromwell, too, has been silent all this year. I believe he has been displeased at some or other of my freedoms, which I very innocently take, and most with those I think my friends," he wrote to Gay on November 13th, 1712. "But this I know nothing of; perhaps he may have opened to you, and if I know you right, you are of a temper to cement friendships, and not to divide them. I really very much love Mr. Cromwell, and have a true affection for yourself, which, if I had any interest in the world, or power with those who have, I should not be long without manifesting to you." [15]

If Pope had lost the friendship of Henry Cromwell, he was certainly anxious to strengthen the bond that was beginning to be forged between himself and Gay, to whom he wrote again: "I desire you will not, either out of modesty, or a vicious distrust of another's value for you—those two eternal foes to merit—imagine that your letters and



conversation are not always welcome to me. There is no man more entirely fond of good-nature or ingenuity than myself, and I have seen too much of these qualities in Mr. Gay to be anything less than his most affectionate friend and real servant." [16] That the intimacy between the poets waxed apace is evident, for when Pope wrote "A Farewell to London in the year 1715," the concluding stanza was:—

Adieu to all but Gay alone.
Whose soul, sincere and free.
Loves all mankind, but flatters none.
And so may starve with me.



Page 11

[Footnote 1: *Gay's Chair*, p. 13.]

[Footnote 2: *Dictionary of National Biography*.]

[Footnote 3: *Gay's Chair*.]

[Footnote 4: *Rural Sports*.]

[Footnote 5: Spence: *Anecdotes* (ed. Singer), p. 13.]

[Footnote 6: George Cheyne (1671-1743), physician, practised first at London, and then at Bath.]

[Footnote 7: "The Epigrammatical Petition" is printed on p. 29 of this work,]

[Footnote 8: "Key to 'Three Hours after Marriage,'" p. 7.]

[Footnote 9: John Freind (1675-1728), physician.]

[Footnote 10: Pope: *Works* (ed. Elwin and Courthope), VI, p. 123.]

[Footnote 11: *Ibid.*, VI, p. 124.]

[Footnote 12: A reference to "The Mourning Muse of Alexis: A Pastoral Lamentary on the Death of Queen Mary." In this piece the Queen is spoken of as "Pastora."]

[Footnote 13: The references are to "Henry and Emma" and "Hans Carvel."]

[Footnote 14: Pope: *Works* (ed. Elwin and Courthope), VI, p. 130.]

[Footnote 15: Pope: *Works* (ed. Elwin and Courthope), VII, p. 408.]

[Footnote 16: *Ibid.*, VII, p. 409.]

CHAPTER III

1713

"RURAL SPORTS," "THE FAN," "THE WIFE OF BATH," ETC.

There has been preserved a letter written by Aaron Hill to Richard Savage, June 23rd, 1766, which contains information concerning the life of the poet during the next two years. "I would willingly satisfy the curiosity of your friend, in relation to Mr. Gay, if it were not easy to get much further information than I am able to give, from Mr. Budgell or Mr. Pope; to the first of whom, the beginning of his life was best known, and to the last,



its afternoon and evening," Hill wrote. "As to your question, whether Mr. Gay was ever a domestic of the Duchess of Monmouth, I can answer it in the affirmative; he was her secretary about the year 1713, and continued so, till he went over to Hanover, in the beginning of the following year, with Lord Clarendon, who was sent thither by Queen Anne. At his return, upon the death of that Queen, all his hopes became withered, but Mr. Pope (who you know, is an excellent planter) revived and invigorated his bays, and indeed, very generously supported him, in some more *solid* improvements; for remember a letter, wherein he invited him, with a very impoetical warmth that, so long as he himself had a shilling, Mr. Gay should be welcome to sixpence of it, nay, to eightpence, if he could but contrive to live on a groat." [1]



Page 12

It is now happily possible to elaborate the information given in this letter. Owing to the kindly offices of one or other of his friends, Gay had secured the appointment of domestic secretary to the Duchess of Monmouth. Anne Scott, Duchess of Buccleuch in her own right, had in 1663 married the Duke of Monmouth. He was executed for high treason in 1683, and three years later his widow married Charles, third Baron Cornwallis. Though she had not long mourned her first husband, she did not forget that he was on his father's side of the blood royal, and to the end of her days she preserved a regal state, which, however, did not make her unpopular at Court. "The Princess," wrote Lady Cowper, "loved her mightily, and certainly no woman of her years ever deserved it so well. She had all the life and fire of youth, and it was marvellous to see that the many afflictions she had suffered had not touched her wit and good nature, but at upwards of three-score she had both in their full perfection." Upon this appointment Dr. Johnson commented: "By quitting a shop for such service Gay might gain leisure, but he certainly advanced little on the boast of independence." As has been seen, however, there was an interval of several years between Gay's apprenticeship and his taking up this position as the Duchess's amanuensis—for it is doubtful if he ever attained to an office more responsible than this—he secured board and lodging, a little pocket money, and no doubt ample leisure. It was necessary for Gay to earn his livelihood, for he had spent his patrimony, and the earnings of his pen were as yet negligible. Indeed, the situation was almost ideal for an impecunious young man of letters. Anyhow, Gay was delighted, and Pope not less so. "It has been my good fortune within this month past to hear more things that have pleased me than, I think, in all my time besides," Pope wrote to Gay, December 24th, 1712; "but nothing, upon my word, has been so homefelt a satisfaction as the news you tell me of yourself; and you are not in the least mistaken when you congratulate me upon your own good success, for I have more people out of whom to be happy, than any ill-natured man can boast of." Pope, now well aware of Gay's natural indolence, was careful in this same letter to urge him to devote himself to literary labours in his leisure hours. "I shall see you this winter with much greater pleasure than I could the last, and I hope as much of your time as your Duchess will allow you to spare to any friend will not be thought lost upon one who is as much so as any man," he added. "I must also put you in mind, though you are now secretary to this lady, you are likewise secretary to nine other ladies, and are to write sometimes for them too. He who is forced to live wholly upon those ladies' favours is indeed in as precarious a condition as any who does what Chaucer says for subsistence; but they are very agreeable companions, like other ladies, when a man only passes a night or so with them at his leisure, and away."^[2]



Page 13

Gay, the most amiable of men, never resented advice, perhaps because he so rarely followed it. In this case, however, he was surprisingly amenable. During the short time he was in the service of the Duchess of Monmouth, he drove his quill with some assiduity, and, indeed, at this period of his life he, who was presently distinguished as the laziest of men, worked diligently.

Before joining the household of the Duchess, he had written "Rural Sports: A Georgic," and this was published on January 13th, 1713, by Jacob Tonson, with an inscription to Pope:—

You, who the sweets of rural life have known,
Despise th' ungrateful hurry of the town;
In Windsor groves your easy hours employ,
And, undisturb'd, yourself and Muse enjoy.

During 1713 Gay wrote such trifles as papers on "Reproof and Flattery," and "Dress," which were printed in the *Guardian* on March 24th and September 21st respectively; and some verses, "Panthea," "Araminta," "A Thought on Eternity," and "A Contemplation on Night," which appeared in Steele's "Poetical Miscellany." A more ambitious work was "The Fan," which had occupied him during the earlier part of the year. He was greatly interested in its composition, and corresponded with Pope while it was being written. "I am very much recreated and refreshed with the news of the advancement of 'The Fan,' which I doubt not will delight the eye and sense of the fair, as long as that agreeable machine shall play in the hands of posterity," Pope wrote to him, August 23rd, 1713: "I am glad your Fan is mounted so soon, but I would have you varnish and glaze it at your leisure, and polish the sticks as much as you can. You may then cause it to be borne in the hands of both sexes, no less in Britain than it is in China, where it is ordinary for a mandarin to fan himself cool after a debate, and a statesman to hide his face with it when he tells a grave lie." [3] Again, on October 23rd, Pope wrote: "I shall go into the country about a month hence, and shall then desire to take along with me your poem of 'The Fan.'" The most ambitious as yet of Gay's writings, there are few to-day, however, who will question the judgment of Mr. Austin Dobson, "one of his least successful efforts, and, though touched by Pope, now unreadable."

Gay had thus early a leaning to the theatre, where presently he was to score one of his greatest successes, and he wrote "The Wife of Bath," which was produced at Drury Lane on May 12th, 1713. Steele gave it a "puff preliminary" in No. 50 of the *Guardian* (May 8th).

Gay was now become known as a man of letters, and had made many friends. Johnson says: "Gay was the general favourite of the whole association of wits; but they regarded him as a playfellow rather than as a partner, and treated him with more fondness than respect." [4] There is some truth in this view, but of the affection he inspired there is no doubt. To know him was to love him. Wherein exactly

Page 14

lay his charm it is not easy now to say; but his gentle good-nature and his utter helplessness seems to have appealed to those of sterner mould. The extracts already given from Pope's correspondence show the affection with which he was inspired for his brother of the pen. Pope took him so completely under his massive wing that he remarked later, "they would call him one of my *elevés*."^[5] Pope accepted the position, and introduced him to his circle. He made him known to Swift, and that great man loved him as he loved no other man; and to Parnell, Arbuthnot, Ford—the "joyous Ford" of "Mr. Pope's Welcome from Greece"—and Bolingbroke, in all of whom he inspired an affection, which endured through life. Parnell and Pope wrote jointly to him, and while in 1714 Pope was still addressing him as "Dear Mr. Gay," Parnell had already thrown aside all formality and greeted him as "Dear Gay." His old schoolfellow, William Fortescue, cleaved to him, and they were in such constant communication that when Pope wanted to see Fortescue, it was to Gay he appealed to arrange a meeting. The terms on which Gay was with the set is shown in Pope's letter to him, written from Binfield, May 4th, 1714: "Pray give, with the utmost fidelity and esteem, my hearty service to the Dean, Dr. Arbuthnot, Mr. Ford, and to Mr. Fortescue. Let them also know at Button's that I am mindful of them."^[6] Erasmus Lewis Gay knew now, and Caryl too, and the rest of the small literary set, who, with gusto, made him welcome among them. Indeed, when the "Memoirs of Scriblerus" were in contemplation, and, indeed, begun in 1713, Gay, then comparatively unknown, was invited to take a hand in the composition with the greatest men of the day. "The design of the Memoirs of Scriblerus was to have ridiculed all the false tastes in learning, under a character of a man of capacity enough, that had dipped into every art and science, but injudiciously in each," we have been told. "It was begun by a club of some of the greatest wits of the age. Lord Oxford, the Bishop of Rochester, Mr. Pope, Congreve, Arbuthnot, Swift, and others. Gay often held the pen; and Addison liked it well enough, and was not disinclined to come in to it."^[7] It does not transpire whether Gay had at this time met Swift, but that soon after they were in correspondence, appears from a letter from Pope to Swift, June 18th, 1714: "I shall translate Homer by the by. Mr. Gay has acquainted you with what progress I have made in it. I cannot name Mr. Gay without all the acknowledgments which I shall owe you, on his account."^[8]

[Footnote 1: Hill: *Works* (ed. 1754), I, p. 325.]

[Footnote 2: Pope: *Works* (ed. Elwin and Courthope), VII, p. 409.]

[Footnote 3: Pope: *Works* (ed. Elwin and Courthope), VII, p. 412.]

[Footnote 4: Johnson: *Lives of the Poets* (ed. Hill), III, p. 268.]

[Footnote 5: Spence: *Anecdotes* (ed. Singer), p. 145.]



Page 15

[Footnote 6: Pope: *Works* (ed. Elwin and Courthope), VII, p. 415.]

[Footnote 7: Swift: *Works* (ed. Scott), XVI, p. 123.]

[Footnote 8: Spence: *Anecdotes* (ed. Singer), p. 10.]

CHAPTER IV

1714

“THE SHEPHERD’S WEEK,” “A LETTER TO A LADY.”

The outstanding literary event in Gay’s career in 1714 was the pastoral, “The Shepherd’s Week,” which was published by R. Burleigh on April 15th, which contained a “Proeme to the Courteous Reader,” and a “Prologue to the Right Honourable the Lord Viscount Bolingbroke,” which was, in fact, a dedication:—

Lo, I who erst beneath a tree
Sung Bumkinet and Bowzybee,
And Blouzelind and Marian bright,
In apron blue or apron white,
Now write my sonnets in a book,
For my good lord of Bolingbroke.

The author then states that he had heard of the Queen’s illness and how the skill of Arbuthnot had restored her to health:—

A skilful leech (so God him speed)
They said had wrought this blessed deed,
This leech Arbuthnot was yclept,
Who many a night not once had slept;
But watch’d our gracious Sov’reign still:
For who could rest when she was ill?
O may’st thou henceforth sweetly sleep!
Shear, swains, oh shear your softest sheep
To swell his couch; for well I ween,
He saved the realm who saved his Queen.

Quoth I, please God, I’ll his with glee
To court, this Arbuthnot to see.

Such loyalty, of course, the hardest heart must touch, but loyalty in this case had its reward, and the journey to Court was well worth the pains:—



There saw I ladies all a-row
Before their Queen in seemly show.
No more I'll sing Buxoma brown,
Like goldfinch in her Sunday gown;
Nor Clumsilis, nor Marian bright,
Nor damsel that Hobnelia hight.
But Lansdown fresh as flowers of May,
And Berkely lady blithe and gay,
And Anglesea, whose speech exceeds
The voice of pipe or oaten reeds;
And blooming Hyde, with eyes so rare,
And Montague beyond compare.
Such ladies fair wou'd I depaint
In roundelay or sonnet quaint.

But charming as were these ladies, there was still a better sight in store for the visitor:

There saw I St. John, sweet of mien.
Full steadfast both to Church and Queen.
With whose fair name I'll deck my strain,
St. John, right courteous to the swain.

For thus he told me on a day,
Trim are thy sonnets, gentle Gay,
And certes, mirth it were to see
Thy joyous madrigals twice three,
With preface meet and notes profound.
Imprinted fair, and well y-bound.
All suddenly then home I sped,
And did ev'n as my Lord had said.



Page 16

It was not Bolingbroke who inspired the pastorals, though he accepted the dedication. The true history of the origin of “The Shepherd’s Week” is well set out by Mr. Underhill. “These pastorals, it should be explained, were written at the instigation of Pope,” he has written. “The sixth volume of Tonson’s ‘Miscellany’ had concluded with Pope’s Pastorals and begun with those of Ambrose Philips. A few years after its publication a writer in the *Guardian*[1] (probably Tickell[2]) discussed the Pastoral in a series of papers, and gave the most extravagant praise to Philips. ‘Theocritus,’ he remarked, ‘left his dominions to Virgil; Virgil left his to his son Spenser; and Spenser was succeeded by his eldest born, Philips.’ Pope was not mentioned, and he set himself to redress the injustice by a device of characteristic subtlety. He wrote a sixth paper, in which he continued to illustrate the true principles of pastoral poetry from Philips’ practice, but in such a way as to show the judicious reader by the examples given either the absurdity of Philips or the superior merit of Pope. The article was anonymously or pseudonymously forwarded to the *Guardian*, and was in due course published. Philips was furious, and providing himself with a birch rod, threatened to flog Pope. The latter, not content with his ingenious revenge, prevailed upon his friend Gay to continue the warfare and to burlesque Philips’ performances in a series of realistic representations of country life.”[3] Gay entered into the sport with joy—it was a game after his own heart, and one for which his talent was particularly fitted. He begins his “Proeme to the Gentle Reader” with a most palpable hit: “Great marvel hath it been (and that not unworthily) to diverse worthy wits, that in this our island of Britain, in all rare sciences so greatly abounding, more especially in all kinds of poesie highly flourishing, no poet (though other ways of notable cunning in roundelays) hath hit on the right simple eclogue after this true ancient guise of Theocritus, before this mine attempt. Other Poet travelling in this plain highway of Pastoral I know none.” Presently comes an attack but little disguised on Philips: “Thou will not find my shepherdesses idly piping on oaten reeds, but milking the kine, tying up the sheaves, or if the hogs are astray driving them to their styes. My shepherd gathereth none other nosegays but what are the growth of our own fields, he sleepeth not under myrtle shades, but under a hedge, nor doth he vigilantly defend his flocks from wolves, because there are none, as maister Spenser well observeth:—

Well is known that since the Saxon King
Never was wolf seen, many or some,
Nor in all Kent nor in Christendom.”

Page 17

Yet a third extract from this satirical “Proeme” must be given, and this in connection with the language of these eclogues: “That principally, courteous reader, whereof I would have thee to be advertised (seeing I depart from the vulgar usage) is touching the language of my shepherds; which is soothly to say, such as is neither spoken by the country maiden or the courtly dame; nay, not only such as in the present times is not uttered, but was never uttered in times past; and, if I judge aright, will never be uttered in times future. It having too much of the country to be fit for the court, too much of the court to be fit for the country; too much of the language of old times to be fit for the present, too much of the present to have been fit for the old, and too much of both to be fit for any time to come. Granted also it is, that in this my language, I seem unto myself, as a London mason, who calculateth his work for a term of years, when he buildeth with old material upon a ground-rent that is not his own, which soon turneth to rubbish and ruins. For this point, no reason can I allege, only deep learned examples having led me thereunto.”

All this is pretty fooling; but Gay, who in the beginning intended “The Shepherd’s Week” to be merely a burlesque, according to the suggestion of Pope, was carried away by his interest in the subject-matter, and produced a poem of undoubted value as a picture of rural life in his own day. With it he won approval as an original poet in his own day, and three centuries after critics still write in praise of it.

“These Pastorals were originally intended, I suppose, as a burlesque on those of Philips’; but, perhaps without designing it, Gay has hit the true spirit of pastoral poetry,” Goldsmith said; and Dr. Johnson wrote: “The effect of reality of truth became conspicuous, even when the intention was to show them grovelling and degraded. These pastorals became popular, and were read with delight, as just representations of rural manners and occupations, by those who had no interest in the rivalry of the poets, nor knowledge of the critical disputes.”[4] Southey, too, had a kind word to say: “In attempting the burlesque Gay copied nature, and his unexpected success might have taught his contemporaries a better taste. Few poets seem to have possessed so quick and observing an eye”[5]; and, coming to the present critics, Mr. Austin Dobson utters commendation: “The object went far beyond its avowed object of ridicule, and Gay’s eclogues abound with interesting folk-lore and closely studied rural pictures.”[6]



Page 18

With all his unworldliness Gay always had an eager, if not very keen, eye on the main chance, and finding himself surrounded by men of influence, he not unnaturally, in a day when men of letters often found their reward in Government places or in sinecures, looked to his acquaintances to further his interests. Great Britain was at this time represented at the Court of Hanover by a Mission which was from 1709 in charge of the Secretary, J. D'Alais, except when Special Missions were dispatched. Lord Rivers was Minister Plenipotentiary in 1710, and Thomas Harley went there as Ambassador Extraordinary in July, 1712, and again in the following February. Henry Paget, first Lord Burton, was appointed Ambassador in April, 1714, but resigned before he set forth, and Lord Clarendon was nominated in his stead.

JOHN GAY TO DEAN SWIFT.

London, June 8th, 1714.

“Since you went out of town, my Lord Clarendon was appointed Envoy-Extraordinary to Hanover in the room of Mr. Paget, and by making use of those friends, which I entirely owe to you, he has accepted me for his Secretary. This day, by appointment, I met his Lordship at Mr. Secretary Bromley’s office; he then ordered me to be ready by Saturday. I am quite off from the Duchess of Monmouth. Mr. Lewis was very ready to serve me upon this occasion, as were Dr. Arbuthnot and Mr. Ford. I am every day attending my Lord Treasurer [Oxford] for his bounty, in order to set me out, which he has promised me upon the following petition, which I sent him by Dr. Arbuthnot:—

I’m no more to converse with the swains,
But go where fine folk resort:
One can live without money on plains.
But never without it at Court.

If, when with the swains I did gambol,
I array’d me in silver and blue:
When abroad, and in Courts, I shall ramble,
Pray, my Lord, how much money will do?

We had the honour of the Treasurer’s company last Saturday, when we sat upon Scriblerus. Pope is in town and has brought with him the first book of Homer. I am this evening to be at Mr. Lewis’s with [Dr. Benjamin Pratt] the Provost [of Dublin College], Mr. Ford, Parnell, and Pope.”

“It is thought my Lord Clarendon will make but a short stay at Hanover. If it was possible that any recommendation could be procured to make me more distinguished than ordinary, during my stay at that Court, I should think myself very happy if you could contrive any method to prosecute it, for I am told that their civilities very rarely descend



so low as to the Secretary. I have all the reason in the world to acknowledge this as wholly owing to you. And the many favours I have received from you, purely out of your love for doing good, assures me you will not forget me during my absence. As for myself, whether I am at home or abroad, gratitude will always put me in mind of the man to whom I owe so many benefits."^[7]



Page 19

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These tidings were confirmed to Swift by Arbuthnot, who wrote from St. James's on June 12th: "You know that Gay goes to Hanover, and my Lord Treasurer has promised to equip him. Monday is the day of departure, and he is now dancing attendance for money to buy him shoes, stockings, and linen. The Duchess [of Monmouth] has turned him off, which I am afraid will make the poor man's condition worse instead of better." [8] As Arbuthnot reported fourteen days later, Gay received a hundred pounds from the Treasury, and "went away a happy man." [9] Lord Clarendon, whose mission it was formally to offer to the Elector George Lewis the condolences of Queen Anne on the death of his aged mother, the Electress Sophia, the heiress-presumptive to the British throne, who had passed away on June 8th, 1714, arrived at Hanover on July 16th.

Despite Gay's forebodings, the civilities of the Court of Hanover did happily "descend so low as to the Secretary." That he was presented to the royal circle and held converse with the highest in the land, is clear from a sentence in a letter from Arbuthnot to Swift, August 13th, 1714: "I have a letter from Gay, just before the Queen's death. Is he not a true poet, who had not one of his own books to give to the Princess that asked for one?" [10] Here it was that Gay first made the acquaintance of Henrietta Howard, afterwards Countess of Suffolk, with whom he was presently on a footing of intimate friendship.

JOHN GAY TO DR. ARBUTHNOT.

Hanover, August 16th, 1714.

"You remember, I suppose, that I was to write you abundance of letters from Hanover; but as one of the most distinguished qualities of a publician is secrecy, you must not expect from me any arcanas of state. There is another thing that is necessary to establish the character of a politician, which is to seem always to be full of affairs of State; to know the consultations of the Cabinet Council when at the same time his politics are collected from newspapers. Which of these two causes my secrecy is owing to I leave you to determine. There is yet one thing more that is extremely necessary for a foreign minister, which he can no more be without than an artisan without his tools; I mean the terms of his art. I call it an art or a science because I think the King of France has established an academy to instruct the young Machiavelians of his country in the deep and profound science of politics. To the end I might be qualified for an employment of this nature, and not only be qualified myself, but (to speak in the style of Sir John Falstaff) be the cause of qualification in others, I have made it my business to read memoirs, treatises, *etc.* And as a dictionary of law-terms is thought necessary for young beginners, so I thought a dictionary of terms of State would be no less useful for young politicians. The terms of politics

Page 20

being not so numerous as to swell into a volume, especially in times of peace (for in times of war all the terms of fortifications are included), I thought fit to extract them in the same manner for the benefit of young practitioners as a famous author has compiled his learned treatise of the law, called the 'Doctor and Student.' I have not made any great progress in this piece; but, however, I will give you a specimen of it, which will make you in the same manner a judge of the design and nature of this treatise.

"Politician: What are the necessary tools for a Prince to work with?

"Student: Ministers of State.

"Politician: What are the two great qualities of a Minister of State?

"Student: Secrecy and despatch.

"Politician: Into how many parts are the Ministers of State divided?

"Student: Into two. First, Ministers of State at home; secondly, Ministers of State abroad, who are called Foreign Ministers.

"Politician: Very right. Now as I design you for the latter of these employments I shall waive saying anything about the first of these. What are the different degrees of Foreign Ministers?

"Student: The different degrees of Foreign Ministers are as follows: First, Plenipotentiaries; second, Ambassadors-Extraordinary; third, Ambassadors in ordinary; fourth, Envoys-Extraordinary; fifth, Envoys-in-ordinary; sixth, Residents; seventh, Consuls; and eighth, Secretaries.

"Politician: How is a Foreign Minister to be known?

"Student: By his credentials.

"Politician: When are a Foreign Minister's credentials to be delivered?

"Student: Upon his first admission into the presence of the Prince to whom he is sent, otherwise called his first audience.

"Politician: How many kinds of audience are there?

"Student: Two, which are called a public audience and a private audience.



“*Politician*: What should a Foreign Minister’s behaviour be when he has his first audience?

“*Student*: He should bow profoundly, speak deliberately, and wear both sides of his long periwig before, *etc.*

“By these few questions and answers you may be able to make some judgment of the usefulness of this politic treatise. Wicquefort, it is true, can never be sufficiently admired for his elaborate treatise of the conduct of an Ambassador in all his negotiations; but I design this only as a compendium, or the Ambassador’s Manual, or *vade mecum*.

“I have writ so far of this letter, and do not know who to send it to; but I have now determined to send it either to Dr. Arbuthnot, the Dean of St. Patrick’s, or to both. My Lord Clarendon is very much approved of at Court, and I believe is not dissatisfied with his reception. We have not very much variety of divisions; what we did yesterday and to-day we shall do to-morrow, which is to go to Court and walk in the gardens at Herrenhausen. If I write any more my letter will be just like my diversion, the same thing over and over again.”[11]



Page 21

Lord Clarendon stayed at Hanover even a shorter time than he had expected. On July 30th Lord Oxford was dismissed, and the white staff was given to the Duke of Shrewsbury, one of whose first acts was to recall the Tory Ambassador. Two days later Queen Anne died, and the Elector George Lewis succeeded to her throne under the style of George I. Lord Clarendon returned at once to England, and with him came Gay, saddened by the blasting of his hopes of advancement.

He was welcomed back by his friends, and received in particular an enthusiastic greeting from Pope, who wrote on September 23rd: "Welcome to your native soil! Welcome to your friend! Thrice welcome to me! whether returned in glory, blessed with Court interest, the love and familiarity of the great, and filled with agreeable hopes, or melancholy with dejection, contemplative of the changes of fortune, and doubtful for the future—whether returned a triumphant Whig or a desponding Tory, equally all hail! equally beloved and welcome to me! If happy, I am to share in your elevation; if unhappy, you have still a warm corner in my heart and a retreat at Binfield in the worst of times at your service." In this same letter Pope, always anxious to assist Gay, added: "Pardon me if I add a word of advice in the practical way. Write something on the King, or Prince or Princess. On whatever foot you may be with the Court, this can do no harm." [12]

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The change of Government having dashed to the ground his hopes of advancement in the diplomatic service, Gay thought that he could not do better than follow Pope's suggestion. Like the majority of men of letters of his day, and not having the independence of spirit of Swift and Pope, he hungered after a patron—a Minister might be good, but Ministers go out of office, and a member of the reigning family would be better. Remembering the kindly welcome given him at Hanover by the royal lady who was now Princess of Wales, he had indulged in a dream that a place would be offered him in her household. "Poor Gay is much where he was, only out of the Duchess [of Monmouth]'s family and service," Arbuthnot wrote to Swift, October 19th, 1714. "He has some confidence in the Princess and Countess of Picborough; I wish it may be significant to him. I advised him to make a poem upon the Princess before she came over, describing her to the English ladies; for it seems that the Princess does not dislike that. (She is really a person that I believe will give great content to everybody). But Gay was in such a grovelling condition as to the affairs of this world, that his Muse would not stoop to visit him." [13]

No proposal, however, being made to him, Gay, following the advice of Pope and Arbuthnot, proceeded to remind the new Court of his existence, and in November published "A Letter to a Lady, occasioned by the arrival of Her Royal Highness"—the "Lady" being, it is generally assumed, Mrs. Howard. In these verses he gave the assurance that he had desired the elements to arrange for the Princess an agreeable passage to England:—

Page 22

My strains with Carolina's name I grace.
The lovely parent of our royal race.
Breathe soft, ye winds, ye waves in silence sleep;
Let prosp'rous breezes wanton o'er the deep,
Swell the white sails, and with the streamers play,
To waft her gently o'er the wat'ry way.

With true poetic exaggeration he extolled Caroline's virtues, and then, so that there should be no excuse for misunderstanding, said in plain terms that he had desired a post at Court, and made it perfectly clear that he was still prepared to accept such employment, if so be as it was coupled with suitable remuneration:—

Since all my schemes were baulk'd, my last resort,
I left the Muses to frequent the Court;
Pensive each night, from room to room I walk'd,
To one I bow'd, and with another talk'd;
Inquir'd what news, or such a lady's name,
And did the next day, and the next, the same.
Places I found, were daily giv'n away,
And yet no friendly *Gazette* mention'd Gay.

Gay's protestations of delight at the accession to the throne of the House of Hanover would probably have been regarded as more sincere if, unfortunately, he had not a few months before dedicated "The Shepherd's Week" to Bolingbroke. His very outspoken hint in the "Letter to a Lady" was ignored; but Caroline, who liked eulogy as much as anyone, received him kindly; and when in February, 1715, he produced "The What D'ye Call It" at Drury Lane Theatre, she and her consort attended the first performance. But still, no place was found for him at Court. "Tell me," Swift asked him so much later as 1723, "are you not under original sin by the dedication of your Eclogue to Lord Bolingbroke?"

[Footnote 1: *The Guardian*, No. 32; April 17th, 1713.]

[Footnote 2: Dr. Johnson in his "Lives of the Poets" attributes the authorship to Steele (*Works*, ed. Hill), III, p. 269.]

[Footnote 3: Introductory Memoir by John Underhill, in his edition of the *Poems of John Gay* ("The Muses' Library"), I, xxxi.]

[Footnote 4: *Works* (ed. Hill), III, p. 269.]

[Footnote 5: *Specimens*, I, p. 298.]

[Footnote 6: *Dictionary of National Biography*, article, Gay.]



[Footnote 7: Swift: *Works* (ed. Scott), XVI, p. 113.]

[Footnote 8: *Ibid.*, XVI, p. 117.]

[Footnote 9: *Ibid.*, XVI, p. 123.]

[Footnote 10: Swift: *Works* (ed. Scott), XVI, p. 193.]

[Footnote 11: Swift: *Works* (ed. Scott), XVI, p. 204.]

[Footnote 12: Pope: *Works* (ed. Elwin and Courthope), VII, p. 415.]

[Footnote 13: Swift: *Works* (ed. Scott), XVI, p. 213.]

CHAPTER V

1715-1719

“The What D’ye Call It”—An Epistle to the Right Honourable the Earl of Burlington—“Trivia, or, The Art of Walking the Streets of London”—“Three Hours After Marriage.”



Page 23

Undismayed by the failure of his first play, "The Wife of Bath," Gay made another bid for theatrical success with "The What D'ye Call It," which was performed at Drury Lane Theatre in February, 1715, and published in March of that year. In the preface Gay wrote: "I have not called it a tragedy, comedy, pastoral, or farce, but left the name entirely undetermined in the doubtful appellation of 'The What D'ye Call It' ... but I added to it 'A Tragi-Comi-Pastoral Farce,' as it contained all these several kinds of drama." Pope saw the play and wrote about it to Congreve, March 19th, 1715: "The farce of 'The What D'ye Call It' has occasioned many different speculations in the town, some looking upon it as a mere jest upon the tragic poets, others as a satire upon the late war. Mr. Cromwell, hearing none of the words, and seeing the action to be tragical, was much astonished to find the audience laugh, and says the Prince and Princess [of Wales] must doubtless be under no less amazement on the same account. Several Templars and others of the more vociferous kind of critics went with a resolution to hiss, and confessed they were forced to laugh so much that they forgot the design they came with. The Court in general has come in a very particular manner into the jest, and the three nights, notwithstanding two of them were Court nights, were distinguished by very full audiences of the first quality. The common people of the pit and gallery received it at first with great gravity and sedateness, and some few with tears; but after the third day they also took the hint, and have ever since been very loud in their claps. There are still sober men who cannot be of the general opinion, but the laughs are so much the majority that one or two critics seemed determined to undeceive the town at their proper cost, by writing dissertations against it to encourage them in this laudable design. It is resolved a preface shall be prefixed to the farce, in vindication of the nature and dignity of this new way of writing." [1] The fact is that, as Johnson put it, "the images were comic and the action grave," and there were many mock-heroic passages which parodied tragedies, including Addison's "Cato" and Otway's "Venice Preserved," well-known in that day. Also it contained several ballads, of which perhaps the best is "'Twas when the seas were roaring" (Act II., Scene 8).

"The What D'ye Call It" was not a piece of much value, but it pleased the audience, and Gay was highly delighted. "Now my benefit night is over, it should be my first care to return my thanks to those to whom I am mostly obliged, and the civilities I have always received from you, and upon this occasion too, claims this acknowledgment," the author wrote to Caryl on March 3rd: "'The What D'ye Call It' met with more success than could be expected from a thing so out of the common taste of the town. It has been played already five nights, and the galleries, who did not know at first what to make of it, now enter thoroughly into



Page 24

the humour, and it seems to please in general better than at first. The parts in general were not so well played as I could have wished, and in particular the part of Filbert, to speak in the style of the French Gazette. Penkethman did wonders; Mrs. Bicknell performed miraculously, and there was much honour gained by Miss Younger, though she was but a parish child." [2] Filbert was played by Johnson, Jonas Dock by Penkethman, Joyce ("Peascod's daughter, left upon the parish") by Miss Younger, and Kitty by Mrs. Bicknell, mentioned by the author in "Mr. Pope's Welcome from Greece":

And frolic Bicknell, and her sister young.

The welcome given by the public to the play brought in its train some annoyance to the author: "I find success, even in the most trivial things, raises the indignation of scribblers," he wrote to Parnell on March 18th, "for I, for my 'What D'ye Call It' could neither escape the fury of Mr. Burnet or the German doctor. Then, where will rage end when Homer is to be translated? Let Zoilus hasten to your friend's assistance, and envious criticism shall be no more." [3] A more biting attack than that of Thomas Burnet's *Grumbler* (No. 1, February 14th, 1715) or that of Philip Horneck in "The High German Doctor" was the "Key to 'The What D'ye Call It,'" written by the actor Griffin in collaboration with Lewis Theobald. About this Gay wrote to Caryl in April: "There is a sixpenny criticism lately published upon the tragedy of 'The What D'ye Call It,' wherein he with much judgment and learning calls me a blockhead and Mr. Pope a knave. His grand charge is against 'The Pilgrim's Progress' being read, which, he says, is directly levelled at Cato's reading Plato. To back this censure he goes on to tell you that 'The Pilgrim's Progress' being mentioned to be the eighth edition makes the reflection evident, the tragedy of 'Cato' being just eight times printed. He has also endeavoured to show that every particular passage of the play alludes to some fine part of the tragedy, which he says I have injudiciously and profanely abused." [4]

Still, Gay could really afford to laugh at those who attacked or parodied him, for the play brought him, if not fame, at least notoriety. It also brought him some much-needed money. Pope told Caryl in March that Gay "will have made about L100 out of this farce"; and it is known that for the publishing rights Lintott gave him on February 14th L16 2s. 6d.

Gay, now a popular dramatist as well as an intimate friend of many of the leading men in literary circles, became known to people of high social rank, who, like his brethren of the pen, took him up and made a pet of him. In the summer of 1715 Lord Burlington, the "generous Burlington" of "Mr. Pope's Welcome from Greece," invited him to accompany him to Devonshire, and Gay repaid the compliment by describing his "Visit to Exeter" in a poetical "Epistle to the Right Honourable the Earl of Burlington," the first lines of which are:—



Page 25

While you, my Lord, bid stately piles ascend,
Or in your Chiswick bowers enjoy your friend;
Where Pope unloads the boughs within his reach,
The purple vine, blue plum, and blushing peach;
I journey far.—You know fat bards might tire.
And, mounted, sent me forth your trusty squire.

During his stay in Devonshire Gay began the composition of “Trivia, or The Art of Walking the Streets of London.” It was to this that Pope made allusion when writing to Caryll, January 10th, 1716: “Gay’s poem [is] just on the brink of the press, which we have had the interest to procure him subscription of a guinea a book to a tolerable number. I believe it may be worth L150 to him on the whole.”[5] In addition to the subscriptions, Gay received from Lintott L43 for the copyright of the book, the copies of which were sold to the public at one shilling and sixpence each; and as, with humorous exaggeration, Arbuthnot wrote to Parnell: “Gay has got as much money by his ‘Art of Walking the Streets’ that he is ready to set up his equipage; he is just going to the bank to negotiate some exchange bills.”[6] The “Advertisement” prefaced to the poem runs:

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“The world, I believe, will take so little notice of me that I need not take much of it. The critics may see by this poem that I walk on foot, which probably may save me from their envy. I should be sorry to raise that passion in men whom I am so much obliged to, since they allowed me an honour hitherto only shown to better writers: that of denying me to be author of my own works. I am sensible this must be done in pure generosity; because whoever writ them, provided they did not themselves, they are still in the same condition. Gentlemen, if there be any thing in this poem good enough to displease you, and if it be any advantage to you to ascribe it to some person of greater merit, I shall acquaint you for your comfort, that among many other obligations, I owe several hints of it to Dr. Swift. And if you will so far continue your favour as to write against it, I beg you to oblige me in accepting the following motto:—

—Non tu, in triviis, indocte, solebas
Stridenti miserum stipula disperdere carmen?”

Whether Swift gave any direct assistance is doubtful. Mr. Austin Dobson thinks that it is not improbable that “Trivia” was actually suggested by the “Morning” and “City Shower” which Swift had previously contributed to Steele’s *Tatler*. Probably these are among the “several hints” which Gay had in mind.

“Trivia” was published on January 26th, 1716, and was the one outstanding feature in the year in the biography of Gay. In the following March 26th there appeared a volume of “Court Poems,” published by J. Roberts, who advertised them as from the pen of Pope, though the preface makes the authorship doubtful between Pope, Gay, and a Lady of quality, who was Lady Mary Wortley Montagu. To the volume Lady Mary

Wortley Montagu contributed "The Drawing Room," Pope "The Basset Table," and Gay "The Toilet." This last has been attributed to Lady Mary, and it has actually been printed among her poems; but, according to Pope, it is "almost wholly Gay's," there being "only five or six lines in it by that lady."



Page 26

In 1716 Gay paid a second visit to Devonshire, and during the year he composed the “sober eclogue,” “The Espousal,” which probably arose out of a suggestion of Swift. “There is an ingenious Quaker[7] in this town, who writes verses to his mistress, not very correct, but in a strain purely what a poetical Quaker should do, commending her looks and habit, *etc.*” Swift wrote to Pope on August 30th, 1716: “It gave me a hint that a set of Quaker pastorals might succeed if our friend Gay could fancy it, and I think it a fruitful subject. Pray hear what he says. I believe farther, the pastoral ridicule is not exhausted, and that a porter, footman, or chairman’s pastoral might do well; or what think you of a Newgate pastoral, among the whores and thieves there?”[8] This letter is of especial importance in the biography of Gay, as it may well have sown in his mind the seed of “The Beggar’s Opera.”

About this time Gay was labouring on another play, “Three Hours After Marriage,” which he wrote in collaboration with Pope and Arbuthnot. It is a sorry piece of work, and unworthy of any one, much less of the three distinguished men associated in the authorship. In the Epilogue it is written:—

Join then your voices, be the play excused
For once, though no one living is abused;

but as a matter of fact one purpose of the play was, as Dr. Johnson said, “to bring into contempt Dr. Woodward, the fossilist, a man not really or justly contemptible.” Woodward was the author of a “History of Fossils,” and his name survives in the Woodwardian Professorship of Geology at Cambridge. He was introduced as Dr. Cornelius in “Martin Scriblerus”:—

Who nature’s treasures would explore,
Her mysteries and arcana know.
Must high as lofty Newton soar,
Must stoop as delving Woodward low.

The bridegroom in the play is called Fossile, and there was no mistaking the intention. Dr. Woodward had many friends, and these made known their disgust in the most unmistakable manner when “Three Hours After Marriage” was produced on January 16th, 1717, at Drury Lane Theatre. It ran for seven nights. “It had the fate which such outrages deserved,” Dr. Johnson has written; “the scene in which Woodward was directly and apparently ridiculed by the introduction of a mummy and a crocodile, disgusted the audience, and the performance was driven off the stage with general condemnation.”[9] The farce was not only dull, it was vulgar. And the geologist (played by Johnson) was not the only person introduced for the purpose of ridicule. Dennis was brought in as Sir Tremendous, and it was believed that Phoebe Clinket (played by Mrs. Bicknell) was intended for Anne Finch, Countess of Winchelsea, who, says Mr. Austin Dobson, “was alleged to have spoken contemptuously of Gay.” Of this farce, Mr.

Dobson writes: "It is perhaps fairer to say that he bore the blame, than that he is justly charged with its errors"



Page 27

of taste"; and it is very probable that, while Gay generously accepted responsibility, Pope and Arbuthnot were equally culpable. "Too late I see, and confess myself mistaken in relation to the comedy; yet I do not think had I followed your advice and only introduced the mummy, that the absence of the crocodile had saved it," Gay wrote to Pope. "I cannot help laughing myself (though the vulgar do not consider it was designed to look ridiculous) to think how the poor monster and mummy were dashed at their reception; and when the cry was loudest I thought that if the thing had been written by another I should have deemed the town in some measure mistaken; and, as to your apprehension that this may do us future injury, do not think it; the Doctor [Arbuthnot] has a more valuable name than can be hurt by anything of this nature, and yours is doubly safe. I will, if any shame there be, take it all to myself, as indeed I ought, the notion being first mine, and never heartily approved of by you.... I beg of you not to suffer this, or anything else, to hurt your health. As I have publicly said that I was assisted by two friends, I shall still continue in the same story, professing obstinate silence about Dr. Arbuthnot and yourself."^[10]

The publication in book form of "Three Hours After Marriage" by Lintott, who paid L16 2s. 6d. for the copyright, a few days after the production, did nothing to arrest the torrent of abuse. "Gay's play, among the rest, has cost much time and long suffering to stem a tide of malice and party, that certain authors have raised against it," Pope wrote to Parnell. Amongst those foremost among the attackers was Addison, who perhaps had not forgotten or forgiven the parody of some of the lines in his play "Cato," which was introduced by Gay in "The What D'ye Call It." Gay, the most easy-going of men, was always stirred by criticism, and in this case he, with unusual energy, sat down to reply to his detractors. "Mr. Addison and his friends had exclaimed so much against Gay's 'Three Hours After Marriage' for obscenities, that it provoked him to write 'A Letter from a Lady in the City to a Lady in the Country' on that subject," so runs a passage in Spence's Anecdotes of Pope. "In it he quoted the passages which had been most exclaimed against, and opposed other passages to them from Addison's and Steele's plays. These were aggravated in the same manner that they served his, and appeared worse. Had it been published it would have made Addison appear ridiculous, which he could bear as little as any man. I therefore prevailed upon Gay not to print it, and have the manuscript now by me."^[11] In Spence's Anecdotes there is another passage bearing on the same matter: "A fortnight before Addison's death, ^[12] Lord Warwick ^[13] came to Gay and pressed him in a very particular manner 'to go and see Mr. Addison,' which he had not done for a great while. Gay went, and found Addison in a very weak way. He received him in the kindest manner and told him, 'that



Page 28

he had desired this visit to beg his pardon, that he had injured him greatly, but that if he lived he should find that he would make it up to him.' Gay, on his going to Hanover, had great reason to hope for some good preferment; but all his views came to nothing. It is not impossible but that Mr. Addison might prevent them, from his thinking Gay too well with some of the great men of the former Ministry. He did not at all explain himself, in which he had injured him, and Gay could not guess at anything else in which he could have injured him so considerably."^[14] It seems, however, more probable that Addison really had in mind the part he had taken in connection with "Three Hours After Marriage." Two critical publications, "A Complete Key to 'Three Hours After Marriage,'" and "A Letter to John Gay, Concerning his late Farce, entitled a Comedy," annoyed Gay; while Pope, too, and, in a minor degree, Arbuthnot, were attacked for their share in the farce. John Durand Breval, writing over the signature of Joseph Gay, published in 1717 "The Confederates: A Farce," in which he introduced a humorous caricature print of Pope, Gay and Arbuthnot, so that, says Professor Courthope, "Pope, at the height of his fame, found himself credited, though he seems to have had little to do with it, with the past paternity of a condemned play."^[15] Another incident, recorded by Professor Courthope, further angered Pope: "While he was still sore at the mishap, Colley Cibber, playing in 'The Rehearsal,' happened to make an impromptu allusion to the unlucky farce, saying that he had intended to introduce the two kings of Brentford, 'one of them in the shape of a mummy, and t'other in that of a crocodile.' The audience laughed, but Pope, who was in the house, appeared (according to Cibber's account) behind the scenes and abused the actor in unmeasured terms for his impertinence. Cibber's only reply was to assure the enraged poet that, so long as the play was acted, he should never fail to repeat the same words. He kept his promise, thus committing the first of that series of offences which, in the poet's vindictive memory, marked him down for elevation to the throne of Dulness which was rendered vacant by the deposition of King Tibbald."^[16] There is a rumour that Gay, in revenge for Cibber's banter of "Three Hours After Marriage," personally chastised the actor-dramatist,^[17] but there is nothing definitely known about this. Anyhow, Gay was so irritated by the failure of this play that he did not produce anything at a theatre during the next seven years.

How Gay managed to exist through the three years after the production of "Three Hours After Marriage" is one of the stumbling blocks for the biographer. Of literary achievement during this period his life was barren. It is true that when he was abroad or in the country he was a guest, but even with this his expenses must have amounted to something. As he earned nothing by his pen, unless his friends

Page 29

provided him with money as well as giving him hospitality, it looks as if some relative must have died and left him a small sum. "As for Gay," Pope wrote to Caryll, June 7th, 1717, "he is just on the wing for Aix-la-Chapelle, with Mr. Pulteney, the late Secretary (at War)."[18] Pulteney who had resigned office when there was a split in the Ministry, had in December, 1714, married a very beautiful woman, Anne Maria Gumley, daughter of a wealthy glass manufacturer. With them Gay went abroad for some months, and perhaps the solution of the problem above stated, is that while he went nominally as their guest, he was actually paid a salary as companion or secretary.

It is evident from Gay's "Epistle to the Right Honourable William Pulteney, Esq." (published in 1717) that the party stayed some while at Paris, for therein is an account of that city, an account in which the author betrays a sad insularity; and he was certainly at Aix in November. "I should not forget to acknowledge your letter sent from Aix. You told me that writing was not good with the waters, and I find since, you are of my opinion, that it is as bad without the waters. But, I fancy, it is not writing, but thinking, that is so bad with the waters; and then you might write without any manner of prejudice if you write like our brother poets of these days." Pope wrote to him on November 8th: "... That Duchess [of Hamilton],[19] Lord Warwick, Lord Stanhope, Mrs. Bellenden, Mrs. Lepell, and I cannot tell who else, had your letters ... I would send my services to Mr. Pulteney, but that he is out at Court, and make some compliment to Mrs. Pulteney, if she was not a Whig."[20]

From this letter it is evident that Gay was becoming well known in fashionable circles, and it is also clear that he had friends in the Court circle. "Gay is well at Court, and more than ever in the way of being served than ever.... Gay dines daily with the Maids of Honour," Pope had written to Martha Blount in December, 1716; and Gay, who would rather have had a place in the Household with nothing to do and no responsibility than anything else in the world, was not the man to refrain from endeavouring to improve the occasion. Mrs. Howard he had first met at Hanover, and in London contrived to turn the acquaintanceship into friendship. Knowing Gay's character and his ambition, it is probably doing him no injustice to say that he was first drawn to the lady by the belief that she might further his aims. However, it is only fair to say that he soon came to like her for herself, and long after he was convinced that she could be of no service to him he remained a very loyal and intimate friend. He was taken entirely into her confidence, as will presently be seen, and she even called him in to assist her when she was conducting an elaborate and stilted epistolary flirtation with Lord Peterborough. It was most probably she who introduced him to Mrs. Bellenden, Mrs. Lepell, and the other ladies of the Court. Of Mrs. Howard and Gay, Dr. Johnson wrote: "Diligent court was paid to Mrs. Howard, afterwards Countess of Suffolk, who was much beloved by the King and Queen, to engage her interest for his promotion; but solicitations, verses, and flatteries were thrown away; the lady heard them and did nothing." This, however, is manifestly unfair, for it is now known that Mrs. Howard's influence was negligible.



Page 30

To the ladies of the Court and others of Pope's friends, Gay paid tribute in "Mr. Pope's Welcome from Greece":—

What lady's that to whom he gently bends?
Who knows her not? Ah, those are Wortley's eyes.
How art thou honour'd, number'd with her friends;
For she distinguishes the good and wise.
The sweet-tongued Murray near her side attends:
Now to my heart the glance of Howard flies;
Now Hervey, fair of face, I mark full well
With thee, youth's youngest daughter, sweet Lepell.

I see two lovely sisters hand in hand,
The fair-hair'd Martha and Teresa brown;
Madge Bellenden, the tallest of the land;
And smiling Mary, soft and fair as down.
Yonder I see the cheerful Duchess stand,
For friendship, zeal, and blithesome humours known:
Whence that loud shout in such a hearty strain?
Why all the Hamiltons are in her train.
See next the decent Scudamore advance
With Winchelsea, still meditating song,
With her perhaps Miss Howe came there by chance.
Nor knows with whom, nor why she comes along.

Gay was now on intimate terms with Lord Harcourt, whom he presently introduced into "Mr. Pope's Welcome from Greece":—

Harcourt I see, for eloquence renown'd,
The mouth of justice, oracle of law!
Another Simon is beside him found,
Another Simon like as straw to straw;

and early in 1718 he visited him, first at Cockthorpe and then at Stanton Harcourt, at which latter seat Pope was staying, working on the fifth volume of the "Iliad." In the following year Gay again crossed the Channel, possibly for the second time with the Pulteneys, but the only record of this trip is to be found in the following letter:—

JOHN GAY TO THE HON. MRS. HOWARD.

Dijon, September 8th, 1719.



“If it be absolutely necessary that I make an apology for my not writing, I must give you an account of very bad physicians, and a fever which I had at Spa, that confined me for a month; but I do not see that I need make the least excuse, or that I can find any reason for writing to you at all; for can you believe that I would wish to converse with you if it were not for the pleasure to hear you talk again? Then why should I write to you when there is no possibility of receiving an answer? I have been looking everywhere since I came into France to find out some object that might take you from my thoughts, that my journey might seem less tedious; but since nothing could ever do it in England I can much less expect it in France.



Page 31

"I am rambling from place to place. In about a month I hope to be at Paris, and in the next month to be in England, and the next minute to see you. I am now at Dijon in Burgundy, where last night, at an ordinary, I was surprised by a question from an English gentleman whom I had never seen before; hearing my name, he asked me if I had any relation or acquaintance with *myself*, and when I told him I knew no such person, he assured me that he was an intimate acquaintance of Mr. Gay's of London. There was a Scotch gentleman, who all supper time was teaching some French gentlemen the force and propriety of the English language; and, what is seen very commonly, a young English gentleman with a Jacobite governor. A French marquis drove an Abbe from the table by railing against the vast riches of the Church, and another marquis, who squinted, endeavoured to explain transubstantiation: 'That a thing might not be what it really appeared to be, my eyes,' says he, 'may convince you. I *seem* at present to be looking on you; but, on the contrary, I see quite on the other side of the table.' I do not believe that this argument converted one of the heretics present, for all that I learned by him was, that to believe transubstantiation it is necessary not to see the thing you seem to look at.

"So much I have observed on the conversation and manners of the *people*. As for the *animals* of the country, it abounds with bugs, which are exceedingly familiar with strangers; and as for *plants*, garlick seems to be the favourite production of the country, though for my own part I think the vine preferable to it. When I publish my travels at large I shall be more particular; in order to which, to-morrow I set out for Lyons, from thence to Montpellier, and so to Paris; and soon after I shall pray that the winds may be favourable, I mean, to bring you from Richmond to London, or me from London to Richmond; so prays, *etc.*, JOHN GAY.

"I beg you, madam, to assure Miss Lepell and Miss Bellenden, that I am their humble servant."^[21]

[Footnote 1: Pope: *Works* (ed. Elwin and Courthope), IV, p. 412.]

[Footnote 2: Pope: *Works* (ed. Elwin and Courthope), VI, p. 223.]

[Footnote 3: *Ibid.*, VII, p. 455.]

[Footnote 4: *Ibid.*, VI, p. 227.]

[Footnote 5: Pope: *Works* (ed. Elwin and Courthope), VI, p. 237.]

[Footnote 6: Pope: *Works* (ed. Elwin and Courthope), VII, p. 460.]

[Footnote 7: George Rooke, a Dublin linendraper.]

[Footnote 8: Swift: *Works* (ed. Scott), XVI, p. 251.]



[Footnote 9: Johnson: *Works* (ed. Hill), II, p. 271.]

[Footnote 10: Pope: *Works* (ed. Elwin and Courthope), VII, p. 418.]

[Footnote 11: Spence: *Anecdotes* (ed. Singer), p. 202.]

[Footnote 12: Addison died on June 17th, 1719.]



Page 32

[Footnote 13: Stepson of Addison.]

[Footnote 14: Spence: *Anecdotes* (ed. Singer), p. 149.]

[Footnote 15: *Life of Pope*, p. 126.]

[Footnote 16: *Life of Pope*, p. 126.]

[Footnote 17: Cibber's *Apology* (ed. Lowe).]

[Footnote 18: Pope: *Works* (ed. Elwin and Courthope), VI, p. 244.]

[Footnote 19: Daughter of Lord Gerard, widow of the Duke of Hamilton, who in 1712 was killed in a duel with Lord Mohun.]

[Footnote 20: Pope: *Works* (ed. Elwin and Courthope) VII. p. 420.]

[Footnote 21: *B.M.*, Add MSS., 22626, f. 22.]

CHAPTER VI

1720

“Poems on Several Occasions”—Gay Invests His Earnings in the South Sea Company—The South Sea “Bubble” Breaks, and Gay Loses all His Money—Appointed a Commissioner of the State Lottery—Lord Lincoln Gives Him an Apartment in Whitehall—At Tunbridge Wells—Correspondence with Mrs. Howard.

Gay in 1720 was in his thirty-fifth year, and he had commenced author some twelve years before this date. During this period his output had been very small, and his success not conspicuous. As a dramatist he had been a complete failure—his first play, “The Wife of Bath,” was still-born, and the others, “The What D’ye Call It” and “Three Hours After Marriage,” had practically been hooted off the stage, and had brought him in their train a considerable degree of unpopularity. Of his poems, the only ones of any marked merit were “The Shepherd’s Week,” and “Trivia,” and even these were unambitious, though not without merit. Gay now bethought him of collecting his poems, published and unpublished, and they were issued in two quarto volumes early in 1720, with the joint imprint of Jacob Tonson and his old publisher, Bernard Lintott, and with a frontispiece by William Kent.

The “Poems on Several Occasions,” as the collection was styled, were issued by subscription. His friends supported him admirably. Lord Burlington and Lord Chandos each put down his name for fifty copies, Lord Bathurst for ten copies; in all Gay made



more than L1,000 by the publication. To this success he alluded in his "Epistle to the Right Honourable Paul Methuen, Esq." [1]

Yet there are ways for authors to be great;
Write ranc'rous libels to reform the State;
Or if you choose more sun and readier ways,
Spatter a minister with fulsome praise:
Launch out with freedom, flatter him enough;
Fear not, all men are dedication-proof.
Be bolder yet, you must go farther still,
Dip deep in gall thy mercenary quill.
He who his pen in party quarrels draws,
Lists an hired bravo to support the cause;
He must indulge his patron's hate and spleen,
And stab the fame of those he ne'er has seen.
Why then should authors mourn their desp'rate case?
Be brave, do this, and then demand a place.
Why art thou poor? exert the gifts to rise,
And vanish tim'rous virtue from thy eyes.



Page 33

All this seems modern preface, where we're told
That wit is praised, but hungry lives and cold:
Against th' ungrateful age these authors roar,
And fancy learning starves because they're poor.
Yet why should learning hope success at Court?
Why should our patriots virtue's cause support?
Why to true merit should they have regard?
They know that virtue is its own reward.
Yet let me not of grievances complain.
Who (though the meanest of the Muse's train)
Can boast subscriptions to my humble lays,
And mingle profit with my little praise.

What to do with the thousand pounds—a sum certainly far larger than any of which he had ever been possessed—Gay had not the slightest idea. He had just enough wisdom to consult his friends. Erasmus Lewis, a prudent man of affairs, advised him to invest it in the Funds and live upon the interest; Arbuthnot advised him to put his faith in Providence and live upon the capital; Swift and Pope, who understood him best, advised him to purchase an annuity. Bewildered by these divergent counsels, he did none of these things. Just when he was confronted with the necessity of making up his mind, Pope's friend, James Craggs the younger, of whom he wrote in "Mr. Pope's Welcome from Greece":—

Bold, generous Craggs, whose heart was ne'er disguised,

made him a present of some stock of the South Sea Company, at the same time, no doubt, telling him that in all probability it would rise in value. Here was a chance, dear to the heart of this hunter after sinecures, of getting something for nothing—or next to nothing. With his thousand pounds he purchased more South Sea stock. At what price Gay bought it is impossible to say, but it is not unlikely that Craggs' present was made in April, 1720, when the first money-subscription was issued at the price of L300 for each L100 stock. The poet's good fortune was at this moment in the ascendant. A mania for speculation burst over the town, and everybody bought and sold South Sea stock. In July it was quoted at L1,000. If Gay had then sold out he would have realised a sum in the neighbourhood of L20,000. His friends implored him to content himself with this handsome profit, but in vain. As Dr. Johnson put it, "he dreamed of dignity and splendour, and could not bear to obstruct his own fortune."^[2] He who a few months ago had been practically penniless, could not now bring himself to be satisfied with an income of about a thousand a year. Realising that it was impossible entirely to overcome his obduracy, his friends then begged him at least to sell so much as would produce even a hundred a year in the Funds, "which," Fenton said to him, "will make you sure of a clean shirt and a shoulder of mutton every day." Gay was not to be moved from his resolve to become a great capitalist. Arguments were of no avail. The wilful man finally had his way. Almost from the moment he refused to yield to his

friends' entreaties the price of South Sea stock declined rapidly. The "Bubble" burst, and in October South Sea stock was unsaleable at any price. Gay lost not only his profit but his capital, and was again reduced to penury.



Page 34

Gay spoke his mind about the “Bubble” in “A Panegyric Epistle to Mr. Thomas Snow, Goldsmith, near Temple Bar: Occasioned by his Buying and Selling of the Third Subscriptions, taken in by the Directors of the South Sea Company, at a thousand per cent,” which was published by Lintott in 1721:—

O thou, whose penetrative wisdom found
The South-Sea rocks and shelves, where thousands drown'd,
When credit sunk, and commerce gasping lay,
Thou stood'st; nor sent one bill unpaid away.
When not a guinea chink'd on Martin's boards,
And Atwill's self was drain'd of all his hoards,
Thou stood'st (an Indian king in size and hue)
Thy unexhausted shop was our Peru.

Why did 'Change-Alley waste thy precious hours,
Among the fools who gaped for golden showers?
No wonder if we found some poets there,
Who live on fancy, and can feed on air;
No wonder they were caught by South-Sea schemes
Who ne'er enjoy'd a guinea but in dreams;
No wonder they their third subscription sold,
For millions of imaginary gold:
No wonder that their fancies wild can frame }
Strange reasons, that a thing is still the same, }
Tho' changed throughout in substance and in name. }
But you (whose judgment scorns poetic flights)
With contracts furnish boys for paper kites.

One of the immediate results of the disaster was Gay's inability to fulfil his obligations to one of the publishers of his “Poems on Several Occasions”:—

JOHN GAY TO JACOB TONSON.

Friday morning [*circa* October, 1720].

“Sir,—I received your letter with the accounts of the books you had delivered. I have not seen Mr. Lintott's account, but shall take the first opportunity to call on him. I cannot think your letter consists of the utmost civility, in five lines to press me twice to make up my account just at a time when it is impracticable to sell out of the stocks in which my fortune is engaged. Between Mr. Lintott and you the greatest part of the money is received, and I imagine you have a sufficient number of books in your hands for the security of the rest. To go to the strictness of the matter, I own my note engages me to make the whole payment in the beginning of September. Had it been in my power, I



had not given you occasion to send to me, for I can assure you I am as impatient and uneasy to pay the money I owe, as some men are to receive it, and it is no small mortification to refuse you so reasonable a request, which is that I may no longer be obliged to you."[3]

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Page 35

The loss of his fortune was, of course, a very severe blow to Gay, but as ever, his friends gathered round him. Instead of being angry with him for his folly—but no one of his friends was ever angry with him—they looked upon him, and treated him, just as a spoilt child who had disobeyed to get over a hedge and had scratched himself in the endeavour. They put their heads together to find “something” for him. Gay, of course, was not easy to deal with; it was difficult to make him listen to reason. He could not be brought to believe that it was not his due to receive something for nothing. He had been secretary to Lord Clarendon’s brief Mission to Hanover; why had not diplomacy something to offer him? The Princess of Wales had asked for a copy of a set of his verses; was there no place for him at Court? He had praised members of the Royal Family in verse; was there somewhere—somehow—a sinecure in the Household for him? It seems that Gay really could not understand the position. Could not Mrs. Howard do something in his interest? Could not the friends of Pope do aught to secure that little post? Or Lord Burlington, or Lord Bathurst, or William Pulteney, or some one of the rest? He became petulant, and it is a tribute to his charm that not one of these persons was ever disgusted with him, but continued to feed him, keep him, and pet him, and made their friends and their friends’ friends do likewise. In fact, this delightful, whimsical, helpless creature leant upon all who were stronger, and each one upon whom he leant loved him to his dying day.

Gay’s health, which was never robust, gave way under his bitter disappointment, and in 1721 he went in the early autumn to Bath, where Mrs. Bradshaw wrote to Mrs. Howard, September 19th: “He is always with the Duchess of Queensberry.” In the following year he was again ill, and went again to recuperate at the Somersetshire watering place.

JOHN GAY TO DEAN SWIFT.

London, December 22nd, 1722.

“After every post-day, for these eight or nine years, I have been troubled with an uneasiness of spirit, and at last I have resolved to get rid of it and write to you. I do not deserve you should think so well of me as I really deserve, for I have not professed to you that I love you as much as ever I did; but you are the only person of my acquaintance, almost, that does not know it. Whomever I see that comes from Ireland, the first question I ask is after your health ... I think of you very often; nobody wishes you better, or longs more to see you ... I was there [at Bath] for near eleven weeks for a colic that I have been troubled with of late; but have not found all the benefit I expected ... I lodge at present at Burlington House, and have received many civilities from many great men, but very few real benefits. They wonder at each other for not providing for me, and I wonder at them all. Experience has given me some knowledge of them, so that I can say, that it is not in their power to disappoint me.”[4]



Page 36

This was certainly ungrateful of Gay, but allowance may perhaps be made for him on the ground that he was, as Coxe has written, “of a sanguine disposition, was easily raised and as easily depressed. He mistook the usual civilities of persons of distinction for offers of assistance, and argued from the common promises of a Court certain preferment.” He accordingly always suffered from mortification, about which he was prone to discourse. This was a foible well known to his friends, and even Pope could not refrain from gently chaffing him: “I wish you joy of the birth of the young Prince,[5] because he is the only prince we have from whom you have had no expectations and no disappointments.”[6]

DEAN SWIFT TO JOHN GAY.

Dublin, January 8th, 1723.

“Although I care not to talk to you as a divine, yet I hope you have not been the author of your colic. Do you drink bad wine or keep bad company?... I am heartily sorry you have any dealings with that ugly distemper, and I believe our friend Arbuthnot will recommend you to temperance and exercise ...

“I am extremely glad he [Pope] is not in your case of needing great men’s favour, and could heartily wish that you were in his.

“I have been considering why poets have such ill success in making their court, since they are allowed to be the greatest and best of all flatterers. The defect is, that they flatter only in print or in writing, but not by word of mouth; they will give things under their hand which they make a conscience of speaking. Besides, they are too libertine to haunt antechambers, too poor to bribe porters and footmen, and too proud to cringe to second-hand favourites in a great family.

“Tell me, are you not under original sin by the dedication of your Eclogues to Lord Bolingbroke?

“I am an ill judge at this distance, and besides am, for my case, utterly ignorant of the commonest things that pass in the world; but if all Courts have a sameness in them (as the parsons phrase it), things may be as they were in my time, when all employments went to Parliament-men’s friends, who had been useful in elections, and there was always a huge list of names in arrears at the Treasury, which would at least take up your seven years’ expedient to discharge even one-half.

“I am of opinion, if you will not be offended, that the surest course would be to get your friend [Lord Burlington] who lodgeth in your house to recommend you to the next Chief Governor who comes over here, for a good civil employment, or to be one of his secretaries, which your Parliament-men are fond enough of, when there is no room at



home. The wine is good and reasonable; you may dine twice a week at the Deanery-house; there is a set of company in this town sufficient for one man; folks will admire you, because they have read you, and read of you; and a good employment will make you live tolerably in London, or sumptuously here; or, if you divide between both places, it will be for your health."^[7]



Page 37

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Gay's friends, who had persistently been on the look-out to help him, at last met with some small measure of success. "I am obliged to you for your advice, as I have been formerly for your assistance in introducing me into business," Gay wrote to Swift from London, February 3rd, 1723. "I shall this year be Commissioner of the State Lottery, which will be worth to me a hundred and fifty pounds. And I am not without hopes that I have friends that will think of some better and more certain provision for me." [8] In addition to this post, the Earl of Lincoln was persuaded to give him an apartment in Whitehall. The Commissionship and the residence to some small extent soothed Gay's ruffled vanity, and were beyond question convenient.

JOHN GAY TO DEAN SWIFT.

London, February 3rd, 1723.

"As for the reigning amusements of the town, it is entirely music; real fiddles, bass-viols and hautboys; not poetical harps, lyres and reeds. There's nobody allowed to say, I sing, but an eunuch or an Italian woman. Everybody is grown now as great a judge of music, as they were in your time of poetry, and folks that could not distinguish one tune from another now daily dispute about the different styles of Handel, Bononcini, and Attilio. People have now forgot Homer and Virgil and Caesar, or at least they have lost their ranks. For in London and Westminster, in all polite conversations, Senesino is daily voted to be the greatest man that ever lived.

"Mr. Congreve I see often; he always mentions you with the strongest expressions of esteem and friendship. He labours still under the same affliction as to his sight and gout; but in his intervals of health he has not lost anything of his cheerful temper. I passed all the last season with him at Bath, and I have great reason to value myself upon his friendship, for I am sure he sincerely wishes me well. Pope has just now embarked himself in another great undertaking as an author, for of late he has talked only as a gardener. He has engaged to translate the Odyssey in three years, I believe rather out of a prospect of gain than inclination, for I am persuaded he bore his part in the loss of the South Sea. I supped about a fortnight ago with Lord Bathurst and Lewis at Dr. Arbuthnot's." [9]

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During the summer of 1723 Gay, still troubled with the colic, went to Tunbridge Wells, where he carried on a vigorous correspondence with Mrs. Howard.



THE HON. MRS. HOWARD TO JOHN GAY.

Richmond Lodge, July 5th, 1723.

"I was very sorry to hear, when I returned from Greenwich, that you had been at Richmond the same day; but I really thought you would have ordered your affairs in such a manner that I should have seen you before you went to Tunbridge. I dare say you are now with your friends, but not with one who more sincerely wishes to see you easy and happy than I do; if my power was equal to theirs the matter should soon be determined.



Page 38

“I am glad to hear you frequent the church. You cannot fail of being often put in mind of the great virtue of patience, and how necessary that may be for you to practise I leave to your own experience. I applaud your prudence (for I hope it is entirely owing to it) that you have no money at Tunbridge. It is easier to avoid the means of temptation than to resist them when the power is in our own hands....

“The place you are in has strangely filled your head with cures and physicians; but (take my word for it) many a fine lady has gone there to drink the waters without being sick, and many a man has complained of the loss of his heart who has had it in his own possession. I desire you will keep yours, for I shall not be very fond of a friend without one, and I have a great mind you should be in the number of mine.”

JOHN GAY TO THE HON. MRS HOWARD.

Tunbridge Wells, July 12th, 1723.

“The next pleasure to seeing you is hearing from you, and when I hear you succeed in your wishes I succeed in mine—so I will not say a word more of the house.

“We have a young lady, Mary Jennings, here that is very particular in her desires. I have known some ladies who, if ever they prayed and were sure their prayers would prevail, would ask an equipage, a title, a husband or matadores; but this lady, who is but seventeen and has but thirty thousand pounds, places all her wishes in a pot of good ale. When her friends, for the sake of her shape and complexion, would dissuade her from it, she answers, with the truest sincerity, that by the loss of shape and complexion she can only lose a husband, but that ale is her passion. I have not as yet drank with her, though I must own I cannot help being fond of a lady who has so little disguise of her practice, either in her words or appearance. If to show you love her you must drink with her she has chosen an ill place for followers, for she is forbid with the waters. Her shape is not very unlike a barrel, and I would describe her eyes, if I could look over the agreeable swellings of her cheeks, in which the rose predominates; nor can I perceive the least of the lily in her whole countenance. You see what L30,000 can do, for without that I could never have discovered all these agreeable particularities. In short, she is the *ortolan*, or rather *wheat-ear*, of the place, for she is entirely a lump of fat; and the form of the universe itself is scarce more beautiful, for her figure is almost circular. After I have said all this, I believe it will be in vain for me to declare I am not in love, and I am afraid that I have showed some imprudence in talking upon this subject, since you have declared that you like a friend that has a heart in his disposal. I assure you I am not mercenary and that L30,000 have not half so much power with me as the woman I love.”

THE HON. MRS. HOWARD TO JOHN GAY.



Page 39

Richmond Lodge, July 22nd, 1723.

“I have taken some days to consider of your *wheat-ear*, but I find I can no more approve of your having a passion for that, than I did of your turning parson. But if ever you will take the one, I insist upon your taking the other; they ought not to be parted; they were made from the beginning for each other. But I do not forbid you to get the best intelligence of the ways, manners and customs of this wonderful *phenomene*, how it supports the disappointment of bad ale, and what are the consequences to the full enjoyment of her luxury? I have some thoughts of taking a hint from the ladies of your acquaintance who pray for matadores, and turn devotees for luck at ombre, for I have already lost above L100 since I came to Richmond.

“I do not like to have you too passionately fond of everything that has no disguise. I (that am grown old in Courts) can assure you sincerity is so very unthriving that I can never give consent that you should practise it, excepting to three or four people that I think may deserve it, of which number I am. I am resolved that you shall open a new scene of behaviour next winter and begin to pay in coin your debts of fair promises. I have some thoughts of giving you a few loose hints for a satire, and if you manage it right, and not indulge that foolish good-nature of yours, I do not question but I shall see you in good employment before Christmas.”

JOHN GAY TO THE HON. MRS. HOWARD.

Tunbridge Wells, August, 1723.

“I have long wished to be able to put in practice that valuable worldly qualification of being insincere. One of my chief reasons is that I hate to be particular, and I think if a man cannot conform to the customs of the world, he is not fit to be encouraged or to live in it. I know that, if one would be agreeable to men of dignity one must study to imitate them, and I know which way they get money and places. I cannot indeed wonder that the talents requisite for a great statesman are so scarce in the world, since so many of those who possess them are every month cut off in the prime of their life at the Old Bailey.

“Another observation I have made upon courtiers is that if you have any friendship with any particular one, you must be entirely governed by his friendship and resentments, not your own; you are not only to flatter him but those that he flatters, and, if he chances to take a fancy to any man whom you know that he knows to have the talents of a statesman, you are immediately to think both of them men of the most exact honour. In short, you must think nothing dishonest or dishonourable that is required of you, because, if you know the world, you must know that no statesman has or ever will require anything of you that is dishonest or dishonourable.



Page 40

“Then you must suppose that all statesmen, and your friend in particular (for statesmen’s friends have always seemed to think so) have been, are, and always will be guided by strict justice, and are quite void of partiality and resentment. You are to believe that he never did or can propose any wrong thing, for whoever has it in his power to dissent from a statesman, in any one particular, is not capable of his friendship. This last word, friendship, I have been forced to make use of several times, though I know that I speak improperly, for it has never been allowed a Court term. This is some part of a Court creed, though it is impossible to fix all the articles, for as men of dignity believe one thing one day and another the next, so you must daily change your faith and opinion; therefore the mood to please these wonderful and mighty men is never to declare in the morning what you believe until your friend has declared what he believes—for one mistake this way is utter destruction.

“I hope these few reflections will convince you that I know something of the art of pleasing great men. I have strictly examined most favourites that I have known, and think I judge right, that almost all of them have practised most of these rules on their way to preferment. I cannot wonder that great men require all this from their creatures, since most of them have practised it themselves, or else they had never arrived to their dignities.

“As to your advice that you give me in relation to preaching and marrying and ale, I like it extremely, for this lady [Mary Jennings] must be born to be a parson’s wife, and I never will think of marrying her till I have preached my first sermon. She was last night at a private ball—so private that not one man knew it till it was over, so that Mrs. Carr was disturbed at her lodgings by only a dozen ladies, who danced together without the least scandal.

“I fancy I shall not stay here much longer, though what will become of me I know not, for I have not, and fear never shall have, a will of my own.”

THE HON. MRS. HOWARD TO JOHN GAY.

August, 1723.

“After you have told me that you hate writing letters, it would be very ungrateful not to thank you for so many as you have written for me. Acting contrary to one’s inclinations, for the service of those one likes, is a strong proof of friendship; yet, as it is painful, it ought never to be exacted but in case of great necessity. As such I look upon that correspondence in which I have engaged you.

“Perhaps you think I treat you very oddly, that while I own myself afraid of a man of wit [Lord Peterborough] and make that a pretence to ask your assistance, I can write to you myself without any concern; but do me justice and believe it is that I think it requires



something more than wit to deserve esteem. So it is less uneasy for me to write to you than to the other, for I should fancy I purchased the letters I received (though very witty) at too great an expense, if at the least hazard of having my real answers exposed.



Page 41

“The enclosed[10] will discover that I did not make use of every argument with which you had furnished me; but I had a reason, of which I am not at this time disposed to make you a judge. Conquest is the last thing a woman cares to resign; but I should be very sorry to have you in the desperate state of my *Knight-errant*. No! I would spare you, out of self-interest, to secure to me those I have made by your assistance.”

THE HON. MRS. HOWARD TO JOHN GAY.

August 22nd [1723].

“I am very much pleased to find you are of my opinion. I have always thought that the man who will be nothing but a man of wit oftener disoblige than entertains the company. There is nothing tries our patience more than that person who arrogantly is ever showing his superiority over the company he is engaged in. He and his fate I think very like the woman whose whole ambition is only to be handsome. *She* is in continual care about her own charms and neglects the world; and *he* is always endeavouring to be more witty than all the world, which makes them both disagreeable companions.

“The warmth with which I attack wit will, I am afraid, be thought to proceed from the same motive which makes the old and ugly attack the young and handsome; but if you examine well all those of the character I have mentioned you will find they are generally but pretenders to either wit or beauty, and in justification of myself I can say, and that with great sincerity, I respect wit with judgment, and beauty with humility, whenever I meet it.

“I have sent the enclosed[11] and desire an answer. I make no more apologies, for I take you to be in earnest; but if you can talk of sincerity without having it, I am glad it is in my power to punish you, for sincerity is not only the favourite expression of my knight-errant, but it is my darling virtue.

“If I agree with you, that wit is very seldom to be found in sincerity, it is because I think neither wit nor sincerity is often found; but daily experience shows us it is want of wit, and not too much, makes people insincere.”

[Footnote 1: Paul Methuen (1672-1757), diplomatist; Comptroller of the Household 1720-1725; K.B., 1725.]

[Footnote 2: *Lives of the Poets* (ed. Hill), III, p. 273.]

[Footnote 3: *B.M.*, Add. MSS., 28275, f. 8.]

[Footnote 4: Swift: *Works* (ed. Scott), XVI, p. 385.]

[Footnote 5: George William, born November 2nd, 1717, died February 6th, 1722.]



[Footnote 6: *Works* (ed. Elwin and Courthope), VII, p. 422.]

[Footnote 7: Swift: *Works* (ed. Scott), XVI, 390.]

[Footnote 8: Swift: *Works* (ed. Scott), XVI, p. 398.]

[Footnote 9: Swift: *Works* (ed. Scott), XVI, p. 297.]

[Footnote 10: Probably a letter from Lord Peterborough to Mrs. Howard.]



Page 42

[Footnote 11: Probably a copy of a letter from Mrs. Howard to Lord Peterborough].

CHAPTER VII

1724-1727

“THE CAPTIVES”—THE FIRST SERIES OF “FABLES”—GAY AND THE COURT—POPE, SWIFT AND MRS. HOWARD.

During 1723 Gay wrote a tragedy, “The Captives,” which at the end of the year he read to the royal circle at Leicester House. “When the hour came,” Johnson has recorded, “he saw the Princess [of Wales] and her ladies all in expectation, and, advancing with reverence, too great for any other attention, stumbled at a stool, and, falling forward, threw down a weighty Japanese screen. The Princess started, the ladies screamed, and poor Gay, after all the disturbance, was still to read his play.”[1] “The Captives” was produced at Drury Lane Theatre in January, 1724, and according to the *Biographica Dramatica* was “acted nine nights with great applause,” the third, or author’s night, being by the command of the Prince and Princess of Wales. According, however, to Fenton, “Gay’s play had no success. I am told he gave thirty guineas to have it acted on the fifth night.”[2] When it was published, Gay prefaced it with the following dedication:—

TO HER ROYAL HIGHNESS THE PRINCESS OF WALES.

“Madam,

“The honour I received from your Royal Highness in being permitted to read this play to you before it was acted, made me more happy than any other success that could have happened to me. If it had the good fortune to gain your Royal Highness’s approbation, I have often been reflecting to what to impute it, and I think it must have been the catastrophe of the fall, the rewarding virtue and the relieving the distressed. For that could not fail to give some pleasure in fiction, which, it is plain, gives you the greatest in reality, or else your Royal Highness would not (as you always have done) make it your daily practice.

“I am, Madam,
“Your Royal Highness’s most dutiful
and most humbly devoted servant,
“JOHN GAY.”

Of what Gay did, or where he went during 1724, next to nothing is known. Presumably he spent most of his time in his apartment at Whitehall, eating much and drinking more



than was good for him, and, to judge by results, writing nothing. The only trace of him during 1724 is in the following letter:—

JOHN GAY TO THE HON. MRS. HOWARD.

[Bath, 1724.]

“Since I came to the Bath I have written three letters; the first to you, the second to Mr. Pope, and the third to Mr. Fortescue. Every post gives me fresh mortification, for I am forgot by everybody. Dr. Arbuthnot and his brother went away this morning, and intend to see Oxford on their way to London. The talk of the Bath is the marriage of Lord Somerville and Mrs. Rolt. She left the Bath yesterday.



Page 43

He continues here but is to go away to-day or to-morrow; but as opinions differ I cannot decide whether they are married or no. Lord Essex gives a private ball in Hamson's great room to Mrs. Pelham this evening, so that in all probabilities some odd bodies being left out, we shall soon have the pleasure of being divided into fractions. I shall return to London with Lord Scarborough, who hath not as yet fixed his time of leaving the Bath. Lord Fitzwilliam this morning had an account that a ticket of his was come up L500. Lady Fitzwilliam wonders she has not heard from you, and has so little resolution that she cannot resist buttered rolls at breakfast, though she knows they prejudice her health.

"If you will write to me you will make me cheerful and happy, without which I am told the waters will have no good effect. Pray have some regard to my health, for my life is in your service."

* * * * *

There is no mention of Gay during the first nine months of the year 1724, after which it has been possible to gather scant information. Apparently, encouraged by the kindly interest displayed by the Princess of Wales, Gay, still obsessed with his desire for a place, went frequently to Court. "I hear nothing of our friend Gay, but I find the Court keep him at hard meat. I advised him to come over here with a Lord-Lieutenant,"[3] Swift wrote to Pope, September 29th, 1725. To this Pope replied on October 15th: "Our friend Gay is used as the friends of Tories are by Whigs, and generally by Tories too. Because he had humour he was supposed to have dealt with Dr. Swift; in like manner as when anyone had learning formerly, he was thought to have dealt with the devil. He puts his whole trust at Court in that lady whom I described to you."[4] "That lady," presumably was Mrs. Howard. But Gay, unable to secure the interest of the politicians, and getting weary of waiting on his friends, suddenly bethought himself of making a direct appeal to royalty. "Gay is writing tales for Prince William,"[5] Pope wrote to Swift on December 10th. "Mr. Philips[6] will take this very ill for two reasons, one that he thinks all childish things belong to him, and the other because he will take it ill to be taught that one may write things to a child without being childish." Than which last few prettier compliments have been paid to Gay.

Though they had long been in correspondence, Swift and Gay had not yet met. Swift, of course, had often in his mind a visit to London—he admitted the temptation, but resisted it. "I was three years reconciling myself to the scene, and the business to which fortune had condemned me, and stupidity was what I had recourse to,"[7] he had written to Gay from Dublin, January 8th, 1723. "Besides, what a figure should I make in London, while my friends are in poverty, exile, distress, or imprisonment, and my enemies with rods of iron?" At last, however, in March, 1726, he did come to London, and he was



Page 44

the guest of Gay, whom he subsequently referred to as “my landlord at Whitehall.” He saw much of Gay. “I have lived these two months past for the most part in the country, either at Twickenham with Mr. Pope, or rambling with him and Mr. Gay for a fortnight together. Yesterday Lord Bolingbroke and Mr. Congreve made up five at dinner at Twickenham,”[8] Swift wrote to Tickell from London on July 7th. Like the rest, Swift came to love Gay dearly, and Gay was no whit less attracted to the great man, who promised on his next visit to stay again in Whitehall. “My landlord,” he wrote in a letter addressed jointly to Pope and Gay, October 15th, 1726, “who treats me with kindness and domesticity, and says that he is laying in a double stock of wine.”[9] Swift had been introduced to Mrs. Howard—it may be by Gay—and she too wished to entertain him. “I hope you will get your house and wine ready, to which Mr. Gay and I are to have access when you are at Court; for, as to Mr. Pope, he is not worth considering on such occasions,”[10] he wrote to her from Dublin, February 1st, 1727.

Gay had become more and more on good terms with the Duke and Duchess of Queensberry, especially with the Duchess, who treated him as a sort of pet lap-dog. “Since I wrote last,” Gay told Swift in a letter dated September 16th, 1726, “I have been always upon the ramble. I have been in Oxfordshire with the Duke and Duchess of Queensberry, and at Petersham, and wheresoever they would carry me; but as they will go to Wiltshire[11] without me on Tuesday next, for two or three months, I believe I shall then have finished my travels for this year, and shall not go further from London than now and then to Twickenham.”[12] It was as well that Gay remained in London, else probably his “Fables” would never have appeared. Gay, who had begun to compose the “Fables” in 1725, was, according to the habit of the man, not to be hurried. “I have of late been very much out of order with a slight fever, which I am not yet quite free from,” he wrote to Swift in October, 1726. “If the engravers keep their word with me I shall be able to publish my poems soon after Christmas.” But of course the engravers did not keep their word. Swift, a more energetic person, became almost fractious at the repeated delays in the publication, and wrote to Pope on November 17th: “How comes Gay to be so tedious? Another man can publish fifty thousand lies sooner than he can publish fifty fables.”[13] And still there were delays. “My Fables are printed,” he told Swift on February 18th, 1727; “but I cannot get my plates finished, which hinders the publication. I expect nothing and am likely to get nothing.”[14] At last, in the spring, the volume appeared, with the imprint of J. Tonson and J. Watts, and with this dedication: “To His Highness William Duke of Cumberland these new Fables, invented for his amusement, are humbly dedicated by His Highness’s most faithful and most obedient servant, John Gay.”



Page 45

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Gay, of course, expected some reward for this courtier-like attention to the son of the Prince and Princess of Wales, and the poet and his friends again believed that his future was assured when they heard that Her Royal Highness had said, or at least was reported to have said, that she should “take up the hare”—an allusion to the “Fable” of “The Hare and Many Friends”:—

A Hare who in a civil way,
Complied with ev'ry thing, like Gay,
Was known by all the bestial train,
Who haunt the wood, or graze the plain.
Her care was never to offend.
And ev'ry creature was her friend.

On June 12th, 1727, George I. died, and Gay felt sure that at last the hour had struck when the “place” so long and diligently sought, would be bestowed on him. The new Queen did not, indeed, forget him; she did what in his eyes was far worse, she offered him the sinecure post of Gentleman Usher to the Princess Louisa,[15] then two years old, with a salary of L200 a year. Gay’s disappointment was bitter, and for a person usually so placid, his indignation tremendous. What ground for hope he had had, he, as Dr. Johnson has said, “had doubtless magnified with all the wild expectation and vanity,”[16] “The Queen’s family is at last settled,” Gay wrote bitterly to Swift on October 22nd, “and in the list I was appointed Gentleman Usher to the Princess Louisa, the youngest Princess, which, upon account that I am so far advanced in life, I had declined accepting, and have endeavoured, in the best manner I could, to make my excuses by a letter to her Majesty. So now all my expectations are vanished and I have no prospect, but in depending wholly upon myself and my own conduct. As I am used to disappointments I can bear them, but as I can have no more hopes I can no more be disappointed, so that I am in a blessed condition.”[17] Pope, than whom no man loved Gay better, could not bring himself to sympathise with his irate brother poet.

ALEXANDER POPE TO JOHN GAY.

October 6th, 1727.

“I have many years ago magnified, in my own mind, and repeated to you, a ninth beatitude, added to the eight in the Scripture: “Blessed is he who expects nothing, for he shall never be disappointed. I could find in my heart to congratulate you on this happy dismissal from all Court dependance. I dare say I shall find you the better and the honester man for it many years hence; very probably the healthfuller, and the cheerfuller into the bargain. You are happily rid of many cursed ceremonies, as well as of many ill and vicious habits, of which few or no men escape the infection, who are



hackneyed and trammelled in the ways of a Court. Princes, indeed, and Peers (the lackies of Princes) and Ladies (the fools of Peers) will smile on you the less; but men of worth and real friends will look on you the better. There is a thing, the only thing which kings and queens



Page 46

cannot give you, for they have it not to give—liberty, which is worth all they have, and which as yet Englishmen need not ask from their hands. You will enjoy that, and your own integrity, and the satisfactory consciousness of having not merited such graces from Courts as are bestowed only on the mean, servile, flattering, interested and undeserving. The only steps to the favour of the great are such complacencies, such compliances, such distant decorums, as delude them in their vanities, or engage them in their passions. He is their greatest favourite who is the falsest; and when a man, by such vile graduations arrives at the height of grandeur and power, he is then at best but in a circumstance to be hated, and in a condition to be hanged for serving their ends. So many a Minister has found it.”

“I can only add a plain uncourtly speech,” Pope wrote again to Gay ten days later. “While you are nobody’s servant you may be anybody’s friend, and, as such, I embrace you in all conditions of life. While I have a shilling you shall have sixpence, nay, eightpence, if I can contrive to live upon a groat.” But if Pope took the matter calmly, Swift, on the other hand, completely lost his temper and wrote as if voluntary attendance at Court made it obligatory upon the Queen to provide for the courtier.

DEAN SWIFT TO JOHN GAY.

Dublin, November 27th, 1727.

“I entirely approve your refusal of that employment, and your writing to the Queen. I am perfectly confident you have a firm enemy in the Ministry. God forgive him, but not till he puts himself in a state to be forgiven. Upon reasoning with myself, I should hope they are gone too far to discard you quite, and that they will give you something; which, although much less than they ought, will be (as far as it is worth) better circumstantiated; and since you already just live, a middling help will make you just tolerable. Your lateness in life (as you so soon call it) might be improper to begin the world with, but almost the eldest men may hope to see changes in a Court. A Minister is always seventy; you are thirty years younger; and consider, Cromwell did not begin to appear till he was older than you.”[18]

* * * * *

Swift could not forgive the Court for the offer, Mrs. Howard for not exerting her influence to get a better post for her protegee. “I desire my humble service to Lord Oxford, Lord Bathurst, and particularly to Miss Blount, but to no lady at Court. God bless you for being a greater dupe than I. I love that character too myself, but I want your charity,” he wrote to Pope, August 11th, 1729; but Pope replying on October 9th said: “The Court lady[19] I have a good opinion of. Yet I have treated her more negligently than you

would do, because you will like to see the inside of a Court, which I do not ... after all, that lady means to do good and does no harm, which is a vast deal for a courtier.”



Page 47

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More than once Swift took up his pen to avenge his friend for the slight that he considered had been passed upon him. In "A Libel on the Rev. Mr. Delany and His Excellency Lord Cartaret," he wrote in 1729:—

Thus Gay, the hare with many friends.
Twice seven long years the Court attends;
Who, under tales conveying truth,
To virtue form'd a princely youth;
Who paid his courtship with the crowd,
As far as modest pride allow'd;
Rejects a servile usher's place,
And leaves St. James's in disgrace.

Two years later he returned to the attack in "An Epistle to Mr. Gay":—

How could you, Gay, disgrace the Muse's train,
To serve a tasteless Court twelve years in vain!
Fain would I think our female friend sincere,
Till Bob,[20] the poet's foe, possess'd her ear.
Did female virtue e'er so high ascend,
To lose an inch of favour for a friend?
Say, had the Court no better place to choose
For thee, than make a dry-nurse of thy Muse?
How cheaply had thy liberty been sold,
To squire a royal girl of two years old:
In leading strings her infant steps to guide,
Or with her go-cart amble side by side!

It is a little difficult at this time of day to understand Swift's indignation. Gay was already in the enjoyment of a sinecure of L150 a year; he was offered another of L200 a year—for the post of Gentleman-Usher involved no duties save occasional attendance at Court, and to this the poet had shown himself by no means averse. A total gift of L350 a year for nothing really seems rather alluring to a man of letters, and it is difficult to understand why Gay refused the offer, unless it was, as the editors of the standard edition of Pope's Correspondence suggest: "The affluent friends who recommended Gay to reject the provisions were strangers to want, and with unconscious selfishness they thought less of his necessities than of venturing their spleen against the Court."

* * * * *

Swift, unable effectively to vent his anger on Caroline, chose to regard Mrs. Howard as the cause of the mortification of his friend. Mrs. Howard, however, not only had nothing



to do with the offer of the place of Gentleman-Usher to Gay, the patronage being directly in the Queen's hands, but, as has been indicated, was unable to secure for him, or anyone else, a place at Court of any description. Certainly she was in blissful ignorance of having given offence, for as Gay wrote to the Dean so late as February 15th, 1728: "Mrs. Howard frequently asks after you and desires her compliments to you."

All the matters affected not a whit the relations between Mrs. Howard and Gay; against her he had no ill-feeling, and their correspondence continued on the same lines of intimacy as before.

THE HON. MRS. HOWARD TO JOHN GAY.



Page 48

October, 1727.

“I hear you expect, and have a mind to have, a letter from me, and though I have little to say, I find I don’t care that you should be either disappointed or displeased. Tell her Grace of Queensberry I don’t think she looked kindly upon me when I saw her last; she ought to have looked and thought very kindly, for I am much more her humble servant than those who tell her so every day. Don’t let her cheat you in the pencils; she designs to give you nothing but her old ones. I suppose she always uses those worst who love her best, Mrs. Herbert excepted; but I hear she has done handsomely by her. I cannot help doing the woman this justice, that she can now and then distinguish merit.

“So much for her Grace; now for yourself, John. I desire you will mind the main chance, and be in town in time enough to let the opera[21] have play enough for its life, and for your pockets. Your head is your best friend; it could clothe, lodge and wash you, but you neglect it, and follow that false friend, your heart, which is such a foolish, tender thing that it makes others despise your head that have not half so good a one upon their own shoulders. In short, John, you may be a snail or a silk-worm, but by my consent you shall never be a *hare* again.

“We go to town next week. Try your interest and bring the duchess up by the birthday. I did not think to have named her any more in this letter. I find I am a little foolish about her; don’t you be a great deal so, for if *she* will not come, do you come without her.”

* * * * *

Gay was not the man to keep his feelings of disappointment to himself, and his feelings were so widely known that at the time the following copy of verses was handed about in manuscript [22]:—

A mother who vast pleasure finds,
In forming of the children’s minds;
In midst of whom with vast delight,
She passes many a winter’s night;
Mingles in every play to find,
What bias nature gives her mind;
Resolving there to take her aim.
To guide them to the realms of fame;
And wisely make those realms their way,
To those of everlasting day;
Each boist’rous passion she’d control,
And early humanise the soul,
The noblest notions would inspire,
As they were sitting by the fire;
Her offspring, conscious of her care,



Transported hung around her chair.
Of Scripture heroes would she tell,
Whose names they'd lisp, ere they could spell;
Then the delighted mother smiles,
And shews the story in the tiles.
At other times her themes would be,
The sages of antiquity;
Who left a glorious name behind,
By being blessings to their kind:
Again she'd take a nobler scope,
And tell of Addison and Pope.



Page 49

This happy mother met one day,
A book of fables writ by Gay;
And told her children, here's treasure,
A fund of wisdom, and of pleasure.
Such decency! such elegance!
Such morals! such exalted sense!
Well has the poet found the art,
To raise the mind, and mend the heart.
Her favourite boy the author seiz'd,
And as he read, seem'd highly pleas'd;
Made such reflections every page,
The mother thought above his age:
Delighted read, but scarce was able,
To finish the concluding fable.
"What ails my child?" the mother cries,
"Whose sorrows now have fill'd your eyes?"
"Oh, dear Mamma, can he want friends
Who writes for such exalted ends?
Oh, base, degenerate human kind!
Had I a fortune to my mind,
Should Gay complain; but now, alas!
Through what a world am I to pass;
Where friendship's but an empty name,
And merit's scarcely paid in fame."
Resolv'd to lull his woes to rest.
She told him he should hope the best;
That who instruct the royal race.
Can't fail of some distinguished place.
"Mamma, if you were queen," says he,
"And such a book was writ for me;
I know 'tis so much to your taste,
That Gay would keep his coach at least."
"My child, what you suppose is true,
I see its excellence in you;
Poets whose writing mend the mind,
A noble recompense should find:
But I am barr'd by fortune's frowns.
From the best privilege of crowns;
The glorious godlike power to bless,
And raise up merit in distress."

"But, dear Mamma, I long to know.
Were that the case, what you'd bestow?"



“What I’d bestow,” says she, “My dear,
At least five hundred pounds a year.”

[Footnote 1: Johnson: *Lives of the Poets* (ed. Hill), III, p. 274.]

[Footnote 2: Letter to Broome, January 30th, 1724 (Pope: *Works* (ed. Elwin and Courthope, VIII, p. 75.))]

[Footnote 3: Swift: *Works* (ed. Scott), XVII, p. 6.]

[Footnote 4: *Ibid.*, XVII, p. 8.]

[Footnote 5: William Augustus (1721-1765), third son of George III; created Duke of Cumberland, 1726.]

[Footnote 6: Ambrose Philips, the poet.]

[Footnote 7: Swift: *Works* (ed. Scott), XVI, 389.]

[Footnote 8: *Ibid.*, XIX. p. 283.]

[Footnote 9: *Ibid.*, XVII, p. 99.]

[Footnote 10: Swift: *Works* (ed. Scott), XVII, p. 94.]

[Footnote 11: To Amesbury, the principal seat of the Duke of Queensberry.]

[Footnote 12: Swift: *Works* (ed. Scott), XVII, p. 66.]

[Footnote 13: *Ibid.*, XVII, p. 81.]

[Footnote 14: *Ibid.*, XVII, p. 96.]

[Footnote 15: Louisa (1724-1751), the youngest of George II’s children. She married in 1743, Frederick, Prince (afterwards King) of Denmark,]



Page 50

[Footnote 16: Johnson: *Lives of the Poets* (ed. Hill), III, p. 274.]

[Footnote 17: Swift: *Works* (ed. Scott), XVIII, p. 42.]

[Footnote 18: Swift: *Works* (ed. Scott), XVII, p. 161.]

[Footnote 19: Mrs. Howard.]

[Footnote 20: Sir Robert Walpole.]

[Footnote 21: An allusion to "The Beggar's Opera," which Gay was then writing.]

[Footnote 22: Printed for the first and only time in "An Account of the Life and Writings of the Author," in *Plays Written by Mr. John Gay*, 1760.]

CHAPTER VIII

1727

"THE BEGGAR'S OPERA"

The opera to which allusion is made in Mrs. Howard's letter of October, 1727, was "The Beggar's Opera," upon which Gay had been actively engaged for some time past, and which was then nearing completion. "You remember," Gay wrote to Swift, October 22nd, 1727, "you were advising me to go into Newgate to finish my scenes the more correctly. I now think I shall, for I have no attendance to hinder me; but my opera is already finished." [1] To which Swift replied from Dublin on November 27th: "I am very glad your opera is finished, and hope your friends will join the readers to make it succeed, because you are ill-used by others." [2]

It was natural that Swift should be especially interested in "The Beggar's Opera," because the first suggestion of it had come from Swift in a letter to Pope, written as far back as August 30th, 1716 [3] "Dr. Swift had been observing once to Mr. Gay, what an odd pretty sort of thing a Newgate Pastoral might make," Pope once remarked. "Gay was inclined to try at such a thing for some time, but afterwards thought it would be better to write a comedy on the same plan. This was what gave rise to 'The Beggar's Opera.' He began on it, and when first he mentioned it to Swift, the Doctor did not much like the project. As he carried it on, he showed what he wrote to both of us; and we now and then gave a correction, or a word or two of advice; but it was wholly of his own writing. When it was done neither of us thought it would succeed. We showed it to Congreve, who, after reading it over, said: 'It would either take greatly or be damned confoundedly.'" [4]



Dilatory as Gay always was, he contrived to finish his opera by about the end of the year. "John Gay's opera is just on the point of delivery," Pope wrote to Swift in January, 1728. "It may be called, considering its subject, a jail-delivery. Mr. Congreve, with whom I have commemorated you, is anxious as to its success, and so am I. Whether it succeeds or not, it will make a great noise, but whether of claps or hisses I know not. At worst, it is in its own nature a thing which he can lose no reputation by, as he lays none upon it." [5] Not only Swift, Pope, and Congreve were doubtful as to the opera's chance of success. Colley Cibber refused it for Drury Lane Theatre, and even when it was accepted by John Rich for his theatre in Lincoln's Inn Fields, Quin had such a poor opinion of it, that he refused the part of Captain Macheath. Very sound was the judgment of Rich, immortalised by Pope in "The Dunciad" (Book III, lines 261-264):—



Page 51

Immortal Rich! how calm he sits at ease,
 'Midst snows of paper, and fierie tale of pease;
 And proud his Mistress's orders to perform,
 Rides in the whirlwind, and directs the storm;

and the opera, to repeat a well-known *mot* of the day, "made Gay rich and Rich gay."

"The Beggar's Opera" was produced on January 29th, 1728, with the following cast:—

Peachum MR. HIPPISEY *Lockit* MR. HALL
Macheath MR. WALKER *Filch* MR. CLARK *Jemmy*
Twitcher... .. MR. H. BULLOCK *Mrs. Peachum* MRS. MARTIN *Polly*
Peachum Miss FENTON *Lucy Lockit* MRS. EGLETON *Diana*
Trapes MRS. MARTIN

At the first performance the fate of the opera hung for some time in the balance. Quin is recorded as having said that there was a disposition to damn it, and that it was saved by the song, "O ponder well! be not severe!" the audience being much affected by the innocent looks of Polly, when she came to those two lines which exhibit at once a painful and ridiculous image—

O ponder well! be not severe!
 For on the Rope that hangs my Dear
 Depends poor Polly's Life.[6]

Pope, too, and the rest of Gay's friends were present. "We were all at the first night of it, in great uncertainty of the event; till we were very much encouraged by hearing the Duke of Argyll, who sat in the next box to us, say: "It will do—it must do!—I see it in the eyes of them," he said. "This was a good while before the first act was over, and so gave us ease soon; for the Duke (besides his own good taste) has a more particular knack than any one now living, in discovering the taste of the public. He was quite right in this, as usual, the good nature of the audience appeared stronger and stronger every set, and ended in a clamour of applause."[7]

The success of the opera was due to many causes. Some liked it for its barely veiled allusions on politicians. "Robin of Bagshot, *alias* Gorgon, *alias* Bluff Bob, *alias* Carbuncle, *alias* Bob Booty," was very obviously intended for Walpole and his "dear charmers" for his wife and Molly Skerrett. It may well be believed that the song, "How happy could I be with either" brought down the house; and the highwayman must have evoked a hearty laugh with—

And the statesman, because he's so great,
 Thinks his trade as honest as mine.



Page 52

Certainly the songs had much to do in the matter of pleasing the audience. As a literary work, "The Beggar's Opera" has no great claims, but there is a spontaneous humour about it that has charm. But it was the *milieu* that, acting on the hint thrown out years before by Swift, Gay chose that appealed to the public taste. Highwaymen and women of the town are not romantic figures, but Gay made the highwaymen handsome and lively, and the women of the town beautiful and attractive, and over them all he cast a glamour of romance and sentimentalism. Even Newgate seemed a pleasing place, for in this fantasy the author was careful to omit anything of the horrors of a prison in the early eighteenth century. Gay, in fact, did for the stage with "The Beggar's Opera" what, a century later Bulwer Lytton and Harrison Ainsworth did for the reading public with "Ernest Maltravers," "Jack Sheppard," and the rest.

The morality of the opera was much discussed. Swift took the field, and wrote in its favour in the *Intelligencer* (No. 3):—

"It is true, indeed, that Mr. Gay, the author of this piece, has been somewhat singular in the course of his fortune, for it has happened that after fourteen years attending the Court, with a large stock of real merit, a modest and agreeable conversation, a hundred promises, and five hundred friends, he has failed of preferment, and upon a very weighty reason. He lay under the suspicion of having written a libel, or lampoon, against a great minister. It is true, that great minister was demonstratively convinced, and publicly owned his conviction, that Mr. Gay was not the author; but having lain under the suspicion, it seemed very just that he should suffer the punishment; because in this most reformed age, the virtues of a prime minister are no more to be suspected than the chastity of Caesar's wife.

"It must be allowed, that 'The Beggar's Opera' is not the first of Mr. Gay's works, wherein he has been faulty with regard to courtiers and statesmen. For, to omit his other pieces, even in his 'Fables,' published within two years past, and dedicated to the Duke of Cumberland, for which he was promised a reward, he has been thought somewhat too bold upon the courtiers. And although it be highly probable he meant only the courtiers of former times, yet he acted unwarily, by not considering that the malignity of some people might misinterpret what he said to the disadvantage of present persons and affairs.

"But I have now done with Mr. Gay as a politician and shall consider him henceforth only as the author of 'The Beggar's Opera,' wherein he has, by a turn of humour entirely new, placed vices of all kinds in the strongest and most odious light, and thereby done eminent service, both to religion and morality. This appears from the unparalleled success he has met with. All ranks, parties, and denominations of men, either crowding to see his opera, or reading it with delight in their closets; even Ministers of State, whom he is thought to have most offended (next to those whom the actors represented) appear frequently at the theatre, from a consciousness of their own innocence, and to

convince the world how unjust a parallel, malice, envy, and disaffection to the Government have made.



Page 53

“I am assured that several worthy clergymen in this city went privately to see ‘The Beggar’s Opera’ represented; and that the fleeing coxcombs in the pit amused themselves with making discoveries, and spreading the names of those gentlemen round the audience.

“I shall not pretend to vindicate a clergyman who would appear openly in his habit at the theatre, with such a vicious crew as might probably stand round him, at such comedies and profane tragedies as are often represented. Besides, I know very well, that persons of their function are bound to avoid the appearance of evil, or of giving cause of offence. But when the Lords Chancellors, who are Keepers of the King’s Conscience; when the Judges of the land, whose title is reverend; when ladies, who are bound by the rules of their sex to the strictest decency, appear in the theatre without censure; I cannot understand why a young clergyman, who comes concealed out of curiosity to see an innocent and moral play, should be so highly condemned; nor do I much approve the rigour of a great prelate, who said, ‘he hoped none of his clergy were there.’ I am glad to hear there are no weightier objections against that reverend body, planted in this city, and I wish there never may. But I should be very sorry that any of them should be so weak as to imitate a Court chaplain in England, who preached against ‘The Beggar’s Opera,’ which will probably do more good than a thousand sermons of so stupid, so injudicious, and so prostitute a divine.

“In this happy performance of Mr. Gay, all the characters are just, and none of them carried beyond nature, or hardly beyond practice. It discovers the whole system of that commonwealth, or that *imperium in imperio* of iniquity established among us, by which neither our lives nor our properties are secure, either in the highways, or in public assemblies, or even in our own houses. It shows the miserable lives, and the constant fate, of those abandoned wretches: for how little they sell their lives and souls; betrayed by their whores, their comrades, and the receivers and purchasers of those thefts and robberies. This comedy contains likewise a satire, which, without enquiring whether it affects the present age, may possibly be useful in times to come; I mean, where the author takes the occasion of comparing the common robbers of the public, and their various stratagems of betraying, undermining and hanging each other, to the several arts of the politicians in times of corruption....

“Upon the whole, I deliver my judgment, that nothing but servile attachment to a party, affectation of singularity, lamentable dulness, mistaken zeal, or studied hypocrisy, can have the least reasonable objection against this excellent moral performance of the celebrated Mr. Gay.”



Page 54

Of course, if "The Beggar's Opera" is taken as irony, there is really nothing at all to be said against it; but the majority of any audience do not understand irony, and to many the whole thing seemed vicious, an approval of vice, and even an incitement to wrongdoing. Dr. Herring, afterwards Archbishop of Canterbury, preached against the Opera in, it is said, Lincoln's Inn Chapel, and censured it as giving encouragement not only to vice but to crimes, by making a highwayman the hero and dismissing him at last unpunished. In the Preface to Dr. Herring's "Sermons," it is added that "several street-robbers confessed in Newgate that they raised their courage at the playhouse by the songs of Macheath." [8] Others certainly shared the views of the clergyman. When on September 15th, 1773, at the Old Bailey, fifteen prisoners were sentenced to death, forty to transportation, and eight to a whipping, it is recorded that the magistrate, Sir John Fielding, "informed the Bench of Justices that he had last year written to Mr. Garrick concerning the impropriety of performing 'The Beggar's Opera,' which never was represented without creating an additional number of real thieves," [9] and that to this effect he not only wrote to Garrick at Drury Lane Theatre, but also to Colman at Covent Garden Theatre. "Mr. Colman's compliments to Sir John Fielding," the latter replied, "he does not think his the only house in Bow Street where thieves are hardened and encouraged, and will persist in offering the representation of that admirable satire, 'The Beggar's Opera.'" [10] Sir John Hawkins, Chairman of the Middlesex Bench of Justices, also held the view that the Opera was harmful, and in 1776, wrote: "Rapine and violence have been gradually increasing since its first representation." [11] Dr. Johnson took a saner view, and one that was subsequently supported by Sir Walter Scott, and is generally accepted to-day. "Both these decisions are surely exaggerated," he wrote in reference to the opinions expressed by Swift and Dr. Herring. "The play, like many others, was plainly written only to divert, without any moral purpose, and is therefore likely to do good; nor can it be conceived, without more speculation than life requires or admits, to be productive of much wit. Highwaymen and housebreakers seldom frequent the playhouse or mingle in any elegant diversion; nor is it possible for anyone to imagine that he may rob as safely because he sees Macheath reprieved upon the stage." [12] And again, he said: "I do not believe that any man was ever made a rogue by being present at its representation. At the same time I do not deny that it may have some influence by making the character of a rogue familiar and in some degree pleasing." [13]

The success of the piece was immense, and its vogue tremendous. "The famous 'Beggar's Opera' appeared upon the stage early in the ensuing season; and was received with greater applause than was ever known: besides being acted in London sixty-three nights without interruption, and renewed the next season with equal applause, it spread into all the great towns of England; was played in many places to the thirtieth and fortieth time; and at Bath and Bristol fifty times," wrote the anonymous editor of the 1760 edition of Gay's plays.



Page 55

“The ladies carried about with them the favourite songs of it in fans, and houses were furnished with it in screens.... The person who acted Polly, till then obscure, became all at once the favourite of the town; her pictures were engraved and sold in great numbers; her life written; books of letters and verses to her published, and pamphlets made even of her sayings and jests. Furthermore, it drove out of England, for that season, the Italian opera, which had carried all before it for several years.”[14] According to Richard’s account book, the opera ran at the theatre in Lincoln’s Inn Fields for sixty-two (not sixty-three) nights, of which thirty-two nights were in succession, and these thirty-two performances realised the total sum of L5,351, Gay’s share amounting to L693.[15] Swift, who was always anxious that Gay should do as well as possible, wrote to Pope on March 5th: “I hope he [Gay] does not intend to print his Opera before it is acted; for I defy all your subscriptions to amount to eight hundred pounds, and yet I believe he lost as much more, for want of human prudence.”[16] The advice, however, came too late, for Gay had already sold the copyright of the “Fables” and “The Beggar’s Opera” for ninety guineas. The opera was published on February 14th, 1728.

Gay was in these days the happiest man in the world. His play was successful, he was making money, and he had had his little dig at Walpole. “John Gay ... is at present so employed in the elevated airs of his Opera ... that I can scarce obtain a categorical answer ... to anything,” Pope wrote to Swift in February, “but the Opera succeeds extremely, to yours and my extreme satisfaction, of which he promises this post to give you a full account.”[17]

JOHN GAY TO DEAN SWIFT.

Whitehall, February 15th, 1728.

“I have deferred writing to you from time to time, till I could give you an account of ‘The Beggar’s Opera.’ It is acted at the playhouse in Lincoln’s Inn Fields with such success that the playhouse has been crowded every night. To-night is the fifteenth time of acting, and it is thought it will run a fortnight longer. I have ordered Motte[18] to send the play to you the first opportunity. I have made no interest, neither for approbation or money: nor has anybody been pressed to take tickets for my benefit: notwithstanding which, I think I shall make an addition to my fortune of between six and seven hundred pounds. I know this account will give you pleasure, as I have pushed through this precarious affair without servility or flattery.

“As to any favours from great men, I am in the same state you left me, but I am a great deal happier, as I have no expectations. The Duchess of Queensberry has signalled her friendship to me upon this occasion in such a conspicuous manner, that I hope (for her sake) you will take care to put your fork to all its proper uses, and suffer nobody for the future to put their knives in their mouths. Lord Cobham says, I should have printed it in Italian over against the English, that the ladies might have understood what they



read. The outlandish (as they now call it) Opera has been so thin of late, that some have called it the Beggar's Opera, and if the run continues, I fear I shall have remonstrances drawn up against me by the Royal Academy of Music."[19][20]



Page 56

DEAN SWIFT TO JOHN GAY.

Dublin, February 26th, 1728.

"I wonder whether you begin to taste the pleasures of independency; or whether you do not sometimes leer upon the Court, *sculo retorto*? Will you now think of an annuity when you are two years older, and have doubled your purchase-money? Have you dedicated your opera, and got the usual dedication fee of twenty guineas? Does W[alpole] think you intended an affront to him in your opera? Pray God he may, for he has held the longest hand at hazard that ever fell to any sharper's share, and keeps his run when the dice are charged. I bought your Opera to-day for sixpence—a cussed print. I find there is neither dedication nor preface, both which wants I approve; it is the *grand gout*."

JOHN GAY TO DEAN SWIFT.

March 20th, 1728.

"'The Beggar's Opera' has been acted now thirty-six times, and was as full the last night as the first; and as yet there is not the least probability of a thin audience; though there is a discourse about the town, that the directors of the Royal Academy of Music design to solicit against its being played on the outlandish opera days, as it is now called. On the benefit day of one of the actresses, last week, they were obliged to give out another play, or dismiss the audience. A play was given out, but the people called for 'The Beggar's Opera'; and they were forced to play it, or the audience would not have stayed.

"I have got by all this success between seven and eight hundred pounds, and Rich (deducting the whole charge of the house) has cleared already near four thousand pounds. In about a month I am going to the Bath with the Duchess of Marlborough and Mr. Congreve; for I have no expectation of receiving any favours from the Court. The Duchess of Queensberry is in Wiltshire, where she has had the small-pox in so favourable a way that she had not above seven or eight on her face; she is now perfectly recovered.

"There is a mezzotinto print published to-day of Polly, the heroine of 'The Beggar's Opera,' who was before unknown, and is now in so high vogue that I am in doubt whether her fame does not surpass that of the Opera itself." [21]

* * * * *

Pope and Swift were keenly interested in Gay's triumph, and in their correspondence are many references to the piece. "Mr. Gay's Opera has been acted near forty days



running, and will certainly continue the whole season," Pope wrote to Swift, March 23rd, 1728. "So he has more than a fence about his thousand pounds; he will soon be thinking of a fence about his two thousand. Shall no one of us live as we would wish each other to live? Shall he have no annuity, you no settlement on this side, and I no prospect of getting to you on the other?"[22]

DEAN SWIFT TO JOHN GAY.



Page 57

Dublin, March 28th, 1728.

“We have your opera for sixpence, and we are as full of it *pro modulo nostro* as London can be; continually acting, and house crammed, and the Lord-Lieutenant several times there, laughing his heart out. I wish you had sent me a copy, as I desired to oblige an honest bookseller. It would have done Motte no harm, for no English copy has been sold, but the Dublin one has run prodigiously.

“I did not understand that the scene of Lockit and Peachum’s quarrel was an imitation of one between Brutus and Cassius, till I was told it.

“I wish Macheath, when he was going to be hanged, had imitated Alexander the Great, when he was dying. I would have had his fellow-rogues desire his commands about a successor, and he to answer, ‘Let it be the most worthy,’ *etc.*

“We hear a million of stories about the Opera, of the encore at the song, ‘That was levell’d at me,’ when two great ministers were in a box together, and all the world staring at them.

“I am heartily glad your Opera has mended your purse, though perhaps it may spoil your Court.

“I think that rich rogue, Rich, should in conscience make you a present of two or three hundred guineas. I am impatient that such a dog, by sitting still, should get five times more than the author.

“You told me a month ago of L700, and have you not yet made up the eighth? I know not your methods. How many third days are you allowed, and how much is each day worth, and what did you get for copy?

“Will you desire my Lord Bolingbroke, Mr. Pulteney, and Mr. Pope, to command you to buy an annuity with two thousand pounds? that you may laugh at Courts, and bid Ministers ‘hiss, *etc.*’—and ten to one they will be ready to grease you when you are fat.

“I hope your new Duchess will treat you at the Bath, and that you will be too wise to lose your money at play.

“Get me likewise Polly’s mezzotinto.

“Lord, how the schoolboys at Westminster and university lads adore you at this juncture! Have you made as many men laugh as ministers can make weep.”

* * * * *



Colley Cibber, in his "Apology" said that "Gay had more skilfully gratified the public taste than all the brightest authors that ever wrote before him," and although this was undoubtedly a piece of friendly exaggeration, it is a fact that John Gay was now a personage. "Mr. Gay's fame continues; but his riches are in a fair way of diminishing; he is gone to the Bath," Martha Blount wrote to Swift, May 7th;^[23] and two months later, with great pride, Gay told Swift, "My portrait mezzotinto is published from Mrs. Howard's painting."^[24] Indirectly, he secured further notoriety when, in the summer, Lavinia Fenton, who had played the heroine in the Opera, ran away with a Duke. "The Duke of Bolton, I hear," he wrote to Swift from Bath, "has run away with Polly



Page 58

Peachum, having settled L400 a year on her during pleasure, and upon disagreement L200 a year."[25] She had played in the whole sixty-three performances of the Opera, the forty-seventh performance being set aside for her benefit. The sixty-third performance took place on June 19th, and that was her last appearance on the boards of a theatre. In 1751, shortly after the death of his wife, the Duke married her, she being then about forty-three, and he sixty-six.[26]

[Footnote 1: Swift: *Work* (ed. Scott), XVII, p. 157.]

[Footnote 2: *Ibid.*, XVII, p. 162.]

[Footnote 3: See p. 41 of this work.]

[Footnote 4: Spence: *Anecdotes* (ed. Singer), p. 159.]

[Footnote 5: Pope: *Works* (ed. Elwin and Courthope), VII, p. 111.]

[Footnote 6: Boswell: *Life of Johnson* (ed. Hill), II, p. 368.]

[Footnote 7: Spence: *Anecdotes*, p. 159.]

[Footnote 8: Dr. Herring: *Sermons* (1763), p. 5.]

[Footnote 9: *Annual Register* (1773), I, p. 132.]

[Footnote 10: Genest: *History of the Stage*, III, p. 223.]

[Footnote 11: *History of Music*, V, p. 317.]

[Footnote 12: *Lives of the Poets* (ed. Hill), III, p. 278.]

[Footnote 13: Boswell: *Life of Johnson* (ed. Hill), II, p. 367.]

[Footnote 14: *Plays Written by Mr. John Gay: With an Account of the Life and Writings of the Author* (1760), VIII.]

[Footnote 15: *Notes and Queries*, First Series, I, 178.]

[Footnote 16: Swift: *Works* (ed. Scott), XVII, p. 216.]

[Footnote 17: Swift: *Works* (ed. Scott), XVII, p. 165.]

[Footnote 18: Benjamin Motte, the bookseller.]



[Footnote 19: The managers and patrons of the Italian Opera, with the King at their head, had formed themselves into an association under this title.]

[Footnote 20: Swift: *Works* (ed. Scott), XVII, p. 176.]

[Footnote 21: Swift: *Works* (ed. Scott), XVII, p. 180.]

[Footnote 22: *Ibid.*, XVII, p. 183.]

[Footnote 23: Swift: *Works* (ed. Scott), XVII, p. 176.]

[Footnote 24: *Ibid.*, XVII, p. 189.]

[Footnote 25: *Ibid.*, XVII, p. 188.]

[Footnote 26: "The Beggar's Opera" has been revived many times. The last and most successful revival was produced by Mr. Nigel Playfair in June, 1920. At the moment of going to press the first anniversary of the revival has just been celebrated. A copy of the programme of the first performance of this revival is printed, by kind permission of Mr. Playfair, on page 162 of this work.]

CHAPTER IX

1728-1729

"POLLY"

The success of "The Beggar's Opera" heartened Gay, as a first great success heartens any man. At once he conceived the idea of following up this triumph with another opera, but, before actually getting to work, he took things easily. In March he stayed at Cashibury with Pulteney, visiting from there Lord Bathurst and the Bolingbokes. Shortly after he went to Bath, where he found many friends, including Henrietta, Duchess of Marlborough.



Page 59

JOHN GAY TO DEAN SWIFT.

Bath, May 16th, 1728.

"I have been at the Bath about ten days, and I have played at no game but once, and that at backgammon with Mr. Lewis, who is very much your humble servant. He is here upon account of the ill state of health of his wife, who has as yet found very little benefit from the waters. Lord and Lady Bolingbroke are here; and I think she is better than when I came; they stay, as I guess, only about a fortnight longer. They both desired me to make their compliments; as does Mr. Congreve, who is in a very ill state of health, but somewhat better since he came here.... I do not know how long I shall stay here, because I am now, as I have been all my life, at the disposal of others. I drink the waters, and am in hopes to lay in a stock of health, some of which I wish to communicate to you.... 'The Beggar's Opera' is acted here; but our Polly has got no fame, though the actors have got money. I have sent [you] by Dr. Delany, the Opera, Polly Peachum, and Captain Macheath. I would have sent you my own head (which is now engraving to make up the gang), but it is not yet finished. I suppose you must have heard that I have had the honour to have had a sermon preached against my works by a Court chaplain, which I look upon as no small addition to my fame." [1]

JOHN GAY TO DEAN SWIFT.

Bath, July 6th, 1728.

"In five or six days I set out upon an excursion to Herefordshire, to Lady Scudamore's, but shall return here the beginning of August.... The weather is extremely hot, the place is very empty; I have an inclination to study, but the heat makes it impossible." [2]

* * * * *

"I suppose Mr. Gay will return from the Bath with twenty pounds more flesh and two hundred pounds less in money," Swift wrote to Pope on July 16th. "Providence never designed him to be above two-and-twenty, by this thoughtlessness and cullibility. He has as little foresight of age, sickness, poverty, or loss of admirers, as a girl of fifteen." [3] From this it may be deduced that Gay, whenever he was free from an attack of colic, persevered in the pleasures of the table and of his favourite quadrille.

JOHN GAY TO ALEXANDER POPE.

August 2nd, 1728.



"I have heard more than once from our friend at Court, who seemed, in the letter she writ, to be in high health and spirits. Considering the multiplicity of pleasures and delights that one is overrun with in those places, I wonder how anyone has health and spirits enough to support them. I am heartily glad she has, and whenever I hear so, I find it contributes to mine. You see, I am not free from dependence, though I have less attendance than I had formerly; for a great deal of my own welfare still depends upon hers. Is the widow's house to be disposed of yet? I have not given up my pretensions to the Dean. If it was to be parted with, I wish one of us had it. I hope you wish so too, and that Mrs. Blount and Mrs. Howard wish the same, and for the very same reason that I wish it."^[4]



Page 60

THE HON. MRS. HOWARD TO JOHN GAY.

Hampton Court, August [1728].

"I am glad you have passed your time so agreeable. I need not tell you how mine has been employed; but as I know you wish me well, I am sure you will be glad to hear that I am much better; whether I owe it to the operation I underwent, or to my medicines, I cannot tell; but I begin to think I shall entirely get the better of my illness. I have written to Dr. Arbuthnot, both to give him a particular account, and to ask his opinion about the Bath. I know him so well that, though in this last illness he was not my physician, he is so much my friend, that he is glad I am better. Put him in mind to tell me what he would have me do in relation to Lady F.; and to send me a direction to write to her.

"I have made Mr. Nash governor to Lord Peterborough, and Lord Peterborough governor to Mr. Pope. If I should come to the Bath, I propose being governess to the Doctor [Arbuthnot] and you. I know you both to be so unruly, that nothing less than Lady P.'s spirit or mine could keep any authority over you. When you write to Lady Scudamore, make my compliments to her. I have had two letters from Chesterfield, which I wanted you to answer for me; and I have had a thousand other things that I have wanted you to do for me; but, upon my word, I have not had one place to dispose of, or you should not be without one.... My humble service to the Duchess of Marlborough and Mr. Congreve."

JOHN GAY TO DEAN SWIFT.

London, December 2nd, 1728.

"I have had a very severe attack of a fever, which, by the care of our friend, Dr. Arbuthnot, has, I hope, almost left me. I have been confined about ten days, but never to my bed, so that I hope soon to get abroad about my business; that is, the care of the second part of 'The Beggar's Opera,' which was almost ready for rehearsal; but Rich received the Duke of Grafton's commands (upon an information that he was rehearsing a play improper to be represented), not to rehearse any new play whatever, till his Grace has seen it. What will become of it I know not; but I am sure I have written nothing that can be legally suppressed, unless the setting vices in general in an odious light, and virtue in an amiable one, may give offence.

"I passed five or six months this year at the Bath with the Duchess of Marlborough; and then, in the view of taking care of myself, writ this piece. If it goes on in case of success, I have taken care to make better bargains for myself."[5]

* * * * *



Gay was naturally greatly elated by the success of “The Beggar’s Opera.” This recompensed him for the neglect, or, as undoubtedly he regarded it, the ingratitude of the Court, and, what pleased him as much, it filled his purse, which he always liked to fill, apparently for the joy of emptying it as soon as possible. Also, it greatly enhanced his reputation: from a writer of minor importance, he now took his place as a personage. After a long apprenticeship, he had at length “arrived.”



Page 61

Thus encouraged, he promptly composed a sequel to “The Beggar’s Opera,” which he called by the name of the heroine of that piece, that is to say, “Polly.” The best summary of “Polly” has been given by Mr. Paull, in his interesting paper on Gay[6]:—

“Macheath has been transported across the herring-pond ... He succeeds in escaping from the plantations, and has become the leader of a band of pirates, under an assumed name, and disguised as a black man. Jenny Driver is now his mistress (presumably he has forgotten her treachery in ‘The Beggar’s Opera’). Polly sails across the ocean to find him, but is entrapped by Mrs. Trapes, a procuress, who sells her to Ducat, a rich merchant. Mrs. Ducat, who is jealous, helps Polly to escape; she assumes a boy’s dress and continues her search for Macheath. She is captured by the pirates, and she and Macheath meet, neither recognising the other. The pirates are attacking the English settlement; the Indians are helping the settlers. At first the pirates are successful, and the young Indian Prince is captured, but ultimately they are defeated, Polly herself capturing Macheath, who is condemned to death by the Indian Prince. Then she learns from Jenny Driver who the pirate chief is, and his life is promised her as her reward; but his execution has already taken place, and she has to console herself with the hand of the Indian Prince, who has fallen in love with her. Even this skeleton will show that the novelty and unity of design which counted for so much in ‘The Beggar’s Opera’ are changed for intricacy of plot. There is no cohesion in the story: there is no reason why the catastrophe should be brought about in one way rather than another; what interest there is turns on an improbable story rather than on the development of character. Evidently Gay reckoned largely on the opportunities he had afforded himself for satire on the Court, and for contrasting the noble and untutored savage with the man tainted by the vices of civilisation.”

“Polly” was accepted for production by Rich at the theatre in Lincoln’s Inn Fields: the subsequent proceedings are but told by the author himself in his Preface, dated March 25th, 1729, to the printed version of the book of the opera:—

“After Mr. Rich and I were agreed upon terms and conditions for bringing this piece on the stage, and that everything was ready for a rehearsal, the Lord Chamberlain sent an order from the country to prohibit Mr. Rich to suffer any play to be rehearsed upon his stage till it has been first of all supervised by his Grace. As soon as Mr. Rich came from his Grace’s secretary (who had sent for him to receive the before-mentioned order) he came to my lodgings and acquainted me with the orders he had received.

“Upon the Lord Chamberlain’s coming to town I was confined by sickness, but in four or five days I went abroad on purpose to wait upon his Grace, with a faithful and genuine copy of this piece, excepting the *errata* of the transcriber.



Page 62

“As I have heard several suggestions and false insinuations concerning the copy, I take this occasion in the most solemn manner to affirm, that the very copy I delivered to Mr. Rich was written in my own hand, some months before at the Bath, from my own first foul blotted papers; from this, that for the playhouse was transcribed, from whence Mr. Steele, the prompter, copied that which I delivered to the Lord Chamberlain; and, excepting my own foul blotted papers, I do protest I know of no other copy whatsoever, than those I have mentioned.

“The copy which I gave into the hands of Mr. Rich had been seen before by several persons of the greatest distinction and veracity, who will do me the honour and justice to attest it; so that not only by them, but by Mr. Rich and Mr. Steele, I can (against all insinuation or positive affirmation) prove in the most clear and undeniable manner, if occasion required, what I have here upon my own honour and credit asserted. The Introduction, indeed, was not shown to the Lord Chamberlain, which, as I had not then settled, was never transcribed in the playhouse copy.

“It was on Saturday morning, December 7th, 1728, that I waited upon the Lord Chamberlain. I desired to have the honour of reading the Opera to his Grace, but he ordered me to leave it with him, which I did upon expectation of having it returned on the Monday following; but I had it not till Thursday, December 12th, when I received it from his Grace with this answer, *‘that it was not allowed to be acted, but commanded to be suppressed.’* This was told me in general, without any reason assigned, or any charge against me, of my having given any particular offence.

“Since this prohibition, I have been told, that I am accused, in general terms, of having written many disaffected libels and seditious pamphlets. As it hath ever been my utmost ambition (if that word may be used on this occasion) to lead a quiet and inoffensive life, I thought my innocence in this particular would never have required a justification; and as this kind of writing is what I have ever detested, and never practised, I am persuaded so groundless a calumny can never be believed but by those who do not know me. But as general aspersions of this sort have been cast upon me, I think myself called upon to declare my principles; and I do, with the strictest truth, affirm that I am as loyal a subject, and as firmly attached to the present happy establishment, as any of those who have the greatest places or pensions. I have been informed too, that, in the following play, I have been charged with writing immoralities; that it is filled with slander, and calumny against particular great persons, and that Majesty itself is endeavoured to be brought into ridicule and contempt.



Page 63

“As I knew every one of these charges was in every point absolutely false and without the least grounds, at first I was not at all affected by them; but when I found they were still insisted upon, and that particular passages, which were not in the play, were quoted, and propagated to support what had been suggested, I could no longer bear to lie under those false accusations; so, by printing it, I have submitted and given up all present views of profit which might accrue from the stage; which undoubtedly will be some satisfaction to the worthy gentlemen who have treated me with so much candour and humanity, and represented me in such favourable colours.

“But as I am conscious to myself, that my only intention was to lash, in general, the reigning of fashionable vices, and to recommend and set virtue in as amiable light as I could; to justify and vindicate my own character, I thought myself obliged to print the Opera without delay, in the manner I have done.

“As the play was principally designed for representation, I hope, when it is read, it will be considered in that light; and when all that hath been said against it shall appear to be entirely misunderstood or misrepresented; if, some time hence, it should be permitted to appear on the stage, I think it necessary to acquaint the public that, as far as a contract of this kind can be binding, I am engaged to Mr. Rich to have it represented upon his theatre.”

* * * * *

It cannot be denied that there was adequate ground for the Lord Chamberlain's veto. In “The Beggar's Opera” Gay had beyond all question lampooned Walpole, and in “Polly” he returned to the attack, there being no doubt that in the opening scene, Ducat, the West Indian planter, was intended for the Minister. The production might well have led to disturbances if both political parties had been represented at the first performance. Walpole was the least vindictive of men, as witness his generous attitude towards Sunderland and the other ministers involved in the scandal of the South Sea “Bubble,” but he may well have thought that Gay was going too far. Gay himself was harmless, but, as Walpole knew, the author, either consciously or unconsciously, was acting for the Opposition party; and Walpole, when he thought it worth while, had a short and effective way with his political enemies.

The prohibition being largely an affair of party, or at least being so regarded, a battle royal ensued. “Polly” could not be performed in public, but, there being no censorship of books, it could be printed. Gay's friends, therefore, decided that the Opera should be published by subscription. To a man and a woman the Opposition rallied round the author. The Duchess of Queensberry “touted” for him everywhere, even at Court. The King at a Drawing-room asked what she was doing. “What must be agreeable, I am sure,” she replied, “to anyone so humane as your Majesty, for it



Page 64

is an act of charity, and a charity to which I do not despair of bringing your Majesty to contribute.” This, of course, was a gratuitous piece of impertinence—for the Lord Chamberlain acts as the official mouthpiece of the Sovereign—and it could not be overlooked. Another story is: The Duchess was so vehement in her attempt to have the embargo removed from Gay’s play, that she offered to read it to His Majesty in his closet, that he might be satisfied there was no offence in it. George II escaped from this dilemma by saying, he should be delighted to receive her Grace in his closet, but he hoped to amuse her better than by the literary employment she proposed.[7]

Whatever the true story, the day after the Duchess’s interview with the King (February 27th, 1729), William Stanhope, the Vice-Chamberlain, carried to the Duchess a verbal message not to come to Court; whereupon she sat down and wrote a letter for him to take to his Majesty. “The Duchess of Queensberry,” so ran her reply, “is surprised and well pleased that the King hath given her so agreeable a command as to stay from Court, where she never came for diversion, but to bestow a great civility on the King and Queen; she hopes by such an unprecedented order as this is, that the King will see as few as he wishes at his Court, particularly such as are to think or speak truth. I dare not do otherwise, and ought not, nor could have imagined that it would not have been the very highest compliment that I could possibly pay the King to endeavour to support truth and innocence in his house, particularly when the King and Queen both told me that they had not read Mr. Gay’s play. I have certainly done right, then, to stand by my own words rather than his Grace of Grafton’s, who hath neither made use of truth, judgment, nor honour, through this whole affair, either for himself or his friends.”[8] Stanhope read this, and begged the Duchess to reflect before sending it. She consented to write another letter, did so, and handed it to him. He chose the first. The Duke of Queensberry supported his wife, and although the King pressed him to remain, resigned his office of Admiral of Scotland—though Gay wrote to Swift,[9] “this he would have done, if the Duchess had not met with this treatment, upon account of ill-usage from the Ministers,” and that this incident “hastened him in what he had determined.” The affair created an immense sensation in Court circles. “The Duchess of Queensberry is still the talk of the town. She is going to Scotland,” Mrs. Pendarves wrote to Mrs. Anne Granville, March 14th, 1729.... “My Lady Hervey told her the other day that ‘now she was banished, the Court had lost its chief ornament,’ the Duchess replied, ‘I am entirely of your mind.’ It is thought my Lady Hervey spoke to her with a sneer, if so, her Grace’s answer was a very good one.”[10]



Page 65

One of the immediate results of the campaign was that the apartments that had been granted to Gay in Whitehall, which belonged to the Crown, had, by order, to be surrendered. On the other hand, two large editions, amounting to 10,500 copies, of "Polly, An Opera: being the Second Part of 'The Beggar's Opera.' Written by Mr. Gay. With the Songs and Basses engraved on Copper-plates," were printed in 1729, and from the sale Gay derived between L1,100 and L1,200.[11] In 1777 Colman produced "Polly" in a revised version, but it failed to attract.

There was an end of Gay's hopes of Court preferment, that was clear to every one. It was not unexpected. "I wish John Gay success in his pursuit," Bolingbroke had written to Swift in June, 1727, "but I think he has some qualities which will keep him down in the world." [12] When the worst was known, Arbuthnot wrote to Swift on the following November 30th: "There is certainly a fatality upon poor Gay. As for hope of preferment [at St. James's], he has laid it aside. He has made a pretty good bargain (that is, a Smithfield one) for a little place in the Custom-house, which was to bring him in about a hundred a year. It was done as a favour to an old man, and not at all to Gay. When everything was concluded, the man repented, and said he would not part with his place. I have begged Gay not to buy an annuity upon my life; I am sure I should not live a week." [13]

* * * * *

It may be that Gay thought that he might in time live down the disfavour at Court in which he had been involved by the Duke and Duchess of Queensberry and his other partisans. He may even have had a momentary hope, in 1730, when the office of Poet-Laureate was vacant that the position might be offered to him, who had written "Fables" for a young Prince. When Colley Cibber was appointed, Gay probably had it brought home to him that his day as a courtier had passed for good and all. Certainly he is credited, though on what authority is not known, with a share in the burlesque, "Ode for the New Year [1731]. Written by Colley Cibber, Esq.," in which his disappointment is vented in somewhat coarse expression. This begins,

This is the day when, right or wrong,
I, Colley Bays, Esquire,
Must for my sack indite a song,
And thrum my venal lyre.

The King is attacked, and there is a disgraceful reference to the Queen:—

O may she always meet success
In every scheme and job,
And still continue to caress
That honest statesman Bob.

That Gay was furious there is no question, and he attacked Walpole in one of the second series of his “Fables” (which appeared posthumously in 1738), entitled “The Vulture, the Sparrow, and Other Birds,” which concluded:



Page 66

In days of yore (my cautious rhymes
Always except the present times)
A greedy Vulture, skill'd in game,
Inured to guilt, unawed by shame,
Approach'd the throne in evil hour,
And, step by step, intrudes to power.
When at the royal eagle's ear.
He longs to ease the monarch's care.
The monarch grants. With proud elate,
Behold him, minister of state!
Around him throng the feather'd rout;
Friends must be served, and some must out:
Each thinks his own the best pretension;
This asks a place, and that a pension.
The nightingale was set aside:
A forward daw his room supplied.[14]
This bird (says he), for business fit
Has both sagacity and wit.
With all his turns, and shifts, and tricks,
He's docile, and at nothing sticks.
Then with his neighbours, one so free
At all times will connive at me.
The hawk had due distinction shown,
For parts and talents like his own.
Thousands of hireling cocks attend him,
As blust'ring bullies to defend him.
At once the ravens were discarded,
And magpies with their posts rewarded.
Those fowls of omen I detest,
That pry into another's nest.
State lies must lose all good intent,
For they foresee and croak th' event.
My friends ne'er think, but talk by rote,
Speak when they're taught, and so to vote.
When rogues like these (a Sparrow cries)
To honour and employment rise
I court no favour, ask no place,
From such, preferment is disgrace:
Within my thatch'd retreat I find
(What these ne'er feel) true peace of mind.

The animus is evident, and it is clear that Gay's sense of humour had entirely deserted him. A man who had been a hanger-on at Court for more than ten years, and bidding



diligently all the time for a sinecure, could but arouse laughter when, discarded at length by those in power, he says proudly, "I court no favour, ask no place."

[Footnote 1: Swift: *Works*, XVII, p. 182.]

[Footnote 2: *Ibid.*, XVII, p. 188.]

[Footnote 3: *Ibid.*, XVII, p. 189.]

[Footnote 4: Pope: *Works* (ed. Elwin and Courthope), VII, p. 429.]

[Footnote 5: Swift: *Works*, XVII, p. 205]

[Footnote 6: *Fortnightly Review*, June, 1912]

[Footnote 7: Swift: *Works* (ed. Scott), XVII, p. 228 (note).]

[Footnote 8: Hervey: *Memoirs*, I, p. 123.]

[Footnote 9: Swift: *Works* (ed. Scott), XVII, p. 228.]

[Footnote 10: Mrs. Delany: *Memoirs*, I, p. 198.]

[Footnote 11: Nichol: *Literary Anecdotes*, I, p. 405.]

[Footnote 12: Swift: *Works* (ed. Scott), XVII, p. 114.]

[Footnote 13: *Ibid.*, XVII, p. 157.]

[Footnote 14: This appears to be a reference to the appointment of Cibber as Poet Laureate.]



Page 67

CHAPTER X

1729

CORRESPONDENCE

With the composition of "Polly," the literary life of Gay came practically to an end, although he survived until December 4th, 1732. During these four years he worked not at all, save occasionally on the second series of "Fables."

After the prohibition of "Polly," Gay, who had been ill during 1728, had a severe attack of fever, during which he was attended by the faithful Arbuthnot, and carefully tended by the Duchess of Queensberry.

ALEXANDER POPE TO JOHN GAY.

[*circa* December, 1728.]

"No words can tell you the great concern I feel for you; I assure you it was not, and is not, lessened by the immediate apprehension I have now every day lain under of losing my mother. Be assured, no duty less than that should have kept me one day from attending your condition. I would come and take a room by you at Hampstead, to be with you daily, were she not still in danger of death. I have constantly had particular accounts of you from the doctor [Arbuthnot], which have not ceased to alarm me yet. God preserve your life, and restore your health! I really beg it for my own sake, for I feel I love you more than I thought in health, though I always loved you a great deal. If I am so unfortunate as to bury my poor mother, and yet have the good fortune to have my prayers heard for you, I hope we may live most of our remaining days together. If, as I believe, the air of a better clime, as the southern part of France, may be thought useful for your recovery, thither I would go with you infallibly; and it is very probable we might get the Dean [Swift] with us, who is in that abandoned state already in which I shall shortly be, as to other cares and duties. Dear Gay, be as cheerful as your sufferings will permit: God is a better friend than a Court: even any honest man is a better. I promise you my entire friendship in all events."

* * * * *

Gay gradually got well. "I am glad to hear of your recovery, and the oftener I hear it, the better, when it becomes easy to you to give it," Pope, who remained a regular correspondent, wrote to him in January, 1729. But, though Gay was better in health, his spirits were low.



JOHN GAY TO ALEXANDER POPE.

[Feb. or March, 1729.]

“My melancholy increases, and every hour threatens me with some return of my distemper, nay, I think I may rather say I have it on me. Not the divine looks, the kind favours, and the expressions of the divine Duchess, who, hereafter, shall be in the place of a queen to me—nay, she shall be my queen—nor the inexpressible goodness of the Duke, can in the least cheer me. The Drawing-room no more receives



Page 68

light from those two stars. There is now what Milton says is in hell—darkness visible. Oh, that I had never known what a Court was! Dear Pope, what a barren soil (to me so) have I been striving to produce something out of. Why did I not take your advice before my writing Fables for the Duke, not to write them! It is my very hard fate I must get nothing, write for them or against them. I find myself in such a strange confusion and depression of spirits that I have not strength enough even to make my will, though I perceive by many warnings I have no continuing city here. I begin to look upon myself as one already dead, and desire, my dear Mr. Pope, whom I love as my own soul, if you survive me, as you certainly will, that you will, if a stone should mark the place of my grave, see these words put upon it:—

Life is a jest, and all things show it,
I thought so once, but now I know it,

with what more you may think proper. If anyone should ask how I could communicate this after death, let it be known, it is not meant so, but my present sentiment in life. What the bearer brings besides this letter, should I die without a will, which I am the likelier to do, as the law will settle my small estate much as I should do so myself, let it remain with you, as it has long done with me, the remembrance of a dead friend; but there is none like you, living or dead.”

Both Swift and Pope remained faithful to Gay, and in their correspondence there are many allusions to him. “Mr. Gay,” wrote Swift to Pope, “is a scandal to all lusty young fellows with healthy countenances; and, I think, he is not intemperate in a physical sense. I am told he has an asthma, which is a disease I commiserate more than deafness, because it will not leave a man quiet either sleeping or waking.”[1]

JOHN GAY TO DEAN SWIFT.

From the Duke of Queensberry's,
Burlington Gardens.
March 18th, 1729.

“I am but just recovered from the severest fit of sickness that ever anybody had who escaped death. I was several times given up by the physicians, and everybody that attended me; and upon my recovery was judged to be in so ill a condition, that I should be miserable for the remainder of my life; but contrary to all expectation, I am perfectly recovered, and have no remainder of the distempers that attacked me, which were at the same time, fever, asthma, and pleurisy.



“I am now in the Duke of Queensberry’s house, and have been so ever since I left Hampstead; where I was carried at a time that it was thought I could not live a day. Since my coming to town, I have been very little abroad, the weather has been so severe.

“I must acquaint you (because I know it will please you) that during my sickness I had many of the kindest proofs of friendship, particularly from the Duke and Duchess of Queensberry, who, if I had been their nearest relation and nearest friend, could not have treated me with more constant attendance then; and they continue the same to me now.



Page 69

“You must undoubtedly have heard, that the Duchess took up my defence with the King and Queen, in the cause of my play, and that she has been forbid the Court for interesting herself to increase my fortune, by the publication of it without being acted. The Duke, too, has given up his employment (which he would have done if the Duchess had not met with this treatment) upon account of ill-usage from the Ministers; but this hardened him in what he had determined.

“The play [‘Polly ’] is now almost printed, with the music, words, and basses, engraved on thirty-one copper-plates, which, by my friends’ assistance, has a possibility to turn greatly to my advantage. The Duchess of Marlborough has given me a hundred pounds for one copy; and others have contributed very handsomely; but as my account is not yet settled, I cannot tell you particulars.

“For writing in the cause of virtue, and against the fashionable vices, I am looked upon at present as the most obnoxious person, almost, in England. Mr. Pulteney tells me I have got the start of him. Mr. Pope tells me that I am dead, and that this obnoxiousness is the reward for my inoffensiveness in my former life.

“I wish I had a book ready to send you; but I believe I shall not be able to complete the work till the latter end of next week....

“I am impatient to finish my work, for I want the country air; not that I am ill, but to recover my strength; and I cannot leave my work till it is finished.

“While I am writing this, I am in the room next to our dining-room, with sheets all around it, and two people from the binder folding sheets. I print the book at my own expense, in quarto, which is to be sold for six shillings, with the music.

“You see I do not want industry; and I hope you will allow that I have not the worst economy.

“Mrs. Howard has declared herself strongly, both to the King and Queen, as my advocate. The Duchess of Queensberry is allowed to have shown more spirit, more honour, and more goodness, than was thought possible in our times; I should have added, too, more understanding and good sense.

“You see my fortune (as I hope my virtue will) increases by oppression. I go to no Courts, I drink no wine; and am calumniated even by Ministers of State; and yet am in good spirits.

“Most of the courtiers, though otherwise my friends, refused to contribute to my undertaking. But the City, and the people of England, take my part very warmly; and, I am told, the best of the citizens will give me proofs of it by their contributions.



"I cannot omit telling you, that Dr. Arbuthnot's attendance and care of me showed him the best of friends. Dr. Hollins, though entirely a stranger to me, was joined with him, and used me in the kindest and most handsome manner."[2]

* * * * *



Page 70

In consequence of this hubbub about “Polly,” Gay became a notorious character, as Arbuthnot in a letter to Swift (March 19th, 1729) remarks very humorously. “John Gay, I may say with vanity, owes his life, under God, to the unwearied endeavours and care of your humble servant; for a physician who had not been passionately his friend could not have saved him,” he wrote. “I had, besides my personal concern for him, other motives of my care. He is now become a public person, a little Sacheverell; and I took the same pleasure in saving him, as Radcliffe did in preserving my Lord Chief Justice Holt’s wife, whom he attended out of spite to her husband, who wished her dead.

“The inoffensive John Gay is now become one of the obstructions to the peace of Europe, the terror of Ministers, the chief author of the *Craftsmen*, and all the seditious pamphlets which have been published against the Government. He has got several turned out of their places; the greatest ornament of the Court [the Duchess of Queensberry] banished from it for his sake; another great lady [Mrs. Howard] in danger of being *chasee* likewise; about seven or eight Duchesses pushing forward, like the ancient circumcelliones in the Church, who shall suffer martyrdom upon his account at first. He is the darling of the City. If he should travel about the country he would have hecatombs of roasted oxen sacrificed to him. Since he became so conspicuous, Will Pulteney hangs his head to see himself so much outdone in the career of glory. I hope he will get a good deal of money by printing his play [‘Polly’]; but I really believe he would get more money by showing his person; and I can assure you, this is the very identical John Gay whom you formerly knew, and lodged in Whitehall, two years ago.”[3]

Gay was now the avowed *protege* of the Duke and Duchess of Queensberry, so he spent the greater part of his closing years either at their country seat, Middleton Stoney, Amesbury, in Wiltshire, or at their London house in Burlington Gardens.

Gay, who really asked nothing better than to be a pet of the great in this world, was happy enough. In May, 1729, he went to Scotland with the Duke of Queensberry, and his only trouble was that the success of “Polly” made it attractive to unscrupulous booksellers. “He has about twenty lawsuits with booksellers for pirating his book,”[4] Arbuthnot wrote to Swift on May 8th. In the following month, the same correspondent, reports, “Mr. Gay is returned from Scotland, and has recovered his strength of his journey.”[5]

JOHN GAY TO THE HON. MRS. HOWARD.

August 9th, 1729.

“I desire you would send word whether white currants be proper to make tarts: it is a point that we dispute upon every day, and will never be ended unless you decide it.



Page 71

“The Duchess would be extremely glad if you could come here this day se’nnight; but if you cannot, come this day fortnight at farthest, and bring as many unlikely people as you can to keep you company. Have you lain at Marble Hill since we left Petersham? Hath the Duchess an aunt Thanet[6] alive again? She says there are but two people in the world that love and fear me—and those are, Lord Drum[lanrig][7] and Lord Charles [Douglas].[8] If they were awake, I would make them love those that I love, and say something civil to you. The Duchess hath left off taking snuff ever since you have; but she takes a little every day. I have not left it off, and yet take none; my resolution not being so strong. Though you are a water-drinker yourself, I daresay you will be sorry to hear that your friends have strictly adhered to that liquor; for you may be sure their heads cannot be affected with that.

“General Dormer[9] refused to eat a wheat-ear, because they call it here a fern-knacker; but since he knew it was a wheat-ear, he is extremely concerned. You are desired to acquaint Miss Smith that the Duchess was upon the brink of leaving off painting the first week she came here, but hath since taken it up with great success. She hopes she will never think of her and my Lord Castlemaine[10] on the same day.

“The Duke hath rung the bell for supper, and says, ‘How can you write such stuff?’

And so we conclude,
As ’tis fitting we should.
For the sake of our food;
So don’t think this rude.
Would my name was ‘Gertrude,’
Or ‘Simon and Jude.’”

It was an amusement of the Duchess of Queensberry and of Gay to write joint letters. They thoroughly loved fooling, and frequently indulged together in that pleasant pastime.

Middleton, August 27th, 1729.

“... What is blotted out was nonsense; so that it is not worth while to try to read it. It was well meant; the Duchess said it was very obscure, and I found out that it was not to be understood at all, nor by any alteration to be made intelligible; so out it went.

“We have this afternoon been reading Polybius. We were mightily pleased with the account of the Roman wars with the Gauls; but we did not think his account of the Achaians, and his remarks upon the historian Philarchus, so entertaining, as for aught we knew it might be judicious.

“I know you will be very uneasy unless I tell you what picture the Duchess hath in hand. It is a round landscape of Paul Brill, which Mr. Dormer[11] lent her, in which there are



figures very neatly finished. It is larger than any she hath yet done; by the dead colouring I guess (though her Grace is not very sanguine) it will in the end turn out very well.”

J.G.

“I do not understand which of our correspondents this letter is fit for; for there is neither wit, folly, nor solid sense, nor even a good foundation for nonsense, which is the only thing that I am well versed in. There were all these good things in the delightful letter you sent us; but as all the different hands are not known, they are unanswerable: for the future, then, pray sign or come,—the latter is best; for whoever can write so well must speak so; but now I think we had better always write for the good of posterity.”



Page 72

C.Q.

JOHN GAY TO DEAN SWIFT.

Middleton Stoney, November 9th, 1729.

"I have been in Oxfordshire with the Duke of Queensberry for these three months, and have had very little correspondence with any of our friends.

"I have employed my time in new writing a damned play, which I wrote several years ago, called 'The Wife of Bath.' As it is approved or disapproved of by my friends, when I come to town, I shall either have it acted, or let it alone, if weak brethren do not take offence at it. The ridicule turns upon superstition, and I have avoided the very words bribery and corruption. Folly, indeed, is a word that I have ventured to make use of; but that is a term that never gave fools offence. It is a common saying, that he is wise that knows himself. What has happened of late, I think, is a proof that it is not limited to the wise....

"Next week, I believe, I shall be in town; not at Whitehall, for those lodgings were judged not convenient for me, and were disposed of. Direct to me at the Duke of Queensberry's, in Burlington Gardens, near Piccadilly.

"You have often twitted me in the teeth with hankering after the Court. In that you mistook me: for I know by experience that there is no dependence that can be sure, but a dependance upon one's-self. I will take care of the little fortune I have got.[12]"

[Footnote 1: Swift: *Works* (ed. Scott), XVII, p. 215.]

[Footnote 2: Swift: *Works* (ed. Scott), XVII, p. 232.]

[Footnote 3: Swift: *Works* (ed. Scott), XIX, p. 232.]

[Footnote 4: Swift: *Works* (ed. Scott), XVII, p. 244.]

[Footnote 5: *Ibid.*, XVII, p. 245.]

[Footnote 6: The great-aunt (not aunt) was Elizabeth, daughter of Richard Boyle, first Earl of Burlington, who married Nicholas Tufton, third Earl of Thanet. Elizabeth's sister, Henrietta, who married Laurence Hyde, Earl of Rochester, was a grandmother of the Duchess of Queensberry.]

[Footnote 7: Henry Douglas (1723-1754), known by the style of Earl of Drumlanrig, the elder son of Charles Douglas, third Duke of Queensberry. He predeceased his father.]



[Footnote 8: Lord Charles Douglas (1726-1756), the younger son of the Duke, who also survived him.]

[Footnote 9: James Dormer (1678-1741), Colonel, 1720; Envoy-Extraordinary to Lisbon, 1725; Lieutenant-General, 1737; a friend of Pope.]

[Footnote 10: Sir Richard Child, Bart., of Wanstead (d. 1749), created Viscount Castlemaine, 1718; and Earl Tynes, 1731.]

[Footnote 11: Mr. Dormer, of Rowsham, elder brother of General Dormer.]

[Footnote 12: Swift: *Works* (ed Scott), XVII, p. 277.]

CHAPTER XI

1730

CORRESPONDENCE



Page 73

There are few or no details to be discovered about Gay at this time, except such deductions as can be drawn from his correspondence.

JOHN GAY TO DEAN SWIFT.

London, March 3rd, 1730.

"I am going very soon into Wiltshire with the Duke of Queensberry. Since I had that severe fit of sickness, I find my health requires it; for I cannot bear the town as I could formerly. I hope another summer's air and exercise will reinstate me. I continue to drink nothing but water, so that you cannot require any poetry from me. I have been very seldom abroad since I came to town, and not once at Court. This is no restraint upon me, for I am grown old enough to wish for retirement....

"I have left off all great folks but our own family; perhaps you will think all great folks little enough to leave off us, in our present situation. I do not hate the world, but I laugh at it; for none but fools can be in earnest about a trifle."^[1]

* * * * *

Earlier in the year Gay had revised his earliest play "The Wife of Bath," which had been produced unsuccessfully at Drury Lane Theatre on May 12th, 1713, and the new version was staged on January 19 of this year at the theatre in Lincoln's Inn Fields. "My old vamped play has got me no money, for it had no success," the author wrote to Swift in the letter of March 3rd; to which Swift replied from Dublin sixteen days later: "I had never much hopes of your vamped play, although Mr. Pope seemed to have, and although it were ever so good; but you should have done like the parsons, and changed your text—I mean, the title, and the names of the persons. After all, it was an effect of idleness, for you are in the prime of life, when invention and judgment go together."

JOHN GAY TO DEAN SWIFT.

March 31st, 1730.

"I expect, in about a fortnight, to set out for Wiltshire.... My ambition, at present, is levelled to the same point that you direct me to; for I am every day building villakins, and have given over that of castles. If I were to undertake it in my present circumstances, I should, on the most thrifty scheme, soon be straightened; and I hate to be in debt; for I cannot bear to pawn five pounds' worth of my liberty to a tailor or a butcher. I grant you this is not having the true spirit of modern nobility, but it is hard to cure the prejudice of education.



“I have been extremely taken up of late in settling a steward’s account. I am endeavouring to do all the justice and service I can for a friend, so I am sure you will think I am well employed.”[2]

* * * * *



Page 74

From this letter it will be seen that Gay was endeavouring to make some return to his host and hostess for their kindness in looking after him by acting as a private secretary to the Duchess. But it may be taken for granted that his duties were merely nominal, and it may equally be taken for granted that his assistance was of little value, and only accepted nominally in order to lessen the weight of the obligation under which they thought—probably erroneously—he might be suffering. Why Gay should have led a life of dependence unless he liked it, it is not easy to see, for when he died about thirty months later, he left the then not inconsiderable sum of L6,000. Gay, who never did to-day what could by any possibility be postponed, neglected, of course, to make a will. As he died intestate, his fortune was divided between his surviving sisters, Katherine Bailer and Joanna Fortescue.

Gay until the end kept up his correspondence with Mrs. Howard, and his letters to her are often delightful reading, especially when he had nothing in particular to say, or when he was able to poke kindly fun at his hostess and protectress.

JOHN GAY TO THE HON. MRS. HOWARD.

May 9th, 1730.

“It is what the Duchess never would tell me—so that it is impossible for me to tell you—*how she does*: but I cannot take it ill, for I really believe it is what she never really and truly did to anybody in her life. As I am no physician and cannot do her any good, one would wonder how she could refuse to answer this question out of common civility; but she is a professed hater of common civility, and so I am determined never to ask her again. If you have a mind to know what she hath done since she came here, the most material things that I know of is, that she hath worked a rose, and milked a cow, and those two things I assure you are of more consequence, I verily believe, than hath been done by anybody else.

“Mrs. Herbert was very angry with her Grace the night before she left the town, that she could part with her friends with such an indecent cheerfulness; she wishes she had seen you at the same time, that she might have known whether she could have carried this happy indifference through, or no. She is grown a great admirer of two characters in Prior’s poems, that of “Sauntering Jack and Idle Joan”[3]; and she thinks them persons worthy imitation: at this very instant she herself is in their way. She had a mind to write to you, but cannot prevail with herself to set about it; she is now thinking of Mrs. Herbert, but is too indolent to tell me to make her compliments to her. Just this minute she is wishing you were in this very room; but she will not give herself the trouble to say so to me: all that I know of it is, she looks all this, for she knows I am writing to you.



Page 75

“There is, indeed, a very good reason for her present indolence, for she is looking upon a book which she seems to be reading; but I believe the same page hath lain open before her ever since I began this letter. Just this moment she hath uttered these words: ‘that she will take it as a very great favour if you will speak to Mrs. Herbert to speak to Lord Herbert, that he would speak to anybody who may chance to go by Mr. Nix’s house, to call upon him to hasten his sending the piece of furniture, which, perhaps as soon as she receives it, may tempt her to write to somebody or other that very little expects it’;—for she loves to do things by surprise. She would take it kindly if you write to her against this thing comes here; for I verily believe she will try whether or no it be convenient for writing, and perhaps she may make the trial to you; she did not bid me say this, but as she talks of you often, I think you have a fair chance.

“As soon as you are settled at Marble Hill, I beg you will take the widow’s house for me, and persuade the Duchess to come to Petersham. But, wherever you are, at present I can only wish to be with you: do what you can for me, and let me hear from you till the Duchess writes to you. You may write to me, and if you express any resentment against her for not writing, I will let her know it in what manner you shall please to direct me.”

JOHN GAY TO DEAN SWIFT.

Amesbury, July 4th, 1730.

“I have left off wine and writing; for I really think, that man must be a bold writer, who trusts to wit without it.

“I took your advice; and some time ago took to love, and made some advances to the lady you sent me to in Soho, but met no return; so I have given up all thoughts of it, and have now no pursuit or amusement.

“A state of indolence is what I do not like; it is what I would not choose. I am not thinking of a Court or preferment, for I think the lady I live with is my friend, so that I am at the height of my ambition. You have often told me there is a time of life that every one wishes for some settlement of his own. I have frequently that feeling about me, but I fancy it will hardly ever be my lot: so that I will endeavour to pass away life as agreeably as I can, in the way I am. I often wish to be with you, or you with me; and I believe you think I say true.”[4]

ALEXANDER POPE TO JOHN GAY.

Twickenham, July 21st, 1730.

“If you consider this letter splenetic, consider I have just received the news of the death of a friend, whom I esteemed almost as many years as you—poor Fenton. He died at



Easthampstead, of indolence and inactivity; let it not be your fate, but use exercise. I hope the Duchess [of Queensberry] will take care of you in this respect, and either make you gallop after her, or tease you enough at home to serve instead of exercise abroad.



Page 76

“Mrs. Howard is so concerned about you, and so angry at me for not writing to you, and at Mrs. Blount for not doing the same, that I am piqued with jealousy and envy at you, and hate you as much as if you had a place at Court, which you will confess a proper cause of envy and hatred, in any poet, militant or unpensioned.”

JOHN GAY AND THE DUCHESS OF QUEENSBERRY TO THE HON. MRS. HOWARD.

Amesbury, August 20th, 1730.

“The Duchess says she cannot say a word more, if I would give her the world, and that her misery hath got the better of her pleasure in writing to you. She thanks you for your information, and says, that if she can bear herself, or think that anybody else can, she intends to make her visit next week. Now, it is my opinion that she need never have any scruples of this kind; but as to herself, you know she hath often an unaccountable way of thinking, and, say what you will to her, she will now and then hear you, but she will always think and act for herself. I have been waiting three or four minutes for what she hath to say, and at last she tells me she cannot speak one word more, and at the same time is so very unreasonable as to desire you would write her a long letter, as she knows you love it.

“I have several complaints to make to you of her treatment, but I shall only mention the most barbarous of them. She hath absolutely forbid her dog to be fond of me, and takes all occasions to snub her if she shows me the least civility. How do you think Lord Herbert would take such usage from you, or any lady in Christendom?

“Now she says I must write you a long letter; but to be sure I cannot say what I would about her, because she is looking over me as I write. If I should tell any good of her, I know she would not like it, and I have said my worst of her already.”

J.G.

“Do not think I am lazy, and so have framed an excuse, for I am really in pain (at some moments intolerable since this was begun). I think often I could be mighty glad to see you; and though you deserve vastly, that is saying much from me (for I can bear to be alone) and upon all accounts think I am much better here than anywhere else. I think to go on and prosper mighty prettily here, and like the habitation so well (that if I could in nature otherwise be forgetful) that would put me in mind of what I owe to those who helped me on to where I wished to be sooner than I feared I could be. Pray tell Miss Meadows that I was in hopes she would have made a dutiful visit to her father. If anyone else care for my respects, they may accept of them. I will present them to Lord Herbert, whether he care or not. I hope by this time he is able to carry himself and Fop wherever he pleases. If I had the same power over you I would not write you word that I

am yours, *etc.*; but since I can only write, believe that I am to you everything that you have ever read at the bottom of a letter, but not that I am so only by way of conclusion.”



Page 77

C.Q.

JOHN GAY AND THE DUCHESS OF QUEENSBERRY TO THE HON. MRS. HOWARD.

[Amesbury] Saturday, September, 1730.

“I cannot neglect this opportunity of writing to you and begging you to be a mediator between my lady duchess and me; we having at present a quarrel about a fishing rod; and at the same time to give her your opinion whether you think it proper for her to stay here till after Christmas, for I find that neither place nor preferment will let me leave her; and when she hath been long enough in one place, prevail with her, if you can, to go to another. I would always have her do what she will, because I am glad to be of her opinion, and because I know it is what I must always do myself.”

J.G.

“To follow one’s fancy is by much the best medicine; it has quite cured my face and left me no pain but the impossibility of being in two places at once, which is no small sorrow, since one of them would be near you. But the boys [Lord Drumlanrig and Lord Charles Douglas] are too lean to travel as yet. Compassion being the predominant fashion of the place, we are preserved alive with as much care as the partridges, which no one yet has had the heart to kill, though several barbarous attempts have been made. If I could write I would for ever, but my pen is so much your friend that it will only let me tell you that I am extremely so.

“I pray it may not be difficult for my dear Mrs. Howard to forgive, as to read this provocation. By the next I hope to write plain.”

C.Q.

ALEXANDER POPE TO JOHN GAY.

October, 1730.

“I continue, and ever shall, to wish you all good and happiness. I wish that some lucky event might set you in a state of ease and independency all at once, and that I might live to see you as happy as this silly world and fortune can make anyone. Are we never to live together more as once we did?”

THE HON. MRS. HOWARD TO JOHN GAY.

October 3rd, 1730.

“I hear you have had a house full of courtiers, and, what is more extraordinary, they were honest people; but I will take care, agreeably to your desire, that you shall not increase the number. I wish I could as easily gratify you in your other request about a certain person [the Duchess of Queensberry]’s health; but, indeed, John, that is not in my power. I have often thought it proceeds from thinking better of herself than she does of anybody else; for she has always confidence to inquire after those she calls friends, and enough assurance to give them advice; at the same time, she will not answer a civil question about herself, and would certainly never follow any advice that was given her: you plainly see she neither thinks well of their heart or their head. I believe I have told you as much before; but a settled opinion of anything will naturally lead one into the same manner of expressing one’s thoughts.”



Page 78

DEAN SWIFT TO JOHN GAY.

Dublin, November 10th, 1730.

"I hope you have now one advantage that you always wanted before, and the want of which made your friends as uneasy as it did yourself; I mean the removal of that solicitude about your own affairs, which perpetually filled your thoughts and disturbed your conversation. For if it be true, what Mr. Pope seriously tells me, you will have opportunity of saving every groat of the interest you receive; and so, by the time you and he grow weary of each other, you will be able to pass the rest of your wineless life in ease and plenty; with the additional triumphal comfort of never having received a penny from those tasteless, ungrateful people from which you deserved so much, and which deserve no better geniuses than those by whom they are celebrated." [5]

JOHN GAY TO DEAN SWIFT.

Amesbury, December 6th, 1730.

"The Duchess is a more severe check upon my finances than ever you were; and I submit, as I did to you, to comply to my own good. I was a long time before I could prevail with her to let me allow myself a pair of shoes with two heels; for I had lost one, and the shoes were so decayed that they were not worth mending. You see by this that those who are the most generous of their own, can be the most covetous for others. I hope you will be so good to me as to use your interest with her (for what ever she says, you seem to have some) to indulge me with the extravagance suitable to my fortune." [6]

DUCHESS OF QUEENSBERRY AND JOHN GAY TO THE HON. MRS. HOWARD.

December 17th [1730].

"You cannot imagine in what due time your letter came; for I had given you up, and with great pains had very near brought our friend Mr. Gay to own that nobody cared for us, and a few more thoughts which shall now be nameless. I am sincerely sorry that you have been ill, and very very glad that you are better and think of life; for I know none whom one could more wish to have life than yourself. I do not in the least approve of your changing your way of thinking of me, for I was convinced it was a good one, and when such opinions change, it is seldom for the better; if it could on my account, I declare you would be in the wrong, for to my knowledge I improve in no one thing. The best thing I can say for myself is, that I feel no alteration in the regard and inclination I have to you. I have no comprehension of what I said in my letter; but at that time my



body was distempered, and very likely my mind also.... I know nothing of coming to town; I only know that when I do I shall not be sorry to see you; and this is knowing a great deal; for I shall not be glad to come, and shall only come if it be unavoidable: this is the blunt truth. I own it would look less like indifference if I had written some civil lie.”



Page 79

C.Q.

“Everything that is above written is so plain and clear that it needs no comment; the writer I know to be so strictly addicted to truth, that I believe every word of it; if it is not written in the fashionable expression, I conclude you will impute it to her manner. She was really concerned very much, that, after she knew you were ill, we were so long before we could get a letter from you: let her contradict this if she can. You tell her you are riding for your life; I fancy she would do it for yours, though she will not for her own. I believe that she will not like that I should say anything more about her; so that I shall leave you to your own thoughts about what she hath said herself; for I find she doth not much care to be talked to, and as little likes to be talked of: if she writes truth, I hope she will allow me the liberty to do the same.... I have sometimes a great mind to answer the above letter, but I know she will do what she will; and as little as she likes herself, she likes her own advice better than anybody’s else, and that is a reason, in my opinion, that should prevail with her to take more care of herself. I just before said I would say no more upon this subject; but if I do not lay down the pen, I find I cannot help it. I have no desire to come to town at all; for if I were there I cannot see you; so that unless she turns me away I am fixed for life at Amesbury: so that, as to everything that relates to me, I refer you to her letters.”

J.G.

[Footnote 1: Swift: *Works* (ed. Scott), XVII, p. 292.]

[Footnote 2: 'Swift: *Works* (ed. Scott), XVII, p. 295.]

[Footnote 3:

Neither good nor bad, nor fool nor wise,
They would not learn nor could advise;
Without love, hatred, joy, or fear,
They led a kind of—as it were;
Nor wish'd nor cared, nor laugh'd nor cried:
And so they lived, and so they died.]

[Footnote 4: Swift: *Works* (ed. Scott), XVII, p. 308.]

[Footnote 5: Swift: *Works* (ed. Scott), XVII, p. 319.]

[Footnote 6: Swift: *Works* (ed. Scott), XVII, p. 333]

CHAPTER XII

1731



CORRESPONDENCE

DEAN SWIFT TO JOHN GAY.

Dublin, April 13th, 1731.

“Your situation is an odd one. The Duchess is your treasurer, and Mr. Pope tells me you are the Duke’s. And I had gone a good way in some verses on that occasion, prescribing lessons to direct your conduct, in a negative way, not to do so and so, *etc.*, like other treasurers; how to deal with servants, tenants, or neighbouring squires, which I take to be courtiers, parliaments, and princes in alliance, and so the parallel goes on, but grew too long to please me.”[1]

JOHN GAY TO DEAN SWIFT.



Page 80

April 21st, 1731.

“Since I have got over the impediment to a writer, of water drinking, if I can persuade myself that I have any wit, and find I have inclination, I intend to write; though, as yet, I have another impediment: for I have not provided myself with a scheme. Ten to one but I shall have a propensity to write against vice, and who can tell how far that may offend? But an author should consult his genius, rather than his interest, if he cannot reconcile them.”[2]

JOHN GAY TO DEAN SWIFT.

Amesbury, April 27th, 1731.

“When I was in town (after a bashful fit, for having writ something like a love-letter, and in two years making one visit), I writ to Mrs. Dreincourt, to apologise for my behaviour, and received a civil answer, but had not time to see her. They are naturally very civil: so that I am not so sanguine as to interpret this as any encouragement. I find by Mrs. Barber that she interests herself very much in her affair; and, indeed, from everybody who knows her, she answers the character you first gave me....

“You used to blame me for over-solicitude about myself. I am now grown so rich, that I do not think myself worth thinking on.”[3]

DEAN SWIFT TO JOHN GAY.

Dublin, June 29th, 1731.

“You are the silliest lover in Christendom. If you like Mrs. [Dreincourt], why do you not command her to take you? If she does not, she is not worth pursuing; you do her too much honour; she has neither sense nor taste, if she dares to refuse you, though she had ten thousand pounds.

“I cannot allow you rich enough till you are worth L7,000, which will bring you L300 per annum, and this will maintain you, with the perquisite of spunging, while you are young, and when you are old will afford you a pint of port at night, two servants, and an old maid, a little garden, and pen and ink—provided you live in the country. And what are you doing towards increasing your fame and your fortune? Have you no scheme, either in verse or prose? The Duchess should keep you at hard meat, and by that means force you to write.”[4]



THE COUNTESS OF SUFFOLK TO JOHN GAY.

Hampton Court, June 29th, 1731.

“To prevent all further quarrels and disputes, I shall let you know that I have kissed hands for the place of Mistress of the Robes. Her Majesty did me the honour to give me the choice of Lady of the Bedchamber, or that, which I find so much more agreeable to me, that I did not take one moment to consider of it. The Duchess of Dorset resigned it for me; and everything as yet promises more happiness for the latter part of my life than I have yet had a prospect of. Seven nights’ quiet sleep, and seven easy days have almost worked a miracle upon me; for if I cannot say I am perfectly well, yet it



Page 81

is certain even my pain is more supportable than it was. I shall now often visit Marble Hill; my time is become very much my own, and I shall see it without the dread of being obliged to sell it to answer the engagement I had put myself under to avoid a greater evil. Mr. H[oward] took possession of body and goods, and was not prevailed upon till yesterday to resign the former for burial. Poor Lord Suffolk took so much care in the will he made, that the best lawyers say it must stand good. I am persuaded it will be tried to the uttermost.

“I have at this time a great deal of business upon my hands, but not from my Court employment. You must take as a particular favour. The Duchess of Queensberry shall hear from me soon: she has a most extraordinary way of making her peace; but she does tell truth, and I told a lie when I said I hated her; for nothing is more true than that I love her most sincerely. However, I put it into your hands to tell her what you think proper; and if she can but feel half for me that I should for her under the same circumstances, it will be punishment sufficient for what I have suffered from her neglect of me. I shall certainly see Highclere this summer, and shall expect some people to meet me there. I hope the chairs will be done, for I do not know whether I ought to expect to be preferred before them. If you find her inclined to think me wrong in any particular, desire her to suspend her judgment till then; and if not to please me, to satisfy her own curiosity, she may come. I have taken care of what you desired me. I have done my best; I hope, for my sake, it will succeed well, for I shall be more concerned, I dare say, if it should not than you would be.”

JOHN GAY TO THE COUNTESS OF SUFFOLK.

July 8th, 1731.

“Your letter was not ill-bestowed, for I found in it such an air of satisfaction that I have a pleasure every time I think of it. I fancy (though by her silence she seems to approve of your Ladyship’s conduct) the Duchess will meet you at Highclere; for those that have a real friendship cannot be satisfied with real relations; they want to inquire into the minutest circumstances of life, that they may be sure things are as happy as they appear to be, and that is a curiosity that is excusable.

“I do not like lawsuits; I wish you could have your right without them, for I fancy there never was one since the world began, that, besides the cost, was not attended with anxiety and vexation. But as you descended from lawyers,[5] what might be my plague, perhaps may be only your amusement. Nobody but yourself hath let us know anything about you. Judge, then, how welcome your ladyship’s letter was to me. I find this change of life of yours is a subject that I cannot so well write upon; it is a thing that one

cannot so well judge of in general. But as for your Ladyship's conduct in this juncture, my approbation goes for nothing, for all the world knows that I am partial.

Page 82

“When you have a mind to make me happy, write to me, for of late I have had but very little chance, and only chance, of seeing you. If ever you thought well of me, if ever you believed I wished you well, and wished to be of service to you, think the same of me, for I am the same, and shall always be so.

“Mr. Pope, I fear, is determined never to write to me. I hope he is well. If you see Miss Blount or Mr. Pope, I beg them to accept my compliments.”

JOHN GAY TO DEAN SWIFT.

July 18th, 1731.

“Your friend Mrs. Howard is now Countess of Suffolk. I am still so much a dupe, that I think you mistake her. Come to Amesbury, and you and I will dispute this matter, and the Duchess shall be judge. But I fancy you will object against her; for I will be so fair to you, as to own that I think she is of my side; but, in short, you shall choose any impartial referee you please. I have heard from her; Mr. Pope has seen her; I beg that you would suspend your judgment till we talk over this affair together; for, I fancy, by your letter, you have neither heard from her, nor seen her; so that you cannot at present be as good a judge as we are. I will be a dupe for you at any time; therefore I beg it of you, that you would let me be a dupe in quiet.

“As to my being manager for the Duke, you have been misinformed. Upon the discharge of an unjust steward, he took the administration into his own hands. I own I was called in to his assistance, when the state of affairs was in the greatest confusion. Like an ancient Roman I came, put my helping hand to set affairs right, and as soon as it was done, I am retired again as a private man.”[6]

THE COUNTESS OF SUFFOLK TO JOHN GAY.

Kensington, September 5th, 1731.

“I was never more peevish in my life than I have been about this journey of Bridgeman’s. I am sure I took true pains that it should have been just as the Duchess wished. I find upon enquiry that he did not go as soon as I expected. He told me of the first letter which he wrote to you.

“I wish he had told me of Mr. Bloodworth’s conversation, for that would have prevented all mistakes. It is not in my power to do anything more, for Bridgeman has been absent a week from hence; but if his servants tell truth, there is no occasion, for they say he is gone to the Duke of Queensberry’s.



“I shall be very uneasy till I hear how this matter has ended. A letter from you was not necessary to make me remember you, but a letter was absolutely necessary to make me think you deserved one. The Duchess did not tell me why I did not see you at Highclere, but I do believe it was a good one; because she knows bringing of you there would have pleased us both. As I never knew what liberty was, I cannot tell you how much I was delighted with this summer’s expeditions. I never see Mr. Pope nor Mrs. Blount, though I never go to Marble Hill without sending to them. She has been ill, but was well last time I sent; but you know she has a peculiar pleasure in refusing her friends.



Page 83

“Let me hear often from you. I am glad you think of coming to Twickenham. I hope we shall meet at Marble Hill; but do not fail of letting me know as soon as possible whether the Duchess is convinced I was in no wise in fault, and that she does me the justice in believing I can never willingly be so to me. If you do not leave off *ladyship*, I shall complain to the Duchess, who shall make you go supperless to bed. Exercise agrees so well with me, that I cannot advise you not to use it; but if her Grace feeds you moderately, I should think your exercise ought to be so. God bless you.”

DEAN SWIFT TO JOHN GAY.

December 1st, 1731.

“If your ramble was on horse back, I am glad of it on account of your health; but I know your arts of patching up a journey between stage-coaches and friends’ coaches: for you are as arrant a cockney as any hosier in Cheapside, and one clean shirt with two cravats, and as many handkerchiefs, make up your equipage; and as for a nightgown, it is clear from Homer that Agamemnon rose without one.

“I have often had it in my head to put it into yours, that you ought to have some great work in scheme, that may take up seven years to finish, besides two or three under-ones, that may add another thousand pounds to your stock; and then I shall be in less pain about you.

“I know you can find dinners, but you love twelpenny coaches too well, without considering that the interest of a whole thousand pounds brings you but half-a-crown a day.”

JOHN GAY TO DEAN SWIFT.

December 1st, 1731

“You used to complain that Mr. Pope and I would not let you speak: you may now be even with me, and take it out in writing. If you do not send to me now and then, the post-office will think me of no consequence, for I have no correspondent but you. You may keep as far from us as you please; you cannot be forgotten by those who ever knew you, and therefore please me by sometimes showing I am not forgot by you. I have nothing to take me off from my friendship to you: I seek no new acquaintance, and court no favour; I spend no shillings in coaches or chairs to levees or great visits, and, as I do not want the assistance of some that I formerly conversed with, I will not so much as seem to seek to be a dependant.



“As to my studies, I have not been entirely idle, though I cannot say that I have yet perfected anything. What I have done is something in the way of those Fables I have already published.

“All the money I get is saving, so that by habit there may be some hopes (if I grow richer) of my becoming a miser. All misers have their excuses. The motive to my parsimony is independence.”[7]

[Footnote 1: Swift: *Works* (ed. Scott), XVII, p. 358]

[Footnote 2: *Ibid.*, XVII, p. 342.]



Page 84

[Footnote 3: Swift: *Works* (ed. Scott), XVII, p. 370.]

[Footnote 4: *Ibid.*, XVII, p. 382.]

[Footnote 5: Lady Suffolk's great-great-great-grandfather was Sir Henry Hobart, Chief-Justice of the Common Pleas.]

[Footnote 6: Swift: *Works* (ed. Scott), XVII, p. 385.]

[Footnote 7: Swift: *Works* (ed. Scott), XVII, p. 436.]

CHAPTER XIII

1732

DEATH

As time passed Gay became less satisfied with his condition. It may have been that his health became worse; or it may be that, like to many men who are idle and make no effort to work, he became annoyed at the *ennui* which is so often the result of an unoccupied life. Anyhow, in his letters there crept in a note of irritability, which has not previously been sounded.

JOHN GAY TO DEAN SWIFT.

March 13th, 1732.

"I find myself dispirited for want of having some pursuit. Indolence and idleness are the most tiresome things in the world. I begin to find a dislike to society. I think I ought to try to break myself of it, but I cannot resolve to set about it. I have left off almost all my great acquaintance, which saves me something in chair hire, though in that article the town is still very expensive. Those who were your old acquaintance are almost the only people I visit; and, indeed, upon trying all, I like them best....

"If you would advise the Duchess to confine me four hours a-day to my own room, while I am in the country, I will write; for I cannot confine myself as I ought."[1]

DEAN SWIFT TO JOHN GAY.

Dublin, May 4th, 1732.



“It is your pride or laziness, more than chair-hire, that makes the town expensive. No honour is lost by walking in the dark; and in the day, you may beckon a blackguard boy under a gate [to clean your shoes] near your visiting place (*experto crede*), save eleven pence, and get half a crown’s-worth of health ...

“I find by the whole cast of your letter, that you are as giddy and volatile as ever: just the reverse of Mr. Pope, who has always loved a domestic life from his youth. I was going to wish you had some little place that you could call your own, but, I profess I do not know you well enough to contrive any one system of life that would please you. You pretend to preach up riding and walking to the Duchess, yet from my knowledge of you after twenty years, you always joined a violent desire of perpetually shifting places and company, with a rooted laziness, and an utter impatience of fatigue. A coach and six horses is the utmost exercise you can bear; and this only when you can fill it with such company as is best suited to your taste, and how glad would you



Page 85

be if it could waft you in the air to avoid jolting; while I, who am so much later in life, can, or at least could, ride five hundred miles on a trotting horse. You mortally hate writing, only because it is the thing you chiefly ought to do, as well to keep up the vogue you have in the world, as to make you easy in your fortune: you are merciful to everything but money your best friend, whom you treat with inhumanity." [2]

* * * * *

In May was first performed at the Haymarket Theatre "Acis and Galatea," of which he wrote the "book" and Handel the music; but this was not work upon which he had been lately engaged—in fact, both words and music had been ready for ten years. Gay, however, did occasionally put in some time on literary work, and at his death left the "book" of an opera "Achilles," which was produced on February 10th, 1733, at the scene of his triumph with "The Beggar's Opera," the theatre in Lincoln's Inn Fields; "The Distrest Wife" and a farce, "The Rehearsal at Gotham," which last were printed, respectively, in 1743 and 1754. He was at this time composing very leisurely a second series of "Fables," which were ready for the press at the time of his death, but did not appear until 1738.

JOHN GAY TO DEAN SWIFT.

London, May 19th, 1732.

"You seemed not to approve of my writing more Fables. Those I am now writing have a prefatory discourse before each of them, by way of epistle, and the morals of them mostly are of the political kind; which makes them run into a greater length than those I have already published. I have already finished about fifteen or sixteen; four or five more would make a volume of the same size as the first. Though this is a kind of writing that appears very easy, I find it the most difficult of any I ever undertook. After I have invented one fable, and finished it, I despair of finding out another; but I have a moral or two more, which I wish to write upon.

"I have also a sort of a scheme to raise my finances by doing something for the stage: with this, and some reading, and a great deal of exercise, I propose to pass my summer.

"As for myself, I am often troubled with the colic. I have as much inattention, and have, I think, lower spirits than usual, which I impute to my having no one pursuit in life." [3]



JOHN GAY TO DEAN SWIFT.

Amesbury, July 24th, 1732.

"I shall finish the work I intended, this summer,[4] but I look upon the success in every respect to be precarious. You judge very right of my present situation, that I cannot propose to succeed by favour: but I do not think, if I could flatter myself that I had any degree of merit, much could be expected from that unfashionable pretension.

"I have almost done everything I proposed in the way of Fables; but have not set the last hand to them. Though they will not amount to half the number, I believe they will make much such another volume as the last. I find it the most difficult task I ever undertook; but have determined to go through with it; and, after this, I believe I shall never have courage enough to think any more in this way."[5]



Page 86

ALEXANDER POPE TO JOHN GAY.

October 2nd, 1732.

“Every man, and every boy, is writing verses on the royal hermitage: I hear the Queen is at a loss which to prefer; but for my own part I like none so well as Mr. Poyntz’s[6] in Latin. You would oblige my Lady Suffolk if you tried your muse on this occasion. I am sure I would do as much for the Duchess of Queensberry, if she desired it. Several of your friends assure me it is expected from you. One should not bear in mind all one’s life, any little indignity one receives from a Court, and therefore I am in hopes, neither her Grace of Queensberry will hinder you, nor you decline it.”

* * * * *

The “royal hermitage” was a building erected by Queen Caroline in the grounds of Richmond Palace, and decorated with busts of her favourite philosophers. This letter of Pope seems extraordinary, and it is a little difficult to guess what inspired the suggestion contained in it. “This is but shabby advice,” Croker has written, “considering the general tone of Pope’s private correspondence, as well as his published satires, and seems peculiarly strange in the circumstances in which Gay himself and the Duke and Duchess of Queensberry, on his account, stood with the Queen. If it were not for the introduction of Lady Suffolk’s name, I should have thought Pope’s advice sheer irony, and a hint for a libel on the Court. The Duchess and Gay were offended at the proposition.” It may be, however, that Pope thought it possible that such a poetical effusion as he had in mind might restore Gay to favour at Court. Gay, who received Pope’s letter while he was on a visit to Orchard Wyndham, the seat of Sir William Wyndham, in Somersetshire, would do nothing in the matter, as will be seen from his reply.

JOHN GAY TO ALEXANDER POPE.

October 7th, 1732.

“I am at last returned from my Somersetshire expedition, but since my return I cannot boast of my health as before I went, for I am frequently out of order with my colical complaint, so as to make me uneasy and dispirited, though not to any violent degree. The reception we met with, and the little excursions we made, were in every way agreeable. I think the country abounds with beautiful prospects. Sir William Wyndham is at present amusing himself with some real improvements, and a great many visionary castles. We are often entertained with sea-views, and sea fish, and were at some places in the neighbourhood, among which I was mightily pleased with Dunster Castle, near Minehead. It stands upon a great eminence, and has a prospect of that town, with an extensive view of the Bristol Channel, in which are seen two small islands, called the



Steep Holms and Flat Holms, and on the other side we could plainly distinguish the divisions of fields on the Welsh coast. All this journey I performed on horseback, and I am very much disappointed that at present I feel myself so little the better for it. I have indeed followed riding and exercise for three months successively, and really think I was as well without it: so that I begin to fear the illness I have so long complained of, is inherent in my constitution, and that I have nothing for it but patience.



Page 87

“As to your advice about writing panegyric, it is what I have not frequently done. I have indeed done it sometimes against my judgment and inclination, and I heartily repent of it. And at present, as I have no desire of reward, and see no just reason of praise, I think I had better let it alone. There are flatterers good enough to be found, and I would not interfere in any gentleman’s profession. I have seen no verses on these sublime occasions, so that I have no emulation. Let the patrons enjoy the authors, and the authors their patrons, for I know myself unworthy.”

JOHN GAY TO DEAN SWIFT.

November 16th, 1732.

“I am at last come to London before the family, to follow my own inventions. In a week or fortnight I expect the family will follow me.

“If my present project[7] succeeds, you may expect a better account of my own fortune a little while after the holidays; but I promise myself nothing, for I am determined that neither anybody else, nor myself shall disappoint me.”[8]

* * * * *

Neither the production of “Achilles,” nor any other earthly project of Gay’s, took place, for, within a few weeks, on December 4th, after three days’ illness, he passed away in his forty-eighth year, at the Duke of Queensberry’s town house in Burlington Gardens.

On the following day, Arbuthnot, who attended him, imparted the sad tidings to Pope: “Poor Mr. Gay died of an inflammation, and, I believe, at last a mortification of the bowels; it was the most precipitous case I ever knew, having cut him off in three days. He was attended by two physicians besides myself. I believed the distemper mortal from the beginning.”[9] Pope, in his turn, immediately wrote to Swift, and his letter was found among Swift’s papers, bearing the following endorsement: “On my dear friend Mr. Gay’s death. Received December 15th, but not read till the 20th, by an impulse foreboding some misfortune.”

ALEXANDER POPE TO DEAN SWIFT.

December 5th, 1732.

“It is not a time to complain that you have not answered me two letters (in the last of which I was impatient under some fears). It is not now, indeed, a time to think of myself, when one of the longest and nearest ties I have ever had, is broken all on a sudden by the unexpected death of poor Mr. Gay. An inflammatory fever burned him out of this life in three days. He died last night at nine o’clock, not deprived of his senses entirely at



last, and possessing them perfectly till within five hours. He asked of you a few hours before, when in acute torment by the inflammation in his bowels and breast. His effects are in the Duke of Queensberry's custody. His sisters, we suppose, will be his heirs, who are two widows; as yet it is not known whether or no he left a will ...



Page 88

"I shall never see you now, I believe; one of your principal calls to England is at an end. Indeed, he was the most amiable by far, his qualities were the gentlest, but I love you as well and as firmly. Would to God the man we have lost had not been so amiable nor so good: but that's a wish for our own sakes, not for his. Surely, if innocence and integrity can deserve happiness, it must be his. Adieu! I can add nothing to what you will feel, and diminish nothing from it." [10]

* * * * *

Gay's body was removed from Burlington House on the morning of December 23rd, to Exeter Change, in the Strand, where it lay in state during the day. At nine o'clock in the evening, it was taken for burial to Westminster Abbey in a hearse with plumes of white and black feathers and appropriate escutcheons, attended by three coaches, each drawn by six horses. In the first coach was the principal mourner, Gay's nephew, the Rev. Joseph Bailer, who is responsible for the above account of the obsequies; in the second coach were the Duke of Queensberry and Arbuthnot. The pall-bearers were Lord Chesterfield, Lord Cornbury, the Hon. Mr. Berkeley, General Dormer, Mr. Gore, and Pope. The service was read by the Dean of Westminster, Dr. Wilcox, Bishop of Rochester. Gay's remains were deposited in the south cross aisle of the Abbey, over against Chaucer's tomb. [11] Later a monument was erected to his memory.

Here lie the ashes of Mr. John Gay,
The warmest friend;
The most benevolent man:
Who maintained
Independency
In low circumstances of fortune;
Integrity
In the midst of a corrupt age
And that equal serenity of mind,
Which conscious goodness alone can give,
Through the whole course of his life.

Favourite of the Muses,
He was led by them to every elegant art;
Refin'd in taste,
And fraught with graces all his own;
In various kinds of poetry
Superior to many,
Inferior to none,
His words continue to inspire,
What his example taught,
Contempt of folly, however adorn'd;



Detestation of vice, however dignified;
Reverence of virtue, however disgrac'd.

Charles and Catherine, Duke and Duchess of Queensbury, who loved this excellent man living, and regret him dead, have caused this monument to be erected to his memory. Pope, than whom no man loved him better, composed an epitaph for him:—

Of manners gentle, of affections mild,
In wit a man, simplicity a child;
With native humour, temp'ring virtuous rage,
Form'd to delight at once, and lash the age.
Above temptation in a low estate,
And uncorrupted e'en among the great.
A safe companion, and an easy friend,
Unblam'd through life, lamented in thy end:
These are thy honours! not that here thy bust
Is mix'd with heroes, or with Kings thy dust;
But that the worthy and the good shall say,
Striking their pensive bosoms—Here lies Gay.

Page 89

Of Gay's posthumous works, there are several references in the correspondence of his friends. The first mention is concerning "Achilles," in a letter written from Twickenham by Pope to Caryl: "Poor Gay has gone before, and has not left an honester man behind him; he has just put a play into the house, which the Duke of Queensberry will take care of, and turn to the benefit of his relations. I have read it, and think it of his very best manner, a true original; he has left some other pieces fit for the press." Quite in keeping with his character Gay had made no arrangements for the disposal of the manuscripts he left behind him. "As to his writings, he left no will, nor spoke a word of them, or anything else, during his short and precipitate illness, in which I attended him to his last breath," Pope informed Swift, February 16th, 1733. "The Duke has acted more than the part of a brother to him, and it will be strange if the sisters do not leave his papers totally at his disposal, who will do the same that I would with them. He had managed the comedy (which our poor friend gave to the playhouse a week before his death) to the utmost advantage for his relations; and proposes to do the same with some Fables he left unfinished." [12] The play was much discussed in advance of its representation.

"Mr. Gay has left a posthumous work, which is soon to be acted," Lady Anne Irvine wrote to Lord Carlisle on January 6th, 1733. "'Tis in the manner of 'The Beggar's Opera,' interspersed with songs; the subject is Achilles among the women, where he is discovered choosing a sword. The design is to ridicule Homer's Odysseys; 'tis much commended, and I don't doubt, from the nature of the subject, will be much approved." [13] Gay's play was put into rehearsal in December, 1732, about a fortnight after his death, [14] and it was produced at the theatre in Lincoln's Inn Fields in February, 1723, when a contemporary account says it "met with a general applause the first night, when there was a noble and crowded audience," [15] and Pope wrote to Swift on February 16th: "The play Mr. Gay left succeeds very well. It is another original of its kind." [16] It ran for eighteen nights. The cast was as follows:—

Lycomedes MR. QUIN *Diphilus* MR. ASTON
Achilles MR. SALWAY *Ulysses* MR. CHAPMAN
Diomedes MR. LAGUERRE *Ajax* MR. HALL
Periphas MR. WALKER *Agyrtes* MR. LEVERIDGE
Thetis MR. BUCHANAN *Theaspe* MRS. CANTREL *Deidamia*
... .. MISS NORSA *Lesbia* MISS BINKS *Philoe* MISS
OATES *Antemona* MRS. EGLETON



Page 90

“The Distrest Wife,” another of the posthumous plays, was a poor thing, and Swift was much annoyed that it was staged. “As to our poor friend, I think the Duke of Queensberry has acted a very noble and generous part,” Swift wrote to Pope, March 31st, 1734. “But before he did it, I wish there had been so much cunning used as to have let the sisters know that he expected they would let him dispose of Mr. Gay’s writings as himself and other friends should advise. And I heartily wish his Grace had entirely stifled that comedy, if it were possible, than do an injury to our friend’s reputation, only to get a hundred or two pounds to a couple of, perhaps, insignificant women. It has been printed here, and I am grieved to say it is a very poor performance. I have often chid Mr. Gay for not varying his schemes, but still adhering to those he had exhausted; and I much doubt whether the posthumous Fables will prove equal to the first. I think it is incumbent upon you to see that nothing more be published of his that will lessen his reputation for the sake of adding a few pounds to his sisters, who have already got so much by his death.” “The Distrest Wife” was produced at Covent Garden Theatre on March 5th, 1734,[17] and the Duke and Duchess of Queensberry were present at the performance. “To-morrow will be acted a new play of our friend Mr. Gay’s; we stay on purpose now for that,” the Duchess wrote to Swift on the previous day.[18] The play was published in 1743, and a second edition was issued in 1750. It was revived at Covent Garden, in 1772, with some alteration.[19]

In a humorous piece, “The Rehearsal at Goatham,” published in 1754, which was written probably about 1729, Gay ventilated his grievance against Walpole and the rest, *a propos* of the suppression of “Polly.” This was Gay’s King Charles’s Head, and he never forgave the Minister for this, or for not finding him a place. He made an attack on him, obvious to all, in “The Vulture, the Sparrow, and Other Birds,” which was included in his second series of “Fables”[20] that appeared posthumously in 1738.

* * * * *

The devotion of Gay’s friends survived his death, and they vied with one another in paying tribute to his memory. “As to himself, he knew the world too well to regret leaving it; and the world in general knew him too little to value him as they ought,”[21] the Duchess of Queensberry wrote to Swift on February 21st, 1733; and, later, she addressed herself to Lady Suffolk from Amesbury, on September 28th, 1734: “I often want poor Mr. Gay, and on this occasion extremely. Nothing evaporates sooner than joy untold, or even told, unless to one so entirely in your interest as he was, who bore at least an equal share in every satisfaction or dissatisfaction which attended us. I am not in the spleen, though I write thus; on the contrary, it is a sort of pleasure to think over his good qualities: his loss was really great, but it is a satisfaction to have once known so good a man.” Her affection endured until the end. Although she was then a very old woman, when “Polly” was produced at the Haymarket Theatre on June 19th, 1777, nothing would content her but she must be present. Within a few weeks, on the following July 17th, she passed away.



Page 91

Lord Bathurst, too, deplored the loss of Gay; he of whom the poet had written in "Mr. Pope's Welcome from Greece":—

Bathurst impetuous, hastens to the coast.
Whom you and I strive who shall love the most.

"Poor John Gay!" he wrote to Swift on March 29th, 1733. "We shall see him no more; but he will always be remembered by those who knew him, with a tender concern." Arbuthnot, who also had had tribute paid him in "Mr. Pope's Welcome from Greece":—

Arbuthnot there I see, in physic's art,
As Galen learned or famed Hippocrate;
Whose company drives sorrow from the heart
As all disease his medicines dissipate.

knew him well and loved him deeply. "We have all had another loss of our worthy and dear friend, Mr. Gay," he wrote to Swift on January 13th, 1733. "It was some alleviation of my grief to see him so universally lamented by almost everybody, even by those who knew him only by reputation. He was interred at Westminster Abbey, as if he had been a peer of the realm; and the good Duke of Queensberry, who lamented him as a brother, will set up a handsome monument upon him. These are little affronts put upon vice and injustice, and is all that remains in our power. I believe 'The Beggar's Opera,' and what he had to come upon the stage, will make the sum of the diversions of the town for some time to come." [22]

By virtue of their fame, towering high above the rest of the select band of Gay's dearest friends, were Pope and Swift:—

Blest be the great! for those they take away,
And those they left me; for they left me Gay,

Pope had written in the "Epistle to Arbuthnot"; and Gay, as has been said, had more than once entered the lists and broken a lance on his brother poet's behalf, as when he parodied Ambrose Philips in "The Shepherd's Week." His "Mr. Pope's Welcome from Greece," written when Pope had finished his translation of the "Iliad," was a fine panegyric, in which he had a sly dig at the rival editor:—

Tickell, whose skiff (in partnership they say)
Set forth for Greece, but founder'd on the way.

and in his "Epistle to the Right Honourable Paul Methuen, Esq.," he pilloried one of his friend's most violent critics:—

Had Pope with grovelling numbers fill'd his page,
Dennis had never kindled into rage.



'Tis the sublime that hurt the critic's ease;
Write nonsense, and he reads and sleeps in peace.

"You say truly," Pope wrote to Swift, on April 2nd, 1733, "that death is only terrible to us as it separates us from those we love; but I really think those have the worst of it who are left by us, if we are true friends. I have felt more (I fancy) in the loss of Mr. Gay, than I shall suffer in the thought of going away myself into a state that none of us can feel this sort of losses. I wished vehemently to have seen him in a condition of living independent, and to have lived in perfect indolence the rest of our days together, the two most idle, most innocent, undesigning poets of our age." [23]



Page 92

Through the long years Gay was present to the minds of these, his dearest friends. “Dr. Arbuthnot’s daughter is like Gay, very idle, very ingenuous, and inflexibly honest,”[24] Pope wrote to Swift, May 17th, 1739; and two years earlier, on July 23rd, 1737, Swift had written to Erasmus Lewis: “I have had my share of affliction in the loss of Dr. Arbuthnot, and poor Gay, and others.[25] Such devotion, from such very different people puts it beyond question that Gay was a very lovable creature. How deeply he returned that devotion it is difficult to say—gratitude he felt, no doubt, but of love ... a man of such weak character, a man so devoted to the fleshpots, probably received more than he could give.” Perhaps Swift, whose affections never blinded his intelligence, had some inkling of this when he said in the “Verses on His Own Death,”

Poor Pope will grieve a month, and Gay
A week, and Arbuthnot a day.

When Gay, in “Mr. Pope’s Welcome from Greece,” wrote:—

Thou, too, my Swift, dost breathe Boeotian air,
When will thou bring back wit and humour here?

the formal tribute is agreeable, but in this set of verses, while there is much that is complimentary, there is something perfunctory about the tributes he paid. He wrote of Pope and Swift and the rest as witty or humorous or generous or clever or learned or honest of mind: they wrote of the love they bore him. The two great literary giants took him under their wing, bore with his foibles, humoured him, championed him, and to the utmost of their power sought to protect their weaker brother of the pen from the rude buffetings of life.

[Footnote 1: Swift: *Works* (ed. Scott), XVII, p. 498.]

[Footnote 2: Swift: *Works* (ed. Scott), XVII, p. 502.]

[Footnote 3: Swift: *Works* (ed. Scott), XVIII, p. 3.]

[Footnote 4: Probably a reference to the Opera, “Achilles.”]

[Footnote 5: Swift: *Works* (ed. Scott), XVIII, p. 23.]

[Footnote 6: S. Poyntz, Governor to the Duke of Cumberland. He married a niece of Lord Peterborough.]

[Footnote 7: Probably another reference to the Opera “Achilles.”]

[Footnote 8: Swift: *Works* (ed. Scott), XVIII, p. 51.]

[Footnote 9: *Ibid.*, XVIII, p. 54.]



[Footnote 10: Swift: *Works* (ed. Scott), XVIII, p. 53.]

[Footnote 11: *Gay's Chair*, p. 24.]

[Footnote 12: Swift: *Works* (ed. Scott). XVIII, p. 84.]

[Footnote 13: Historical MSS. Commission Reports—Carlisle MSS.]

[Footnote 14: Swift: *Works* (ed. Scott), XVIII, p. 57.]

[Footnote 15: Historical MSS. Com. Reports—Bath MSS., I, p. 95.]

[Footnote 16: *Gentleman's Magazine*, 1773, pp. 78, 85.]

[Footnote 17: Genest: *History of the Stage*, III, p. 428.]

[Footnote 18: Swift: *Works* (ed. Scott), XVIII, p. 180.]



Page 93

[Footnote 19: *Biog. Dram.*, II, p. 168.]

[Footnote 20: The "Advertisement" to the volume was as follows: "These Fables were finished by Mr. Gay, and intended for the Press, a short time before his death, when they were left, with his other papers, to the care of his noble friend and patron, the Duke of Queensberry. His Grace has accordingly permitted them to the Press, and they are here printed from the originals in the author's handwriting. We hope they will please equally with his former Fables, though mostly on subjects of a graver and more political turn. They will certainly show him to have been (what he esteemed the best character) a man of true honest heart, and a sincere lover of his country."]

[Footnote 21: Swift: *Works* (ed. Scott), XVIII, p. 82.]

[Footnote 22: Swift: *Works* (ed. Scott), XVIII, p. 95.]

[Footnote 23: Swift: *Works* (ed. Hill), XVIII, p. 96.]

[Footnote 24: *Ibid.*, XIX, p. 200.]

[Footnote 25: *Ibid.*, XIX, p. 92.]

APPENDIX

I. NOTES ON THE SOURCES OF THE TUNES OF "THE BEGGAR'S OPERA," BY
W.H.
GRATTAN FLOOD, Mus.D.

II. A CHRONOLOGICAL LIST OF THE CORRESPONDENCE OF JOHN GAY

III. PROGRAMME OF THE REVIVAL OF "THE BEGGAR'S OPERA," LYRIC
THEATRE,
HAMMERSMITH, JUNE 7TH, 1920

I

NOTES ON THE SOURCES OF THE TUNES OF "THE BEGGAR'S OPERA," BY W.H.
GRATTAN FLOOD, Mus.D.

Air VI. VIRGINS ARE LIKE THE FAIR FLOWER—
Was written by Sir Chas. Hanbury Williams.



Air XXIV. GAMESTERS AND LAWYERS—
Was written by Mr. Fortescue, Master of the Rolls.

Air XXX. WHEN YOU CENSURE THE AGE—
Was written by Dean Swift.

Airs I and XLIV. THROUGH ALL THE EMPLOYMENTS OF LIFE—and THE MODES
OF
THE COURT—
Were written by Lord Chesterfield.

All the songs, except I, VI, XXIV, XXX, and XLIV were written by Gay.

SOURCES OF THE TUNES.

I. AN OLD WOMAN CLOTHED IN GRAY. Old English air first published in 1665.

II. THE BONNY GRAY-EY'D MORN.
Composed by Jeremiah Clarke in 1695.

III. COLD AND RAW.
Old Irish *air*, 1600. "The Irish Ho Hoane" *cir.* 1610.

IV. WHY IS YOUR FAITHFUL SLAVE DISDAIN'D?
Composed by Bononcini. Published in Playford's *Banquet*. 1688

V. OF ALL THE SIMPLE THINGS WE DO.
Old Irish *air*, 1660. Introduced by Doggett into his *Country
Wake*, 1696; also known as "The Mouse Trap," 1719.

VI. WHAT SHALL I DO TO SHOW HOW MUCH I LOVE HER?
Composed by Henry Purcell. *Bonduca* in 1695.



Page 94

- VII. OH! LONDON IS A FINE TOWN,
Old English. Published by Playford in 1665.
- VIII. GRIM KING OF THE GHOSTS.
Old Irish. Adapted by Henry Purcell to “Hail to the Myrtle Shades,” in *Theodosius*, 1680. Also adapted to “Rosalind’s Complaint,” by Mr. Baker, in 1727.
- IX. O JENNY! O JENNY!
Old Irish air, 1600. Adapted to “May Fair,” 1703.
- X. THOMAS, I CANNOT.
Sung in Weaver’s *Perseus and Andromede*, 1717. Published in Playford’s *Dancing Master*, in 1719.
- XI. A SOLDIER AND A SAILOR.
Composed by John Eccles for Congreve’s *Love for Love*, 1696.
- XII. NOW PONDER WELL.
Old English. “The Children in the Wood.” Seventeenth Century.
- XIII. LE PRINTEMPS RAPPELLE.
Old French chanson.
- XIV. PRETTY PARROT, SAY.
Old English. Published by Playford in 1719.
- XV. PRAY, FAIR ONE, BE KIND.
Old English air, 1715.
- XVI. OVER THE HILLS AND FAR AWAY.
Old Irish. Atkinson’s MS. in 1694. By Farquhar in his *Recruiting Officer*, in 1706. Published by Dufey in 1709.
- XVII. GIN THOU WERT MINE AWN THING.
Old Scotch. Published by Ramsay in 1726, in his “Musick for the Songs in the Tea Table Miscellany.”
- XVIII. O THE BROOM!
Old Irish. Quoted by Bishop Wadding in 1680.
- XIX. FILL EVERY GLASS.
A French Drinking Song. “Que chacun remplisse son verre”; adapted by Dufey in 1710.



XX. MARCH IN "RINALDO."

Composed by Handel. Produced in 1711.

XXI. WOULD YOU HAVE A YOUNG VIRGIN?

Old Irish. Published as "Poor Robin's Maggot" in 1652. Adapted by Durfey to a song in *Modern Prophets* in 1709.

XXII. COTILLON.

A *French* Dance tune. Printed in a Frankfort book of the year 1664, and by Playford as "Tony's Rant," in 1726.

XXIII. ALL IN A MISTY MORNING.

Old English. "The Friar and the Nun" (Friar Foxtail). Printed by Playford in 1651. Durfey's *Pills*, 1719.

XXIV. WHEN ONCE I LAY WITH ANOTHER MAN'S WIFE.

Old English. Sung in Durfey's *The Wiltshire Maid*.

XXV. WHEN FIRST I LAID SIEGE TO MY CHLORIS.

Old Irish. Adapted by Durfey in his *Pills*, 1720.

XXVI. COURTIERS, COURTIERS, THINK IT NO HARM.

Old English air, 1720.

XXVII. A LOVELY LASS TO A FRIAR CAME.

Old Irish. Printed in 1721.

XXVIII. 'T WAS WHEN THE SEA WAS ROARING.

Composed by Handel. Sung in Gay's *What d'ye call it* (1715).

XXIX. THE SUN HAD LOOS'D HIS WEARY TEAMS.

Old English. "The Hemp Dresser." Published by Playford in 1651.

XXX. HOW HAPPY ARE WE.

Composed by Dr. Pepusch. 1716.



Page 95

XXXI. OF A NOBLE RACE WAS SHENKIN.

Introduced in Henry Purcell's *Richmond Heiress*, 1693.

XXXII. No name, but evidently intended for HOW SHOULD I YOUR TRUE LOVE KNOW. Ophelia's song.

Published by Playford in 1713.

XXXIII. LONDON LADIES.

Old English.

XXXIV. ALL IN THE DOWNS.

Composed by Henry Carey. 1720.

XXXV. HAVE YOU HEARD OF A FROLICKSOME DITTY.

Old Irish. "Molly Roe." Published as "The Rant" in Apollo's Banquet, in 1690.

XXXVI. IRISH TROT.

Old Irish. Printed as "Hyde Park," by Playford, in 1651.

XXXVII. No name given, but evidently CONSTANT BILLY, published in 1726.

Sir H. Bishop says that it was composed by Geminiani.

XXXVIII. GOOD-MORROW, GOSSIP JOAN.

Old English. Printed in 1705.

XXXIX. IRISH HOWL.

Old Irish. Printed as "The Irish Howl," by Playford, in the third volume of his *Dancing Master*, in 1726.

XL. THE LASS OF PATIE'S MILL.

Old Scotch. Printed in *Orpheus Caledonius*. 1725.

XLI. IF LOVE'S A SWEET PASSION.

Composed by Henry Purcell. *Fairy Queen* (1692).

XLII. SOUTH-SEA BALLAD.

Old English. Printed in 1720.

XLIII. PACKINGTON'S POUND.

Old English. Melody in the Fitzwilliam Virginal Book.

XLIV. LILLIBULLERO.

Old Irish. Printed in 1688. Adapted by Purcell.



XLV. DOWN IN THE NORTH COUNTRY.

Old English.

XLVI. A SHEPHERD KEPT SHEEP.

Old English.

XLVII. ONE EVENING, HAVING LOST MY WAY.

Printed as "Walpole, or the Happy Clown," in 1719. Words by Birkhead. The tune also occurs in the Overture.

XLVIII. NOW, ROGER, I'LL TELL THEE BECAUSE THOU'RT MY SON.

Old English.

XLIX. O BESSY BELL!

Old Scotch. Printed by Playford in 1700.

L. WOULD FATE TO ME BELINDA GIVE.

Composed by John Wilford. Printed in 1710.

LI. COME, SWEET LASS.

The tune was printed as "Greenwich Park," by Playford. 1688. Song from *The Compleat Academy* (1685). Music composed by Jeremiah Clarke, 1685.

LII. THE LAST TIME I WENT O'ER THE MOOR.

Old Scotch. Printed in Ramsay's *Tea Table Misc.* 1726.

LIII. TOM TINKER'S MY TRUE LOVE.

Old English. Printed by Playford in 1664.

LIV. I AM A POOR SHEPHERD UNDONE.

Old English. Printed by Playford in 1716.

LV. IANTHE THE LOVELY.

Composed by John Barret, 1701.

LVI. A COBLER THERE WAS.

Old English.

LVII. BONNY DUNDEE.

Old Scotch. The melody is in the *Skene MS.*, 1630.

LVIII. HAPPY GROVES.

Adapted from "The Pilgrim," composed by J. Barret in 1701.



Page 96

LIX. OF ALL THE GIRLS THAT ARE SO SMART.

Composed by Henry Carey, in 1716. N.B.—The air was superseded by another in 1790.

LX. BRITONS, STRIKE HOME.

Composed by Henry Purcell. *Bonduca*, 1695.

LXI. CHEVY CHASE.

Old English. Early Seventeenth century. Printed in 1710.

LXII. TO OLD SIR SIMON THE KING.

Old English. Seventeenth century. Printed in 1652.

LXIII. JOY TO GREAT CAESAR.

Composed by Frescobaldi (1614). Adapted by Tom Durfey in 1682 or 1683.

LXIV. THERE WAS AN OLD WOMAN.

Old English. Printed as “Puddings and Pies,” by Playford, in 1716.

LXV. DID YOU EVER HEAR OF A GALLANT SAILOR?

Old Irish. “Youghal Harbour,” in 1720. Also known as “Ned of the Hill” (1700).

LXVI. WHY ARE MINE EYES STILL FLOWING.

Old English. Seventeenth century.

LXVII. GREEN SLEEVES.

Old English. Sixteenth century.

LXVIII. ALL YOU THAT MUST TAKE A LEAP.

Composed by Lewis Ramondon. 1710.

LXIX. LUMPS OF PUDDING.

Old Irish. Printed by Playford in 1701. Adapted by Durfey in 1697.

W.H. GRATTAN FLOOD.

June 7th, 1915.

II

A CHRONOLOGICAL LIST OF THE CORRESPONDENCE OF JOHN GAY.



1712

Binfield, November 13 Alexander Pope to John Gay
 December 24 Alexander Pope to John Gay

1713

London, January 13 John Gay to Maurice Johnson, junior.
 April 23, 1713 John Gay to Maurice Johnson, junior.
 August 23 Alexander Pope to John Gay
 October 23 Alexander Pope to John Gay

1714

Binfield, May 4 Thomas Parnell and Alexander Pope to John Gay
 London, June 8 John Gay to Jonathan Swift
 Hanover, August 16 John Gay to John Arbuthnot
 September 23 Alexander Pope to John Gay

1715

London, March 3	Alexander Pope and John Gay to John Caryl
London, March 18	Alexander Pope and John Gay to Thomas Parnell
[March]	Alexander Pope and John Gay to John Caryl
April 7	Alexander Pope and John Gay to William Congreve
London [April]	John Gay and Alexander Pope to John Caryl
July 8	John Gay to Alexander Pope

1716

Undated John Gay, Jervis, John Arbuthnot
 (beginning: "I was and Alexander Pope to Thomas Parnell
 last summer in
 Devonshire").

1717

Undated John Gay to Alexander Pope
 (beginning: "Too
 late to see and
 confess myself
 mistaken")



Page 97

London, November 8 Alexander Pope to John Gay

1719

September 8 John Gay to the Hon. Mrs. Howard

1720

[circa October] John Gay to Jacob Tonson

1722

September 11 Alexander Pope to John Gay
[September or October] Alexander Pope to John Gay
(beginning: "I think
it obliging in you")

London, December 22 John Gay to Jonathan Swift

1723

Dublin, January 8 Jonathan Swift to John Gay
London, February 3 John Gay to Jonathan Swift
July 5 The Hon. Mrs. Howard to John Gay
July 12 John Gay to the Hon. Mrs. Howard
July 13 Alexander Pope to John Gay
July 22 The Hon. Mrs. Howard to John Gay
Tunbridge Wells, August John Gay to the Hon. Mrs. Howard
August The Hon. Mrs. Howard to John Gay
August 22 The Hon. Mrs. Howard to John Gay

1724

Undated John Gay to the Hon. Mrs. Howard
(beginning: "Since
I came to the Bath")

Saturday night [autumn] John Gay to Alexander Pope

1725

Thursday, 10 at night John Gay to Alexander Pope

1726



London, September 16 John Gay to Jonathan Swift
October 15 Jonathan Swift to Alexander Pope and John Gay
Whitehall, October 22 John Gay to Jonathan Swift
November 17 John Gay and Alexander Pope to
Jonathan Swift

1727

Whitehall, February 18 John Gay to Jonathan Swift
London, March 3 John Gay to John Caryl
[October] (beginning: "I The Hon. Mrs. Howard to John Gay
hear you expect and
have a mind to have, a
letter from me")
Twickenham, October 16 Alexander Pope to John Gay
October 22 John Gay and Alexander Pope to
Jonathan Swift

1728

February 12 John Gay to Edward Harley, Earl of Oxford
Whitehall, February 15 John Gay to Jonathan Swift
February 26 Jonathan Swift to John Gay
March 20 John Gay to Jonathan Swift
Dublin, March 28 Jonathan Swift to John Gay
Bath, May 16 John Gay to Jonathan Swift
June 15 The Hon. Mrs. Howard to John Gay
Bath, July 6 John Gay to Jonathan Swift
August 2 John Gay to Alexander Pope
August The Hon. Mrs. Howard to John Gay
London, December 2 John Gay to Jonathan Swift
[December, 1728 or Alexander Pope to John Gay
January 1729] (beginning: "No words
can tell you the
great concern")

1729



Page 98

[January] (beginning, "I Alexander Pope to John Gay faithfully assure you")

Sunday night [January] Alexander Pope to John Gay
[January] (beginning: "I Alexander Pope to John Gay am glad to hear of the progress")

[1][February or March] John Gay to Alexander Pope (beginning: "My melancholy increases")

From the Duke of John Gay to Jonathan Swift
Queensberry's
in Burlington
Gardens, March 18

Dublin, March 19 Jonathan Swift to John Gay

August 9 John Gay and the Duchess of Queensberry
to the Hon. Mrs. Howard

August 27 John Gay and the Duchess of Queensberry
to the Hon. Mrs. Howard

Middleton Stoney, John Gay to Jonathan Swift
November 9

Dublin, November 20 Jonathan Swift to John Gay

[Footnote 1: The authenticity of this letter is doubtful.]

1730

London, March 3 John Gay to Jonathan Swift

Dublin, March 19 Jonathan Swift to John Gay

March 31 John Gay to Jonathan Swift

May 7 John Gay to the Hon. Mrs. Howard

Amesbury, July 4 John Gay to Jonathan Swift

Twickenham, July 21 Alexander Pope to John Gay

July 31 The Hon. Mrs. Howard to John Gay

August 18 Alexander Pope to John Gay

August 20 John Gay and the Duchess of Queensberry
to the Hon. Mrs. Howard

August 22 The Hon. Mrs. Howard to John Gay

September 3 The Hon. Mrs. Howard to John Gay

September 11 John Gay and the Duchess of Queensberry
to the Hon. Mrs. Howard

September 11 Alexander Pope to John Gay

October 1 Alexander Pope to John Gay

October Alexander Pope to John Gay

October 23 Alexander Pope to John Gay



Amesbury, November 8 John Gay and the Duchess of Queensberry
to Jonathan Swift

Dublin, November 10 Jonathan Swift to John Gay

Dublin, November 19 Jonathan Swift to John Gay and the
Duchess of Queensberry

Amesbury, December 6 John Gay and the Duchess of Queensberry
to Jonathan Swift

December 17 John Gay and the Duchess of Queensberry
to Hon. Mrs. Howard

1731

Dublin, March 13 Jonathan Swift to John Gay and the
Duchess of Queensberry

March 20 John Gay to Dean Swift

April 21 John Gay and the Duchess of Queensbury
to Jonathan Swift



Page 99

Amesbury, April 27 John Gay to Jonathan Swift
Dublin, June 29 Jonathan Swift to John Gay and the
Duchess of Queensbury
June 29 The Countess of Suffolk to John Gay
July 8 John Gay to the Countess of Suffolk
July 18 The Duchess of Queensbury and John Gay
to Jonathan Swift
"The Country," August 28 Jonathan Swift to John Gay and the
Duchess of Queensbury
September 5 The Countess of Suffolk to John Gay
[November] John Gay and the Duke of Queensbury to
Jonathan Swift
December 1 Jonathan Swift to John Gay and the
Duke and Duchess of Queensbury
December 1 John Gay and Alexander Pope to Jonathan
Swift
December 16 William Cleland to John Gay

1732

London, January 18 John Gay to Jonathan Swift
March 13 John Gay to Jonathan Swift
Dublin, May 4 Jonathan Swift to John Gay
London, May 16 John Gay to Jonathan Swift
Dublin, July 10 Jonathan Swift to John Gay and the
Duchess of Queensberry
Amesbury, July 24 John Gay and the Duchess of
Queensberry to Jonathan Swift
Dublin, August 12 Jonathan Swift to John Gay and the
Duchess of Queensbury
Amesbury, August 28 John Gay and the Duchess of Queensbury
to Jonathan Swift
October 2 Alexander Pope to John Gay
Dublin, October 3 Jonathan Swift to John Gay and the
Duchess of Queensbury
October 7 John Gay to Alexander Pope
November 16 John Gay to Jonathan Swift



UNDATED.

November 3 (beginning: The Hon. Mrs. Howard to John Gay

“I have not been
well “)—B.M., Add.

MSS., 22626 f. 63

December 7 (beginning: The Hon. Mrs. Howard to John Gay

“I write this to quiet
your conscience “)—B.M.,

Add. MSS., 22626 f. 64

(Beginning: “Most John Gay to the Hon. Mrs. Howard

honoured Roger “)—B.M.,

Add. MSS., 22626 f. 59

(Beginning: “You oblige The Countess of Suffolk to John Gay

me extremely in giving
me”)—B.M., Add.

MSS., 22626 f. 61

(Beginning: “Pray tell The Countess of Suffolk to John Gay

Mr. Pope “)—B.M.,

Add. MSS.. 22626 f. 62

III

PROGRAMME OF THE REVIVAL OF “THE BEGGAR’S OPERA,” LYRIC THEATRE,
HAMMERSMITH, JUNE 7TH, 1920.



Page 100

THE BEGGAR'S OPERA

By MR. GAY

New Settings of the Airs and Additional Music by Frederic Austin.

CAST

PEACHUM.....FREDERIC AUSTIN
LOCKIT.....ARTHUR WYNN
MACHEATH.....FREDERICK RANALOW
FILCH.....ALFRED HEATHER
THE BEGGAR.....ARNOLD PILBEAM
MRS. PEACHUM.....ELSIE FRENCH
POLLY PEACHUM.....SYLVIA NELIS
LUCY LOCKIT.....VIOLET MARQUESITA
DIANA TRAPES.....BERYL FREEMAN
JENNY DIVER.....NONNY LOCK

Drawer: DAVID HODDER *Turnkey:* JACK GIRLING

Members of Macheath's Gang:

ALAN TROTTER,
 MALCOLM RIGNOLD,
 JOHN CLIFFORD,
 EDWARD BARRS,
 CHARLES STAITE

Women of the Town:

VERA HURST,
 ELLA MILNE,
 WINIFRED CHRISTIE,
 MILDRED WATSON,
 SYDNEY LEON,
 EDITH BARTLETT

* * * * *



PERIOD 1728

ACT I. PEACHUM'S HOUSE

ACT II. Sc. i. A TAVERN. Near Newgate

Sc. ii. NEWGATE

ACT III. Sc. i. A STREET

Sc. ii. NEWGATE

Sc. iii. THE CONDEMN'D HOLD

Scenes and Costumes designed by C. Lovat Fraser.

* * * * * Produced by NIGEL PLAYFAIR

INDEX

"Absence," 5; *quoted*, 6

"Achilles," 134, 135, 141, 142

"Acis and Galatea," 134

Addison, Joseph, 11, 12, 13-14, 16, 23, 37, 44

Alais, J.D', 28

Anne, Queen, 24, 33

"Araminta," 20

Arbuthnot, Dr., 22, 23, 24, 29, 34, 41, 42, 44, 51, 58, 66, 94, 95,
105, 109, 146;

letters quoted:

to Parnell, 39;

to Pope, 138;

to Swift, 30, 34, 102, 109, 111, 145

Argyll, Duke of, 80

Aston (actor), 142

Atterbury, Francis, Bishop of Rochester, 12, 23

Baller, Anthony (brother-in-law of the poet), 2

Mrs. Anthony, *i.e.*, Gay, Katherine (*q. v.*)

Rev. Joseph (nephew of the poet), 2, 140;

his "Gay's Chair," *quoted*, 4

Barber, Mrs., 127

Bathurst, Lord, 50, 54, 58, 72, 92, 145;

letter to Swift, *quoted*, 145,

"Beggar's Opera, The," 41, 75, 78-91;

"Notes on the Sources of the Tunes of 'The Beggar's Opera,'" by W.H.

Grattan Flood, Mus. D., 150;

programme of the revival at the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith, June, 1920, 162.

Bellenden, Madge, 47

Mary, 46, 47, 49

Berkeley, Hon. George, 140



Bicknell, Mrs., 37, 42

Binks, Mrs., 142

Bloodworth, Mr., 131

Blount, Martha, 47, 72, 94, 130, 131



Page 101

Teresa, 47
Bolingbroke, Viscount, 12, 24, 25, 35, 68, 90, 92
 Viscountess, 92
Bolton, Duchess of, see Fenton, Lavinia
Bradshaw, Mrs., 55
Bridgeman, 131
British Apollo, 9
Bromley, Mr. Secretary, 29
Buchanan (actor), 142
Buckingham, Lord, 15
Budgell, Eustace, 18
Bullock, H., 80
Burlington, Earl of, 39, 50, 54, 57
Burnett, Thomas, 38
Burton, Lord, 28

Cantrel, Mrs., 142
"Captives, The," 65
Caroline, Queen, 30, 34, 36, 67, 70, 103, 136
Caryll, John, 22
Castlemaine, Viscount, 112
Chandos, Lord, 50
Chapman (actor), 142
Chesterfield, Earl of, 140
Cibber, Colley, 45, 79, 102;
 his "Apology," *quoted*, 90
Clarendon, Earl of, 28, 29, 30, 33
Clark (actor), 80
Cobham, Lord, 87
Colman, George, 84, 101
"Comparisons," 5
"Complete Key to 'Three Hours After Marriage'," 44
"Congratulation to a Newly-married Couple," 5
Congreve, William, 15, 23, 58, 68, 79, 92, 94
"Contemplation on Night," 20
Cornbury, Lord, 140
"Court Poems," 40
Courthope, Professor, his "Life of Pope," *quoted*, 44, 45
Craggs, James, the younger, 52



- Cromwell, Henry, 14, 16, 17, 36
Cumberland, Prince William Augustus, Duke of, 67, 70
- Delany, Dr., 93
"Devonshire Hill, A," 5
"Distrest Wife, The," 134, 142, 143
Dobson, Austin, his article on Gay in "Dictionary of National Biography," *quoted*, 7, 28, 42
Dormer, General James, 112, 140
Douglas, Lord Charles, 111, 122
Drelincourt, Mrs., 127
"Dress," 20
Drumlanrig, Earl of, 111, 122
- Egleton, Mrs., 80, 142
"Epigrammatical Petition," 9; *quoted*, 29.
"Epistle to the Right Honourable Paul Methuen, Esquire," *quoted*, 146
"Epistle to the Right Honourable the Earl of Burlington," *quoted*, 39
"Epistle to the Right Honourable William Pulteney, Esquire," 46
Essex, Earl of, 66
Examiner, The, 11, 12
- "FABLE," 5
"Fables" (first series), 69-70
"Fables" (second, series), 135, 144
"Fan, The," 20, 21
Fenton,—, 52, 119
Fenton, Lavinia, Duchess of Bolton, 80, 91
Fielding, Sir John, 84
Fitzwilliam, Countess of, 67
Fitzwilliam, Earl of, 67
Flood, W.H. Grattan, Mus. D. See Grattan Flood, W.H.
Flying Post, The, 12
Ford, Charles, 22, 29
Fortescue, John (brother-in-law of the poet), 2
Fortescue, Mrs. John, *i.e.*, Gay, Joanna (*q. v.*)
Fortescue, William, 2, 3, 22, 66
Freind, Dr. John, 11, 12
- Garrick, David, 84
Garth, Dr., 16
Gay, Anthony, 1
Gilbert le, 1
Rev. James (uncle of the poet), 2



Joanna (sister of the poet), 2, 117
Jonathan (brother of the poet), 2, 7
Johans, 1
John (grandfather of the poet), 1
John (uncle of the poet), 2
John (the poet), ancestors, 1;
parentage and family, 1-2;

Page 102

birth, 2;
death of parents, 2;
lives with his uncle, Thomas Gay, 2;
attends Free School at Barr staple, 2-3;
apprenticed to a London silk-mercator, 3;
in ill-health, 4;
returns to Barnstaple, 4;
early writings, 4-5;
youthful love affair, 5-6;
in improved health, 7;
returns to London, 7;
life in the Metropolis, 7-8;
love of food, drink, and dress, 8-9;
"Wine," 9-10;
"The Present State of Wit," 11-14;
makes acquaintance with Henry Cromwell and Pope, 14;
"On a Miscellany of Poems to Bernard Lintott," 14-16;
becomes intimate with Pope, 17;
domestic secretary to the Duchess of Monmouth, 18-19;
"Rural Sports," 20;
some minor verses, 20;
"The Fan," 20-21;
"The Wife of Bath," 21, 113, 115-116;
his charm, 21-22;
Pope as his protector and adviser, 22;
"Memoirs of Scriblerus," 23;
"The Shepherd's Week," 24-28;
appointed Secretary to Lord Clarendon's
Mission to Hanover, 1714, 29;
letters from Hanover, 29;
returns to England on death of Queen Anne, 33;
"A Letter to a Lady," 34-35;
"The What D'ye Call It," 35, 36-39;
recognised as a man of letters, 39;
visit to Exeter with the Earl of Burlington, 39;
"Trivia," 39-40;
"Court Poems," 40;
"The Toilet," 41;
second visit to Devonshire, 41;
"Three Hours After Marriage," 41-45;



visits the Continent with Pulteney, 45-46;
intimate with the Maids of Honour, 46;
and with the Hon. Mrs. Howard, 46-47;
again abroad with Pulteney, 48;
his literary reputation in 1720, 50;
"Poems on Several Occasions," 50;
given a present of South Sea stock,
and invests his fortune in it, 52;
loses his money when the "Bubble" bursts, 53;
financial embarrassment, 53;
the desire of his friends to aid him, 54;
the disappointment affects his health, 55;
recuperates at Bath, 55;
appointed a Commissioner of the State Lottery and
given an apartment in Whitehall, 57;
at Tunbridge Wells, 58;
correspondence with the Hon. Mrs. Howard, 59-64;
"The Captives," 65;
dedication to the Princess of Wales, 65;
again at Bath, 66, 67;
first meeting with Swift, 68;
becomes more intimate with the Duke and
Duchess of Queensberry, 69;
"The Fables" (first series), 69;
dedication to Prince William Augustus, 69;
his expectation of a post at Court, 70;
offered appointment of Gentleman Usher to the Princess Louisa, 70;
his indignation, 70;
refuses the post, 70;
the opinions of Pope and Swift on the offer, 71-74;
lampooned, 75-77;
"The Beggar's Opera," 78-91, 93;
at Bath, 92-94;
"Polly," 95-101, 108;
loses his Commissionship and his apartments in Whitehall, 101;
an end of hope of Court preferment, 102;
seriously ill, 105;



Page 103

lives with the Duke and Duchess of Queensberry, 110;
in failing health, 133;
“Acis and Galatea,” 134;
“Achilles,” 134, 141, 142;
“The Distrest Wife,” 134, 142, 143;
“The Rehearsal at Goatham,” 135, 143;
“Fables” (second series), 135, 144;
death, 138;
buried in Westminster Abbey, 139;
his monument, 140;
his epitaph written by Pope, 141;
posthumous works, 141-144;
his friends’ devotion, 145-147;
letters quoted: to Arbuthnot, 31;
to Caryl, 37, 38;
to Parnell, 38;
to Pope, 42, 93, 106, 137;
to the Countess of Suffolk, 48, 59, 61, 66, 111, 117, 120, 121,
124, 129;
to Swift, 9, 29, 55, 57, 58, 69, 70, 72, 74, 78, 87, 92, 93, 107,
113, 115, 116, 127, 130, 132, 133, 135, 138;
to Tonson, 53.
Chronological List of the Correspondence of John Gay, 156.
References to his writings will be found under the respective titles.
Katherine (sister of the poet), 1, 117
Richard, 1
Richard (uncle of the poet), 2
Thomas (uncle of the poet), 2
William (father of the poet), 1
Mrs. William, *i.e.*, Hanmer, Miss (*q.v.*)
Gaye, John, 1
Richard, 1
George I., 30, 33, 70
II., 36, 100, 103
Gore, Mr., 140
Grafton, Duke of, 95, 97-99, 101
Grattan Flood, W.H., Mus. D.:
“Notes on the Sources of the Tunes of ‘The Beggar’s Opera’” 150
Griffin (actor), 38



Gumley, Anne Maria, 46

Hall (actor), 80, 142

Hamilton, Duchess of, 46, 47

Hanmer, Miss (mother of the poet), 1, 2

Rev. Jonathan (grandfather of the poet), 1

Rev. John (uncle of the poet), 2, 3, 4

Harcourt, Lord, 48

“Hare and Many Friends, The,” *quoted*, 70

Harley, Thomas, 28

Hawkins, Sir John, 85

Henley, Anthony, 12

Herbert, Lord, 118, 120

Miss, 118

Herring, Dr. (Archbishop of Canterbury), 84

Hervey, Lady, 101

Miss, 47

“High German Doctor, The,” 38

Hill, Aaron, 3, 9;

letter to Savage, *quoted*, 18

Henry, 10

Hippisley (actor), 80

Hollins, Dr., 109

Horneck, Philip, 38

Howard, The Hon. Mrs., *see* Suffolk, Countess of

Howe, Miss, 48

Irvine, Lady Anne, letter to Lord Carlisle, *quoted*, 142

Jennings, Mary, 59

Johnson (actor), 42

Samuel, his “Lives of the Poets,” *quoted*, 18, 21, 28, 42, 47, 52, 65, 85

Kent, William, 50

King, Dr. William, 11, 12

“Ladies’ Petition to the Honourable the House of Commons,” 5

Laguerre (actor), 142

Lepell, Miss, 46, 47, 49

“Letter from a Lady in the City to a Lady in the Country, A,” 43

“Letter to a Lady, A” 34; *quoted*, 34-35

“Letter to a Young Lady,” 5; *quoted*, 6

“Letter to John Gay, concerning his late Farce, entitled a Comedy,” 44

Leveridge (actor), 142



Lewis, Erasmus, 14, 22, 29, 51, 58
Lincoln, Earl of, 57
Lintott, Bernard, 14, 39, 43, 50, 53, 54
Louisa, Princess, 70
Luck, Rev. Robert, 3



Page 104

Mainwaring, Arthur, 12
Marlborough, Henrietta, Duchess of, 88, 92, 94, 95, 108
Martin, Mrs., 80
Meadows, Miss, 121
Medley, The, 12
“Memoirs of Scriblerus,” 23, 29
Methuen, Sir Paul, 51
Monmouth, Duchess of, 18-19, 29
Montagu, Lady Mary Wortley, 40, 47
Monthly Amusement, 12
Motte, Benjamin, 87, 90
Murray, Miss, 47

Norsa, Miss, 142
Nash, Ricard (“Beau”), 94

Oates, Miss, 142
Observer, The, 12
“Ode for the New Year, Written by Colley Cibber, Esq.,”
quoted, 102, 103
Oldmixon, John, 12
“On a Miscellany of Poems to Bernard Lintott,” *quoted*, 10,
14, 15-16
Otway, Thomas, 37
Oxford, Earl of, 29, 33, 72
Ozell, John, 12

“Panegyric Epistle to Mr. Thomas Snow, Goldsmith,”
quoted, 53
“Panthea,” 20
Parnell, Thomas, 22, 29
Paull, H.M., his essay on Gay, *quoted*, 95-96
Pelham, Mrs., 66
Pendarves, Mrs., letter to Mrs. Anne Granville, *quoted*, 101
Penkethman (actor), 37
Peterborough, Earl of, 63, 64, 94
Philips, Ambrose, 25, 26, 27, 28, 67
John, 10
Playfair, Nigel, 91 *note*
“Poems on Several Occasions,” 50
“Polly,” 95-101, 108
Pope, Alexander, 14, 16, 17, 19, 20, 23, 27, 29, 34, 38, 39, 40, 41,
43, 44, 45, 51, 54, 58, 66, 68, 79, 80, 90, 107, 123, 130, 131,
132, 134, 140, 145, 146;



- his epitaph on Gay *quoted*, 141;
his "Epistle to Arbuthnot" *quoted*, 145;
his "Farewell to London" *quoted*, 17;
letters quoted: to Martha Blount, 46;
to Caryl, 39, 45, 141;
to Congreve, 36;
to Cromwell, 14, 16;
to Gay, 16, 19, 20, 21, 22, 33, 46, 71, 105, 119, 122, 136;
to Parnell, 43;
to Swift, 8, 23, 67, 73, 79, 86, 89, 139, 141, 142, 146
"Pope's Welcome from Greece, Mr." *quoted*, 8, 47-48, 52, 145,
146, 147
Poyntz, S., 136
Pratt, Dr. Benjamin, 29
"Prediction," 5
"Present State of Wit, The," 11;
quoted, 9, 12, 13-14
Prior, Matthew, 12, 15
Pulteney, William, 45, 46, 54, 90, 92, 108, 110
Mrs. William, see Gumley, Anne Maria
- Queensberry, Duke of, 69, 101, 115, 140, 141, 143
Duchess of, 69, 74, 87, 88, 100, 101, 105, 108, 109, 110, 111,
118, 119, 122, 123, 127, 128, 129, 130, 131, 133, 136, 140, 143,
144, 145;
letters quoted: to the Countess of Suffolk, 120, 121, 134,
144;
to Swift, 144.
- Quin, James, 79, 80, 142
- Raynor, William, 3
Redpath, George, 12
"Rehearsal at Gotham, The," 135, 143
"Reproof and Flattery," 20
Rich, John, 79, 90, 95, 96
Rivers, Lord, 28
Roberts, J., 40
Rolt, Mrs., 66
Rooke, George, 41
"Rural Sports" 20; *quoted*, 8, 20



Page 105

- Salway (actor), 142
Savage, Richard, 18
Scarborough, Lord, 67
Scott, Jane, 5, 6
Scudamore, Miss, 48
 Lady, 93, 94
Senesimo, 58
"Shepherd's Week, The," 24, 28, 35, 50; *quoted*, 9, 24, 25, 27
Shrewsbury, Duke of, 33
Skerrett, Molly, 80
Smith, Miss, 112
Snow, Thomas, 53
Somerville, Lord, 66
Sophia, Electress, 30
Spectator, The, 11
Spence, Joseph, his "Anecdotes of Pope" *quoted* 43, 44
Stanhope, Lord 46
 William, 100
Steele, Sir Richard, 11, 12, 13-14, 21
Swift, Jonathan, 12, 23, 33, 35, 51, 68, 73, 74, 78, 81, 84, 106, 138;
 his "Libel on the Rev. Mr. Delany and His Excellency Lord Cartaret," *quoted*, 73;
 his "Epistle to Mr. Gay," *quoted*, 73;
 Verses on his own Death *quoted*, 147;
 letters quoted: to Gay, 56, 68, 88, 89, 116, 123, 126, 127, 131, 133;
 to Erasmus Lewis, 146;
 to Pope, 41, 67, 68, 69, 73, 78, 86, 93, 107, 143;
 to the Countess of Suffolk, 68;
 to Tickell, 68
Suffolk, Henrietta Howard, Countess of, 30, 46, 47, 54, 67, 68, 74, 90, 109, 110, 119, 130;
 letters to Gay *quoted*, 59, 60, 63, 64, 74, 94, 122, 128, 130
 Earl of, 128

Tatler, The, 11, 12
Thanet, Countess of, 111
"Thought on Eternity, A," 20
"Three Hours After Marriage," 41-42, 43, 44, 50
Tickell, John, 26
"To a Young Lady with some Lamphreys," 8
"To Miss Jane Scott," 5; *quoted*, 5



“To My Chair,” 5

“Toilet, The,” 41

Tonson, Jacob, 15, 20, 50, 53, 69

“Trivia,” 39, 50

Tutchin, John, 12

Underhill, John, *quoted*, 5, 25

“Vulture, the Sparrow, and other Birds, The,” *quoted*, 103-104

Walker (actor), 80, 142

Walpole, Sir Robert, 80, 99

Warwick, Earl of, 44, 46

Watts, J., 69

Weekly Review, 12

“What D’ye Call It,” 35, 36-39, 43, 50

Whig Examiner, The, 12

“Wife of Bath, The,” 21, 50, 113, 115-116

Wilcox, Dr., Bishop of Rochester, 140

William Augustus, Prince. See Cumberland, Duke of

“Wine,” *quoted*, 10-11

Woodward, Dr., 41, 42

Wyndham, Sir William, 137

Younger, Miss, 38