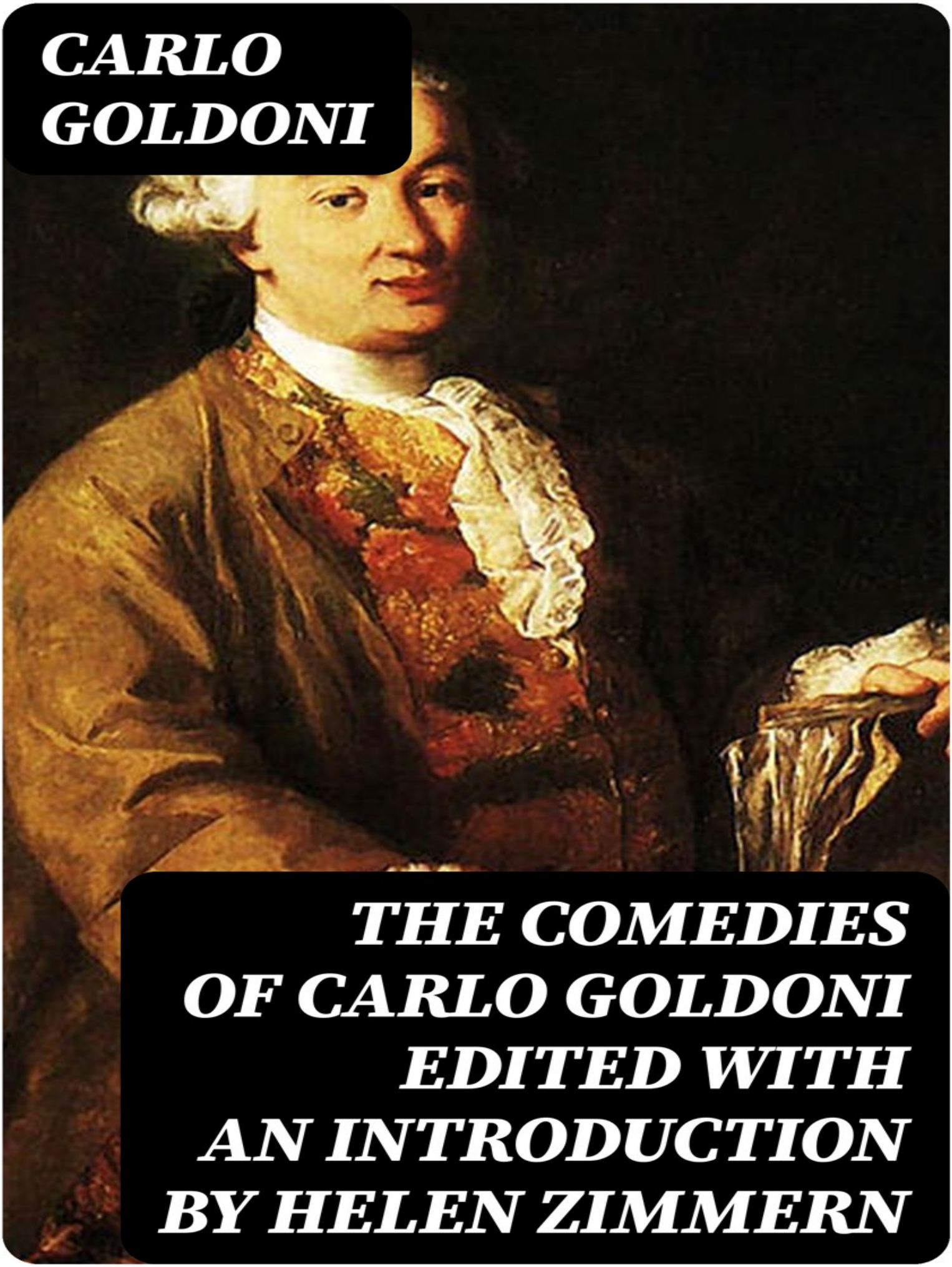
CARLO GOLDONI



THE COMEDIES OF CARLO GOLDONI EDITED WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY HELEN ZIMMERN

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Contact: DigiCat@okpublishing.info

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INTRODUCTION.

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"Painter and son of nature," wrote Voltaire, at that time the arbitrator and the dispenser of fame in cultured Europe, to Carlo Goldoni, then a rising dramatist, "I would entitle your comedies, 'Italy liberated from the Goths.'" The sage of Ferney's quick critical faculty had once again hit its sure mark, for it is Goldoni's supreme merit, and one of his chief titles to fame and glory, that he released the Italian theatre from the bondage of the artificial and pantomime performances that until then had passed for plays, and that, together with Molière, he laid the foundations of the drama as it is understood in our days. Indeed, Voltaire, in his admiration for the Venetian playwright, also called him "the Italian Molière," a comparison that is more accurate than such comparisons between authors of different countries are apt to be, though, like all such judgments, somewhat rough and ready. It is interesting in this respect to confront the two most popular dramas of the two dramatists, Molière's "Le Misanthrope" and Goldoni's "Il Burbero Benefico." Goldoni, while superior in imagination, in spontaneity, deals more with the superficial aspects of humanity. Molière, on the contrary, probes deep into the human soul, and has greater elegance of form. In return, Goldoni is more genial and kindly in his judgments, and, while lacking none of Molière's keenness of observation, is devoid of his bitter satire. Both have the same movement and life, the same intuitive perception of what will please

the public, the same sense of dramatic proportion. Goldoni was, however, less happy than Molière as regards the times in which his lines were cast. The French dramatist, like Shakespeare, was born at an age in which his fatherland was traversing a glorious epoch of national story. The Italian lived instead in the darkest period of that political degradation which was the lot of the fairest of European countries, until quite recently, when she emancipated herself, threw off the chains of foreign bondage, and proclaimed herself mistress of her own lands and fortunes. And manners and customs were no less in decadence in private as well as in public,—a sad epoch, truly, though to outsiders it looked light-hearted and merry enough. Goldoni's lot was cast in the final decades of the decrepitude of Venice, the last of the Italian proud Republics, which survived only to the end of the eighteenth century, indeed dissolved just four years after her great dramatist's demise. His long life comprised almost the whole of that century, from the wars of the Spanish Succession, which open the history of that era, to the Peace of Aix-la-Chapelle and the French Revolution.

Historical events had, however, merely an outward and accidental influence on this great artist-nature, entirely absorbed in his work, and indifferent, even unconscious, to all that surged around him in this respect. To be assured that this is so, we need merely peruse Goldoni's own Memoirs, composed by him in his old age, and which, according to Gibbon's verdict, are even more amusing to read than his very comedies.

"The immortal Goldoni," as his countrymen love to call him, was born in Venice in 1707. His family were of Modenese origin. The grandfather, who held a lucrative and honourable post in the Venetian Chamber of Commerce, married as his first wife a lady from his native town, who died, leaving him a son. He then espoused a widow with two daughters, the elder of whom, in due course, he gave in marriage to this son. The couple became the parents of the playwright.

This grandfather had a considerable influence over Goldoni's youth, and also modified his later life. A good-natured, not ill-intentioned man, he was nevertheless hopelessly extravagant, and inordinately addicted to material pleasures,—at that time, it must ever in justice be remembered, the only outlet possible to male energies and ambitions. For a pleasure-lover, the Venice of that day was an earthly paradise, and the result in this case was that the elder Goldoni put no restraint upon himself whatever. It so happened that he had the entire control not only of his wife's comfortable fortune, but of that of her two daughters. With this he hired a large villa, six leagues from Venice, where he lived in so free and open-handed a manner as to rouse the jealousy of the neighbouring proprietors. A fanatic for the stage and all that pertained to it, he caused comedies and operas to be performed under his roof; the best singers and actors were hired to minister to his amusement; reckless expenditure and joyous living were the watchwords of the house. It was in this atmosphere that the child Carlo was reared, no wonder it affected his character. It may be said that he imbibed a love for the play with his

first breath. Unfortunately, ere he was a man, the pleasure-loving and open-handed grandfather caught cold and died, to be followed soon after by his wife. At a blow all was changed for the Goldoni family. Carlo's father, having lacked proper training, was unable to maintain himself in his father's position, which was offered him; the property had to be sold, and when all debts were paid there remained only the mother's dowry for the maintenance of the whole family. However, there was clearly good stuff in Goldoni's father. Already a man of some years, he resolved nevertheless to study medicine in order to earn an honest livelihood, and, wonderful to tell, he became a very popular and successful physician, practising first at Perugia. It was there that, only eight years old, Carlino, as he was then called, wrote a comedy, which so vastly pleased his father that in consequence he resolved to give him the best education within his reach. To this end he placed him in the local Jesuit school. At first the boy, shy and repressed, cut a bad figure, but by the end of the first term he came out at the head of his class, to the immense delight of his father. To reward him for this success, his parents instigated for his benefit what we should now call private theatricals. As women were forbidden to appear on the stage within the Papal States, to which Perugia then belonged, Carlino took the part of the prima donna, and was further called upon to write a prologue, which, according to the taste of the day, was absurdly affected and hyperbolical. Goldoni gives in his Memoirs the opening sentence of this literary effort, and it may serve as a measure of the extent to which he became a reformer of Italian style:—

"Most benignant Heaven, behold us, like butterflies, spreading in the rays of your most splendid sun, the wings of our feeble inventions, which bear our flight towards a light so fair."

To compare this bombast with the crystal clearness and simplicity of the language of Goldoni's comedies, is to gain a fair estimate of what he had to overcome and what he achieved.

A while after, the family removed to Chioggia, the climate of Perugia not being suited to Goldoni's mother. He himself was sent to Rimini to study philosophy in the Dominican school, a study which in those days was considered indispensable for the medical career to which he was destined. But philosophy as taught at Rimini did not attract our hero, and instead of poring over the long passages dictated to him by his professor, he read Plautus, Terence, Aristophanes, and the fragments of Menander. Nor did the philosophic debates amuse him half as much as a company of actors with whom he contrived to knock up an acquaintance. Hearing that these people, to his immense regret, were leaving Rimini, and that of all places in the world they were proceeding to Chioggia, it occurred to the youthful scamp that nothing could be more easy and delightful than to go with them in the big barge they had hired for their transit. The rogue knew full well that his mother at least would forgive him his escapade in the pleasure of having him back again. So he went, and there was an end of his philosophy. As he foresaw, his mother pardoned him, and his father happened to be absent on business. From Pavia, where he was staying with a relative,

at that time governor of the city, Dr. Goldoni wrote that his Marchese had promised to be kind to his eldest son. "So," went on the letter, "if Carlo behaves well, he will provide for him." This sentence filled Carlo the disobedient with alarm. Nevertheless, when his father returned, he forgave him almost as readily as his mother had done. They were not strict disciplinarians, these Goldoni, but easy-going folk, who liked to live and let live.

The father now resolved to keep his son at home at Chioggia, that he might begin to study medicine under his guidance. Very desultory study it was, both father and son thinking more of the theatre and of actors than of the pharmacopœia. So medicine, too, had to be abandoned. Goldoni's mother then bethought her of the law, and Carlo was sent to Venice to study under the care of an uncle. At Venice he found no less than seven theatres in full swing, and all of them he frequented in turn, enjoying especially the operas of Metastasio, which were the latest novelty,—that author who may be said to have done for Italian opera what Goldoni did for Italian comedy, though unfortunately the music to which his graceful verses have been set has not, like them, proved immortal. After some months of alternate gaiety and study of jurisprudence, Carlo was moved to Pavia to complete his studies, a vacancy having been found for him there in the Papal College. Various preliminaries were needful to obtain admission, among them the tonsure. During the delay caused by these formalities, Carlo devoted himself to the study of dramatic literature in the library of one of the professors. Here he found, beside his old friends, the classical dramatists, the

English, Spanish, and French playwrights. But the Italian, where were they? he asked himself, and at once the resolve awoke in him that he would do his very utmost towards reviving the drama of his native land and tongue. What he would do should be to imitate the style and precision of the great authors of antiquity, but to give to his plays more movement, happier terminations, and characters better formulated. "We owe," he says, "respect to the great writers who have smoothed the way for us in science and in art, but every age has its dominant genius and every climate its national taste. The Greek and Roman writers knew human nature and copied it closely, but without illusion and without skill. To this is owing that want of moderation and decency which has led to the proscription of the drama by the Church."

At Pavia, Goldoni spent his time over everything else but study, nor was his sojourn there long, for a satire composed and published, taken together with other pranks, led to his expulsion from the College. His parents as usual forgave him, and he was allowed to accompany his father on one of his business journeys, during the course of which Goldoni tells that he obtained much knowledge of men and things. At Modena, it happened that the pair fell in with some very devout people, and saw the "admonition" of an abbé of their acquaintance, who was punished in public after a severe and impressive fashion. Carlo, who was at the time suffering from a juvenile attack of disgust with the world, felt this spectacle arouse in him the desire to become a Capuchin monk. His wise father did not contradict him, and took him to Venice, ostensibly to present him to the Director of the

Capuchins. But he plunged him also into a round of gaieties, dinners, suppers, theatres; and Carlo discovered that, to avoid the perils of this world, it was not needful to renounce it altogether. He had now arrived at man's estate, it was requisite he should have an occupation. Through the kindness of friends he obtained a position in the service of the government, not lucrative but yet remunerative, which he contrived to make useful to his dramatic training, the one idea to which he ever remained faithful. This position, Chancellor to the Podestà, required almost continual change of place, and although Goldoni himself liked it very well, his mother disapproved of it highly, calling it a gipsy's post.

In 1731, Goldoni lost his father, an irreparable sorrow to him. He now found himself, at twenty-four, the head of his family. His mother consequently insisted he should give up his wanderings and assume the lawyer's toga. He therefore went to Padua to finish his studies, and this time he studied really, passing a brilliant examination, though the whole night previously he had spent at the gaming-table, whence the University beadle had to fetch him to come before his examiners.

Behold him now a full-fledged lawyer, but with few clients and causes to defend. His fruitless leisure was employed in scribbling almanacs in terza rima, in which he sought to insert such prophecies as were likely to fulfil themselves. In hopes of further bettering his fortunes, he also wrote a tragedy called "Amalasunta." He had hoped this would bring him in one hundred zecchini. Unfortunately, however, he had at the same time let himself in for a love affair, from which there was no other exit but that which his father had

taught him to adopt in similar cases, namely, flight from the scene of action. So, putting the MSS. of "Amalasunta" under his arm, he bolted from his native town. This was to be the beginning of his artistic career. Milan was his destination, where he arrived in the full swing of the Carnival. Here he was brought in contact with Count Prata, Director of the Opera. At a reception at the house of the prima ballerina, Goldoni undertook to read his "Amalasunta." The leading actor took exception to it from the outset, and by the time the reading was ended none of the audience were left in the room except Count Prata. The play ended, the Count told the author that his opera was composed with due regard to the rules of Aristotle and Horace, but was not framed according to the rules laid down for Italian opera in their day.

"In France," he continued, "you can try to please the public, but here in Italy, it is the actors and actresses whom you must consult, as well as the composer of the music and the stage decorators. Everything must be done according to a certain form, which I will explain to you. Each of the three principal personages of the opera must sing five airs, two in the first act, two in the second, and one in the third. The second actress and the second soprano can only have three, and the lower rank of artists must be contented with one, or at most two. The author must submit his words to the musician, and must take care that two pathetic airs do not follow each other. The same rule must be observed with regard to the airs of bravura, of action, of secondary action, as also with regard to the minuet and rondeau. And above all things remember that on no account must moving or

showy airs be given to the performers of the second rank. These poor people must take what they can get, and make no attempt to shine."

The Count would have said more, but the author had heard enough. He thanked his kind critic, took leave of his hostess, went back to the inn, ordered a fire, and reduced "Amalasunta" to ashes. This performance completed, not without natural regret, he ordered a good supper, which he consumed with relish, after which he went to bed and slept tranquilly all night. On the morrow, dining with the Venetian Ambassador, he recounted to him his adventures. The Ambassador, compassionating his destitute condition, and finding pleasure in his company, found a post for him in his household as a sort of chamberlain. This position, by no means arduous, left Goldoni plenty of time for himself. He now made the acquaintance of a quack doctor, a certain Buonafede, who went by the name of the Anonimo, and was a very prince of charlatans. This man, among other devices to attract customers, carried about with him a company of actors, who, after assisting him in distributing the objects which he sold and collecting the money for them, gave a representation in his small theatre erected in the public square. It so happened that the company of comedians which had been engaged for that Easter season at Milan, unexpectedly failed to keep their engagement, so that the Milanese were left without players. The Anonimo proposed his company, Goldoni through the Venetian Minister helped him to attain his end, and wrote for the first performance an intermezzo, "The Venetian Gondolier," which was set to music by the composer attached to the company, and had,

as Goldoni himself says, all the success so slight an effort deserved. This little play was the first of his works performed and afterwards published.

At this time in Italy, the so-called *Commedie dell' arte* or *a soggetto* held the boards; extremely artificial, stilted forms of dramatic composition, which, it is true, testified to the quick and ready wit of the Italians, but also to a puerile taste, far removed from artistic finish. These plays were all performed by actors in masks, after the manner of the classical drama, and in the greater number of cases the players were supplied merely with the plot and the situations of the play, the dialogue having to be supplied by the invention of the actors themselves; the outline was often of the roughest nature, much after the manner of modern drawing-room charades, but there were certain stock characters, such as an old man who is the butt of the tricks and deceptions of the others, an extravagant son, scampish servants, and corrupt or saucy chambermaids. These characters and their established costumes were derived from different cities of Italy, and were traditional from the earliest appearance of the *Commedie dell' arte*. Thus, the father, Pantaloon, a Venetian merchant, the doctor, a lawyer or professor from learned Bologna, and Brighella and Harlequin, Bergamasque servants as stupid as the corrupt or saucy maid-servants and lovers from Rome and Tuscany were sharp. Lance and Speed in "Two Gentlemen of Verona" are good specimens of these characters. The merchant and the doctor, called in Italian "the two old men," always wore a mantle. Pantaloon, or Pantaleone, is a corruption of the cry, *Plantare il Leone*,

(Plant the Lion), to the sound of which, and under shadow of their banner, the Lion of their patron St. Mark, the Venetians had conquered their territories and wealth. Pantaloon was the impersonation, however, not of fighting but of trading Venice, and wore the merchant costume still in use, with but slight modification, in Goldoni's day. The dress of the doctor was that of the lawyers of the great university, and the strange mask which was worn by this character imitated a wine-mark which disfigured the countenance of a certain well-known legal luminary, according to a tradition extant among the players in Goldoni's time. Finally, "Brighella and Arlecchino," called in Italy Zanni,[1] were taken from Bergamo as the extremes of sharpness or stupidity, the supposed two characteristics of the inhabitants of that city. Brighella represented a meddlesome, waggish, and artful servant, who wore a sort of livery with a dark mask, copied after the tanned skin of the men of that sub-Alpine region. Some actors in this part were called Finocchio, Scappino (Molière's Scapin), but it was always the same character, and always a Bergamasque. Arlecchino, or Harlequin, too, had often different names, but he never changed his birthplace, was always the same fool, and wore the same dress, a coat of different-coloured patches, cobbled together anyhow (hence the patchwork dress of the modern pantomime). The hare's tail which adorned his hat formed in Goldoni's time part of the ordinary costume of the Bergamasque peasants. Pantaloon's disguise was completed by a beard of ridiculous cut, and he always wore slippers. It is in allusion to this that Shakespeare calls the sixth age of man, "the lean and slippered pantaloon."

When Goldoni began to write, the drama had fallen into a sadly burlesque condition. Shortly after the first performance of his "Venetian Gondolier," a play called "Belisario" was represented, in which the blinded hero was led on to the stage by Harlequin, and beaten with a stick to show him the way. This indignity of presentation awoke in Goldoni a desire to write a play on the same theme. Asking the principal actor in this farce, what he thought of it, the man replied, "It is a joke, a making fun of the public, but this sort of thing will go on till the stage is reformed." And he encouraged Goldoni to put his purpose into action. He did indeed begin a play on this theme, but wars and sieges hindered its performance; for the War of the Polish Succession broke out, that war called the war of Don Carlos, regarding which Carlyle is so sarcastic in his Life of Frederick the Great; and Milan was occupied by the King of Sardinia, to the great astonishment of Goldoni, who, although he lived in the house of an ambassador, and should have been well informed of current events, knew no more about them than an infant. He now accompanied his chief to Crema, Modena, and Parma, in which latter city, he, the man of peace *par excellence*, assisted at the great battle of June 1734. The impressions then gained, he afterwards utilised in his comedy, "L'Amante Militare." Indeed, skilful workman that he was, he always turned to account whatever befell him, whatever he saw or heard, and his wandering and adventurous life furnished him many opportunities for studying men and manners.

It would lead us too far to follow Goldoni through all the incidents of his varied history. It must suffice to indicate the

salient points. In 1736, having freed himself from service to the Ambassador, and having again now consorted with actors, now exercised his legal profession, he married the woman who proved his good angel, Nicoletta Conio, who accompanied him all his life, modest, affectionate, indulgent, long-suffering, light-hearted even in the midst of adverse fortune, enamoured of him and of his fame, his truest friend, comforter, inspirer, and stay: in a word, an ideal woman, whose character has been exquisitely sketched by the modern Italian playwright, Paolo Ferrari, in his graceful comedy, "Goldoni e le sue sedici Commedie." Shortly after this marriage, and in large part thanks to his wife's encouragement and faith in him, Goldoni issued finally from out the tortuous labyrinth of conventional tragedies, *intermezzi cantabili*, and serious and comic operas in which hitherto his talents had been imprisoned, and found his true road, that of character comedy. His first attempt at a reforming novelty was the abolition of the mask, to which he had a just objection, considering it, with perfect reasonableness, as fatal to the development of the drama of character.

But he was not to go on his road unhindered. War, so frequent in those days of petty States, once more crossed his plans, and this conjoined to his native love for roaming, inherited from his restless father, caused him to sojourn in many cities, and encounter many adventures gay and grave, all recounted by him with unfailing good temper in his Memoirs, in which he never says an unkind word, even of his worst enemies; for Goldoni's was an essentially amicable character. He writes of himself:—

"My mental nature is perfectly analogous to my physical; I fear neither cold nor heat, neither do I let myself be carried away by anger, nor be intoxicated by success.... My great aim in writing my Comedies has been not to spoil nature, and the sole scope of my Memoirs is to tell the truth.... I was born pacific, and have always kept my equanimity."

These words sum up the man and the author. In Goldoni the perfect equilibrium of the faculties of the man correspond to the perfectly just and accurate sense of truth and naturalness which is revealed in the writer.

After five years spent in Pisa, practising, and not unsuccessfully, as a lawyer, and hoping he had sown his theatrical wild oats, and had now settled down as a quiet burgher, Goldoni was roused from this day-dream (which after all did not reflect his deepest sentiments, but only an acquired worldly wisdom) by an offer from Medebac, the leader of a group of comedians, to join his fortune to theirs as dramatic author to the company. After some hesitation, his old love for the stage gained the upper hand, and Goldoni assented, binding himself to Medebac for a certain number of years. From that time forward he remained true to his real passion, the theatre.

The company proceeded to Venice, at that time in the last days of its glory, but dying gaily, merrily. The Venice of those days, an author of the time said, was as immersed in pleasure as in water. And above all did its inhabitants love the play. To this city, among this people, Goldoni returned, one of its own children, endowed with its nature, apt to understand its wishes and inclinations. And here, among his compatriots, he resolved not to follow the bad theatrical

taste in vogue in favour of spectacular plays and scurrilous *Commedie dell' arte*, but to take up for Italy the task accomplished by Molière for France, and to re-conduct comedy into the right road, from which it had wandered so far.

"I had no rivals to combat," he writes, "I had only prejudices to surmount."

The first play written for unmasked actors proved unsuccessful. Goldoni was not daunted. He wrote a second. It was applauded to the echo, and he saw himself well launched upon his career as a reformer. The great obstacle to his entire success lay in the difficulty of finding actors, as the masked parts could be taken by greatly inferior players; and also by the circumstance, already pointed out to him by his critic of "Amalasunta," that an Italian playwright had to think more of pleasing his actors than his public. What Goldoni had to endure from this *gens irritabilis*, from their rancour, vapours, caprices, stolid and open opposition to his reform, is told with much good nature and sense of fun in his Memoirs. It can have been far from easy to endure, and no doubt often exasperated the author, though in his old age he can speak of it so calmly and dispassionately. But Goldoni, even as a young man, was wise, and proceeded slowly, first making himself and his name known and popular on the old lines, and only risking his new ideas under favourable conditions. Thus he respected the antique unities of time and action, which, after all, save in the hands of great genius, are most conducive to dramatic success, and he only infringed the unity of place to a certain extent, always confining the action of the comedies within the walls

of the same town. He says, with a sagacity not common in his profession, that he should not have met with so much opposition, had it not been for the indiscreet zeal of his admirers, who exalted his merits to so excessive a degree, that wise and cultivated people were roused to contradict such fanaticism. As to the ill feeling roused by the ridicule freely showered by Goldoni upon the corrupt customs of his time, he takes no heed of it, save to redouble his efforts in the same direction. Like Molière, he had the courage to put upon the boards the defects and absurdities of his own age, not merely those of a bygone time. And his satire, though keen, is never bitter. His laugh is an honest one. As Thackeray says of Fielding, "it clears the air." His dramatic censure is considered to have been instrumental in putting down the State-protected gambling which was the plague-spot of Venice in those days, and further in giving the first death-blows to that debased survival from the time of chivalry, the *Cavaliere Servente*, or *Cicisbeo*.

Goldoni's diligence was as great and untiring as his invention was fertile. Thus once, provoked by an unjust *fiasco*, he publicly promised that he would write and produce sixteen new comedies in the course of the next year, and he kept his pledge, though at the time of making it he had not one of these plays even planned. And among this sixteen are some of his Masterpieces, such as "Pamela" and the "Bottega del Caffé." The theme of Pamela was not exactly his choice. He had been teased to compose a play after the novel of Richardson, then all the fashion in Italy. At first he believed it an impossible task, owing to the great difference in the social rules of the two countries. In England

a noble may marry whom he likes; his wife becomes his equal, his children in no wise suffer. Not so in the Venice of that time. The oligarchical rule was so severe, that a patrician marrying a woman of the lower class forfeited his right to participate in the government, and deprived his offspring of the patriciate. "Comedy, which is or should be," says Goldoni, "the school of society, should never expose the weakness of humanity save to correct it, wherefore it is not right to recompense virtue at the expense of posterity." However, the necessity of finding themes, conjoined to this insistence on the part of his friends, induced Goldoni to try his hand with Pamela. He changed the *dénouement*, however, in compliance with Venetian social prejudices, making Pamela turn out to be the daughter of a Scotch peer under attainder, whose pardon Bonfil obtains.

It must not be supposed, however, that Goldoni, although he had now reached the apex of success and fame, was to find his course one of plain sailing. Enmities, rivalries, assailed him on all sides; and these, in the Italy of that date, took a peculiarly venomous character, men's ambitions and energies having no such legitimate outlets as are furnished to-day by politics and interests in the general welfare. Everything was petty, everything was personal. Goldoni's chief rival, and consequently enemy, was Carlo Gozzi, the writer of fantastic dramas, and stilted, hyperbolical dramatic fables, entirely forgotten now, which found a certain favour among the public of that day, one having indeed survived in European literature in the shape of Schiller's "Turandot." A fierce skirmish of libellous fly-sheets and derisive comedies was carried on by the respective combatants and partisans,

filling now one theatre, now another, according as the taste of the public was swayed or tickled.

Annoyances with the actors, graspingness on the part of Medebac, made Goldoni abandon his company and pass over to that conducted by Vendramin, an old Venetian noble,—for in those days men of birth thought it no dishonour to conduct a theatre. He was then forty-six years of age, and had written more than ninety theatrical works. For his new patron and theatre he laboured with various interruptions, caused by political events and by his own restless temperament, until 1761, in which space of time he produced some sixty more comedies, besides three comic operas and plays written for a private theatre. And all this labour in less than ten years, and among them some of his best works, such as the trilogy of the Villeggiatura, *Il Curioso Accidente*, *I Rusteghi*, *Le Barufe Chiozote*, and many others, removed from changes of fashion, schools, methods, to which no public has ever been or can be indifferent, eternally fresh and sunny, filled with the spirit of perpetual youth. Notwithstanding, however, the excellence of Goldoni's dramas, the current literary rivalries made themselves felt, and there was a moment when Gozzi's Fables left Goldoni's theatre empty.

It then happened that at this juncture there came to him an offer from Paris to go thither as playwright to the Italian Comedy Company, established there under royal patronage. Was it fatigue, a desire for new laurels, a love of change, the hope of larger gains, that induced him to accept the offer? Perhaps a little of all these. In any case, he assented, binding himself for two years. He was never again to leave

France. Paris fascinated him, though he regretted his lovely Venice, and a certain nostalgia peeps forth from his letters now and again. Still his social and pecuniary position was good in the French capital, he was honoured and esteemed, his nephew and adopted son had found lucrative employment there, and, added to all this, even Goldoni was growing old. His eyesight began to fail; he was often indisposed, and no longer inclined to move about and pitch his tent in various cities. A post as Italian teacher at the court brought him much in contact with the royal family. It strikes the readers of the Memoirs with some amazement to see how Goldoni could live in that society, could hear the talk of intellectual Paris, and not be aware upon the brink of how frightful a precipice all French society then hovered. He actually held the king to be adored by his subjects, and these subjects as happy as it was possible for a people to be, well ruled, kindly governed. The narrative of his life ends at the age of eighty, six years before his death, two before the outbreak of the Revolution. We have not, therefore, his impression of the storm when it broke. We only know, alas! that this light-hearted, gay old child—for a child he remained to the end—died in misery, involved in the general ruin and wreck that overwhelmed all France within that brief space of time. It was, in fact, his nephew who stood between him and starvation; for with the king's deposition had vanished the pension allowed to the aged Italian dramatist. A day after his death a decree of the National Convention restored it to him for the term of his days. The proposed gift came too late, but it honours those who voted it and him who pleaded for it, no less a person than Joseph-

Marie Chénier, the poet. When the orator learned that the benevolence he invoked could no longer help its object, he again pleaded for the octogenarian, or rather that the pension should be passed on to the faithful wife in whose arms Goldoni had passed away. "She is old," said Chénier, "she is seventy-six, and he has left her no heritage save his illustrious name, his virtues, and his poverty." It is pleasant to learn that this request was conceded to by the Convention. The French, to their honour be it said, are ever ready to pay tribute to genius.

So sad, so dark, so gloomy, was the end of that gay, bright spirit, Italy's greatest and most prolific comic author. To sum up his merits in a few words is no easy task. It is doubtful whether we should rank him among the geniuses of the world. On the plea of intelligence he certainly cannot claim this rank; his intellectual perceptions might even be called mediocre, as his Memoirs amply prove, but he had a gift, a certain knack of catching the exterior qualities of character and reproducing them in a skilful and amusing mode upon the boards. His art is not of the closet kind. What he put down he had seen, not elaborated from out his brain, and his own genial temperament gave it all an amiable impress. The turning-point of his comedies is always the characters of his personages. His plays are founded on that rather than on the artifice of a plot, which, as compared to the former, was held by him as of secondary importance. He distinguished between the comedy of plot and the comedy of character, and imposed the latter on the former, which he held the easier of the two. His mode was in direct contrast to that of the Spanish dramatists, then held

in great vogue, who were masters at spinning plots, but whose characters were usually mere conventional types. In Goldoni, action results in most part as a consequence of the individuality of the personages depicted, and his intrigue is directed and led with the purpose that this may develop itself, more especially in the protagonist. Herein consists his great claim to being a theatrical reformer. What is to-day a commonplace was then a novelty. We moderns study character almost to exaggeration. In earlier drama it was ignored, and complicated plot absorbed its place. It was on this that Goldoni prided himself, and justly. It was he who first invented the Commedia del Carattere. Yet another of Goldoni's merits was his rare skill in handling many personages at the same time, without sacrificing their individuality or hindering the clear and rapid progress of the scene. This gift is specially manifest in "The Fan."

Roughly speaking, we may perhaps divide Goldoni's plays into three classes: Those that deal with Italian personages, and which are written in pure Italian, among which may be comprised those written in Martellian verse; those, including the largest number, which are written partly in Italian and partly in dialect; and finally, those written entirely in Venetian dialect, which are the fewest, eleven in all. From this it will be seen how unjust is the criticism of those who would look on Goldoni as merely a writer of comedies in a local dialect. It is this admixture of dialect, however,—and a racy, good-humoured, and amiable dialect it is, that Venetian,—which renders Goldoni's works so difficult, indeed impossible, to translate, especially into English, where dialects such as the Italian, which form quite distinct

languages, are unknown. Happily, for we are thus saved much confusion of tongues, and we hence know no such schism between written and spoken language such as exists in Italy. Even in translation, however, much as Goldoni's plays suffer, their life and movement, their excellent dramatic action, and their marvellous play of character, are not lost. To understand, however, how eminently they are fitted for the boards, it is needful to see them acted. Those who have witnessed either Ristori, or her younger and more modern rival, Eleonora Duse, in "Pamela" or "La Locandiera," will not easily forget the dramatic treat. Goethe in his Italian journey, while at Venice relates how he witnessed a performance of "Le Barufe Chiozote," and how immensely he was struck with the stage knowledge possessed by Goldoni, and with his marvellous truth to the life that surged around him. "This author," writes Goethe, "merits great praise, who out of nothing at all has constructed an agreeable pastime." It has been objected by foreign critics that Goldoni's dialogue is sometimes a little dull and tame. Charles Lever, for example, could never be brought to find Goldoni amusing. It is, however, more than probable that a very accurate acquaintance with Italian is required to appreciate to the full the manner in which the plays are written, the way in which each person's conversation is made to fit his or her character. "La Donna di Garbo" (the title may be rendered as "A Woman of Tact") is a case in point. This young person seizes on the peculiar hobby or weakness of the people around her, and plays on it in her talk. Desirous, for weighty reasons, of becoming the wife of the young son of a great family, this "woman of tact"

gets herself hired as a chambermaid in the household, and so pleases every member of it that all are in the end glad to assist her in gaining her cause. The extreme simplicity of Goldoni's plots is truly astonishing. None but a true adept in human nature and stage artifice could hold audiences, as he does, spell-bound with interest over such everyday occurrences as he selects. His comedies recall one of Louis Chardon's articles in Balzac's "Grand Homme de Province à Paris," beginning, "*On entre, on sort, on se promène.*" People go and come, talk and laugh, get up and sit down, and the story grows meanwhile so intensely interesting, that for the moment there seems nothing else in the world worthy of attention. And the secret of this? It lies in one word: Sympathy. Goldoni himself felt with his personages, and therefore his hearers must do the same.

Goldoni in his Memoirs gives no account of the production of "The Fan." It was written and first brought out in Paris, and soon became universally popular, especially in Venice. "The Curious Mishap" was founded on an episode of real life which happened in Holland, and was communicated to Goldoni as a good subject for a play. The *dénouement* is the same as in the real story, the details only are slightly altered. The intrigue is amusing, plausible, and happily conceived. The scene in which Monsieur Philibert endeavours to overcome the scruples of De la Cotterie and gives him his purse, is inimitable. Indeed, it is worthy of Molière; for if it has not his drollery and peculiar turn of expression, neither has it his exaggeration. There is no farce, nothing beyond what the situation of the parties renders natural. "The Beneficent Bear" was first written in

French, and brought out at the time of the *fêtes* in honour of the marriage of Marie Antoinette and the Dauphin, afterwards Louis XVI. Played first in the city, and then before the court at Fontainebleau, it was immensely successful in both cases. For this play the writer received one hundred and fifty louis d'or. The published edition also brought him much money.

It was certainly a rare honour for a foreigner to have a play represented with such success in the fastidious French capital and in the language of Molière. He followed it with "L'Avaro Fastoso" ("The Ostentatious Miser"), also written in French. The fate of this drama was less happy, owing, however, to a mere accident, for which Goldoni was in no wise responsible. Nevertheless, he would not allow it to be represented a second time. He seems to have been discontented with it as a dramatic work, though it has qualities which bring it nearer to the modern French *comédie de société* than perhaps any other play he has left behind him. "It was born under an evil constellation," writes Goldoni, "and every one knows how fatal a sentence that is, especially in theatrical affairs." "The Father of the Family" is, according to Goldoni's own opinion, one of his best comedies; but, as he considers himself obliged to abide by the decision of the public, he can, he says, only place it in the second rank. It is intended to show the superiority of a domestic training for girls over a conventual one. "The aunt, to whom one of the daughters is consigned, figures allegorically as the convent," says the author, "that word being forbidden to be pronounced on the Italian stage." "Action and reaction are equal," says the axiom; and much,

if not all, of the present irreverent attitude of Italians towards religious matters must be attributed to the excessive rigour, petty and despicable detail, of the regulations in vogue under their former priestly and priest-ridden rulers in these respects.

Goldoni, during his residence in Paris, had an amusing colloquy with Diderot, who was furious at an accusation made that he had plagiarised from Goldoni in his own play, "Le Père de Famille,"—an absurd idea, as there is no resemblance, save in name, between the two. It was from the Larmoyant plays of Diderot and his school, which reflected the false sentimental tone of the day both in France and Germany, that Goldoni had liberated his countrymen, quite as much as from the pseudo-classical plays to which their own land had given birth. Diderot did not perceive this, and in his fury wrote a slashing criticism of all the Italian's plays, stigmatising them as "Farces in three Acts." Goldoni, who, with all his sweetness of temper, was perfectly fearless, simply called on Diderot, and asked him what cause for spite he had against him and his works. Diderot replied that some of his compositions had done him much harm. Duni, an Italian musician, who had introduced them to each other, at this point interposed, saying that they should follow the advice of Tasso,—

"Ogni trista memoria ormai si taccia

E pognansi in oblio le andate cose,"

which may be freely rendered as "Let bygones be bygones." Diderot, who understood Italian well, accepted the suggestion, and the two parted friends. It is an anecdote creditable to all parties, and not least to the two Italians.

It is a pity that Goldoni's Memoirs, from which the above sketch of his life is derived, were written in French instead of Italian, and with regard to a French rather than an Italian public. Had he written in his own language and for his own people, he might have produced a work worthy to rank beside the wondrous tale of Cellini, though of course of a very opposite character. As it is, the narrative is little known, though it has been translated into Italian and issued in cheap form.

Such, briefly, the Italian dramatist, whose best works in substance are the continuation of the ancient plays of Menander and Terence, imitated by the Italians in the sixteenth century, but allowed to degenerate, and then again renovated and carried to perfection by Molière in France and by himself in Italy.

1: Jacks; Zanni being a nickname for Giovanni, John.

A CURIOUS MISHAP

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(UN CURIOSO ACCIDENTE)