

**THE WORLD'S SLIPPERY
TURNS; OR,
MIND HOW YOU WED! A
PLAY, IN THREE ACTS**

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The world's slippery turns; or, Mind how you wed! A play, in three acts by John Whitsed

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A PLAY,

IN THREE ACTS.

BY JOHN WHITSED.



LONDON
SAUNDERS AND OTLEY CONDUIT STREET.

1846.

PREFACE.

THE following Play is taken from No. 322 of the "Spectator," attributed to, or supplied by Steele, and signed "Octavia;" a paper well calculated to interest the reader, both by its affecting detail of injuries, and the beautiful simplicity with which the whole narrative is given. Out of the main incidents of that story—viz., the destruction of her marriage certificate, and the wrongs inflicted upon Octavia by her husband—the Author has attempted the formation of his plot. But if the reader will take the trouble to look over Sir Richard Steele's paper, he will perceive that its materials, though interesting, are too slight to furnish more than the groundwork of a dramatic composition. It became necessary, therefore—at least in the Author's judgment—not only to give the facts and incidents a new shape, but also to re-model and multiply the characters there described, if he would render them available to his purpose.* It formed, moreover, a part of his design to produce a Play entirely free from obligation to any

* "Publica materies privati juris erit, si
Non circa vilem patulumque miraberis orbem."

foreign source; one which might be deemed as purely English in spirit as the nature of the subject would admit; and to attempt the portraiture of an honest, straightforward John Bull character, whom no tyranny can appal or self-interest seduce.* Should it be objected that there are certain incongruities in the same character; that the career of one especially, which, at the outset, gives promise of better things, is marked with excessive cruelty and injustice, his answer would be this:—He fears he has not overdrawn the picture; that persons imbued with the principles of Edward Thrifty are by no means so rare as, for the honour of humanity, it could be wished; in short, if the axiom be admitted, that the chief end of the drama was, and is, to incite men to nobleness and deter them from vice, by showing the beauty of the former, the repulsiveness of the latter—whether success or failure attend

* The character of Farmer Hearty has been pronounced original of that particular class by one long accustomed both to the stage and dramatic writing. That I aimed at novelty and boldness in the construction of it, I do not hesitate to acknowledge; how far, or with what degree of success, it is for others, not myself, to judge. I trust, however, I shall be spared the charge of inconsistency for raising him above the level of the every-day farmer in respect to the language he uses, since it is distinctly told, in the very first scene, that he was born a gentleman. His education, perhaps, had fitted him for more ambitious pursuits, while his bluntness and plain dealing obviously comport with that he has chosen; and, for my own part, I am not inclined to quarrel with him for minor faults if, in the main, he prove consistent—by being, from first to last, one and the same person—the identical Farmer Hearty.—J. W.

“ Si quid inexpertum scene committis, et audes
 Personam formare novam, servetur ad imum
 Qualis ab inccepto processerit, et sibi constet.”

HOR. *ARS. POET.* 125.

his effort, the Author hopes he has kept those objects in view. Yet, to represent life as it is, or even to approach its realities in the picture, it behoves us neither to set up our men for saints, nor our women for angels. The senses of an audience, or of our readers, are too wide awake to tolerate such delusion; and surely the moral effect of the drama will be best sustained by seeing virtue and vice so faithfully contrasted, that we cannot fail to admire the one and condemn the other.

As to the probabilities of this Play, it should be borne in mind that the "time" is laid in the early part of the eighteenth century—a period when the English law in respect of marriage was so loose, that all kinds of hurried and clandestine unions were effected with greater ease than they are now by a hasty trip to Gretna Green. No notice or publication of banns was required—no license looked for—and any clergyman might perform the ceremony at any time or place, even in cellars, garrets, or alehouses, without consent of parents or any other preliminary condition; hence, as Smollett observes, to the scandal of religion, the reproach of the order they professed, and the destruction of the peace of families, the worst or lowest of the clergy became instrumental to the most disgraceful and ruinous marriages. The base consideration of a fee, however paltry in amount, served for too tempting a bait to such degraded characters. The Fleet Prison, especially, was known as their frequent hiding-place, and its neighbourhood as the haunt of their spies or accomplices, whose business it was to ply for custom, and entrap the young and giddy as they passed. And how could such marriages be

proved, unless by a certificate—a certificate bearing the signatures of witnesses? The law, vague as it was, directed, that the document in proof should be signed by the minister, the parties themselves, and two witnesses. This regulation, it is true, applied more particularly to the parish register; but, though a parish register had been instituted as early as the 13th of Henry the Eighth—viz., in 1522—it was suffered to fall into such gross neglect, especially in cases of private or clandestine marriages, that the proof was seldom forthcoming when it was most wanted; nor could its accuracy be relied upon when it was discoverable. An Act to remedy these abuses was first passed in 1753 (26th of George the Second), under the auspices, and through the determined zeal, of Lord Chancellor Hardwicke.

COPY OF SIR RICHARD STEELE'S PAPER.

Monday, March 10th, 1711—12.

“ Ad humum merore gravi deducit et angit’—

HON. AAS. POET. 110.

“ Grief wrings her soul, and bends it down to earth. ’—

FRANCIS.

“ It is often said after a man has heard a story with extraordinary circumstances, it is a very good one if it be true : but as for the following relation, I should be glad were I sure it were false. It is told with such simplicity, and there are so many artless touches of distress in it, that I fear it comes too much from the heart.

“ MR. SPECTATOR,

“ Some years ago, it happened that I lived in the same house with a young gentleman of merit, with whose good qualities I was so much taken, as to make it my endeavour to show as many as I was able in myself. Familiar converse improved general civilities into an unfeigned passion on both sides. He watched an opportunity to declare himself to me; and I, who could not expect a man of so great an estate as his, received his addresses in such terms as gave him no reason to believe I was displeas'd with them, though I did nothing to make him think me more easy than was decent. His father was a very hard, worldly man, and proud; so that there was no reason to believe he would easily be brought to think there was anything in any woman's person or character that could balance the disadvantage of an unequal fortune. In the meantime, the son continued his application to me, and omitted no occasion of demonstrating the most disinterested passion imaginable to me; and in plain, direct terms offered