

**MORGANN'S ESSAY ON  
THE DRAMATIC  
CHARACTER OF  
SIR JOHN FALSTAFF**

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Morgann's Essay on the dramatic character of Sir John Falstaff by William Arthur Gill

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**WILLIAM ARTHUR GILL**

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## INTRODUCTION

MAURICE MORGANN was a man of some influence in politics and literature, though of too retiring a disposition to catch the eye of the general public. As an author he was always anonymous, and sometimes his reserve went further, as for instance when he refused a pressing demand for a second edition of the Falstaff essay, or when he strictly enjoined his executrix to destroy compositions of his which, according to an intelligent critic, 'would have planted a permanent laurel on his grave.' In politics again he seems to have preferred exercising his great abilities in other men's names to coming forward as his own spokesman. Such a nature is not likely to make much impression on contemporary records, and several important questions about Morgann's life are still unanswered.

Morgann was born in London in 1726 and died there in 1802. He is said to have come of 'an antient and respectable family in Wales', but beyond this we know nothing of his parent-

age ; and the events of his youth and of the earlier part of his manhood are left to conjecture. At the age of thirty-five he emerges in the official lists of the 'Court and City Kalendar' as 'Weigher and Teller' at the Mint with a yearly salary 'for himself and clerk' of £142 10s.,—a position which he retained to the end of his life. A colleague of his at the Mint for many years was George Selwyn, as 'Surveyor of the Meltings and Clerk of the Irons', with a salary 'for himself and clerk' of £132 10s., and Selwyn's successor was the Hon. Spencer Perceval. The appointment to this sinecure proves that Morgann had influence of some sort, but throws little light on his occupations. In 1766, when he was forty, he became an Under-Secretary of State. He had somehow gained—how he had gained it is one of the unanswered questions—an uncommonly thorough knowledge of American affairs, and he was appointed 'Secretary of the American Department' under Lord Shelburne, then for the first time, at the age of twenty-nine, Secretary of State. In this office, and in troubled times, Morgann showed himself clear-sighted and liberal as well as accurately informed, and we know from memoranda of his addressed to his young chief and from the latter's course meanwhile that his views re-

ceived as much notice in the Government councils as Lord Shelburne was able to obtain for them. A friend of Morgann's has asserted that if 'his solicitous and enlightened representations had experienced attention, the temporary and the abiding evils of the American contest would not have existed'. There is no doubt at least that his representations were enlightened.

After this he was sent by Lord Shelburne, we are told, 'across the Atlantic as the intended legislator of Canada.' This must have been in 1767 or 1768, for he gave up the Under-secretaryship in the former year, and Lord Shelburne's official connexion with the colonies ceased in the latter, and was not renewed until 1782, at which time Morgann was otherwise engaged. It is probable that he retired from his Government office in 1767 in order to undertake the Canadian mission, the nature and course of which can only be inferred. General Carleton, who was then acting as Governor-General, is known to have opposed a scheme put forward by Lord Shelburne about 1766 for providing Canada with a Council and Assembly. While this and other points of local administration remained unsettled,—it was even disputed under which laws the Canadians were living, French or British,—there was matter enough for an envoy of the Home Government



to examine on the spot. If it is implied in the words, 'the intended legislator of Canada,' that Morgann's powers went beyond examining and reporting, the exercise of them was doubtless conditional, and there is no reason to think that he actually did more than collect information and confer with Carleton. In 1769 Carleton crossed to London to answer questions and advocate his own ideas, and it is probable that Morgann — Lord Shelburne having already withdrawn from office—returned at least as soon. He and Carleton had become good friends, and during the next four years they must often have met in London, and considering Morgann's liberal views and his recent local studies we may assume with some reason that he was no stranger to the framing of the Quebec Act of 1774,—in which Carleton certainly had a large part,—and that he thus helped to obtain for French Canada the corner-stone of her political and religious liberty.

The next time we find Morgann with a special employment is in 1782, or a dozen years after his Canadian mission, and this long blank interval may serve to raise the question whether he had any regular profession or not. He has been described as a 'clerk in the Foreign Office', and it would agree well enough with most of his re-

corded doings to assume that he was normally a Government official. There are difficulties in the way, however. Apart from the fact that the Foreign Office did not come into existence till Morgann was nearly sixty, it does not appear from the extant lists of officials that Morgann belonged to any Government office during most of his life, if we except his more or less nominal connexion with the Mint. He may have given private help to Lord Shelburne and perhaps to other statesmen oftener than we know, but such occupation can only have been intermittent, and on the whole the conjecture that his ordinary position was that of a gentleman of leisure, with some small inherited income, who occasionally served the State, — though never as a member of Parliament, — seems permissible.

Anyway, we do not hear of him doing anything but literary work of an unlucrative kind between 1770 and 1782. In the latter year he crossed the Atlantic again, going to New York as official Secretary to Carleton, who had just been appointed Commander-in-chief. They sailed from England in March, and by the end of April Morgann was busy at head-quarters in Manhattan, where his sagacity and knowledge found an opening suited to them. Fighting

was less needed than statesmanship at this stage of the Revolutionary War; indeed, Carleton went out with the double title, 'Commander-in-chief and Commissioner for restoring peace.' A treaty was being spoken of; the prospect required the British in America to show as much conciliation as prudence and dignity permitted; moreover, the Government at home, in order to shape its proposals to the best advantage, needed an accurate running comment upon the changes in American feeling and other conditions as they occurred. The usefulness of Morgann in these circumstances proved to be such that, about the middle of his stay in New York, he was specially rewarded, at the King's request, with a life-pension of £250 a year and a considerable grant of ready money. He returned home in July, 1783, after an absence of fifteen months, to give Lord North, then Prime Minister, a verbal report and the benefit of his experience in the last stage of the negotiations. When the treaty of peace was signed, he was appointed Secretary of the Embassy charged with the ratification of it,—in acknowledgement, no doubt, of his share in the result,—and in 1784 he received a second official sinecure, worth £200 a year, as one of the four Commissioners of the Hackney Coach Office. At this point his active