MEMOIRS OF GOLDONI; IN TWO VOLUMES; VOL. II

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CARLO GOLDONI

MEMOIRS OF GOLDONI; IN TWO VOLUMES; VOL. II

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MEMOIRS

OF

GOLDONI,

WRITTEN BY HIMSELF,

FORMING A COMPLETE

HISTORY OF HIS LIFE AND WRITINGS.

TRANSLATED FROM THE ORIGINAL FRENCH,

BY JOHN BLACK.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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MEMOIRS OF GOLDONI.

CONTINUATION OF PART II.

CHAPTER I.

Consequences of my severe labours—Ingratitude of the director—Plan of the first edition of my 'Theatre'—First volume of my works—My journey to Turin—A few words respecting that city—'Molière,' a comedy of five acts, in verse—History of that piece—Its success at Turin—My journey to Genoa—My return to Venice—First representation of 'Molière' in that capital—Its success—'The Father of a Family,' a comedy in three acts—'The Venetian Advocate'—'The Feudatory'—'The Obedient Daughter.'

At the age of forty-three, I had a great facility both in invention and execution, but still I was a man subject to infirmities like others. The assiduity of my labours at length undermined my health, and I fell sick, and paid the penalty of my folly.

I was always subject to fits of spleen, which attacked body and mind at once; but I felt a renewal of them at this time with more violence than ever.

I was literally worn out with fatigue, but still my wretched state was, in a great measure, occasioned by the chagrin which I felt. I must conceal nothing from my readers.

I had given sixteen pieces in the course of a year.

The director, it is true, did not demand them; but still he profited by them. What benefit had I derived? Not a farthing beyond the annual stipulation, not the smallest gratification. I received abundance of praise, and a profusion of compliments, but not the most trifling acknowledgment. I was displeased at this, but I said nothing.

However, we cannot live on glory alone; and I had no other resource but an edition of my works. Who would suppose that in this I should meet with opposition from Medebac, and that some of his protectors should approve of the opposition?

This man disputed my right of authorship under the pretext of having purchased my works. Of the period of our engagement there was still some time to run; I could not, or rather I was unwilling, to enter into a litigation with persons whom I should have occasion to see every day; I was too great a lover of peace to sacrifice it to interest; and I yielded my pretensions, and was satisfied with the permission of printing every year a single volume of my comedies. From this singular permission, I discovered that Medebac counted upon my remaining attached to him during my whole life; but I waited the expiration of my fifth year to take my leave of him.

I gave the manuscripts of four of my pieces to Antonio Bettinelli, the bookseller, who undertook the first edition of my 'Theatre,' and published the first volume at Venice in 1751.

Our company were to pass the spring and summer at Turin. I thought that a change of air, and the pleasure of the journey, might contribute to the restoration of my health. I followed the company at my own expense; and, in the intention of visiting Genoa, I took my dear companion along with me.

I was unacquainted with Turin, which I found a delightful place. The uniformity of the buildings in the principal streets produce a charming effect. The squares and churches are exceedingly beautiful; the

citadel is a superb promenade; and the royal residences, both in town and country, display great magnificence and taste. The inhabitants of Turin are very kind and polite; they have much of the manners and customs of the French, and speak the language familiarly; and on the arrival of a Milanese, a Venetian, or a Genoese, they are in the habit of saying, "He is an Italian."

My pieces were represented at Turin with applause, to crowded audiences; but there were a set of singular beings, who, at every one of my productions, observed, "This is good, but it is not Molière." This was doing me more honour than I deserved, for it had never entered into my head to compare myself with the French author. I knew that those who pronounced this vague and ridiculous judgment, merely went to the theatre for the sake of making the circuit of the boxes, and indulging in conversation.

I was acquainted with Molière, and respected this master of the art as highly as the Piedmontese, and I was seized instantly with a desire to give them a convincing proof of it.

I immediately composed a comedy in five acts, and in verse, without masks or change of scene, of which the title and principal subject were Molière himself.

The argument was taken from two anecdotes of his private life: the one, his projected marriage with Isabelle, the daughter of Bejard; and the other, the prohibition of his 'Tartuffe.' These two historical facts accord so well together, that the unity of action is perfectly observed.

The impostors of Paris, alarmed at the comedy of 'Molière,' knew that the author had sent to the camp, where Louis XIV then was, to obtain permission for its representation, and they were afraid lest the revocation of the prohibition should be obtained.

I employed in my piece a person of the name of Pirlon, a hypocrite in every sense of the word, who introduces himself into the author's house; discovers

to La Bejard Molière's love for her daughter, of which she was yet ignorant, engages her to quit her companion and director; behaves in the same manner to Isabelle, holding up to her the situation of an actress as the road to perdition, and endeavours to seduce La Foret, their waiting-woman, who, more adroit than her mistresses, dupes the duper, inspires him with a love for her, and takes his cloak and hat from him to give to Molière, who appears on the stage with the dress of the impostor.

I was bold enough to exhibit in my piece a much more marked hypocrite than that of Molière; but hypocrites had then lost a great deal of their ancient credit in Italy.

During the interval between the fourth and last acts of my comedy, the 'Tartuffe' of Molière is acted on the theatre of the Hotel de Bourgogne; all the characters of my piece make their appearance in the fifth act, for the purpose of complimenting Molière: Pirlon, concealed in a closet, where he was expecting La Foret, is forced to come forth in the presence of all the spectators, and is assailed with the sarcasms which he so richly deserved; and Molière, to add to his joy and happiness, marries Isabelle, in spite of the mother, who aspired to the conquest of her future son-in-law.

In this piece are to be found several details of the life of Molière. The character of Valerio is Baron, an actor of Molière's company. Leander is a copy of La Chapelle, a friend of the author, and often mentioned in the account of his life; and count Lasca is one of the Piedmontese who judged of pieces without seeing them, and instituted an awkward comparison between the Venetian and French authors, that is to say, between the scholar and the master.

This work is in verse; I had composed tragi-comedies in blank verse, but this is the first comedy which I composed in rhyme.

As its subject was a French author, who wrote

largely in that style, it became necessary to imitate him; and I found nothing that approached the Alexdrines but the Martellian verses, of which I have already spoken in the first part of these memoirs.

On the conclusion of my piece, and the distribution of the parts, I witnessed two rehearsals at Turin, and set out for Genoa without seeing it acted.

The actors, and a few of the townspeople, were let into the secret of the character of count Lasca. I charged them to acquaint me with the result; and I learned, a few days afterwards, that the piece had the greatest success; that the original of the criticism was discovered, and that he had been candid enough to avow that it was deserved.

I remained the whole summer at Genoa, leading a most delicious and completely idle life. How delightful it is, especially after much severe labour, to pass a few days without doing anything! But the autumn was fast approaching; the season began to grow more cool, and I resumed the road to my workshop.

On arriving at Venice, I found my first volume in print, and money in the hands of my bookseller. I received at the same time a gold watch, a box of the same metal, a silver board with chocolate, and four pair of Venice ruffles. These were presents from those to whom I had dedicated my four first comedies.

Medebac arrived a few days after me, and spoke highly of the pleasure which 'Molière' gave at Turin. I had a strong desire to see it myself; and we brought it out at Venice in the month of October 1751.

This piece contained two novelties, the subject and the versification; for the Martellian verses were at that time forgotten. The monotony of the cesural pause, the great frequency of the rhyme, and the perpetual recurrence of couplets, disgusted the ears of the Italians during the life-time of the inventor, and every person was prejudiced against me for pretending to revive a mode of versification already proscribed.

But the effect gave the lie to this anticipation; my