

REPRESENTATIVE PLAYS
BY
JOHN GALSWORTHY

With an Introduction by
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INTRODUCTION

"L'art pour l'art," ("art for art's sake"),—three utterly meaningless words Dumas fils declared them half a century ago, when he was fighting in play, feuilleton and preface for the ideas of love, marriage and divorce which his plays presented and defended.

Not "art for art's sake," not "man for art's sake," but "art for man's sake" he insisted should be the slogan for any thoughtful dramatist closely observing his time and seeking painstakingly to depict some of his problems. Differ from Dumas fils as Mr. Galsworthy undoubtedly does in subjects and artistic methods, nevertheless it is "art for man's sake" which is the essence of his work. He has himself said that "he is not conscious of any desire to solve problems in his plays, or to effect direct reforms. His only ambition in drama is to present truth as he sees it and, gripping with it his readers or his audience, to produce in them a sort of mental ferment whereby vision may be enlarged, imagination livened, and understanding promoted."* Clearly Mr. Galsworthy believes what many a co-worker in the drama has come to believe in the past twenty years, that the province of the dramatist is not to preach definite reforms, but to arrest attention and stimulate thinking on the conditions depicted.

Born at Coombe, Surrey, in 1867, passing his childhood in a cultivated home, educated at Oxford, taking at New College an Honor degree in Law, he would seem destined

* Works. Manaton edition. Vol. XVIII. p. XIV.

for one of the careers accepted in England for a gentleman's son. Like many of his period, however, the world over, in his leisurely days he became deeply interested in his fellow-men—the seeming chance inequalities of class, the striking injustices of modern life. Everywhere these days of Mr. Galsworthy's early manhood were days of restless doubt and questioning—with, in the drama, Ibsen as the great protagonist. What the young Galsworthy felt with his generation, he has phrased recently: "There is a true saying, 'Whatever is, is right.' And if all men from the world's beginning had said that, the world would never have begun at all. Not even the ^{EMANATION} protoplasmic jelly ^{WESLEY} could have commenced its journey; there would have been no motive force to make it start."* Thinking thus, he longed more and more to join the Great Adventurers, not those who discover new lands or chart hitherto uncharted seas, but the Adventurers who fare forth in the ship, Independent Thinking, over the supposedly well-charted Sea of Human Experience. And sometimes they return to the lands of Smug Acceptance with discoveries more exciting, more disturbing, than those of any voyager in Arctic or Antarctic. In and out of the universities men and women were waking to a new social consciousness, to a stronger sense of the responsibility of one class for another, of the individual for his fellows. In the colleges and universities thinking youth was restlessly seeking new causes beyond the issues which had deeply stirred their fathers, to set their own souls aflame. Little wonder, then, that though called to the bar at Lincoln's Inn (1890) young Galsworthy was unsatisfied by the law. Soon he turned to travel, watching men and manners for nearly two years in Canada, British Columbia, Australia, the Fiji Islands and South Africa. He began writing and in 1899 published

*Preface to *The Island Pharisees*. Manaton edition.

Jocelyn, a novel, not adjudged by him worthy of reprinting in the Manaton edition. In the next ten years he published ten volumes of fiction, winning wide-spread attention—particularly by *The Man of Property*, *The Country House* and *Fraternity*. In 1906 his play *The Silver Box* was produced in London; in 1907, *Joy*; in 1909, *Strife*; in 1910, *Justice*. This group of plays at once established Mr. Galsworthy's reputation as one of the foremost English dramatists of the day.

Not his the ordinary experience of the dramatist: years of writing in accepted ways, either of classic standards or purely popular forms of the moment; passage through one artistic mood, such as romanticism, to another; years of failure or of slowly developing success. From the start, as a dramatist, Mr. Galsworthy knew what he wanted to treat. He was very fortunate in coming forward when all the newer work on the Continent, when the pioneer efforts in England of Henry Arthur Jones and Sir Arthur Pinero, had gone far to establish the right of a dramatist to choose his subject at will and to be equally free in treatment of it. He has said of his total writing to the present day that it seems to divide into three periods: from 1901-1910, in which time the critical in his work was stronger than the emotional; 1910-1918, when the emotional dominated the critical; and from 1918-1923, when it has been, in his own phrase, very much a "dead heat." Doubtless that dominance of the critical in the first period came from the wide reading he was doing and the rapid development therefrom of critical standards for his own fiction—whether novel or drama. "Let me pay," Mr. Galsworthy wrote recently, "a passing tribute to the three great dead writers to whom I owe, beyond all others, inspiration and training—the Russians—Turgenev and Tolstoi; and the Frenchman—De Maupassant. The poetic art of Tur-

genev's novels is unequalled so far by any other novelist. Its singular balance and elusive strength; its economy, ease and utter lack of pose or self-consciousness; its creative reality and essential wisdom, philosophic breadth and tolerance, combine to give it an unique position in the world of fiction. Turgenev was a perfect master of form, atmosphere and concise character-drawing. Though Turgenev always inspired me more than the Frenchman, I learned more from De Maupassant. Without question, in the essentials of style, De Maupassant is the prince of teachers. The vigor of his vision, and thought, the economy and clarity of the expression in which he clothes them, have not yet been surpassed. No writer so disgusts one with turgidity, shallow expression and formless egoism. Disciplined to his finger-nails and fastidious though he was, he yet contrived to reach and display the very depths of human feeling. His sardonic nature, loathing prejudice and stupidity, had in it a vein of deep and indignant pity, a burning curiosity, piercing vision, and a sensitiveness seldom equalled. Tolstoi, at his best, is as great—perhaps even greater than the other two—but from Tolstoi a writer learns his craft as much but no more than he learns it from life itself. Tolstoi's work is spread and edgeless, and its priceless and inspiring quality is due not to its form or style, but to its deep insight, the unflinching truth of its expression, his range and the breadth of his character-drawing.”*

These, then, have been his ideals in fiction for twenty years: moved by deep indignant pity, to paint with unflinching truth those subjects in the life around him which an eager curiosity, piercing vision and rare sensitiveness have made plain to him. All this he has wanted to treat, hating turgidity, shallow expressionism, formless egoism,

*Preface to *Beyond*, Manaton Edition.

with economy, ease and lack of self-consciousness. Wisdom, philosophic breadth resting on tolerance he has sought. Poetic art, form exactly fitted to the task he has in each case set himself, he has desired. Later, as his plays, especially those in this volume, are reviewed with passing comment, we shall see that he reached his artistic goals—especially in his plays—very early in his career.

As has been said, practically all of Mr. Galsworthy's work—novels or plays—rests on questioning Society as Society accepts itself. "The Institutions of this country, like the Institutions of all other countries, are but half-truths; they are the working, daily clothing of the nation; no more the body's permanent dress than is a baby's frock. Slowly but surely they wear out, or are outgrown; and in their fashion they are always thirty years at least behind the fashions of those spirits who are concerned with what shall take their place. The conditions which dictate our education, the distribution of our property, our marriage laws, amusements, worship, prisons, and all other things, change imperceptibly from hour to hour; the moulds containing them, being inelastic, do not change, but hold on to the point of bursting, and then are hastily, often clumsily, enlarged. The ninety desiring peace and comfort for their spirit, the ninety of the well-marked beds, will have it that the fashions need not change, that mortality is fixed, that all is ordered and immutable, that every one will always marry, play, and worship in the way that they themselves are marrying, playing, worshipping. They have no speculation, and they hate with a deep hatred those who speculate with thought. They were not made for taking risks. They are the dough, and they dislike that yeasty stuff of life which comes and works about in them. The Yeasty Stuff—the other ten—chafed by all things that are, desirous ever of new forms and moulds, hate in

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their turn the comfortable ninety. Each party has invented for the other the hardest names that it can think of: Philistines, Bourgeois, Mrs. Grundy—Rebels, Anarchists, and Ne'er-do-wells. So we go on! And so, as each of us is born to go his journey, he finds himself in time ranged on one side or on the other, and joins the choruses of name-slingers.

"But now and then—ah! very seldom—we find ourselves so near that thing which has no breadth, the middle line, that we can watch them both, and smile to see the fun." This is the position Mr. Galsworthy has striven for and won.

Observing his fellowmen, Mr. Galsworthy has wished through sympathy, understanding and a pity that is not sentimental but judical, to write of them with truth. This, "to the human consciousness at least, is but that vitally just relation of part to whole which is the very condition of life itself. The task of the imaginative writer is the presentation of a vision which to the eye and ear and mind has the implicit proportions of truth." He is no believer in "impersonal elucidations of the truths of Nature." There are "no such things as the truths of Nature apart from the individual vision of the artist. Seer and things seen, inextricably involved one with the other, form the texture of any masterpiece; and I, at least, demand therefrom a distinct impression of temperament. Such subtle mingling of seer with thing seen is the outcome only of long and intricate brooding, a process not too favored by modern life, yet without which we achieve little but a fluent chaos of clever, insignificant impressions, a kind of glorified journalism holding much the same relation to the deeply impregnated work of Turgenev, Hardy and Conrad, as a film bears to a play." Any treatment Mr. Galsworthy may give to truth as he finds it in the turmoil of life around

him he wishes should have flavor. "I confess to have always looked for a certain flavor in the writings of others, and craved it for my own, believing that all true vision is so coloured by the temperament of the seer, as to have not only the just proportions but the essential novelty of a living thing—for, after all, no two living things are alike. A work of fiction should carry the hall-mark of its author as surely as a Goya, a Daumier, a Velasquez, and a Mathew Maris should be the unmistakable creations of those masters. This is not to speak of tricks and manners which lend themselves to that facile elf, the caricaturist, but of a certain individual way of thinking and feeling."*

Consistently for more than twenty years, Mr. Galsworthy has sought to attain in both his novels and his plays these standards, whether borrowed from his masters or created from his own thinking. In his first play, *The Silver Box*, it is the inequality of two men before the law, where one is poor and friendless, the other rich and aided by a family with power, which rouses his "indignant pity." Inequality, injustice, is at the core of this play. In *Strife*, which first brought its author wide reputation as a dramatist, it is not the rights or wrongs of the struggle between Labor and Capital represented which is of significance. Rather it is the utter futility of the struggle even when carried on by two extremists, who, like Anthony and Roberts, do only what they honestly believe to be right. The bitter irony of the last lines of the play has done much to make it famous:

HARNESS: A woman dead; and the two best men both broken!

TENCH: (*Staring at him—suddenly excited*) D'you know, sir—these terms, they're the *very same* we drew up

*Preface to *Villa Rubein*, Manaton Edition.

together, you and I, and put to both sides before the fight began? All this—all this—and—and what for?

HARNESS: (*In a slow, grim voice*) That's where the fun comes in!

(*Underwood, without turning from the door, makes a gesture of assent.*)

The curtain falls.

Dogged, unimaginative, unwilling to search for truth and to face it squarely, courageously when found, people go on bringing misery to themselves and their fellows. Of course *Justice*, when first produced, was declared a problem play, a *drame à thèse*. It is easy to think this from the terrible pantomime of Falder in his cell and these words of his:

"What I mean, sir, is that if we'd been treated differently the first time, and put under somebody that could look after us a bit, and not put in prison, not a quarter of us would have got there."

But it is not the one particular injustice, imprisonment, of which Mr. Galsworthy is writing but of "man's inhumanity to man" which still, as in Dr. Johnson's day, "makes countless thousands mourn." At the end of *Justice* everybody of the group we watch is willing to help Falder, but with human nature as weak, and human law as indiscriminating as it is, thinking more of punishing by rule than of helping or training the individual, tragedy is sure.

And all the bitter irony in the tragedies he treats Mr. Galsworthy feels intensely. Yet, if as he views life's injustices he sees terrible irony in the futilities with which Society tries to counter the blows of Fate, irony has for him some of the illuminating quality that Aristotle gave to pity and terror in tragedy. With John Galsworthy irony saves us from letting honest sentiment lapse into the excess that is sentimentality. Watching the pity, the injustice,

the futility of life when we view it clear-eyed, to what shall we turn—sentimentality or despair? Neither if we have a sense of the ironies of life. As Ferrand says in *The Pigeon*: “There is nothing that gives more courage than to see the irony of things.” Poor bewildered Mrs. Megan, just rescued from drowning herself, might have the protective philosophy of Ferrand could she see clearly, as he does, that “not a soul in the world wants her alive—and now she’s prosecuted for trying to be where everyone wishes her.” She would have something to make her fight on if she could feel as Ferrand does: “If I were rich, should I not be simply verree original, ’ighly respected, with soul above commerce travelling to see the world? And that young girl, would she not be ‘that charming ladee,’ ‘verree chic,’ you know.” There is much of Mr. Galsworthy’s own philosophy of life in *The Pigeon*.

Naturally, no dramatist may observe the injustices of life and pass by the confusions, contradictions and tragedies caused by the passion too easily called Love. *The Eldest Son*, 1912; *The Fugitive*, 1913; and *A Bit o’ Love*, 1915; are Mr. Galsworthy’s earlier treatments of this subject. Broadly, they are contemporaneous with his studies of the same subject in the novels *The Dark Flower* and *Beyond*. In the plays, travelling anew the ground already beaten flat by countless other dramatists who could treat no other topic, he has worked less notably than in his individual and very thoughtful presentations of similar material in *The Dark Flower* and *Beyond*. For his best results in this subject he needs the chance the novel offers to carry us with him by illuminating analysis and suggestive comment, by the slow presentation of a character detail by detail, scene after scene, rather than by the telegraphic dots and dashes of the most compact of artistic forms—the drama. *A Bit o’ Love* has been selected from this group as most character-

istic, as more than the others combining "seer with thing seen," as holding more of the "poetic art" Mr. Galsworthy admires in Turgenev. Full of deep feeling, delicate characterization, it has its own atmosphere. Profoundly painful as it is, no wonder that amusement seekers have not greatly cared for it, but for what it accomplishes when dealing with time-worn subjects, background and to a great extent, people, it is a notably fine play.

He returns to his more personal material in *The Mob*. Again he takes up the cause of the one in a hundred, the adventurer in human conduct, who sees with the eyes of the future, not with that of the benumbed or befogged present. Whether wholly convincing or not—and it caused much debate—*The Mob* will remain noteworthy, because in 1914 it so clearly foreshadowed the tragedies in 1914-1918 of pacifists and war-objectors. It was a veritable hand-writing on the wall.

After *The Mob*, save for *A Bit o' Love*, in 1915, and *The Foundations*, in 1917, there is silence as a playwright till 1920. Yet these five years were rich in novels that added materially to their author's fame: especially *Beyond*, *Five Tales*, *Saint's Progress*, and *In Chancery*. In 1920 came a reawakening of dramatic expression. In quick succession appeared *The Skin Game*, and *A Family Man*, 1922; *Loyalties*, and *Windows*, 1923. The first of these plays, and *The Foundations*, 1917, grew out of the War: neither could have existed except as a consequence of it. *The Foundations* contains admirable characterization and much humor, but the intended satire which is its essence missed the desired effect because the general public did not understand its significance, or in what mood exactly the play should be taken. As a mere story, and as satire, it lacked the great essential—clarity. *The Skin Game* created much discussion. Passage after passage, such as "Mother re-

minds one of England according to herself—always right whatever she does,” convinced some that the play was a careful allegory of the War. It stands as that indeed, in so far as it is the dramatization of a duel *à outrance*, with all the throwing overboard of standards and gentility which such a duel entails. *A Family Man* studies Builder, an obstinate nature, settled in his point of view, determined to have his own way, who learns the truth in his brother’s admonition: “Let’s boss our own natures before we boss those of other people.” For persons who have found the purpose of *Windows* uncertain, Mr. Galsworthy has stated it: “If we cleaned our windows better and looked things straight in the face, we should not be disconcerted; for instance, when the fourteen points don’t function, because we never should have hazarded the fourteen points. We all admit that we must have ideals, but the play objects to our saying die because human nature, like Faith, is forever hiding away from them.” *Loyalties*, Mr. Galsworthy’s greatest recent success, treats incidentally the clash of classes or social groups already treated in *Strife* and *The Skin Game*; but its main purpose is to throw up into relief the incessant clash of differing loyalties, which makes the path of right action so difficult. First, last, and always, it is the right relation of the part (as observed in play and novel) to the whole of life, truth, at which Mr. Galsworthy aims.

Rarely does a dramatist formulate for us the principles underlying his practice. Rather he prefers to give his time and thought to the new problem each fresh dramatic effort is. From the outset, however, Mr. Galsworthy seems to have been deeply interested in the technique of fictional expression. His careful study of Turgenev, Tolstoi and De Maupassant proves this. So, too, does his article *Some Platitudes Concerning the Drama*, first published in 1909.

It is surprising that after the experience of writing only three plays he could go so directly to the core of his subject and reveal what he finds in phrase so final. Already, for students of dramatic technique, the essay has taken its proper place, side by side with Congreve's *Essay on Humor in Comedy* and George Meredith's classic *Essay on Comedy*. Reading this article of Mr. Galsworthy's, one sees that for him the play and the novel are basically much the same. He anticipates, in 1909, in writing of his plays, much that he re-phrases in 1922-1923 as to his short stories and novels. To his mind, "drama must have a spire of meaning." Mere entertainment of the idly unthinking has no interest for him. "In writing a play there are, philosophically speaking, three courses open to the serious dramatist. The first is to set definitely before the public that which it wishes to have set before it; the views and codes of life by which the public lives, and in which it believes. This way is the most common, successful and popular. The second course is to set definitely before the public the views and codes of life by which the dramatist himself lives, those theories in which he himself believes—the more effectively if they are the opposite of what the public wishes to have placed before it—presenting them so that the audience may swallow them like a powder in a spoonful of jam. There is a third course: to set before the public no cut and dried codes, but the phenomena of life and character, selected and combined, *but not distorted*, by the dramatist's outlook, set down without fear, favor or prejudice, leaving the public to draw such poor moral as nature may afford. This third method," obviously enough Mr. Galsworthy's, "requires a certain detachment; it requires a sympathy with, a love of, and a curiosity as to, things for their own sake; it requires a far view, together with patient industry for no immediately practical result."

Any careful examination of Galsworthy's plays will reveal that these needed qualities are his. Granted, however, this detachment, this judicial attitude of seeking truth without favorites in persons or ideas, whence—we ask—came the stories, later to be moulded by the technical skill of Mr. Galsworthy into the plots of his plays? "A good plot is that sure edifice which slowly rises out of the interplay of circumstance on temperament and temperament on circumstance, within the enclosing atmosphere of an idea. The perfect dramatist rounds up his characters and facts within the ring fence of a dominant idea which fulfills the craving of his spirit,—having got them there he suffers them to live their own lives. The dramatist who depends his characters to his plot, instead of his plot to his characters, ought himself to be depended." In characterization, Mr. Galsworthy has added memorable figure after memorable figure to our drama. Roberts, Anthony, Falder, DeLevis, and Ferrand, the down and out philosopher who is quite worthy to stand before Gorki's Satine in *The Lower Depths*. The women of the plays are perhaps less unusual than the men, but all have an equal truth to life, an equally understanding interpretation. Certainly in all the plays of this volume, the plots grow from the characters. Mr. Galsworthy runs no chance that, because of these plays, he will be "depended" by some critical hand.

Developing his dramatic theories, he adds: "Take care of character: action and dialogue will take care of themselves. True dramatic action is what characters do, at once contrary as it were to expectation, and yet because they have already done other things. No dramatist should let his audience know what is coming, but neither should he suffer his characters to act without making his audience feel that these actions are in harmony with temperament and rise from previous known actions, together with the tempera-

ments and previous known actions of the other characters." It is these ideas which have made the characters of John Galsworthy from the beginning of his play-writing, alive, convincing, as creative of discussion as are real people, making friends and enemies.

In turn, "good dialogue is character marshalled so as continually to stimulate interest and excitement." It "requires not only a knowledge of what interests or excites, but such a feeling for character itself as brings misery to the dramatist's heart when his creatures speak as they should not speak—ashes to his mouth when they say things for the sake of saying them—disgust when they are 'smart.' The art of writing good dialogue is an austere art, denying itself all license, grudging every sentence devoted to the mere machinery of the play, suppressing all jokes and epigrams severed from character, relying for fun and pathos on the fun and tears of life." Mr. Galsworthy, in his recent preface to the first volume of his plays, returns to these ideas on dialogue. "It might be said that I create characters who have feelings they cannot express. I think this comes from the sort of subject and the range of character which I temperamentally select and still more from the severely naturalistic medium to which I am predisposed. The English man or woman of today—and my characters are practically all Englishmen and women of today—do not express themselves glowingly, they have almost a genius for under-expression and even on the stage seem to resent being made to 'slop-over.'" Feeling this, Mr. Galsworthy naturally fully recognizes the value of pantomime without speech. Recall Falder in his cell. Mr. Galsworthy has chosen as, perhaps, the best moment in any of his plays, that when, Anthony and Roberts, knowing that they have failed, face each other: "*Anthony rises with an effort. He turns to Roberts, who*

looks at him. They stand several seconds, gazing at each other fixedly. Anthony lifts his hand, as to salute, but lets it fall. The expression of Robert's face changes from hostility to wonder. They bend their heads in token of respect. Anthony turns and slowly walks toward the curtained door. Suddenly he sways as if about to fall, recovers himself, and is assisted out. Roberts remains motionless for several seconds, staring intently after Anthony, then goes into the hall." There is the same quality in a stage direction in *The Pigeon*: "Mrs. Megan turns slowly and slips away." Fully sensing the seeming hopelessness of her life, as Ferrand has summed it up to Wellwyn, silently the girl slips out to drown herself. When Mr. Galsworthy has such exacting standards of dialogue and keeps to them, no wonder that Mr. Lewisohn has said: "Whoever wishes to attain to style in dramatic dialogue, exact but always restrained, natural but never redundant, must give his days and nights to the volumes of Galsworthy."

For drama as for the novel, Mr. Galsworthy demands "flavor, the thin, poignant spirit which hovers up out of a drama, and is as much differentiating essence of it as is nicotine of tobacco or caffeine of coffee—the spirit of the dramatist projected into his work in a state of volatility, so that no one can exactly lay hands on it here, there or anywhere—the one thing at which the dramatist cannot work, for it is outside his consciousness." Is there not a personal touch, an individual spirit in all that John Galsworthy writes? Hard to trace exactly to its sources it certainly is. Yet it is so unmistakable that were anyone who knows Galsworthy's plays well to read an unsigned typed manuscript of his, its author must be recognized at once.

The medium he chooses for his plays is naturalism. The