

DICKENS AS A DRAMATIST

THESIS SUBMITTED FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN ARTS (ENGLISH)

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PREFACE

The present thesis is a modest attempt to call attention to a comparatively unexplored aspect of Dickens as an artist. A celebrity as a novelist even in his life time Dickens's reputation as a novelist has grown ever since. In range and sweep in depth and understanding the fictive world of Dickens is almost matchless.

It is natural therefore that Dickens's venture as a dramatist has been completely ignored. He wrote just six plays out of which two are collaborative authorship - one with Mark Lemon and the other with Wilkie Collins. These six plays incidentally are spread over a period of thirty years (1836 - 1867) and this shows that Dickens never really completely lost interest in drama. His first play was written when he had already achieved success as a novelist and, after that last play he had practically written nothing of significance. A close look at these plays provides a new dimension to Dickens's genius, and it would not be wrong to say that even as a dramatist Dickens is quite in his elements. Theatre was possibly in his blood.

In our critical survey of the plays we have examined them chronologically, in the following pattern :

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

STORY OUTLINE

CHARACTERS (In order of appearance)

HUMOUR

CRITICAL ESTIMATE

Dickens may not be a great dramatist but his achievement as a dramatist, even when judged on the basis of these plays seems to be quite commendable. We feel that the plays constitute a significant, though minor, tributary to Dickens's Creative genius and present Dickens in a new light.

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[Basudeb Chakraborty]

Basudeb Chakraborty

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INTRODUCTION

Although Dickens is universally acclaimed as a great novelist and his reputation as a writer mainly rests on his novels, Dickens also wrote a few plays sometimes individually sometimes in collaboration with other writers, and these plays have not received the attention that they deserve. It is interesting to note how Dickens's life-long interest in theatre led him to write these plays and how eventually he switched over to novels mainly to reach a wider range of audience. Even then it is always possible to trace a dramatic strain in his novels and it is in this context that the plays, however insignificant in comparison with the massive body of Dickens's novels, assume enormous significance as a tributary to the novels. It is also possible to discover in these plays some of the essential characteristics of Dickens as an artist - his interest in the riddle of existence, his abiding concern with the social malaise, his sympathy with the downtrodden and, above all, his remarkable sense of humour.

Dickens was associated with the theatre right from his childhood. In this connection Emlin Williams writes :

In an age where there was no button to switch on Radio or Television, amateur theatricals were part of family life and of the Dickens family life as much as only...¹

1. Emlyn Williams, "Dickens and Theatre" in Charles Dickens 1812-1870 : A Centenary Volume. Ed. E.M.F. Tomlin (London : Weidenfield and Nicolson, 1969). Subsequently cited as Williams, p. 178.

And again :

... on the slightest provocation charlie would lift on to a table to sing duets with his sister Fanny, apparently acquiting himself with innate self possession...²

When six years old he was taken to see Richard III, at eight he was taken to see Grimaldi, the great clown could sure have been touched to know that he had enchanted a child so permanently that one day that child would (in the first flush of his own film) edit his memoirs. We also learn from Williams how in 1821 when Dickens was just a nine year old and the family was compelled to move to London under very difficult circumstances, James Lamert comforted the poor Dickens by making him a personal toy theatre. It was this toy theatre that gave the poor homesick child a sense of satisfaction by giving him an opportunity to live in a world of make belief. The Editor of the Vision Edition of Dickens's Plays and Poems also tells us that "Dickens wrote his play, Misnar, The Sultan of India, when he was no more than ten years old ..."³

The play is founded on one of the narratives in Tales of the Genii. We are also told that "a burlesque, O'Thello, (Part of the Great Unpaid), was performed by amateurs, including his father, John Dickens in 1833..."⁴

2. Ibid.

3. Charles Dickens, Complete Plays and Selected Poems. (Vision: Vision Press Limited, 1970).
p. 1.

4. Ibid.

Dickens's interest in theatre was also conspicuous in the school theatricals, where he was a popular figure and a leading light. His performance in Miller and His Men produced at schools was quite satisfactory and enjoyable.

When Dickens left school at fifteen and started working in London as an office boy, he was always haunted by the world of Theatre which beacons him and held out a promise of relief and satisfaction. We have it on record that even during these years Dickens would often run away to theatre to spend a night there in order to forget his immediate surrounding and be transported into the world of imagination away from the world of brute reality. The night theatre provided him an escape from the dull routine existence and "the thorns of life."

It would not be fair to dismiss Dickens's love of theatre as a passing taste of an adolescent who is dazed by the glammers of the illusive world of the stage.

In fact, Dickens had already by the time plunged into acting and we learn that on the nights that he would not go to the theatre he would spend his time in memorizing his dialogue and practising his part for the stage. Sometimes he would practise even seven hours a day with a religious devotion to the art of practice. It is clear that Dickens's frequent visit to the theatre,

to the pantomimes at the Rochster theatre during the formative period of his life cast an abiding influence on his character, shift it in a particular manner and profoundly affected his creative talents. It should also be borne in mind, in this connection, that there were certain personal factors as well that drove Dickens towards the theatre. Dickens was not a happy child. He did not receive adequate love. He famished for love, some kind of emotional bond that would sustain him and give him a meaning of his existence. Theatre, or the world of make belief that the theatre offered, acted both as a safety valve and solace. It made him forget his sorrow as he became engrossed in the theatre. It may not be wrong to say that unhappy childhood, personal problems and domestic misery were largely instrumental in driving Dickens towards the gloriously beautiful, though unreal, world of theatre, and sharpen his theatrical sensibility which was already latent in his character.

But unfortunately the condition of the theatre at Dickens's time was far from satisfactory. The size of the theatre was so large that it was not possible for the actors to display the subtle nuances of gesture or modulations. The dramatis personae of the plays were as stereotyped as those of medieavel mystery plays. The hero pure; the farmer simple, slow and endearing; the law year unscrupulous and so on. The existing condition of the

theatre was no better. From Dickens's novels, articles, letters, etc. we can form a rough idea of the taste and nature of the typical theatre-going audience, and also of the type of actors, professionals and amateur that filled the play houses. Dickens writes :

We were motley assemblage of people ... besides prowlers and idlers, we were mechanics, Clock labourers, coaster mongers, petty tradesmen, small clerks, milliners, stay-makers, shoe-binders, shop-workers, poor-workers in a hundred high ways and by-ways. Many of us - on the whole, the majority - were not all clean and not all choice in our lives or conversations.⁵

And what about the actors ? Dickens writes in Sketches by Boz :

Did any of our readers ever notice the class of people who hang about the stage - doors of our minor theatres in the day time ? You will rarely pass one of these entrances without seeing a group of three or four men conversing on the pavements, with an indescribable public house - parlour, swagger and a

5. Charles Dickens, "A Cheap Theatre" in The Dickens Theatrical Reader Ed. Edgar and Eleanor Johnson, (London : Victor Gollance Ltd., 1964), p. 323.

kind of conscious air, peculiar to people of this description. They always seem to think they are exhibiting; the lamps are ever before them.⁶

The Theatre Act of 1843 legalized the bourgeois demand for entertainment. The rapid industrialization and the growth of the bourgeois class as a strong growing force compelled the theatre to cater to the demands of the audience. What was their demand? This demand chiefly was melodrama or drama enacted on a simplistic level. G.M. Trevelyan, the great social historian, quotes an American auditor who remarked after visiting the London theatre :

Enthusiastic applauses were bestowed by the Galleries this evening on this sentiment, that if a poor man had an honest heart there lived not one in England who had either the presumption or the power to oppress him. In this incident may be seen the active jealousy of liberty which exists even in the lowest orders of England.⁷

6. Charles Dickens, Sketches by Boz in Works of Charles Dickens, Vol. I (London : Gresham Publishing Co. Ltd., n.d.) p. 81.

7. G.T. Trevelyan, English Social History : A Survey of Six Centuries from Chaucer to Queen Victoria (London: Longman Green and Co. Ltd., 1944), p. 468.

This reflects the social situation. An applause in a theatre is an applause by the mass, and the mass demanded exclusive entertainment. It would not possibly be wrong to say that no other era has been so strongly dominated by the demands of the masses. If the plays that Dickens wrote are essentially melodramas or burlesques, it only shows Dickens's sense of zeitgeist, the spirit of the time, and by temperament also Dickens was always in sympathy with the suffering multitudes, the down-trodden and the exploited.

However, Dickens's love of the theatre was not confined to witnessing the performances of simple mimicry as a pasttime. At once stage of life, he took theatre seriously and started acting. His talent particularly in acting comic roles has been referred to by his close acquaintances. George Lear recalls that Dickens's imitations of the speech, ways, and manners of the charwoman at Ellis and Blackmore's were true to life. Dickens had told Lear that he had taken part in amateur theatricals and his father knew many of the wellknown actors. Lear makes a particular mention of Mac Ready and John Pritt Harley. Another source of his acquaintance with the theatre personalities was his sister Fanny who after four years of study at the Royal Academy of Music had begun to hang around the theatres. It is on record

that in 1827 and 1828 she sang for the benefit of the theatrical crowd. In 1833 we find Dickens as the moving spirit behind two evenings of amateur theatricals with his family and a few friends. The first that took place on 27th April consisted of performances of John Howard Payne's opera : Clari, The Maid of Milan, P.P.O. Callaghan's The Married Bachelor and R. Brinsley Peake's Amateur and Actros. We learn from the play-bill that Dickens had not only written prologue for the evening but also worked as a stage manager responsible for directing the plays, getting the actors to rehearsals, pleading with them to complete the scenery that they were assigned to construct, renting costumes, and such matters. He also acted in all the three plays. It was with great passion that Dickens performed the task that he had set upon himself. In the second half of the same year Dickens produced theatrical entertainment, The O'Thello.

In summer holiday also Dickens would generally assist the rehearsal. Dickens's love of the theatre was such a passion that on his honey moon in 1836 he amused his bride and himself by writing a farce The Strange Gentleman. In September 1836 his one act farce, The Strange Gentleman scored a success. In December The Village Coquettes was produced. The third and probably the best of Dickens's plays to be performed at

St. James theatre was Is She His Wife ? or Something Singular. It is comic burletta and happens to be the last publically performed and published dramatic work of which Dickens was the sole author. The Lamplighter, a farce again, was written in 1838. Mr Nightingale's Diary was written by Dickens in collaboration with Mark Lemon for the guild of literature and was first performed at Devonshire house in May 1851. The best and most important of the plays No Thoroughfare written in collaboration with Wil^lkie Collins, the great author of The Women in White, had its maiden show at the Adlephi theatre, London in December 1867.

Dickens's first tour to America occurred in 1842, and at that time he, says Williams, all on a sudden 'burst into dramatic forms'. While at Montreal, Dickens had, Williams further adds, a chance to set in three plays such as A Rose-lind for an Oliver, A Good Night's Rest and Deaf and Past. He would never waste his time in bad companies, says Williams, according to whom, "he turned to acting as another writer might have sought relaxation in fishing or gambling"⁸.

8. Williams, p. 100.

It has already been mentioned that Dickens's passion for the theatre found expression as much in his writing plays as in his acting. It is interesting to note that in 1845 he appeared in The Elder Brother by Beaumont and Fletcher and in Ben Jonson's Every Man in his Humour in which he played the role of Bobadil. In 1848 he appeared as Justice Shallow in The Merry Wives of Windsor. In 1855 he took part in Wilkie Collins's The Lighthouse. And in 1857 in a private production at Tavistock House he played again a most important part in Collins's The Frozen Deep. This is the last recorded appearance of Dickens as play actor.

Dickens's active interest in the theatre may be seen as a manifestation of his natural love for the dramatic. Inga-Stina Ewbank has rightly remarked :

Just as he was both literally and metaphorically a great stage manager in life, so he manipulates the reader's sympathies with theatrical flair in his novels Dickens's ... style draws attention to itself by its blatant theatricality, over statements, chanted repetitions, reiterated, catch phrases

and imagery, a dramatically unexpected metaphors in which people and things merge grotesquely.⁹

And again :

His success stems from an absorbing interest in the problems of the middle and lower classes. Out of an awareness of a man's suffering sprang his vehement attacks on the social evils of his days.¹⁰

Robert Garris also says the something in a different way :

Anyone who opens one of Dickens's novels, then, is prepared to enter a 'theatre' and to co-operate with the 'theatrical mode' ...¹¹

In A Tale of Two Cities a domestic drama is enacted in the backdrop of one of the greatest dramas of human civilization : French Revolution. Apart from the powerful use of different kind of conflict - internal and external - Dickens also uses the dramatic device of the dialogues form. For pages together, for example we have dialogues instead of a narrative by the omniscient narrator. It is highly dramatic novel. Even in a novel like Dombey and Son he draws our attention mainly

9. Inga-stina, Ewbank, Encyclopaedia Americana, International Edition, 1988 p. 80.

10. Inga-stina, Ewbank, Encyclopaedia Americana, International Edition, 1988, p. 82.

11. Robert Garris, The Dickens Theatre : A Reassessment of the Novels (Oxford : Oxford UP, 1965) p. 40.

to the father's suffering and the slow change forced on him by experience. Dickens catches human journey so vividly that the reader accepts at the end of the portrayal of Dombey's pride, not as theatrical manipulation but as the objective revelation of great art. Dickens's natural love for the dramatic is also revealed in his descriptions. Here, for example, is the external view of Lady Deadlock in Bleak House :

Both before and after saying it she remains absorbed, but at length moves, and turns, unshaken in her natural and acquired presence, towards the door. Mr Tulkinghorn opens the doors exactly as he would have done yesterday, Or as he would have done ten years ago, and makes his old - fashioned bow as she passes out. It is not an ordinary look that he receives from the handsome face as it goes into the darkness, and it is not an ordinary movement, though a very slight one, that acknowledges his courtsey. But, as he reflects when he is left above the woman has been putting no common constraint upon herself.

He would know it all the better, if he saw the woman pacing her own room with her hair widely thrown from her flung-back face, her hand clasped behind her head, her figure twisted as if by pain. He would think so

all the more, if he saw the woman thus hurrying up and down for hours, without fatigue, without intermission, followed by the faithful step upon the Ghost's walk.¹²

Here Dickens is doing exactly what Shakespeare had done in the scene between Hamlet and Polonius. He is setting up a tension between behaviour and inner feeling. A close scrutiny of any novel of Dickens in fact would give enough evidence of Dickens's predilection for drama, while it is true that Dickens was in his element when he wrote the novels which gave him enormous scope of moralizing or intruding into the novels as an omniscient narrator. Dickens's plays are also of significance. It is true that Dickens was not a potential Shakespeare. He did not have the 'negative capability' of Shakespeare but the plays that he has produced deserve critical attention. The reason why Dickens wrote mainly melodrama must be sought as much in Dickens's love for the teeming multitude, the common man, as the historically unique character of the Victorian audience composed of people who wanted nothing but entertainment with the establishment of the railways people from the country side began to throng the theatre halls. It is to their demand that Dickens, ever a sympathetic humanist, condescended and wrote plays which are either broad farce, or melodrama or musicals but invariably are of lower order.

12. Charles, Dickens, Bleak House, N.P. : Wordsworth Edition Limited, 1993, p. 479.

CHAPTER - I

THE STRANGE GENTLEMAN

Historical Background

"The first play performed publicly was The Strange Gentleman, which was staged at the St. James's Theatre, London, in September, 1836. Founded on one of the Sketches of Boz, The Great Winglebury Duel, the play is a light comedy which owes much to Oliver Goldsmith. An instant success, it ran for fifty performances and was revived more than once in 1837."¹

It is interesting to note why this piece, a farcical comedy depending on misunderstandings in dialogue and situation had to be put on as a burletta. The reason was that the only London theatres at that time licensed under Royal patent for "straight" plays were Covent Garden, Drury Lane and the Hay Market, the last named operating only when the first two were closed for the summer recess. The principal fare was Shakespeare, Congreve, Farquhar, Vanbrugh and Sheridan, and occasionally opera, though new dramas and comedies were often introduced to make up a composite bill. Other houses, apart from the private theatres already noticed, could only present musical performance of a dramatic nature, such as operas, burlesques, and so on.

1. Charles Dickens, Foreword. Collected Plays and Selected Poems. Ed. Shepherd Herne Richard, N. p. : W.H.Allen & Co., 1882. 1

Obviously, to evade the monotony, music had to be provided. But, in view of the looseness of the wording of the prohibition, other managements were quick to perceive that the musical "quota" could be reduced to minimum. Hence the announced duet in The Strange Gentleman, though there would be, of course, an overture, and interval music. An official end was put to this untenable situation by an act of parliament, though not till 1843. The Strange Gentleman, by the way, was played at the Park Theatre, New York, in the autumn of 1837 with Charlotte Cushman in the cast. As the very first of Dickens's plays to be mounted on a public theatre, the cast, as printed is worth preserving, if only as a museum piece.

The Story Outline :

The story of The Strange Gentleman starts at and develops from Mrs Noakes's Inn. It is an ever busy inn because the landlady herself along with the waiters look after the comfort of the boarders and discipline of the inn. The inn is central to the play. As soon as the curtain is raised two ladies and a young man are seen booking a room in the inn. During the booking there arrives an odd man who intends to book a private sitting room. Thereafter the man becomes the focus of the action and the play is named after him.

Previously, the man had rented a room at the Royal Hotel, but he could not bear with the disturbance there.

He needs a room badly because the doors of his house have closed for him for ignoring his father's choice. Besides, a mysterious letter-cum-death warrant leads him to utter confusion and restricts his free movement. In his helplessness he decides to write to the Mayor about his wretchedness. But without posting it he confides his plan to Tom and promises him reward for the job. Tom runs on errand and the odd man wonders how he would be saved. While he passes tense time, Mary and Fanny, both boarders of the same inn, mistake him for Charles Tomkins and come to see him along with Mrs Noakes. Mary misunderstands Fanny because Fanny, she thinks, has been trying to keep the presence of Tomkins a secret. Fanny tries to make Mary understand that she does not know the whereabouts of Tomkins but she would not listen to her. Rather she goes to the man to check the truth of Fanny's statement. In this context it may be borne in mind it is a trying situation that has compelled Mary to come to the inn. John Johnson, Mary's sweet heart, has forced Mary to elope with him. On the way feeling that their funds were running short they have come to halt in the inn for collecting money. Fanny thinks that she could possibly be present at the inn and has reached the inn following Mary. Mary meets the old man and talks with him for an hour and decides to let him go. But the odd man comes to dote on Mary and tries to embrace her. Mary screams for help and cleverly saves her honour.

Julia meanwhile has mistaken the Strange Gentleman for Lord Peter and begun her journey towards Noakes's inn or St. James's Arms. On her way she meets the Mayor who has been called into Noakes's inn. Julia discloses to the Mayor her purpose of journey to the inn, and solicits his sympathetic help. The Mayor feels sympathy towards Julia, he listens to her plan and reaches the inn to meet Mrs Noakes and he tells the landlady what she will have to do. In fact, the plan is to take the odd man as a lunatic, so that he can be shifted to an asylum.

This shifting will help Julia to elope with the man, who appears to be Lord Peter to her. When the planning goes on in full swing. Tomkins reaches the inn and meets Fanny. But Fanny's coldness makes him suspicious. However, this misunderstanding does not last long. Julia also realizes her faults and when she tells the Strange Gentleman that she has no husband he takes Julia as his wife. Thus, the play ends with a merry note.

Mrs Noakes

Mrs Noakes, a side character in Chintz gown, French apron and handsome cap, is nice enough. This land lady of the inn is well versed and basically good, for she feels for others sincerely. Her inn takes adequate care of the boarders and she herself helps the waiters in this regard. The smooth running of the inn points to her managerial competence. It is interesting to note that her moral sense often eclipses her commercial dealings with boarders. She is one of those characters who are the source of the play's humour. One can hardly forget the scene where along with the Mayor she herself takes the labour to remove the strange gentleman from the inn to an asylum. Again, her speech, "Poor dear! - Mad people always think other people mad." (27), bears testimony to her own sense of humour. Here the humour arises from the differences between the actual situation and her perception of it. Though sketched briefly, her character is not without development. Initially, Mrs Noakes, does not co-operate with the strange gentleman on account of his peculiar behaviour. In course of time she becomes sympathetic towards him. Thus, on the whole she is an impressive character.

Waiters

Some of the minor characters in The Strange Gentleman are unimpressive, yet Dickens has taken much care to

individualise them.

John, the first waiter, greets the boarders. He takes care of them sincerely and seriously. He is diligent, honest and obedient. We notice him when he introduces a visitor to the land lady. The man needs a room in the inn. His presence is always felt, even when he does not do his own work, the job of a waiter. John's short and significant presence shows Dickens's thorough understanding of the life and activities of waiters.

Tom

Tom, the second waiter, is also very polite. He stays on the stage for a very brief period. He too is sincere and loyal. He is first seen when he is attending visitors. Always busy, Tom talks little, yet his sense of humour can hardly be missed. When Mrs Noakes enquires about the visitors, he replies to Mrs Noakes with his enviable sense of humour :

SECOND WAITER. Ladies are something alike, ma'am.

Gentleman. like neither of'em (7).

Will

The third waiter, Will, is more assertive than his co-waiters. He has an undaunted nature and a power of reasoning. Where Tom fails, Will succeeds comfortably. He too has a lively sense of humour. Consider his humorous description of the Strange Gentleman :

THIRD WAITER. No, ma'am; he's quite a stranger here. - He's a wonderful man to talk, ma'am keeps on like a steam engine Here he is, ma'am (8).

The Strange Gentleman

The Strange Gentleman in the play The Strange Gentleman has two identities : one is the identity of a boarder and the other is the identity of a humour character. Indeed, he arrests our attention with his first appearance and rouses our curiosity that is sustained throughout the play. Again, the name of the man is in harmony with the comical tone of the play which has been described as a comic burletta.

In fact, this strange Gentleman has enjoyed an eventful boardership. He feels satisfied having lodged at the inn, though evidently he differs from the landlady on different issues. Indeed he is a man of conflicting traits of character. He is ill-logical too. This ill-disciplined boarder imprints a lasting impression upon our mind.

The play is based on misunderstanding and mistaken identity. So, this main character has continually been either misunderstood or mistaken for somebody else by other characters. Both Mary and Fanny mistake him for Charles Tomkins, and thus Mary gets involved in an embarrassing situation. The Strange Gentleman meets Mary, Fanny,

Mr Owen and Julia, Tom Sparks and a few other minor characters, and each meeting sheds significant light on the different aspect of his life. He is a man of good heart too. That is why he is deeply moved by Julia's pathetic confession :

JULIA (R.H. with her handkerchief to her eyes). And through Lord Peters' negligence. I have lost a husband! (38).

His sympathy towards Julia is so profound that he marries Julia unconditionally. Besides, the Strange Gentleman's jolly comments tickle the spectators to hearty laughter. Most of the humorous situations arise from his unusual activities. He bolts Mrs Noakes inside the room to talk privately to her. Again, he clasps Mary emotionally and offers a pure fun to the spectators. Again, it is difficult to forget that particular funny scene where both Julia and the Strange Gentleman conceal their own identities.

Like every well-drawn character, he too develops in the course of the play. His first appearance in the play is in sharp contrast to his behaviour in the latter part of the play. At the beginning we encounter his voice from 'without' (8).

STRANGE GENTLEMAN (without). Now don't tell me, because that's all gammon and nonsense; and gammoned I never was, and never will be, by any waiter that ever drew the breath of life, or a cork - And just have the goodness to leave my portmanteau alone, because I can carry it very well myself; and show me a private room without further delay; for a private room I must and will have.—Damme, do you think I'm going to be murdered !

Enter the three waiters, C. DOOR - they form down L.H., the Strange Gentleman following, carrying his portmanteau and great coat.

There - this room will do capitally well. Quite the thing, - Just the fit. - How are you, ma'arr ? I suppose you are the landlady of this place ? Just order those very attentive young fellows out, will you and I'll order dinner. (8-9).

Here is the picture of a man who has enormous self-confidence. But this same gentleman is hurled in a sea of mistakes towards the end. He fails to keep his portmanteau with him as he fails to prevent the waiters from physically lifting up and shifting him not only from one room to another but also from St James's Arms into the arms of Julia Dobbs. Towards the end of the play when his innocent

behaviour is mistaken as feigned madness, he becomes a victim of most helpless situation and cannot even face the one-eyed boots. There is an interesting fluctuation in the fate of Trot in the course of short play. His condition changes from alarm to helplessness after which there is a sudden turn of events when he finds Julia as the most prospective bride for himself, and just before the curtain drops, we find him once again in his elements.

In this character Dickens has made a punch of the abnormal and the comic. His encounter with Mrs Noakes and Mary bears testimony to this blend of rusticity and comicality.

Tom Sparks

Tom Sparks, a one-eyed 'Boots', calls our attention to his amusing presence. His self introduction is full of fun :

TOM (Still at the door). I'm the head o' that branch o' the establishment. There's another man under me, as brushes the dirt off and puts the blacking on. The fancy work's my department. I do the polishing, nothing else (13).

Though Tom is disabled, he can carry out jobs tirelessly. The Strange Gentleman depends on him largely for his job. Tom is a crafty person who has used fully the handicapped situation of the Strange Gentleman and demands

tips. Unlike other waiters Tom sparks is honest and loyal. His sense of humour deserves special attention. A few comical scenes arise from his enviable sense of humour :

STRANGE GENTLEMAN. Hallo! stop, are you the Boots?

TOM. (Still at the door). I'm the head o' that branch o' the establishment (13).

This verbal exchange between Tom and the Strange Gentleman bears the testimony to his commendable sense of humour. He is also a superb entertainer. Again, it is indeed interesting that his sense of humour is not incompatible with the rustic background :

TOM. Ay, ay. Anything you please. - poor creature; don't put yourself in a passion. It'll only make you worse (25).

Indeed, Tom is a fine creation of Dickens. He is an impressive boot with distinctive qualities.

Mary Wilson

Mary is one of the significant women characters in the play The Strange Gentleman, she has been staged as a boarder, a lady-love and a humour-character. Mary has become one of the boarders in the inn of Mrs Noakes by accident. Mary and John Johnson on the way suddenly find out that their funds are running short. So, they take shelter at the inn. In the meantime Fanny reaches there and meets Mary. Fanny's unexpected presence enrages Mary. There ensues a short quarrel which throws much light on their characters. Uncomplaining as a boarder, Mary leaves home for a new destination as soon as she receives John Johnson's call. This highlights her emotional nature. Again, Mary is a girl of possessive personality. It is evident in her behaviour towards Fanny. Indeed, Mary's role as a sister does not impress us on account of her doubtful nature. Often she strikes us as rude and lacking in manners.

The short and significant verbal exchange between Mary and the Strange Gentleman produces huge laughter. The source of humour is her misunderstanding. However, there is a definite development in Mary's character. In the beginning Mary looks very rude and sceptical. Gradually she becomes calm, quiet and practical.

Incidentally, some critics think that the character of Mary has been modelled on Dicken's sister-in-law Mary Hogarth who died untimely.

Fanny Wilson

Dickens has sketched two sisters in the play The Strange Gentleman. They are Mary and Fanny. Both the sisters lodge at the same inn. The conversation between Mary and Fanny shows their differences. Mary is somewhat despotic and rude; Fanny is passive, cool and sensible. She is a girl of calculating nature. Her power of reasoning is praise-worthy. Her elderly qualities add a dimension to her character. Despite Mary's rudeness, she never uses abusive words to Mary.

Fanny is Charles Tomkin's sweet heart. It may be passingly mentioned that the play does not bring this aspect under any sharp focus. It is learnt from their conversation that they dote on each other. True, Fanny differs from Tomkins on various issues. Fanny is rational, Tomkins is emotional.

Though Fanny is a realist, she feels for both Tomkins and the Strange Gentleman. She is a victim of misunderstanding between herself and Charles Tomkins. This misunderstanding creates a humorous situation. Her practical sense is in sharp contrast to Tomkin's emotional

exuberance. She is, in short, a memorable face in Dickens' portrait gallery.

John Johnson

John Johnson is the smart-looking youngman who elopes with Mary and lodge temporarily at Mrs Noakes' inn as they run short of money.

It is interesting to note that Mary explains John Johnson as a 'harebrained' (15) and 'mad-cap swain' (15). Basically, John Johnson is a bit rough and indiscreet. He is critical of the arrangement of the inn. Though he is somewhat haughty, he has a feeling heart as evident from the following remark :

JOHN. unfortunate man ! It is the second time to-day that he has been the victim of this strange delusion (28).

The Strange Gentleman behaves with John Johnson improperly, yet he deeply feels for him :

JOHN. Poor fellow ! His hopeless condition is pitiable indeed. (Goes up) (29).

Though not a humour character, he is at the nucleus of more than one humorous situation. Consider the following defence of his relationship with Mary questioned by the Strange Gentleman :

JOHN. Legally sworn in! Sir, that is an insolent reflection upon the temporary embarrassment which prevents our taking the marriage vows. How dare you to insinuate - (19).

He is thus an impressive creation of Dickens.

Julia Dobbs

In the play The Strange Gentleman a few women characters play significant role. Among them Julia Dobbs may be considered as the most attractive. She appears on the stage only in the second scene of the first Act although we hear of her before we see her. It is Julia who gives out the original identity of the so-called strange gentleman. The laborious journey that Julia undertakes to reach 'St. Jones's Arms' (5) shows her strength of mind and seriousness of purpose.

Julia Dobbs is a calculating and witty girl. The conversation between the Mayor and Julia Dobbs throws ample light on her character. It is learnt from the Mayor that Julia is an unfortunate girl as her arranged marriage had broken up on account of unavoidable reasons. However, both friends begin to talk to each other about old happy days. This shows that Julia is a good friend.

Julia has a strong heart, that is why she never easily surrenders to anything. She judges everything in the light of reason. Julia's plan to make the Strange Gentleman lunatic proves that she is resourceful enough. The recognition of her faults and consequent repentance .

"Oh! Sir, - spare my feelings - I did. - The horses were ordered and paid for; and everything was ready. (weeps)"(38). marks the development of her character.

Julia's acceptance of Mr Walker Trott as her husband reveals the helplessness of Victorian women who had no choice but to accept whatever came their way by accident.

Mr Owen Overton

The name of Mr Owen Overton, the Mayor of the town, is first heard from the 'odd' man who wishes to convey the news of his distress to the Mayor and pray for his intervention. So the Mayor came not only as an administrator but as a friend of Julia.

The Mayor has met Julia on the way quite accidentally, and come to know that she is in trouble. In order to help her he asks Mrs Noakes that she should do something for the benefit of Julia. But he is more a friend than the town-administrator. For the sake of friendship he becomes partial, when as a mayor he should be impartial. Indeed,

he is not very much competent as an administrator. He has neither the governing voice nor the strong personality. His power is enormous, yet his authority is nil. He prefers to steer through the middle course where there is hardly any risk. His approval of Julia's marriage is an example to it.

The Mayer is a humour-character in the play. When Julia demands for repayment of borrowed money, Overton humorously says :

OVERTON. Stay, Miss Dobbs, Stay.

As you say, we are old acquaintances,
and there certainly were some small
sums of money, which - which - (20).

This character is interesting and fine creation of Dickens.

Charles Tomkins

Charles Tomkins is a spirited young boy. Fanny conveys her destination to him. Tomkins without delay reaches there following her information. Thus, Tomkins has been introduced to the spectators. It is interesting to note that Tomkins becomes emotionally involved with Fanny, though it has not been stated directly. This character possesses a soft heart in addition to his simplicity and sincerity.

Tomkins's short presence leaves a lasting impression upon our mind. He reaches the inn with a lot of hope, but Fanny disappoints him. Instead of giving Tomkins warm reception, Fanny receives him coldly. It enrages Tomkins and he grows suspicious. This reaction suggests that Tomkins is highly emotional.

Tomkins is aggressive in love, while Fanny as a lover is consistently rational. The audience enjoys the humour which arises out of their contrast. Tomkins's haughty attitude may possibly be explained as part of his rustic nature. Many humorous situations arise out of his misunderstanding. Tomkins anticipates one thing, but things happen otherwise. This gives delight to the spectators.

Finally, it is worth noting that Tomkins is a fine creation of Dickens. His short but significant appearance on the stage not only pleases us but adds a charm to the play.

Chambermaid

The chambermaid is one of those poor, neglected characters for whom Dickens had a natural sympathy. The chief function of this character is to guide visitors to their respective rooms and to look after their comfort. One may question : What is the use of such character in the play ? The introduction of such characters gives a touch of realism to the social profile dramatised.

Humour

Charles Dickens is a master creator of humour. As a writer he never forgot that art is primarily a source of amusement. Therefore his characters, situations and dialogues are soaked in humour though they never take us to the unreal world of fantasy.

In this play he has employed a few comic-characters. The Strange Gentleman himself is a humour-character. He looks like a clown. His encounter with John Johnson and Tom has been humorously conceived. To some extent Mrs Noakes is also a humour-character. Mr Owen Overton, the Mayor, is also a humour character. His presence, utterances and above all dealings with other characters tickle the audience. Will, the third waiter, is also a humour-character. Consider his funny description of the Strange Gentleman. Again, Tom Sparks is a superb entertainer. In fact, his sense of humour deserves special attention. His verbal expressions may be recalled in this context. When the Strange Gentleman wants to know from him whether he is a boot or not, he says that he is "the head o' that branch o' the establishment" (13). The spectators also burst into laughter as Fanny and Mary meet John Johnson and the latter feels that 'insult' may mar 'marriage vows'. In The Strange Gentleman Dickens has employed picturesque language and made some unforgettable situations which evoke

laughter and fun. The old man, who is alleged to behave like a lunatic, is actually a man of perfect sensitivity. The plan itself is funny, and again the shifting scene is also full of fun. There are several incidents in the play produce situational humour. The scene where the old man bolts Mrs. Noakes inside to talk to her privately may be taken as an example of situational humour. Again, the way Julia and the Strange Gentleman try to conceal their identities is also full of fun. Most situational humour in this play emerge from either misunderstanding or mistaken identities. The mock serious verbal exchange between Mary and the Strange Gentleman is also a source of situational humour. Actually, Mary mistakes the Strange Gentleman for Lord Peter. This mistaken identity evokes laughter in our heart.

An interesting aspect of Dickens's dramatic use of verbal humour is the skill with which he creates a deliberate ambiguity which leads to all kind of confusion. Indirect use of words and phrases like 'the lady', 'her', 'the other party' etc. are instances in point. We become aware of this ambiguous quality of the phrases when Mary meets the Strange Gentleman as her sister's lover :

MARY : You have arrived at this house in pursuit of a young lady, if I mistake not ?

STRANGE GENTLEMAN : You are quite right, ma'am (Aside)
Mysterious female!

MARY : If you are the gentleman I'm in search of, you wrote a hasty note a short time since, stating that you would be found here this afternoon.

STRANGE GENTLEMAN : (drawing back his chair). I-I-Wrote a note, ma'am!

MARY : You need keep nothing secret from me, Sir. I know all.

STRANGE GENTLEMAN (aside). That villain, Boots, has betrayed me! Know all, ma'am ?

MARY : Everything.

STRANGE GENTLEMAN (aside) : It must be so. She's constable's wife(17).

MARY : You are the writer of that letter, Sir ? I think I am not mistaken.

STRANGE GENTLEMAN : You are not, ma'am; I confess I did write it. What was I to do, ma'am ? Consider the situation in which I was placed.

MARY : In your situation, you had, as it appears to me, only one course to pursue.

STRANGE GENTLEMAN. You mean the course I adopted ?

MARY. • Undoubtedly.

STRANGE GENTLEMAN : I am very happy to hear you say so,
though of course I should like it to be kept a secret.

MARY. • Oh, of course.

STRANGE GENTLEMAN (Drawing his chair close to her, and
speaking very softly). Will you allow me to ask you,
whether the constables are downstairs ?

MARY. • (Surprised). The constables!

STRANGE GENTLEMAN : Because if I am to be apprehended, I
should like to have it over. I am quite ready, if
it must be done.

MARY. • No legal interference has been attempted. There is
nothing to prevent your continuing your Journey to
- night.

STRANGE GENTLEMAN : But will not the other party follow ?

MARY : (Looking down). The other party, I am compelled
to inform you, is detained here by-by want of funds.

STRANGE GENTLEMAN (starting up) : Detained here by want of
funds! Hurrah! Hurrah! I have caged him at last.
I'm revenged for all his blustering and bullying.
This is glorious triumph, ha, ha, ha ! I have
nailed him - nailed him to the spot :(16).

The Critical Estimate

The Strange Gentleman is a strange concoction indeed. The well-worn machinery of farce can be detected rattling and squeaking and the number of "asides" is prodigious. Harley has one explanatory soliloquy of over 500 words, another of 200 words, and so on. It says much for his art that he carried the role so well. As the very first of Dickens's plays to be put on at a public theatre, the cast, as printed, is worth preserving, if only as a museum piece. The constant repetition of the "St James's Arms" after the description of each character works as though it were intend as cumulative reminder of the theatre itself - a "psychological advertisement."

Although, technically the play may not be strictly called a burletta, it is full of Dickensian humour. The most important comic device employed by Dickens in this play is mistaken identity. Both Julia and Owen Overton mistake The Strange Gentleman as Lord Peter and think him to be an extremely passionate man. They think that Mr Trot of The Strange Gentleman is only a disguised name of Lord Peter.

Julia's plan to ask Lord Peter to play the Lunatic is just the thing required for the humorously pathetic situation of Mr Trot whose most original and true sincerity is regarded by overton as an excellent performance. He considers it as an expression or real 'passion' and an admirable 'Joke' in itself. Noakes who is actually made to believe that this Strange Gentleman is mad contributes to the humour of situation with her exclamation :

MRS NOAKES (R.H.). Poor dear ! Mad people always think other people mad (27).

The humour is further intensified by the Strange Gentleman's appeal to the Mayor to secure the one-eyed boots which the Mayor construes as a hint for being sent to his bed room :

STRANGE GENGLEMAN. Mr. Mayor, I call upon you to issue your warrant for the instant confinement of that one-eyed Orson in some place of security (28).

Another aspect of the humour of situation is cleverly exploited by Dickens through his setting. Room No. 23 is Strange Gentleman's bed room and one is made aware of his presence inside by his pair of boots lying at the door. Fanny is under the impression that they are Charles Tomkins's boots. Tomkins on the other hand has noticed the pair of

boots at the entrance of the Room No. 23 and he suspects that his rival whom he supposes to be Fanny's lover must be sleeping in the same Room No. 23 and his confusion becomes worse confounded when he notices another pair of boots outside Room No. 24, the Room where Mary's lover John Johnson has put up.

It is evident that the coincidences arising out of the arrival of three sets of people all planning to get Gretna green has been dramatically exploited to the extent that all the people are confused. It is for this reason that the hasty note which Fanny receives from Tomkins and the mysterious note which Julia has asked Lord Peter to write have both been confused with the Strange Gentleman's anonymous letter. The confusion with "the other party" is best seen in the conversation between The Strange Gentleman and Overton :

STRANGE GENTLEMAN. I thought I was managing properly.

I understood the other party was detained here,
by want of funds.

OVERTON : Want of funds! There's no want of funds in
that quarter, I can tell you.

STRANGE GENTLEMAN : An't there, though ?

OVERTON : Bless you, no. Three thousand a year! - But
who told you there was a want of funds ?

STRANGE GENTLEMAN : Why, she did.

OVERTON : She! you have seen her then ? She told me
you had not.

STRANGE GENTLEMAN : Nonsense; don't believe her, she
was in this very room half an hour ago.

OVERTON : Then I must have misunderstood her, and you
must have misunderstood her too. - But to
return to business. Don't you think it would
keep up appearances if I had you put under some
restraint.

STRANGE GENTLEMAN : I think it would. I am very much
obliged to you — (24).

Humour also springs naturally when Overton tries to
put the Strange Gentleman under restraint for feigned
madness. The Strange Gentleman takes it to be an excellent
response to his anonymous letter sent to Overton. The entire
situation becomes charged with rollicking fun when the
Strange Gentleman is again confused :

STRANGE GENTLEMAN. Yes-Yes-I say, what a queer room
this is of mine. Somebody has been tapping at
the wall for the last half hour, like a whole
forest of wood-peckers.

OVERTON. Don't you know who that was ?

STRANGE GENTLEMAN. No.

OVERTON. The other party.

STRANGE GENTLEMAN (alarmed). The other party !

OVERTON. To be sure - The other party is going
with you.

STRANGE GENTLEMAN : Going with me! - In the
same chaise ! (36).

The above illustrations bear testimony to Dickens's superb craftsmanship. Indeed, he is not only a humorist but a creator of innovative plots and situations.

CHAPTER - II

THE VILLAGE COQUETTES

The Village Coquettes

Historical Background :

It goes beyond doubt and debate that around 1837 the St. James's theatre was under the management of the famous singer, John Braham. He was sufficiently impressed by the young dramatist to sponsor two more of his works. The first of which was The Village Coquettes, a comic opera with music by John Hullah. It was first performed on December 6, 1836 and was well received. Richard Herne Shepherd, the first editor of Dickens's Plays, wrote that no English musical piece equal to The Village Coquettes had appeared since Sheridan's The Duenna. Truly, the work-man like unfolding of the action and the charm of the dialogue were exceptional in an English libretto of the early nineteenth century.

"The book of The Village Conquettes was published in the following year, 1837 by Bentley's in pamphlet form and we see, in Dickens's preface, how grateful he felt for 'the way in which it had been presented.'" ¹

1. Frank Dubrez Fawcett, "Dickens as Playwright" in Dickens The Dramatist on Stage, Screen and Radio. London : W.H. Allen, 1922. 24

Story Outline

John Maddox and his men begin to rejoice with drink after reaping and packing corn sheaves. Martin enters and embitters the whole situation. As he is John Maddox's friend, Maddox cuts a joke at him, but Martin responds to it quite amazingly. Martin hurts Maddox by reminding of his worth and position. However, Maddox admits it and the situation cools. In the meantime Squire and his accomplice making the sound of fire reach there. Old Benson, Norton's oldest reliable attendant and Lucy also come to attend them. Squire and Falm fall in love at the first sight. They begin to court both Rose and Lucy. Rose is attracted by the smartness of Flam. It is only flirtation, Rose tells Maddox. Lucy from the beginning objects to it. In course of time Martin meets old Benson and reports against Lucy and Rose. He also informs him about the doubtful relationship between Lucy and Squire, and Rose and Flam. But old Benson strongly believes that Lucy and Rose could not do such thing. Benson feels ashamed and agitated. On the other hand, Squire being rejected by Lucy becomes infuriated and orders old Benson to leave the firm. Besides, Squire scolds Benson, though the former considers Benson's long helps and contributions to the family. Flam, the crude person plans to somehow lift Rose from the Ball hall. He fashions a plot and discloses the way of his functioning to Martin. Earlier Maddox proved unbearable to Flam but Martin by cunning

behaviour pleases Flam and gains both his trust and belief. The result is the disclosure of the plan to young Benson, Edmunds and John Maddox. They all become cautions. When Lucy hears that Squire has ordered them to leave the farm, she feels really sorry because the whole family is in trouble on account of her. So she again returns to Squire and tells him that she is ready to obey his wishes. By this time Squire's good senses develop and he, too, realizes his faults. A repentant Squire assures Lucy that they ought not to leave the farm. But Flam does not change. On the ball-day everybody appears in the hall. Edmunds and Maddox, keep close eyes on Rose and Lucy. Everything goes very joyously and smoothly. Suddenly a scream is heard and it comes from outside, probably from the garden. All rush towards the garden and the truth is revealed. It is Flam who is caught red handed with Lucy in his arms. Then Lucy was in unconscious state. Gradually she recovers. Flam is scolded and punished. With the exposure of the Villain and the villainy the play ends happily. At the end Maddox is given land that heightens him to the position of Martin. Edmunds gets Lucy and the play ends with a choral song.

John Maddox

John Maddox, a farmer cum villager, is seen in the cart which is filled in with corn sheaves. In the stage direction the dramatist identifies Maddox as attached to Rose. Close and intimate scrutiny of the character shows John has three identities : Farmer, Lover and Friend.

Really, Farmer Maddox is a fine creation of Dickens. He possesses some essential good qualities. He is active, hard working and agreeable. In him boldness combines with tenderness. But he has no land and cottage in his possession. The farmer John looks very upright, vocal and dominant. John never works at the field by himself, he only reviews the workings :

JOHN. . . well done, my lads , ... do me good into the bargain. That's right, my lads, stow these sheaves away, before the sun goes down (45).

John has a true protesting self also. He openly challenges Flam :

JOHN ... I oughtn't to make jokes till I arrive , like you, at the dignity of a small piece of ground and a cottage; but I must laugh at a joke sometimes(46).

He has a tender heart :

JOHN ... but to my thinking I never saw the hedges look so fresh, the fields so rich or the old house so pretty and comfortable, as they do this morning. It's fancy that, George-an't it ? (77).

Poverty and misery never make him mean. Rather the 'insult' and 'negligence', which he, time and again, receives, make him emotional. Thus, he becomes an embodiment of the spirit of the country. The distinction between Martin and him is well established. John does not know how to speak. Therefore, his jokes offend Martin.

In fact, most of Dickens's characters are humanized. This John is no exception. Therefore, John feels real sorrow when he comes to know that old Benson has to leave the Farm by squire's order. He thinks that farm is a place of solace, happiness and inspiration. So he is shocked at the news. His free and frank nature adds a new dimension to the character. Urban society cannot spoil his basic goodness. When Flam asks him to leave the place for his selfish ends, John makes Flam understand that in a public place he can wait without other's permission. Sense of gratitude is another striking feature of his character. Edmunds offers him a cottage and a land, which means social recognition and John ever remains grateful. As a friend, John is jolly. Divisions and sub-divisions of a society are insignificant to him. John is Rose's love. He is logical, responsible, upright and cautious. In love he looks more like a guardian than a lover. Maddox has a deep seated faith in Rose. Therefore Martin fails to disturb John's love for Rose. John having known Rose's relation with

Flam simply says :

JOHN. That's just the very advice I would give you, Rose; do you go away, if you don't want to be ruined (56).

Here lies the distinction between John Maddox and common lovers. Such considerations indicate broadness of his mind. Mark how he excuses Rose's alleged weakness for Flam :

JOHN. You mean Mr. Flam ? Ah! it's a bad business, altogether; but still there are some excuses to be made for a Young country girl, who has never seen a town gentleman before, ... (78).

As a lover John is honest and since and holds that a healthy relation waits on mutual admiration and respect.

John is a country man. He may not have external sophistication and handsome appearance, but he is laborious, and responsible. He always conscious of his limitations also.

The play is an overt criticism of the feudal society and John Maddox voices Dickens's protest against the norms of the society. John represents the have-nots who are supposed to be blindly obey their lords. But on several

occasions we find John strongly asserting his personality. Although he evinces ox-like obstinacy, when he is insultingly called 'ox' he boldly protests :

JOHN.Ox! who do you call Ox? Maddox is my name (51).

John begins as an ordinary farmer and ends with the possession of a piece of land and a cottage. This possibly is symptomatic of the great change that was coming over the social order towards the middle of the 19th century.

Martin Stokes

Martin Stokes is a scheming mischief maker and a hypocrite. Dubiousness is the keynote of his nature. His refrain (Mudradosh) 'capital custom' is actually a mask that he puts on when he is in a light mood. But close scrutiny reveals that he does not use the refrain when he is serious. It is also absent, when he is excited. This ambivalence is also reflected in his double dealing with Flam.

Martin Stokes is a small farmer and keeps a large circle of friends and has an access to the upper society. Indeed, Martin's story has a different strand but through several incidents, coincidences and chances Dickens relates this to the main stream. On every occasion it is he who corrupts the character he comes in contact with. Martin

is a snob as is evident from the following speech addressed to John Maddox :

MARTIN.

Hallo, John,hallo! I have often told you before, Mr. Maddox, that I don't consider you in a situation of life which entitles you to make jokes, far less to laugh at'em. If you must make a Joke, do it solemnly, and respectfully ... (46)

Martin insults even rose :

MARTIN...

"where is your sweetheart, Rose? - An't her walkings and gigglings, and whisperings, and simperings, with the Squire's friend, Mr. Sparkins Flam, the talk of the whole place ? Nothing wrong there - eh ?" ... (47)

He poisons her mind saying , "Mr. Flam intends at ten o' clock, this very night ... by force, in secret ... to carry off,against her will, and elope with Miss Rose" (83).

Though he has a lame excuse for this misdeed :

MARTIN... always thinking of the welfare of those I like best, and very seldom receiving any gratitude in return (48).

Martin should not do this because he is well aware of Rose's involvement with John. It signifies his ill nature

clearly. He speaks against Lucy before idealist old Benson :

MARTIN... don't you think that ill-natured people may say there's something wrong in the frequency of the Squire's visits here?(59).

Thus, Martin spoils all the relations. However, he half-redeems himself when he realizes his fault and begs pardon :

MARTIN (running forward). So have I ! So have I ! I have done his honour wrong, and I hope he'll forgive me too (80).

When Martin convinces Flam that he has cut off the relation with Benson, Flam discloses his plain. This intelligence which adds a new dimension to the character set him apart from the common run of farmers.

Another striking feature of his character is his craze for the city which eventually makes him an urbanized farmer.

It is interesting to note here the human contradictions that exist in Martin's character. He loves the city though he represents the country. Martin is an immature plotter who still has some essential goodness in his character. Thus Martin is a realistic creation of Dickens.

Rose

Apparently rose is one of the village coquettes. But is she really a flirt ?

In the dramatis personae Dickens has shown Rose as John's dear. But Rose herself can hardly resist the temptation of Flam as she admits., " I wish Mr. Mr. Flam would come, for I will own, notwithstanding what graver people may say, that I enjoy a little filtration as any one"(54).

Like a rose, she attracts and entraps. John sums up "A great deal more like a monthly one, -- constantly changing, and gone the moment you wear it" (55). So it seems that she is one of the flirts mentioned in the title.

However, we will do injustice to the character by bringing such inference. Though John misunderstands her, Rose always remains devoted to him. She is worried about his well-being. When he is in danger of attack, she cries out in fear : "Oh, pray don't hurt him,-- pray don't. Go away you stupid creature, if you don't want to be ruined." (56).

Critics may cite some examples to blacken her, yet a close scrutiny shows that she is a sincere lover although as a poor woman she for sometime inclined towards the wealth and prospect of Flam. Her affair with Flam is

only incidental. Flam leads her to suffering, Yet she does not protest and endures every torture dumbly. It is she who consoles Lucy in time of her need :

ROSE. Rise, dear Lucy, rise; You shall not kneel before
The tyrant who drives us away (68).

There are also several occasions where Rose is singularly assertive. Actually, John is Rose's love, but Flam makes love to her. Rose's doubtful relation with Flam generates the dramatic conflict. Finally all ends with a happy note when she is wedded to John. Rose-Maddox relation is highly significant in the play, for it implies the supremacy of the country over the city. Since Flam represents the city, the rejection of Flam is a symbolic rejection of urban values.

Thus Rose has a simplicity and innocence which can hardly be missed. On ultimate analysis she is certainly not a conquette out stands upright and makes false all apprehensions regarding her moral state.

Squire Norton

Squire Norton is the representative of a particular class, namely the rich. His nature as a land lord or as a feudal lord has been highlighted. He cares little for social and moral values. So, he feels no shame in proposing

to Lucy, planning to carry her off and threatening Benson. Not only that he also seduces Lucy : " Deserve it ! you do yourself an injustice, Lucy. No; rather let me remove you from a house where you will suffer nothing but persecution, and confer upon you a title which the proudest lady in the land might wear" . . (63).

He misbehaves with Benson who is in their old and trusted man : "Villain ! quit my house, then. This farm is mine : You and yours shall depart from under its roof, before the sun has set to-morrow"(Benson sinks into a chair in centre, and covers his face with his hands. (67).

This shows his evil nature. One may take Squire as a type-character, but in fact, he is not so. He is quite a complex character.

It seems Squire has two aspects, good and bad. On the one hand he is crooked. The song sung by Squire points to this : " The honour, which to them was life,
Throbs in no bosom now; It only gilds the gambler's strife, Or decks the worthless vow"(63).

On the other he has certain qualities which redeem his villainous nature. Once Squire receiving the insulting defiance of old Benson, extends the lease and admits

"wrong as I know I have been, I would rather that the first concession came from him" (70). And again, "Nor will I. He shall not leave the farm, if I myself implore, and beg him to remain" (70). Again, when he learns the actual relationship between Lucy and Edmunds, he voluntarily withdraws. Thus he gradually corrects himself. At the end of the play Squire emerges as a changed man. The villagers are now 'honest people' to him and he takes pride in the fact that his tenants are honest :

SQUIRE. Flam, you know these honest people ? all tenants of my own" (51).

The main thrust of the play is to affirm the values of country. Squire with the essential goodness realizes this :

"A country life without the strife/And noisy din of town,/Is all I need, I take no heed/Of splendour or renown" (77).

This song gives a pastoral touch to the texture of the drama.

Sparkins Flam

Sparkins Flam is a 'friend' of Squire Norton. Flam is rustic. There is no sophistication and politeness in his utterances. His intentions are sinister,

attitude haughty, carriage proud. Flam's character develops through a series of incidents. He meets Martin Stokes first and feels satisfied because the latter agrees to his suggestion. But John raises voice against Flam's arbitrary activities and makes Flam enraged. Flam does not hesitate abusing John as a "poetical cauliflower" (55) and "rejected cultivator?" (55) Flam is a product of city culture where Mammon-worship is respectable. Like most urbanites he is a double dealer. He pretends to be passionately in love with Rose :

'Tis true I 'm caress'd by the witty, / The
 envy of all the fine beaux / The poet of the
 court and the city, / But still I'm the lover of
 Rose (58).

In fact, there are other references to his malicious nature. Flam rouses Squire's interest in Lucy for material gain. He is full of cunning machinations. Like Iago he can smile and smile and still be a villain. Mark the tone of banter in the following vituperative :

FLAM. AS I live, it's the Ox! - retire, Ox, to your
 pasture, and don't rudely disturb the cooing
 of the doves. Go and graze, Ox ! (55).

Flam begins as a loyal friend cum accomplice of Squire and, gradually his hypocritical nature is revealed. What is 'disgrace' to others is 'drollery' to him. Finally everybody sees through him and his villainy is exposed.

Old Benson

Old Benson is an honourable tenant of Squire Norton. He is practically present throughout the play. On the surface, he is a meek, polite and well meaning tenant. His soberness makes him shy :

BENSON. Not a merit of receiving, nor a boast of refusing it; but a man in humble station should be cautious how he receives favours from those above him, which he never asks and can never return — (49).

In the play we see Benson in three different roles : a tenant, a father and a farmer. As a tenant he is co-operative, not disturbing. His fatherly affection touches our hearts. It is his cleverness that prevents Flam from ruining the relationship between Lucy and Edmunds. Benson is always against falsehood and trick. It is his simplicity that lends force to his words and he carries conviction when he says :

BENSON. They lie ! Her breast is pure and innocent !

Her soul is free from guilt; her mind from blemish.
They lie ! I'll not believe it (60).

He sharply reacts to Martin's words 'who dares suspect my child ?' He does not hesitate to tell Squire :

BENSON. Calm ! - Do you know that from infancy I have almost worshipped her, fancying that I saw in her young mind the virtues of a mother, to whom the anguish of this one hour would have been worse than death ! Calm ! - do you know that I have a heart and soul within me, or do you believe that because I am of lower station, I am a being of a different order from yourself, but that Nature has denied me thought and feeling! (66).

Simplicity is his forte and his personality commands the respect even of Squire. Benson is a sharp contrast to tricky Flam. He sounds like the mouthpiece of Dickens when he says :

BENSON.
"... a farmer ... I care not for your long pedigree of ancestors, - my forefather's made them all. Here, neighbours, friends! ... Here this, hear this! your landlord, a high-born gentleman, entering the houses of your humble farmers, and tempting their daughters to destruction!" (66)

Old Benson's allegation against squire voices the feelings of the farmers against the feudalistic system. The weakness of Benson is that he is not rational in the

true sense of the term. If he were rational, he ought not to have believed in Martin regarding this comment on Lucy. To sum up it can be said that Benson is a good tenant and responsible father. He begins as a docile and accommodative tenant, but ends as a wounded father. His sufferings as a hapless farmer has been represented through the inexpressible hardships of his daughter. There is a definite development in the characters. Primarily, Benson curses Norton Squire because the latter is responsible for his miserable condition. Again, Benson forgives Squire because Norton helps a lot after realizing his own fault. This forgiving is a sign of development. Besides, Benson had a critical eye. At the beginning men like Squire and Flam receive respect for him. But as soon as he sees through their true nature, he judges them properly and is on his guards.

Lucy Benson

Lucy Benson is the second woman character in this play. She is a girl from a poor farmer's family. She has a fine sense of self-respect. When she cancels Squire's proposal, she is directed to leave the farm soon. Adversity forces her to marginally surrender to Norton's will. Lucy suffers but never breaks down. It is hard to find Lucy's weakness for Squire. Contrarily Lucy pays respect and honour to Edmund.

What is striking about Lucy's love is restraint. As a lover she is honest and truthful. Therefore, she can sing :

Love is not a feeling to pass away,
Like the balmy breath of a summerday (50).

She is poor and has always a sense of fear and so she does not allow Edmund to take too much advantage with him.

An interesting contrast between Rose and Lucy can be noted. While Rose says that she enjoys "a little flirtation as much as **any** one" (54), Lucy comes having prayer "Mr. Norton, I come here to throw myself upon your honourable feelings, as a man and as a gentleman. Oh, Sir! now that my eyes are opened to the misery into which I have plunged myself, by my own ingratitude and treachery, do not do not add to it the reflection that I have driven my father in his old age from the house where he was born, and in which he hoped to have died" (71).

The question that disturbs Lucy's integrity is the epithet, 'coquette'. It goes without saying that Lucy is not responsible for this. Lucy has never shown any weakness for Squire, yet she is called a Coquette by the society. Lucy is a victim of circumstances. Close study of the character shows Lucy's inner conflict. She is on the cross roads, wondering what to do and what not to do.

She has her father and family on one side, and on the other there is Squire and his proposal. This mental conflict makes this character dramatically effective and leads to her growth.

Nature has an effective influence upon Lucy. Nature has double aspects - cruelty and friendliness. Lucy is basically a good woman, so nature's better part is manifest in her. She feels for her father and family. Edmunds correctly says that she is "... the high-souled woman; not the light and thoughtless trifler that disgraces the name. (81).

George Edmunds

Edmunds is would-be husband of Lucy Benson. He is basically a food farmer, yet he has a house to live in and a land to plough. Here lies the distinction between John Maddox and Edmunds. Edmunds is a good soul. He has a fine heart. His integrity of character is praiseworthy :

EDMUNDS ... although you were armed, you would have had the worst of a scuffle, and you may not have the benefit of a third person's interference at so critical a moment, another time; remember this warning, Sir, and benefit by it (57).

A man of bold personality, Edmunds objects to what is an unjustified act. Instead of being dominated by others he dominates others. His attack is actually against the highly placed persons like Squire and Flam. Edmunds finds out the roots of evil. Therefore, his undaunted self cries out :

EDMUNDS Hold your hand, Sir, - hold your hand, Or I'll
 fell you to the ground. Maddox, ... I'll follow
 you. As for you, Sir, who by the way of vindicating
 yourself from the charge of cowardice, raise your gun
 against an unarmed man, tell your protector, the
 Squire, from me, that he and his companions might
 content themselves with turning the heads of our
 farmers' daughters, and endeavouring to corrupt
 their hearts, without wantonly insulting the man
 they have most injured (56 - 57).

Edmunds's speeches reveal malpractices and corruptions of a money-dominated society. Thus, he becomes a studied contrast to Martin. 'Trickery' is Martin's policy and straightforwardness is Edmunds's policy. While Martin's culture is rootless, Edmunds's culture has a root in brotherliness.

Young Benson

Young Benson is always in a haste. However, his haste only externalizes his mental restlessness.

"Where is Lucy?" (61) is a frantic expression of his internal anguish. The very interrogation shows the agitated state of his mind. Indeed, young Benson shows his impatience about Lucy and Squire's relation, though it is purely false. It is also a manifestation of his uncharitable decision. That is why on several occasions Young Benson threatens Squire. When Squire plots to oust the Benson family, he cannot sit still. He raises his voice against Squire along with other farmers of the society. His protest becomes significant because it is against feudal society or system.

However, the contrast between Old Benson and Young Benson is worth seeing. While the former is meek, modest and submissive, the latter is active, revolting and unyielding. Young Benson's insolent attitude enlivens the play. His lack of modesty may be due to his poverty.

Nevertheless, the character lacks flexibility because this is a very self-centered character. Throughout the play this character broods over self existence which comes in the form of family and shelter. He is so engrossed in thinking of himself that he cannot spend time for other's feelings, likings and manners. Therefore, he blames Squire without taking this situation into account. Squire proposes to Lucy

only when he feels satisfied that she wants a separation from Edmunds. It proves that Young Benson is a biased person, yet Dickens makes us feel that he is largely a product of the evil of the feudal system.

Humour :

Dickens is an impressive figure in the line of English humourists. He begins writing plays keeping in mind those spectators who used to visit the theatre for diversion. In this play Flam and Martin provide pure humour of characters. Martin uses a refrain 'Capital custom' when he remains in a relaxed mood. Often Flam insults Maddox and sometimes his utterances tickle us. At one point of the play both Martin and Flam become buffoon-like. When Edmunds threatens Flam, the latter takes it as casual drollery. To him nothing is serious. Again, Flam in order to gain favour of Lucy describes quite humorously that he and Damask are the 'Models of constancy' (64). He beats his own drum; naturally it sounds like an empty vessels. Flam has a greater sense of humour. Therefore, he can say 'Happiest of the happy. As happy as (aside) - a separation could make them' (64). The witty juxtaposition of 'happy' and 'separation' here produces laughter and makes him a pure comic character.

The Village Coquettes is an early theatrical venture of Dickens. Therefore, humour of situations and verbal

humour in this play outweigh humour of character. Besides, Dickens here has created certain situation which are extremely funny, even farcical. Maddox and his associates, for example, return from the field after reaping. They are looking happy for the rich harvest. They enjoy the day's hard labour drinking beer and dancing freely. Maddox in his state of intoxication passes some loose remarks which stir Rose. In this circumstances Martin tells Rose :

MARTIN. Oh! Miss Rose, if you go on in this way, you' ll bring us to our bier, instead of bringing our beer to us (48).

The quibble on 'bier' and 'beer' here is extraordinarily amusing.

Take another intance. Flam is uninterested in the presence of John. Time and again Flam praises Martin as the latter honours his words. But Maddox does not mend, and it causes Flam's anger. He tells John Maddox :

FLAM. Oh, mad Ox! true; I forgot the lunacy : - Your health, mad Ox (51).

The clever articulation of Maddox's name as 'mad ox' reveals Dickens's mastery over the use of wit.

On another occasion infuriated by John's disobedience Flam threatens to shoot him with his gun. Edmunds checks

him and then Flam says :

FLAM. The idea is admirable. My affecting to quarrel with a ploughman, and submitting to be lectured by another caterpillar, whom I suffer to burst into a butterfly importance! (57).

The comparison of Edmunds to a 'caterpillar' is singularly rib-tickling.

Again, when replying to Rose's question "Then you were not really quarreling ? (57).

Flam smartly replies "Bless you, no ! I was only acting" (57). The spectators wallow in jolly laugh. This fun is intensified by Rose's sarcastic comment . "Lor' ! how well you do act, to be sure." (57).

Dickens's skilful use of verbal humour is also evident from phrases like 'Poetical cauliflower' (55), 'rejected cultivator' (55), 'animated potatoes' (57) etc. It is interesting to note that most of Martin's analogies come from the agricultural world. Such expressions amuse the spectators and enliven this comic spirit of the burletta .

The Critical Estimate Of the Play :

The Village Conquettes has been described as a comic opera in two acts. There are as many as fifteen songs in it and so Dickens is justified in describing it as an Opera. In the preface, however, he describes it as a libretto which is supposed to be vehicle for the music.

In the first two paragraphs of the preface Dickens anticipates the possible criticism of this drama regarding its plot structure, function of the songs and the essential theme. But he leaves it to the opinion of the reader/audience. In the third paragraph he says that it is unfair "to judge it by those strick rules of criticism which would be justly applicable to a five-act tragedy, or a finished comedy."¹

The Village Conquettes is then a burletta, full of music, comedy and stylized acting. The play, we learn, was produced in 1836. And, historically speaking it was the first musical piece after R.B. Sheridan's experiment with this particular form in The Duenna. In view of Dickens's warning it is necessary to see it as a musical piece and not as realistic play. Since it is libretto, it is reasonable to expect emotional exaggeration and artificial characterization.

The play opens with a song celebrating "merry Autumn days" (45) which is the season of Harvest. The villagers welcome "merry harvest time, the gayest of the year" (45).

1. Charles Dickens , Preface. Complete Plays and Selected Poems. Ed. Shepherd, Richard Herne, N.P. W.H. Allen Co. 1882 43.

The song in a way strikes the key note of the play. And all that we should expect is mirth and gaiety, so that ultimately the play would end with reaffirmation of the essential goodness of things when virtue will be rewarded and vice punished.

The key character in bringing about controlling the action of the drama is Martin Stokes. His refrain "capital custom", is actually a mask that he puts on when he is in a light mood.

Old Benson is an interesting rustic character. He is simple and strong but he has remarkable sense of self respect and defiance. His passionate outburst, "...

do they know of what a father's heart is made?(60) reminds one of the wild revaings of king Lear and old Goriot. He does not hesitate to tell Square "Calm! - Do you know that from infancy I have almost worshipped her, fancying that I saw in her young mind the virtues of a mother, to whom the anguish of this one hour would have been worse than death! Calm ! - do you know that I have a heart and soul within me; or do you believe that because I am of lower station, I am a being of a different order from yourself, and that Nature has denied me thought and feeling!" (66) when touched to the quick Old Benson can forget his position and thunder at Square "I spurn your offer" (80). The character of Benson

is not just a type. He embodies a universal fatherhood and the strength of simplicity. It is on account of this greatness of his character that even Squire respects him. In contrast to Old Benson, Young Benson is simple but crude. He has neither the wisdom of his father nor has he innate strength of a simple villager.

Edmunds and Maddox are basically good. They are forgiving and faithful.

Squire Norton and Flam offset the village rustics. Of the two, Squire is a representative of his class and is crooked enough to plan how 'the girl must be carried off to-night' (62). But unlike his ancestors who had a remarkable sense of honour he is a hypocrite. To them honour was life, it

"Throbs in no bosom now;
It only gilds the gambler's strife,
Or decks the worthless vow" (63).

When Squire makes love to Lucy, he not only tempts her but sincerely believes that the girl is worthy of all the trouble. But after all he is not an incurable blackguard. Even after the insulting defiance of Old Benson, he extends the lease and when he learns that Lucy is actually in love with Edmunds, he gives up his claim and tries to make as much amends as possible. Unlike Squire Flam is a hypocrite out and out. He fails to understand the

honest intentions of Squire. The contrast between these two characters is evident in their use of language. The language of Flam is rough, uncultured and contemptuous, "then the sooner you create a scarcity of such animals in this market, the better" (56).

His description of the villagers is equally contemptuous. 'animated potatoes' (57). He refers to John as 'ox', 'cauliflower', 'caterpillar', etc.

Norton on the other hand describes the villagers, as 'honest people'. He takes pride in the fact that his tenants are honest people. The contrast between Squire and Flam is also evident in the expression of dramatic emotion in response to unexpected situation. Norton's reaction to Lucy's faithfulness is sharply different from Flam's reaction to the reminder from his creditor.

In this short play Dickens shows remarkable skill in his treatment of Nature as reflecting a state of mind. The opening and the closing of the play welcome Autumn days when the harvest is rich. Nature is brought into a significant relationship with human life. But to Edmunds the same Autumn days have a different significance. The withering autumn leaves remind him "love once true, and friends once kind. And happy moments fled;" (53).

The songs in fact are made to do the job of a Soliloquy. A dramatist uses soliloquy to reveal the inner workings of the mind of a character. The song as used by

Dickens also reveals the mind of the character engaged in the song. A soliloquy is unnatural but a song particularly in a musical opera is quite natural. But Dickens has used these songs not for decoration but for a thematic support. These songs, therefore, are more functional than decorative. In this respect, Dickens has added a new dimension to musical opera as a literary form.

The main thrust of the drama is on the values of country life and on pastoral setting. Squire admits :

A country life without the strife
 And noisy din of town,
 Is all I need, I take no heed
 Of splendour or renown (77).

He idealizes rural life and says :

•And when I die, oh, let me lie
 where trees above me wave;
 Let wild plants bloom, around my tomb,
 My quiet country grave! (77).

The contrast between city life and country life corresponds to the contrast between urban and rural values. Young Benson's song(79) is another solo and it brings to light the nostalgia and tenderness that one has for his home. The song reveals the agony of Young Benson as he is compelled to leave his home and its surroundings with which he has a strong emotional bond.

Similarly the song of Lucy (85) throws a flood of light on the deepest recess of her mind. There are three important duets. Rose and Flam in their duet (58) express their feeling in a very simple language. Squire and Edmunds in their duet (81) sing of Lucy's love for Edmunds. Martin Stokes's song provides the finale of the drama in the form of chorus and repeats the celebration of the Autumn day, thus completing the circle.

The play is divided into two acts corresponding to two opposite moods. The first act opens in a village and the prevailing mood is one of simple gaiety, the second Act opens in an apartment of an urban hall and the prevailing mood, as evident from Flam's long monologue, is one of crookedness and hypocrisy.

This short burletta is a quite remarkable achievement of Dickens because even within the narrow canvas of two Acts Dickens has been able to leave a mark of his dramatic skill. The setting, devices like parallelism and contrast and other elements contribute to the working out of the central theme : simplicity of village girls who are so inordinately emotional that sometimes they are mistaken for "coquettes".

CHAPTER - III

IS SHE HIS WIFE ?

Is She His Wife ?

Historical Background :

Is She His Wife? or Something Singular is Dickens's second comic burletta, The Strange Gentleman being his maiden venture in this interesting genre. Although barely mentioned in Forster's life, Is She His Wife ? Subtitled 'Something Singular!' was a success when mounted on the stage on 13 March 1837.

It was first presented to make up the bill for 6 March 1837, with only five characters, plus a small part of a servant. In this context Fawcett writes :

"However, as mentioned earlier, Dickens traded his third piece to the St. James's management, a one act comic burletta, Is She His Wife? or Something Singular, with Harley as Felix Tapkins, Esq., described as "formerly of the India House, Leadenhall Street, and prospect place, Popular; but now of the Rustic Lodge, near Reading". The cast was completed by Forster as Alfred Lovetown, Esq., Gardner as Peter Limbury; Miss Allison as Mrs. Lovetown, and Madame Sala as Mrs. Peter Limbury."¹

1. Frank Dubrez Fawcett, "Dickens as Playwright" in Dickens the dramatist on Stage, Scireen and Radio. London : w.H. Allen, 1922. 26.

The Story Outline :

The story of Is She His Wife? or Something Singular centres round a series of mistakes. Mr Lovetown is not outwardly smart and impressive. Mrs Lovetown is critical of her husband's poor appearance. This leads to occasional conjugal tiffs. Tapkins, a merry young bachelor, who is unwanted to Mr Lovetown, visits them. As Mrs Lovetown plans to make her husband jealous by feigning love for Tapkins, Tapkins misinterprets her words 'wife of another' and jumps to the conclusion that the couple is unmarried. The misunderstanding provokes him to capitalize the situation, while Tapkins offers himself to Mrs Lovetown and seizes her hand, unexpectedly Lovetown reaches there. In this awkward situation Tapkins pretends to be looking for something on the floor. Now appear Mr Limbury and his wife who keeps her husband under strict control. Mr Limbury is sent out strategically and then in order to wound Mrs Lovetown's vanity Lovetown comes too close to Mrs Limbury and seizes her hand to walk round the garden. Mrs Lovetown overhears everything and plans to check their dalliance by informing Mrs Limbury's husband of her intimacy with Mr Lovetown. Meanwhile Tapkins visits Limbury and tells him that Mrs Lovetown is somebody else's wife, not Lovetown's. Cautioned by Tapkins, Limbury is determined to prevent his wife from visiting the Lovetown family. Now Lovetown hides in a conservatory expecting his wife there in the company

of Tapkins. Mrs Loveton however reaches there to find her husband making love to Mrs Limbury. She accidentally meets Mr Limbury who snubs her for her supposedly illicit affair with Lovetown. The confusion increases with the appearance of Mrs Limbury and Tapkins. Disentanglement follows as Tapkins's grave mistakes came to light. Thus, the play ends on a merry note.

Alfred Lovetown

Lovetown is admittedly a key character in the play. He is seen first at the breakfast table. Lovetown seems to be indifferent to the breakfast served on the table as he is busy reading a newspaper. It seems that he is a very tired person. His 'yawning' confirms his weariness. The cause of his weariness remains unknown.

The character of Lovetown has been projected through a series of encounters : encounter with his wife, encounter with Mrs Limbury and encounter with Tapkins. He tackles the situations differently. The ability of controlling situations shows his personality. He is first seen as an annoyed, vexed, indifferent and peevish husband, yet he is polite and well-behaved by nature. He knows it well that his wife is fond of country side but declares his lack of interest in nature. "... but I candidly confess that I prefer paved street, area railings and dustman's bells, after all" (93). This comment bears testimony to

Lovetown's love for town. As a husband, Lovetown does not seem to be considerate at all.

In vain Mrs Lovetown tries to remind Lovetown of his earlier vows, and complains of his indifference. But Lovetown is repelled by a routine-bound life and requests his wife not to quarrel.

In the beginning Lovetown is a man of very few words, Mrs Lovetown brings charges against him because she is not properly attended. Lovetown is not wholly blame-worthy. He loves his wife but he is not assertive, when his wife tells him that Tapkins is a better fellow, Lovetown just reminds her that Tapkins is a 'bachelor' implying that he might take advantage. Lovetown can never tolerate Mr Tapkins; though this antipathy points to the narrowness of his nature, he is not incorrigibly bad. Tapkins's relation with Mrs Lovetown strirs up his jealousy but his suffering is not so acute because he still has faith in his wife's good sense. However, he cannot keep off the disturbing thoughts. So he oscillates between what has been done and what is to be done. "But stop, I must keep a sharp eye upon them this afternoon, without appearing to do so. I would not appear unnecessarily suspicious for the world" (99-100). This decided step indicates that he is not hyper emotional. He knows how to tackle an embarrassing situation, 'Disembling in such a case, though is difficult - very difficult' (100). This

self contradiction makes the character interesting. Lovetown feels unnerved when Tapkins goes out with his wife saying : "Take care of yourself. I'll take care of Mrs L" (99). He reflects :

LOVETOWN.

what the deuce ... laying such emphasis on Mrs. L. ?
 what 's my wife to him, or he to my wife ?
 Very extraordinary ! I can hardly believe that
 even if he had the treachery to make any advances,
 she would encourage such a preposterous
 intrigue (99).

This remark hints at his want of love.

At this stage enter Mr and Mrs Limbury. Knowing well that Mrs Limbury has weakness for flattery, he decides to come close to her to excite jealousy in the heart of his wife. This proves that he is profusely ready-witted. Mr Lovetown casts admiring glances at Mrs Limbury and flatters her saying that the brightness of her eyes casts her colourful bonnet 'quite into shade' (101). Lovetown here is clever enough to intelligently exploit others for his ends. Limbury is embarrassed by his growing intimacy with his wife. Out of this misunderstanding arise situations which provoke laughter on the stage. Finally as he accuses Tapkins of tampering with the affections of Mrs Lovetown, the complications clear up and the play ends happily.

Lovetown is an important character in this play. Two things deserve due attention in judging his character. One is his plan, and the other is his confession. He confesses his plan to Mrs. Limbury. Had he not followed his plan very carefully, the play would not have ended happily. It is

Lovetown's plan which compels others to gather round an issue. Each character appears and confesses. Thus he helps other characters to open up and works as a catalyst. Again, the character of Mr Lovetown develops very convincingly. He starts as person who is apparently indifferent to his wife, but ends as a responsible husband. There is an artistic contrast between the initial impression that we have of him and what he turns out to be towards the end of the play. Initially we find him insensitive even cruel to his wife. But his coldness has been made plausible through his confession :

LOVETOWN.

I - partly to obtain opportunities of watching her closely, under an assumed mask of levity and carelessness, and partly in the hope of awakening once again any dormant feelings of affection that might still slumber in her breast, affected a passion for your wife which I never felt, and to which she never really responded. The second part of my project, I regret to say, has failed. The first has succeeded but too well (110).

Mrs Lovetown

Mrs Lovetown is another important character in this play. She is first seen on the stage at the break-fast with her husband. She is expressing her dissatisfaction with her husband's unattractive appearance. She reminds her husband of the promises he had made just six months ago, only to help him revive his interest in her. But her effort aborts. Lovetown's apparent indifference infuriates her. Indeed, she is free and simple and has a natural love for nature. She imputes her husband's ennui to his lukewarm interest in her affairs :

MRS. LOVETOWN.

And I repeat that if you took any pleasure in your wife's society, or felt for her as you once professed to feel, you would have no cause to make much a complaint (94).

Tapkins as if comes to her as a saviour and she finds relief in exchanging words with him. There is no secret relation between Tapkins and Mrs Lovetown. In fact, she feigns love for Tapkins only to make her husband jealous and thereby more loving. All these show that though very simple she can be tactful on urgent occasions. Benton using Tapkins as an instrument for her scheme, she admits her weakness for Tapkins before him but gives the impression that she was unmindful of his presence :

MRS LOVETOWN (starting up in affected confusion). Mr, Tapkins ! (They sit) Bring your chair nearer. I fear, Mr. Tapkins, that I have been unconsciously giving utterance to what was passing in mind. I trust you have not overheard my confession of the weakness of my heart (98).

She pretends to be desperate :

MRS. LOVETOWN. That agitated manner convinces me ... to confess
 Them why - why should I seek to conceal from you -
 that though I esteem my husband, I-I-love-another?
 (98).

She is surprised when Tapkins responds negatively to pseudo-emotional question :

MRS LOVE TOWN (Putting her hand on his shoulder with a languishing air). Does my selection meet with your approbation?(98).

But she soon understands that there must be a gap in communication, for Tapkins projects himself as her sincere admirer. Mrs Lovetown's association with Tapkins is apparently serious, yet it is only comical and highly enjoyable. Through this relation Dickens has created situations of humour. Incidentally, Mrs. Lovetown, in a sense, is the model of the liberated women. She is bent on exploring the reasons of her husband's coldness to her.

She is shocked to find Mr Lovetown in an objectionable position with Mrs Limbury. But she does not sentimentalize over the suspected infidelity of her husband :

MRS. LOVETOWN. Faithless man! His coldness and neglect are now too well explained (102).

Mrs Lovetown is next seen at the conservatory, where she reaches with a trembling heart to discover the truth behind Lovetown's coldness and jealousy - his close attachment to Mrs Limbury. Interestingly, her determination to find out this truth and her own attachment for Tapkins seem to be contradictory. When she chances to meet Limbury the latter tries to tell her something very seriously. But they talk at cross purposes and when Limbury asks her not to talk to Mrs Limbury and more she leaves him saying :

MRS. LOVETOWN. What ! an you suppose I am so utterly dead to every sense of feeling and propriety as to meet that person, - the destroyer of my peace and happiness, - the wretch who has ruined my hopes and blighted my prospects for ever ? Ask your own heart, Sir, - appeal to your own feelings (107).

Finally she realizes her mistakes and is reconciled to her husband.

Mrs Lovetown is impulsive but nor rakish as evident from her concluding statement—

MRS. LOVETOWN. Afraid, her me! I am as innocent as yourself. Your fancied neglect and coldness hurt my weak vanity, and roused some foolish feelings of angry pride. In a moment of irritation I resorted to some such retaliation as you have yourself described. That I did so from motives as guiltless as your own I call Heaven to witness. That I repent my fault I solemnly assure you (110-111)—is a fine piece of self assessment.

Tapkins

Tapkins is the most interesting character in the play. We owe our first glimpse of his characters to Mrs. Lovetown. To her he is a 'good natured', 'light hearted' creature of 'lively disposition'. Tapkins is trapped in an ingenious plot created for no other purpose than to arouse the mutual jealousy in a husband and a wife. Once he is caught in the web, he begins to spy on Mr and Mrs Lovetown to find whether they are actually married to each other.

He appears on the Stage humming a song. Apparently he is jolly and frisky. The song he sings is very

significant. It expresses a wife's appeal to her husband for cancelling the hunting-trip under stress of weather :

The wife around her husband throws /
 Her arms to make him stay / "My dear,
 it rains, it hails, it blows/
 And you cannot hunt to-day" (94).

The song not only reveals the gay mood of Tapkins but contrasts Tapkins's merry bachelorhood with the condition of a strained material relationship. Tapkins is much interested in trees and flowers. This points to the softness of his nature. Close contact with nature, one understands, accounts for the disciplined politeness and sobriety of his temperament.

Tapkins is a keen observer of life. He has a soothing enchanting personality. We wonder that Mrs Lovetown is fascinated by his charming bearing. As he overhears Mrs Lovetown's words and jumps to the conclusion that she is not Lovetown's wife, he reveals this to Limbury. This only complicates the plot because Limbury is already suspicious of his wife's intimacy with Lovetown. Tapkins thus makes Limbury think of Lovetown as a man who is fond of running away with other man's wives. He makes the action-thread of the skein more and more tangled. He regains his light mood only when at the end the knots

are unwound. He emerges as the happy go-lucky Felix whom we met at the beginning of the play.

In the beginning it is seen that Tapkins has a fine relation with Lovetown's family. He looks smart and has a charming personality. He can suit himself to any sort of situations. His personality is finely coloured with charming sense of humour :

TAPKINS . Bless you, Yes ! Something like the country, -quite a little Eden. Why, when I'm smoking under the verandah, after a shower of rain, the black beetles fall into my brandy and-water (96).

The incongruous juxtaposition of 'Eden' and 'Verandah' is profusely funny.

Though his exaggerated speeches fit into the comic tone of the play Tapkins is hardly a pedant. He is neither flippant nor dull, but occasionally makes funny comments. As he leaves Lovetown, he says. "Take care of yourself. I'll take care of Mrs,L " (99) .

There is a bit mystery in his character. The playwright does not say anything about the origin of his love for Mrs. Lovetown. But he is assuredly the engine of the plot. His closeness to Mrs Lovetown generates the conflict in the play. Again his decision to divulge to Limbury,

the so called secret about the relationship of Mr and Mrs Lovetown is dramatically crucial :

TAPKINS. This, certainly, is a most extraordinary affair.

Not her ... the confession I overheard about her marriage to another. I have been thinking that, after such a discovery, it would be highly improper to allow Limbury and his wife to meet her without warning him of the fact ..(103).

When Tapkins first appears as a family friend of the Lovetowns, he looks formal, sober and upright. But gradually his love-sickness makes him very emotional. However, when he complains to Limbury against the Lovetowns he impresses us as one who is anxious for social health. But Tapkins is not after all mischievous. At the end he confesses his mistake and asks Lovetown to be reconciled to his wife :

TAPKINS. Very possible indeed ! Believe ... my corroboration. Here, give and take is all fair, you know. Give me your hand and take your wife's. Here, Mr. and Mrs L. (To LIMBURY).

Double L, - I call them, (To LOVETOWN) Small italic and Roman capital ... The key to the whole matter is, that I've been mistaken, which is something singular (111).

Thus Tapkins is capricious, love-sick precipitant but honest. He is a mixture of seriousness and light-heartedness and illustrates the Dickensian 'humour of character'.

John (Servant to Lovetown)

Dickens in all his works takes special interest in the downtrodden. Such characters are introduced customarily, often to meet the physical needs of the society and occasionally to represent unuttered thoughts and ideas. General feelings of the neglected are often voiced through the servants.

The servants in Dickens have to bear a lot of responsibilities and thus they become a part of the household. Incidentally, having a servant is an index of status and affluence. It also reflects a feudalistic attitude, for feudal lords in the past would like to have a particular class at their beck and call. Often servants either raise their voice against injustice or question their abject state.

Dickens had sympathy for this neglected, economically dependent class. His servants though poor are gentle and polite. Though rude in appearance, in reality they are well-behaved and pragmatic. Generally, servants serve as porters. They bring boxes, suitcases, breakfast table,

call visitors, furnish rooms, reply to queries about the household. They are traditionally viewed not merely as submissive but poor in dress.

In Is She His wife ? the servant plays a significant role. He appears on the stage only twice. From the stage-direction it is learnt that his name is John. Nothing in detail has been given about him. About his costume the dramatist remains silent. John appears in the first scene in order to inform the Lovetown family of the visit of Mr and Mr Limbury. Here he is just a servant. He hastily reappears on the stage after sometime to report about the bay pony 'Kicking the chaise to pieces!' (101). He is responsible enough to report in time if the bay pony gets its 'hind leg over the traces' (101). The news conveyed by John gives Lovetown to virtually push Limbury out of the room and to make love to Mrs. Limbury, theatrically in order to make his wife jealous. The servant's role in complicating the threads of the plot is here pivotal.

Limbury

Limbury, an image of Victorian conservatism, is also an interesting character in the play. We are introduced to Limbury in the first scene. He remains on the stage for a brief period of time.

Nothing of him has been said in the stage direction. As a husband he is loving and responsible. He has much respect for his wife's sentiments and feelings. But he is free from jealousy. So, he cannot tolerate Lovetown. While Mrs. Limbury is open, he is very conservative. As a social man, he commands respect. Truly he has no control over his wife. This is probably because as a peace-loving person he avoids confrontations and surrenders to the wills of his wife. As he is civilized in his manners, he expresses even his deepest anger most politely. He is so passive that when Tapkins discloses his version of the relationship of Mr and Mrs Lovetown; he accepts it without a question.

Limbury is neither sly as Tapkins, nor assertive as Lovetown. He is a comic character. He intends to correct Mrs. Lovetown, though he has no proof of her dishonesty. Though conservative, he reviews her supposed elopement with her paramour in the light of reason and advises Mrs Lovetown to return to her husband. Limbury is a bit impractical. He accuses Mrs Lovetown without verifying the truth of Tapkins's words. At the initial stage of

his conversation with Mrs. Lovetown; Limbury strikes us as polite and sophisticated. But then the disparaging comments he makes about Mrs. Lovetown without having definite clues amount to defamation. Limbury is dramatically an important character. The complications resolve only when he accuses Lovetown of being a philanderer, a Don Juan protesting love to many. If he had not attacked Lovetown, the latter would not have held Tapkins culpable for all this and the play would not have been dramatically successful. It is Limbury who bridges the breach between Lovetown and Mrs. Lovetown. He is not mean, for he is unwilling to take advantage of the helplessness of Mrs. Lovetown.

AS a writer of comic burletta Dickens in this play never attempts to probe psychological depth but looks for material absurdities in the nature of Limbury. In this respect he is a sharp contrast to Lovetown. While Lovetown is shrewd and practical, Limbury is gullible and impractical but not too complex. He may be an odd man out, but a comic burletta draws its strength from characters like Limbury.

Mrs Limbury

Mrs. Limbury is introduced to us as an ordinary housewife, having the common traits of a female character. Like other women, she has a tendency to dominate and command. Mrs. Limbury looks frank and free. She is slightly talkative. We meet her when she comes with her husband to the house of Lovetown. She is well behaved and refined. She keeps informal and easy relationship with everyone. She treats her husband egoistically :

MRS LIMBURY. O! Peter is always agreeable to anything that is agreeable to me. Aren't you, Peter ? (101).

Mrs Limbury demands social position and honour generally denied to the Victorian women. Mrs. Limbury, remains on the stage for a short while. Her short presence on the stage is, however, quite significant. Mrs. Limbury in her speech never shows any serious feelings for Lovetown. Though she does not know that Lovetown is in zest and not in earnest she would not encourage Lovetown to be close, "Rise, I entreat you, - we shall be discovered" (102).

This is not simply a fear of scandal, for even Lovetown at the end admits that he affected a passion for her which "I never felt, and to which she never really

responded" (110). Mrs. Limbury by nature is honest and true to herself. She is proud of her identity. Thematically, the Character of Mrs. Limbury is important. When Lovetown protests his love for her, though a married woman she entertains it not because she is lustful but she wants to make her husband jealous. There is no evil motive behind it.

Mrs. Limbury reappears on the stage before the end of the play. She clears her stand and makes other easy about her actual relation with Lovetown. She admits that she received Lovetown's addresses not only to help him in his project but to teach her husband the misery of jealous fears. Her concluding sentence "come here, you stupid little jealous insinuating darling" (110) shows her bitter-sweet love for her husband.

The mystery that gathered round their relationship ends and everyone comes to know the truth about her. So, while as a friend she is true, as a wife she is sincere, though dominating. It is to be noted that though apparently uncompromising, Mrs. Limbury occasionally could be humorous. When the servant reports of the bay horse 'kicking the chaise to pieces" (101). She quips "Oh! he'll kick somebody's brains out, if Peter don't go to him" (102) in order to dismiss her husband and receive the addresses of Lovetown.

There is a point of similarity between Mrs. Lovetown and Mrs. Limbury. Both wish to arouse jealousy in the hearts of their husband. Mrs. Lovetown fed up with Lovetown's coldness and insensibility plans to use Tapkins as a very good instrument for wounding her husband's vanity.

But there is also a point of difference between these two ladies. In the last scene of the play Mrs. Lovetown is most humble and appologetic :

MRS LOVETOWN. Alfred, here me ! I am as innocent as yourself. Your fancied neglect and coldness hurt my weak vanity, and roused some foolish feelings of angry pride. In a moment of irritation I resorted to some such retaliation as you have yourself described ... That I repent my fault I solemnly assure you (110-111).

She is the only character in the play who is truly repentant. Mrs. Limbury, on the otherhand, is anything but apologetic. When she explains why she received the attentions of Lovetown, her tone is authoritative :

MRS .LIMBURY. Why, not because I liked them, of course, but to assist Mr. Lovetown in his project, and to teach you the misery of those jealous fears (110).

Humour :

Dickens is an impressive figure in the line of English humorists. As a playwright he always kept in mind those working class spectators who used to visit the theatre in order to entertain their weary hearts. Truly speaking, some characters in this play are jester-like. The ideal example of this is the character of Tapkins. His walks and talks tickle us into laughter. He comes singing, acts humourously, hides in the conservatory only to hear himself disparaged by Lovetown. Again, incongruous activities make both Lovetown and Mrs Lovetown humorous character. A close reading of the play explains that Mr and Mrs Limbury are also humour-characters. In short the characters in this play have hardly any chance to be serious. Quite early in the play, Lovetown while reading a newspaper reads aloud certain phrases. The phrases that he reads aloud in the context of what Mrs Lovetown says renders both the character and situation highly humorous :

MRS. LOVETOWN : How often have you told me
that, blessed with my love, you could
live contented and happy in a desert ?

LOVETOWN (reading) : 'Artful imposter !'

MRS. LOVETOWN : Have you not over and over again said that fortune and personal attractions were secondary considerations with you ? That you loved me for those virtues which, while they gave additional lustre to public life, would adorn and sweeten retirement ?

LOVETOWN (reading). 'Soothing syrup !' (93).

MRS. LOVETOWN : You complain of the tedious sameness of a country life. Was it not you yourself who first proposed our residing permanently in the country ? Did you not say that I should then have an ample sphere in which to exercise those charitable feelings which I have so often evinced, by selling at those benevolent fancy fairs ? (93-94).

LOVETOWN (reading). 'Humane man-traps! (94).

Again in her intra-personal communication Mrs Limbury alludes to Tapkins which the latter overhears but thinks that she is talking about her husband.

MRS. LOVETOWN. So fascinating, and yet so insensible to the tenderest of passions as not to see how devotedly I love him.

TAPKINS (aside). I thought so.

MRS LOVETOWN. That he should still remain unmarried is to me extraordinary.

TAPKINS. Um!

MRS. LOVETOWN. He ought to have married long since.

TAPKINS (aside). Eh ! why, they aren't married!

... I rather think he ought (97).

Tapkins's confusion is so strong that when Mrs Lovetown actually alludes to her husband, he thinks that she is referring to somebody other than Lovetown. Thus, abundant fun which arises out of misunderstanding account for the humour that sets the tone of the play. Besides, trivialities, jolly comments and mirthful expression which the audience enjoy are present profusely in the play and create the buoyancy which is the hall mark of a Dickensian comedy.

The conversation between Lovetown and Mrs Lovetown at the beginning provide us with a fine humour of situation. Lovetown disgusted with living in with their dull 'out-of-the way-villa' makes the following funny comment when his wife tries to revive his interest in her society.

LOVETOWN. If I did not know you to be one of the sweetest creatures in existence, my dear, I should be strongly disposed to say that you were a very close imitation of an aggravating female (94).

Mrs Lovetown meets him squarely :

MRS.LOVETOWN.. for I declare that if I hadn't known you to be such an exquisite, good-tempered, attentive husband, I should have mistaken you for a very great brute (94).

Such an exchange of words, apparently pungent, is actually soaked in humour.

Again the situation in which Tapkins overhears the utterances of Mrs Lovetown and jumps to the conclusion that she is another person's wife, is comically tickling. Part of the situational humour springs from talking at cross purposes. When Tapkins proceeds to divulge to Limbury the so called secret about the relationship between Lovetown and Mrs Lovetown, Limbury wrongly thinks that the disclosure is about the faithlessness of his wife. So he works into furious distraction till it becomes clear that the dishonourable woman in question is not his wife but Mrs Lovetown. As they talk at cross purposes, the audience rolls in boisterous laughter.

Again, through a veiled use of pronouns or absence of pronouns Dickens creates humorous situations. The exchange of dialogues between Lovetown and Limbury is an instance in point. Lovetown thinks that Limbury is actually accusing Tapkins while the latter accuses none other than Lovetown. Lovetown's allusion to his wife as "Mrs. Lovetown" (109) adds to the confusion. This is also evident from the conversation between Tapkins and Lovetown that follows :

LOVETOWN (to TAPKINS). How dare you tamper with
the affections of Mrs. Lovetown ?

TAPKINS. O, is that all? Ha! Ha! (crosses to C.)

LOVETOWN. ALL !

TAPKINS, Come, Come, none of your nonsense.

LOVETOWN. Nonsense ! Designate the best feelings
of our nature nonsense !

TAPKINS. Pooh ! Pooh! Here, I know all about
it.

LOVETOWN (angrily). And so do I, sir, And so
do I.

TAPKINS. Of course you do, and you've managed
very well to keep it quiet so long. But
you're a deep fellow, you jove! you're a
deep fellow !

LOVETOWN. Now, mind ! I restrain myself sufficiently to ask you once again before I knock you down, by what right dare you tamper with the affections of Mrs Lovetown ?

TAPKINS. Right! O, if you come to strict right, you know, nobody has a right but her husband.

LOVETOWN. And who is her husband ? who is her husband ?

TAPKINS. Ah! to be sure, that's the question. Nobody that I know. I hope - Poor fellow (109).

Admittedly, the entire situation draws its strength from the indirectness in the use of pronouns and pronominals.

The Critical Estimate of the Play :

Is She His Wife ? or Something Singular, has a tightly structured plot. The sequential arrangement of the plot has been most skilfully manipulated. The various entrances and exists give opportunities to the characters to be left alone to talk out their hearts

and to be spied upon. Dickens has also made a careful distinction between soliloquies and asides, between the words that are meant only for the audience. The most striking feature of the play is the way the action build up to a crescendo leading to the climax which revolves to everybody's satisfaction. This whole thing has been done most enchantingly. So, never for a moment, the play reads dull. The interest of the audience is kept up through a series of interesting developments and funny situations.

The play is an eloquent testimony to Dickens's mature dramatic art.

CHAPTER - IV

THE LAMPLIGHTER

Historical Background :

The Lamplighter was written in 1838 when Dickens was actually very busy with Nicholas Nickleby. Three years later in 1841 Dickens had adapted the farce in the form of a narrative, in The Picnic Papers subsequently reprinted in Collected Papers (London : Chapman and Hall 1906, 183-196). It is interesting to compare the play with the story as the comparison would reveal the strength and the weakness of Dickens as a writer. Allardyce Nicoll, for one, holds that Dickens "could not find the true way of expressing himself dramatic wise. When he is permitted that opening into personal revelation which is narrative, he can do great things, when he is tied down to dialogue alone, his strength fails him."¹

In the narrative the story of The Lamplighter is presented not directly but as part of a larger narrative. It is a story within a story. Dickens describes the Lamplighters' "House of call" and the chief of the tribe, described as the "cacique", narrates the story of Tom Grig to a band of Lamplighters. In fact, Tom Grig is

1. Allardyce Nicoll, A History of English Drama 1600-1900, London : Cambridge University Press, 1963, Vol. IV, 210.

introduced as a third person in the story "Tom Grig, gentleman ... was an ornament to us ... Tom's family gentlemen were all Lamplighters."²

Asked whether the ladies were also Lamplighters, the cacique makes a comment which reflects Dickens's attitude to women "They had talent enough for it, Sir and would have been, but for the prejudices of the society ... (they) attended to the house keeping generally. It's hard thing upon women, gentlemen, that they are limited to such a sphere of action as this : very hard."³

It is obvious that the opportunity in the narrative form for expression of personal feelings is completely missing in the dramatic form. For example, in the narrative when Tom is taken inside the house of Mr. Stargazer his condition is described in a way which is impossible to do in the play "Gentlemen, if Tom had n't been remarkable for his love of truth I think you would still have believed him when he said all this was like a dream."⁴ In the fiction Tom is treated with good drink

2. Collected Papers : London : Chapman and Hall, 1906, 184.

3. Ibid, 185.

4. Ibid, 188.

and dinner and his reaction to it reveals his social position. This is definitely an improvement upon the play which does not have this situation. Consider also how Tom describes the two young ladies in the narrative:

I will not attempt a description of female beauty gentlemen, for everyone of us has a mode of his own that suits his own taste best.⁵

The narrative form has another advantage over the dramatic. The former can make use of dialogues but the latter cannot make use of narration. Dickens himself has made much use of dialogues in his novels. In A Tale of Two Cities for example, sometime dialogues occur for pages without a break.

But the play also has certain unique features not found in the story. Stargazer's quarrels with nature, the Lamplighter asking for his ladder and Betsy swooning in the arms of Mr Mooney all these are extraordinarily dramatic and hence unfit for fictionalisation.

5. CP 188.

Story Outline

Tom Grig, the Lamplighter, appears on the stage with a ladder on his back, a lantern in his hand and a song on his lips. The song is offered to the night because only at night lamps are bright. He climbs on a lamppost and lights a lamp and just as he goes to light another Mr. Stargazer notices him from his window and calls him. The lamplighter hears him but as he would not like to be detained he tries to run off. Stargazer is a peculiar man. He stops the lamplighter because he believes that man whom he would meet at that precise moment must marry his niece. Stargazer takes him home promising to give him the philosopher's stone. He then takes the lamplighter into confidence and introduces him to the family members one by one. Meanwhile, Galileo, Mr. Stargazer's son, quite whimsically wants to marry Fanny. His father is indifferent to his son's choice. Galileo and Betsy are dead against Mr. Stargazer's choice of Tom as Fanny's husband. But Mr. Stargazer who is very determined takes him to the lumber room where he finds Mr. Mooney, a gifted man, according to Mr. Stargazer. But Mooney looks very abnormal. The lamplighter being unimpressed by Mooney makes some adverse comments which Mr. Stargazer does not like.

Betsy tries to falsify Mooney's prediction and check Galileo who must assault his rival. In the lumber room

Tom sees a skeleton which has been prepared by Mooney. He is told that his days are numbered and he should die shortly. But he outlives the fatal hour and the play ends happily with Mr. Stargazer realizing his mistake. On Emma's request Mr. Stargazer allows his daughter to select the husband of her own choice. For Betsy's reward there is a general suggestion that Tom would be a suitable match for her. More so because Mr. Stargazer has noticed an error in the earlier calculations and accordingly Tom should continue to live till his 82 years of age. But it is at this point of time that a servant walks in to tell them that the people outside are calling the lamplighter to light the lamps. Tom, freed from all possible bonds of Mr. Stargazer's household, goes back to his routine work. After a temporary excursion into a world of dream, as it were, he returns to reality.

CHARACTERS

Tom Grig

Tom Grig, the lamplighter, is the key character in this one act farce.

A perfect combination of straight forwardness and light heartedness, Tom Grig is a balanced character. There are occasions when he does become a victim of Mr Stargazer's astrological predictions but finally he realized his folly and comes out of the maze. He is the representative of the working class who works for other people's sake.

Tom sings twice in the play. The first song shows that he is a lonely but uncomplaining lamplighter. This song indicates that he is a dedicated workman. Small wonder that he is unwilling to waste time in conversation with Mr. Stargazer. He is unpretentious for he is never shy of saying that he is a lamplighter. He never resorts to double dealing with men. Mr. Stargazer is a stranger to him, yet the lamplighter accompanies him on his request.

He possesses a civil manner. He humbly protests against Mr. Stargazer's plan of marriage between the unequals. He knows well that the lamplighter will remain a lamplighter even when favoured by the stars:

... the stars have made a mistake — the comet has put em out! (118). Tom is very judicious and takes decision carefully without any haste. He is always calm

and quiet. There is a sharp distinction between Tom at the beginning and Tom at the end. At first he is a simple man ignorant of the traps of the world. But illusion shatters at the end as he bids farewell to the world of dreams. The character develops through three encounters with the star-dependent man, with Galileo and with reality. In the portrait of Tom Dickens has finely mingled dream with reality. He is poor and so the assurance of the philosopher's stone immediately tempts him. But when Mr. Stargazer informs him that his days are numbered his dreams are shattered and he returns to reality again. There is a mystery about Tom's parentage. Finally, Tom has a fine sense of humour and a gift for wit.

Mr. Stargazer :

Mr. Stargazer is more melodramatic than dramatic character. His main occupation is with the stars, specifically with the position of the stars.

Mr. Stargazer who is first seen beside the open window looks outside the window inquisitively to know from Tom, the lamplighter, the position of the comet.

He is astrologer in the true sense of the term. His utterances and actions are ridiculous as evident from the following speech :

MR. STARGAZER. You don't understand ... what's going to happen here. Six months ago I derived from this source the knowledge that, precisely as the clock struck five, on the afternoon of this very day, a stranger would present himself before my enraptured sight, — that stranger would be a man of illustrious and high descent, — that stranger would be the destined husband of my young and lovely niece (118).

Though Tom is a stranger he is informal with him because the latter too is superstitious like him. When it rains he does not believe it. Rather to disprove it he brings weather almanack. It suggests that his own superstitious ideas are more dear to him than fact. He loves and feels for his niece. But the way he introduces Tom to Fanny can hardly be supported. In a farce making fun is more important than realistic character portrayal. Mr. Stargazer is not a man of fixed principle. He is a wee bit humbug too. Consider the following remark :

MR. STARGAZER. Don't interrupt me. I am versed in the great sciences of astronomy and astrology (118).

He is unusually eccentric and ever in the world of planetary position and mysterious change of fortune.

He wonders that Tom who is destined to win the philosopher's stone is a mere lamplighter :

MR. STAGAZER. Certainly. A man in whom the planets take especial interest, and who is about to have a share in the philosopher's stone, descend to lamplighting ! (119).

When it is actually rains against prediction he begins to quarrel with nature :

MR. STAGAZER. I don't acknowledge that it has any right rain, mind ! I protest against this (120).

This amusing remark reveals that Stargazer is a prisoner of his dogma.

Although he is odd, he is not a hypocrite. He ignores his responsibility towards his son. Naturally, Galileo almost at every step differs from him in opinion. There is a sharp conflict between father and son. The conflict brings out the arrogance of Mr. Stargazer. Mark also how he forces both Emma and Fanny to submit to his will.

The most amusing scene is the scene in which Mr. Stargazer appears in the sanctum sanctorum. He brings Tom with him. Here he meets Mooney. The way he introduces Mooney to Thom is a fine example of his sense of humour.

For example when he says "Nothing awakens him from these fits of meditation but an electric shock" (119). the audience bursts into laughter. He has a very soft corner for Mooney. He asks Tom not to show a 'disrespectful attitude to one of the greatest men that ever lived'(129). He shows typically Victorian conservatism in his unwillingness to listen to a girl. He would not listen either to Fanny or to Emma. Mr. Stargazer begins as an orthodox Victorian, but ends as a reasonable good mannered victorian.

In the story Mr. Stargazer is made the representative of the aristocratic society. The play also reveals his ridiculous stupidity not only in the manner in which he perceives hidden nobility in a lamplighter but also the way he quarrels with nature for violating his forecast. He is so obsessed with his findings that he refuses to accept reality when it contradicts his findings. The only compromise Mr. Stargazer makes in course of the play is when his dear Mooney threatens to leave the house and he asks Emma to choose a husband of her choice.

Betsy Martin :

Betsy Martin in this one-act farce is more dominating than the other three female characters. We see Betsy Martin only in the second scene at Mr. Stargazer's house. She is then chattering with the other members of the family. She is a friend, a guardian and a catalyst.

As a friend she is reliable. As a friend, she is sympathetic to her friend. She urges Emma to marry Mooney and exhibits her natural sympathy for Galileo. She also throws some light on Mr. Stargazer and Mooney with whom she is not happy. In fact, she helps us to study and understand other characters of the play. It is through interaction with her that other characters are revealed.

As she holds a soft corner for Galileo, she warns him against his misbehaviour with full command over him. Betsy on the whole impresses us as a woman with strength and stamina. She is not really interested in spoiling the relation of Fanny and Tom, as Mr. Stargazer thinks. As Fanny is not much interested in it, Betsy thinks of doing something positive for her. She works as a catalyst here. Betsy is of the dominating type. Her only aim is to press others to do according to her wish. Her jest and jokes amuse the audience. In fact, from the second scene onwards Betsy becomes the centre of attention. One interesting aspect of her character is her straightforwardness.

Throughout the play she never surrenders to anybody, rather compels others to accept her. She has a bold personality. She is witty too. Consider her remark that Mr. Mooney is "... always winking and blinking through telescopes ... and can't see a pretty face when it's under his very nose " (120). When Tom clarifies the cause behind tickling her hand, she quips "Then you ought to be more careful, Mr. Grig. That was a liberty, Sir" (126). Whatever she receives, she accepts only after judging it. When Emma, Galileo and Fanny press her to take Tom as her husband, she politely refuses but at the same time assures them that she can be friendly with Tom.

Her character is free from complexity and urban sophistication. Her pragmatism is best felt when she tells Galileo : "Nonsense, you can't afford to indulge in such expensive amusements as retaliation yet awhile. You must wait till you come into your property, Sir" (126). Frivolity and seriousness finely combine in her person. In the second scene when Betsy tries to prevent Tom going to the mysterious chamber, Tom wants to know the reason. She answers :

BETSY. (affecting to recover herself). No, no,
Mr. Grig, it's nothing — it's ha! ha! ha! -

don't mind me, don't mind me, but it certainly is very shocking; — no, — no, — I don't mean that. I mean funny, — yes. Ha! ha! ha! (127).

She knows her station in society and hence declines to marry Grig. "Let me see. I don't wish to have Mr. Grig to myself, you know. I don't want to be married" (125).

But this strong decision changes in course of the play. Just before the end of the play Tom receives Betsy. The change of decision points to Dickens's vast knowledge of the unpredictable complexity of human nature.

Betsy functions like a catalyst in the play. She helps Emma and Mooney to marry each other. Fanny gets Galileo only for Betsy. The way she convinces Mr. Stargazer about Galileo's claim on Fanny shows her tact and intelligence. The main reason behind Betsy's objection to marry Tom, is that Tom is only five thousand earner. This consideration of material gain in marriage, though mean, was not uncommon among the working class women in the Victorian era with whom marriage was a means for social upgradation.

Emma Stargazer :

Emma is the daughter of Mr. Stargazer. She appears on the stage only in the second scene. But it is only in the middle of the second scene that she opens her lips. It is interesting to note that about Emma nothing is told clearly in the stage direction of the second scene. Betsy first makes Emma known to us. She mentions her name in her speech, we are not even told how old Emma is. Only we are given a hint that she is a marriagable girl.

Dickens says little about her. Other characters and certain incidents help to form an idea about her. From Betsy's comment it appears that the marriage of Emma is going to take place without the consent of her and it is her reactions which reveal her character.

First, Emma is seen with her father. She is seen with her fellows in the same scene. Where her reaction against Galileo's idea of action is hard to overlook. Emma remains on the stage for a brief time. But within this brief time she makes her presence felt. Emma is not as prompt as Betsy. So, her reaction to Galileo's violent action is notable :

EMMA.(On the other side). No ! pray do not - it makes my blood run cold to hear you (123).

It is the appeal of a very meek and modest girl. Since she is not assertive, she has to surrender before any violent actions. Practically, she is a foil to Betsy who is forward and outspoken. Her detestation of Mooney is revealed when she disagrees to take Mooney as her husband :

EMMA. It's actually worse than my being sacrificed to that odious and detestable Mr. Mooney (124). Her dilemma becomes clear when she tells Betsy :

EMMA. You could not manage . the same time to get any young friend of yours to make something more than a friend of Mr. Mooney, could you, Betsy ? (125).

Emma's longing for freedom - to be unfettered in her words really projects the general wish. Her unsubmitiveness to her father's irrational demand creates conflict in her character. Had she completely obeyed her father, she would have become dull, unimpressive and uninteresting. Her opposition makes her real.

Emma herself is a mystery in the play. Why she objects to her alliance with Mooney remains unknown. The mystery is unrevealed.

Fanny Brown :

Fanny appears on the stage only in the second scene. She is the niece of Mr. Stargazer. In the very opening scene Mr. Stargazer himself speaks of the beauty of his niece :

MR. STARGAZER.

Beautiful ! A graceful carriage, an exquisite shape, a sweet voice; a countenance beaming with animation and expression; the eye of a startled fawn (119).

In his description there is an exaggeration that amuses the audience. But it is clear that Fanny is a pretty girl. The description exhibits that she is quiet and calm.

It is interesting to note that the entire play centres on Fanny. Mr. Stargazer gives Tom the proposal of marriage with Fanny. Galileo is madly in love with Fanny and wishes to marry her at any cost. But Mr. Stargazer wants her to marry Tom.

Fanny's main activities on the stage began with Tom's appearance. She makes a lot of fun at his cost. All her comments are witty. When Mr. Stargazer introduces Tom, Fanny's reaction to that is remarkable. She makes a fun of it :

FANNY. What gentleman, uncle ? Do you mean that elastic person yonder who is bowing with so much perseverance ? (121).

Fanny is well-behaved and well versed in etiquette. when she comes to know that Tom is chosen as her husband she does not openly show disrespect to her uncle. She simply expresses her wonder :

FANNY. My husband, uncle ? Goodness gracious, Emma ! (122).

Fanny successfully tackles the embarrassing situation. She knows well how to behave in an awkward situation and she is never in haste. She talks with Galileo very cordially. Her conflict feeling, love and sympathy all appear natural. At the same time Fanny is much conscious of her age. She cannot ignore the age she belongs to :

FANNY. You forget that, situated as we are, we could not be married, even if you were one-and-twenty ; - we have no money ! (123-124).

What she suggests is that they are the victims of a mercenary society which is inimical to human qualities : love, affection and sympathy. As a lover, Fanny is very practical and reasonable. She always tries her best to make Galileo see what is what.

Fanny suffers much mentally. Her silent suffering makes her all the more charming. The truth is she loves Galileo. But the problem is that she has no money and her uncle will not let her marry Galileo. In such a miserable condition Fanny remains steady and confident. She has an extraordinary stamina of mind though the situation she is in is highly critical : "was such an atrocity ... heard of? I, left with no power to marry without his consent, and he almost possessing the power to force my inclinations" (124). What she intends to say is that she is the victim of circumstances. While Fanny is passive, Emma is vocal and wishes to gain everything forcefully.

Placed between Tom and Galileo, she remains the centre of interest. Fanny is the nucleus of some funny situations particularly during feigned love scenes. When she tells Mooney "... You are my first and only love. Oh ! speak to me" (134), we only feel the mockery of it. Fanny's mock-courtship—

FANNY. Oh! no, no, no (detaining him), Give me some encouragement. Not one kind word? not one look of love ? (134) — is never taken seriously by the audience. Through this trick Fanny befools Tom fulfils her love for Galileo. As a lover Fanny is sober and her love is devoid of violent passion.

Master Galileo Isaac Newton Flamstead Stargazer :

Master Galileo's role in the play is secondary. Even the courage that he evinces towards the end is also secondary to Mooney's anger. The fact that he caricatures his father behind his back and decides to attack Tom secretly is a testimony to his lack of purpose and his cowardice. However towards the end when, on seeing Fanny's passion towards Mooney, he shows jealousy characteristic of a lover, his character becomes more realistic.

We meet him in the second scene. Fanny, Betsy, Emma and Galileo are in a mirthful mood. Friendly exchange goes on. Galileo appears on the stage with a fixed objective, that of marrying Fanny. Incidentally, Galileo was a great scientist who dared to tell the truth that earth revolves round the sun, not the sun round the earth as held by Ptolemy. The great scientist had to suffer inhumanly for his idea. The scientist Galileo had to fight his opponents and Dickens's Galileo has to fight against a self-opinionated father. His father in his opinion, is :

GALILEO... so much occupied in making observations on the sun round which the earth revolves, that he takes no notice of the son that revolves round him! (121).

Usually vexed by his father's obstinacy he occasionally shouts protestingly :

GALILEO.I won't stand it - I won't submit to it
any longer. I will be married (121).

The way he reacts when Tom, the Lamplighter advances towards Fanny and kisses at the back of her head reveals the strength of his personality. We may laugh at his childish behaviour but we can never question his sincerity as a lover. He is witty and ever quick in his reply. When Emma reminds his about the need for money, he observes :

GALILEO.Oh, I am sure every Christian clergyman,
under such afflicting circumstances,
would marry us on credit (124).

Sometimes, his feelings are demonstrated through actions. That he is suspicious of Fanny is demonstrated through his stealthy entrance into the lumber room and endeavour to oterhear the conversation between Betsy and Fanny.

Mr. Mooney :

Mooney is undoubtedly the most amusing character in the play. He is almost a clown.

Mooney, as the stage direction represents him, is an astrologer. From the conversation between Betsy and Emma we come to know that he is the prospective husband of Emma. But Emma cannot tolerate Mooney. Though Betsy thinks that Mooney is 'bad', Mr. Stargazer thinks that he is a kind and generous person. He is wholly dedicated to his astrological studies. As he tells Emma :

MOONEY. The little boy, ... has spoken wisdom. I have

been led to the contemplation of womankind.

I find their love is too violent for my staid habits. I would rather not venture upon the troubled waters of matrimony (135).

His character contributes to make fun and amusing scenes in the play. Mooney is an egoist. The recurrent use of 'I' in his speech fingers at his egoism. Mooney has a rare sense of humour. The audience bursts into laughter when he steals Tom's 'hat', and puts it upon his head. Again, when Stargazer tells him to unfold his hand for greeting, he raises his legs. The Victorians were by and large superstitious and they had faith in future-telling as Mooney has. Mooney is a fine creation of Dickens.

Humour :

Dickens's use of wit and humour in The Lamp-lighter deserves special attention. Humour here is never cynical but genial. Even the wit used is singularly free from sting. Mr. Stargazer is seen obsessed with stars. To him 'Sun' is important than 'son'. So, often it seems that Mr. Stargazer is more a clown than a serious character. Mr. Mooney is more a magician than an astrologer. For his funny activities the audience roll in laughter. When he steals Tom's hat and puts it upon his own head, audience bursts in a peal of laughter. Galileo's long name itself is a source of fun to all. Humour of situation is highly prominent in the play. Take one example. When it starts raining Mr. Stargazer quarrels with nature because according to the weather forecast it should be a dry day. Tom kisses Fanny under his hat. Betsy swoons in the arms of Mr. Mooney. The feigned love which takes place between Emma and Mr. Mooney is amusing too. Again, the bursting of the crucible also provides enough humour of situation. One can hardly forget the situation which arises out of Mr. Stargazer's appearance in the sanctum sanctorum. Betsy's stealthy entrance into the mysterious chamber and her hiding behind the skeleton tickle the audience beyond control.

There is no dearth of verbal humour in The Lamp-lighter. When Mr. Stargazer asks Tom whether he can distinguish anything of a tail of a comet, he says :
Distinguish a tail ? I believe you-four tails ? (115).

The following exchange of words between Tom and Mr. Stargazer is a splendid example of verbal fun-making :

MR. STARGAZER. Don't interrupt me. I am versed in the great sciences of astronomy and astrology; in my house there I have every description of apparatus for observing the course and motion of the planets. I'm writing a work about them... I read what's going to happen in the stars.

TOM. Read what's going to happen in the stars ! Will anything particular happen in the stars in the course of next week, Now ?

Mr. STARGAZER. You don't understand me. I read in the stars what's going to happen here. Six months ago I derived from this source the knowledge that, precisely as the clock struck five, on the afternoon of this very day, a stranger would present himself before my enraptured sight, ... that stranger is yourself : I receive you with open arms !

TOM. Me! I...the husband of a young and lovely -
 Oh! it can't be, you know the stars have
 made a mistake - the comet has
 put'em out ! (118).

Critical Estimate of the Play

In this play Dickens focuses on several problems of each individual. He is an optimist. Naturally, every emerging problem ends with a happy note. Each problem has some peculiarity and magnitude. Sometimes his handling of jokes and jests appears too boring. The play has three distinct scenes, but they are finely tied up by the single thread of action - problem of choice in matrimony. Both Fanny and Emma has this problem of choice. The lamplighter is always at the focal point. The title of the play is therefore apt and apposite.

Technically, the play is not flawless. The stage direction is not adequate. Moreover the exist, and entrances of the characters take place abruptly. The use of lengthy dialogues often jar on our aesthetic sense. Galileo appears melodramatic. Mooney seems to be not an actor but a clown on the stage. Mooney depends more on body language and gestures than on speeches.

Inspite of these Dickens has been able to retain our interest all through. The play like Ben Jonson's The Alchemist makes people conscious about social evils like the philosopher's stone. As a play wright Dickens is true to his moral duty. Undeniably, this play like Hard Times serves as a social critique and is a success.

CHAPTER - V

MR. NIGHTINGALE'S DIARY

Mr. Nightingale's Diary

Historical Background

"Mr. Nightingale's Diary was written by Dickens and Mark Lemon for the Guild of Literature and Art and was first performed at Devonshire House in May 1851 in the presence of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert".¹ Dickens himself was an actor when the play was staged. In fact, the combined efforts of Dickens and Lemon made the play a hilarious comedy with a farcial bent. It is not that Dickens suddenly took part as an actor. Five years before the production of the play Dickens had written :

I tried to recollect, in coming here, whether I had ever been in any theatre in my life from which I had not brought away some pleasant association, however, poor the theatre, and I protest, out of my varied experience, I could not remember even one from which I had not brought some favourable impression,....²

1. Charles Dickens, Foreword. Collected Plays and Selected Poems. Ed. Shepherd Herne Richard. N. p. W.H. Allen & Co., 1882. 2

2. Emlyn Williams, "Dickens and the Theatre" in Charles Dickens 1812-1870. A centenary volume. Ed. **EMF** ~~Tow...~~ London : Weidenfield and Nicolson 1969, 181-182.

We learn from Emlyn Williams that Dickens "turned to acting as another writer might have sought relaxation in fishing or gambling."³ Moreover, Dickens was such a good actor that his performance was practically "indistinguishable from a professional one."⁴ It may be interesting to recall in this connection that in 1845 Dickens had played a role in The Elder Brother of Beaumont and Fletcher. He also took part in Ben Jonson's Every Man in his humour. In 1848 he played the role of Falstaff in The Merry Wives of Windsor. In 1850 he acted brilliantly in Bulwer Lytton's Not so Bad as we seem. So, in 1851 when he produced Mr. Nightingale's Diary and played many roles in it he was already a seasoned and successful actor. In this play we get a picture of the 'dramatic Dickens' in more sense than one.

3. Emlyn Williams, "Dickens and the Theatre in Charles Dickens 1812-1870 : A Centenary Volume. Ed. ~~E.M.E. Tomlinson~~. London : Weidenfield and Nicolson 1969. 181-182.

4. Ibid.

Story Outline :

The location of Mr. Nightingale's Diary is the water-lily Hotel at Malvern. The hotel is owned by Lithers. It is a favourite recluse for 'sick' persons undergoing treatment of coldwater cure at Malvern. The play begins with Gabblewig, a lawyer of the Middle Temple. He has come to the hotel as an unrequired lover. He loves Rosina Nightingale. Rosina's uncle has not approved of the match because he considers Gabblewig a worthless fellow, a man deficient in everything. But Gabblewig is surprised to learn that Rosina along with her uncle and maid is also expected to come to the same hotel in the same afternoon. The next soujourner is Slap. Slap is however disguised as Mr. Formiville. But they recognize each other as old acquaintances in their theatrical career. Gabblewig decided to use Formiville as a foil and to impress Nightingale how deserving a suitor he is. He plans to use his amateur dresses and make an effective use of the assistance of Lithers.

Next appears Mr. Nightingale with Rosina, his niece, and Susan, the maid. We find Rosina and Susan constantly helping Nightingale in writing his diary or to refer to it. Incidentally, when the diary accidentally drops Slap at once takes the advantage of it and reads its contents. All the time, however, he is overheard by Gabblewig until Nightingale recovers the diary.

Making himself comfortable in the hotel Slap orders for wine. Gabblewig disguised as a boots brings it in a tray, but he by way of praising Slap for different roles that he has played, actually consumes Slap's food and drink. Gabblewig also tries to extract from him some information about Mr Nightingale. It is learnt that Nightingale who passes for a confirmed bachelor had a wife who is now dead. Gabblewig after eliciting some information from slap persuades Susan to reveal the rest of the secret. He learns from Susan that after her death Mrs Nightingale was buried in the preshore churchyard where her uncle was the sexton. Gabblewig then asks Susan to procure the death certificate of Mrs Nightingale.

The rest of the play is a series of humorous situations in which slap tries to befool Nightingale and Gabblewig, with the help of Rosina, dupes Slap and frustrates all his plans. When Slap tries to convince Nightingale in the guise of a smug physician against water-cure and prescribes mustard and milk, Gabblewig and Rosina appear in disguise of an ailing couple Mr and Mrs Poulter who are dead against mustard and milk recommended by Slap. Gabblewig talks of a captain Blower who suffered after using that. Slap tries to warn Nightingale against hired humbugs who mislead the patients and induces Nightingale to buy a bottle of his concoction and drink a gulp. Immediately, Gabblewig and

Rosina appear as the invalid captain Blower and Mrs Trusty and show Nightingale how adversely affected they have been after using mustard and milk. As Slap's plans come to nothing he moves out of the scene, only to have recourse to more complex designs, with the assistance of Tip he appears with a charity boy. He introduces himself as an old acquaintance of Mrs Nightingale who, he says, is still alive and is prepared to let off Nightingale if he pays two hundred pounds to her (Maria's) brother who is ready to take charge of her. When Nightingale agrees, Slap reappears and introduces Tip as the son of Mrs Nightingale. Just before Nightingale's surrender, Gabblewig appears as an old woman and claims Tip as her own son and thus foils the manoeuvre of Slap. When challenged by Slap, Gabblewig vouches the death of Mrs Nightingale and then appears as the deaf sexton and produces the death certificate. The death certificate gives a profound relief to Nightingale who now experiences a sense of liberation. Gabblewig then appears in his real person and confesses all his doings. He has now proved that he is not good for nothing. On the contrary he is capable of rendering a really useful service. Nightingale is convinced of Gabblewig's capabilities and when Gabblewig expresses his desire to marry Rosia, Nightingale after some hesitation agrees. Gabblewig advises Nightingale to burn the diary and be happy. The diary, he suggests, has been a great psychological encumbrance, a dead weight on him all these years.

Tip :

Tip is a clever fellow though he looks dull and unimpressive. With a lot of burden he knocks at the door of Water Lily Hotel at Malvern. He is very obliging to Gabblewig. Intelligence and calculating brain distinguish Tip from common attendants or coolies. Everyone tries to use him as a tool. To Gabblewig he is a burden bearer. Slap uses him to befool Nightingale in order to manage Rosina. Sometimes he is looked upon as a charity boy. His charity boy image makes him a complete buffoon. When he is in disguise Tip is hugely jolly. He entertained us with his distorted pronunciation. For example, the aspirated pronunciation of orphan as 'horphan' evokes smiles in every heart.

As has been said at the beginning Tip is very clever though he has the appearance of a dullard. At first Slap employs him for befooling Nightingale, but when Tip finds Gabblewig outwitting Slap he turns his coat and surrenders to Gabblewig before his double-dealing gets exposed. Through Tip Dickens shows the miserable state of the poor who are easily made tools by the rich. Tip rightly says that men like him are deluded 'with a glass of rum - and - water; and the promise of a five-pound note' (168).

Gobblewig calls him his 'puppy'. The word 'puppy' provides a dramatic contrast to the description of Tip as 'tiger' in the Dramatis Personae. He faces Gabblewig dressed as an old woman. He embraces him first as 'master' and then his 'mother'. The most interesting part is the way he then reacts to Slap :

SLAP. are you mad? Am I mad ? Are we all mad ?
 (To Tip) Din't you tell me that whatever I
 said.

TIP. You said ? What is your voice to the
 voice of Natur ? (Embraces his master
 again (165).

Here we see the 'tiger' - and indeed it is Gabblewig's tiger alone.

Lithers

'Lithers' has been introduced as the 'Landlord of the Water-Lily' a hotel in Malvern. The most striking aspect of Lither's character is friendliness and approachability. He assures Gabblewig all sorts of co-operation "I'm entirely devoted to you, and ready to serve you in any way" (146).

Lithers who is so informal to Gabblewig is very formal to Slap. His managerial quality is evident in his dealings with his customers

LITHERS (arranging table and Chair). Wine coming, Sir, directly ! My young man has gone below for it. (Bell rings without). More company ! Mr. Ninghtingale, beyond a doubt ! (showing him in at door.) This way, Sir, if you please ! Your letter received, Sir, and your rooms prepared (149).

Lither's role is vital indirectly because it is in his hotel that the entire episode takes place and the problems get solved. As a character Lithers impresses us by his sense of gratitude. He acknowledges Gabblewig's kindness in paying out "that execution for me when I was in the green-grocery way, and used to wait at your parties in the Temple" (143).

Lithers is a great observer of human nature. At the very first encounter with Gabblewig he feels that 'something's wrong' with him.

Gabblewig

Gabblewig is the protagonist of the play Mr. Nightingale's Diary. He appears as soon as the curtain rises and leaves the stage when the curtain drops. He comes to the Hotel with a definite purpose. It so happens that the landlord is familiar to him. Initially Gabblewig is taken as a man of 'all words', not of acts. Only for this reason Nightingale is going to separate him from Rosina whom he loves sincerely.

At the beginning, he as a frustrated lover is slightly dejected. But as soon as Gabblewig comes to know that Slap has an intention to grab the property of Nightingale, he becomes alert and watchful. This reveals that Gabblewig is not really the man of words but of action. Slap intends to befool Nightingale in the guise of a doctor but Gabblewig foils his attempt by proving his prescription wrong. Again, when Slap uses Tip as a charity boy and tries to convince Nightingale that there was a son born just before their final separation, it is Gabblewig who in the guise of a woman frustrates the plan. Gabblewig in the guise of Sexton appears to produce all the relevant papers showing the confirmed burial of Mrs Nightingale. Thus, Gabblewig proves his worth and removes Slap from his way. He is thus not a worthless loafer but a man of shrewdness, cunning and ready wit.

Though he has an undoubted seriousness of purpose he is not without a sense of humour. Take for example the scene where Gabblewig appears as an old woman :

TIP (solemnly). I'm a horphan. (Goes up to GABBLEWIG).

what are you talking about, you old Bedlam ?

GABBLEWIG. Oh! (screaming and throwing her arms about his neck) - my 'ope-my pride-my son !

TIP (Struggling). Your son !

GABBLEWIG (aside to him). If you don't own me for your mother, you villain, on the spot, I'll break every bone in your skin, and have your skin prepared afterwards by the Bermondsey tanners.

TIP (aside). My master ! - My mother ! (they embrace) (165).

Earlier, Slap in the guise of a doctor prescribed Mustard and Milk for quick cure of Nightingale's disease. Again, Rosina and Gabblewig being disguised respectively as a complete invalid and an old nurse take the wind out of Slap's sails. The ensuing discourse is soaked in fun :

GABBLEWIG (starting up). Mustard and Milk !

ROSINA. Mustard and milk !

SLAP (aside). Is this Captain Blower ?

GABBLEWIG (to Nightingale). Are you, too, a victim ?

Have you swallowed any of that man - 'slaughtering compound? (160).

NIGHTINGALE (alarmed). Only a little, -- a very little.

GABBLEWIG. How do you feel ? Dimness of sight, -- feebleness of limbs ? (161).

Gabblewig is a man of strong personality who wants to prove his worth. In one of his conversations he says :

GABBLEWIG.

Me. My dear Mr. Nightingale, you did think

I could do nothing but talk. If you now think

I can act - a little - let me come out in a new character. (168).

In his character we find a symbolisation of the conflict between words and acts. He does everything quietly and intelligently. He is a very clever too. Take for example the situation where disguised as a boots he informs Slap that Mr Nightingale got a wife who died and was buried properly. Soon he meets Susan to ascertain the justness of his statement. He prays to Susan to collect the burial certificate. Whatever Gabblewig does is actually prompted by his love for Rosina. He starts as a very dejected fellow, but at the end succeeds in embracing Rosina. Thus he proves his worth as a man.

It has been alleged that Gabblewig is more a caricature than a character. Indeed, there is a great deal of farcical exaggeration which makes heavy demands on our imagination. Presumably, in writing the play Dickens had in mind the cast - himself as Gabblewig and Lemon as Slap. But should we forget that Dickens conceived the play as a farce where such exaggerations are not out of place but the very soul of the comic.

Slap

From Slap's self-introduction we know that he is Mr Formiville. He is an immature impostor. He is Gabblewig's rival in his attempts to hoodwink Nightingale. He has an eye on Nightingale's property. The way he gets Nightingale's diary is, in a word, improper. But after all, he is not a blackguard. His tricks serve as the staple of fun. Slap adopts various ways to be befool Nightingale. It is Slap who brings Christopher before Nightingale to prove that a son was born to him before the death of his wife. Slap may be taken as a representative of the rapidly progressing industrial civilization which made people money-minded. But the most striking element of Slap's character is his calm acceptance of the defeat of his plans at the hand of Gabblewig. The character of Slap develops in the course of the play. In his first appearance he is seen energetic and full of mettle. But when he leaves the stage, he looks pale and frustrated seeking consolation in the philosophical realization that failure is universal :

SLAP ... I am not the first man who has failed in a great endeavour. Napoleon had his Waterloo, — Slap has his Malvern. . (168).

Nightingale

Nightingale is an interesting character in the play. His obsession with diary is highly significant. It suggests that his mind is always in grip of the past. Gabblewig and Slap time and again confront Nightingale because while Slap wishes for his property, Gabblewig wants Rosina.

He is somewhat proud. He thinks that Gabblewig is a man of mere words not of deeds. He is a responsible guardian, for he is worried about Rosina's marriage with Gabblewig who, he thinks, is good-for-nothing. Nightingale knows the importance of money and it is his contempt that brings out the active man in Gabblewig. Nightingale has a very keen eyes glowing under the bright brows. It indicates his stern personality. A man of monumental patience, he pursues everything till the end. What bores all is his recurrent diary reading.

Another striking feature of his nature is mental steadiness. Repeatedly Slap and Gabblewig disturb him and resist him from taking any sort of decision, yet he never loses his patience. His 'wait-and-see' policy

finally helps explaining the truth behind those incidents going around him. As soon as he feels satisfied with Gabblewig's worth, he concedes :

NIGHTINGALE.

Will I ? Take her, Mr. Gabblewig. Stop, though.

Ought I to give away what has made me so
unhappy (168-69).

Though otherwise well-composed, Nightingale is occasionally peevish. On one occasion he takes Susan to task :

NIGHTINGALE.

Ill ! you are ill, if you only knew it.

If you were as intimate with your own interior as I am with mine, your hair would stand on end (151).

Nightingale is not only obsessed with own illness but he is convinced of Susan's illness as well. He is caught between two humbugs : Slap and Gabblewig.

Nightingale has very simple values and it is his simplicity which is exploited by Slap who extracts money from him. It is also on account of his simplicity that Gabblewig is able to win him over by removing his reservations against him. But his obsession, with the diary remains till the end when just before burning it he wishes to look at it once more. The secrecy that Nightingale maintains regarding his wife gives an opportunity to Gabblewig and Slap to twist it to their advantage. The episode is both ridiculous and fairly unconvincing. But

the audience would like to cultivate what is called 'a willing suspension of disbelief' for the sake of the entertainment that they would get in the bargain.

Rosina :

Rosina is a minor female character. She is weak and she gets easily intimidated by the sterner sex. When Lithers whispers to Rosina, she screams with excitement and when Gabblewig wants Susan to reveal the secret of Nightingale, she is hesitant. Nonetheless, Rosina, despite her feminine weakness, exhibits much agility and enthusiasm. She is carried off her feet by Lithers's whispering as she tells her uncle :

ROSINA. O uncle ! I felt as if — don't be frightened, uncle, — as if something had touched me here (with her hand upon her heart) so unexpectedly, that I — don't be frightened, uncle — that I almost dropped, uncle (150).

She is nimble spirited and has a extraordinary presence of mind. With confidence and ease she carries out the different tasks assigned by Gabblewig in befooling Slap. So though Rosina is not a major character in the play, she has an important role in smoothly resolving the complications of the action.

Susan :

What is obscure about Susan is her identity and purpose. Both Susan and Rosina accompany Nightingale. She is ever busy either with Nightingale or with Gobblewig.

The basic difference between Susan and Rosina lies in their attitude and approach. While Rosina is passive and submissive, Susan is assertive and firm. When Nightingale scolds Susan for her incapacity, Susan remarks :

SUSAN. Then I'm very glad of my ignorance, Sir, for I wish it to keep in Curt (151).

It is clear that Susan is a woman of strong personality. Susan informs Gobblewig of what Slap has told Tip. Behind the screen, she is a witness to the whole proceeding. Promptness is also another feature of her character. She is ever ready to help Gobblewig. Though very determined Susan is not without feminine softness. Her exclamation; -

SUSAN. -What a wicked world this is, to be sure !

Everybody seems trying to do the best they can for themselves . . (162).

points to the depth of her perception. Susan may not be the heroine yet she is the most important woman character in the play.

Humour :

Dickens has become a name for his inimitable humour. In this play, Slap and Nightingale are excellent studies of humourous characters. Nightingale is a typical humour character on account of his excessive obsessions with his imagined sickness and his past. The charity boy image of Tip makes him a complete buffoon and contributes its mite to the fun of the play. Gabblewig is also a humour character. Take for example the scene where Gabblewig appears in the guise of a Sexton and produces all the relevant papers to confirm the burial of Mrs. Nightingale. There are many humourous situations in the play. The most interesting is the way the disguises are made known to the audience while characters in the play are ignorant of these. The first time Gabblewig dresses up as the boots, he encounters Slap and then meets Susan :

GABBLEWIG. Don't you know me ? Mr. Gabble

SUSAN. Wig ! . Why, la, Sir, then you're the boot -

Jack ! Now I understand, of course

(154).

Consider the scene when Rosina and Gabblewig appear as Mr and Mrs Poulter :

GABBLEWIG (aside ROSINA). I have my cue, fellow

me directly. I'll bring you another glass,
Sir, in a quarter of an hour (157).

Dressed up as the invalid Blower Gabblewig first calls
out to Rosina :

GABBLEWIG (aside, calling). Rosina, quick,
your arm. (Aloud) I tell you, Mrs
Trusty, I can't walk any further (160)..

The play is action oriented and very often humour springs from
specific gestures. Consider the showing and shaking
of bottle in the following dialogue spoken by Slap :

SLAP. Think so ? - I know it. There are men base
enough to stand between you (shows bottle)
and perfect health (Shakes bottle) who
would persuade you .. (159).

Another example of gestural humour may be found in the
scene in which Rosina and Gabblewig keep on walking even
while talking in the guise of Mr and Mrs Poulter. Soon,
situational humour complements the gestural humour and
the scene is made funnier than before :

NIGHTINGALE. Well, Sir, if you really could
pull up for a few minutes, I should be
extremely obliged to you.

GABBLEWIG. Here we are, then, — don't keep us long. (Looks at watch, Rosina does the same).
Say a minute, chronometer time.

NIGHTANGALE. You must know I'm an invalid

GABBLEWIG. Five Seconds

NIGHTINGALE. Come down here to try the cold-water cure.

GABBLEWIG. Ten Seconds (158).

Dickens has also used verbal humour significantly. Consider how Gabblewig compares Mr. Nightingale to a bird. Gabblewig compares Mr Nightingale to a bird, to a Nightingale in all probability, but with a completely different connotation. When Lathers produces a letter from his pocket, Gabblewig at once recognizes the hand writing and comments :

GABBLEWIG.

The cramped hand of the obstinate old bird,
who might, could, and should have been —
and would n't be my father-in-law ! (145).

It is interesting to note how the metaphor of the same bird is used for two contrastive character by the same person who loves one and hates the other. Take also the allusion to the nightingale in Shakespeare :

GABBLEWIG. If the waters ... of Lethe, ...
drink ... to-morrow morning. Anything
to wash out the tormenting remembrance
of Rosina Nightingale (144-145).

LITHERS. Nightingale, Mr. Gabblewig ?

GABBLEWIG. Nightingale. As the Shakespear
duet went, in the happy days of our
amateur plays :

The Nightingale alone,
She, poor bird, as all forlorn,
Lean'd her breast uptil a thorn (145).

The Critical Estimate of the Play :

Mr. Nightingale's Diary is an excellent farce which aims to "demonstrate the contiguity of the logical and the mad. "As a farce it explores a closed world where belief is suspended because nothing has a real cause. Action is self-generated once the groomed rules are accepted."¹ What is supremely important about the play is the way Dickens has exploited the potentials of this genre to demonstrate his acting talent. In this respect the contribution of Mark Lemon is also very significant. Without him Dickens the actor would have been less prominent as without Slap Gabblewig will be lame. Emlyn Williams writes about Dickens' "amazing ability of expression, bravura use of voice up and down the register, an actor to his finger tips ... in the farago Mr. Nightingale's Diary, in which he impersonated an ancient crone in quivering search for a lost child, a testy hypochondriac, a writer, senile grinning sexton, and two other parts; and actor in search of six characters, and finding them too, all in one play."²

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1. Roger Flower, Ed. A Dictionary of Modern Critical Terms. London : Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973, 70.
 2. Emlyn Williams, "Dickens and the Theatre" in Charles Dickens 1812-1870. A Centenary Volume. Ed. E.M.F. Tomlin. London: Weidenfield and Nicolson 1969. 181-182.

CHAPTER - VI

NO THOROUGHFARE

Historical Background :

No Thoroughfare, the last of Dickens's plays produced in 1867 is based on the story published in the Christmas Number of All the Year Round or the same year, written in collaboration with Wilkie Collins, the celebrated author of The Women in White. No Thoroughfare, thus is the dramatized version of the story and the influence of Collins is evident in its theme, treatment and technique.

In fact, Dickens had long toyed with the idea of the story which revolves round the identity of a child left quite mysteriously at a foundling hospital. The lasting friendship between Dickens and Charles Fechter, a powerful actor, made possible the production of No Thoroughfare in Adelphi. Forster, Dickens's biographer, is silent on this work probably because he disliked Dickens's connection with Wilkie Collins who collaborated in the writing of No Thoroughfare.

Wilkie Collins had the lion's share in the scheme of the Story. The play was first staged on 26 December 1867 and the performance continued for 150 days without any break. During the performance Dickens left for the United States on his famous reading-tour and there he began to negotiate the play, on terms, for Wallack's theatre, New York. Finally, the Conway management put it on at the Park theatre, Brooklyn. Lequel became the owner of the

Copy-right by virtue of adaptation and nomination of his version in New York. In America also it had a good business. It was produced for the last time at Grand Theatre, Islington on 11 May 1903.

Prologue

The five-act play No Thoroughfare (1867) begins with a prologue that presents the discovery of a lost child. A veiled lady once came and put her son at the foundling hospital before leaving for a foreign land. There Sally Goldstraw was the nurse then. She took all possible care of the child. After a considerable gap the mother returns, and fortunately finds Sally Goldstraw whom she had met once. The veiled lady wants information regarding her child and comes to know that her son is still there. Seeing her very eager to meet her boy Sally Goldstraw singles him out from a group of children. With her voice choked by surging motherly affection the veiled lady wants to know if he would like to have a home and a mother. The curtain falls as he answers in the affirmative. Thus the prologue introduces some of the central characters, shows us a mother's yearning for a child, a foundling's craving for home and the broad-heartedness of nurses like Sally Goldstraw. It also strikes the keynote of the play, for the play too pivots on the theme of finding out

the lost son of the veiled woman who brings Walter Wilding back from the foundling hospital mistaking him for her own lost child.

Story Outline :

The play opens with Walter Wilding, no longer a boy after a gap of twelve years, looking for a house keeper. Sally Goldstraw meets Walter Wilding and is chosen the fittest house-keeper. Wilding recognises her as his former nurse but is terribly shocked to know from her that he is not the original Wilding who has a claim to the fortune left to him by the veiled lady. Sally Goldstraw tells him that during her absence one Mrs Miller took the boy away to Switzerland. Therefore, instead of taking back the original Walter Wilding, the veiled lady had given shelter to another boy called Walter Wilding. Wilding who is indebted to the veiled woman, his foster mother, for his social position now becomes desperate to find out the original Wilding and to give him back the property of his mother. Meanwhile Obenreizer, an old travelling companion of Wilding's partner Vendale, comes from Switzerland.

Vendale is in love with Marguerite, the niece of Obenreizer who, Wilding believes, could be the man he is looking for. But in reality Obenreizer is very shrewd

and, as Marguerite's guardian, agrees to marry her to Vendale on condition that he must double his income. By this time Walter Wilding's physical condition worsens and he dies. Worse still, the news of a loss of five hundred pounds in the firm's business comes. The handwriting of the forged receipt must be compared with certain other specimens for detection. Vendale decides to go to Switzerland for this purpose and Obenreizer volunteers to accompany him. Marguerite smells a rat in this plan and tries to dissuade him from going with Obenreizer. But as Vendale turns a deaf ear to Marguerite's advice, she decides to follow them with Joey. In the Swiss Inn Obenreizer's evil motive becomes clear. He drugs Vendale and, at night, enters stealthily into his room to snatch the important papers. However, Vendale wakes up and thus the first attempt is foiled. In the morning the guides advise them to postpone the journey across the mountains on account of the foul weather. But Obenreizer convinces Vendale that no danger will befall them. As they undertake the journey, over the hills Obenreizer attacks Vendale and they fall from the top of the mountain. But fortunately Joey and Marguerite save them and bring them to a monastery. There from the papers recovered from one Mr. Vendale who perished on the hills it is known that Vendale is that lost son of the veiled lady they are searching for. The discovery gives Vendale all Wilding's wealth and doubles his income which compels Obenreizer

to withdraw his objection to Marguerite's marriage. When all his schemes abort, Obenreizer leaves the world by taking poison.

Sally Goldstraw :

Sally Goldstraw is an important character in the play. At the beginning of the play she is but a nurse at a foundling hospital, but at the end she gets a husband. Apparently, an ordinary woman, in reality Sally is blessed with some unforgettable qualities. She is a well meaning girl of good sense and polite nature. In the prologue she introduces the veiled lady to her supposed son. In the first Act she is appointed housekeeper by Walter Wilding. Though Dickens is silent about this change of profession, it is not altogether unconvincing for the motherly affection that developed in her heart at the hospital has qualified her for this new role.

Sally loves Wilding as a mother loves her son. It is a coincidence that she is appointed house keeper for a man who was once under her care at the foundling hospital. Her character is polished, her discourse is impressive. Flexibility is her nature, for she finds no difficulty in her new job. Joey justly says that this 'pleasant woman'(184) has 'brought the pleasant sunshine into this monotonous place'(184). The photograph of an aged woman in Wilding's room unfolds to Sally a faded past history

of her hispital days. She is psychologically upset, for she inadvertently misguided the veiled lady in taking her son back from the foundling-home. In other words, the Wilding who has prospered as the successor of the veiled lady is not her son. That Sally admits her mistake even after so many years is a proof of the nobility of her character. The disclosure :

SALLY.No, Sir. I mean the child of that lady (points of R. IE). You were not her child ~~---~~ (185).

is made not to tease Wilding but to help him feel the truth. When the crisis of identity virtually wrecks Wilding, she soothes his heart with motherly affection:

SALLY. Let your head rest on my shoulder, - not the first time, my boy. I have rocked you to sleep in my arms when a child, many and many's the time (185).

Sally has neither pride nor vanity. Her only object is to be a good companion. Sincerity, fellow-feeling and eagerness to do something for others are features of her character. What is noteworthy is Sally's *selfless* ~~...~~ to ignore the craving for love in her heart. And yet, as a girl of dignity she is unwilling to foist herself on Joey. When he tells her of his weakness for her. She tries to convince him that she is the cause of all the trouble that has come into the house :

SALLY. Me! you want me ? ... I was the cause of ... the trouble ... into the house.

If it had not been for me, none of this would have happened. If you, Joey, knew all, you would hate me (205).

So, it will be unjust to overlook her honesty and integrity of character.

Veiled Lady

Veiled Lady comes in the prologue only, and sets the action rolling. The mystery about the lady is her masked presence, yet at the fag end her identity is revealed. She has not been given any name. The word 'Veiled' suggests that she is secretive by nature. The adjective also indicates the prevailing moral orthodoxy which compelled transgressors to cloak their identity. Though society compels her to be 'veiled', the mother in her rebels. She shakes off her shame to claim her child born out of wedlock :

VEILED LADY.

I told you I would not ask you to say more, but point me him out, dear Sally, good Sally ! (180).

Her secret suffering consequent upon her separation from her child is singularly touching here. She is placed in so miserable a situation that she cannot even name the boy she wants to meet for a moment. One feels that she has more than 'paid the penalty of ... disgrace', (178).

Thus, the character of the veiled lady gives us an idea of the norms of the society to which the characters of the play belong. It was a typically conservative victorian society which tried to harness private passions by social regulations.

First Wife, First Husband.

Second Wife, Second Husband

They are all minor characters in the second scene of the prologue. Their presence expresses the plurality of human nature. While First Husband and Second Wife are magnanimous and sympathetic, First Wife and Second Husband look self-centered and arrogant. Though first wife calls her husband a fool for taking her to the foundling-shelter, First Husband is no blockhead. He knows that the children even of a foundling-home are innocent and 'pretty'. He is as open-hearted as second wife who wants to kiss them. First wife, reversely is a moral prig who looks upon the pretty children as 'example of vice' (179) since they have possible been born out of the wedlock. She

shares her nature with second husband who would rather kiss his own boys at home and not the foundlings. The two sets thus give us two contrastive pairs and suggest that human nature is so complex as to cut across family line and often opposite profiles may be found among members of the same family.

These pairs also make it clear that the social position of children in this type of society depends a lot on the sort of social relation their parents have. On one side there are boys like Tom whose parents are married according to rule and law. These children get love and affection. On the other there are children born out of wedlock who are not only hated by others but are deserted by their own parents.

Walter Wilding

Walter Wilding is a tragic face in the play. He is a victim of identity crisis. He has a free and frank nature which moves every heart. He is first seen in the foundling-home singing with others 'God save the Queen' (179). When the veiled lady asks him whether he wishes to have a home of his own and a mother, he nods affirmatively. This indicates that like others in the foundling-shelter he too is starving for parental love.

But what is remarkable in his character is that when he grows up he expresses no feeling of shame for being naturally born :

WILDING

I am not ashamed of her ! I mean, not ashamed of being in foundling ... (182).

He rather is grateful to his mother for taking him back from the foundling-home and bequeathing to him a fortune which has given him social standing. The portrait of his mother hung in his room shows how deeply he cherishes the memory of his mother who raised him almost from the gutter. Wilding is extraordinarily well-behaved. Though he has no idea about who could be his father, he promises that he would be "I can be a father to all in my employment " (182).

His sense of gratitude is also shown by his attitude to Sally Goldstraw as she comes to his house as house-keeper. In the day of his helplessness Goldstraw attended him ungrudgingly. Now he gets a chance to repay what he owes to her. But the most striking feature of his character is his sense of self-respect. When Sally tells him that he is not the child of the veiled lady and adds that she wanted to conceal the fact, he, however, does not blame her for the disclosure. His words : "Would you have me enjoy the fortune of a another man?" (185) points to the broadness of his heart. Now on he is determined to

find out the real wilding who is entitled to the fortunes. "He must be found" (185).

There is a bit of farcical exaggeration in the sudden death of Wilding caused by heart-break. But this mortal illness brings out his zeal to redress a wrong done involuntarily to his namesake.

Bintry :

Bintry is by profession a lawyer and a friend of Walter Wilding. He is jolly though not without calculation characteristic of a lawyer. The friendly relation that exists between Bintry and Wilding is warm enough. Bintry helps and guides Walter Wilding and shares his pain and suffering. He is too practical to react emotionally. When Wilding gets impatient to find out the lost child of the veiled lady, he shows least hastiness and says :

BINTRY.

Not easy after a lapse of twenty years.

At this time of day, you will find it

no thoroughfare, Sir, no thoroughfare (186).

He has keen sense of humour. When Vendale hesitantly admits that once he met obenreizer and his neice in Switzerland, Bintry cross-examines him good hummouredly :

BINTRY. And you fell in love with her ? Excuse my
 legel habit of helping out an unwilling
 witness! (187) .

Thus in him we find the co-existence of frivolity
 and seriousness. He is wise and sensible. When obenreizer,
 the bully of humility, boasts of his low origin, he says:

BINTRY. No! I am deaf on principle to all humbugs!(188) .

Basically Bintry is a good man. He is very eager to
 be of any service to Wilding.

In the final scene Vandale's true identity comes
 alive by Bintry's questions to obenreizer. His profe-
 ssional queries compel obenreizer to present the truth.
 Throughout the play Bintry looks stern and hard but he
 is actually soft and approachable. His sense of humour is
 also remarkable. His words to Joey :

BINTRY. Isn't it enough to monopolise your wife after
 marriage, and not to want to monopolise
 her before she is your wife? (217)

are highly amusing.

Though both are Wilding's well wishers, there is a
 basic difference between Joey and Bintry, while Joey is
 responsible but not serious, Bintry is serious as well
 as responsible. Joey only acts. Bintry thinks, suggests
 and acts.

Joey Ladle :

Joey Ladle is the head cellar man who sympathises with Wilding's pain and suffering. Joey appears occasionally, yet what creates our interest in the character is his fidelity to his masters. When Vendale decides to go to Switzerland along with Obenreizer, Joey resolves to follow him to assist him in danger.

Apart from being good hearted, Jocy is also witty. When Bintry says that it is Joey who is likely to marry Goldstraw instead of himself, he quips :

JOEY. 'Then why are you walking off with her,
instead of me ? (217)

Joey's honesty is beyond doubt. Through Joey Dickens shows the power of humanity which remains alive even in a mercenary society.

George Vendale

George Vendale is a major character in the play. Unlike Bintry who is titled as lawyer and Joey as cellarman, Vendale is untitled. This arouses our curiosity about him. He is very sensible and devoted to Wilding. When after Sally's disclosure Wilding demeans himself as a 'miserable imposter', he consoles him :

VENDALE. Don't talk like that! As to your being an impostor, that is simply absurd, for no man can be that without being a consenting party to the imposition. You need not distress yourself. We will help you. Come, compose yourself (L.C) (186).

Vendale is in love with Marguerite. Though Obenreizer, Marguerite's guardian, disapproves of their courtship, he never submits to his pressure. In fact, the more restrictions are imposed, the more determined he becomes.

Deprived of mother's love in his infancy, he tastes love in Marguerite and is true to her. But love with him is not an enfeebling sentiment. Though Marguerite repeatedly asks him not to go to Siwtzerland with Obenreizer as his companions, so strong is his sense of duty that he ignores her advice and sets out for Milan with the secret paper. The comic irony of the play comes through him. He leaves no stone unturned to find out the real Walter Wilding without knowing that he himself is the person he is on the look out for. When his true identity comes to light, he looks confident and says to Obenreizer "Then I must force you." (221). It is to be noted that though fairly intelligent, Vendale at first fails to see the devil in Obenreizer. But for being free, frank and honest he succeeds in outwitting the villain.

Jules Obenreizer

Obenreizer plays a key role in the play. He lives in Switzerland and is Marguerite's guardian. He meets Wilding at a time when the latter is eager to go to Switzerland to find out the lost boy. Obenreizer thus has an advantage of the situation. This is clear from Wilding's remarks :

WILDING. Something tells me I must lose no time.

I must see Mr. Obenreizer at once (197).

Accredited as the agent of the wine merchants, he is an old travelling companion of Vendale. So, they begin conversation freely and frankly, outwardly he is gentle and well-behaved. But close scrutiny confirms the character's deceptive nature. He rails at Vendale's partnership in wine trade :

O BENREIZER. Though you are descended from so fine a family, you have condescended to come into trade? Stop though (...) Is it trade in England or profession ? Not fine arts ? (smiling) (188).

His self-introducing admission : "I a man of low origin - for what I know of it - no origin at all !" (188) may mislead us to take him as an unassuming character. We never think that he could be full of tricks and schemes. But subsequent incidents shed light on

Obnreizer's villainous nature which is more than revealed in Joey's pronunciation of his name as open-razor. He happens to be the legal guardian of Marguerite. But he looks after Marguerite presumably not out of benevolence but to appropriate her fortune. He is seriously offended when he comes to know of Marguerite's love for Vendale. To remove him from her mind, Obenreizer presents her a jewel case of her birthday. Finding her still devoted to Vendale he gives his consent on condition that Vendale must double his income to marry her. The absurdity of the condition makes it clear that Obenreizer is desperate to forestall their marriage. It is during Vendale's visit to Switzerland in which Obenreizer volunteers to accompany him that his murderous fang comes to our view. He attempted to murder Vendale first in the inn then on the mountain top. Happily the bid is foiled and they are taken into a monastery. There also he hoodwinks Father Francis and steals a paper which is a document of Vendale's identity.

Obenreizer is thus a scheming Villain, a double dealer. He misguides men by external goodness. His suicide does not strike us as the death of an individual, but the death of what is bad and unwholesome.

Marguerite

Marguerite is a foil to Sally and the veiled lady. While Sally is a sacrificial figure and the veiled lady very pathetic, Marguerite is lively and impressive.

In the first act she appears under the shadow of Obenreizer. Her love affair, though not fully explored, is a happy interlude in the play. Though conscious of the disparity of family status, she loves Vendale. Her love never shows loss of identity or lack of personality. That she resolves to marry Vendale inspite of Obenreizer's objection shows her determination and integrity.

As a better judge of character she endeavours to stop Vendale's journey with Obenreizer as his companion :

MARGUERITE .

Don't go , George, or go alone. It is near
seven. It will be too late in a few minutes.
Change your mind, George, change your
mind! (206).

Marguerite is thus more than a mere emotional partner of Vendale that Marguerite takes a quick decision to follow Vendale to Switzerland is an index of her independence of spirit and will.

True, she never raises voice for the women cause. But in her zeal to go beyond her limits to assert her rights she stands out as pioneer of liberated women. Finally,

Marguerite has a forgiving heart. Though Obenreizer tried to ruin her happiness, she at the beginning of her new life with Vendale forgives him :

MARGUERITE. Free! (To VENDALE, L.C.) I don't know what feeling prompts me to do this. (Approaches OBENREIZER, C. front). I am going to begin a new and happy life. If I have ever done you wrong, ... I forgive you (222).

Landlords :

Jean Marie, Jean Paul, Father Fancis and Madame Dor

Besides the main characters there are some minor characters who contribute their mite to the progress of action. Jean Marie and Jean Paul, introduced by landlords are guides who are to accompany Vendale and Obenreizer in crossing the mountain region. Their natures vary. While one speaks against the weather, the other prepares them for the tour. He fears now, and anticipates mishap. The other is so money minded as to take any risk to make a fortune. But none of them wishes Vendale and Obenreizer any harm. Though the guides have not been individualized, their role in the play is not mechanical. They delay the journey and make the chance of rescue of the travellers by Marguerite more probable.

The landlord serves the guests, and wakes them up at dawn for the journey and introduces the guide to Obenreizer and Vendale. It is the Father who tells Obenreizer of the secret room that opens by clock work and in which the properties of the dead travellers are preserved. Again it is from him that Obenreizer comes to know of the Vendale papers, steals them and this leads to disentanglement of the action.

Humour

In a serious play like No Thoroughfare there is not much scope for humour. Even then it is not completely devoid of humour either.

Both Obenreizer and Wilding are melodramatic characters in their own ways, and, therefore, they provide a lot of humour through their melodramatic behaviour. The most important character, however, that keeps up a spirit of humour throughout the play is certainly Joey. Dickens has introduced through him a very humorous situation in the midst of two serious scenes. We are particularly referring to the scene of courtship between Joey and Sally in Act III Sec II. It functions as a comic interlude between two serious scenes. The courtship scene follows the scene in which Obenreizer persuades Vendale to accompany him to the Swiss farm and Joey becomes suspicious.

And the scene that follows the courtship scene is a sentimental but dramatically important scene in which even Marguerite becomes suspicious of her uncle's design. When Vendale takes farewell from her, she tries to desuade him from undertaking a journey with Obenreizer. Placed between two serious scenes the comic elements of the courtship scene come under sharp focus :

SALLY (c). Mr. Joey, why do you follow me about into my part of the house ? (204)

And again

SALLY (Laughs). The idea of any man making love in an apron like that! (205)

In fact most verbal humour comes through Joey :

JOEY. If you wish to board and lodge me, take me. I can peck as well as most men. Where I pecks ain't so high a h'objeck as what I peck, nor even so high a h'objeck as how much I peck (182).

And again

JOEY. ... I've been a Cellarman all my life, and what's the consequence ? I'm as muddled a man as lives - You won't find a muddleder than me, or my ekal in moloncolly ! (183).

Joey has a bad memory and weakness for mixing up expression,

and the changes that consequently takes place in his utterances make room for comedy.

SALLY, ... but the institutions of marriage is a serious thing, and the more a man and a woman look at it in that light before marriage, the better for the parties afterwards ! (205)

But Joey turns into :

JOEY. Beautiful language ! ... before I forget it !
The institution of a man and a woman is a serious matter (205).

Later he mixes it up even farther :

JOEY. That's my experience of Sarah oldstraw, Sir ... The separation of a man and a woman is a serious institution, and the sooner they come together again after it, the better for all parties ..(216).

Another element of humour is the pronunciation of the name of Obenereizer. In this connection Dickens writes :

"Except Vendale and Joey, all pronounce 'Obenreizer' in the English manner, that is 'oben-righ-sir'. Joey calls him 'open razor' and Vendale gives it the Swiss or German pronunciation, 'Obenrightzer' (173).

We can well imagine how the different ways of pronouncing the same name will create fun for the audience. The fact that Dickens wants the names to be pronounced in different ways by different character is an indication that Dickens is deliberately trying to introduce a comic variation to an otherwise serious play. Similarly, Dickens's instruction that Walter Wilding has "... an habitual action of putting his hand to his head when pausing for a word" (174) is obviously intended to create a comic situation because the audience would anticipate the gesture everytime Wilding "pauses for a word" (174). It is evident that Dickens's subtle use of humour in this sombre play functions as necessary comic relief to a play which deals with the grim situation of an unwedded mother.

The Critical Estimate of the Play

It goes without saying that this play, particularly stands out from the other plays of Dickens in respect of plot, treatment and technique. Whereas in his other plays different stories tend to unhinge the central action, this play has a singleness or direction. The plot has linear development. Nothing happens abruptly. The story centres round one problem that is the identity of a lost child. The play ends by tracing out the boy. Remarkably enough, Dickens has nicely observed the unity of action though the number of characters is quite large. The use of asides is significant. The outdoor scene over the snowy mountains indicates Dickens's eye for photogenic setting. Suspense and conflict, two indispensable ingredients of a well-written play have been kept alive all through.

C O N C L U S I O N

CONCLUSION

It is evident from the foregoing discussion that even as a play-wright Dicken's achievement is quite commendable. Drama has always been the mirror of the age. The classical Dramas of the Greek reflect the dependence on divinity and the profoundly religious sentiment that accompanied it during the hey-day of Greek civilization. The plays of Seneca, Plautus and Terence similarly, give us an idea of the Roman temper and Roman view of life. The Medieval plays of England still carry with them the religious sentiment that we find in the Greek dramas. The Miracle plays and the Morality plays are basically religious in their main thrust. During the Renaissance drama took a new turn in the hands of Marlow and Shakespeare. The plays of Marlow express Renaissance spirit of Adventure and longing for the infinite and the desire to know the unknown. The plays of Shakespeare were essentially marked by Romanticism and bid for Romantic Freedom. Shakespeare broke the Aristotelean bindings and oriented his plays towards contemporary sensibility. After Shakespeare, in the Restoration and the Augustan tragedy drama became cloistered and was practically cut off from the general masses. The genteel plays in particular and Augustan plays in general were mainly confined to elite. In the early Nineteenth Century there was a lyrical outburst in the works of Romantics and drama suffered an eclipse. Obviously the Romantic period was not

really dramatic in the sense the Elizabethan period was. After the Industrial Revolution the drama assumed two distinct forms. On the one hand we find plays meant for sophisticated urban audience. On the other, just outside this Elitist area there came about a series of plays that did not care for the urban stamp and met the demand of the masses by catering to their simple taste and what is described as 'Vulgar' propensities.

Dickens was ever in sympathy with vast teeming illiterate masses that started pouring into the cities in great number not for education but simply for entertainment. Dickens made no scruples about his plain intention of entertaining the masses with whom he shared his attitude to life and basic temperament. It is natural therefore that in all the plays that we have discussed the rustic characters occupy an important position. In other words the rustic characters get careful attention of Dickens, the dramatist. Tom sparks in The Strange Gentleman, the village folk in The Village Coquettes and Tom Grig and Betsy Martin in The Lamplighter and Joey Ladle and Sarah Goldstraw in No Thoroughfare are essentially rustic characters who control the plot structure of the play in question. In a different way Is She his wife ? Or Something Singular! and Mr. Nightingale's Diary also highlight the rustic culture and simple rustic

values with satirical presentation of the urban culture. Obviously, though a man of the city Dickens is at heart a man of the village and he tries to uphold the simple life and manners of the village folk and their belief in essential goodness of things.

Of the five plays, generically seen, we have two comic burlettas : The Strange Gentleman and Is She his wife ? Or Something Singular. In The Strange Gentleman the dramatic plot is developed through sequential happenings and mistaken identities. In this respect, as has been suggested earlier, the play has an edge over its source in the Sketch, In Is She his Wife? Or Something Singular : Dickens's method is a quick arrangement of the timing by introducing very fast Entrances and Exits. It is this enormous speed or pacing that significantly contributes to the dramatic effectiveness of the play. So, it can be seen that even though both The Strange Gentleman and Is She his wife ? Or Something Singular : are comic burletta, there is a significant difference in the plot structure and dramatic devices of the two plays. As a comic burletta the play is certainly a marked improvement on The Strange Gentleman. The plot is lighter, the theme is more funny and, above all, the sequential arrangement masterly. In The Strange Gentleman the tempo is hampered from time to time, when Dickens tries to acquaint us with Mary and Fanny or with Julia and Overton.

But in Is She his wife ? Or Something Singular the movement is as fast as the action is concentrated. Never for a moment, the play reads dull. This only shows Dickens's originality in not repeating himself. Again, the two farces - The Lamplighter and Mr. Nightingale's Dairy are similar in certain respect and different in many respect.

In Mr. Nightingale's Dairy Dickens's Principal dramatic device is that of caricature. While in both the plays Dickens's principle device is that of caricature, in The Lamplighter the humour is more disciplined and in Mr. Nightingale's Dairy it borders on the ridiculous. In both the plays, however, Dickens satirizes obsessions : One is obsessed with the diary and the other is with the stars.

Obviously, Dickens who never lost touch with reality has no sympathy for people who live in a world of obsession denying themselves the pleasures of life. The Village Coquettes has been described as a comic opera. The description is justified because there are a number of musical pieces in the play and these are more functional than decorative because it is the song that gives support and substance to the central theme of the play. Dickens seems to express his lament for the loss of country life and the fast dying culture with all its

values. Again, No Thoroughfare is remarkable on account of Dickens's ability to maintain the unity of action while handling a large number of characters. His use of 'asides' deserves particular attention and it is really praise worthy. Suspense and conflict which are taken for granted as two indispensable ingredients of a well-written play have been kept alive all through.

Incidentally all the plays whether short or long, whether a comic burletta or comic opera, a farce or a regular play have a beginning, a middle and an end. However, it may be interesting to note in this connection that Is She his wife ? Or Something Singular ! after going through the three stages - beginning, middle and end - coming back to the beginning because all the incidents take place during the course of the plays are undone.

In so far as characterization is concerned we do not certainly have 'God's plenty' but most of the characters that people Dickens's plays are true to life. Squire Norton in The Village Coquettes and Mr. Peter Limbury in Is She his Wife ? Or Something Singular! and Tom Grig in The Lamplighter and Mr. Nightingale in Mr. Nightingale's Diary and Jules obenreizer in No Thoroughfare are certainly round characters by any standard. Dickens was equally at home in presenting stock

characters such as Tom Sparks in The Strange Gentleman and Joey Ladle (head Collerman) in No Thoroughfare, the so-called villains character like Sparkings Flam in The Village Coquettes and Jules obenrëizer in No Thoroughfare bear testimony to Dickens's awareness of evil that is inherent in man. These two characters also suggest that urban civilization has a corrupting influence on human mind. Dickens's women characters that we meet in these plays also offer a wide range of interest and variety. The habit of Mrs. Noakes to pip and see the supposed-to-be lovers only reveals a universal feminine curiosity. The coquettishness of Rose and Lucy is only a simple manifestation of Freudian id. Betsy Martin's pretence of goodness also makes her true to life. The treatment of sex that we find in these plays indicates that Dickens had no sympathy for the Victorian prudery which was only another name for hypocrisy. Evidently, Dickens considered sex as a healthy manifestation of a natural human instinct. The Stange Gentleman's advancement towards Mary or Tom Grig's advancement towards Betsy warrants the conclusion.

Dickens is nothing, if not a humorist and the humour of Dickens manifests in all these plays takes diverse form : Humour of Character, Humour of situation and verbal humour. Quite often with remarkable dexterity Dickens combines these three so that the situational humour arises

out of verbal ambiguity. Broadly speaking it is humour that provides the main source of vitality and interest and dramatic effectiveness of these plays. To say this however does not mean that Dickens has neglected the other important aspects of a drama. We know that except The Lamplighter all the plays were staged and we find Dickens paying adequate attention to stage direction, Costumes, Soliloquies, Gesture and Movement etc.

The Strange Gentleman for example has detailed description of the costume. No Thoroughfare has a meticulous description - more detailed than that of The Strange Gentleman - of costumes. This only shows how seriously Dickens was concerned with the dramatic appropriateness of Costumes. Indeed, much of the affectiveness of the play when staged, depends largely on the judicious selection of dress for the actors and actresses.

It is not an accident that all the plays of Dickens had stage success. Soliloquies and Asides which are important dramatic devices and give the audience an opportunity to see what is happening in the mind of a character have been very successfully used by Dickens in all the plays. With equal success Dickens uses songs in his plays. A song in a play has always a thematic significance and it also reveals the mood of a character which possibly could not have been communicated through conversations.

The songs in fact reveal the inner workings of the mind of a character. Soliloquy is another device of revealing the mind. But whereas a soliloquy is somewhat unnatural songs, especially in a musical opera, is quite natural. But Dickens has therefore used these songs not for decoration but for a thematic support. These songs, therefore, are more functional than decorative. In reference to this context one may possibly point out the song sang by Tom Grig, the lamplighter. This song may not arise out of emotion, yet it characterizes him as a simple and dutiful person. So, it clearly appears that the song which has been sang by Tom Grig serves some purpose. Again, Tapkins in the Is She his wife? Or Something Singular appears on the stage with a song in his lips. Apparently, he is jolly and frisky. The song he sings is very significant. It expresses a wife's appeal to her husband for cancelling the hunting trip under stress of weather. The song not only reveals the gay mood of Tapkins but contrasts Tapkins's merry bachelorhood with the condition of strained marital relationship.

Interestingly, in The Village Coquettes Martin's song reflects how country dominates the city.

Join the dance, with step as light,
As every heart should be to-night,

Music, shake the lofty dome,
 In honour of our Harvest Home (88).

The song sang by Squire Norton in the same play indicates that his basic goodness has been contaminated by double dealing :

The honour, which to them was life,
 Throbs in no bosom now,
 It only gilds the gambler's strife,
 or decks the worthless vow (63).

Again, his song :

A country life without the strife
 And noisy din of town,
 Is all I need, I take no heed
 Of splendour or renown (77)

gives a pastoral touch to the texture of the drama. It will be just to tell that there are huge songs in the play, and they also serve some purposes. Songs are also present significantly in other plays. It is neither possible nor desirable to analyse critically all songs which are actively functioning in other plays. Therefore, the examples which practically show functions of songs sang by different characters in different plays are con-founded to mainly three plays.

A close scrutiny of the plays in the light of discussions above would lead us to the conclusion that Dickens was a quite powerful playwright, though he devoted most of his creative energy to writing fiction. Indeed, the plays are indispensable parts of a Dickens canon.

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