American Elements in the Drama of the Revolutionary Period

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AMERICAN ELEMENTS IN THE DRAMA OF

THE REVOLUTIONARY PERIOD

BY

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INTRODUCTION

American drama from its very inception until the Civil War days was for the most part a derivative drama. Calling it that means that the greatest number of the plays which appeared in America during the Revolutionary period were derived from English, French or German dramatic models. The historians of this early drama tell us that Dunlap and Payne were the outstanding playwrights of the period. Although William Dunlap borrowed and adapted foreign plays for the American stage there were some of his works which did show distinct native elements, and it is these plays which are used throughout the discussion while others have been omitted. Payne’s plays were of great dramatic value for their influence on other playwrights in America, but Payne in these plays introduced no native characteristics whatever, and for that reason has been purposely left out of this thesis.

The percentage of plays selected to be used in the body of the paper seems very minute in comparison to the great number which appeared during the period, but this small group is representative. They constitute what may be said to have been American drama in that each one contained one or more particular characteristics which were native. This thesis deals primarily with the plays which appeared here between 1773 and 1810. There is no attempt made to distinguish between the plays which were actually produced and those closet dramas which were written only for the delight of the reader. If the latter group were not to be considered drama proper, it
would be necessary to eliminate the delightful and thoroughly American plays of Mrs. Mercy Warren. In the selection of the plays, I have tried to keep in mind these three factors as being native, and have chosen plays which represented the following: (1) Plays which presented historical personages of this period as characters; (2) plays which treated and used as subject and plot the Indian themes and legends of American history; and (3) American comedies of an American type and character. Each of these three phases gave to native drama a distinctly American element.

Before considering the drama of the Revolutionary War period proper, it might be well to take a backward look at dramatic history on this continent. Many literary historians have dismissed the history of our colonial theatre as non-existent. It is easily seen in theatrical history throughout the world that the stage has been deemed part of a country's cultural life; so it must have been in early American life. The first settlers in the New World came from Elizabethan England and it seems most probable that they should have known some of the plays and the playwrights of that era. No doubt they were acquainted with the best the dramatic world had to offer.

In as much as this thesis concerns itself with the establishment of native drama in America it attempts to weed out foreign elements and influences in the three classes of plays mentioned above. To be sure, a true native drama must have its roots deeply embedded in its own soil, but in its shade it must include the world's theatre. Because of the use of a common literary tradition, however, not only its drama, but all of American literature in its very form and spirit, owed more to English authors than to those of any other country. As has been stated before, our earliest
settlers came from the England of Elizabeth where they had been used to fine drama, good music, excellent literature and a comfortable living. It is a different story, indeed, the story of their existence on these shores. The struggle of the American stage to gain any sort of a foothold or recognition was a long and hard one. In the first place, the severe conditions of frontier life in a new land, the extreme cold, the difficult tasks of building their homes, securing their food and protecting themselves from the attacks of the Indians, gave the colonists little leisure time and no money for amusements. In the very struggle for mere existence they forgot, for a time at least, the plays, the lectures, the music, the social clubs and the organized sports which they had enjoyed in England.

Secondly, the rigid New England Puritans and the staid Quakers of the Middle colonies frowned upon amusements as frivolous indulgences. On our first statute books the theatre was called "the ante-chamber of the devil" and the actors, accordingly, were called the "caterpillars of the commonwealth." ¹ The doors of our freedom were barred to both the art and the artists. There was a complete ban against theatres in Boston. Found in a letter, written by Chief Justice Samuel Sewall of Massachusetts, is a vehement protest against the acting of a play in the council chambers in Boston. At that time Boston had no other place where a play could possibly have been presented. Sewall said that even the old Romans, fond as they were of plays, were not "so far set upon them as to turn their senate house into a play-house." He continued further, "Let not Christian Boston go beyond heathen Rome in the practice of shameful Vanities." ² The protests

¹ Edith J. Isaacs, Theatre, intro., p.xi
² Charles Patrick Daly, The First Theatre in America, p.16.
and the intolerance of these religious fanatics were not singular in America. England had known them even when drama flourished there. Only for a time did this serve as a check to the early flowering of the drama on these shores.

Annie Marble, in her work Heralds of American Literature, mentions a play written here as early as 1662. Governor Berkeley, while still in Virginia prior to his return to England, tried his hand as a playwright. The result was *Cornelia.* Paul Ford, in his Beginnings of American Dramatic Literature, says that Berkeley's play was never presented on this continent. Of course it wasn't, but is that a reflection on the worth of the play? Ford neglects to mention that in 1662 there was no place in colonial America where it might have been presented. Berkeley took his play with him to England and that same year it appeared on the boards in London at Gibbon's Tennis Court.

Ford also mentions the appearance, in 1690, of a play of unknown authorship, *The Widdow Ranter or Bacon in Virginia.* The scene of the play was laid in Virginia and its subject dealt with the Virginia insurrection. One of the leading characters was the convict parson, typical of a certain element in the Virginia colonization of that day. We have no more knowledge of the play than this, but it is easy to see that it was American in more than its location. Its author, whether he was an Englishman or an American, showed himself so thoroughly conversant with Virginian life. The play, although we have no record of where it might have been produced, Ford tells us, was much cut in its performance and it failed miserably as a stage success. Thus the seed of the drama was sown in American soil and it now
needed careful nurturing to grow.

The dawn of the eighteenth century saw a change in living conditions in the colonies. The New England coast villages became prosperous commercial towns and there appeared a fair amount of wealth. New York and Philadelphia led this wave of prosperity and in the southern towns an aristocracy of planters grew up. American life became rich in spiritual, intellectual and social values. The colonists were not as yet thoroughly Americanized. They leaned heavily upon the aristocratic tradition in acting of England and in their towns the orchestras played the best music of Europe. The South responded more quickly than the North to the external dramatic urge in a truly colonial way. At first the theatres were just rude halls, but in time they became accurate imitations of the London models. At the beginning of the century these theatres served traveling companies of actors. While there was some interchange of actors between England and America, most of these players were Englishmen but they gave to American audiences the best that England had to offer in drama.

It was Governor Robert Hunter of New York who created the first play written and printed in America. Having been a close associate of Addison, Steele and other wits in England before he came to the colonies, Hunter wielded a caustic pen. In his play Androboros he made up in vigor what the play lacked in delicacy. It reeked of filth, even in the coarse and vulgar day in which it was written, but despite its vulgarity and coarseness, the characters were admirably drawn and the entire play abounded in humor. It was a clever satire on the Senate and the Lieutenant Governor, Nicholson. There is only one copy of this unique play in existence today, and it is
kept at the Huntington Library. Fred Atkinson, however, has a fine photostat copy of the original which is found at the University of Chicago in his collection of American drama. It is this photostat copy that has been used for reference and study. Written in the original copy is a key to the characters. Nicholson was represented by Androboros, the man-eater; the keeper was Governor Hunter, himself; and the Mulmachians were the French against whom Androboros had planned to lead an attack. Coad suggests that the satire was directed against certain officials of Trinity Church who were hostile to Hunter because he had refused to grant land to the parish. There was no performance of the play on record, because Hunter probably never intended it for production when he wrote it. Nevertheless, had he intended that it be presented he would have had difficulty in finding a theatre for it. Hunter was a thoroughbred Englishman, but his play was concerned with incidents which were happening and people who were living in New York between the years of 1710 and 1719. It added nothing to American literature perhaps, but it is interesting to note that even at its very inception on this continent, drama made use of local incidents and political motives.

Dramatic historians have been wrangling and setting forth many arguments as to the actual date of the beginning of a drama, worthy of the name, in this country. If the author of this paper could accept Sheldon Cheney's premise that up to 1820 nothing appeared in American drama to astound the world, this thesis could not be written. Believing however that it was to these early writers of the Revolutionary period that America owes whatever success she might have had, an attempt has been made to show in what manner they have contributed to her dramatic history. It is, perhaps, to William
Dunlap that the student may look for authority on the drama of that era. Manager, playwright and dramatic historian, he was the outstanding figure in the dramatic circle in the last decade of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries. Later historians such as Quinn, Mayorga and Daly have accepted his date, 1752, as marking the beginning of a dignified drama in America. Hallam, having failed as the manager of Goodman's Fields that year, sent a company of players to America under the direction of his brother, Lewis. So that they would be ready for immediate action upon their arrival the company held regular rehearsal on board ship and upon landing on these shores, they secured permission from Governor Dinwiddie to fix up an old building to be used as a theatre. Their first performance was Shakespeare's Merchant of Venice at Williamsburg in September, 1752.

The audience that filed into the play-house about 6 o'clock on the nights of the acting was a representative one. In the boxes sat the members—especially the ladies of the first families who provided their own system of reservation by sending negro servants early in the afternoon to hold good seats for them. The young men of the town exercised the ancient prerogative of sitting on the stage and no doubt took occasion to ogle the actresses shamelessly and perhaps even to chat with them during the play. The pit was occupied only by men, who, before the performance began, stood on the uncomfortable benches that were their seats in order to inspect the audience. In the gallery sat the vociferous rabble, who did not hesitate to express their disapproval either by words or by missiles. At times actors, orchestra and audience suffered from their attention.3

Just as the audiences had been in England, so they were here. At times, all the glory of the Elizabethan era was re-enacted in the colonial theatre both

3. Oral Coad and Edwin Mims, Jr., The American Stage, p.10
on the stage and off. The work of Hallam's company was valuable and useful in acquainting the colonists with the masters of English drama; Congreve, Farquhar, Fielding, Otway, Jonson and Shakespeare. When colonial writers began to try their own hands at playwriting it was this group to whom they looked as models for their own work. This influence is best seen in Thomas Godfrey's tragedy The Prince of Parthia which will be treated a little later as the first play written by an American to be actually performed by a professional company.

In 1767 a play by Andrew Barton, Esquire, was put into rehearsal for production by the American Company. It was a local satire ridiculing the prevailing idea that the pirate, Blackbeard, had hidden his ill-gotten wealth somewhere near Cooper's point on the banks of the Delaware. There was a local superstition that this old rogue had killed a man and buried his body with the treasure so that the ghost would guard it from any attempts to steal it. This was the story that Barton seized upon as a plot for his play. Again it was the local setting which gave the play an American flavor. This play, The Disappointment, was without merit other than that. As a dramatic composition it fell flat, but it served to paint an excellent picture of a credulous and a superstitious epoch in the history of Pennsylvania. The play was rehearsed for production but it never reached the boards. It was discovered that the characters in the play were real Philadelphians and so it had to be withheld. Seilhamer, one of the most recent critics of our early drama says that its coarseness and immorality made it unfit for production even if it had not held up to ridicule the most prominent men of the day. Seilhamer is severe in his criticism of this
period in dramatic history but if he selected the characters of Moll Plackett and Topinloft, the sailor, as the criterion by which he judged the play he was not far wrong. Moll and Topinloft are on the bottom rung of the social ladder, the epitome of vulgarity. Even a sophisticated twentieth century audience might lift an eyebrow at some of the scenes. In spite of these criticisms, the play is not without its irresistibly humorous situations and dialogues. The Yankee Doodle tune is used for one of the songs in the play and the air Sing Tantara rara is strongly suggestive of the song Ta-ra-ra-boom-de-ay of Floradora fame at a later date in American theatricals.

The Disappointment had indeed been a disappointment. Four days later The Prince of Parthia, written by the youthful Thomas Godfrey in 1759, appeared as a substitute. It was the first play, as has already been mentioned, written by an American and performed in America by a professional company of actors. Godfrey originally intended the play for Douglas's company but it arrived too late in the season to be produced and so it did not appear on the stage until after the death of its author. The diction was extravagant, but it did contain verses of genuine dramatic power. It gave the actors a chance to deliver highly-colored poetical lines modeled after the manner of Elizabethan drama. The phraseology and the slaughter of the main characters ring with Shakespearian influence. There are no lighter moments in Godfrey's play such as are found in Shakespeare to soften the stark terror of the tragedy. The fearful hatred between the brothers who love the beautiful Evanthe, the unfilial ambition of Vardanes, and a mother more monstrous than Lady Macbeth, furnish a theme more worthy of the bard of Avon. Godfrey has used the ghost of the king, Artabanes, to haunt the evil
conspirators just as Shakespeare has used the ghost of Banquo to haunt Macbeth after his crime. Mention might here be made of the similarity to the songs of Shakespeare of Vardanes' Song to Phyllis.

Tell me, Phyllis, tell me why,
You appear so wond'rous coy,
When that glow and sparkling eye,
Speak you want to taste the joy?
Pr thee, give this fooling O'er,
Nor torment your lover more.

While youth is warm within our veins,
And nature tempts us to be gay,
Give to pleasure loose the reins,
Love and youth fly swift away.
Youth in pleasure should be spent.
Age will come, we'll then repent.

Although Godfrey adhered to the formal English school of tragedy of the eighteenth century, it was, indeed, a creditable beginning for American dramatic poetry. The Prince of Parthia, taking its respective place in the parade of American drama, presents an interesting note of contrast, dealing as do its British models with a far distant time and scene, to the very local Androboros which had been written by an active man of affairs. The dramatic seed which had been planted in this soil almost a century before the appearance of The Prince of Parthia had taken root and was beginning to grow.

For a time, a great number of our home-made dramas were adaptations or imitations of British, French and German plays. Sometimes only the title was changed, though in other instances the characters were localized and an American flavor given to the dialogues. In this type of thing William Dunlap again came to the front. His Fontainville Abbey was an adaptation of the Gothic melodrama of Mrs. Radcliffe, A Romance of the Forest. He also trans-

4. The Prince of Parthia, Act V, Scene i.
lated the French farce Jérôme Pointu into English and called his translation Tell the Truth and Shame the Devil. It was through Dunlap that the German influence on the American stage became noticed, in his adaptations of the dramas of Kotzebue. The influence of August von Kotzebue had already made itself felt on the stages of Germany, Russia and finally England, and at this time Dunlap was introducing him to America. He translated and adapted a whole score of these German plays.

Then the day arrived when American writers ceased to be Englishmen and their national consciousness came to the top. American drama like American literature began to feel its way for the proper expression of national characteristics. During the war the theatres were closed but many plays were written; scathing satires written by men and women alike, both English and American. The Whigs and the Tories engaged in a war of their own, using only their pens as weapons. No one was spared, from the great commander-in-chief down to the lowliest private. We even learn with some surprise that our old friend of elementary school history days, General Burgoyne, was as good a playwright as he was a militarist in this controversy of the pens. National heroes appeared as characters in these plays, at times under their own names, sometimes under strange titles. Outstanding in the field of dramatic satire of this period was the general's wife, Mrs. Mercy Warren.

Our national heroes did not hold the stage alone. The Indians, no longer proving to be such a menace to the existence and safety of the colonists, became excellent figures for the stage. For a while they were stiff and very conventional, typical stage Indians, with nothing natural about them. It was the plot with its romance, setting and music which lent beauty
to the production in almost every instance. The second chapter of this thesis is an attempt to establish the character of the American Indian and also the themes built on his life and customs, as distinct native elements in the drama of the Revolutionary period and the few years following the war.

A third thing which singled out the drama of that early date as being American was Tyler's introduction to our stage of the comedy character, the American Yankee. Of the farmer class, this Yankee was plain, blunt, quite simple in his tastes, wholesome and honest to the core. England did not know him until she met him in Tyler's play, The Contrast. He was a total stranger to France and Germany. Jonathan was a product of native soil and his long line of descendants lived for more than half a century after him, enjoying his popularity.

Perhaps, as Cheney says, these three classes of plays did not astound the world, but they gave drama in this country a sturdy and solid foundation in its native soil. Washington lives today on the American stage, Pocahontas has lost none of her simple, glowing appeal, and our present day audience still rooks with laughter at funny fellows similar to Jonathan. The tiny seeds sown in these early days, as early as 1662, had taken root in 1752 and after some care they blossomed forth in flaming colors by the beginning of the Civil War.

Plays, dialogues and other stage productions were written very often to commemorate special events or days. This group of plays which appeared during this early period will not be considered in the main body of this thesis, so mention is made of them here. One example is the Monody written
by Charles Brockden Brown and spoken on the stage of Dunlap's theatre by Cooper at the time of Washington's death. Washington out an important figure as a character in many of the plays written and presented during the war and after. He had won a place in the hearts of the Thespians and this was their tribute to him. Dunlap's theatre had been closed for a week while the nation mourned and on the night it reopened, the curtain rose on a stage draped in black and printed in large letters across the back drop, was,

MOURN,

WASHINGTON IS DEAD!

It was into this setting that Cooper stepped to deliver the Monody.

Another example is Dunlap's musical interlude written for a Fourth of July celebration in 1812 after the victory of the Constitution over the English frigate, the Guerriere. After recounting all the incidents of the battle to Old Bundle and O'Blunder, Ben Bundle entertained the audience with the rollicking patriotic song, Yankee Chronology. Other than the song there is practically nothing to the interlude at all.

In passing, there are two other plays important enough to be briefly discussed because they deal with subject matter decidedly American. Yet, like the productions mentioned above, The Monody and Yankee Chronology, they do not fit logically into the body of the paper. The first play is Barker's tragedy Superstition. Its theme is the persecution of witches and non-conforming sects by the New England Puritans. These Puritans made history and their very fanaticism and bigotry made themes for drama. Superstition was a powerful and gripping drama presented in 1824. Barker used incidents

which are said to have actually taken place in New England in the last half of the seventeenth century. Ravensworth, one of the important characters in the play, is the embodiment of the New England witch-hunting spirit manifested in the flesh. His is the tenacity of a fanatic hunting his innocent victims, and in his bitter denunciations of Isabella and her son, Charles, he represents the Calvinistic doctrine of divine wrath and punishment for sins. He says to the jury who try them as witches,

Ye all remember
The terror and despair that filled each bosom
When the red comet, signal of Heaven's wrath,
Shook its portentous fires above our heads.6

Again in the same scene he interprets the thundershower which is raging outside the courtroom as a sure sign of divine wrath against Isabella and Charles. It is a sign from above.

The angry Heavens—
Hark, how they chide in thunder!

Atkinson says that the character of Ravensworth really existed and was founded on the history of Goff — "(Ravensworth, one of the stern republicans who sat in judgment on Charles the First and condemned him to lose his head, fled to New England and as a preacher took a lead in witchcraft trials.)"7

The other play referred to is one attributed to Perkins Howes, The New England Drama, founded on the incidents in a New England Tale. Appearing just one year after Superstition, it, too, has as its theme religious intolerance, prejudice and hypocrisy. It is Puritanism, represented by Mrs. Wilson and Erskine, wholly intolerant of Quakerism in the character of

7. In his notes in the Card Catalogue of Atkinson's American drama collection he has recorded this fact.
Mr. Lloyd and Methodism in the character of the servant girl, Mary Hull. They who ridicule are hypocrites of blackest dye. By 1825 the audiences could probably laugh at the narrow-mindedness and false modesty of Old Sarah.

Sarah: Why dear husband, don't you know that you ha'nt another stocking in the world, but just them are you got on you leg -le -l - hem - feet. (aside) Oh dear, if I had said legs then what would our minister say to me.8

The play carries on and ends in true melodramatic style, the villians get their just desserts and maidenly virtue its reward.

Quickly summing up what has been said in the preceding pages it is easily seen that the only thing which linked Berkeley's drama Cornelia to America was the fact that it was written here. The Widdow Ranter which appeared a little more than a quarter of a century later was American in its scenes, its subject and its characters. Hunter's Androboros, like The Widdow Ranter dealt with local incidents and characters. Godfrey's play which has borne the distinction of being the first play written by an American and presented by an American company marked the beginning of American drama proper. While the actual writing of The Prince of Parthia predated that of The Disappointment by eight years, it almost missed by only four days being the first play presented by a native company of actors, remembering that originally the company intended to do The Disappointment. It would be an interesting speculation as to what dramatic history might have been had not the Philadelphia "Board of Censors" banned the production of The Disappointment.

The two plays, *Superstition* and *The New England Drama*, were American in theme and plot. The authors, Barker and Howes, had taken events from American history of an earlier date and put them on the other side of the footlights. The tragedy *Superstition* differs greatly from Godfrey's play in its form and structure. No longer are found the traces of Elizabethan influence and Shakespearian patterns which abounded in *The Prince of Parthia*.

Finally the period of the war itself requires a word or two. Just as the verse and the prose of the period expressed the patriotism of the writers and their hostility to Great Britain, so the drama expressed these feelings. The Americans were not alone in this field of writing; the British, too, wrote dramatic satire expressing their hatred of American independence and disloyalty to the Mother country. Many of the satires appeared only as closet dramas, a fact already stated. During the British occupation of Boston the colonists had no chance to present their plays because the theatres were closed to them. But the footlights were not dimmed. The British officers and soldiers wrote plays and acted them for their own amusement. Clinton, Howe and Burgoyne each had their own company of actors and it was Burgoyne's play *The Blockade of Boston* which aroused Mrs. Mercy Warren, the most prolific writer of dramatic satire of that period. In the first chapter it is her plays to which are given our first considerations.
CHAPTER I

ROMANTIC STUDIES OF HISTORICAL CHARACTERS

The plays to be considered in this chapter are those which appeared in America between 1773 and 1798. In the struggle for independence it was probably the theatre which felt one of the greatest shocks. In 1774, the Continental Congress passed a resolution agreeing to discontinue and discourage every "species of extravagance, gambling, cock-fighting, exhibitions of shows, plays and other expensive diversion and entertainment." But drama could not be completely suppressed although some of the plays appeared in printed form only and have been presented on the stage only in modern revivals of Revolutionary drama. These plays, both printed and produced were truly representative of the spirit of the times, depicting the characters and reflecting episodes of national history. Heroes of the Revolution appeared before the footlights and on the printed page; politics, international complications and the war inspired dramatic pieces whose chief aim was the patriotism of a young nation. Then, too, the mistakes of the Continental Congress and the hatred between the Whigs and the Tories furnished an abundance of themes. Every event, from the Boston Tea Party to the battle of Yorktown, was dramatized. At times, satire and invective flew from the pens of writers as fast as bullets from the guns of the armies.

A discussion of the Revolutionary drama would be incomplete if Mrs. Mercy Warren and her dramas were to be omitted. Being the wife of General James

Warren and the sister of James Otis, she was constantly and actively in touch with the politics of the day. Her friends and correspondents were such people as John and Samuel Adams and Thomas Jefferson and so she was well equipped to satirize their foibles. She was one of the best and most prolific of the partisan writers.

The first expression of Mrs. Warren's hostility to the oppression of the British appeared in the dramatic satire, *The Adulateur*, written in 1773. In five acts of unrhymed pentameter verse she has exhibited a series of historical events which occurred between 1770 and 1773. The air was hot with revolution, intrigue and conspiracy. The title-page of the plays reads,

THE ADULATEUR:

a tragedy

as it is now acted in Upper Servia.

Upper Servia is, of course, Boston. The play dealt with the Boston massacre and the characters were thinly veiled disguises of real people. Quinn says, "The chief satire of the play is directed against Thomas Hutchinson, who had held at once the three offices of member of the Council, Chief Justice and Lieutenant Governor, and who finally became Governor of the Colony." He was called Rapatio; Brutus represented Mrs. Warren's brother, James Otis; Cassius was John Adams; Junius was Samuel Adams and Portius was John Hancock. The character, Meagre, was the Governor's brother, Foster Hutchinson. All the genuine satire of the play is hurled directly at him. Although the play is decidedly American in flavor and in spirit, every little while the American chiefs are discovered speaking of American liberty in the grandiose manner of the Greek and Roman patriots whose names they wear.

2. Arthur Hobson Quinn, *History of the American Drama*, p.34
In 1775, Mrs. Warren wrote *The Group*. In a ruthless manner she pilloried the group of Americans who sanctioned the king's repeal of the Massachusetts Charter. This group of prominent citizens included the Governor's brother, Fostor, from whom patriotic leadership might have been expected. Meagre had already been introduced to the public in the former play, *The Adulatour*, but in this play the malign character ascribed to him is indicative of his brother, the most hated and dreaded of all the Tory leaders. Certainly Mrs. Warren's play cannot be called great drama; some of it cannot be called good drama in so far as its dramatic merit might be considered. Only at one time does it approach real drama at all, that, the appearance of General Gage in the character of Sylla. The author of *The Group* has treated him kindly compared to the manner in which she has treated some of the characters. Later in the chapter Gage is discussed again in the consideration of Leacock's play and an interesting comparison may be struck, of the manner in which each of these authors has handled Gage. In *The Group*, he rises to almost majestic heights in the last scene when he realizes the true justice of the colonists' cause, yet he recognized his own duty as a British soldier. It is this speech in which he is engaged in mental conflict that shows the one spot where the play comes close to genuine drama.

Sylla: And shall I rashly draw my guilty sword,
And dip its hungry hilt in the righ blood
Of the best subjects that a Brunswick boasts,
And for no cause, but that they nobly scorn
To wear the fetters of his venal slaves!
But swift time rolls, and on his rapid wheel
Bears the winged hours, and the circling years.
The cloud cap'ed morn, the dark short wintry day,
And the keen blasts of rough(e)ned Boreas' breath,
Will soon evanish and approaching spring
Opes with the fate of empires on her wing.

The entire play consists of two acts which take place in two rooms, and in that space of time and in that setting, the members of the Tory club exhibit either for the derision or the horror of their Whig fellow countrymen, their half-hearted ambitions, guilty surmises of failure, their jealousies, hatreds and sullen contempts for their countrymen.

In the first act the characters are revealed. Various Royalists of New England found themselves presented to the public under astonishing names. Comparing the Dramatis Personae with the figures they represented as it is given by Alice Brown, Mrs. Warren's biographer, and as Walbridge gives it in his *Literary Characters Drawn From Life*, the following is a fairly accurate interpretation.

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<th>Character</th>
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<tr>
<td>Lord Chief Justice Hazlerod</td>
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<td>Judge Meagre</td>
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<td>Hum Humbug, Esquire</td>
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<td>Simple Sapling, Esquire</td>
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<td>Scribblerius Fribble</td>
<td>Brown says Leonard; Walbridge says Harrison Gray</td>
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<td>Commodore Batteau</td>
<td>Joshua Loring</td>
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<td>Sylla</td>
<td>General Gage</td>
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The true significance of these names is probably even more apparent to the student of history than to the student of drama or dramatic literature.

Late in 1775, Burgoyne wrote *The Blockade of Boston* for the amusement of his officers and the Tories, during the time they were forced to remain in Boston. The officers presented it with great gusto in Faneuil Hall. In this play Burgoyne showed many traces of being as good a playwright as he was a
general. It was this play that brought forth a stinging retort from Mrs. Warren. Upon reading it she immediately sharpened her pen and replied by writing the counter-farce which she called The Blockheads, or The Affrighted Officers. Mrs. Warren well know how to wield her pen in anger, and in this play she reflected all the bitter spirit of the times. Quinn doubts that it was she who really was the author of the farce, although most of the dramatic historians are willing to attribute it to her. He argues that there is a certain element of coarseness found in The Blockheads, particularly between Simple and his wife, which clearly indicates that the play is not hers. This is absent from all of her other plays. The fact that some of the names which she has used, reappear in this farce, shows that the play was certainly influenced by her satires. Quinn has neglected to point out that the prologue strongly supports his theory that the play was not hers. Keeping in mind the fact that she wrote The Adulateur in the year of 1773 and The Group early in the year of 1775 and also that this play did not appear until late that same year, the prologue reads:

**PROLOGUE TO THE BLOCKHEADS:**

Your pardon first I crave for this intrusion.
The topic's such it looks like a delusion;
And next your candour, for I swear and vow
Such an attempt I never made till now.
But constant laughing at the Desperate fate,
The bastard sons of Mars endur'd of late,
Induce'd me this to minute down the notion,
Which put my risibles in such commotion,
By Yankees frightened too! oh, dire to say!
Why Yankees sure at red-coats faint away!
Oh yes - they thought so too - for lack-a-day,
Their general turned the Blockade to a play:
Poor vain poltroons - with justice we'll retort,
And call the Blockheads for their sport.

It hardly seems probable that Mrs. Warren who had already two plays to her
credit, would make that statement "Such an attempt I never made till now." Yet, Atkinson who is also a prominent authority says on the file card for this play, in the American collection at Chicago, "that the clever prologue is representative of her manner of writing and particular satirical ability which was unequalled by any other writer of the day." He accounts for that certain coarse element by saying that "burlesque, while amusing went a long way to ridicule the failings of the British." Regardless of its authorship, the characters in the play were representative of living persons, who gave many a merry laugh to the patriots. It is Quinn who gives the interpretation of the dramatis personae.

- Captain Bashaw .......... Graves
- Puff ....................... Howe
- Lord Dapper ............... Lord Percy
- Duke ........................ Who you please
- Meagre ..................... Gray
- Surly ....................... Ruggles
- Brigadier Punch .......... Bratels
- Bonny ....................... Murray
- Simple ...................... Eaton

It is an interesting observation that in The Adulateur and in The Group the character, Meagre, has represented Foster Hutchinson, but in this play it is Harrison Gray whom the character represents.

The Motley Assembly, another play of intense partisanship, published anonymously, so closely resembled the plays of Mrs. Warren that it has been attributed to her. It was a satire on social control aimed at certain Americans in high society in Boston whose patriotism had grown cold. In the play, the Flourishes represent the Declois family; the Taxalls, the Sheafe family; the Bubbles, the Swan family; and the Turncoasts, the Hubbards.

4. Quinn, op. cit., p.37
5. Earle Walbridge, Literary Characters Drawn from Life, p.104
Mrs. Warren represented the Whigs in the controversy but it is to be expected that the Tories had their satires too. *The Americans Roused, or A Cure For the Spleen*, although written in dramatic form was not intended for presentation but rather by its humor and its satire to "attract readers and gain proselytes to the cause of royalty or Toryism." It ridiculed the work of the first Continental Congress and indeed, as its title indicates, aroused the Americans. The conceited barber, Trim, is the advocate of the people in his shop only because it serves his purpose. The shrewd Quaker, the honest justice and the orthodox parson are friends to Old England's paternal dominion. The real friends to freedom are Puff, the stupid and ignorant blockhead and Deacon Graves, equally stupid and ignorant. The following lines are a fine character portrayal of the local politicians.

Trim, the barber, protests against the banishment of politics from his shop because they are a part of his trade. Brim, the Quaker, Puff, the late representative and Trim are talking over this question.

**Brim.** Why I have often heard thee holding forth to thy customers with such apparent zeal against British tyranny and oppression, that I was verily persuaded that thou wert inflicted with the epidemical frenzy of the times.

**Trim.** Ay. Friend Brim, all trades have their mysteries, and one half of the world live by the follies of the other half.

**Puff.** But pray, Mr. Trim, are you such a Tory, as to turn all our grievances into scorn and derision, and only pretend to be friend to your country for the sake of a living.

Elsewhere Trim says:

**Trim:** If I was denied the privilege of my shop to canvass politics as a body may say - that is, Lord North, East India Company Charter rights and privileges, duties, taxes, and the likes 0' that - body o' me,

sir, strip me of this darling privilege and you may take my razors, soap, combs and all. 7

In this battle of the pens Washington was probably one of the most colorful of the historical characters represented in the plays of the period. Quoting Ford, from his work, Washington and the Theatre,

If the outbreak of the Revolution ended for a time Washington's seeing of plays it produced a new phase, by putting him into them — not as he once wished, as a performer, but as a character. Thus, John Leacock's play, The Fall of British Tyranny, and an anonymous farce, The Battle of Brooklyn, both issued in 1776, introduced the commander-in-chief; the one a Whig production making him a hero, while the other of Tory origin, gives him the obverse, though it is an interesting fact that he is drawn even in this as the one honest and high-principled man in a band of rogues.

Although the author of The Battle of Brooklyn is unknown, the local knowledge of the region and the people who are characters in the play, point to an American author. However Gabriel Harrison, attributes the play to General Burgoyne because in it Washington, Putnam, Stirling and Sullivan, the rebel chiefs, are pointed to with contempt. Washington is treated with slight forbearance and at times he is ridiculed by the other characters. This is the only play of the entire period in which Washington falls short of being the hero that history has portrayed for us, and it is for this reason that Harrison thinks that it was a product of Burgoyne's pen.

Leacock's play, The Fall of British Tyranny, does not introduce him until the third scene of the last act. This seems to the first appearance of the great man on the stage on record. In just a few lines Leacock has caught the character and the fineness of the man as is shown in his conversation with the messenger who has brought him news of Montgomery's death.

7. Ibid., pp. 35-36.
Gen. Washington. Is General Montgomery killed?
Messenger. He is certainly, sir.
Gen. Washington. I am sorry for it - a brave man; - I could wish him a better fate! .......

In one line in the following scene Leacock has summed up all the bravery of the greatest of American patriots. "I have drawn my sword, and never will I sheathe it, till America is free or I'm no more."

Leacock's play is not significant, however, merely for its fine portrayal of Washington. The entire play is one of the most interesting of the patriot dramas because the author has rooted out at the very beginning of the war, one of the principle causes of the Revolution, the eagerness and the greed of the British Parliament to gain place and profit. The most representative character who shows traces of this almost every time he opens his mouth is Lord Paramount (Mr. Butte). Again Gage is portrayed, this time masquerading under the title of Lord Boston. It is an entirely different General that Leacock paints than the Gage which Mrs. Warren portrayed as represented by Sylla in her play The Group. Throughout The Fall of British Tyranny, Gate is the one ludicrous figure, an indolent and cowardly voluptuary. Leacock has proved himself a dramatist of no small ability; he has presented excellent characterizations of men who were taking the leading roles in American history. The following excerpt is representative of Leacock's dramatic ability as well as a glowing description of the battles of Lexington and Concord.

Messenger. I bring your Excellency unwelcome tidings -
Lord Boston. For Heaven's sake! from what quarter?
Messenger. From Lexington plains.
Lord Boston. 'Tis impossible!
Messenger. Too true, sir.

8. The Fall of British Tyranny, Act V, scene iii.
Lord Boston. Say - is it? Speak what you know.
Messenger. Colonel Smith is defeated and fast retreating.
Lord Boston. Good God! What does he say? Mercy on me!
Messenger. They're flying before the enemy.
Lord Boston. Britons turn their backs before the Rebels! The Rebels put Britons to flight? Said you not so?
Messenger. They are routed, sir; - they are flying this instant; - the provincials are numerous, and hourly gaining strength; - they have nearly surrounded our troops.
A reinforcement, sir - a timely succour may save the shattered remnant. Speedily! speedily, sir! or they're irretrievably lost!
Lord Boston. Good God! What does he say? Can it be possible?
Messenger. Lose no time, sir.
Lord Boston. What can I do? oh dear!
Officer. Draw off a detachment - form a brigade; let the drums beat to arms. Send for Lord Percy.
Lord Boston. Aye, do, Captain; you know how better than I. Did the Rebels fire on the king's troops? Had they the courage? Guards keep round me.
Messenger. They're like lions; they have killed many of our honest officers and men; and if not checked instantly will totally surround them, and make the whole prisoners. This is no time to parley, sir.
Lord Boston. No indeed; what will become of me?

Leacock's characters throughout the play have been as well drawn as that of Gage in the above lines. So many of the satires of the period were merely conversations between prominent citizens and political characters but this is not the case in The Fall of British Tyranny. Leacock has gotten away from this entirely, each character is an individual in himself.

In spite of its enemy title, Dunlap's play, André reflects a strong nationalism overflowing with patriotic actions. The striking figure of Washington dominated the action of the play at almost every turn and Dunlap has portrayed him with the greatest respect and admiration. His keen understanding and tender sympathy are shown in this play in the words of a little child. Mrs. Bland has come to Washington to plead for André's freedom that her husband's life might be spared by the British. The general, although 9. Ibid., Act III, scene iii.
moved, places duty to his country above all emotion. The small child says of him,

You need not cry, Mama, the General will do it, I am sure, for I saw him cry. He turned his head away from you, but I saw him.10

This play was Dunlap's first attempt at native tragedy and perhaps his best play. At one point, however, in the premier production, young Bland, representative of the American opposition to André's execution, almost ruined the play. Bland had appealed to Washington for his friend's (André) release and had been refused. In his anger and indignation at the great general he tore the American cockade from his hat and threw it to the ground. The audience rose to their feet in a body and hissed and hooted and demanded that the play be withdrawn. To them it was almost rank treason and disloyalty to the patriot cause. Dunlap was forced to modify his play before the second performance if it was to remain on the boards. In the fifth act he made the impetuous young American apologize for his rash act and accept his cockade again.

In the first scene of the fifth act, originally the lines read:

Bland. How all men tower above me!
M'Donald. Nay, not so.
    Above what thou once wast, some few do rise;
    None above what thou art.
Bland. It shall be so.
M'Donald. It is so.
Bland. Then to prove it.
    For I must yet a trial undergo,
    That will require a consciousness of virtue.

But after seeing the actor who played the role of Bland hissed off the stage, Dunlap omitted these lines and inserted the following conversation between Bland and M'Donald; it was another instance of Dunlap's great respect for 10. André, Act IV, scene i
Washington, it toned down the mighty manner of the young American, it gave an added patriotic action and it pleased the audience of the time.

Bland. Noble M'Donald, truth and honor's champion! Yet think not strange that my intemperance wrong'd thee: Good as thou art! for, would'st thou, can'st thou think it?
My tongue, unbridled, hath the same offence,
With action violent, and boisterous tone,
Hurl'd on that glorious man, whose pious labors
Shield from every ill his grateful country.
That man, whom friends to adoration love,
And enemies revere. Yes, M'Donald,
Even in the presence of the first of men
Did I abjure the service of my country,
And reft my helmet of that glorious badge
Which graces even the brow of Washington.
How shall I see him more?
M'Donald. Alive himself to every generous impulse,
He hath excused the impetuous warmth of youth,
In expectation that thy fiery soul,
Chastened by time and reason, will receive
The stamp indelible of godlike virtue.
To me, in trust, he gave this badge disclaim'd,
With power, when thou should'st see thy wrongful error,
From him, to reinstate it in thy helm,
And thee in his high favor.

(Gives the cockade.)
Bland. (Takes the cockade and replaces it.)
Shall I speak of my thoughts of thee and him?
No! let my actions henceforth show what thou
And he have made of me. Ne'er shall my helmet
Lack again its proudest, noblest ornament,
Until my country knows the rest of peace,
Or Bland the peace of death!11

Another striking fact about the play which puts it above some of the other plays which have portrayed Washington, is the fact that Dunlap has endowed the character with a much more natural vocabulary than have the other playwrights who have brought him to the footlights.

It is natural that some of our foremost patriot writers would have depicted the enemy leaders in a dye of deepest black but the traitor, André,

11. Ibid., Act V, scene 1, 1798 edition.
has been sympathetically handled by William Dunlap. Being primarily interested in producing a real drama when he wrote André he pictured the dignified and courageous spy in such a manner that the audiences who saw the play were in sympathy with him from the rise to the final drop of the curtain. At no one time does Dunlap deviate from this; at no point in the play does he allow André to drop the cloak of bravery in which he has clothed him. When the young American, Bland, proposes to desert his country and join the Britons if André is not released, André says:

Andre. Hold, hold, my friend! Thy country's woes are full. What! Wouldst thou make me cause another traitor? No more of this; and, if I die, believe me, Thy country for my death incurs no blame. Restrain thy ardor— but ceaselessly entreat That André may at least die as he lived, A soldier. 12

André's sense of fair play and the honor of a soldier even in war is shown in the scene in which he learns that Bland's father is being held as a captive by the British.

André. What mean'st thou, Bland? Surely my General Threats not retaliation. In vengeance Dooms some better man to die for me? Bland. The best of men. André. Thou hast a father, captive—I dare not ask— Bland. That father dies for thee. André. Gracious Heaven how woes are heap'd upon me! What cannot one, so trifling in life's scene, Fall, without dooming such a ponderous ruin? Leave me, my friend, awhile—I yet have life A little space of life—let me exert it To prevent injustice; from death to save Thy father, thee to save from utter desolation. Bland. What mean'st thou, André? André. See thou the messenger Who brought this threat. I will my last entreaty Send by him. My General, sure, will grant it. Bland. To the last thyself.

12. Ibid., Act II, scene 1.
Andre. If at this moment,
When pangs of death already touch me,
Firmly my mind against injustice strives,
And the last impulse to my vital powers
Is given by anxious wishes to redeem
My fellow men from pain; surely my end
However accomplish'd, is not infamous. 13

When all efforts to save Andre have failed, Dunlap portrays the final test of Andre's indomitable courage. Knowing that death was inevitable, that there could be no escape, no way out, he had hoped to die as a soldier might, but Washington had decreed that he must be hanged as a spy. Bland offered his sword to his friend that he might take his own life and thus escape the ignominious death which was meted out to him. Andre refused.

Andre. No men shall say that cowardice did urge me,
In my mind's weakness, I did wish to show
That mode of death which error represented
Infamous; Now let me use superior will;
And with a fortitude too true to start
From mere appearances, show your country
That she in me, destroys a man who might
Have liv'd to virtue. 14

In all these examples previously cited from the play Andre there are shown, instances of Dunlap's fine qualities as a dramatist, his ability to use appealing language and his fine characterizations. He was facing a difficult problem in his presentation of patriotic drama. He represented the Federalist point of view in the closing years of the eighteenth century, trying to be fair to England without underestimating the heroes of his own country. In this effort of Dunlap's to produce a real drama he did not neglect the love interest and although it is not significant, it is interesting to note that the character, Honora, who appealed to Washington for Andre's release, is based on a real woman, Honora Seward, whom Andre loved in

13. Ibid., Act III, scene iii.
14. Ibid., Act IV.
real life. The introduction of this character makes the tragedy even more tragic than it might have been without her.

The last play to be considered here, in which Washington is an important figure, is Custis's The Indian Prophecy. It is a national drama founded on an interesting episode in the life of the general. Dr. James Craik, a bosom friend of Washington is responsible for having furnished the idea for the play as well as for its historical authenticity. Washington, the doctor and a group of hunters were exploring the country along the Kenhawa, when the old Indian chieftain Menewa came to the general to prophesy that one day he would become the founder of a great nation. Menewa believed him to be under the special protection of the Great Spirit and therefore invulnerable in battle. It is this story that Custis has used as the background of his play, and it is perhaps the most romantic of the plays which have portrayed Washington as one of the leading characters. Custis has taken the general off of the battlefield and placed him in the forests of the country which he later was to govern. All the romance which the American Indian lends to the stage is present in this play, but with that we leave The Indian Prophecy to be reconsidered in the second chapter in the discussion of Indian themes in the native dramas.

Washington did not stand alone as a romantic figure in these plays of the American Revolutionary period. Following as a close second was General James Warren, the husband of Mercy Warren, whose plays were discussed at the beginning of this chapter. Two plays appeared during the war in which Warren was the central figure; one was written at the beginning of the war, Brackenridge's The Battle of Bunker's Hill; the other written after the fighting had
ceased and a new nation been established, Burke's Bunker Hill. Dramatically

Brackenridge's play was not much more than a vigorous dialogue which he wrote
to be used as an exercise in oratory by the young men of Sommerset Academy
in Maryland. Having been written in the studied and pedantic manner of the
times, it did little more than depict the scenes of the battle. However,
Brackenridge had more of an opportunity for historical accuracy than did
Burke because he was much closer to the actual battle.

Brackenridge's play lays no claim to production but there is definite
proof of Burke's play having appeared on the boards from Williamson's letter
to the producer, Hodgkinson.

They have brought out a new play called Bunker's Hill,
a tragedy, the most execrable of the Grub-street kind -
but from its locality in title, the burning of Charles-
town and peppering the British (which are superadded to
the tragedy in pantomine) to the utter disgrace of Boston
theatricals, has brought them full houses. The deplorable
Bunker Hill was offered to the New York stage by the
author for one hundred guineas. He published it and we
are sorry to say it was afterward played in New York.15

The above excerpt does not throw a favorable light upon this play, and it is
said that President Adams did not feel that Burke did full justice to the
brave general but rather that he represented Warren as a "bully and a black-
guard." This statement, however, does not have much ground on which to
stand. Both authors have portrayed a hero worthy of the name. Even the
British appreciated the true worth of the man as is shown in the tribute of
an enemy officer to him after his death.

Howe ....... Warren is dead,
And lies unburied on the smoky hill;
But with rich honors, he shall be inhumed
To teach our soldiery how much we love,
Even in a foe, true worth, and noble fortitude.16

Historically these plays had value; dramatically they had little or none. In each play perhaps the nearest approach to a dramatic moment is the death of General Warren but a comparison of the two scenes would be extremely difficult. Both authors have employed a speech of great length, too long to be recorded on these pages, in the death scene. In each case, however, the speech sounded forth the nobility and courage of the general. A few lines from each play will suffice to illustrate this point. The hero of Brackenridge expired with these words on his lips.

Warren. A deadly ball hath limited my life,
And now to God I offer up my soul.
But O my countrymen, let not the cause,
The sacred cause of liberty, with me
Faint or expire • • • • •
Fight on, my countrymen, be FREE, be FREE. 17

In Burke's play there is that same display of valour, and that same final burst of patriotism which could not die even though the general was beyond mortal help.

Warren. I had but one poor life to give my country,
Had I ten thousand, it should have them all ... 
America - my country! bless thee heaven,
O God protect the land - I faint, I die. 18

Brackenridge made no pretense at writing great drama. It was apart from the theatrical world that he achieved literary fame but his was a confident spirit during hard and trying days, and he did feel that the publication of

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16. The Battle of Bunker's Hill, Act V, scene x
17. Ibid., Act V, scene iv.
18. Bunker Hill, Act V.
moment when the country was in such turmoil rather than when the war was over.

Montgomery was another general whom Brackenridge made live in ringing and patriotic dialogue which flowed from his pen. The Death of General Montgomery followed The Battle of Bunker's Hill a year later. Together these plays typified the college drama of the day. This too, was written as an exercise in dialogue for his students. Brackenridge is his own best critic in his introductory note to the latter play. Herein is stated its entire purpose.

It is my request that the following Dramatic Composition may be considered only as a school piece. For though it is written according to the prescribed rules of the Drama with the strictest attention to the unities of time, place and actions, yet it differs materially from the greater part of those modern performances which have obtained the name of Tragedy. It is intended for a private entertainment of Gentlemen of taste and martial enterprise, but by no means for the exhibition of the stage. The subject is not love but valour. I meddle not with any of the effeminating passions, but confine my muse to the great themes of patriotic virtue.

The chief incidents of the play concern the attack on Quebec where the three generals, Montgomery, Chessman and Macpherson were slain. In almost all of his speeches Montgomery revealed his prescience of a terrible fate ahead of them as well as the glory. The solemn note of impending disaster is never lacking. There is no dramatic death scene or lengthy speech in which Montgomery has a chance to show his heroism as does Warren in The Battle of Bunker's Hill. Montgomery's death is only indicated in a speech of Aaron Burr's. In both of his patriot dramas, Brackenridge chose defeats rather than victories for his themes, but in each case, that of Warren and that of Montgomery, defeat far surpassed victory for it revealed a triumph of character. Even after death the character of Montgomery influenced the American troops
in the appearance of his ghost on the battlefield pronouncing disaster to the British and predicting final victory and the birth of a great nation for the colonists. In the predictions of the ghost we find again a manifestation of the confident spirit of the author in the American cause.

Washington, Warren, Montgomery and André were not the only heroes of the war who saw themselves either across the footlights or on the printed page. Many of the underofficers who were so much a part of the actual battles found themselves characterized in the plays. Putnam, Prescott and Gardiner marched side by side with General Warren at Bunker Hill, and their chief purpose was to serve as a spur to the American people for the patriot cause.

The foregoing plays form only a small percentage of those which appeared in America during the years of the war, but in placing emphasis on these particular plays, which have been considered, there has been singled out the representative dramas of America during the early period in her dramatic history. Just as the British writers took events and persons who made history in their country and transferred them to the stage in England amidst picturesque and dramatic settings, so our earliest playwrights took the events and the persons figuring in those events which made early American history, surrounded them with dramatic settings and put them on our stage and in print. The satires of Mrs. Warren, the college dramas of Brackenridge, the national dramas such as The Indian Prophecy, the dramatic controversy between the Whig and Tory writers; all of these were distinctive forms created by the occasion and by the time in this great period of nationalism.

In many cases Patriotism was the byword which set these native playwrights of ours to work with no thought whatever of producing drama worthy of
the name. Most of them wrote for the America of 1775 and the few years which followed with no great concern for posterity. Mrs. Warren's plays were not much more than propaganda in dramatic form which brought before the colonial public the politicians of the day. Satire on these shores did not differ essentially from that of England in its form, but the elements making Mercy Warren's plays distinctly American were the subject she used and the characters she portrayed. The men she represented were of real flesh and blood, men with whom she rubbed shoulders daily.

Leacock's play *The Fall of British Tyranny* was another which laid claim to being distinctly American in spite of its British characters. Here again the subject matter was that thing which was closest to the heart of every American as the title suggests, the *fall of British tyranny*, and American independence. This play did not have the personal touch and interest for the student of the drama that the plays of Mrs. Warren did because so little is known of its author. However the vast scope of this dramatic piece lends to it all the dignity of an American chronicle play. It presented a kaleidoscopic view of the happenings of the period. Leacock's satire was unlike that of Mrs. Warren, but it was levelled against the political system then in force as hers was. Most of the characters were Royalists, but they too, as did Mrs. Warren's characters, represented colonial personages. Leacock caught perfectly the spirit and method of Revolutionary thought when it was first confronted with the question of independence, and he ably put across to the public this trend of thought in his tremendous Whig satire.

The interest of the colleges in the drama ran for the greater part to foreign plays. Quinn lists four plays given by the young gentlemen of
William and Mary college; Cato, The Beaux Stratagem, The Recruiting Officer, and The Busybody. But Brackenridge was responsible for a change in the interests of college drama when he wrote his two patriotic dialogues, the Battle of Bunker's Hill, and The Death of General Montgomery. To be sure, his work in no way could measure up to British drama which the colleges had been using, but in giving his students these plays he introduced to the colleges American characters, heroes of the American Revolution, and put them on the college platform in a setting of historical events then happening in this country. Both of his dramatic pieces were charged with an intense hatred for all things British and an equally intense admiration for things American.

The greater number of these war plays which dramatized our national heroes and events of the Revolution appeared during the early years of the war. The stage was a battlefield where factional feelings and Tory and Revolutionary sentiments crossed swords or exchanged cannon fire. The dramas stirred the audiences who witnessed their performances into wild and frenzied demonstrations. It has already been shown in what manner the British entered into this controversy with the dramatic writings of their staff officers and companies of soldier-players. In the form of closet dramas dramatic humor served the American colonists in much the same manner and with much the same zeal as did the newspapers, magazines and pamphlets served the public of a later date.

The heroic colonial generals and the ludicrous British officers did not hold the dramatic interest of the people alone in the portrayal of the scenes of American history. Filling an equally important place were the plays which
dealt with the American Indians in their native backgrounds. The Indian Prophecy might well be cited as an example of a combination of these two elements, the romantic figure of General Washington closely linked to that of the chieftain Menewa. Menewa is considered again in the following chapter when this play is discussed as it represented the Indian themes which came into vogue almost immediately after the actual fighting of the Revolutionary war.
CHAPTER II

INDIAN THEMES

Although America has not experienced an age of truly great drama it does not follow that there had been a lack of aspiring playwrights in those early days. The first American plays were chiefly outgrowths of contemporary situations and no matter how negligible they may be otherwise, they have a certain historical value. The group of Indian plays honestly intended to be truly American and for a long time they were accepted as national, but now they have faded into a rather blurred background and are almost forgotten. The heroes and heroines of this group of plays were native Indians, and with the exception of Ponteack, were portrayed in that romantic style which the novels of James Fenimore Cooper made popular. William Gilmore Simms was another early novelist whose writings furnished excellent material for the themes of the plays.

The first of the Indian plays to appear was Roger's Ponteack, or the Savages of America, published in 1766. Major Robert Rogers, its author, was a backwoodsman and soldier who fought in the French and Indian war and participated in the siege of Quebec against Pontiac and the French. His first contact with the red man was at the age of fifteen when he helped withstand an Indian attack near his home. The rest of his life is mixed up in the efforts of the Colonists against the Indians. All these experiences seem to have inspired him to put into permanent literary form a special plea for the Indian.
At the time it was written, the play appealed to the interest of the moment because it dealt with the Indian conspiracy just crushed in America. There is no record of the play ever having been considered by the theatrical companies for production. Ford says that it was not intended for stage presentation at the time it was written; and Holliday, who passes it by as of little account, says:

Perhaps it was best that it was born to blush unseen, for it had cause to blush. It was thoroughly conventional, and every Indian was a gentleman.1

Some of Ford's criticism is justly deserved perhaps. The form of this particular play is blank verse and the great rhetorical orations are amusingly out of place in the mouths of the Indians. To be sure, Ponteach talks and acts like a European statesman, and his son, Philip, is a veritable Iago. All of the native characters are typical stage Indians and they are represented as more generous and more courteous than the white men who invaded their forests to pursue fur trading and hunting. In spite of its five acts packed full of conventionality, its stage Indians and their formal speeches, there is much to be said in its favor. It is the first play of which both the authorship and the subject matter are known to be American. In addition to this, it was the first example of the Indian play, which at a later date was to have great popularity on the stage. It was the first attempt at a sentimental delineation of this so-called stage Indian. Rogers, in writing this play reflected the dramatist who had a problem to propound, that problem existing between the Indian traders and the frontiersmen. Keeping this fact in mind, Ponteach may well be considered America's first

problem play. The problem of the Indian was presented with dignity and feeling and the white man's dealings with the red man were indignantly exposed by Rogers. Much realism is displayed in the portrayal of the cruelty and deceit of the Colonists. The play gives interesting sidelights on the trading customs of the time and it reflects the constant fears the Americans had of Indian warfare.

In the characterizations of the English hunters and traders there is an almost naive attempt at subtle humor. A striking example of these points, (1) the dealings of the white man with the Indians, (2) the deceit practiced by the English traders, (3) the early trading customs of this country, and (4) the attempt at humor already mentioned; are found in the following excerpt from the opening scene of the play.

1st Indian. So, what you trade with Indians here today?
M'Dole. Yes, if my Goods will suit, and we agree.
2nd Indian. 'Tis Rum we want, we're tired, hot and thirsty.
3rd Indian. You, Mr. Englishman, have you got Rum?
M'Dole. Jack, bring a bottle, pour them each a Gill.
1st Indian. You know which Cask contains the Rum. The Rum?
M'Dole. It's good strong Rum, I feel it very soon.
1st Indian. Give me a Glass. Here's Honesty in Trade;
M'Dole. We English always drink before we deal.
2nd Indian. Good Way enough; it makes one sharp and cunning.
M'Dole. Hand round another Gill. You're very welcome.
3rd Indian. Some say you Englishmen are sometimes Rogues;
1st Indian. You make poor Indians drunk and then you cheat.
M'Dole. No, English good. The Frenchmen give no Rum.
2nd Indian. I think it's best to trade with Englishmen.
M'Dole. What is your Price for Beaver skins per Pound?
1st Indian. How much you ask per quart for this strong Rum?
M'Dole. Five Pounds of Beaver for One quart of Rum.
1st Indian. Five Pounds? Too much. What is't you call Five Pound?
M'Dole. This little weight. I cannot give you more.
1st Indian. Well, take 'em; weigh 'em. Don't you cheat us now.
M'Dole. No. He that cheats an Indian should be hang'd.
1st Indian. There's thirty Pounds precisely of the Whole;
M'Dole. Five times Six is thirty. Six Quarts of Rum.
1st Indian. Jack, measure it to them; you know the Cask.
M'Dole. This Rum is sold. You draw it off the best.
By Jove, you've gained more in a single Hour
Than ever I have done in Half a Year;
Curse on my Honesty! I might have been
A little King, and lived without Concern,
Had I but known the proper Arts to thrive.

Ay, there's the way, my honest Friend, to live.
There's Ninety Weight of Sterling Beaver for you,
Worth all the Rum and Trinkets in my Store;
And, would my Conscience let me to the thing,
I might enhance my Price, and lessen theirs,
And raise my Profits to an higher Pitch.2

From this scene it is easy to see the artificiality of the Indian
characters. All the Indians are exact duplicates of each other, there is
no differentiation whatever. Only the old chief, Ponteach, stands apart at
all as an individual, but even he has not been accurately portrayed. His
high manner and eloquent speech equals that of any English lord. Although
this dignity of diction renders the play very unindian it does give it a
certain literary value and throughout the blank verse there are occasional
accesses of rhyme. Ponteach's final speech is perhaps the outstanding
example of his grandeur; much too grandiose for an American savage, but
indeed, dramatic and poetic.

Will they desert their King in such an hour,
When pity might induce them to protect him?
Kings like Gods are valued and ador'd,
When men expect their bounties in Return,
Place them in want, destroy the given Power,
All Sacrifices and Regards will cease.
Go, tell my friends that I'll attend their call.
I will not fear - but must obey my stars:
Ye fertile Fields and gland'ning Streams, adieu;
Ye fountains that have quenched my scorching Thirst,
Ye Shades the hid the Sun-beams from my Head,
Ye Groves and Hills that yielded me the Chace;
Ye flowery Meads, and Banks, and bending Trees,
And thou proud Earth, made drunk with Royal blood,
I am no more your owner and your King.
But witness for me to your new base Lords,

2. Ponteach, Act I, scene i
That my unconquered Mind defies them still;
And though I fly, 'tis on the Wings of Hope.
Yes, I will hence where there's no British foe,
And wait a respite from the Storm of Woe;
Begot more Sons, fresh Troops collect and arm,
And other schemes of future Greatness form;
Britons may boast, the Gods may have their Will,
Ponteach I am, and shall be Ponteach still.3

In considering Ponteach with its greatest fault, that of the artificiality of the Indians, it is interesting to note this decided lack of true Indian manners and expressions in spite of Rogers' very close association with Indian life. The subject and the characters are American, and while the play may lay its claim to being original it certainly cannot be called aboriginal. The play contains intrigue, hatred, violence, lust, superstition, assassination and torture worthy of a Shakespeare, but rather than using a theme of the past, Rogers used matters of current interest to the Colonists.

Twenty years later, Mrs. Ann Julia Hatton's opera Tammany appeared. It was the story of Tammany, or Tamanend, Chief of the Delawares who was highly regarded for his wisdom. He was said to have affixed his mark to William Penn's famous treaty with the Indians. Before the Revolution, the twelfth of May each year was set aside to celebrate in honor of this great chieftain with feasting, dancing and parades. Warriors decked with feathers and bucktails gathered around a Maypole (now called a liberty pole) and Tammany came forth from his wigwam - gave a talk on courage and freedom and then dismissed them to their sports and games. Columbus as well as the Indians had his place in the festival as a character. It was this festival

3. Ibid., Act V, scene i.
which probably influenced Mrs. Hatton in her description of the games and dances in the grove in Manana's song.

Dunlap gives an interesting bit about the presentation of this play.

On the 3rd of March, the long forthcoming opera of Tammany, from the pen of Mrs. Hatton appeared. The Daily Advertiser called upon republicans to support the efforts from a female, filled with the simple and virtuous sentiments. It is needless to say that the opera was received with unbounded applause. The Daily Advertiser has a communication that places this drama among the highest efforts of genius. It was literally a melange of bombast. The following extracted from the Daily Advertiser of the 7th of March 1794, shows that all the visitors of the theatre were not blinded by the puffs of the time. 'I am among the many who were diverted by the piece in your paper, signed a citizen, particularly where it supposes that surprise at the merits of the opera lately exhibited, astonished our literati into silence. Much credit is due Messrs. Hallam and Henry for the pains they have taken in decorations, scenery, etc.; and I doubt not, a citizen will, whenever Tammany is performed, hear the warm though juvenile exclamation, Oh what a beautiful sight!'

This account from Dunlap, the theatrical historian of the day, and some of the songs are all that remain to us from which we might attempt to reconstruct the play. From William Abbott's reprint of the songs there is nothing remarkable to be found in their poetry. The opera was no doubt a tragedy of the love of Manana and Tammany. From the lines,

Now we laugh, and dance and play;
Happy Indians! Come away.

Happy Indians! haste away
Let us celebrate the day.

the student may conclude that dancing and revelry accompanied the songs.

From the song of the braves and maidens we are able to know the nature of the tragedy.

Yes, he deserved our fairest praise,
Our proudest and most exalted lays;
Manana, too, of form divine!
Our hands the flowing garland twine,
To decorate thy graves. 5

James Nelson Barker fully realizing the lack of native drama in America did his best to fill that lack. His work is significant in quality rather than in quantity. His sense of dramatic values was keen and he had a particular knack of dramatic expression in verse. His choice of American themes was not accidental. He was thoroughly conversant with other literatures and he made use of them but, because he felt so strongly America's need for a drama of her own he chose American themes in his writings.

As early as 1805 he wrote a one act dramatic dialogue, America, which he patterned after the masque in The Tempest. The play which concerns us here is his The Indian Princess, or la Belle Sauvage, which appeared for the first time in 1808. It was the first play to be written and presented which was based on a theme that afterwards became so popular, the romance of Pocahontas and Rolfe. The war being over, the theatres were again open to the public, religious intolerance had waned a little, and so The Indian Princess had the distinction of being the first Indian play written by an American to be performed. When Barker wrote the play he planned it as a drama, but at the request of the musical composer, Bray, he wrote words for the songs and they called the finished piece an operatic melo-drama. Little did Barker suspect that he started a series of Indian themes which have continued on the American stage even to this present day.

5. All quotations and information concerning the play are taken from William Abbott's reprint of The Songs of Tammany in the Magazine of History, Vol. 43
In The Indian Princess there are five pairs of lovers of which Pocahontas and Rolfe are the main ones. It is the love affairs of the low comedy characters, however, which keep the operatic sub-theme interesting. Barker was especially proficient in the technique of light musical comedy as is shown in his portrayal of the characters.

All of Barker's Indians were conventional stage Indians except Pocahontas who was largely imaginary. The principal materials of the play were extracted from Smith's General History of Virginia and historic truth was followed as closely as dramatic rules would permit. When liberties were taken with historic facts the author fully succeeded in producing an interesting effect in a romantic setting. Perhaps the truest poetry of the play occurs in the love scene between Rolfe and Pocahontas. Up to the time of The Indian Princess no one in America had surpassed Barker and there were few in England who had done so. The following excerpt is an example of the tender and flexible verse of which he was capable.

Princess. Nay, let me on -
Rolfe. No further, gentle love;
The rugged way has wearied you already.
Princess. Feels the wood pigeon weariness, who flies,
Mated with her beloved? Ah! lover, no.
Rolfe. Sweet! in this grove we will exchange adieus;
My steps should point straight onward; were thou with me,
At every pace, or fix my side-long look,
Spell-bound, upon thy beauties.
Princess. Ah! you love not
the wild-wood prattle of the Indian maid,
As once you did.
Rolfe. By heaven! my thirsty ear,
Could ever drink its liquid melody.
Oh! I could talk with thee, till hasty night,
Ere yet the sentinel day hath done his watch;
Veil'd like a spy, should steal on printless feet,
To listen to our parley! 6

6. The Indian Princess, Act II, scene ii.
In 1820 this play appeared at Drury Lane in London. It was called *Pocahontas, or The Indian Princess*. In many aspects the play was changed; the British adaptor had changed some of the names of the characters and some of the comic parts were omitted entirely. Barker doubted that the play bore any relation to his own, but Genest states positively that it was Barker's *Indian Princess*, and evidently he had the printed play before him when he made the comparison between the American and the British versions. This seems to be the first well authenticated existence of an original American play having been performed on a London stage.

An interesting comparison may be made between Barker's play and that of George Washington Parke Custis on the same theme. Custis wrote his play, *Pocahontas, or The Settlers of Virginia* twenty years after Barker gave native drama a foothold on American soil. His heroine is not at all like the childish maiden portrayed by Barker. She is a woman of high intelligence who has already expressed her mental emancipation by accepting the Christian faith. He has handled the love affair between Pocahontas and Rolfe in a more skillful manner than has his predecessor. In most of the Pocahontas plays, the most dramatic incident, Pocahontas's rescue of John Smith, comes too early in the play. This incident however is not the main theme in Barker's play, but rather, the love interest, to which he unites the salvation of the English through Pocahontas's warning. At time the minor love scenes of Barker's play become sentimentally nauseating.

In this comparison of these two plays one may note the similarity of the dramatis personae. Needless to say, no Pocahontas theme could be carried through without the historical character of Captain John Smith as 7. Quinn, op. cit., p. 139
one of the central figures. Probably second to him in importance is Rolfe.

In Pocahontas the character of Percy is treated lightly, but in The Indian Princess he and the English maid, Geraldine, furnish the love theme for one of the underplots. Barclay and his Indian wife Mantea, in Custis's play cement a bond between the two races, a factor lacking in Barker's play.

The wily and cunning old chief, Powhatan, is much the same in each play. At moments in the plays he resembles Ponteach of an earlier date. An outstanding character in both plays is that of the Indian prince who woos Pocahontas. Barker calls him Miami, of the Susquehannock tribe and though he is brave and fearless, the author has portrayed him as treacherous and crafty. His sincerity is easily doubted for at no one time in the play is one led to believe that he really loves the Indian princess. Metacoran, whom Custis portrays, is a much nobler character. Although he thoroughly hated the English and plotted against them, he had none of the braggadocio about him as did Miami.

Barker, in 1808, and Custis, in 1830, are the outstanding examples of playwrights who used the Pocahontas theme successfully in the first days of American drama. Over a long period of years this theme was a great favorite on our stage, but to James Barker goes all the honor of having been the first of that long line.

In 1838, the play Pocahontas, which had been written by an Englishman, Robert Dale Owen, appeared at the Park Theatre in New York. The play was a mixture of blank verse and prose in which the author tried to introduce a love interest between Pocahontas and John Smith but he was unsuccessful in this attempt. Although Owen used effective language the play was so long
and drawn out that it did not play long on the stage.

Ten years later, Charlotte Barnes Conner's *Forest Princess* was produced in Philadelphia. Like Owen she allowed her historic theme to become sidetracked and it was not overly successful. Mrs. Conner took Pocahontas to England for the purpose of clearing her English lover of a treason charge. The Indian heroine died there in England. The tragedy lacked the force and vigor of some of the earlier Pocahontas plays.

Then in 1855 this motive ran to satire as is illustrated by John Brougham's burlesque, *Pocahontas*, or *The Gentle Savage*. The last three plays mentioned appeared at too late a date to figure prominently in this thesis but are mentioned to show the large measure in which this theme, born in Barker's *Indian Princess*, live for more than half a century and it was not until 1860 that its great popularity began to fade.

Another Indian play of James Barker's was the *Armourer's Escape*, or *Three Years at Nootka Sound*, but it is no longer extant. It was performed in 1817. Although the armourer was the principal character, the rest of the characters were Indians; Maquina, chief of the Nootka Indians; Tyee, the prince; Machee Utilla, King of the Klaissats; and Arcomah and Yucca, Indian women. Here again, Barker had made an earnest effort to write native American drama. His degree of success we can only guess at, because of the fact that the play is no longer in existence. The playbill furnished an almost complete scenario, Quinn tells us, from which the student of American drama can easily recognize unlimited dramatic possibilities and action.

There were only two acts but the first showed the treachery of Maquina, the destruction of the crew, the saving of Jewett, the armourer and Thompson,
and the arrival of the American brig to take them away. The most interesting part of the play must have been the representation of the manners and customs of the Nootka Indians. In the fourth and fifth scenes portrayed the assembling of the king, his chiefs and women, for the funeral ceremonies of a chief; the burning of a ship, the eclipse of the moon and an attack of the Aychat tribe.

The second act was concerned with a parade of several Indian tribes; first came the Nootkians in the garb of the crew they had captured; second came the Klaissats, led by Machee Utilla, then the Wynkinnish, Equates, Attizarts and Cayuquit tribes. "Then followed the 'ludicrous ceremonies of the Bear,' then a war dance and the armourer was compelled to choose a wife - the choice falling on the Princess Uyqua. Next came the dance of the young Nootkian girls and the chiefs entered masked with heads of animals to carry them off. The girls were rescued and a general dance ensued."  

Custis's play, The Indian Prophecy, has already been mentioned in Chapter I as being representative of a play in which Washington was a romantic figure. We come again to it to consider it as an Indian drama. In representing the incident which Dr. Craik tells of in the life of the American general, Custis has added several fictitious characters to his play in order to lend color to this historic happening. The chief, Menewa and his daughter, Manette are the outstanding Indians. There is nothing of the savage in Manetta who has been converted to Christianity by her English friends, but the figure of Menewa is outstanding. Dr. Craik, in his Memoirs describes the Indian as "one of the noblest looking of men," as he strikes

8. All information and quotations on The Armourer's Escape are found in Quinn, pp.144-145.
his chest and throws his arms up to the heavens as he invokes Washington as the future chief of all nations. The most colorful and most dramatic moment of the play occurs when the old Indian is prophesying the future of the Colonel in the last scene.

Menewa. Menewa is a chief and a ruler of many tribes: his influence extends to the waters of the great lakes and to the far blue mountains. Menewa has traveled a long way that he may see the young Warrior of the Great Battle. It was on the day that the white man's blood mixed with the Forest that Menewa first beheld this chief. He called to his young men, and said, mark yon tall and daring Warrior, he is not of the Red Coat tribe, his warriors fight as we do, himself alone is exposed. Quick! let your aim be sure and he dies. Our rifles were leveled, rifles which but for him, knew not how to miss; 'twas all in vain, a power mightier far than we, shielded him from harm. He cannot die in battle. Menewa is old, and soon will be gathered to the Great Council of his Fathers in the land of the shades; but ere he goes, there is something here which bids him speak in the voice of Prophecy. Listen! The Great Spirit protects that man and guides his destiny. He will become the Chief of Nations, a people yet unborn, hail him as the Founder of a mighty Empire! (arms outstretched to haven) Fathers! Menewa comes! (sinks to ground - dies)

Once more in the character of Menewa we find the conventional stage Indian. He is no more representative of the true Indian spirit than was the Powhatan of Custis. Menewa, as is easily seen from the preceding speech, was as polished though perhaps not as poetic as the Pontach of a much earlier date.

Indian drama came into its own in 1829 with the representation of John Augustus Stone's Metamora. After corresponding with the Forest home while he was compiling his work, Representative American Plays, Moses tells us that it was learned that either the manuscript of Metamora was destroyed 9. The Indian Prophecy, Act II.
or so carefully preserved that no one even remotely connected with the actor has been able to locate it thus far. We can only hazard a guess as to whether it was seeing *The Indian Prophecy* or looking over Bird's play *Sagamore*, prompted the writing of this play. It is not known with certainty that it was written for and produced by Edwin Forrest, having been the prize-winning play in the contest in which Forrest offered five hundred dollars for a good "five act tragedy in which the hero should be an original of this country." The play was a triumph because it enabled a native actor to portray a native character. From the few remaining speeches of the hero and a few isolated scenes which are left, it is seen that Metamora, like his predecessors, was a typical stage Indian and Forrest was splendid at doing types on the stage. Stone used a curious mixture of Indian and Ossian as the language of the Indians which has since become traditional on the stage.

At the end of that year, spurred on by the success of *Metamora*, Richard Penn Smith attempted to carry on the tradition of Indian plays now established. Holding a high position among the Philadelphian dramatists of the period, he experimented with every dramatic form, often using American history for his material. His play in which he introduced Indian characters was *William Penn*, produced at the Walnut Street Theatre. The play was never printed but the few fragments which remain read well, and it is a curious language indeed which was spoken by Smith's Indians. The theme of the play is the rivalry between the Sakamaxon and Sanhican tribes on the Delaware. Evidently this play met with some degree of success in its 10. Quinn, *op.cit.* p.271.
presentation because it played in New York again in 1841.

At this period Robert Montgomery Bird had been coming to the front in American drama. He, too, had been greatly interested in the Indians and he had written a play, Sagamore, which Stone was allowed to read just before he wrote Metamora. According to Bird's wife, Bird is supposed to have said that Stone borrowed the idea for his play from Sagamore. Unfortunately the existing manuscripts of the two plays are too fragmentary to make any comparison. Bird's last dramatic work was a revision of Metamora, a commission which Forrest had given him after a long and successful run of the original play.

In 1825 Finn had written a play, Montgomery, which was performed at Boston. It was really a domestic comedy but it sounded loudly a national note. Five years later because of the overwhelming popularity of Indian plays it was rewritten and produced under the title of The Indian Wife. It serves as an example of the stage Yankee creeping into the Indian plays, giving them a humorous rather than a tragic note.

Present day dramatists do not often put contemporary history on the stage and expect the modern audience to find pleasure in seeing such plays. The workings of our government, our president and statesmen hardly seem to be fitting material for our dramas; the American stage is not the political battlefield that it formerly was. Daily papers serve that purpose. However, in the early days of American drama, the plays which represented her national heroes and history were the only ones which could lay claim to being native in America. The other productions were foreign plays or adaptations from them.
In presenting Washington on the stage, it followed most naturally that the Indian, too, should cut a dramatic figure. He was contemporary with Washington in history. In presenting the settling of Virginia by John Smith, the Indian characters could not be ignored. In setting forth William Penn as a dramatic figure on the stage the Indians again played an important part in the course of events. Almost hand in hand, they walked with the great men across the early stage. The majority of the plays which were in any measure American, necessarily portrayed contemporary life. America did not have much of a past about which she might boast. Indians were a part of that contemporary life.

After the actual fighting had ceased it was the introduction of the Indian into the plays which gave them romance and action. Ponteach led the parade of Indian chiefs who took their places on the American stage. Each one was almost a carbon copy of their predecessor, artificial and thoroughly conventional. After Barker had introduced the Pocahontas theme, the long line of plays following in its wake were only repetitions, improvements or slight variations of this original romantic theme.

The acting of Edwin Forrest did much for the advancement of this Indian element in American drama. He had asked for a tragedy in which the hero was an original of this country. The only true originals were the Indians, and the play which received Forrest's prize was Metamora.

Beyond a doubt the most popular of the Indian plays were the Pocahontas series which presented so well the North American Indian. Although they made their first appearance at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the greatest number were performed between 1825 and 1860. Of these, only a few
have survived. It has already been mentioned that when Brougham began to burlesque the savage, who heretofore had been a noble figure on the stage, the vogue for Indian drama died quickly. It could hardly survive with its sameness of plot, and its stiff conventionality in the treatment of the Indian. Like the race it presented, it, too, vanished.

With the disappearance of the Indian a third character of the American stage who was native to this country comes to the notice of the public.
CHAPTER III

AMERICAN COMEDY OF AMERICAN TYPE AND CHARACTER

American comedy like the other forms of American literature began life, as Colby puts it, tied to the apron strings of English drama. During the war, drama, like everything else, was revolutionary. The first American plays were revolutionary in that they developed a new idea, a thesis of military enthusiasm and opposition. In the flippant farces of Mrs. Warren, the ties between the English and Colonial dramas were completely severed for a time. It has been shown in the first two chapters, the measure in which American drama was free. But when the war was over there was a reaction and our stage looked again to London for dramatic triumphs. Colby cites this as the reason "that a distinct American comedy was slow and hesitating about showing its head. It had to face competition with tried successes from London and had to cater to an audience fed on that type of drama. Its character was moulded to a great extent by the character of the comedies then being produced in New York. And these comedies were English comedies." 1 Many of the English plays appeared on these shores as adaptations. Fanny Birney's Evalina appeared on the boards in Boston as The Poor Lodger and Mrs. Radcliffe's Romance of the Forest built its American reputation under the title of Fountainville Abbey. "America not only imported the London 1. Elbridge Colby, Early American Comedy, p.4
successes, but imitated them with its right hand when its left hand was trying to be original." Melodrama, merely comedy dealing with ordinary people, enriched with the spectacle of dance, and decoration, was eagerly followed and accepted in America. In these pieces, "the hero was always poor but honest; the heroine of the whitest white; the villain of the blackest shade; and the cause of the villain always in the ascendancy until the last act when he went straight to hell, - and the gallery gods rejoiced at his fall." However under the influence of historical pride, abolitionist agitation of western progress and growing commercial successes, there did finally emerge a localized comedy.

It is a difficult task to attempt to draw a line between those patriotic spectacles dealing with people and events that made history and those comedies which reflected the contemporary customs and manners during the Revolutionary period. The note of contrast between the affectations of English manners and a sturdier reliance upon native worth has already been sounded in the satires of this era. This appeared, particularly in Mrs. Warren's *The Motley Assembly* and in another play which was attributed to her, *Sans Souci*, alias *Free and Easy*. The latter satire ridicules foreign affectations and card-playing for money in public which takes place in the Metropolis of Massachusetts. It revealed perfectly the Puritan expression of a national point of view.

The first professional American comedy continued the expression of that point of view modified by a more liberal attitude. The Revolution being over, a great many plays continued to exist merely for the pleasure and entertain-

ment they provided; some were rude, some vulgar and some crude, but all were lively and contained a hearty laugh or jingle that caught the public ear; for example, the Sleighing Song from the popular play, The Better Sort, or The Girl of Spirit of 1789. The Contrast was an outgrowth of the period in which it was written. All of the nationalistic forces which were responsible for the Revolution and which carried it to a successful finish were now struggling to unite themselves in some permanent form. The concept of nationalism reached its culmination in the drafting of the Constitution of the United States in 1787. As close as it is to the war itself, the comedy The Contrast exhibits little or none of the belligerent spirit of the day. It was not malicious nor was it particularly anti-British but it was essentially nationalistic in that it portrayed the intrinsic worth of the American culture as opposed to that of Europe and in its own small sphere it was in itself a Declaration of Independence.

There are other nationalistic trends in the play; the reverence for Washington, the high esteem for Lafayette, the movement for confidence in federal security and the agitation for the aid to disabled veterans. It also mildly reflects the philosophy of the Hamiltonian Federalists. It is the first dramatic presentation of a concept of American self-consciousness and sufficiency, and it gives glimpses of contemporary American life of that day. The play reports with authenticity the current dress, entertainment, customs, manners, morals and character. The Contrast, beyond a doubt, was suggested to Tyler by Sheridan's School for Scandal. The only native product in the play in spite of these American touches was Jonathan, and in him is shown an attempt at New England dialogue and American characterization.
Although Charlotte and Letitia discuss the manners of the times and the fashions of the day in the terms of the Battery in New York, it is in the spirit of London that they do it and the lines of the School for Scandal can almost be read between the lines.

Letitia. And so, Charlotte, you really think the pocket-hoop unbecoming.

Charlotte. No, I don't say so. It may be very becoming to saunter round the house of a rainy day; to visit my grandmama, or to go to Quakers' meeting; but to swim in a minuet, with the eyes of fifty well-dressed beaux on me to trip it in the Mall, or walk on the battery, give me the luxurious, jamuty, flowing, bell-hoop. It would have delighted you to have seen me the last evening, my charming girl! I was dangling o'er the battery with Billy Dimple; a knot of young fellows were upon the platform; as I passed them I faltered with one of the most bewitching false steps you ever saw, and then recovered myself with such a pretty confusion, flirting my hoop to discover a jet black shoe and brilliant buckle. Gads! how my little heart thrilled to hear the confused raptures of - "Demme, Jack, what a delicate foot!" "Hal General, what a well-turned--."

Letitia. Fie! Fie! Charlotte, I protest you are quite a libertine.

Charlotte. Why, my dear little prude, are we not all such libertines? Do you think, when I sat tortured two hours under the hands of my friseur, and an hour more at my toilet, that I had any thoughts of my aunt Susan, or my cousin Betsey? though they are both allowed to be critical judges of dress. 4

Tyler has meant his play to be American without British ties although it is so strongly suggestive of Sheridan's play. In his prologue he has clearly made known his intention.

Prologue:

Exult each patriot heart - This night is shown a piece we may fairly call our own; Where the proud titles of "My Lord!" - "your Grace!" To humble "Mr." and plain "Sir" give place; Our author pictures not from foreign climes the fashions of the follies of the times; But has confined the subject of his work To the gay scenes - the circles of New York. 5
Holliday claims it to be the first essay of American genius in a difficult species of composition. Tyler had never studied the rules of the drama and he had seen very few plays previous to his writing The Contrast. The play he completed in three weeks and from the box office returns the play was heartily approved by the American audience.

Margaret Mayorga feels that anywhere in the history of the American stage and drama, "comparisons are odious; for if The School for Scandal had never been written The Contrast might have been an American classic." The original contribution of this play to the field of American drama, is, as has been suggested before, the character of Jonathan. As an American comedy character he might almost be termed classic for he was the first of his kind. He served as a model for a long succession of stage Yankees which followed. Just as the representation of provincials, of Irishmen and Scots, simple characters with wit and plain honesty, was accepted in London, in like manner our Yankee received recognition here. Jonathan was played by Wignell who, himself, had a certain degree of humor and a fine knowledge of Yankee dialect; and in the hands of a favorite performer the character was greatly embellished and relished by the audiences and he has never been surpassed by any of his successors.

Jonathan bears little relation to the play but it is his very detachment which makes him important. He is the one spot of reality in a sea of

4. The Contrast, Act I, scene i.
5. Ibid., Prologue.
6. Mayorga, op.cit., p.44
stage conventions, a mixture of "homely shrewdness, provincial conservatism and unfaltering self-respect." The people who saw him liked to think of these qualities as national although they laughed at his ignorance and credulity on the stage. This is easily seen in the scene between Jessamy and Jonathan.

JessaMy. Votre tres humble serviteur, Monsieur. I understand Colonel Manly, the Yankee Officer has the honor of your services.

Jonathan. Sir!

JessaMy. I say, Sir, I understand that Colonel Manly has the honor of having you for a servant.

Jonathan. Servant! Sir, do you take me for a neger, - I am Colonel Manly's waiter.

JessaMy. A true Yankee distinction, egad, without a difference. Sir, do you not perform all the offices of a servant? do you not even blacken his boots?

Jonathan. Yes; I do grease 'em a bit sometimes; but I am a true son of liberty, for all that. Father said I should come as Colonel Manly's waiter to see the world, and all that; but no man shall master me. My father has as good a farm as the Colonel.3

It is easily surmised that when the Yankee uttered those words, "I am a true son of liberty" all the true sons of liberty hearing them rose to their feet and cheered. He was expressing the sentiment of Americans in the simple language of the country folk.

Probably the best and never to be forgotten scene of the play is that in which Jonathan related his adventures at the playhouse to Jenny, all the while denying that he had been there. Mayorga uses this scene as an illustration of the Yankee at the theatre. It does serve to reveal the popular point of view concerning the theatres of the New Englanders. It is interesting to note, while reading this amusing bit that Tyler himself had never been to the theatre until that very year.

7. Quinn, op.cit., p.194.
8. The Contrast. Act II. scene ii
Jenny. So, Mr. Jonathan, I hear you were at the play last night.
Jonathan. At the play! why, did you think I went to the devil's
drawing room?
Jenny. The devil's drawing room!
Jonathan. Yes, why, an't cards and dice the devil's device, and
the playhouse the shop where the devil hangs out the
vanities of the world upon the tenter-hooks of tempta-
tion.

Jenny. Well, Mr. Jonathan, you were certainly at the playhouse.
Jonathan. I at the play-house! - Why didn't I see the play then.
Jenny. The people you saw were the players.
Jonathan. Mercy on my soul! did I see the wicked players? Mayhap
that 'ere Darby I liked so well was the old serpent
himself and had his cloven foot in his pocket.

Also in this scene is found the first recorded use on the stage of that
ballad, Yankee Doodle, whose very name is a matter of obscure origin.

In the Daily Advertiser of April 18, 1787, there appeared a criticism
of The Contrast by a contemporary critic under the pen name of Candour. It
stated that the play was the "production of a man of genius," also that there
was "nothing more praiseworthy than the sentiments of the play throughout."
It showed "effusions of an honest patriot heart expressed with energy and
elocuence." The characters were "drawn with spirit, particularly Charlotte."
The dialogue was "easy, sprightly and at times witty, and there was the
frequent use of soliloquies." The character of Jessamy was overdrawn and
he was much too cultured for a servant. The character of Jonathan was
well-drawn but "there are times when the humor degenerates to farce." 10

Needless to say, The Contrast was a great success. It first appeared
on the boards of the John Street theatre in 1787, the year in which it was
written, and again in New York later that same year on three different
occasions. Baltimore saw it in '88, Philadelphia in '39 and Boston in '92

10. A reprint of Candour's criticism is found in Montrose J. Moses and John
and '95. Quinn notes that while the play was appearing in Philadelphia, Wignell published it by subscriptions and the name of George Washington headed the list.

Thus Jonathan serves as the American contribution of the play and the original Yankee of dramatic fame. Perley Reed suggests that the character, Simple, in The Blockheads, as early as 1776 may be thought to have anticipated Jonathan. But the Jonathan, representative of the first low comedy character in America was a product of New England soil, based on the farmer class. He was a truly homely soul, honest in his own way, uneducated and unimaginative. Simple, measures up to these characteristics in no respect. He was a raw country man who used coarse and vulgar language, with no use whatever for manners or style. Jonathan had, and exhibited in all his actions and speeches, a great deal of good common sense that was lacking in Simple. There is no line in the entire play, The Blockheads, on which Reed might base this assumption that Simple was in any way a pattern on which Jonathan may have been modeled.

As a book, as well as a play, The Contrast exercised great influence, most of all, perhaps, on William Dunlap and his work in the early American theatre as a playwright and producer. The play was widely read at the time and this popularity probably could account for the rarity of extant copies of it at the present.

Tyler wrote other plays which show to great advantage his keen dramatic sense, but they do not concern us here because they made no particular American contribution to the comedy of this nation at that period.

11. Perley Isaac Reed, American Characters in Native American Plays, p.47.
Shortly after his birth, Tyler's Jonathan found many imitators. In 1792, while *The Contrast* was still at the peak of its popularity, Robinson introduced a Yankee character in *The Yorker's Stratagem, or Banana's Wedding*. The play was based on the attempt of the hero to win the hand of the heroine by pretending to be a Yankee merchant.

The year of 1807 saw Barker in his first attempt to produce native plays, introducing his Yankee, Nathan Yank by name, in the comedy, *Tears and Smiles*. It was a comedy with songs; in form, a mediocre comedy of manners showing very plainly the influence of Tyler's play. Fluttermore, the American fop, was a disciple of French rather than English manners. Rangely's servant, Yank, in no way equals the original Jonathan. Trying to learn the name of the lady with whom his master is in love at first sight, Yank is the center of a series of hilarious blunders. Again, as in Tyler's play, it is the complete detachment of the Yankee character which makes him important. Without him the play would have no decided American aspect. In a letter Barker wrote to Dunlap, he tells the circumstances under which the play was written and the Yankee created.

*Tears and Smiles*, a comedy in five acts was written between the 1st of May and 12th of June, 1806. The idea of writing was suggested at a dinner of the fishing company at their ancient castle of the Schuykill on which august occasion you yourself were a guest. The topic happened to be *Breck's Fox Chase* which had been acted on the preceding night. Manager Warren, who was present, asked me to enter the lists as a dramatist and Jefferson put in for a Yankee character. By-the-way, such a Yankee as I drew! I wonder what Hackett would say to it. The truth is, I had never even seen a Yankee at the time . . . . It was first acted March 4th, 1807 to a brilliant audience and with complete success. Not withstanding I must confess that one of the deities of the
of the gallery where I had ensconced myself, did fall fast asleep (O all ye gods!) in the second act. Nay; others appeared likely to follow his example, during the sentimental dialogue and were perhaps only kept awake by the spectacle of seeing 'that funny fellow' Jeff again. Never did I hail a 'funny fellow' with so much glee as on that night.12

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The following petit piece written in the beginning of the year 1806 was intended for representation on the stage; but was not presented to the manager until it was too late for the season. New arrangements having taken place at the theatre and the circumstances which induced the author to write it having passed away, it is not now probable that the piece will ever have the honor to be played. The public are left without information as to the motive for printing at this time. It will probably be more satisfactory to have the privilege of guessing than it would to be let into the secret.13

There seems to be no recorded instance when the play actually appeared on the stage but the printed play has furnished amusement for many readers. The Yankee makes his bow in the play, Jonathan Postfree as the postman and he is as humorous and as blundering as any Yankee who has gone before him. In the third scene of the first act, his first blunder is made in mistaking Maria for Sally, for whom he has a letter. There are many laugh-provoking moments at Jonathan's troubles with the carpets on the floor, "plaguey kiver lids to walk on," he calls them. For a second time in the history of the stage Yankee he is found entertaining a lady with a little ditty to the tune of the ever-popular Yankee Doodle.

A.L. Lindsay's Love and Friendship, or Yankee Notions, brought three Yankee characters to the stage; the lover Seldreer, the sailor Captain Horner

and his man Brother Jonathan. Only Jonathan is patterned after our "waiter" of The Contrast, and all three are grossly exaggerated types although the humor provided by them is not at all bad.

The Politician Outwitted, while it is not outstanding for its Yankee characters, presented two. Humphrey Cubb was just as awkward and just as droll, but more caricatured than Jonathan. Dolly was a simple country girl, an animated creature of flesh and blood and a specimen of distinctive American life, reproduced, it is true, with obvious exaggeration, but possessing all the traits of a true Yankee nature. Four years after Humphrey Cubb, the servant, Obadiah, formed in this same mold, made his appearance in The Traveller Returned.

All these mirth-provoking Yankees were dear to the hearts of the early American audiences and the name Jonathan became almost interchangeable with the term Yankee. Even the 1812 version of Jonathan was just another ditto of all those who preceded him. He was Jonathan Peabody in James Kirke Paulding's The Bucktails, or Americans in England. The play itself overflows with nationalism and the Englishman is satirized for his view of Americans. He describes them as "people who wear copper rings in their noses - eat raw meat - paint one-half of their faces red and the other half black - and are positively half naked." 14 In this play the Yankee goes to England but his lingo is that of his first ancestor while he sojourns on foreign shores. The scene between Rust, Jonathan and Paddy Whack sounds strangely familiar and reminiscent of that between Jessamy and Jonathan in The Contrast. It shows plainly how closely Paulding has followed the example set by Royall Tyler.

Rust. Then you make a point of dining out with your master?
Jonathan. I've no master, I calculate.
Rust. No! I beg pardon, I thought you served the young aboriginal gentleman?
Jonathan. Maybe, so I do - but serving a man don't make him my master, by a darn'd sight.
Rust. The dickens it don't. How do you make that out Master Peabody?
Jonathan. Mr. Tudor pays me a salary for taking care of him, I calculate - but I don't see how one white man can be the master of another.15

Yet another imitator of Tyler's American comedy character was Samuel Woodworth, whose name is more familiar to us when it is associated with the authorship of The Old Oaken Bucket. His pastoral opera, The Forest Rose, or American Farmers was one of the most popular plays of the period and this popularity was due largely to the Yankee part of Jonathan Ploughboy, which the comedians, Henry Placide, George Hill and Dan Marble each made famous in their individual performances of the character. In his imitation of Tyler, Samuel Woodworth became the forerunner of a whole school of imitators. The play ran for a hundred nights in London and held the American stage for a period of more than forty years on the strength of this stage variety Yankee who repeated with great success all the characteristics of the type in The Contrast.

The Forest Rose showed very well Woodworth's ability as a playwright. Although his Jonathan is a type and thoroughly caricatured, he is vigorous and wholly alive amidst a group of conventional characters. Their very conventionality makes this stage Yankee stand apart. Woodworth's last play, The Foundling of the Sea was a prize piece which the author wrote for G.H. Hill, one of the dearly loved comedians of the day. It contained a Yankee

15. The Bucktails, Act III, scene i.
pedlar, Zachariah, whom Hill made live on the stage as a real being. Woodworth received one hundred dollars as the prize money for the play.

As has already been noted, the production of The Contrast marked the beginning of a long line of successful plays and was important in its effect on Dunlap. He has been honored with the title of the Father of the American Stage. With the success of The Contrast still fresh in the mind of the theatrical world, he wrote a play, The Modest Soldier, or Love in New York. It was never produced, nor has it survived, but from his own description Dunlap tells us that it was based on Tyler's successful play and that it contained "a Yankee servant, a travelled American, an officer of the late Revolutionary army, a fop . . . . an old gentleman and his two daughters." 16

Dunlap was not discouraged at the failure of his first original play. The following year he wrote another, The Father, or American Shandyism which was produced in 1789 and published immediately. Later it was reprinted under the title, The Father of an Only Child. In the second printing the play included the same characters although some of them had been rechristened. Bates cites it as "the first play performed by regular comedians which had come from the American press. 17

The criticism published in the September 9th edition of the Gazette of the United States in 1789 says "that the play was excellently received; the prologue and epilogue were finely adapted and the sentiment, wit and comic humor were happily blended in due proportion with the pathetic." The prologue states the attempt to put American elements into comedy to make it suitable

for the new world stage.

PROLOGUE TO The Father

The comick muse, pleas'd with her new abode,
Steps forth in sportive tho' in moral mode;
Proud of her dwelling in our new-made nation,
She's set about a serious reformation,
For faith, she'd almost lost her reputation.
What time so fit as this to gain her end,
When ev'n what's good our sages still amend;
What time could Thalia choose as this so fit?

In the breakfast table scene between Ranter and his wife, there are times when this domestic comedy almost drops to the level of farce. Ranter's tale of his nose got bruised is regular slapstick. And for the first time in the history of the American drama, an allusion is made to the proverbial collar button when Racket interrupts the tete-a-tete between his wife and Ranter because said button cannot be found.

The medical science of the day is duly satirized in the character of the amusing and mad Dr. Quiescent. Ranter sums him up,

Ranter. That, sir, is a travelled American, who has been gaining knowledge in England, Scotland, France and Italy; but most unfortunately cannot prevail upon any two ideas to become acquainted with each other. His head is New York on May-day - all the furniture wandering.18

There is a certain feeling of reality and substantiality in the portrayal of the characters even in the most ludicrous situations. The plot is wholly conventional however. The play is a riot of hilarious confusion and laugh-provoking situations, every situation perfect, making Dunlap's American comedy a success.

18. The Father, Act II.
The actor, Wignell, asked Dunlap to write a play for his benefit and Dunlap, inspired by the character of Darby in John O'Keeffe's *The Poor Soldier*, wrote the interlude *Darby's Return*. The Gazette criticism of November 28th, 1789, stated that it contained "happy illusions to interesting events and very delicately turned compliments." Dunlap says of it:

The following dramatic trifle was written in the year 1780 at the request and for the benefit of Mr. Wignell, at that time the favorite comedian of the American stage. His popularity in Darby gave popularity to this little piece; and it is endeared to me by the recollection of the pleasure expressed by that truly great man, General Washington, then newly elected president of the United States.

W. Dunlap

The melodies which Dunlap used in his interlude he took from the already popular *The Modest Soldier*. The scene of the play is laid in the little village of Carton to which Darby has returned after his travels abroad and his tale almost rivals that of Sinbad, the Sailor. The early audiences had many a laugh at his description of the president - whom he did not see after all.

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**Darby.**

Soon after I saw another show:

A man who fought to free the land from woe,
Like me had left his farm a soldiering to go;
But having gained his point, he had like me,
Return'd his own potato ground to see,
But there he couldn't rest: with one accord
He's called to be a kind of - not a lord:
I don't know what: he's not a great man, sure,
For poor men love him, just as he was poor!
They love him like a father or a brother.

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**Darby.**

Why, sure I didn't see him. To be sure,
As I was looking hard from out the door,
I saw a man in regimentals fine
All lace and glitter, botherum and shine,
And so I looked at him till he was gone,
And then I found that he was not the one.
And the great man who was in the audience among the first nighters looked grave at first, but when Darby explained that he had not seen him at all, he gave way to a hearty laugh.

There is another character, who, with the stage Yankee, also made an appearance in these early dramas. That was the American negro. He appeared as early as 1776 in *The Fall of British Tyranny* as Cudjo, and he used the negro dialect which the present day stage uses.

| Kidnaper. | Well, my brave blacks, are you come to list? |
| Cudjo.    | Eas, massa Lord, you preasee.               |
| Kidnaper. | How many are there of you?                 |
| Cudjo.    | Twenty-two, massa.                         |
| Kidnaper. | Very well, did you all run away from your masters? |
| Cudjo.    | Eas, massa Lord, eb'ry one, me too.        |

Even more distinctly native than Cudjo was Murdock's Sambo in *Triumphs of Love*, 1795. As early as this in the history of the stage the negro was associated with minstrelsy and Sambo sang many tunes throughout the play. The freeing of Sambo by his master in the play shows it to be one of the first to be concerned with the abolition movement. The great actor, Forrest, who had done so much to put across the Indian character on the stage also found no small success in his portrayal of the negro roles. The chief attraction of the negro character lay in the minstrelsy and picturesque extravagance. At this early date he was burlesqued and caricatured; a great many years passed before the American negro attained any high degree of importance dramatically.

Without careful examination the Indian plays seemed trivial and of little or no importance. This same situation prevails with regard to the Yankee plays, but they were important in more ways than one. "In as much as

drama is significant only in proportion as it develops character,"20 these plays were important in that they presented one real character who was native and he was, in most instances, acted by native actors. Jonathan did not remain solely on these shores but was popular on the stages of London, Paris and parts of Poland as well; thus this stage Yankee, American born, brought foreign attention to the American plays and playwrights.

Closely related to the "Yankee plays" were the social satires of the period which were also based on The Contrast. Although this thesis mentions only a few, Dunlap's The Father, Barker's Tears and Smiles, and Mrs. Warren's play of a much earlier date, The Motley Assembly, these plays which satirized fashionable society, appeared in great numbers from the period of the Revolution through the Civil War days. Social satire still holds the American stage today. These plays of Barker and Dunlap were just forerunners for the great stage success of Mrs. Moffatt, Fashion, and all the plays of city life and manners which followed it.

CONCLUSION

In selecting the American drama of the Revolutionary period the most stress has been laid on those plays which appeared between the actual years of the fighting and the first fifteen years of the new century. Hunter's play, Androboros, of 1714 has been cited, not because of its native elements or distinct American contributions to our drama, but rather for its great historic importance in this field. It was the first play actually written and printed here. Although Hunter was an Englishman, his play satirized the Lieutenant Governor of New York and the Senate, thus using local incidents and persons.

The foregoing pages make no pretense at being a complete, or even nearly complete study of early American drama in its various phases. An attempt has been made to point out those elements in the plays written here which did give them the right to be considered native American dramas. The influence of English, German and French writers was so tremendous that it was a difficult task for the struggling American playwrights to produce a play which would be favorably received. American audiences at that date were used to the successful plays from the London stage, and these plays were for the most part acted by English actors. Barton's play, The Disappointment, was an attempt to dramatize a local American superstition but the play was doomed because the characters were too American, perhaps, being representation of real Philadelphians. So it was that all honor went to Godfrey for his play, The Prince of Parthia.

The Prince of Parthia was patterned after the English plays of
eighteenth century writers and its author followed all the formal lines of tragedy. In spite of this, Godfrey gave to this country a play she could at last call her own - a play written by an American - played by a professional company on the American stage. Again it is the historic rather than the dramatic value that gives this work importance in the parade of American drama, although the play had many good points as a fine tragedy.

Slowly the drama broke away from its foreign ties. At no other time in its history was American drama so completely divorced from foreign influence as during the years of the Revolution. When American writers selected the heroes of the new country as the characters of their plays they began to express a national trend in drama. The satires of Mrs. Warren caught perfectly the revolutionary and bitter spirit of the times. She ridiculed the British and prodded the Americans on in the cause of independence with only her pen.

Less vigorous, less fiery in their attacks, yet thoroughly American in spirit were the plays of Brackenridge, Burke, and Leacock. The themes they chose and the characters they represented are the elements which are considered native in their dramas. Washington, Warren, Putnam, Montgomery and André took their respective places in the plays of the period, both written and produced on the stage. Most of these patriots had a chance during their lifetime to see themselves represented across the footlights, or to read themselves on the printed pages of the closet dramas popular at that time. In almost every instance the playwrights exercised care to follow closely the details of American history so far as dramatic effectiveness would permit.

The second native contribution to American drama was the introduction
of the Indian. At this point, credit goes to Rogers for his creation of Ponteach. He was a character such as no other country could claim. In spite of the fine English manners and few savage instincts of its hero, the theme and plot of Roger's play were genuinely American. From Ponteach there developed a stereotyped stage Indian of which Menewa, Powhatan, Tammany and Metamora were almost exact duplicates. Many of these Indian portrayals were merely idealizations rather than accurate representations of the red man. But these heroes and heroines were native Indians, who like the national characters were a part of the history of the country and in their historic and romantic settings they were transplanted to the stage.

Barker used the Indian theme as a means of trying to fill a very definite need of the American stage for American plays. When the characterization of the Indian had served its purpose, that of establishing a type native to America, the flare for this type began to die out and it has never been revived on so large a scale as it originally enjoyed. In more recent years the only Indian figure which has rivaled Pocahontas in popularity is the ever-romantic Hiawatha.

A third important contribution was the creation of the stage Yankee. Like the Indian he became a type but he was not conventional in any respect. He was thoroughly alive and vivacious, of the homely, well-meaning New England farmer type. Saying that he was not conventional does not mean that the stage Yankees differed from one another. They did not. Jonathan of The Contrast was the pattern from which they were all cut; but in a sea of conventionality this Yankee proved to be the one real personality standing apart from the rest of the characters. Tyler's play could have, without Jonathan,
passed for an English comedy of manners had the settings been those of London rather than New York. But Jonathan was native to the core; all his qualities and characteristics were representative of the spirit of American independence. These were the things that were imitated by Robinson, Barker, Beach, Paulding and Woodworth in their respective Yankee characters.

Although William Dunlap was greatly influenced by Tyler's play, it was not in the creation of a Yankee character alone that Dunlap's success lay. He gave to this country social satire distinctly American. There is room for argument here. Some students of American drama will give credit for the establishment of social satire to Mrs. Warren, but in so doing, it is well to remember that her works were closet dramas, they were never produced. Dunlap's plays were presented and some of their success is due to the actors who did them. His contributions far outnumber those of Mercy Warren and he developed true comedy, domestic and social.

Just a word for the comedy character, the negro; his importance in the dramatic history of America at this early date is in no way comparable to that of the stage Indian or Yankee. The negro was not native in the sense that the Indian was because he had been brought here from Africa. The so-called American negro was purely a burlesque character who added melody and mirth to the comedies. Although he was a humorous character in The Fall of British Tyranny, the negro did not appear frequently in the comedies until the end of the period being discussed in this thesis. As the Civil War approached he developed from a low comedy character into a dramatic character and it was as such that he became the center of the abolitionist agitation.

Thus after a careful process of elimination there were really only
three important phases in which the beginnings of American drama may be said to lie. They were (1) the representation of historical and political personages in the national dramas and satires dealing with the war; (2) the development of Indian themes and settings with Indian characters as the heroes and heroines of the plays; and (3) the creation of the stage Yankee as a low comedy character in social satires and comedies of contemporary city life. With this start drama developed ever so slowly until after 1860 before it received international recognition by its own merits.
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