CHAPTER VI

THE SKIN GAME AND LOYALTIES

The Skin Game

Calsworthy began The Skin Game in June 1919; the play was written without a break and was finished in London by July 17 in the same year. It was first produced in 1920 and became so popular that it ran triumphantly for a year. It is also recorded as Galsworthy's first commercial success in the theatre. This is understandable since The The Skin Game is probably the most enjoyable of Galsworthy's plays; it does not make one feel that 'here is another lesson to learn'. The moral teaching and the pleading for the unfortunate are an essential part of the development of the play with dramatic atmosphere and they come out quite naturally leaving no 'bitter taste' in our mouths as in some of Galsworthy's lesser plays.

The Skin Game is in fact one of Galsworthy's greatest plays, and deserves fuller consideration than any of his others because in it we see his art and his dramatic skill fully developed. It is worth while considering in detail the way in which he brings out his theme, his creation of characters and dialogue, all of which show Galsworthy at his best and are also interesting for their relation to his other plays.

The plot of this play is uncomplicated and contains no superfluous our elements. It goes straight to the main theme, that of the fight between the landed gentry, the Hillcrists and the Hernblowers, the newly rich middle class for some land which will be changed into industrial sites by Hernblower if he wins. This is not a very fair fight as is suggested by the title of the play itself: The Skin Came, an American slang 1 expression meaning a swindling game or trick.

The fight is as bitter and determined as in <u>Strife</u>, but there is something more in <u>The Skin Game</u>: the two sides decide that if they cannot win in a fair fight, they will try tricks. Hornblower begins first. He and Hillcrist bid against one another at the auction of the piece of the piece of land each wants -- though Hillcrist only wants it to prevent Hernblower buying it and using it for his own industrial

^{1.} Slang -- from Western New International Dictionary, 1934

development plans. When Hornblower realizes that Hillerist will follow him in his bids — even to a price far above the value of the land — he introduces a third bidder, the Duke, and Hillerist, with some relief, allows the Duke to cap his own bid, and sees the land fall to him, only finding out when it is too late that he has been duped and that the Duke has acted on behalf of Hornblower. Hornblower's action has been ungentlemanly and unsporting. He has gone beyond the rules of the game. The Hillerists will now fight him with his own weapons — trickery and subterfuge and threats — and will no longer allow themselves to be bound by their old code of honour. They will play the skin game too — and with thoroughness.

The active avenger is not Mr.Hillerist, but it is Mrs.Hillerist who thus declares wer: "Mr. Hornblower, as you fight foul - so shall wo." And in spite of Mr. Hillerist's disapproval Mrs. Hillerist, together with Dawker, the Hillerist's agent, works out a cunning schome to the complete destruction of Hornblower and his family.

In fact there is a certain similarlity in the manner of the failure of both Hornblower in The Skin Game and Roberts in Strife. They first appear to be the toughest fighters imaginable who will by no means lot any circumstances divert them. But then an unexpected event happens, not to them, but to their women, and compols them to change their ways. In Strife, the sudden death of Roberts' wife makes him unable to retain his position as the head of the strikers and consequently the strike fails. In The Skin Game, the Hillcrists' discovery of the shameful past life of Chloe, Hornblower's daughter - in - law, is the heavy and unexpected blow that falls on Hornblower who eventually has to withdraw from his enemies in great shame and resentment.

The wretched victim of the fight, Chloc, reminds us of Paula in Pinero's play, The Second Mrs. Tangueray. Chloc and Paula are fortunate enough to give up their immoral careers and marry rich men. But when their secret is revealed afterwards, society is unable to accept them as respectable Mrs. Tanqueray and Mrs. Hornblower any longor. They find that it is no use trying to live a new life since society does not will them to. Therefore they decide to commit suicide. Paula succeeds in doing so, but Chloc is rescued in time and is still alive though badly injured.

^{1.} Galsworthy: The Plays of John Galsworthy (1929), p. 543

Chloe, a harmless and pathotic figure, is a typical Calsworthian woman, weak and helpless in the cruel hands of English society. She is not much more individualized than other pitiful women of his such as Mrs. Honeywill in Justice, and Wanda in The First and The Last. They are very dependent on their loved ones, and will live or die at their command. Without their men, they are unable to carry on their own lives properly because they have no courage of their own. Here is the Chloe's appeal for mercy to the Hillerists': ".... he does love me. And if he throws me off, I'll go under -- that's all." In short such women are too weak to be impressive and they have no other qualities to compensate for their weakness which might attract us instead.

Galsworthy's other kind of woman which I think more impressive, is of the type of Jill Hillcrist, the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Hillcrist in The Skin Game. She reminds one of Det in The Eldest Son and Maud in A Family Man; these women are bold, frank, humourous, well-brod, and rather masculine. They are all unconventional; they use their reason and form their own opinions, and have fewer social prejudices than their contemporaries, examples below justify this statement.

"Dot | the second daughter of the Cheshires'in The Eldest Son | :

If it wasn't for mother ! Freda's just as much of a lady as most girls. Why shouldn't he marry her, and go to Canada?

It's what he's really fit for. 2

"Jill: D' you think Hormblower had a father? I believe he was spontaneous. But, Dodo, why all this — this attitude to the Hornblowers?

"Maud the second daughter of the Builders' in A Family Man :

I've heard you say ever so many times that no man was any good who couldn't make his own way, father. Well, women are the same as men, now. It's the law of the country. I only want to make my own way.

^{1. &}lt;u>Ibid</u>, p. 568

^{2.} Ibid, p. 190

^{3.} Ibid, p. 557

^{4.} Ibid, p. 605

"Joan the only daughter of Sir John Mazer in Exiled]:
What's the good of morals and beliefs? What do they lead to?
Tell me that! I mean if you want me to go somewhere you must tell me why."

Those girls, being accustomed to thinking for themselves are often headstrong. But they are usually elever enough to know what is going to happen before the more simple - minded are aware of it. In The Skin Game it is Jill who warns her father to beware of her mether's next step after the victory of the Hornblowers'; "They'll make you do things you don't approve of, Dodo, if you don't look out. Mother's fearfully bitter when she gets her knife in. If old Hornblower's disgusting, it's no reason we should be"

It is necessary for Mr. Hillcrist to have a daughter like Jill to take care of him. He is not a strong character and has "no volition of his own" In fact he is a man of high morality, but he fails to live up to it when his determined and snobbish wife takes control. He cannot stop her blackmailing Chloe though he is very much against her idea. However the destruction of Chloe and the rest of the Hermblowers' makes him realize his weakness. And in the presence of his astonished wife, he summons enough will power for the first time to say that he is the master in his house and to state his real feelings about this fight; "What is it that gets loose when you begin a fight, and makes you what you think you're not? What blinding evil! Bogin as you may, it ends in this - skin game! Skin game!"

The message of this play as explained by Galsworthy is that "Centility cannot survive when formed into a sort of Limited Company, of which the Managing Directors are not gentle!" Sillcrist sets out to fight Hornblower because he cannot let him drive the poor out of the place where they have lived for generations. The fight ends with Hornblower being forced to give up all his land so that the poor can move back. But when they come to thank Hillcrist, he confesses that he has entirely forgetten their existence during the fight what urged the Hillcrists to continue the fight was rather the personal insult from

-> Hornblower. So in this case there is no merit in

^{1.} Ibid, p. 1070

^{2.} Tbid, p. 531

^{3.} Marrot, p. 494

^{4.} Galsworthy: Collected Plays of Galsworthy (1929), p. 574

^{5.} Marrot, p. 495

his action as Hillcrist sorrowfully admits in the end: ".... What's gentility worth if it can't stand fire?" Besides, the Hillcrists cannot be proud that they have saved some people because at the same time they have destroyed a woman who has never done them any harm.

Such are the tragedies of the play. And who are to be blamed for all these ? I would rather say none, although in fact Mr. Hornblower who represents the new middle class with his ambitious schemes for advancement seems at first to be the real villain. But he has his Ho represents the new society with its new reasons for his behaviour. ideals and motivation. It is necessary for him to push his way forward, at all times and in all circumstances, for the sake of money, because money makes him what he is. He becomes a somebody through nothing clso but his money; he and his family will be nobedies again if they lose their wealth. If he and his family were given more consideration from his upperclass neighbours who have not had to struggle to become what they are he would certainly divert his attention to something else instead of thinking of money all the time. But he and his family are always treated by the Hillcrists as if they were in a different world, and as if it were unthinkable to accept them as neighbours. Being thus humiliated, Hornblower is certainly not to be totally blamed for whatever he has dono: hurt feelings, humiliation, bruised vanity are behind his actions. It is not that he has no understanding of what the Hillerists stand for : they force him to oppose themselves and their values.

In fact there is no completely guilty scoundrel in the play who can be blamed entirely for what happens and whose destruction can be celebrated by all. The "villain" of the piece is heartlessness, lack of love and humanity for fellow creatures. Mrs. Hillerist and Dawker who cause Chloo to attempt suicide have no real conception of what their accusations will lead to. They simply follow the habitual pattern of their life. The latter is like all loyal agents who will do any-thing for his masters. But he does not care a straw for others. He has broken his promise to Hornblower by revealing Chloe's secret to Charles, her husband, when Charles rouses him to anger. In so doing, he ruins their married life, but he can feel no deep remorse since besides his own masters he considers

^{1.} Galsworthy : Collected Plays of John Calsworthy (1929),

himself attached to nobody, least of all to those of a lower class than his masters'. Regarding Mrs. Hillerist, who is very similar to other upper - class married women such as Mrs. Barthwick in The Silver Box, Lady Cheshire in The Eldest Son and Mrs. March in Windows; she has been trained to see only people of her own class and so she can do nothing clse but look down upon people of the lower classes, especially those who value money more than anything else. Her world is confined to her husband, children and a few intimates. Her duty is to do her best for those people and to preserve the old traditions which have been transferred from one generation to another for a very long time, and that is all. Therefore she can find nothing wrong in injuring a woman whom she despises for the sake of her beloved family.

The characters in this play as well as in Galsworthy's other plays, are neither to be blaned nor admired. They are all the puppets of society end of systems which are themselves attrault and in need of remedies. In The Skin Came it is the class system, the problem which Galsworthy seems to be most anxious about, and which of course constantly finds expression in his plays. However The Skin Game's characters are more lively and more accessible than many others in Galsworthy's plays because they have more emotional response to surrounding facts, and hence seem the more human. Besides, they do not preach as much as many Galsworthy characters do.

The dialogue of this play is skilfully written. It suits the characters and seems to come from their own mouths rather than from their creator's (whereas the opposite is often the case in such plays as The . Pigeon and The Foundations). In it we can also find a lot of slang and fresh topical dialogue; Calsworthy is particularly good at differentiating between the speech of his characters, the old and the young, the conservative and the modern. Many of the expressions used by Jill Hilleriat for instance - who represents youth a nd modernity -- are dead now, but they were frosh and vital in Galsworthy's time and ring out in splendid contrast to the more serious and less colourful words of her reactionary elders. Examples abound on every page of the richness and variety of human speech: In particular, the language and idiom distinguish different reactions of the old and the young, and of the newcomers and the long - established family, to the changing situation. Jill Fillerist's speech continually contrasts with her father's and with her mother's, as in turn theirs contrast with Hornblower's and Dawker's:

"Jill: Dodo (her own father), you're narrow.

Buck up, old darling, it won't do

Hillcrist: It takes generations to learn to live and let live, Jill. People like that take and ell when you give them an inch

"Hillcrist: I was born here, and my father, and his, and his, and his. They loved those fields, and those old trees. And this barbarian, with his 'improvement' schemes, forsooth!

Hornblower: How the man talks! Why! Ye'd think he owned the sky, because his fathers built him a house with a pretty view, where he's nothing to do but live. It's sheer want of something to do that gives ye your fine sentiments, Hillerist......4

Hornblower: Look here, Hillcrist, I don't object to you personally; ye seem to me a poor creature that's bound to get left with your gout and your dignity; I'm a good - natured man if you'll treat me as such. Now, you take me on as a neighbour and all that, and 'I'll manage without chimneys on the Contry. Is it a bargain? 5

Hillcrist: Hopeless; we're in different worlds 6

"Mrs. Hillerist Pointing to Chloc,] May I ask who this lady is ?

<u>Hornblower</u>: No, ma'am, ye may not, for ye know perfectly well.
<u>Jill:</u> I brought her in mother.

Mrs. Hillcrist: Will you take hor out again, then.

Hillcrist: Amy, have the goodness to remember -
Mrs. Hillcrist: That this is my house so far as ladies are concerned.

Ibid,

p. 544

Ibid, p. 515

^{2.} Ibid, p. 517

^{3. &}lt;u>Ibid</u>, p. 532

^{4. &}lt;u>Ibid</u>, p. 524

^{5. &}lt;u>Ibid</u>, p. 527

^{7. &}lt;u>Ibid</u>, p. 530

"Hillcrist [Speaking to Hornblower himself]:
And I never met anyone so pachydermatous.....

Jill [Speaking to Rolf, Hornblower's son]: And we can't help thinking he's a pig. Sorry!.....

"Hillcrist: To use a piece of knowledge about a woman —
it's repugnant. I - I won't do it

Mrs. Hillcrist: - - - to know this is our salvation,
and we must use it

Dawker: The Squire's squeamish — too much of a gentleman.
But he don't count. The grey mare's all right.

Dawker: You ought to know that in a row it's the weak
and helpless—we won't say the innocent — that get it
in the neck. That can't be helped.6

The Skin Game received buch praise from the critics and the press. The Daily Telegraph said; "In every way this play is admirable. From the first rising of the curtain our attention is held, and as the story develops, we find ourselves more and more gripped. Each of the characters is minutely true to life. This is why the play inspires every member of the east to produce his or her very best work. The general tone was laudatory though a few critics were more restrained; however none made a severe attack on The Skin Game. It is universally accepted as one of Galsworthy's great plays, and it will survive when other lessor plays of his are dead and buried.

The Skin Game seems to have been immediately followed by the writing of a group of one - act plays and A Family Man; there seems to be some confusion about the date of the production of the latter 8 and little information generally available about it or the one - act plays.

^{1.} Ibid, p. 527

^{2.} Ibid, p. 557

^{3.} Ibid, p. 547

^{4.} Ibid, p. 546

^{5.} Ibid, p. 548

^{6.} Ibid, p. 554

^{7.} Marrot, p. 493

^{8.} See above, p. 21

They will therefore be dealt with briefly before we pass on to the consideration of Loyalties that followed them.

Six Short Plays.

The one - act plays were published in one volume called.

Six Short Plays in 1921; they are The First and The Last, A Drama;

The Little Man, A Fereical Morality; Hall - Marked, A Satirie Trifle;

Defeat, A Tiny Drama; The Sun, A Scene, and Punch and Co, A Little Comedy.

Three of them are about war: Defeat, probably the shortest of Galsworthy's dramas, deals with a German girl who meets an American soldier during the war, while The Sun deals with a very common post war incident, the return home of a soldier and his discovery that his girl has been unfaithful to him. The Little Man, althought its story has nothing to do with the war, is about the sprit of internationalism as symbolized by "The Little Man". This play proclaims the need for international cooperation in simple human relationships, an ideal which, on a broader lovel, found expression later in 1925 in the League of Nations.

The Little Man is probably the most remarkable and the best of Galsworthy's short plays. In it we find interesting skotches of people . from various nations such as the American, the German, and the English couple who find themselves thrown together on a train with a temporarily motherless baby in their midst. The American is idealistic. His theory is absolute unselfishness towards others but his love of self often makes his theory unpractical. He thinks that he should be kind to a baby who has lost its mother, but at the same time he is drawn back by the fear of catching a cortain infection from it. The German never cares for the weak; he believes that the world is for the strong and powerful only. As for the English couple, they show no feeling and seldom mingle themselves in others' affairs. They are neither good nor evil, but like to be detached. The American has been trying to behave like a saint, but he cannot. The real saint is the Little Man who devotes himself to helping the ill - fated baby and who is really free from national projudice because: "I'm afraid I'm nothing particular. My father was half - English and half - American, and my mother half -German and half - Dutch." 1

^{1.} Galsworthy: The Plas of John Galsworthy (1929), p. 929

What Galsworthy himself said about this play is relevant to the play itself as well as to many others of his plays: "The position, as you see, is a little ironical.The milk of human kindness flows in most people, but the sense of property flows too, and not too much imagination, or we shouldn't have our Bethnal Greens, hungry children, our solitary confinement, our docked horses, our caged skylarks and a thousand other insensate evils - not even this war."

Such a temperament is often found to be dominant in Galsworthy's plays. For instance, in <u>The Eldest Son</u>, we see that Sir Cheshire is generous enough when it comes to making his servant marry the girl he has seduced. But when it comes to his own son who has seduced a maid of the house, his selfish interest finally compelshim to act otherwise. A similar attitude can also be found in such plays as <u>The Silver Box</u>, <u>Strife</u>, <u>Windows</u>, etc. and even in the very short play <u>Punch</u> and <u>Co</u>.

In this play we see how cruel an important producer is in not allowing a certain play to be performed. In doing so he nearly breaks the heart of a talented actress who has taken the leading role. Though he is kind enough to let her know how fine she is as an artist, his sense of property -- which is not always the same as a sense of true propriety -- prevents him putting on the play. Here is his reason: "... I've only one rule, sir! Cive the Public what it wants, and what the Public wants is punch and go"

In The First and The Last and in Hall - Marked we see how people are unable to live in society without certain thinge, in the former, it is pluck; in the latter, strangely enough, it is a wedding ring. We see how people in Hall - Marked shrink back from a woman who has been very good and kind to them just because they suspect her and her husband of not being lewfully married.

Except for The Little Man, the six short plays are not distinguished wished. Owing to the extreme shortness of such plays as The Sun and Dofoat, they have very soldom been performed on the professional stage, although they make enjoyable reading and rank among the best English one - act plays.

^{1.} Marrot, p. 733

^{2.} Galsworthy: The Plays of John Galsworthy (1929), p. 982

A Family Man

Brief mention should also be made of A Family Man, the reputation of which seemed to get lost under the loud and continual applause for The Skin Game and for Loyalties.

The title of this play has already suggested its theme: this play is about a dutiful magistrate, Builder, who rules his family by force and power rather than love, and who 'does not know where to stop being firm'. He has been at variance with his daughters and his wife and beats them in his anger. When this becomes known in the town it makes him unpopular; the model citizen, the upholder of the family, "the pillar of society", falls into diagrace and has to give up his hope of being mayor of the town in the near future. Builder reminds us of Roberts and Hornblower in Strife and The Skin Game. They are all alike, determined and purposeful, but come to their destruction partly because of their women folk.

Although the play ends tragically and touchingly, the whole atmosphere of its is not serious at all; it is more like a comical tragedy with the "family man" running after his cloping daughter and later after his own wife who has left him in anger after seeing him kissing the French maid.

It is often found in Galsworthy's plays that the light atmosphere and comic elements are not as effective as the exploitation of serious themes and elements. This play is yet another example of a lighter play which, as usual, was not well received by the audience; its run lasted for only a short period, making way for the next play, a far greater one, Loyalties.

Loyaltics

Writing <u>Loyalties</u> in 1921, Galsworthy was in fact exploring the same theme as in <u>The Skin Game</u>: - - that of the conflict between a new - made man and the long - established people of English upper middle - class society. It therefore seems fitting to discuss <u>Loyalties</u> in the same chapter as <u>The Skin Game</u>.

The plot of <u>Loyaltics</u> is quite simple: a thief steals a large sum of money and is finally arrested. But the fact that the thief is an Englishman, a received member of society, whereas the owner of the money is a Jow, who has had to make his own way into that society, differentiates this play from a mere crime drama. Instead of socing the criminal being east out we find that it is the owner himself who is banished because he dares to accuse one who really belongs to society whereas he kimself is only an outsider who has been trying in vain to become part of it.

The unfortunate outsider, Ferdinand De Levis, is very much like Hornblower in The Skin Came. He is a bitter, money - minded Jew who imagines bad feelings against him everywhere, even from the servants of his English friends who also have a certain snobbery of their own. He is far from being a sympathetic character, but he is the victim and therefore demands our sympathy. Being a very shrewd man he can point to the real thief very quickly: the man is in fact Mr. Dancy, a well - known gallant English soldier, a fellow - guest in the country - house at which he is staying. De Levis's accusation causes a great deal of abuse from Dancy's friends and relatives whose loyalty to Dancy blinds them to all his faults. When informed of how Dancy's behaviour has roused suspicion, Colford, one of his close friends replies: "Well! What proof's that? No, by George | An old school - follow, a brother officer, and a pal. He didn't. But if he did, I'd stick to him, and see him through it, if I could." 1 Colford's response is typical. Margaret, one of Dancy's relatives, answers in an even stronger tone :

Such an attitude among people who stick together is common everywhere in the world. In fact it is admirable to love and be loyal to our friends and relatives, but if loyalty is exceeded, it will become prejudice and thus lessen our consideration towards the outsiders who happen to deal with us; in other words, there are greater loyalties than those to our immediate circle and tradition. Examples 3 below will give us some idea of how people who are staying in the same house with De Lovis take the news of his discovery of the theft:

"I don't care. He's my third cousin. Don't you feel you couldn't, ...? " 2

^{1.} Ibid, p. 658

^{2.} Ibid, p. 660

^{3. &}lt;u>Ibid</u>, p.p. 635, 639, 647

"Lady Adela [the hostoss speaking to De Levis himself] :
But how fearfully thrilling ! (With sudden realization)
Oh! But -- Oh! it's quite too unpleasant!

"Winsor [the host, as soon as De Levis makes his exit] : Phow ! Did you ever see such a dressing -- gown ?

"Margaret [one of the guests] : ".... Isn't this gorgeous ? Poor little Ferdy !

" <u>General Canyage</u> [another guest, after being told by De Levis that Dancy is suspected of having committed the theft]: But this is a private house, Mr. De Levis, and semething is due to our host and to the <u>osprit de corps</u> that exists among gentlemen."

and it is this 'esprit de corps' that keeps Dancy out of prison for a long time. Though certain evidence against him is found, his friends try to keep their mouths shut as long as possible. On the other hand, one feels that if it were De Levis who had committed this crimo himself, the 'esprit de corps' would certainly unite Dancy's friends and enable them to gather enough evidence to send him to prison in no time.

Loyaltics is another play of Galsworthy's which was a great commercial success. After finishing this play Galsworthy was very sure of it as we can see in his letter to one of his friends: "This was the only play of mine of which I was able to say when I finished it:
'No manager will refuse this'." And that was true; the play was received with very much enthusiasm by Sir James Barrie, who was in charge of its first production at the St. Martin's Theatre in March, 1922.

The play met with an immediate and great success. Here again we see Calsworthy at his best with his intensity and seriousness of purpose and his great dramatic skill. It is agreed that while Loyalties is, in its social emphasis, a very important drama of ideas, it is also very interesting on a lower plane as a crime drama. This play is full of interesting incidents, as in the scene of the inspector's cross - examination of the guests which is deliberately and amusingly written.

^{1.} Marrot, p. 508

Generally the critics found more to praise than to blame in this play. However, after praising Galsworthy whose master-hand makes this play "exciting through every minute of its course", the Daily Chronicle came to disagree with the end, Dancy's suicide, which was said to be "the least good part of it."

I do not agree with this criticism. What could be more suitable than such an end ? What else can Dancy do when the policemen with a warrant for his arrest are waiting outside his room? To fight against the armed policemen would be impossible whereas to give in to the police and be under arrest would be too simple for such a born - fighter and a dare devil as Dancy whose character is described by one of his friends as follows: "He can't live without danger. If there is no excitement going, he'll make it -- out of sheer craving." There is only one way left for him apart from committing suicide and that is to try another jump (he is a very expert jumper), and make his escape. But then it would be too contemptible for him who was once a gallant soldier and an English gentleman. There is still another reason to support Dancy's suicide, perhaps the most essential one: such an end makes us see with our own eyes the final binding spell of loyalty. In spite of Dancy's moral weakness, his friends still keep faith in him and after his suicide they consider him as a hero who has committed a great deed: "Hara - kiri for his wife's sake, and his own." This speech of Colford is very effective -- it sums up Galsworthy's theme in its irony. The very act that has scaled Dancy's acknowledgement of his shame and guilt, evokes a last tribute of praise and loyalty from his friends: they are still blinded by the old school tic Thus we may conclude that Dancy's suicide, if it is not the best part of the play, is not the least good part of it either, because it does make the play end very neathy and conclusively.

^{1.} Ibid, p. 516

^{2.} Galsworthy: The Plays of John Galsworthy (1929)

^{3.} Ibid, p. 685