

wasted a considerable portion of his life awaiting court favours which never came. But he acquired two fortunes by his pen, the first of which he lost in the "South Sea Bubble", the orgy of speculation which convulsed England during the reign of George I.

He was the friend of Bolingbroke and of Swift, and by the influence of the latter became secretary to Lord Clarendon, who was sent in 1714 as Envoy Extraordinary to the Court of Hanover. He appears to have been bored at Herrenhausen, and the death of Queen Anne put an end to his advancement.

The Hanoverians, once on the English throne, looked with some disfavour on the friend of Bolingbroke, and Gay was compelled once more to earn his living with his pen. Swift is said to have suggested to him a "Newgate pastoral", although he did not approve when Gay produced instead a lyrical drama, dealing with the life of highwaymen in the famous prison.

He offered it to Cibber, the manager of Drury Lane, who rejected it. The general opinion even of Gay's friends seems to have been unfavourable, but in the end it was produced in the theatre in Lincoln's Inn Fields on January 29, 1728, and met with immediate success. It ran for the then astonishing period of sixty-three days, and on into the next season. It was played in the provinces, in Scotland, Wales, and Ireland, and even in Minorca. A company took it to the West Indies, where all its members had the misfortune to die of fever.

In the London production the part of Macheath — the highwayman — was taken by Walker, the part of Lucy by Miß Egleton, and the part of Polly by Miß Fenton. The great Hogarth painted a picture of the stage with its side



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boxes, and this, in 1790 was engraved by no less a person than William Blake. The engraving shows, behind the actors, the most important members of the audience, including the author, Rich, the manager of the theatre, and the Duke of Bolton, who eloped with the heroine and afterwards married her. Miß Fenton was the first English actress to marry into the peerage; and it is curious to note that two other Pollys afterwards did the same.

The causes of the success of a play are never easy to disentangle, but apart from the obvious of the