



# "Nance Oldfield": An unrecorded printed play by Charles Reade

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## Nance Oldfield: An Unrecorded Printed Play by Charles Reade

THE bibliography of Reade's plays is obscure and confusing. I have listed . . . only those of the printed issue of which I have found certain evidence. He is known, however, to have written many more, some at least of which were probably printed privately.<sup>1</sup> So writes Charles Reade's bibliographer, Michael Sadleir,<sup>2</sup> and he is echoed by Reade's biographer, Malcolm Elwin.<sup>3</sup> It is therefore of some interest and importance when an unrecorded edition of one of Reade's plays comes to light. Such a play is *Nance Oldfield*, of which the Harvard College Library has recently acquired the copy once in Lord Esher's collection.<sup>4</sup>

The title-page is as follows:

NANCE OLDFIELD, | A COM-  
EDY, | IN ONE ACT. | BY |  
CHARLES READE, D. C. L. |

The volume is in plain gray paper wrappers and measures 5½ by 8¼ inches. It consists of three unnumbered leaves followed by 22 leaves numbered from 6 to 27, printed on rectos only on stiff laid paper without watermark. The leaves are all separate and have been stitched by stabbing. The foliation numbers appear at the top right corner of the odd leaves and the top left of the even.

<sup>1</sup>*Excursions in Victorian Bibliography* (London, 1922), p. 177.

<sup>2</sup>*Charles Reade, a Biography* (London, 1931), p. 368.

<sup>3</sup>The printed play is also unknown to M. L. Parrish, *Wilkie Collins and Charles Reade* (London, 1940).

These peculiarities are strongly suggestive of page-proof, but there is no evidence that the present copy was used for such a purpose. No printer, place, or date appears anywhere in the volume. The first leaf contains the title-page; the second, the *dramatis personae* with blanks for the insertion of the names of the actors; and the text begins on the third leaf, continuing through the leaves numbered 6-27.

The history of the play is not without its own interest. Reade found the idea for it in a one-act comedy by Narcisse Fournier called *Tiridate*, first performed in Paris in 1841. He made both a play and a story of it, placing it before the public first as the novella *Art: A Dramatic Tale*, in *Bentley's Miscellany* for December 1853 and January 1854.<sup>4</sup> In his story Reade took Fournier's sketch of an actress in the Paris of Louis XV and transferred it to the London of George II, with the English actress Anne Oldfield as his heroine; further, he enlarged it to include a contest between Mrs Oldfield and the celebrated Mrs Bracegirdle in the leading roles of *The Rival Queens*. His dramatization of this story, *Art*, was presented at the St James's Theatre on 17 February 1855.<sup>5</sup> *An Actress by Daylight*, pre-

<sup>4</sup>Its first appearance in book form was in Reade's *Clouds and Sunshine* (Boston, 1855).

<sup>5</sup>Not 17 April, as stated by D.N.B. (Charles Kent's article on Reade) and Elwin, p. 373. See the *Theatrical Journal*, XVI

sented at the St James's on 8 April 1871, was a reworking of the same material.<sup>6</sup> Neither of these is known in printed form.

Reade's final recension of the comedy was the present version, *Nance Oldfield*, which was first produced at the Olympic Theatre on 24 February 1883 with Genevieve Ward in the title role. It was revived with considerable success by Ellen Terry in 1891.

In *Nance Oldfield* the Bracegirdle incident was omitted (we may perhaps assume that this was also the case in the earlier dramatizations) and the play followed more or less the outlines suggested by Fournier's piece. There seems little doubt that the vol-

(1855), 58 (21 February). I am indebted to Dr W. B. Van Lennep for the reference. According to Elwin, pp. 105-106, the play may have been written as early as 1851 and may thus have preceded the fictional version.

<sup>6</sup>Elwin, p. 236.

ume described above was printed for the performance at the Olympic. It would have been useful in the production and would also serve to protect the author's rights to the play—a matter concerning which he was notoriously touchy. Its suspicious resemblance to page-proof would indicate that a normally-printed edition may have been contemplated, but no copy has been recorded. Like various other plays by Reade, *Nance Oldfield* seems to have been printed 'but not published.'<sup>7</sup>

WILLIAM H. BOND

<sup>7</sup>A final complication is the existence of a dramatization by Mildred Aldrich, *Nance Oldfield: A Play in One Act, Arranged from Charles Reade's Story, 'Art: A Dramatic Tale'* (Boston, copyright 1894). The Aldrich version agrees with Reade's in omitting the Bracegirdle episode, but there is every evidence that it is an independent piece of work and not a plagiarism of Reade's play.

## The Engineering Library at Harvard University

THE Engineering Library at Harvard had its origin in the collections of the Scientific School of the University at Cambridge which was established on the thirteenth of February 1847. This School was renamed the Lawrence Scientific School upon the gift of Abbott Lawrence for its endowment in June of that year.

Until Lawrence Hall was completed in 1850 the new school did not have quarters of its own, and students used the books of Harvard's 'Public Library' in Gore Hall. By 1862, the

Lawrence Scientific School Library was listed in the University catalogue as a separate library with 5000 volumes. In addition to books on civil engineering, it contained volumes on chemistry, geology, zoology, botany, anatomy, physics, and astronomy, all of these being subjects offered by the School at that time. Throughout the rest of the nineteenth century this library was classified as one of the University's seven or eight departmental libraries. It was in charge of the Dean of the School. Emphasis then, and for many years thereafter, was

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