

does in Castalio, which had sunk for many years under the hands of ignorance and incapacity into obscurity. His voice is finely calculated to aid the appearance: it has melody, depth, and strength; but he does not always display it to advantage. There is a fine break of grief in it, which, if I do not mistake, he first introduced in the last Act of Essex; where, when the officers are pressing his departure, he points to his wife lying on the ground, with

Ob! look there!

The manner of this expression was so affecting, that the whole house burst into tears. He saw the effect, and has used the cause rather too often improperly. He again often runs out to a high treble that quarrels with the ear, and gives us room to suspect, that he is trying the force of his voice, instead of being warmed with the necessary passion. A performer of his rank and consequence ought to avoid giving any body room to arraign his judgment: for the future, perhaps, he will not leave such an opening to criticism.

After all, wherever love, grief, tenderness, or pity, are the ruling passions of a character, there Barry is sure to excel.

Othello

Othello is his master-piece; and his acting of it cannot be transcended. He addresses the assembled senate with an account of the whole process of his wooing better than any man I ever saw. In the two scenes in the third and fourth Act, where Iago works upon his credulity, so as to inflame him to the highest pitch of jealousy, his perturbations are natural and noble. His perplexity and anger in

Villain! be sure you prove my love a whore.

Be sure of it---&c.

are beautifully represented; and his attitude, when kneeling by the side of Iago, he vows vengeance against his unhappy wife, is truly graceful.

Here he shews us, that he has properly considered the passion of anger, which in man never breaks out in loud words, but is kept in under an interrupted voice; and discloses its utmost fury rather in action. On the other hand, the anger of a woman is loud, shrill, and frantic, having little or no strength, but what is in her tongue; and this Mrs. Hamilton appears well acquainted with, in her performance of Emilia in this Play.

Marc Anthony, in *All for Love*, is a character which he supports with elegance and propriety. It is impossible to see him stretched on the ground, in the first Act, overwhelmed with misfortunes, without entering into all his grief; nor does he forget to seize the great room a performer has to shine in the third Act of this Play. No body can attend without sympathetic feeling to Anthony's dispute with himself, whether to give way to love, or fatherly affection; and in his countenance the inward tumult and contention is finely marked.

In the *Humorous Lieutenant*, he performs Demetrius, a young prince possessed of many virtues, but actuated by very strong passions. There is a tincture of romance in it, but it is not bad; and in his hands it loses no part of its merit. In all the Scenes with Celia, whether representing tenderness, jealousy, or despondence, he is just and pleasing. Not so much can be said for his *Macbeth*. There is a character in the same Tragedy to which he is much better adapted. How delightful would the plaintive notes of his voice sound in Macduff's bewailing the loss of his children. There is a stern, murderous savageness in the first
that

that becomes him not near so well as would the tenderness and affection of the last, in which Wilkes was always received with great applause; and is complimented by the Tatler, Numb. 68. Garrick exhibits this Play as it was written. Barry performs it with Betterton's alterations, which I cannot think any ornament to the piece. They put us in mind of German money, wherein we find copper and silver intermixed. Perhaps Shakespear has nowhere left us finer writing than in this Play; the speaking and acting of which is as hard as the writing is great. I cannot say I ever saw the character played all through equal to what I conceive of it. Mr. Barry has many beauties in it; on which neither my leisure nor space permit me to descant. I shall, however, delay a little here to remark to him, that I think him wrong in his manner of stopping this speech:

To-morrow, to-morrow, &c.

In this place, Macbeth, among other perplexities, receives the news of his wife's death, and cries out,

She should have died hereafter---

There had been time for such a word to-morrow--

*To-morrow, to-morrow, and to-morrow,
Creep in a slow and stealing pace along, &c.*

Macbeth's situation is at this time so very critical, that he has not leisure to indulge private grief. Hence he is led to observe, that his wife's death had better happened at any other time than now, when his circumstances are so very perplexed; and which have now reached such a point, that they must, in the course of things, sustain some considerable change even by *to-morrow*; that this change he is persuaded will be for his advantage, through a reliance on the equivocal and delusive promises of the witches. His mentioning the word, *Morrow*, leads him into a chain of reflections upon its meaning and consequences, which are otherwise abruptly, nay, absurdly, introduced: and this is the case in Barry's way of replying to the account of his wife's death, which he delivers thus:

*She should have died hereafter---
There had been time for such a word,
To-morrow, &c.*

But he makes up for this mistake, if it may be called one, in that scene wherein he says,

Is that a dagger which I see before me?

in

in which he is extremely happy, as well as in receiving the ghost of Banquo, and all thro' the last Act.

He is certainly fine in the part of Alexander; the manner in which he disposes himself, his various attitudes in the last Act, and particularly in the last scene, have a charming effect; and one is wrought up almost to imagine, that Darius approaches in his chariot, drawn by milk-white steeds; and that Alexander is going to lead the charge against him. Yet this Play is spoiled in the altering, so miserably mangled, that were Nat Lee to rise from the church-yard of St. Clement's, where he lies buried (next to the tomb of William Pattison) he would run mad again; for poor Nat was as mad as his own Alexander. Misfortunes and drink were the occasion: he was under the regimen of a milk-diet for the last week of his life; but getting one evening out of his physician's reach, he drank so hard, that he dropped down in the street, and was run over by a coach. His body was laid in a bulk near Trunkit's, the perfumer's at Temple-bar, till it was owned. He was a clergyman's son; his education was liberal; he was for some
time

time on the Stage, where he cut but a poor figure ; he had an open countenance, and a fine head of hair, which, when he missed in his lucid intervals, he often regretted it, having been necessary to shave him in his madness. He was modest and silent: his works speak his genius. Barry has done much justice to Varanes and Alexander : he is so happily formed to express that feeling of tenderness, that sensibility that runs through all Lee's Plays, and are the characteristics of his genius, that the mentioning one puts me in mind of the other. I am not singular in saying, that since Wilkes's days there never was so fine a lover upon the Stage ; and this is a cast, in which were Barry to confine himself he would remain always unrivalled. I shall mention him in one character, in which he almost equals Verbruggen. Nobody, acquainted with the history of the British Stage, need be told, that I mean Bajazet. It was there that Verbruggen, whose eye had an infinity of fire, and who had great command of face, acquired vast reputation. There was something so astonishing in his silent expression of the rage, pride, and impatience of Bajazet, when in chains, so intimidating, that his only putting on the same
look,

look, when one day he was in danger of being arrested under the piazzas, the bailiff was so frightened, that he dropped the writ, and ran away, as if a mob had been at his heels; at least Verbruggen told this story in Will's coffee-house, and said, that his Bajazet-look had killed a bailiff, and secured him his liberty. There are performers whom I have seen play this character; nay, and heard others praise, whose only merit consisted in growling, frowning, and rattling of chains. But Barry, through the whole, preserves a proper deportment; his dignity finely marks the character; and is happily intermixed with that fierceness, contempt, fullness, and savage temper, that should swell the bosom of this intractable monarch. There are few characters but what sit easy upon Barry; there is nothing labored in his deportment; and he often snatches from nature graces that cannot be too much admired.

Mr. Ryan has been long, and deservedly, a favourite of the town; but *being now sunk into the vale of years*, claims indulgence as much as he formerly did applause. From his long acquaintance on the Stage, he has acquired an
ease

ease and freedom equal to any performer I can ever remember. In some parts of Iago, he has great merit; and in Mr. Ford is very excellent: but I wish he would resign Capt. Plume, Myrtle, Marcus, Archer, &c. and other characters of that kind, which require the fire of youth to execute.

Mr. Ross is a good figure, and has an elegance on the Stage which must recommend him in genteel Comedy, in which cast he has lately given strong proofs of his genius, especially in Sir Charles Easy, Constant, Frankly, and Dorimant. His Bevil is superior to any I have seen in that character; and I believe comes nearer the author's intention. He has succeeded in some characters in Tragedy, especially the Lovers; but his fort is genteel Comedy, in which he is equal to any Performer on the Stage.

Mr. Shuter's performance in the comic way is nearer to nature than most of the Comedians on our Stage. His chief excellence lies in old men. The setness and risible turn of his features diffuse a peculiar humour thro' all the parts he plays in low Comedy. He has

a fine vacancy of look, an inexpressible and inimitable simplicity in Master Stephen, which is finely contrasted by the blustering air of Bobadil. His Scrub has nothing forced in it: he makes every line of it tell, by his having strictly studied nature; and he is obliged to nothing of mimicry, but to real merit for the applause he gains in it. I would rather see him in the Puritan, in the Duke and no Duke, than in Trappolin. There is a part of the same nature in the Alchymist, in which I have seen him with great pleasure; the formality, the hypocrisy, and self-interestedness of the part, he preserves with all proper force, and is exceedingly just, and exceedingly laughable. His Launcelot, Cimberton, and Young Clincher, are equal to our warmest wishes. He is but young Falstaff; yet I think he plays it better than any man now on the Stage. However, in the first part of Henry the Fourth, I would rather see him play Francis; and his genius would make of Justice Shallow in the second part almost as much as old Cibber, whom nobody has yet come near in that character. Though he is far from being a bad Ben, in Love for Love, yet I own I prefer his Foresight. Nature has done a great deal for this

Actor ; education very little ; yet the goodness of his head is such, that he is daily advancing towards perfection, and doubt not of seeing him one day equally esteemed with the celebrated Pinkethman.

Mr. Sparks is an Actor of merit, and shews the strength of his judgment in chusing Acasto, Sciolto, and parts of that cast in Tragedy, which are well adapted to his years and manner. He stands well in Manly, in the Provoked Husband ; and in the part of the Old Batchelor. He requires something of agitated passion in Tragedy, and of importance in Comedy to keep him up ; but the former he sometimes overdoes ; the latter he permits to degenerate into a strut, and an affectation of Quin's voice ; otherwise he may be justly allowed pre-eminent in his walk.

Mr. Smith's figure is very pleasing ; and his performance very tolerable : his voice is agreeable, but he wants variety, and speaks always in the same tone.

Mr. Dyer is a pleasing Actor, and claims applause in several characters in Comedy.
He

He shines most in Dick in the Confederacy, Modely, Count Basset, &c. in some scenes of Clodio, and Tom in the Conscious Lovers; nor does he want merit in Macheath; but has not weight sufficient for Chamon, or Romeo, &c. These characters, besides a critical judgment, require expressive features, and a marking eye, which he wants. Would he keep to Comedy alone, he would shew his genius to greater advantage.

It would be unpardonable negligence not to mention Mr. Arthur's great excellence in the clowns in pantomimery; but I cannot help saying, that when he speaks, I forget all his merits.

Mrs. Bellamy has all the softness of her sex, and that sweet sensibility which gives the most affecting pathos to the tender parts in Tragedy. Monimia, Juliet, and Cordelia, as she represents them, have every thing that is engaging in beauty or innocence; and there her performance is the more pleasing as it seems to be dictated by nature alone. Parts of violence are too strong for her powers; and her voice and look must lose their effect in painting

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ing the rage of Alicia, Hermione, or Zara. But in those of love, and tender distress, she is second only to Mrs. Cibber.

Mrs. Hamilton, formerly Mrs. Bland, appears in a very elevated light in *Queen Elizabeth*; the dignity and spirit of which she really supports very properly. Her *Charlotte*, in the *Lady's Philosophy*, is not without its admirers; but I must be free enough to tell her, that *Lady Wrangle* would now sit upon her with more ease. She has vivacity in *Elvira* in the *Spanish Friar*; and I should think it a high entertainment to see her perform in it along with *Quin*; who, in the *Friar*, was inimitable; and I dare say equalled *Tony Leigh*, whose picture in the character, by *Kneller*, was the *Earl of Dorset's* favorite, and to whose talents *Dryden* used to say, the piece owed much of its success.

C H A P.

C H A P. IV.

A short history of the Irish Theatre; and an account of the principal Performers.

THOSE who are versed in the Irish language will tell you, that it is extremely musical, and admits of variety of poetical modulations. This we are certain of, that every noble family had its bard and its jester; from which they derived either serious or ludicrous entertainments, according to their disposition of mind. Yet, tho' there are many good poems extant in that language, we have not been able to find any that are dramatic: nor, with our utmost enquiry, do we learn what was their taste for theatrical entertainments; till the latter end of the reign of the illustrious Queen Elizabeth, and the beginning of James the First; at which æra Shakespear's writings were in as high a degree of estimation in Dublin as in London. There being no regular Theatre, it was customary for the nobility to have Plays occasionally exhibited at their own houses; some of them were also performed in the ball-room of the castle of Dublin by the nobility, &c.

The first Theatre that was built in Dublin was in St. Werburgh's-street, about the year 1634, by Mr. Ogilby, who was at that time deputy-master of the revels of both kingdoms. I have been informed it had a gallery and pit, but no boxes, except one on the Stage for the then Lord Deputy, the Earl of Strafford, who was Ogilby's patron. The names of the Actors who performed in this Theatre, I could never learn; but they had good success, particularly in 1638, with a new Play, called *The Royal Master*, wrote by Shirley, an intimate friend of the Manager's*. This Play was acted several times at the castle by the nobility and gentry. It is dedicated to the Earl of Kildare; as was also a Play, called *Langartha*, written by Henry Burnell, Esq; and first acted on St. Patrick's day, in the year 1639; but the rebellion breaking out in 1645, the Theatre was shut up, and never afterwards opened. During the wars of that kingdom, Ogilby was reduced by various mis-

* Shirley is said to have been possessed of some sketches of Beaumont's and Fletcher's. This in a great measure solves the manifest inequality of his pieces. I have been told, that this intelligence came from Dryden.

fortunes, and returned to England, where he remained till the year 1662; when his friends obtained him a renewal of a patent from his majesty for master of the revels in Ireland. On his return to that kingdom, he was very well received; and several of the nobility subscribed towards building a new Theatre in Smock-alley, of which he was master. It is said to have cost upwards of 2000 *l.* But his success not answering his expectations, he continued there but a short time, and returned to London, where he died in 1676. •

Joseph Ashbury, Esq; had been appointed deputy-master of the revels under Mr. Ogilby, and superintended that Theatre till 1675, when a part of it fell down, and killed and wounded several of the audience. It is uncertain whether any Plays were performed there again, till after the Revolution; and the first Play we then read of was Othello, presented by some gentlemen for their amusement; for now there was no regular company in Dublin. Mr. Ashbury, who was the only Actor by profession among them, performed Iago, and the celebrated Mr. Wilkes, Othello, which was his first attempt; and the applause

he received at that time induced him to quit a very valuable employment, of which he was in possession, and ever after to attach himself to the Stage. About half a year after, Mr. Ashbury formed a regular company, which was greatly encouraged; and those celebrated performers, Wilkes, Booth, Estcourt, Keen, Norris, Griffith, and T. Elrington, occasionally appeared among them. This manager had great skill in dramatic affairs, was an excellent performer, and many of the first rate players were formed by him. The principal actresses in this company were Mrs. Ashbury, a very amiable person, and of great merit in several characters, Mrs. Knightly, Mrs. Smith, and the celebrated Mrs. Butler, a great favorite of Charles the Second's, and one of the most eminent Comedians of her time. For her character, see C. Cibber's Life, page 121, vol. 1, 12mo.

This Theatre, under his prudent management, flourished from the time of the Revolution to his death in 1720, without interruption; except that in the year 1701, on St. Stephen's day, the galleries gave way, and several were hurt in endeavouring to get out. This
was

was the first night that Shadwell's *Libertine* was performed in Dublin; and many ridiculous stories were told of this accident. Among the rest, that the candles burned blue, and went out; two or three times there was a dancer extraordinary among the devils on the Stage, that nobody knew him, and that he had a cloven foot, &c. &c. It was this gentleman to be sure that made free with the gallery; and several grave folks pronounced, with solemnity, that it was a judgment on the spectators for going to see so profane a piece of work. However, it was not performed again for near twenty years afterwards, when Mr. Ashbury was dead.

Mr. Thomas Elrington, who was his son-in-law, succeeded him in the management of this Theatre, which he continued to his death in 1732. He was an Actor of great merit, both in Tragedy and Comedy, chiefly in *Orestes*, *Bajazet*, and *Oroonoko*. In the year 1732, a booth was opened in George's-lane, under the direction of Madam Violante, an Italian rope dancer, where several feats of activity of that kind were performed; but not meeting with the success she expected, she

changed it into a play-house. Here it was that Mrs. Woffington made her first appearance in the character of Polly, in the Beggar's Opera. This lady has since stood in a capital light, both in Tragedy and Comedy, with a dignity in the former, and a polite deportment in the latter, that we despair of ever seeing equalled. Her Jocasta was noble and spirited; her Jane Shore tender and distressful; her Lady Townly easy and elegant; her Phillis humorous and affected: she had in her walk an ease, an air, and an understanding, for which we now search the Stage in vain. The Theatre being suppressed by the Lord Mayor, a very genteel one was built in Ransford-street, by permission of the Earl of Meath. Of this Mr. Husbands was manager. The Theatre Royal in Aungier-street was opened in the year 1734, with the Recruiting Officer; but this being built more for show than real use, it was soon deserted; and on the 11th of December, 1735, the present one in Smock-alley was rebuilt by subscription, and opened with Love makes a Man.

The City-Theatre, in Capel-street, was opened afterwards, January 7, 1744-5, with
The

The Merchant of Venice; but the success here was not of long continuance; and it is now altogether neglected. A very elegant one is at present building for Mr. Barry in Crow-street, in that city, which will make the seventh that has been erected there since the year 1634; and is expected to surpass all the former in beauty and convenience.

These are the most material accounts worth recording of the Irish Stage, which has produced so many capital performers; the inhabitants of that kingdom having been always remarkable for their encouraging the polite arts, and more especially the Drama, of which they are good judges.

In 1711 Mr. Wilkes made a summer's excursion thither, and staid there three months; during which time he performed the character of Sir Harry Wildair for nineteen nights running at Smock-alley. In 1715 Jane Gray was performed seventeen nights successively; in the year 1727 the Beggar's Opera had a run of twenty-four nights. In 1735 Henry the Eighth was played twelve nights at Sun-gier-street; and the Royal Merchant about

seventeen in Ransford-street. The profits of a Play thirty years ago in Dublin were thought good, if they amounted to 50 *l.* Farquhar, who, in the year 1707, played Sir Harry Wildair for his own benefit, received 100 *l.* and though the part was of his own writing, his friends blushed to see him act it: however, he thought himself well paid, because his benefit far exceeded any thing that had ever been known in that city.

C H A P. V.

Of the Performers on the Irish Stage.

THE first of the Irish performers is Mr. Sheridan, a gentleman of a collegiate education, who was intended originally for the church; but fortune ordained that he should raise contributions on the world in another character, and brought him on the Stage. He soon found the Buskin preferable to the master's gown, and one night's benefit better than the annual income of a good vicarage. He set out with many disadvantages; some of which he conquered by perseverance and resolution. He found the Dublin Stage at the lowest ebb, without any
spirit

spirit in the people to support it, or taste in the Managers to raise it. He took the burthen upon himself, to which he soon shewed he was well adapted. He solicited his friends to stand by him; they thought him worthy of it, and they did. He was particularly obliged to the gentlemen of the college in which he was bred, though he afterwards quarrelled with them. He cleared the Stage entirely of those *popinjays*, those gilded butterflies, who used to stop up the entrances, and shew themselves, their folly, and fine cloaths, plainer than the performers; a proceeding in which he was opposed by much want of manners, insolence of wealth, and wildness of youth. By such means he made his stage very regular; his decorations were in general proper, his cloaths elegant and in character, nor was his scenery and paintings bad. As a Manager it is allowed, even by his worst enemies, that he is excellent; that he has some humour, appears in his Farce of the brave Irishman; and his Essay upon Education is regarded as a proof of his learning and skill in school-discipline. When we come to consider him as an Actor, we find, with regret, we cannot say as much in his favor. Nature has not been very liberal

liberal to him in those practical gifts which are generally first regarded in that character. His voice is unequal, harsh, and discordant, and not sufficiently powerful to express the tender and pathetic of Tragedy, the delicate sensibility of Romeo, the fine tenderness of Anthony, or the workings of the relenting undone Varanes. Here, however just he may be in speaking, and in this his judgment never fails, yet his looks and action are unequal. However he may feel himself, he cannot convey it to his auditors: and old Cibber, in his Apology, justly remarks, “ That
 “ though the sentiments of a declaimer may
 “ be accompanied with all the sublimity that
 “ poetry can raise them to; let them be de-
 “ livered too with the utmost grace and dig-
 “ nity of elocution that can recommend them
 “ to the auditor, yet this is but one light
 “ wherein the excellence of an Actor can
 “ shine;” and this may, in the course of his playing, be often applied to Sheridan. I remember to have seen him play Romeo, altered by himself, in which he took Mercutio’s fine speech of,

Oh! then I see Queen Mab has been with you.

very

very unseasonably out of his mouth, and recited it with all the melancholy solemnity of a sermon. I am sure he must have seen the impropriety of making Romeo speak a speech which was intended for the gay Mercutio to divert his own gloom : but perhaps he had no performer then in his company whom he could entrust with the speech ; and things considered in this, but in no other light, his performing the part of Romeo may be pardoned.

I doubt not but I shall see him in Friar Laurence, in which he would convey to us more pleasure than we ever experienced even in one speech ; nor is such a character beneath his notice. Betterton, Wilkes, Booth, and Cibber, have done some of as little consequence ; and Garrick at this day is in the same disposition. I have honored his judgment when I have seen him resign Anthony, and fall into Ventidius. The rough old soldier sat well on him ; and were he to give us Kent instead of Lear, we should praise him still more. Mr. Sheridan's genius tends to declamation, and speaking that has weight in it ; but here his figure is none of the best. By a view of it,

one

one would think nature intended him for Comedy; but his attempt shews us we are deceived. His action is solemn, stiff, and confined, entirely void of that elegance and ease which is requisite in a Lord Townly, a Dorimant, or a Sir Charles Easy; nor can he assume the sprightly *degagée* air of an Archer, a Ranger, or a Benedict; but he makes up for these deficiencies in his Tamerlane, his Cato, and his Brutus: the orations of the last were never better spoken. I remember to have seen him support the loss of Marcus in the former with all the resignation and patriot deportment that the circumstance enjoins. Hamlet is allowed to be his master-piece: it is a character into the spirit of which he enters; nor has he less merit in Horatio in the Fair Penitent; and he receives as much applause in replying to Lothario's appointing a place of duel,

I'll meet thee there,

as ever I heard. He deserved it for that look of contempt he put on; the negligence with which he heard him were fine contrasts to the warmth which he had manifested in the cause of virtue and his friend. There are some parts of Macbeth and Richard the Third in which he has merit. He went through *Œdipus*

pus happily. He possessed the transitions of the character, and particularly in the scene with Phorbas ; his words, his action, and his look strongly indicated the passions that raged and ruled by turns in the bosom of the unhappy prince.

I have heard his Falstaff much condemned, perhaps not with injustice : he wants that festivity, that joy, which nature must have given an Actor who fills up this character, otherwise it will lose its effects. Here old Quin was capital, and will perhaps remain for years unequalled. He was certainly Falstaff in perfection ; and in his playing it, he only shewed a copy of himself in his gayer hours. We shall conclude this character with observing, that in level-speaking Sheridan is always just ; that he is sometimes happy in conveying horror and terror ; and when he remains at home, he will, and must be always allowed excellence ; but if he wanders into the walks of tenderness and genteelity, he exhibits defects that counterbalance all his perfections.

Mr. Dexter has a genteel figure, agreeable voice, an easy carriage, and good sense. He
has

has acquitted himself with applause in several parts of genteel Comedy ; and some of those he has attempted in Tragedy have been equally deserving of it.

Mr. King, a sprightly and useful Comedian, in some parts reminds us of Woodward. He has not as yet attained elegance sufficient for the Foppingtons, or Fine Gentlemen : however, there are several characters which hit his humour and genius ; among which are Sir Joseph Wittol, Tom in the Conscious Lovers, Brags, Scrub, the Lying Valet, Pedlar in Florizel and Perdita, &c. in all which his performance must ever appear pleasing.

Mr. J. Sparks is not only a useful but a very diverting Comedian : that pleasantry of temper which is habitual to him will not admit him to give a false colouring to any humorous character. In the hearty Old Men of Comedy he has great merit, particularly in Sir Sampson Legend. His Foigard is nearer to nature than any other performer's ; but his Teague in the Committee has not the vivacity of Barrington's. In Foigard he is very expressive of that ridiculous gravity which is
the

the result of pedantry and ignorance. He perfectly well supports all the oddity, wildness, and extravagance of Caliban. His Peachum and Serjeant Kite are humorous draughts of nature; and his merit lies in low Comedy.

Mrs. Fitz-Henry, on her first appearance, promised to arrive at excellence in a short time; but her improvements are slower than were then expected. There is a cast of parts suitable to her genius, and wherein she has merit; such as Hermione, Zara, &c. In Calista she supports the violence of her rage, where she tears the letter with great spirit; but afterwards fails in the distresses; and indeed in all characters of the tender or plaintive kind. Her action is too violent; and both that and her voice want that delicacy and tenderness which speaks to the heart. She does not promise to excel in Comedy, wanting an ease and genteelity which in polite characters is absolutely requisite. Would she modulate her voice, and regulate her action, it would add greatly to her excellence in Tragedy.

Before

Before I dismiss this account of the Irish Theatre, I must not omit Mr. Sowdon, who, during the two years that he was Manager of it, conducted it with great regularity. Considered as an Actor he has merit in several characters; and I believe his performance of Henry the Eighth to be as true a likeness of that monarch as Shakespear or history could draw him. I have seen him also judiciously pleasing in Pyrrhus, Ventidius, Old Batchelor, and Strictland; and he must be always considered as a performer of consequence in the theatrical world.

C H A P. VI.

Of the Usefulness of the Stage.

AMIDST all the fashionable amusements which have prevailed of late years in opposition to the Drama, the encouragement it still meets with is a convincing proof, that virtue, good sense, and taste, are yet to be found among us. As it has its foundation in reason, it will always find patrons of that character to improve and recommend it; and must at length prevail over those trifling amusements which have no connection

nection with either, and are calculated for such weak and vitiated appetites as cannot relish the exalted entertainments to which the Stage invites.

A just and refined taste in the public will have its due influence on the Stage. Was this more universal, the manager and actor would more strictly conform to it; and neither would introduce, or perform, what would not stand the test of truth and reason; and such as the audience is, such will always be the actor.

To have the springs of nature open to the soul, and to have the manners of mankind truly delineated, is the intent of the Drama. This cannot be effected, unless the audience will readily concur with the manager in promoting such theatrical pieces as will not only entertain the fancy, but mend the morals, and in discouraging those contemptible entertainments which, having nothing else but novelty and shew to recommend them, are too much the admiration of the gaping majority, till the lively lessons of moral instruction and example given by the Stage have influenced our understandings, and formed our manners

to a similarity of thinking and acting; or, in other words, till we think and act like rational creatures.

The Drama, considered in this light, will be found to be of national advantage, and claim all possible indulgence and encouragement from the public. When this is the case, we, like our forefathers, shall be charmed with the tender touches of nature in Shakspear and Otway, the wit of Jonson, and the sprightly ease and genteelity of Fletcher; and, from the whole, derive both pleasure and improvement.

Though some are apt to complain of the expences of our theatrical entertainments, yet on comparison how insignificant are they, compared to those of our Italian Operas? Sorry I am to say, that I have known an Italian singer to have been paid more than double the sum in a season which our best performer has received. Is not this a preposterous preference of sense to sound, and unmeaning shew to nature and passion? To descend lower, have we not known the Stage to have been debased by wire-dancers, fire-eaters, ring-
ing

ing of hand-bells, men playing on broomsticks, and tumblers climbing of ladders ?

*Old Shakespear's days could not thus far advance ;
For what's his Buskin to our ladder-dance ?*

STEELE.

Such diversions were the reproach of common sense ; and were better adapted to the taste of the rude rabble at Bartholomew Fair, than a polite English audience.

Among the various frequenters of the Theatre, and even some who are its professed admirers, there are yet but few who can be selected as real judges, and have formed their taste on that true idea of perfection which is founded in nature. Most borrow their judgment and ideas from others, perhaps as ignorant and tasteless as themselves, whose censure or applause is only dictated by whim and caprice, and to be regarded accordingly. Some of these fashionable and pretendedly polite gentlemen have I seen, who had such savage hearts, or weak heads, that they have sat with the most inelegant indolence and unsentimental feeling at the most affecting passages of the best of poets, represented in all their

beauty by the best of Actors ; or, if they felt any tender natural emotion, they were ashamed to disclose what would have been their highest glory, that they were * men, and not strangers to the distresses of humanity.

It was politely said of one of the greatest Generals † of his age, who was observed to be tenderly affected at the distress of Indiana, That he would fight ne'er the worse for all that ; and indeed he who could be so moved with an imaginary scene of private distress, discovered as true a greatness of soul as the warmest patriot does in the defence of his country.

I recollect an instance not unlike this, which happened once in a celebrated theatre. When Orestes had wrought himself up to the highest pitch of rage and phrenzy, one of the spectators caught the magical infection, and for a long time after did not recover his usual way of thinking. If this man had not the strongest understanding, he had at least the

* Homo sum, et nil humani a me alienum puto.

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† Duke of Marlborough.

most

most feeling heart. Such are the effects of a well wrote, or well acted scene, on minds actuated by nature alone.

This tender sensibility in the fair sex adds a double lustre to their charms ; and to see them shedding tears only at imaginary woe, heightens every beauty into a perfection of the most amiable kind, which at once attracts our veneration and love.

There is another species of unfeeling admirers of the Drama, who barter all solid sense and reason of our own growth for a silly, stupid admiration of foreign productions ; who fancy that they see more regular and correct beauties in the cold and studied productions of foreigners, than in all the unfettered flights of our unrivalled British muse. The real fire which animates our dramatic genius is too warm and too bright for their nearer view or examination ; and whilst our Stage boasts of authors which Greece or Rome might envy, the limited starved regularity of Corneille, Racine, and Moliere, is preferred by these wiflings to that real language of nature which

our poets dictate, and to which our Actors give voice, motion, and action.

The feebleness of that language which we so much admire sinks under the weight of a bold and free sentiment. The tyranny and superstition of their government have infested their language with all that froth and slavish complaisance which we so heartily reject and despise as much in their Drama as in common conversation.

A truly poetical spirit is a spirit of liberty, which is the blessing of our nation and constitution. Should a poet of theirs by great chance hit upon a sentiment of the kind, it must be suppressed in silence, for fear of the resentment of the Grand Monarque, and punishment of his Bastile. I have often thought, and am not alone in my opinion, that if our admired poet was translated into their effeminate dialect, he would suffer considerably under their perpetual returns of languid rhyme, which would let all the spirit of his heaven-born genius evaporate, and only leave a *caput mortuum* of dead imitation behind. This will appear plainly to those who will take pains to

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compare the French translations of the Fair Penitent and Venice Preserved with the originals, in which the greatest beauties of both are omitted. By the way, let it be observed, that one of Shakespear's most envious defamers owes the chief part of his dramatic reputation to his numerous, but unacknowledged, plagiaries from this our great Ornament and Master of the Drama.

And I would remark in the last place, that as nature is always the same, though at different times she may wear different aspects; and as the first Dramatic Genius drew her as he found her, I see no reason why our Shakespear may not have as good a right to vary from, or reject, the antient model, by drawing from something more grand and august than had been before discovered. And I might add further, that as the Stagyrice drew his rules from a model or example ready drawn to his hands, I do not see for what reason they should be imposed as a perpetual rule or obligation for any future poet to observe, who had genius to strike out new beauties and graces of his own superior to, and undiscovered by all former rules of art; which might serve

as a standard and example for future poets and critics to follow.

Severe is the fate of the author and actor who is obliged to submit to such superficial inspectors. When an author has lavished away the whole strength and richness of his genius in producing a work worthy of the public attention, and has embarked all his hopes of future fame and advantage on the attempt; when the actor too has endeavored to give the utmost grace to every idea, very often they are dismissed without a hearing; or, if heard, with disregard and contempt: the fair edifice is blasted by envy, malevolence, or ignorance, and the author and his performance consigned to perpetual obscurity. To judge of the language, sentiment, &c. of a new Play on seeing it once only, requires a degree of discernment, which very few are master of, though all pretend to be judges. Mr. Congreve* justly observes,

* It may be a matter of curiosity to inform the public, tho' it is not immediately pertinent to our subject, what this gentleman (who was so good a judge of true humour) esteemed as the most diverting Comedy in the English tongue; and that was the Northern Lass, wrote by
Broome.

observes, that “ Many come to a play so over-
 “ charged with criticism, that they very often
 “ let fly their censure, when through their
 “ rashness they have mistaken their aim.”
 One would think that the bare attempt to
 please, though unsuccessful, has yet merit
 enough in it to demand a candid reception and
 fair hearing.

The case is the same with respect to the
 young actor, though it is allowed that his art

Broome. I have it from unquestionable authority, that
 he has often declared to his friends, he would rather be
 the author of that piece than of all he ever wrote; and
 had never missed seeing it for twenty years. Mr. Addi-
 son was of the same opinion. What the motive of their
 approbation was, I shall not determine; but perhaps the
 good performance of it was one. In the year 1711, the
 cast of the parts were thus:

Northern Lads, Mrs. Bicknell; Sir Philip Luckless,
 Mr. Wilkes; Tridewell, Mr. Mills; Sir Paul Squelch,
 Mr. Johnson; Bullfinch, Mr. Estcourt; Widgin, Mr.
 Bullock; Captain Anvil, Mr. Spillar; Nonsense, Mr.
 Norris; Howdee, Mr. Cibber; Beavis, Mr. Bickerstaff;
 Pate, Mr. Bullock, jun. Widow, Mrs. Knight. The
 Spectator, 468, gives a high encomium of Estcourt's
 performance of Bullfinch. This was formerly a stock-
 play; but has been neglected for some years.

is one of the most difficult of any ; that few are capable of softening the soul with the tender touches of woe, of charming the heart with the harmony of nature, and calling those passions into action which before slept in the soul ; and as, to accomplish all this requires such uncommon powers, such an actor is intitled to all the patronage and encouragement the public is capable of bestowing.

: And it is to be lamented, that such a station, which requires to be filled up with such extraordinary talents, should be held in such disrepute by some, or be subject to the supercilious remarks of those nominal critics, who without the least knowledge of the Drama, and sometimes so destitute even of common literature, without an acquaintance with life, and its manners, and altogether strangers to the delicate sensations of the human heart, yet assume a right to judge of the merits or demerits of a performer, whose merits are perhaps as much beyond their comprehension as their blemishes are remote from their discernment.

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To be a judicious critic of an actor's performance requires almost as much judgment as to be an actor. Their difference is only this; that the one has formed his judgment and idea of perfection on a comparison of those different characters and objects which have come within his observation: the other is obliged, by severe study and application, to inform himself of every thing which will give the appearance of truth and reality to his performance, and to reduce all his theory into practice.

Every dawning of merit in a young actor should be kindly nourished by the audience with its due proportion of applause, till it has attained perfection. Young blossoms bloom into maturity under a warm sun; cold winds destroy them; and envy, prejudice, and ignorance have damped the fire of many a promising genius.

I have often observed in the first appearance of a divine, or orator, fear has got the better of his abilities. The case is the same with the player. An absolute perfection should not therefore be expected at first: the best

performers are still conscious that they fall short of it, and cannot act up to their own ideas. There should be kind allowances made by all audiences for the involuntary failings of young, nay indeed of old actors. A variety of causes, most of them unknown, and what the audience have no concern with, may occasion an actor to perform unlike himself on some occasions; and when he has done his utmost, when his duty calls to divest himself of all connection with common life, and forget even his own being to assume a contrary character, it would be cruel to condemn him all at once, and to deprive him of all future reputation and advantage for a few unintended slips.

I know but of one case where an actor is inexcusable; and that is where he is deficient in point of memory. Because this, as has been formerly remarked, is the highest indignity that can be offered to his auditors; but as this negligence is commonly treated with the contempt it deserves, it does not need any further remark.

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On the other hand, many a promising actor has been spoiled by the ill-timed, injudicious applause of an ignorant audience ; as a certain writer has observed, “ it is more difficult to praise than to blame ; because it is easier to discover in people what may be turned into ridicule than to understand their merit.” This has increased their self-sufficiency and arrogance, and made them greater in their own eyes than in the public’s ever after. Several examples of this kind might be given, were it necessary.

It is not a little mortifying to some of our best actors to have their merits disputed, and their predecessors preferred before them, as if human nature was not the same in all ages, and could not be as well represented now as by an actor who flourished fifty years ago. This partial way of judging arises chiefly from the ideas formed in youth, which as they are the first, make the most lasting impression ; and those persons and objects which at first delighted us are always dearest to our recollection. By these ideas their standard of taste and perfection is fixed ; and ever after whatever varies from it, however excellent in its

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kind, is either condemned, or but coolly approved of. Thus the fame of an actor, like that of a poet or painter, increases with time, his beauties still bloom in recollection, and his faults, like those of Homer or Shakespear, are too remote for candor to enumerate. When Booth flourished, Mr. Betterton was remembered with regret, as Hart had been before; and notwithstanding all their respective excellencies, there are some of opinion, that were it possible to see them in competition with our modern Roscius, the scale of merit would greatly turn in his favour, nature being now more than ever the standard of taste and perfection in the Drama.

Of all stations that of a Manager seems to be the most difficult, to fill with satisfaction to the public, to the persons under his direction, and to himself. Often it happens, that when he has done his utmost to serve the public in preparing an entertainment to their taste, and adapting it to the different geniusses of his performers, his most sanguine hopes are frustrated by the inconsiderate behaviour of some, who, void of all manners and decorum, and out of a particular pique to
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some poor author, or actor, or for some other trifle of that nature, disturb the public entertainment, and turn the Theatre, which is, or ought to be the School of Manners, into a Bear-garden. Such nuisances of society have often met with the treatment they deserved; and it is a pity they ever escaped it.

The Manager, considered in his proper light, is the trustee or conductor of the most rational amusements of the public. If all who are fond of the Drama, and who are desirous of seeing order and decency preserved in it, will protect him in his station, and concur with him in promoting such entertainments as are worthy of it; then may we expect to see the Stage a real School of Virtue, extending its instruction and usefulness every where. The reformation will become general; virtue and good sense will become fashionable; and, if the player exemplifies the Scene in his moral conduct, he will be always esteemed as an honourable and useful member of society.

F I N I S,