SAMUEL ARNOLD

THE MIRROR OF TASTE, AND DRAMATIC CENSOR

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HISTORY OF THE STAGE

CHAPTER II

rise and progress of the drama in greece – origin of tragedy – thespis – æschylus, "the father of the tragic art" – his astonishing talents – his death

It has been already remarked that at a very early period, considerably more than three thousand years ago, the Chinese and other nations in the east understood the rudiments of the dramatic art. In their crude, anomalous representations they introduced conjurers, slight of hand men and rope dancers, with dogs, birds, monkies, snakes and even mice which were trained to dance, and in their dancing to perform evolutions descriptive of mathematical and astronomical figures. To this day the vestiges of those heterogeneous amusements are discernible all over Indostan: but that which will be regarded by many with surprise, is that in all countries pagan or christian the drama in its origin, with the dancings and spectacles attending it have been intermixed with divine worship. The Bramins danced before their god Vishnou, and still hold it as an article of faith that

Vishnou had himself, “in the olden time” danced on the head of a huge serpent whose tail encompassed the world. That very dance which we call a minuet, has been proved by an ingenious Frenchman, to be the same dance originally performed by the priests in the temple of Apollo, and constructed by them, to be symbolical of the zodiac; every figure described by the heavenly bodies having a correspondent movement in the minuet: the diagonal line and the two parallels representing the zodiac generally, the twelve steps of which it is composed, representing the twelve signs, and the twelve months of the year, and the bow at the beginning and the end of it a profound obedience to the sun. About the year four hundred after the building of the city of Rome, the Romans, then smarting under great public calamity, in order to appease the anger of heaven, instituted theatrical performances, as feasts in honour of their gods. The first Spanish plays were founded, sometimes on the loves of shepherds, but much more frequently on points of theology, such as the birth of Christ, the passion, the temptation in the desert and the martyrdom of saints. The most celebrated dramatic poet of Portugal, Balthazar, wrote dramas which he called Autos chiefly on pious subjects – and the prelate Trissino, the pope’s nuncio, wrote the first regular tragedy, while cardinal Bibiena is said to be the author of the first comedy known in Italy, after the barbarous ages. The French stage began with the representation of Mystries, by the priests, who acted sacred history on a stage, and personated divine characters. The first

they performed was the history of the death of our Saviour, from which circumstance the company who acted, gave themselves the name of the confraternity of the passion: and in England one single paper which remains on record, proves that the clergy were the first dramatists. This paper is a petition of the clerks or clergy of St. Paul's to king Richard the Second, and dated in 1378 which prayed his majesty to prohibit a company of *unexpert* people from representing the history of the Old Testament, to the great prejudice of the said clergy, who had been at great charge and expense to represent the same at christmas.

It would be little to the purpose, to dwell longer on that part of the history of the drama, which lies back in the darkness of remote antiquity. Having shown that it did exist, in some shape or other, of which but very imperfect traces remain, and of course very inadequate notions can be collected, all further inquiry backward would be but the loss of so much time and trouble. The scope of human knowledge is extended at too heavy a price when the industry which might be more usefully applied, is exercised in hunting down origins into the obscurity of times so extremely distant. Where the greatest pains have been lavished on that sort of research, little knowledge has been gained; and the most diligent inquirers have been compelled either to confess that they were baffled, or rather than own their disappointment, to substitute fable for fact, and pass the fictions of imagination for historical truths.

It is in the records of Greece the dramatic art first presents

itself in the consistent shape and with the circumstantial detail of authentic history. There, plays were first moulded into regular form, and divided into acts. Yet the people of that country knew so little of its having previously existed in any shape, in any other country, that the different states contested with each other, the honour of having invented it; each asserting its claim with a warmth that demonstrates the high sense they entertained of its importance: and surely what such a people highly valued is entitled to the respect of all other nations. Of the drama, therefore, it might perhaps be enough to say that it was nursed in the same cradle with Eloquence, Philosophy, and Freedom, and that it was so favourite a child of their common parents, that they contended, each for an exclusive right to it. The credit of having first given simplicity, rational form, and consequent interest to theatrical representations has, by the universal concurrence of the learned, been awarded to Attica, whose genius and munificence erected to the drama that vast monument the temple of Bacchus, the ruins of which are yet discernible and admired by all travellers of taste and erudition.

The origin of tragedy is a subject of curious contemplation. A rich planter of Attica, finding, one day, a goat devouring his grapes, killed it, and invited the peasantry to come and feast upon it. He gave them abundance of wine to drink, intoxicated with which they daubed their faces with the lees, ornamented their heads with chaplets made of the vine branches, and then danced, singing songs in chorus to Bacchus all the while round the animal

destined for their banquet. A feast so very agreeable was not likely to go unrepeated; and it was soon reduced to a custom which was pretty generally observed in Attica, during the vintage. On those occasions the peasants, absolved from all reserve by intoxication, gave a loose to their animosities against the opulent, and in token of defiance of their supposed oppressors, went in bodies to their houses, and in set terms of abuse and sarcasm, called aloud for redress of their grievances. The novelty of the exhibition drew a multitude round them who enjoyed it as a new species of entertainment. Far from preventing it, the magistrates authorized the proceeding in order that it might serve as an admonition to the rich; taking special care, however, that no positive violence should be resorted to, and thus making it a wholesome preventive of public disorder. To this yearly festival which was called "the feast of the goat" the people of all parts were invited; and as this extraordinary spectacle was performed in a field near the temple of Bacchus, it was gradually introduced into the worship of that god. Hymns to the deity were sung both by priests and people in chorus while the goat was sacrificing, and to these hymns the name was given of *Tragodia* (tragedy) or "the song of the goat."

During these exhibitions the vintagers, intoxicated with wine and joy, revenged themselves not only on the rich by publishing and satirizing their injustice, but on each other with ridicule and sarcasm. In their other religious festivals also, choruses of fauns and bacchants chaunted songs and held up individuals to public

ridicule. From such an humble germe has sprung up an art which in all parts of the world has, for centuries, administered to the advancement of poetry and elegant literature, and to the delight and improvement of mankind.

To these performances succeeded pieces composed by men of poetical talents, in some of which the adventures of the gods were celebrated and in others the vices and absurdities of individuals were attacked with much asperity. The works of all those poets probably died with them; nor is there any reason to believe that the loss of them is to be regretted – they are mentioned here only because they form a link in the chain of this history. By them, such as they were, however, the influence of the drama was established so far that it was soon found necessary to regulate it by law; the players who entered into competition at the Pythian games being enjoined to represent successively the circumstances that had preceded, accompanied and followed the victory of Apollo over Python. Some years after this, came Susarion of Megara, the first inventor of comedy who appeared at the head of a company of actors attacking the vices of his time. This was 562 years before Christ, and in twenty-six years after, that is 536 before Christ, appeared Thespis.

Thespis has the credit of being the first inventor of regular tragedy. Disgusted with the nonsensical trash exhibited on the subject of Bacchus, and indignant, or pretending to be so, at the insult offered by such representations to that deity, he wrote pieces of a new kind, in which he introduced recitation,

leaving Bacchus entirely out, lashing the vices and follies of the times, and making use, for the first time, of fiction. Though his representations were very rustic and imperfect they still make the first great era in the history of the tragic art: and they must be allowed to have made no slight impression upon the public mind, when it is remembered that they called forth the opposition of Solon, the great lawgiver of Athens; who, on seeing the representations of Thespis, sternly observed, that if falsehood and fiction were tolerated on the stage they would soon find their way into every part of the republic. To this Thespis answered, that the fiction could not be harmful which every one knew to be fiction; that being avowed and understood, it lost its vicious character, and that if Solon's argument were true, the works of Homer deserved to be burned. Solon, however, exercised his authority upon the occasion, and interdicted Thespis not only from writing but from teaching the art of composing tragedies at Athens. Whether Thespis was supported by the people in contradiction to Solon, or whether he contrived to follow his business in some other part of Attica, out of the jurisdiction of that great man, is not known; but he certainly disregarded the interdict, and not only wrote tragedies, but instructed others in their composition. For Phrynicus, the tragic poet of Athens, (the first who introduced a female character on the stage) was his disciple.

In less than half a century after Thespis had, by his ingenuity, so improved the dramatic art as to form an era in its history,

arose the illustrious personage, whose further improvements and astonishing poetical talents justly obtained for him the high distinction of "The Father of Tragedy." Æschylus, in common with all the natives of Attica, was bred to arms. The same genius which, applied to poetry, placed him at the head of tragic writers, raised him in the field to a high rank among the greatest captains of antiquity. At the celebrated battles of Marathon, Salamis and Platæa he distinguished himself in a manner that would have rendered his name forever illustrious as a warrior, if the splendor of his martial fame were not lost in the blaze of his poetical glories. Descended from some of the highest Athenian blood, he was early placed under Pythagoras to learn philosophy, and at the age of twenty-one was a candidate for the prize in poetry. Thus illustrious as a philosopher, a warrior and a poet, it is no wonder that he was held in the highest respect and consideration by his countrymen. He wrote sixty-six, or, as some say, ninety tragedies, forty of which were rewarded with the public prize. Of all these, seven only have escaped the ravages of time, and descended to us perfect.

Thespis, who had gone before him, still left the Grecian stage in a state of great rudeness and imperfection, and, what was worse, in a condition of low buffoonery. Before Thespis tragedy consisted of no more than one person, who sung songs in honour of Bacchus. Thespis introduced a second performer; such was the state of the Grecian stage when Æschylus arose, and made an illustrious epoch in the history of the drama.

Before him the chorus was the principal part of the performance; but he reduced it to the state of an assistant, which was introduced between the acts to heighten the effect by recitation or singing, and by explaining the subject in its progression. He introduced another actor, which made his dramatis personæ three. He divided his pieces into acts, and laid the foundation of those principles of dramatic poesy upon which Aristotle afterwards built his rules. Thespis and his successors before Æschylus, acted from a cart in the streets: neither his actors nor himself were distinguished by any more than their ordinary dress. Æschylus built a theatre, embellished it with appropriate scenery, machinery, and decorations, and clothed his actors with dresses suitable to their several characters. This would have been effecting much if he had done nothing more; but to the theatre which he erected, he added plays worthy of being represented with the splendor of such preparations. Abandoning the monstrous extravagancies and uncouth buffoonery of his predecessors, he took Homer for his guide, and composed pieces which for boldness and terrible sublimity have never been surpassed. His fiery imagination, when once on the wing, soared beyond the reach of earth, and seemed to spurn probability, and to delight in gigantic images and tremendous prodigies. No poet ever had such talents for inspiring terror. When his tragedy of Eumenides was represented, many children died through fear, and several pregnant women actually miscarried in the house, and it is related of him that nothing could surpass the terrible

ferocity of his countenance while, under the inspiration of his sublime Muse, he composed his tragedies.

The mind of this very extraordinary man was comprehensive, energetic, vigorous, and fiery: of him may with equal truth be said what doctor Johnson has said of our Shakspeare:

> Existence saw him spurn her wide domain.

For his imagination, daring, wild, and disorderly, resorted to the agency of preternatural beings, and in one of his plays called up the dead, with a degree of skill which Shakspeare only has surpassed, and none but Shakspeare could at all equal. He selected his subjects from the highest regions of sublimity, and his morals, always excellent, are enforced by the most dreadful examples of divine vengeance. To sum up his character in a few words – Longinus, the prince of Critias, says of him that he had a noble boldness of expression, with an imagination lofty and heroic, and his claim to the sublime has never been contested. At the same time it must be owned that his style is, at least to modern readers, obscure, and that his works are considered the most difficult of all the Greek classics. The improvements he made in the drama seemed to his cotemporaries to bespeak an intelligence more than human; wherefore, to account for his wonderous works, they had recourse to fable, and related that the god Bacchus revealed himself to him personally, as he lay asleep under the shade of a vine, commanded him to write tragedy, and

inspired him with the means. This story is very gravely told by the historian Pausanias.

There is little doubt that Æschylus felt a gratification in putting down the monstrous rhapsodies to Bacchus and the other deities, with which the idolatrous priests of that day blindfolded and deceived the people; his plays having frequent cuts upon the gross superstition which then darkened the heathen world. For some expressions which were deemed impious he was condemned to die. Indeed christian scholars particularly mark a passage in one of his tragedies in which he palpably predicts, the downfall of Jupiter's authority, as if he had foreseen the dispersion of heathenism. The multitude were accordingly going to stone him to death when they were won over to mercy by the remonstrances and intreaties of his brother Amynias who had commanded a squadron of ships at the glorious battle of Salamis, and was regarded as one of the principal saviours of his country. This brave man reminded the people what they owed to his brother Æschylus for his valour at Marathon and at Platæa, and then of what they owed himself for his conduct at Salamis, in which bloody but glorious battle he had been chiefly supported by that brother whom they were now ungratefully going to put to death: – having said this, he threw aside his cloak and exposing his arm from which the hand had been cut off, "Behold," he cried – "behold this, and let it speak for my brother and myself!" The multitude relented, and were all at once clamorous in their applause and benediction of the two brothers. The highminded

Æschylus however was so incensed at the ingratitude of the mob and the slight they put upon him, that he retired into Sicily where he lost his life by a most singular accident. Having wandered into the fields, an eagle which had mounted into the air with a tortoise, for the purpose of dropping it upon a rock in order to break the shell, mistaking the bald head of Æschylus for a stone, let the animal fall upon it, and killed him on the spot. The Athenians gave him the honour of a pompous public funeral with orations, and all that could denote their respect for the hero, the philosopher, the poet, and the father of the tragic art – and succeeding tragedians made it a ceremony to perform plays at his tomb.

To complete the glories of this wonderful man, the ruins of the theatre he planned and erected, furnished the Romans with the model, upon which they afterwards raised those magnificent edifices which still are the objects of admiration and delight with the world, and of imitation with the scientific professors of architecture.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF MRS. WARREN

Mrs. Ann Warren, whose name has, for some years, stood so high in theatrical annals, was the daughter of Mr. John Brunton, who as an actor and a manager, maintained a respectable rank in Great Britain, while he remained upon the stage; and all his life has been considered a man of great worth, and an estimable gentleman. Having received a good classical education under the tuition of the reverend Mr. Wilton, prebendary of Bristol, Mr. Brunton was bound apprentice to a wholesale grocer in Norwich, and when his time was out, married a Miss Friend, the daughter of a respectable merchant of that city, soon after which he went to London, and entered into business, as a tea-dealer and grocer in Drury-Lane. Here he became acquainted with Mr. Joseph Younger, who was at the time prompter at Covent Garden theatre, and though no actor himself, knew stage business as well as any man in England. Mr. Younger, discerning in Mr. Brunton good talents for an actor, advised him to try the experiment, and gave him such strong assurances of success, that he agreed to make the attempt and actually made his first appearance in the character of Cyrus for his friendly adviser's benefit, sometime in the year 1774. His reception in this character was so very encouraging that he again came forward before the end of the season, and played the character of Hamlet for the benefit of

Mr. Kniveton. So completely did the event justify Mr. Younger's opinion, and evince his discernment that Mr. Brunton soon found it his interest to abandon commerce, and take entirely to the stage. At this time his eldest daughter, the subject of the present memoir, was little more than five years of age. Having settled his affairs in London, and sold off his stock in trade, Mr. Brunton returned to the city of Norwich in which he got an engagement, and met all the encouragement, he could hope for, being considered the best actor that had ever appeared on that stage. From this he was invited to Bath and Bristol, where he continued to perform for five years, and at the end of that time returned to the Norwich theatre of which he became manager. Mr. B.'s family had now become very numerous; he had six children, – a charge which in England would be thought to lean too heavy upon a very large estate – and yet with nothing more than the income which he derived from his professional industry, did this exemplary father tenderly rear and genteelly educate that family.

From the circumstances of her father's situation, and from her early accomplishments and success as an actress, it will be imagined by many, that Miss Brunton was early initiated in stage business; that she had seen every play acted, and had studied and imitated the many great models of her time, the Barrys, the Bellamys, the Yeates, and the Siddonses; that under a father so well qualified to instruct her, her talents were brought forth in the very bud, by constant exercise, and that while yet a child

she had learned to personate the heroine. What then will the reader's surprise be, when he is informed that she had seen very few plays; perhaps fewer than the general run of citizens' daughters – and that the stage was never even for an instant contemplated as a profession for her till a very short time before her actual appearance in public. The fact is, that Mr. Brunton's conduct through life was distinguished no less by prudence and discretion, than by a lofty regard to the honourable estimation of his family. While he himself drudged upon the stage and faced the public eye, his family, more dear to him, lived in the repose of retired life, and instead of fluttering round the scenes of gayety and dissipation, or haunting the theatre before or behind the curtain, Mrs. Brunton trained her children to domestic habits, and contented herself with qualifying her daughters to be like herself, good wives and mothers. Not in the city but in the country near Bath did Mr. Brunton live in an elegant cottage, where his little world inhaled the pure air of heaven, and grew up in innocence – Mrs. Brunton herself being their preceptress. Nothing was farther from his thoughts than that any of his daughters possessed requisites for the stage; they were all very young, even the eldest, our heroine, had but turned past fifteen, and, exclusive of her youth, had a lowness of stature and an exility of person, than which nothing could be farther from suggesting ideas of the heroine, or of tragic importance, when one day, by desire of her mother, she recited some select passages in her father's presence. He listened with mixed emotions of

astonishment and delight – a new train of thought shot across his mind; he put her over and over again to the trial, and at every repetition had additional motives to admire and to rejoice. Then, for the first time, was he aware of the mine which lay concealed in his family under modesty and reserve, and then, for the first time, he resolved that she should try her fate upon the stage, his fond heart prognosticating that *his* darling would, ere long, be the darling of the people. That she should possess such an affluence of endowment, without letting it earlier burst upon her father's sight, is evidence of a share of modesty and diffidence as rare as lovely, and well worthy imitation, if under the present *regime* the imitation of such virtues were practicable.

As this circumstance exhibits our heroine's private character in a most exalted and amiable view, so it demonstrates the native powers of her genius. Let it only be considered! – while she yet fell, by two months, short of sixteen years of age, or in other words while she had yet scarcely advanced a step from the date of childhood, without any previous stage practice, without the advantage of studying, in the performances of other actresses, what to do, or what to avoid, she comes forward, for the first time, in one of the most arduous characters in tragedy, and at one flight mounts to the first rank in her profession. It is a circumstance unexampled in the records of the stage, and would be incredible if not too universally known to be doubted.

Mr. Brunton immediately on discovering the treasure he possessed, resolved to bring it forth to public view. The time was

nearly at hand when he was to take his benefit, and he judiciously thought that there could not be a more happy way of introducing her with advantage than in the pious office of aiding him on that occasion – nor can the most lively imagination, conceive an object more interesting than a creature so young, so lovely, and so much wiser than her years standing forward to encounter the hazards and the terrors of that most trying situation in cheerful obedience to a father's will, and for a father's benefit. The selection of the character of Euphrasia for her, while he played the aged father, Evander, who is supposed to be sustained by the nourishment given from his daughter's bosom, was judicious, as it formed a coincidence of fact and fiction, which if it had been only moderately supported by her performance, could scarcely fail to excite in every bosom, in the house, the most lively and interesting sensations. Nothing that paternal affection, and good sense could dictate were wanting on the part of Mr. Brunton. Of the short time he had for instructing her, no part was lost. The appearance of Mr. Brunton's daughter in Euphrasia, with a prologue written for the occasion, was announced, and notwithstanding there were not wanting wretches mean and miserable enough to trumpet abroad her youth and smallness of stature, as insurmountable obstacles to her personating the Grecian daughter, more just ideas of her, or perhaps curiosity brought a full house. Mr. Brunton himself spoke the prologue, which was written for him by the ingenious Mr. Meyler, and was as follows:

Sweet Hope! for whom his anxious parent burns,
Lo! from his tour the travelled heir returns,
With each accomplishment that Europe knows,
With all that Learning on her son bestows;
With Roman wit and Grecian wisdom fraught,
His mind has every letter'd art been taught.
Now the fond father thinks his son of age,
To take an active part in life's vast stage;
And Britain's senate opes a ready door,
To fill the seat his sire had fill'd before,
There when some question of great moment springs,
He'll rise – then "hear him, hear him," loudly rings,
He speaks – th' enraptur'd list'ning through admire
His voice, his argument, his genius' fire!
The fond old man, in pure ecstatic joy,
Blesses the gods that gave him such a boy!
But if insipid Dulness guide his tongue,
With what sharp pangs his aged heart is wrung —
Despair, and shame, and sorrow make him rue
The hour he brought him to the public view.
And now what fears! what doubt, what joys I feel!
When my first hope attempts her first appeal,
Attempts an arduous task – Euphrasia's wo —
Her parent's nurse – or deals the deadly blow!
Some sparks of genius – if I right presage,
You'll find in this young novice of the stage:
Else had not I for all this earth affords
Led her thus early on these dangerous boards.

If your applause gives sanction to my aim,
And this night's effort promise future fame,
She shall proceed – but if some bar you find,
And that my fondness made my judgment blind,
Discern no voice, no feeling she possess,
Nor fire that can the passions well express;
Then, then forever, shall she quit this scene,
Be the plain housewife, not the tragic queen.

Such an appeal, delivered with all the powers of an excellent speaker, and enforced by the genuine and unfeigned feelings of a father's heart, told home – peals of applause gave assurance that her entrance was strewed with flowers, and that at least, her reception, would correspond with his fondest wishes.

The accounts that have been given by spectators of the events of that night are extremely interesting. Many, no doubt, went there with a prepossession, raised by the unfavourable reports of her personal appearance; and if lofty stature were indispensibly necessary to a heroine, no external appearance could be much less calculated to personify a Thalestris than Miss Brunton's – but the mighty mind soon made itself to be felt, and every idea of personal dimensions vanished. "The audience (says a British author) expected to see a mawkin, but saw a Cibber – the applause was proportionate to the surprise: every mouth emitted her praise, and she performed several parts in Bath and Bristol, a phenomenon in the theatrical hemisphere." Though the trepidation inseparable from such an effort diminished her

powers at first, the sweetness of her voice struck every ear like a charm: the applause that followed invigorated her spirits so far that in the reciprocation of a speech or two more, her fine clear articulation struck the audience with surprise, and when, more assured by their loud approbation, she came to the speech:

> "Melanthon, how I loved, the gods who saw
> "Each secret image that my fancy formed,
> "The gods can witness how I loved my Phocion,
> "And yet I went not with him. Could I do it?
> "Could I desert my father? – Could I leave
> "The venerable man, who gave me being,
> "A victim here in Syracuse, nor stay
> "To watch his fate, to visit his affliction,
> "To cheer his prison hours, and with the tear
> "Of filial virtue bid each bondage smile."

she seemed to pour forth her whole heart and soul in the words, and emitted such a blaze as filled the house with rapture and astonishment. In a word, no actress at the highest acmé of popularity ever received greater applause. Next day her performance was the topic of every circle in Bath. Horatia in the Roman Father, and Palmyra in Mahomet, augmented her reputation, and in less than a month the fame of this prodigy, for such she appeared to be, had reached every town and city of Great Britain and Ireland.

It was natural to imagine that such extraordinary powers

would not be long suffered to waste themselves upon the limited society of country towns. Mr. Harris, as soon as he received intelligence on which he could depend, upon the subject of Miss Brunton's talents, resolved to be himself an eye-witness of her performance, and set off to Bath with a view, if his judgment should concur with that of the public of that city, to offer her an engagement at Covent Garden. To see her was to decide; he resolved to have her if possible, and lost no time to make such overtures at once as could not well be refused. These included an engagement at a very handsome salary for her father; her own of course was liberal – when one considers how long Mrs. Siddons had appeared upon the stage before she got a firm footing on the London boards, one cannot but be astonished at the rise of this lady at one leap from the threshold to the top of her profession. It is worthy of observation that the real children of nature generally burst at once upon the view in excellence approaching to perfection; while the mere artists of the stage lag behind, labouring for years, before they attain the summit of their ambition; when their consummate art and their skill in concealing that art (ars celare artem) if they have it, entitles them at last to the highest praise. Mrs. Bellamy was one of those children of nature. Before she appeared, Quin decidedly gave judgment against her: yet the first night she performed he was so struck with her excellence, that, impatient to wipe away his injustice by a candid confession he emphatically exclaimed, "My child, the spirit is in thee." Garrick it is said never surpassed his first night's

performance: and the Othello of Barry's first appearance, and the Zanga of Mossop's never were equalled by any other actors, nor were ever surpassed even by themselves.

Such was the impression made by this phenomenon, even before she left the country for London, that the presses teemed with tributes to her extraordinary merit, in verse and prose. Learning poured forth it praise in deep and erudite criticism – Poetry lavished its sparkling encomium in sonnets, songs, odes, and congratulatory addresses, while the light retainers to literature filled the magazines and daily prints with anecdotes, paragraphs, bon-mots, and epigrams. In a word, there was for sometime no reading a newspaper, or opening a periodical publication without seeing some production or other addressed to Miss Brunton. From the number which appeared the following is deservedly selected, for the elegance of its Latin and the beauty of its thoughts:

AD BRUNTONAM

e granta exituram

Nostri præsidium et decus thartri;
O tu, Melpomene severioris
Certe filia! quam decere formæ

Donavit Cytherea; quam Minerva
Duxit per dubiæ vias juventæ,
Per plausus populi periculosus; —
Nec lapsam – precor, O nec in futuram
Lapsuram. Satis at Camœna dignis
Quæ te commemoret modis? Acerbos
Seu præferre Monimiæ dolores,
Frater cum vetitos (nefas!) ruebat
In fratris thalamos, parumque casto
Vexabat pede; sive Julietæ
Luctantes odio paterno amores
Maris: te sequuntur Horror,
Arrectusque comas Pavor. Vicissim
In fletum populus jubetur ire,
Et suspiria personant theatrum.

Mox divinior enitescis, altrix
Altoris vigil et parens parentis.
At non Græcia sola vindicavit
Paternæ columen decusque vitæ
Natam; restat item patri Britanno
Et par Euphrasiæ puella, quamque
Ad scenam pietas tulit paternam.

O Bruntona, cito exitura virgo,
Et visu cito subtrahenda nostro,
Breves deliciæ, dolorque longus!
Gressum siste parumper oro; teque
Virtutesque tuas lyra sonandas

Tradit Granta suis vicissim almunis.

The following very elegant poem, published as a version of this ode, is rather a paraphrase than a translation. What Gibbon said of Pope's Homer may with some truth be applied to it: "*It has every merit but that of resemblance to the original.*" Might not a version equally elegant, but adhering more closely to the original, and preserving more of its peculiar genius be found in America. We wish some of our readers who feel the inspiration of a happy Muse would make the experiment.

Maid of unboastful charms, whom white-rob'd Truth,
Right onward guiding through the maze of youth,
Forbade the Circe, Praise, to witch thy soul,
And dash'd to earth th' intoxicating bowl;
Thee, meek-eyed Pity, eloquently fair,
Clasp'd to her bosom, with a mother's care;
And, as she lov'd thy kindred form to trace,
The slow smile wander'd o'er her pallid face,
For never yet did mortal voice impart
Tones more congenial to the sadden'd heart;
Whether to rouse the sympathetic glow,
Thou pourest lone Monimia's tale of wo;
Or happy clothest, with funereal vest,
The bridal loves that wept in Juliet's breast.
O'er our chill limbs the thrilling terrors creep,
Th' entranc'd passions still their vigils keep;
Whilst the deep sighs, responsive to the song,

Sound through the silence of the trembling throng.
But purer raptures lighten'd from thy face,
And spread o'er all thy form a holier grace;
When from the daughter's breast the father drew
The life he gave, and mix'd the big tear's dew.
Nor was it thine th' heroic strain to roll,
With mimic feelings, foreign from the soul;
Bright in thy parent's eye we mark'd the tear;
Methought he said, "Thou art no actress here!
A semblance of thyself, the Grecian dame,
And *Brunton* and *Euphrasia* still the same!"
O! soon to seek the city's busier scene,
Pause thee awhile, thou chaste-eyed maid serene,
Till Granta's sons, from all her sacred bow'rs,
With grateful hand shall weave Pierian flow'rs,
To twine a fragrant chaplet round thy brow,
Enchanting ministress of virtuous wo!

It was on the 17th of October, 1785, that Miss Brunton made her first appearance at Covent Garden theatre in the character of Horatia. The public had anxiously looked for her, and the house was crowded to receive her. The venerable Arthur Murphy wrote a prologue for the occasion, in which he displayed his accustomed delicacy and judgment. It was as follows, and was well spoken by Mr. Holman:

The tragic Muse long saw the British stage
Melt with her tears, and kindle with her rage,

She saw her scenes with varied passions glow,
The tyrant's downfall and the lover's wo;
'Twas then her Garrick – at that well-known name
Remembrance wakes, and gives him all his fame;
To him great Nature open'd Shakspeare's store,
"Here learn," she said, "here learn the sacred lore;"
This fancy realiz'd, the bard shall see,
And his best commentator breathe in thee.
She spoke: her magic powers the actor tried;
Then Hamlet moraliz'd and Richard died;
The dagger gleam'd before the murderer's eye,
And for old Lear each bosom heav'd sigh;
Then Romeo drew the sympathetic tear,
With him and Cibber Love lay bleeding here.
Enchanting Cibber! from that warbling throat
No more pale Sorrow pours the liquid note.
Her voice suppress'd, and Garrick's genius fled,
Melpomene declined her drooping head;
She mourn'd their loss, then fled to western skies,
And saw at Bath another genius rise.
Old Drury's scene the goddess bade her choose,
The actress heard, and spake, "herself a muse."
From the same nursery, this night appears
Another warbler, yet of tender years;
As a young bird, as yet unus'd to fly
On wings, expanded, through the azure sky,
With doubt and fear its first excursion tries
And shivers ev'ry feather with surprise;
So comes our chorister – the summer's ray,

Around her nest, call'd forth a short essay;
Now trembling on the brink, with fear she sees
This unknown clime, nor dares to trust the breeze.
But here, no unfledg'd wing was ever crush'd;
Be each rude blast within its cavern hush'd.
Soft swelling gales may waft her on her way,
Till, eagle-like, she eyes the fount of day:
She then may dauntless soar, her tuneful voice
May please each ear and bid the grove rejoice.

It would be superfluous, and indeed only going over the same ground already beat at Bath, to describe Miss Brunton's reception on her first appearance in London. Suffice it to say that plaudits and even exclamations of delight were, if possible, more rapturous and more incessant at Covent Garden than at Bath. Of the reputation thus quickly acquired, she never, to the day of her death, lost an atom; but continued to perform, in different parts of England, with accumulating fame, till her marriage deprived the people of England of her talents.

Mr. Robert Merry, a gentleman well known in the literary world, and rendered conspicuous by some pretty poetry published under the name of *Della Crusca*, had the honour of rendering himself so agreeable to Miss Brunton that she suffered him to lead her to the altar. He was of a gentleman's family, and received his education under that mass of learning, doctor Parr, was a man of brilliant genius, amiable disposition, elegant manners, with a fine face and person. Being a *bon vivant* and a

little addicted to play, as well as to other fashionable and wasteful frivolities of high life, his affairs were in a very unpleasant state, but for this there was an abundant remedy in his wife's talents; and perhaps (with her aid) a little in his own too. Family pride, however, forbid it. He was much swayed by his relatives, particularly by two old maiden aunts, who were, or affected to be wounded at his marrying an actress. Nothing but his withdrawing his wife from the stage could assuage their wrath or heal the wound, and Mrs. Merry, in a spirit of obedience to her husband, and of amiable feeling for his situation, which will ever do honour to her memory, complied; and as soon as her engagement at Covent Garden expired (in 1792) left the stage, to the great regret, and a little to the indignant contempt for the old ladies, of the whole British nation.

Mr. and Mrs. Merry soon after paid a visit to the continent, where they lived for a little more than a year, when they returned to England, and settled in retired life in the country and there remained till the year 1796, when they removed to America. Mr. Brunton, the father of Mrs. Merry, was, no less than the old ladies alluded to, and on much more substantial grounds, averse to her marriage with Mr. Merry, and still more to her coming to America. In obedience to a higher duty, however, she followed the fortunes of her husband, and with the most poignant regret left her native country and her father, to sojourn in a strange land. On the 19th of September, 1796, they sailed from the Downs, and on the 19th of October following landed at New-York.

Few country theatres in Great Britain have been able to boast of so good a company as that which assembled at Philadelphia on the season which succeeded Mrs. Merry's arrival. The theatre opened on the fifth of December, with Romeo and Juliet, and the Waterman. The elegant and interesting Morton played Romeo – Mrs. Merry Juliet; all the characters had excellent representatives, and Mrs. Merry appeared to the audience a being of a superior kind. That winter she played all her best parts, but though supported by such a company it often happened that the receipts were insufficient to pay the charges of the house, and the season was, on the whole, extremely unsuccessful; a circumstance which at first view will excite surprise, but at the time might reasonably have been expected. This will be understood when the general financial condition of the city is called to recollection. Every one who has known the country but for a few years back must remember the almost general bankruptcy occasioned by the failure of land speculating men of opulence and high credit. During that time commerce in all its classes sensibly felt the shock, and business languished in all its branches. No wonder that the theatre, which can only be fed by the superflux of all other departments of society, should droop, neglected and unsupported. The prices then too were higher than now – the boxes a dollar and a quarter – the pit a dollar. And here we cannot help expressing a wish, founded we believe on justice and common sense, that admittance to the pit were raised: – first, because it is, at least, equal if not preferable to the boxes; and

next because it would in some degree tend to exclude many who, though fit to sit only in the upper gallery, make their way into the pit to the great annoyance of those decent well behaved people who go to enjoy and understand the play, and not to blackguard and speak aloud.

When the theatre was closed, according to civil regulation, the company, went to New-York. At that time Hallam and Hodgkinson had possession of both the theatres of that city – the old one in John-street, and the new one at the Park. The Philadelphia company, still bleeding from the wounds of the unsuccessful season, and urged by necessity for future support, applied to Hallam and Hodgkinson to rent them the theatre in John-street. Guided by a policy, rational enough and perhaps justifiable on principles of self-defence, though certain not very liberal, and in the end greatly injurious to themselves, the York proprietors peremptorily refused. The circus of Ricketts, the equestrian, in Greenwich-street then presented itself, and the Philadelphia company opened in full force. In order to oppose them, Hallam and Hodgkinson invited Mr. Sollee with his company to John-street. The Philadelphia company, however, made a very successful campaign of it. Sollee also had his visitors, and the consequence to H. and H. was that when they came to open the new house they played to thin or rather empty boxes; the town being saturated with theatrical exhibitions, and a little exhausted too of the cash disposable for such recreations.

In New-York as well as Philadelphia, and indeed in every

place where Mrs. M. went, she was no sooner seen than admired; and the impression she never failed to make at first sight remained, not only uneffaced but more deeply augmented in proportion as she was seen, even to the end of her life. She afterwards visited Baltimore and other places, and wherever she went, was the polar star to which the attention of all was directed.

While she was proceeding in this career of success her felicity met with the most cruel interruption by the sudden death of her husband, which happened at Baltimore in the latter end of the year 1798. Mr. Merry had not laboured under any specific physical complaint from which his death could in the smallest degree be apprehended. On the day before christmas he was apparently well, had walked out into the garden, and was soon after followed by some friends who found him lying senseless on the ground. Medical aid was immediately called in – several attempts were made to draw blood from him but without the least success; the physicians pronounced it an apoplectic case, and from every circumstance the conclusion was that his death was instantaneous and without pain. Mr. Merry was large and of a plethoric habit; and to that his death may, in some sort, and was then entirely ascribed. But circumstances appeared after his death which led to a conclusion that concealed sorrow, might have had some share in it. From refined motives of tenderness for a beloved wife's feelings, and that loftiness of spirit which clings to the perfect gentleman, he concealed the state of his affairs in England, which had for some time been in a rapid

decline, and of the complete ruin of which he had a short time before been fully informed. His patrimonial estate had been foreclosed and sold under a mortgage, and he remained debtor for a considerable sum after the sale. To this effect a letter was found after his death. As soon as this was discovered, every one who knew his exquisite sensibility, reflected with astonishment upon the delicacy which dictated and the fortitude with which he managed his concealment, and felt deep and sympathetic sorrow for the anguish he must have been privately enduring while he endeavoured to dress his face with tranquillity and to converse with his accustomed cheerfulness and ease. Smothered grief is one of the most deadly inmates; and it is reasonable to believe that a paroxysm of violent emotion in a moment when solitude gave an opportunity for giving a loose to reflection, operating upon a plethoric habit, occasioned his sudden dissolution.

That Mr. Merry was a gentleman of great private worth we believe the evidence of all those to whom familiar intercourse had revealed his disposition; that he was learned and accomplished in a very eminent degree no one has ever denied; and that he was a man of genius, his "Della Crusca," and the many witty and satirical epigrams he wrote for the public prints under the signature of "Tom Thorne," abundantly prove. But the pen of state vengeance was raised against him, and his poetical fame was immolated as an expiation for his political offences. Attached to French revolutionary, or, as they were then called, jacobin principles, to a degree which even Foxites censured, he

was viewed with abhorrence by one party, and with no great regard by the other; so that when the witty author of the Pursuits of Literature drew his sword, and the sarcastic author of the Baviad and Mæviad lifted his axe against him there was no one to ward off the blows. There is a fact respecting Mr. M. which, though it does not properly belong to this biographical sketch, yet as it is curious enough to apologize for its introduction, we take the liberty to relate. The celebrated Mrs. Cowley, under the name of "Anna Matilda," and Mr. M. under that of "Della Crusca," corresponded with and admired each other, without being known or even suspected by one another, or, for some time, by the public. These productions formed a new era or rather a new school of poetry, which excited such attention and curiosity that every art was resorted to in order to discover the authors. It was at length whispered abroad, and then what most surprised the world was, that the two persons were totally strangers to each other.

Mrs. Merry remained a widow for more than four years: she then, on the first of January 1803, married Mr. Wignell, the manager of the Philadelphia theatre, who died in seven weeks after their marriage. For three years and a half she retained the name of Wignell, when the present manager solicited her hand so successfully that she consented, and took the name of Warren, on the 15th of August, 1806. By this marriage the property and management of the Philadelphia theatre devolved upon Mr. Warren; than whom, exclusive of the personal attachment that

subsisted between them, she could not have pitched upon any one person more competent to the care of her property or the direction of the theatre; or one more worthy of the sacred trust of being a parent and a guardian to her infant daughter. For near two years they lived together in a state of ease and felicity which bid fair to last for years, when he being obliged to attend his company to their customary summer stations, Mrs. Warren, then in a far advanced state of pregnancy, desired to go along with him. Aware of the fatigue, the inconveniences, and the privations to which she would, in all likelihood, be exposed, during her journey southward, and still more in her *accouchement*, which must necessarily take place before his return, he endeavoured to prevail upon her to stay behind. But "Fate came into the list," and she would go. Arrived at Alexandria, he took a large commodious house, and put it in a condition sufficiently comfortable; Mrs. Warren was in lusty health, and as the time approached all was fair and promising. By one of those turns, however, which it pleases Providence for his own wise purposes frequently to ordain, to mock our best hopes and baffle our most sanguine expectations, this admirable woman was, contrary to every antecedent prognostic, visited in her travail with epileptic fits, in which she expired, "leaving," (as the sublime Burke no less truly than pathetically said on the death of doctor Johnson,) "not only nothing to fill her place, but nothing that has a tendency to fill it."

Here, we let the curtain drop. Neither her private nor her

public character can derive additional lustre from any pen.

PORTRAIT OF THE CELEBRATED BETTERTON

Mr. Thomas Betterton, dramatist and actor, was born in Tothill-street, Westminster; and after having left school, is said to have been put apprentice to a bookseller. It is supposed he made his first appearance on the stage about the year 1657, at the opera house, which was then under the direction of sir William Davenant. He went over to Paris to take a view of the French scenery, and on his return, made such improvements, as added greatly to the lustre of the English stage.

The professional merits of this great man were of a kind so perfectly unequivocal and unalloyed that there never was heard one dissenting voice upon the subject of his superiority to all other actors. He stood so far above the highest of his profession that competition being hopeless there was no motive for envy.

Of the few who lived to see him and Garrick, the far greater number gave him the palm, with the exception of Garrick's excellence in low comedy. Indeed he seems to have combined in himself the various powers of the three greatest modern actors, of Garrick, except as before excepted, of Barry, and of Mossop; add to which, he played Falstaff as well as Quin. The present writer got this from old Macklin, who was stored with anecdotes of his predecessors.

Of Betterton, Colley Cibber speaks thus, in his apology for

his own life:

"Betterton was an actor, as Shakspeare was an author, both without competitors! formed for the mutual assistance, and illustration of each other's genius! how Shakspeare wrote, all men who have a taste for nature may read, and know – but with what higher rapture would he still be read, could they conceive how Betterton *played* him! Then might they know, the one was born alone to speak what the other only knew to write! pity it is, that the momentary beauties flowing from a harmonious elocution, cannot, like those of poetry, be their own record! that the animated graces of the player can live no longer than the instant breath and motion that presents them; or at best can but faintly glimmer through the memory, or imperfect attestation of a few surviving spectators. Could *how* Betterton spoke be as easily known as *what* he spoke, then might you see the Muse of Shakspeare in her triumph, with all her beauties in their best array, rising into real life, and charming her beholders. But alas! since all this is so far out of the reach of description, how shall I show you Betterton? Should I therefore tell you, that all the Othellos, Hamlets, Hotspurs, Mackbeths, and Brutuses, whom you may have seen since his time, have fallen far short of him; this still would give you no idea of his particular excellence. Let us see then what a particular comparison may do! whether that may yet draw him nearer to you?

"You have seen a Hamlet perhaps, who, on the first appearance of his father's spirit, has thrown himself into all the

straining vociferation requisite to express rage and fury, and the house has thundered with applause; though the misguided actor was all the while (as Shakspeare terms it) tearing a passion into rags – I am the more bold to offer you this particular instance, because the late Mr. Addison, while I sate by him, to see this scene acted, made the same observation, asking me with some surprize, if I thought Hamlet should be in so violent a passion with the ghost, which though it might have astonished, it had not provoked him? for you may observe that in this beautiful speech, the passion never rises beyond an almost breathless astonishment, or an impatience, limited by filial reverence, to inquire into the suspected wrongs that may have raised him from his peaceful tomb! and a desire to know what a spirit so seemingly distressed, might wish or enjoin a sorrowful son to execute towards his future quiet in the grave! this was the light into which Betterton threw this scene; which he opened with a pause of mute amazement! then rising slowly, to a solemn, trembling voice, he made the ghost equally terrible to the spectator, as to himself! and in the descriptive part of the natural emotions which the ghastly vision gave him, the boldness of his expostulation was still governed by decency, manly, but not braving; his voice never rising into that seeming outrage, or wild defiance of what he naturally revered. But alas! to preserve this medium, between mouthing, and meaning too little, to keep the attention more pleasingly awake, by a tempered spirit, than by mere vehemence of voice, is of all the master-strokes of an

actor the most difficult to reach. In this none yet have equalled Betterton. But I am unwilling to show his superiority only by recounting the errors of those, who now cannot answer to them, let their farther failings therefore be forgotten! or rather, shall I in some measure excuse them! For I am not yet sure, that they might not be as much owing to the false judgment of the spectator, as the actor. While the million are so apt to be transported, when the drum of their ear is so roundly rattled; while they take the life of elocution to lie in the strength of the lungs, it is no wonder the actor, whose end is applause, should be also tempted, at this easy rate, to excite it. Shall I go a little farther? and allow that this extreme is more pardonable than its opposite error? I mean that dangerous affectation of the monotone, or solemn sameness of pronunciation, which to my ear is insupportable; for of all faults that so frequently pass upon the vulgar, that of flatness will have the fewest admirers. That this is an error of ancient standing seems evident by what Hamlet says, in his instructions to the players, *viz.*

> Be not too tame, neither, &c.

The actor, doubtless, is as strongly tied down to the rules of Horace as the writer:

> Si vis me flere, dolendum est
> Primum ipsi tibi —

He that feels not himself the passion he would raise, will talk to a sleeping audience: but this never was the fault of Betterton; and it has often amazed me to see those who soon came after him, throw out in some parts of a character, a just and graceful spirit, which Betterton himself could not but have applauded. And yet in the equally shining passages of the same character, have heavily dragged the sentiment along like a dead weight; with a long-toned voice, and absent eye, as if they had fairly forgot what they were about. If you have never made this observation, I am contented you should not know where to apply it.

"A farther excellence in Betterton, was, that he could vary his spirit to the different characters he acted. Those wild impatient starts, that fierce and flashing fire, which he threw into Hotspur, never came from the unruffled temper of his *Brutus* (for I have more than once, seen a *Brutus* as warm as Hotspur) when the Betterton Brutus was provoked, in his dispute with Cassius, his spirit flew only to his eye; his steady look alone supplyed that terror, which he disdained an intemperance in his voice should rise to. Thus, with a settled dignity of contempt, like an unheeding rock, he repelled upon himself the foam of Cassius. Perhaps the very works of Shakspeare will better let you into my meaning:

> Must I give way, and room, to your rash choler?
> Shall I be frighted when a madman stares?

And a little after,

> There is no terror, Cassius, in your looks! &c.

Not but in some part of this scene, where he reproaches *Cassius*, his temper is not under this suppression, but opens into that warmth which becomes a man of virtue; yet this is that *hasty spark* of anger, which Brutus himself endeavours to excuse.

"But with whatever strength of nature we see the poet show, at once, the philosopher and the hero, yet the image of the actor's excellence will be still imperfect to you, unless language could put colours in our words to paint the voice with.

"*Et, si vis similem pingere, pinge sonum*, is enjoining an impossibility. The most that a *Vandyke* can arrive at, is to make his portraits of great persons seem to *think*; a Shakspeare goes farther yet, and tells you *what* his pictures thought; a Betterton steps beyond them both, and calls them from the grave, to breathe, and be themselves again, in feature, speech, and motion. When the skilful actor shows you all these powers at once united, and gratifies at once your eye, your ear, your understanding. To conceive the pleasure rising from such harmony, you must have been present at it! 'tis not to be told you!

"There cannot be a stronger proof of the charms of harmonious elocution, than the many, even unnatural scenes and flights of the false sublime it has lifted into applause. In what raptures have I seen an audience, at the furious fustian and turgid

rants in *Nat. Lee's Alexander the Great*! for though I can allow this play a few great beauties, yet it is not without its extravagant blemishes. Every play of the same author has more or less of them. Let me give you a sample from this. Alexander, in a full crowd of courtiers, without being occasionally called or provoked to it, falls into this rhapsody of vainglory:

> Can none remember? Yes, I know all must!

And therefore they shall know it again.

> When Glory, like a dazzling eagle, stood
> Perched on my beaver, in the Granic flood,
> When Fortune's self, my standard trembling bore,
> And the pale Fates stood frighted on the shore,
> When the immortals on the billows rode,
> And I myself appeared the leading god.

When these flowing numbers come from the mouth of a Betterton, the multitude no more desired sense to them, than our musical connoisseurs think it essential in the celebrated airs of an Italian opera. Does not this prove, that there is very near as much enchantment in the well-governed voice of an actor, as in the sweet pipe of a eunuch? If I tell you, there was no one tragedy, for many years, more in favour with the town than Alexander, to what must we impute this its command of public admiration? not to its intrinsic merit, surely, if it swarms with passages like this I

have shown you! If this passage has merit, let us see what figure it would make upon canvas, what sort of picture would rise from it. If Le Brun, who was famous for painting the battles of this hero, had seen this lofty description, what one image could he have possibly taken from it? In what colours would he have shown us *Glory perched upon a beaver*? how would he have drawn *Fortune trembling*? or, indeed, what use could he have made of *pale Fates*, or *immortals* riding upon *billows*, with this blustering *god* of his own making at the *head* of them! where, then, must have lain the charm, that once made the public so partial to this tragedy? why plainly, in the grace and harmony of the actor's utterance. For the actor himself is not accountable for the false poetry of his author; that, the hearer is to judge of; if it passes upon him, the actor can have no quarrel to it; who, if the periods given him are round, smooth, spirited, and high-sounding, even in a false passion, must throw out the same fire and grace, as may be required in one justly rising from nature; where those his excellencies will then be only more pleasing in proportion to the taste of his hearer. And I am of opinion, that to the extraordinary success of this very play, we may impute the corruption of so many actors, and tragic writers, as were immediately mislead by it. The unskilful actor, who imagined all the merit of delivering those blazing rants, lay only in the strength, and strained exertion of the voice, began to tear his lungs, upon every false, or slight occasion, to arrive at the same applause. And it is hence I date our having seen the same reason prevalent, for above fifty years. Thus equally

misguided too, many a barren-brained author has streamed into a frothy flowing style, pompously rolling into sounding periods, signifying – roundly nothing; of which number, in some of my former labours, I am something more than suspicious, that I may myself have made one, but to keep a little closer to Betterton.

"When this favourite play I am speaking of, from its being too frequently acted, was worn out, and came to be deserted by the town, upon the sudden death of Monfort, who had played Alexander with success, for several years, the part was given to Betterton, which, under this great disadvantage of the satiety it had given, he immediately revived with so new a lustre, that for three days together it filled the house; and had his then declining strength been equal to the fatigue the action gave him, it probably might have doubled its success; an uncommon instance of the power and intrinsic merit of an actor. This I mention not only to prove what irresistible pleasure may arise from a judicious elocution, with scarce sense to assist it; but to show you too, that though Betterton never wanted fire, and force, when his character demanded it; yet, where it was not demanded, he never prostituted his power to the low ambition of a false applause. And further, that when, from a too advanced age, he resigned that toilsome part of Alexander, the play, for many years after never was able to impose upon the public; and I look upon his so particularly supporting the false fire and extravagancies of that character, to be a more surprizing proof of his skill, than his being eminent in those of Shakspeare; because there, truth and

nature coming to his assistance he had not the same difficulties to combat, and consequently, we must be less amazed at his success, where we are more able to account for it.

(To be continued.)

DRAMATIC CENSOR

I have always considered those combinations which are formed in the playhouse as acts of fraud or cruelty: He that applauds him who does not deserve praise, is endeavouring to deceive the public; He that hisses in malice or in sport is an oppressor and a robber.
Dr. Johnson's Idler, No. 25.

PHILADELPHIA THEATRE

Dec. 6th.	Douglas, *with the* Shipwreck.	Young Norval	*By MASTER PAYNE.*
8th.	Mountaineers—Raising the Wind.	Octavian	
9th.	Lover's Vows—Rosina.	Frederick	
11th.	Mahomet—Spoiled Child.	Zaphna	
13th.	Hamlet—Weathercock.	Hamlet	
15th.	Pizarro—The Ghost.	Rolla	
16th.	Douglas—Youth, Love and Folly.	Young Norval	
18th.	Tancred and Sigismunda—Farmer.	Tancred	
20th.	Barbarossa—Too Many Cooks.	Selim	
22d.	Romeo and Juliet—Love laughs at Locksmiths, for his own benefit.	Romeo	

All those plays are well known. From the peculiar circumstances attending their performance they call for a share of particular attention, which would otherwise be superfluous. Where there is something new, and much to be admired, it

would be inexcusable to be niggard of our labour, even were the labour painful, which in this instance it is not. The performance of Master Payne pleased us so much that we have often since derived great enjoyment from the recollection of it; and to retrace upon paper the opinions with which it impressed us, we now sit down with feelings very different from those, which, at one time, we expected to accompany the task. Without the least hesitation we confess, that when we were assured it would become our duty to examine that young gentleman's pretensions, and compare his sterling value with the general estimate of it, as reported from other parts of the union, we felt greatly perplexed. On one hand strict critical justice with the pledge which is given in our motto, imperiously forbidding us to applaud him who does not deserve it, stared us in the face with a peremptory inhibition from sacrificing truth to ceremony, or prostrating our judgment before the feet of public prejudice: while, on the other we were aware that nothing is so obstinate as error – that fashionable idolatry is of all things the most incorrigible by argument, and the least susceptible of conviction – that while the dog-star of favouritism is vertical over a people, there is no reasoning with them to effect; and that all the efforts of common sense are but given to the wind, if employed to undeceive them, till the brain fever has spent itself, and the public mind has settled down to a state of rest. We had heard Master Payne's performances spoken of in a style which quite overset our faith. Not one with whom we conversed about him spoke within the bounds of reason: few indeed seemed

to understand the subject, or, if they did, to view it with the sober eye of plain common rationality. The opinions of some carried their own condemnation in their obvious extravagance; and hyperbolical admiration fairly ran itself out of breath in speaking of the wonders of this cisatlantic young Roscius.

While we knew that half of what was said was utterly impossible, we thought it due to candor to believe that such a general opinion could not exist without some little foundation; that in all likelihood the boy had merit, considerable for his years and means, to which his puerility might have given a peculiar recommendation, and that when he came to be unloaded by time and public reflection of that injurious burthen of idolatrous praise, which to our thinking had all the bad effects of calumny, we should be able to find at bottom something that could be applauded without impairing our veracity, deceiving the public, or joining the multitude in burning the vile incense of flattery under the boy's nose, and hiding him from the world and from himself in a cloud of pernicious adulation.

But how to encounter this reigning humour was the question: to render his reasoning efficacious, the critic must take care not to make it unpalatable. And here the general taste seemed to be in direct opposition to our reason and experience; for we had not yet (even in the case of young Betty, with the aggregate authority of England, Ireland, and Scotland in his favour) been free from scepticism: the Roscio-mania contagion had not yet infected us quite so much: in a word, we had no faith in miracles, nor could

we, in either the one case or the other, screw up our credulity to any sort of unison with the pitch of the multitude. We shall not readily forget the mixed sensations of concern and risibility with which, day after day, from the first annunciation of Master Payne's expected appearance at Philadelphia, we were obliged to listen to the misjudging applause of his panegyrists. There is a narrowness of heart, and a nudity of mind too common in our nature, under the impulse of which few people can bring themselves to do homage to one person without magnifying their incense by the depreciation of some other. According to these a favourite has not his proper station, till all others are put below him; as if there was no merit positive, but all was good but by comparison. In this temper there certainly is at least as much malice to one as kindness to the other: but an honourable and beneficent wisdom gives other laws for human direction, and dictates that in the house of merit there are not only many stories, but many apartments in each story: and that every man may be fairly adjudicated all the praise he deserves without thrusting others down into the ground floor to make room for him. Yet not one in twenty could we find to praise Master Payne, without doing it at the expense of others. "He is superior to Cooper," said one; "he speaks better than Fennell," said a second: these sagacious observations too, are rarely accompanied by a modest qualification, such as "I think," or "it is my opinion" – but nailed down with a peremptory is. This is the mere naked offspring of a muddy or unfinished mind, which, for want of

discrimination to point out the particular beauties it affects to admire, accomplishes its will by a sweeping wholesale term of comparison, more injurious to him they praise than to him they slight. Nay, so far has this been carried, that some who never were out of the limits of this union have, by a kind of telescopical discernment, viewed Cooke and Kemble in comparison with their new favourite, and found them quite deficient. We cannot readily forget one circumstance: a person said to another in our hearing at the playhouse, "You have been in England, sir, don't you think Master Payne superior to young Betty?" "I don't know, sir, having never seen Master Betty," answered the man; "I think he is very much superior," replied the former – "You have seen Master Betty then, sir," said the latter; "No, I never did," returned he that asked the first question, "but I am sure of it – I have heard a person that was in England say so!!" – This was the pure effusion of a mind subdued to prostration by wonder. In England this was carried to such lengths, that the panegyrists of young Betty seemed to vie with each other in fanatical admiration of that truly extraordinary boy. One, in a public print, went so far as to assert, that Mr. Fox (who, as well as Mr. Pitt, was at young Betty's benefit when he played Hamlet) declared the performance was little, if at all, inferior to that of his deceased friend Garrick. With the very same breath in which we read the paragraph we declared it to be a falsehood. Mr. Fox had too much judgment to institute the comparison – Mr. Fox had too much benignity to utter such a malicious libel upon that noble boy.

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