

VARIOUS

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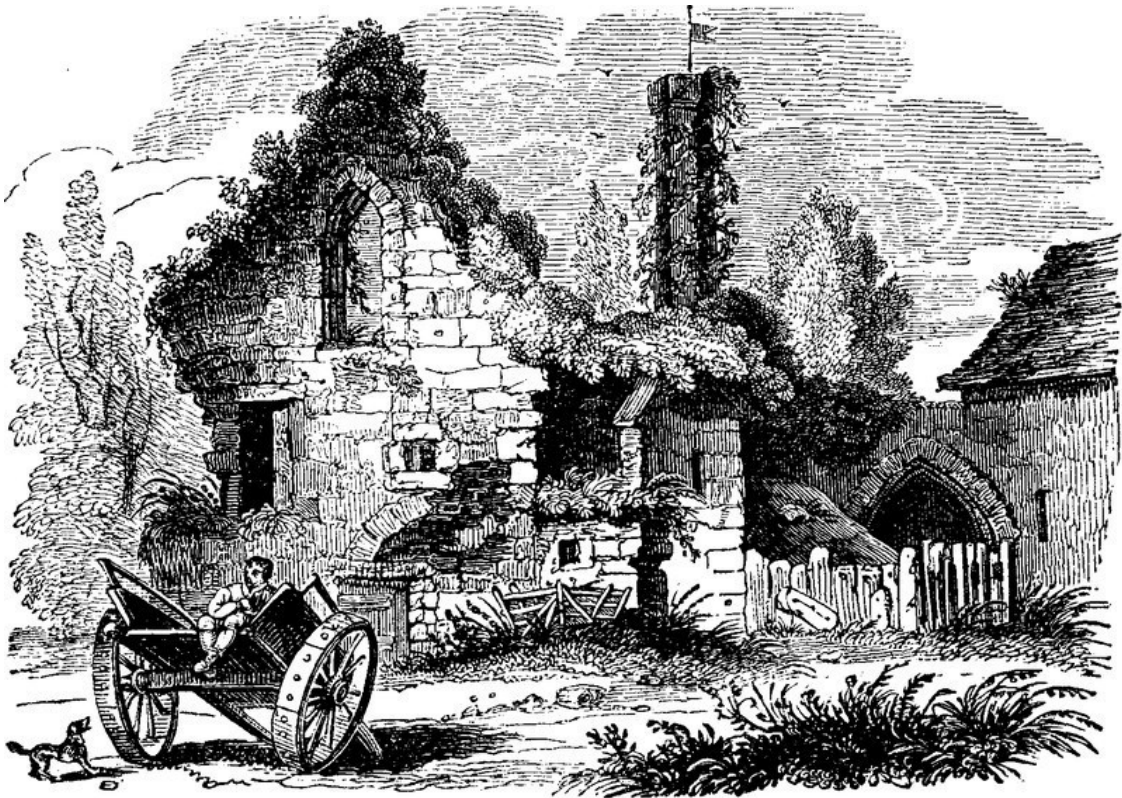
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BURNHAM ABBEY



BURNHAM ABBEY, From a Sketch, by a Correspondent.

Burnham is a village of some consideration, in Buckinghamshire, and gives name to a deanery and hundred. Its prosperity has been also augmented by the privilege of holding three fairs annually. It is situate in the picturesque vicinity of Windsor, about five miles from that town, and three miles N.E. of Maidenhead. It was anciently a place of much importance. One of the few relics of its greatness is the ivy-mantled ruin represented in the above Engraving. So late as the fourteenth century, Burnham could also boast of a royal palace within its boundary: but, alas! the wand of Prospero has long since touched its gorgeousness, so as to "leave not a rack behind."

The ruin stands about one mile south of the village, and is part of an Augustine nunnery, built in the year 1228, by Richard, Earl of Cornwall, and brother of Henry the Third. He was a vexatious thorn in the crown of Henry, whose long and confused reign, "were it not that for the first time it exhibits the elements of the English constitution in a state of disorderly fermentation, would scarcely deserve the consideration of the philosopher and the politician."¹ One of Richard's fraternal acts was placing himself at the head of a formidable confederacy, to which Henry was obliged to yield. The

¹ Sir James Mackintosh.

papal power was at this time at its greatest height; Richard had been elected King of the Romans, and from the spoil obtained by the monstrous exactions of his court, he may be presumed to have erected the above nunnery. Of this system of pious plunder we have many proud architectural memorials; though to rob with one hand, and found religious houses with the other, reminds one of the trade of a waterman—to look one way and row the other.

The nunnery was richly endowed with several of the neighbouring manors; the remains are now used as the out-offices of an adjoining farm. Little can be traced of the "studious cloister," the "storied window," or the "high embowed roof;" but the ivy climbs with parasitic fondness over its gable, or thrusts its rootlets as holdfasts into its crumbling wall. The dates of these ruins claim the attention of the speculative antiquary. The chimney, though of great age, did not of course belong to the original building; the earliest introduction of chimneys into this country being stated, (but without proof,) to be in the year 1300. The upper window, and the arched doorway are in the early English style prevalent at the date of the foundation; the former has the elegant lancet-shape of the earliest specimens.

A DREAM OF THE BEAUTIFUL

*"Another scene where happiness is sought!
A festive chamber with its golden hues,
Its dream-like sounds, and languishing delights."*

R. MONTGOMERY.

I stood in the light of the festive hall,
Gorgeously wrought was its pictured wall;
And the strings of the lute replied in song,
To the heart-breathed lays of the vocal throng.

Oh! rich were the odours that floated there,
O'er the swan-like neck and the bosom fair;
And roses were mingled with sparkling pearls,
On the marble brow, and the cluster'd curls.

I stood in that hall, and my lips were mute,
And my spirit entranced with the elfin lute;
And the eyes that look'd on me seem'd fraught with love,
As the stars that make Night more divine above.

A sorrowful thought o'er my spirit came,
Like thunder-clouds kindling with gloom and flame;
For I knew that those forms in the dust would lie,
And no passionate lips to their songs reply.

But the music recalled me, the hall glow'd with light,
And burst like a vision of heaven on my sight;
"Oh! thus," I exclaimed, "will dark feelings depart,
When the sunshine of beauty descends on the heart!"

G.R. CARTER.

TRAGEDY AND COMEDY

It has been observed by an able and popular writer² of the present day, that the following proposition, though very generally received, is far from being a true one: "Tragedy improves and exalts the nature of man, while Comedy has a tendency to lower it." Now I profess also to believe rather in the converse of this proposition, and shall endeavour in this essay to establish that belief in the minds of my readers, by the same line of argument that originally induced me to adopt it. With the generality of persons, who are not in the habit of reasoning upon subjects of this nature, this question would perhaps be decided, and the preference awarded to either species of the drama, according to the peculiar organization of each person: I mean, that those who are naturally grave, would be more gratified by being affected, and by having an appeal made to their feelings; while on the other hand, those who are of a freer temperament, and never dream of brooding over misfortune, would doubtless prefer being amused. If this remark carries any weight with it, egotism will be so far necessary to my argument, that I may be excused for saying thus much:—I suspect myself to be classed, by nature, under the first of these divisions, and am the more entitled to a fair hearing, because I argue against feeling and natural inclination.

Perhaps I shall be able to lay more clearly before the reader, my reasoning on this interesting as well as important subject, by considering Tragedy and Comedy respectively, under three distinct heads:—1st. with respect to the particular sphere or province of each; 2ndly, their plot and characters; and 3rdly, the end or design in view.

First, then, as to the province of Tragedy. Tragedy professes to be a representation of all the high passions that influence the mind, such as jealousy, hatred, or revenge; it can have nothing to do with vanity or any other of the petty passions, for a course of action dependent on them would appear as insignificant in Tragedy as the passions themselves. Now, what possible advantage, in the way of improvement, can be derived from witnessing a display of all the odious passions of our nature? Some benefit might indeed be derived, if a moral were attached to Tragedy, but it has no moral (at least very rarely) and for this simple reason: Tragedy professes to be a speaking picture of life,—and it is a melancholy but true reflection, that as in real life we see the deserving depressed, and the bad man flourishing in the world, so also it ought to be in Tragedy. Let us take *Macbeth* or *Richard the Third* as examples of this: we see here two men, by a succession of crime, arriving at the pinnacle of their ambition, and rewarded for giving way to their passions. There is little or no moral in the death of either, for every honest soldier in their armies was subjected to the same fate, and many of course met with it; so far from being disgraceful, falling in battle is regarded as an honourable end, and it is the death a brave man might wish to die. Secondly, let us consider the plot in Tragedy, and the characters it works with: the plot is rarely fictitious, but is generally built either on fact, or on some event that the antiquated errors of fable or history have made sacred; not having in this respect the advantage which Comedy possesses from liberty of invention, and correcting thereby the inequalities of life; and having also the additional fault of laying its scenes for the most part in a foreign country. The characters of Tragedy are always selected from high life; here is a great defect, for it is by no means a true observation, that men are inclined greatly to pity the misfortunes of their superiors; on the contrary, they are secretly rejoiced at seeing them fall from a situation so much above their own; whereas they sympathize more with their equals, and take a much greater interest in a course of events that is likely to occur to themselves. Thirdly, let us look to the end that Tragedy has in view. The main object in a tragic representation is to excite pity and terror in the spectators; in this definition I am amply borne out by authority, for not only Gibbon, Addison, and others, but Voltaire and even Aristotle, have used these very expressions; now how can we be benefited by the excitement of these

² Lord John Russell.

feelings? Pity is at the best but a feminine virtue, and by giving way to it, the mind, if not enervated, is at any rate not strengthened; and with regard to terror, a man under its influence is incapable of any reflection whatever. When we witness, for instance, the tragedy of *Macbeth*, the mind, after such a scene of human villany is rather inclined to become morbid than to feel either dignified or improved.

We will now turn to Comedy, which, in order to compare more satisfactorily with Tragedy, we will consider under the same view. First, then, the province of Comedy is with the follies and foibles or our nature; it is generally, and it ought always to be, a speaking picture of national faults, and should satirize the people of the country where it is represented, by which means a much greater scope is afforded for the improvement of the spectator. It is not so confined in its sphere as Tragedy is, for it may affect as well as amuse; there should be a proper mixture of gravity with mirth, and that succession of ridiculous and pathetic events with which the life of man is variegated. But the main superiority of Comedy consists in its having what Tragedy wants, a moral. It is true that the enlightened portion of the audience do not require this moral; no farther interested in the scene they witness than as being spectators of it, they sit by in silence, void of all passion, and learn in silence a lesson that speaks for itself, and will have its certain effect on their future lives; but the greater part of the audience, not being capable either of accurate reasoning or deep reflection, require to be told what is right, and to have its distinction from wrong pointed out to them; as in a fable, its point would be useless to most men without its concomitant moral. Secondly, the plot of Comedy (as I have said before) is for the most part fictitious, and refers to national manners, the advantages of both which peculiarities I have already had occasion to refer to; the characters also being selected from private as well as public life, from low as well as polite company, afford Comedy a far wider field to range in than Tragedy can boast. Comedy introduces us to the cottage as well as the palace, and displays the economy of one as well as the splendour of the other; and it can amuse us with the intrigues of a citizen's wife, as well as interest us with the passion of a princess. We see also in Comedy, as well as in the world itself, the despicable character of the rake, and the disgusting vanity of the coquette; we learn to distinguish between the different traits of character, and we soon find that those whose language is that of men of honour, often act like knaves. It is all this diversity that makes Comedy so pleasing as well as so instructive. Thirdly, the end that Comedy has in view, is to bring about improvement by exciting contempt and ridicule: by thus mixing ridicule with vice, we feel a positive enjoyment in seeing it exposed, and it is by this powerful engine that the manners of a people may be insensibly improved. A satirical exhibition will at all times explode vice better than serious argument; and it was from a conviction of this that the Lacedemonians intoxicated their unhappy slaves in order that the children of the state, by seeing the despicable state to which drunkenness reduced a man, might learn a lesson that wanted no explanation. In short, I think a theatrical representation may cure our faults, but it can hardly subdue our more powerful vices; it may give a check to our follies, but it will never succeed in curbing our passions. When a man is under the sway of any particular passion, it is too firmly rooted in his disposition to be eradicated by sitting a few hours in the pit of a theatre; but with our petty foibles it is very different; ridicule can, and often does, cure them, when it can be brought into play against them; which, however, is not very often in real life, for a man is more inclined to resent an attack upon his faults than his vices, and would rather be thought the slave of his passions than be known to have given way to a single weakness.

There is another great difference between Tragedy and Comedy, and that is, with regard to diction: the language made use of by Comedy is natural and proper, while that of Tragedy is laboured and elevated; we meet not unfrequently with long declamation and sentences highly polished, whereas passion never speculates in this manner; the feelings of nature dictate the simplest language, and generally find a vent in broken sentences, as we find them in the Greek tragedians.

The unities of the drama are rules which are the result of good sense, and serve greatly to heighten the entertainment of the stage; they undoubtedly tend to keep up the necessary illusion that we are witnessing scenes in real life, and the more they are acted up to, the greater is the merit of

the piece, and the more perfect the effect produced. Now, Comedy rarely breaks through these rules; for, from its nature, the events recorded are frequently comprised within the space of a day; and there is the same regard paid (as far as it is possible) to unity of place as well as time. Tragedy, at least modern Tragedy, (with the exception of *Cato* and one or two more) entirely disregards these rules, and we sometimes find the hero of the piece has grown ten years older within the short space between the acts, or else that he has travelled from one country to another in the same period of time. Thus, in *Julius Caesar*, Brutus, in one act is at Rome, and another in Thessaly. Again, in *Coriolanus*, now we find him expelled by the Romans, afterwards residing amongst the Volscians, and eventually marching an immense army to the gates of Rome; all within the space of two or three hours: this is a sad blow to any scenic illusion, and tends to weaken, if it does not entirely break, the thread of the imagination.

There is one point in which I consider both Tragedy and Comedy, in modern days, to be at fault, and that is in the constant introduction of love on our stage. We cannot frequent the theatre without being sickened by the repetition of some nauseous courtship and love-making, the particulars of which, even in real life, can be agreeable to none but the parties themselves. This blemish is said to have arisen during the earlier periods of the drama, from the vanity of the female sex; who, however much they were kept under control, and their opinions disregarded in ancient days, have amply made up for that restriction now, by taking matters of taste entirely under their direction. It is said, that when modern play-writing first came in fashion, the ladies refused to honour the theatre with their presence, unless their inclinations were more attended to, and love was made the burthen of the song. Accordingly, we find even the pure taste of Addison giving in to this demand, and the otherwise beautiful tragedy of *Cato* (for even the unities are preserved in it) is spoiled by two stupid love plots, that not only disfigure it, but throw a complete weariness over the whole. With the ancients it was very different, and amongst all those splendid Greek compositions which are regarded as models for the drama, we find none of them, with the exception of Hippolitus, in which there is any of this trifling with love affairs.

Before I close these observations, let me add, that in looking at this question, we must consent to throw off our national prejudices; and in drawing the comparison, not to regard English plays, whether tragic or comic, as the standards of perfection. English Comedy is not only considered inferior to that of most nations, but it is in many respects bad in its tendency, and may almost be looked upon as a school for vanity. To conclude, instead of regarding the drama as it is, I have rather endeavoured to consider it as it should be.

F.

THE PUBLIC JOURNALS

REAL CHARACTER OF LOUIS XIV

Concerning Louis the Fourteenth himself, the world seems at last to have formed a correct judgment. He was not a great general; he was not a great statesman; but he was, in one sense of the words, a great king. Never was there so consummate a master of what our James the First would have called king-craft,—of all those arts which most advantageously display the merits of a prince, and most completely hide his defects. Though his internal administration was bad,—though the military triumphs which gave splendour to the early part of his reign were not achieved by himself,—though his later years were crowded with defeats and humiliations,—though he was so ignorant that he scarcely understood the Latin of his mass-book,—though he fell under the control of a cunning Jesuit and of a more cunning old woman,—he succeeded in passing himself off on his people as a being above humanity. And this is the more extraordinary, because he did not seclude himself from the public gaze like those Oriental despots whose faces are never seen, and whose very names it is a crime to pronounce lightly. It has been said that no man is a hero to his valet;—and all the world saw as much of Louis the Fourteenth as his valet could see. Five hundred people assembled to see him shave and put on his breeches in the morning. He then kneeled down at the side of his bed, and said his prayer, while the whole assembly awaited the end in solemn silence,—the ecclesiastics on their knees, and the laymen with their hats before their faces. He walked about his gardens with a train of two hundred courtiers at his heels. All Versailles came to see him dine and sup. He was put to bed at night in the midst of a crowd as great as that which had met to see him rise in the morning. He took his very emetics in state, and vomited majestically in the presence of all the *grandes* and *petites entrees*. Yet though he constantly exposed himself to the public gaze in situations in which it is scarcely possible for any man to preserve much personal dignity, he to the last impressed those who surrounded him with the deepest awe and reverence. The illusion which he produced on his worshippers can be compared only to those illusions to which lovers are proverbially subject during the season of courtship. It was an illusion which affected even the senses. The contemporaries of Louis thought him tall. Voltaire, who might have seen him, and who had lived with some of the most distinguished members of his court, speaks repeatedly of his majestic stature. Yet it is as certain as any fact can be, that he was rather below than above the middle size. He had, it seems, a way of holding himself, a way of walking, a way of swelling his chest and rearing his head, which deceived the eyes of the multitude. Eighty years after his death, the royal cemetery was violated by the revolutionists; his coffin was opened; his body was dragged out; and it appeared that the prince, whose majestic figure had been so long and loudly extolled, was in truth a little man.

His person and his government have had the same fate. He had the art of making both appear grand and august, in spite of the clearest evidence that both were below the ordinary standard. Death and time have exposed both the deceptions. The body of the great King has been measured more justly than it was measured by the courtiers who were afraid to look above his shoe-tie. His public character has been scrutinized by men free from the hopes and fears of Boileau and Molière. In the grave, the most majestic of princes is only five feet eight. In history, the hero and the politician dwindles into a vain and feeble tyrant.—the slave of priests and women,—little in war, little in government,—little in every thing but the art of simulating greatness.

He left to his infant successor a famished and miserable people, a beaten and humbled army, provinces turned into deserts by misgovernment and persecution, factions dividing the court, a schism raging in the church, an immense debt, an empty treasury, immeasurable palaces, an innumerable household, inestimable jewels and furniture. All the sap and nutriment of the state seemed to have

been drawn to feed one bloated and unwholesome excrescence. The nation was withered. The court was morbidly flourishing. Yet it does not appear that the associations which attached the people to the monarchy, had lost strength during his reign. He had neglected or sacrificed their dearest interests; but he had struck their imaginations. The very things which ought to have made him most unpopular, —the prodigies of luxury and magnificence with which his person was surrounded, while, beyond the enclosure of his parks, nothing was to be seen but starvation and despair,—seemed to increase the respectful attachment which his subjects felt for him.—*Edinburgh Rev. (just published.)*

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